

INSIGHTS OF CASE MANAGEMENT APPROACH: AS A DISCIPLINE OF STUDY AND AS A METHOD OF WORK IN CHILD PROTECTION

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Abstract. *Case management can be approached from a double perspective: as mandatory work method in child care services and also as study matter for students enrolled in Social Work. Proper knowledge and use of case management as coordination and integration method in social services regarded as means of improving the beneficiaries' situation and development of abilities in case investigation are the competences aimed by Case Management study matter. Training and development of such competences are absolutely necessary to future social workers; however, the complexity of case management procedures makes it difficult to develop such competences with students. Thus, professors are challenged to point out very briefly numerous actions, interventions, procedures conducted simultaneously by specialists of various institutions. This study tries to draft a model of organizing course contents and seminar activities for the subject matter Case Management, so that it would enhance the understanding of case management as procedure/work method in child care. I would like to focus on the use of modern, interactive teaching methods but also on team work along with specialists involved in case management services. The paper points out the most important elements of case management used as study matter as well as the difficulties that emerge while teaching it. We have to refer to this method considering the complexity of the process of integrated services for children in difficulty.*

Keywords: *case management, study matter, work method.*

Case Management as Study Matter

Case Management is among the compulsory courses in the study programme Social Work according to the indicative list proposed by the ARACIS¹. A brief analysis of syllabi used in different universities reveals that this subject matter is or is not taught in these universities although it is possible that

similar contents are approached during other courses. For instance, Case Management is not taught as such at the University of Iasi, but it is studied at 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia (3rd year of study, 1st semester, 2 hours course, 1 hour of seminar) at Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad and the University of Oradea.

The Romanian field literature refers to case management in a few works. The topic is approached as work method used in child care services; one reference work in the field is Ștefan Cojocaru`s work, who makes a thorough diagnosis of the practices used in case management and presents the real situation in Romania in the year 2008.

For students enrolled in the study programme Social Work, Case Management is at first a pretty easy study matter. It presents clearly the stages of case management and the actors involved in the process. Considering the high share of interventions in the field of child care services, we presume that the study matter is important as it tries to place the student in the centre of integrated interventions in the field of child care. Case Management along with *Work with the group*, *Conceptual theories and framework*, *Family and couple therapy* all belong to the category entitled *Theories and practices*, which are a major thematic area for the study programme Social Work. A study conducted in 2014 shows that *Case Management* and *Work with the Group* cover approximately 5,6 % in the share of subjects taught at Social Work study programmes in Romania (Universities of Iasi, Bucharest, Cluj, Arad, Oradea) in terms of thematic area. The percentage drops significantly at Master programmes, namely to only 1,3% (Hatos, 2014, 135- 138). This study matter is approached at Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, in the 1st year of study, by Social Work students. It has been assigned with 1 hour of lecture and 1 hour of seminar.

The relevance of the programme in the training of social workers is reflected by the professional competences assigned for the field of social work (according to RNCIS¹); out of 6 professional competences, 4 can be developed by this study matter, namely:

C1. Identifying, collecting information, documentation, assessment and recording of information, analysis, evaluation and specific interventions to reduce social risks at individual, family, group, community and society level.

C4. Consultancy in accessing community resources for socially excluded persons and groups or for those at the risk of social exclusion (institutions, services, social benefits)

C5. Counselling and other intervention methods for families or institutions (hospitals, schools, penitentiaries, antidrug centres, social work institutions) with respect for the values and principles of social work

C6. Communication and professional connections with the beneficiaries and other involved social actors

The study matter develops these competences by putting theory into practice. Case Management focuses on the practical aspects of the study matter, being in close connection to *Internship*. The understanding of all stages of this method should be doubled by use of techniques proper for each stage. These techniques refer to collecting information, intervention techniques. etc. Case Management is for professors the perfect opportunity to revalue the students' knowledge acquired during lectures such as *Counselling in Social Work, Public-private Partnership in Social Work, Methods and techniques used in Social Work* and to use their communication and organizational abilities as well as other qualities required by a successful intervention. Some of them are connection making between needs and services, promptness, diplomacy in approaching the problem situation, problem solving with respect for deontological values and principles. More than any other study matter, Case Management will help students understand and use the answers to the following questions:

Table no1 *Some easy questions that describe the Case Management method*

Question	Answer and reference to legislation
Which is the beginning of case instrumentation? How are such cases disseminated?	The case is reported by different people (family, institution, social worker, neighbour)
Who has the responsibility of immediate intervention?	The case is registered at SPAS (Public Services of Social Work) and the social worker has the duty of making a house call
What is the goal of a social worker's house call?	Determining the gravity of the case (it will be instrumented by SPAS if abandonment can be prevented, or it will be taken over by the DGASPC (General Directorate of Social Work and Child Care) if the social worker suspects child abuse or the family's impossibility to raise the child)
Who has the responsibility of coordinating child care services?	Appointment of case manager and coordination of services
What is the meaning of integrated services for children?	Assessment of all child's needs and provision of specific interventions: medical, emotional, social, educational, legal, religious, etc.
Where will the child live throughout the separation period?	Knowledge of the type of child care institutions: residential placement centres, family houses, maternal care
What is the child's status throughout the placement period?	The child's legal situation depends on the parents' existence, on their desire and ability of getting involved in the child's nursing
Under what circumstances is the case considered closed?	The child can be adopted, can be institutionalized until the age of 18 or 25, can be integrated in a family or socio-professionally

The above questions briefly capture the whole path of case management procedures and I consider that learning by discovery is the most appropriate

method of understanding it. We should start with concrete notions and shift towards abstract in understanding case management.

