

**RELIGIOUS SOCIAL WORK:
EXPERIENCE OF REFLECTING NEW REALITIES
IN THE TEACHING PROCESS**

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Abstract. Higher education in modern Russia is becoming a space of contact between secular and religious worldviews. The secular nature of education at a classical university does not diminish the opportunity to discuss religious processes and to have one's own point of view about them, both for the teacher and the student.

This research presents an analysis of the case study of the development and implementation of the course "Religious Social Work" in the framework of "Social Work" (Bachelor's degree) at the Lobachevsky National Research State University of Nizhny Novgorod in the period from 2009 to 2019.

During the period from 1991 to the present day the social work of religious organizations has passed a huge way of development in our country, from the beginnings of social service to professional activity, performance of the state order to provide social services to the population.

At the same time, the analysis of curricula and training materials of various Russian universities shows that this phenomenon, which is new for the country, is not yet fully reflected in the educational process at different levels of secondary and higher education. Cases of inclusion of such subject in the educational program are rare and, as a rule, it is possible for confessional-oriented universities or universities that have the right to develop educational standards (including federal and national research universities).

The author's course "Religious Social Work" was developed in 2009, and for 10 years now I have been conducting it as part of the preparation of Bachelors of Social Work for students of 3d year study. During this time, more than 200 students have attended the course (mandatory), more than 80% of them women. The course is designed in the form of research to answer the question - is the social activity of religious organizations in the provision of social services professional social work? We use different theoretical approaches and define the professional component of such work in different practical cases.

Throughout this period, from 2009 to the present, as part of the course, I have followed all the trends in the development of the professional social

work of religious organizations in Russia and around the world, including an analysis of emerging new regulations, practices, and opportunities for cooperation with government agencies and secular social institutions. At the same time, these 10 years have been the period of a series of sociological studies aimed at studying the phenomenon of confessional social work and the attitudes of secular social work specialists, the academic community, the general public and students.

As a result of the research, the following complex should be presented: a questionnaire survey of the population of Nizhny Novgorod on expectations from social services of religious organizations (2013-14, N = 1992); (quasi) an expert survey of social work specialists of public and budgetary social service institutions of Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region (2016, N = 53; a semi-structured interview, the average duration of which is about 1 hour); included monitoring of the teaching process and an annual survey of students on the value of the course; analysis of scientific materials on the topic (2008-2019).

The results of the study indicate positive expectations of the population of Nizhny Novgorod from social services provided by religious organizations (assuming that they are better suited to the most difficult life situations - palliative care, alcoholism and drug addiction, rehabilitation of prisoners, as well as confessional specialists and the services themselves give soul and spirituality). Secular specialists from social service institutions talk about the need for knowledge and skills to work with faith-based clients who require religious sensitization.

Keywords: Religion, religious social work, sociological research, discipline, higher education

Introduction

New phenomena and processes in society do not immediately become the subject of study of modern science, and much later are reflected in the educational process.

The social ministry of religious organizations in modern Russia has been a subject of study since the 1990s. Published scientific articles, monographs and textbooks devoted to the analysis of theological foundations, directions and forms of the diaconical work of religious organizations (Kononenko R.V., 2013: 369).

The social activity of religious organizations in foreign countries has a longer history and is presented both in charitable and professional forms of work, including the provision of social services under the state order (Husmann B., 2009: 15). At the same time, professional social services of religious organizations in Russia remain little studied.

Objectives / Purpose of the study

Professional social work of religious organizations begins with the initiative projects and program documents of confessional structures published since 2010. The article is aimed at studying the representation of topics of religious social work in Russian social sciences and higher education over the past years.

Methodology

The article presents data from a series of empirical studies conducted with the participation and under the guidance of the author in 2008-2019, including:

Content analysis of in-depth interviews with employees of social service of Nizhny Novgorod on the subject of conducting religious and spiritual-sensitive social work 2015-16, (N = 70).

Questionnaire of the population of Nizhny Novgorod on religious social services 2013-14, (N = 1992, the sample type is randomly stratified).

