

NURSES IN HEALTHCARE – A SOCIOLOGIST’S PERSPECTIVE:

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This volume, authored by sociologist and researcher Silvia Popovici is the result of her doctoral work in the field coordinated by professor Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu and came out in the Social Observer collection focused on field surveys and research in action at the publishing house of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University. It comprises two chapters and three studies accompanied by ten appendices with an up-to-date bibliography.

Even from the introduction she stresses the importance of nursing in our country, a significant profession that counted no less than 190 000 members in 2013 at national level. After 1989, its professionalization skyrocketed due to the need for autonomy, acknowledgement and the shaping of identity in the context of changing legislation, scientific developments in the field, emancipated patients or the rigor of medical institutions (p. 9). Previous research such as Genevieve Charles’s (1981) in France is mentioned to account for the representations of nurses marked by devotion and vocation, underlining a tendency towards laicization (p. 10) (Charles, 1981). The main aim stated is to highlight the model of professionalization in Romania adopted following historical tradition, current features, capital forms and values gained in the development from job to profession. The secondary aims are meant to analyse challenges and openness towards a truly responsible profession against the complex background of motivation in the exercise of profession, the new professional rhetoric acquired by the members of the group, the shift of cultural and symbolic capital accumulation forms, changes in relations with beneficiaries and the efforts made to gain higher social prestige and a favourable public

image (p. 15). The stages in the research process imply varied methodological instruments and techniques, consisting of five steps: 1. quantitative research based on questionnaire, 2. qualitative research conducted through semi-structured interviews and participative observation, 3. study of documents, 4. analysis of results and 5. drawing up conclusions and recommendations (p. 16).

The first chapter, “Field, profession, professionalization” is theoretical and brings into play Bourdieu’s theory of social fields to integrate it into theories of professionalization referring to jobs and professions in which other voices (namely the sociologist Alexander Carr-Saunders or the historian Paul Wilson) had a say. In the line of Durkheim, building on the matrices of Weber and Pareto, Talcott Parsons comes up with his own theory of social action in 1934, restricting professions to four fields, medicine, technology (engineering), law and education, marked by scientific legitimacy, professional authority and affective neutrality (pp. 29-30) (Dubar & Trippier, 1988). More recent theories take into account interprofessional competitiveness proposing holistic views on institutions, with emphasis on the identity and stability of professions (pp. 48-49) (Abbot, 1988; Champy, 2011).

The second chapter overviews stages, tendencies and challenges that marked the professionalization of nursing in Romania and worldwide mentioning solid contributions such as Jonathan Gabe’s research on emotions, Isabelle Feroni’s noting of fine gestures and spokespersons within the professional group, Olivier Dembinski’s considerations on the administrative side of the work, French-British aspects viewed

comparatively by in the specific imaginary of nursing by Françoise Acker, the stress of routine errors by Eleonore Lépinard or the heterogeneity of nursing work based on the type of institution and the division of work or the pathology of patients nursed by Olgierd Kutty (p. 54). Historical facts include the foundation of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) in 1899 in London and, more recently, The European Federation of Nursing Regulators (FEPI) in 2004 to promote the health and security of EU patients and citizens (p. 60). Complex classification systems such as Nursing Outcomes Classification (NOC) or the Nursing Diagnosis Scheme (NANDA) were also implemented (p. 70). In our country special facilities have been created to cure the sick ever since the Middle Ages (Ro: 'bolnițe mănăstirești') (p. 74), the ambulance system was set up in 1906 and after WWII, the Soviet model Semashko was implemented in the healthcare system (p. 77) (Doboș, 2006). Schooling for nurses in our country was basic and mostly church-related until the 19th century. Under the influence of the Red Cross, its modernization started as first aid courses were given and volunteers trained (p. 80). Special schools of nurses were founded in 1948 and in 1965 technical schools that incorporated vocational schools for nurses were established (p. 81). In 1990, the Romanian Nursing Association was created and with the help of the Ministry of Health, the first Institute of Romanian Nursing came to life, providing specialties in nursing management and education for future trainers in the field, community nursing for home healthcare and psychiatric nursing for a mindset change in mental care (pp. 83-84). Romanian Nursing significantly benefited from our country joining the EU and the Order of Nurses and Midwives in Romania (OAMGMAMR) aligned its policies to European legislation (p. 87).