There is a varied offer of interactive methods suitable for teaching case management. The use of such methods leads to the development of desired professional competences. The selection of proper methods and teaching procedures for case management involves the identification of methods which would enhance finding proper solutions, building learning situations and use of ideas/knowledge in real work situations: Case study, Role play, Problem-solving.

The Cube, the Cognitive map, the Tour of Gallery, Brainstorming, Venn-Euler Diagrams, Jigsaw or the Thinking Hats are only some of the interactive methods which successfully develop the systematic and selective thinking, bring about the discovery of new connections and solutions and stimulate students' involvement in solving real cases. When doing so, students follow each step and stage of case management.

The approach of theoretical aspects concerning intervention in child care is absolutely necessary, according to Coposescu, (2007) who tries to prove that *"silent involvement and explanation of theoretical aspects used in the social workers' professional arrangements is inevitable and crucial for the public acknowledgement, the autonomy and development of social work."* The student needs to understand the context of applying this method, the structure of social work system and also to learn the social networks which favour his/her client in order to be able to use the complex procedure of case management.

In this respect, *Law 272/2004 on child's rights* and *Order 288/2006 for the approval of SMO¹ regarding case management* contain fundamental information on the contents which need to be taught in this subject matter. We often call up legislation in teaching social work issues in the study programme Social Work because the procedures covering all three elements (context, social worker and client) are regulated by laws. Many times, the protection of clients calls for changes in his/her legal status. Observing the stages of case management is therefore impossible without knowledge of the way specialists have to deal with specific situations. Specialists work in different institutions but their work and actions overlap, intermingle, and follow one another. Apparently, as students pointed out, these actions have no logical explanation or if any, it is a very complicated one.

Operationalizing notions: Case management as work method in child care services

When referring to case management we focus on the Order 288/2006 which defines it as *a compulsory work method used when instrumenting cases in*

child care services; it is a method which comprises a set of techniques, procedures and work tools that coordinate all the activities and interventions undertaken by various professionals in the best interests of the child. Almost undisputedly, this definition can be found in case management literature along with *M.Weil and J.Karls's definition (1985). They see case management as a set of logical steps within the network of services by means of which the beneficiaries get what they need in an integrated and efficient manner.* Case management is now considered a pivotal component of long-term care service delivery and as a likely adjunct to primary care in managed health care systems ([Grower, 1997](#), in Newcome, 1997)

If in the USA, case management has existed since the 19th century, in Romania, the legislation appears only in 2006 when the GO 288 on Minimal Compulsory Standards in Case Management has been issued. Of course that before that date interventions were conducted after a similar model but without a grid of activities and properly standardized moments. In other words, the interventions were adapted to the beneficiaries' needs but also to the resources of the agency which provided the services.

Although the legislation refers to case management as a working method in particular for the protection of children in difficulty, the procedure is similar for other areas of intervention (elderly, refugees etc.). For other areas, the services provide specialists with working procedures, completed with mandatory standards and quality indicators.

Order 288/2006 regulated the steps that need to be taken in case instrumentation, appoints the actors involved and delegates tasks to the case manager and case responsible. The management of the whole case management path called for the establishment of a Case management Compartment, a Service of Entries and Exits.

Short Insight into the Complexity of Case Instrumentation

The study matter Case management recommends taking also courses of *Social Work Systems, Methods and Techniques in Social Work* or knowledge of Law 242/2007 and Law 292/2011. It is also advisable to have some knowledge of the Adoption Law. When we talk about case management, we refer to both children separated from their families and to children in families with abandonment risk.

I will focus on the first situation as it is much more complicated and therefore more time consuming in terms of actions.