Analysis of the registers of social service providers of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in 2018 years of formation.

Data author's expertise of educational programs of various Russian universities in the field of social work from 2013 to the present.

Results / Findings

In the 2000s, religious associations of Russia publish program documents of a social orientation on interaction with the main institutions of modern society (Fundamentals, 2011). The key provisions of these manifestos speak of the participation of religious organizations and associations in the formation and implementation of the country's social policy, conducting social activities to resolve important problems of society, and achieving social stability in society.

Starting in 2010, the religious associations of Russia are becoming more active in developing their own concepts of social service, the Russian Orthodox Church has become a powerful actor in shaping church social work. Over the past 10 years, an all-Russian system of church social work has been formed, enshrined in association regulations, analytical and methodological literature, and a training structure for this ministry (Belkova A., 2013: 178).

Since 2015, social services of various faiths in many regions of the country are included in the registers of social service providers and participate in the competition for the right to implement state subsidies in social services (Tarasenko A. V., 2017: 14).

Despite the development of social work of religious organizations, the population's awareness of the social services of confessional services is low, social workers of these organizations are expected not so much

professionalism as a good attitude and believe that religion should solve the most complex problems of society that the state cannot cope with (drug addiction, rehabilitation of convicts).

The number of scientific publications on the social work of religious organizations in Russian journals over the past 10 years has increased slightly, but the subject changed from studying social service only to analyzing the professionalization of religious social services (Zubanova S.G., 2016: 18; Zabaev I.V., 2013: 358).

An analysis of the educational programs of bachelor and master programs at more than 130 Russian universities in the direction of "Social work" shows that the subject of confessional social work has practically not been reflected in the modern Russian secondary special and higher education. Courses devoted to religious social work are rare, among educational publications one can find only work programs and sections in several textbooks (Saraliev Z.KH., 2011: 279).

Discussion

Social work as a profession in modern Russia went through a period of institutionalization from 1991 to the present, and was basically devoid of religious roots, unlike the development of social work in the world. In general, the 70th anniversary of atheism and the legislative ban on charity in Russia has weakened the traditions of social service of religious organizations, which in the last 28 years have been formed almost anew.

Under these conditions, the attitude towards the social services of religious organizations among the population, employees of secular social institutions, representatives of the academic community and officials of administrations of different levels has been mixed. On the one hand, the participants of any non-state social work are traditionally denied the proper level of professionalism, on the other - religious services are indiscriminately accused of missionary work, believing that services are needed to attract new members.

An expert survey of employees of secular social service institutions in Nizhny Novgorod and the region showed that they emphasize the importance and necessity for them to have knowledge of religious organizations, the specifics of dogma of various faiths, and the provision of social services with religious services. When meeting with religiously oriented clients, they need to know how to properly deliver the work, and in the case of partnership with religious social services, to understand the religious characteristics of religion. The registers of social service providers in 2018 in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation have already recorded more than 30 Orthodox organizations, 5 from the confederation of Jewish communities of Russia, 3 Catholic and 2 Protestant movements. All

the interviewed employees showed the lack of disciplines on religious social work necessary for studying in educational programs.

The course "Confessional social work" was introduced at the National Research University of Nizhny Novgorod. N.I. Lobachevsky since 2009 and is obligatory for studying by students of a bachelor degree in the direction Social work on the 3rd year of study. As part of the course, we offer topics on the history of the development of religious social work, foreign experience of confessional organizations, the legal framework for their participation in social services, the specifics of confessional theology and the established practice of social work. The experience of local religious organizations is available to students in lectures, invited clergymen and staff, interviews with clients and introductory practice. According to the results of successful testing in the magistracy in the direction of Social Work, from 2019 a course on confessional social policy will be introduced.

Conservatism of professional and educational social institutions forms a certain tradition of studying new phenomena in the social sphere, sifting out insignificant and very difficult to let in the unfamiliar.

Social work of religious organizations still needs professional understanding, as well as reflection in the educational process of training social workers.

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