For starters, theoretical understanding of the stages of case management does not pose many difficulties to students. These steps go absolutely logically and naturally, so their completion seems a very easy step for students who want to understand how a case works from the moment it is signaled to the authorities until it is closed. There seems nothing easier than to accept that the initial assessment is followed by comprehensive evaluation which aims

to identify the child's needs in order to develop the intervention plan. Information is gradually completed so that each stage requires knowledge of the actors involved in the process, the tools, the methods and techniques used by them in their interventions. The difficulty of understanding the whole case management path and the difficulty of visualizing its stages is given by the following aspects:

- the involvement of an important number of specialists from different fields and institutions (DGASPC, SPAS, the Police, County School Inspectorates, Hospitals, Child Care Centres, etc.)
- spontaneous conduct of actions and procedures such as: completion of reports, approval of reports, obtaining agreements and signatures, keeping to deadlines, etc.
- knowledge of legislation regarding the loss of parental rights and the intervention of the Court, etc.
- knowledge of the institutions involved in child abandonment situations
- knowledge of the map with social services available in each County
- field related knowledge: protection measures for children in difficulty, steps taken in implementing the measures, parents' obligations in different situations, etc.

My experience in teaching this subject matter has made me face situations when students had difficulties in understanding the information and thus asking questions such as: where is the case manager? What steps need to be taken when the parent does not approve the child's placement in a foster family? How does the case responsible interfere? What is the relationship between the child and the case manager? When does the responsibility of the case responsible stop in cases of abuse? When does the responsibility of the case responsible stop in abuse prevention? When can the child be given for adoption? How are the meetings with the parents conducted?

A special situation is the understanding of working scheme in pluridisciplinary teams. Students need to understand the intervention of these specialists and the way the life of a child separated from his parents and surrounded by specialists looks like. Students understand only chunks of the process because they cannot see it as a whole from the lecture room. Thus, the study matter Case Management aims to understand and describe the whole path of the method with the same name, which involves besides the steps taken by specialists involved in this process, also certain specific tools, methods and techniques. All these elements have to keep to deadlines which are very important in case instrumentation. All these aspects are reflected in the table below.

I. Identification, initial assessment and case take over			
Case Identification			
Actors involved in Case Management	Tools	Methods and techniques	Deadlines
The social worker within SEI (Service of entries and Exits) (DGASPC) The social worker within SPAS	The register of new cases ¹	Phone conversations ¹	The case is registered immediately after it has been brought under the specialists` attention
Initial assessment			
The social worker within SPAS The mobile team/social worker/psychologist and police officer (for cases of abuse)	The initial file of the case Social enquiry Visit report Acceptance/rejection certificate of the beneficiary`s request	House call Meeting Observation Documentation	Initial assessment takes place within 72 hours since case registration. In case of emergency, initial assessment can be performed as soon as possible, but not more than an hour. An initial assessment report must be issued in 24 hours after the assessment.
Case takeover			
The DGASPC manager (with attribution on child care services) The coordinator of Case Management Department/CMC (Case Management Compartment) The case manager /DGASPC The person in charge with prevention /SPAS	Decision for the appointment of a case manager Decision for the appointment of a RCP Documents which record the clients` information regarding the content of the initial assessment report which and the decision taken.		The assessment report is sent directly to the hierarchical superior; based on this report the case take over by the DGASPC is confirmed or declined. The content of the initial assessment report is presented to the client within 3 days after release and a record of this session is made
COMPLEX ASSESSMENT			
Case manager Pluridisciplinary team (Service for complex assessment /DGASPC) Prevention responsible /SPAS Team of professionals	Tools used for psychological assessment Ecomapa Genograma meeting reports Social enquiry Meeting recordings Complex assessment	Documentation Observation Structural interview Exploration interview Phone conversation	The content of the house call reports is presented to the family and the child within 3 days after the visit /meeting, except for cases when it could alter the assessment process

	report Meeting minutes	Meetings Case Meetings	
ELABORATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL PROTECTION PLAN/SERVICE PLAN			
Case manager Pluridisciplinary team (Service for complex assessment /DGASPC) Prevention responsible /SPAS Team of professionals	Individual protection plan Service plan Special intervention plan		Within 30 days since case registration
MONITORING AND REASSESSMENT			
Case manager under the coordination of the CMC coordinator Prevention responsible /SPAS Under the guidance of SPAS manager	Observation, diagnosis interview, social counselling, phone conversation, individual meetings, support groups, house calls, monitoring files/reports, meeting files, visit reports, reassessment reports, PIS (Specialized Intervention Plan)		Reassessment is done every three months Post-service monitoring takes place at least 3 months after the PIP, PS implementation closure, namely at least 2 years for national adoptions.
CASE CLOSURE			
Case manager Prevention responsible /SPAS	Cessation disposition of PIP (Individual Protection Plan)/ PS (Service Plan) Visit reports Case meeting reports.	Observation Meeting Phone conversation House calls.	When the conditions which led to special protection measures have disappeared

Tabel no.2 *Aspects of the case investigation*

Conclusions

Case management approached as study matter involves besides the explanation of certain notions and procedures specific for this work also some questions on how contents should be taught and what methods should be used to enhance the development of professional competences in child care services. The blank space between knowledge and intervention needs to be filled in by means of analysis, documentation, and involvement. Child care as field of intervention requires good knowledge of case management method because it is a compulsory work method in case instrumentation. The complexity of this method assigns a level of high difficulty to this study matter, considering the amount of information which needs to be put into practice.

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