The first study navigates through the perceptions of nurses on professional autonomy and their social-political commitment as professional group, aiming at a self-assessment of professional autonomy in nursing and its regulation, the identification of nurses' opinions on the Romanian healthcare system, the conditions in which their activity is carried out, the directions of change and the professional role

that nurses want to play in healthcare. Quantitative research methods were applied to allow statistical analysis and the generalization of the data obtained on nurses from Iasi County at the level of the professional group nationally. Questionnaire-based, the study was carried out between November 2010 and April 2011 (pp. 96-97). The participants were nurses from all public hospitals in Iasi, Pascani, some dispensaries and kindergartens, pharmacies and GP offices (pp. 98-99). Pie charts were employed for data analysis and showed that 92% of participant nurses were women and only 8% men, 6% of the respondents younger than 25, 26% between 26 and 35, 33% between 36 and 45, 21% aged 46-55 and the remaining 14% over 56 (p. 101). Work seniority was also assessed, along with the school graduated, the specialty chosen, the reason behind it, whether it met the respondents' expectations and what they enjoyed most about it (pp. 102-107). Other issues studied were: the advantages of the nursing profession in relation to others (pp. 108-109), the respondents' opinion on the Romanian healthcare system (p. 113), on the quality of medical care provided by nurses to their patients (p. 114), their thoughts on the Romanian public opinion regarding nurses (p. 115), on who played the most important role in the shaping of the public opinion on nurses in Romania (p. 117), their knowledge of the role and status of OAMGMAMR (p. 118), whether they desired to improve it (p. 119), take part in the activities organized by the Iasi branch (p. 122), propose three actions that OAMGMAMR may take to support its members (p. 124). The study reached the conclusions that aims were achieved and several problems were identified, namely: the low pay of nurses at the time, scarce properly trained personnel, lack of medicine and medical devices in our county, lack of information and education in patients, heavy workload, high levels of stress, insufficient jobs and consideration for the tasks carried out at the workplace, hence decreased motivation (p. 125) and the desire to change things for the better (p. 126). There was also awareness that the profession required more promotion, visibility in the medical act and more direct care assessment by beneficiaries which could be achieved though cutting the middlemen (p. 128).

The second study delves into the current stage of nursing professionalization which, in Romania, is deemed a long and complex one according to the author (p. 131). In her approach, S. Popovici adopted several schemes to show the dimensions of development in a professional group (p. 132), the cycle of change (p. 134), sense confirmation (p. 137), its loss (p. 139) and seeking (p. 140) (Pyronnet & Roux, 2005). Research questions range from the characteristics of the Romanian nurse to the forms of capital available to nurses and the mechanisms to acquire it at their disposal, the practices of multiplying the habitus specific to nurses and its transformation, the forms and mechanisms of domination exerted on nurses, the system of relations in which they carry out their work, the rapport between the symbolic violence exerted on them and the symbolic power they exert on the medical field, their vision on professionalization, at what stage of it Romanian nurses were and the strategies they used for professionalization. As methodology, the qualitative method was chosen and it comprised document analysis techniques, semi-directive interview and participative observation (p. 141). Among the results of the research, it was stressed that nurses chose the profession because they loved people (p. 149) or sought the qualification to find a better paid job in the country or abroad (p. 151). The decrease in the quality of postgraduate health schools was recorded as it reflected on the qualification as a spare means to earn a living overseas (p. 154). Continuing professional development, NGOs and other partners are factors that contribute to professional socialization (pp. 166-167), whilst migration is seen as development (p. 190). If relationships between nurses are based on solidarity, cooperation and mutual help (p. 214), those with doctors are rather tense in our country (p. 230). The author concluded that because of the doubts and difficulties faced by nurses in their search for identity, they swung between mundane problems and a constructive approach towards collective solutions to be applied by all nursing professionals (p. 240).

The third study refers to discourse and image, i.e., professional rhetoric and self-image of nurses in Romania, its research questions

pertaining to the argumentation pillars on which the nurses' professional rhetoric holds, the extent to which their opinion on nursing denotes the need to build a new professional identity, the image of nurses in the field of healthcare professions, the overlapping of their opinion on the nursing profession, trajectory and becoming with other healthcare professions and whether the professionalization efforts of nurses prove awareness of a good correlation with the needs of the beneficiaries of care services in the socio-economic context of the medical field. The final set of questions in the some of the appendices was used for the thirty interviews in the book (pp. 245-246) and results were interpreted based on graphs for experience (p. 249), responsibility (p. 250), selflessness (p. 251) and professional knowledge (p. 252). In communicating with the patient, 'nice talk' was also quantified by a graph (p. 255), and so was professional satisfaction (p. 257) and fear (p. 259). The opinions of other professions on nurses in Romania were described via graphs, as well, where the lack of respect (p. 267), informal payment (p. 268), gratitude (p. 269), public image (p. 271) were also assessed considering the rural or urban system (pp. 272-273). To summarize, the two corpora analysed, the one selected from the nurses' interviews on their own profession and the one of other professionals in healthcare on nurses, could only afford a partial overlapping of the nurses' self-image and that of other professionals on them. Furthermore, the quality of healthcare services and the functioning of the system in question have a negative impact on medical professions; meanwhile, the media excessively presents negative events from the field (p. 276). There is a need for gradual renegotiation of all symbolic relations of power within the healthcare system and nurses have the necessary resources and motivation, argues S. Popovici (p. 280).

The final conclusions reached by the author is that her research showed that the professional group of nurses was in an emergent stage, searching its identity and needed acquiring cultural and symbolic capital to be used socially; the increase and diversification of schooling forms is a must, values have to be renewed, and

logistics implemented for a proper acknowledgement of the profession (p. 283). Romanian nurses should consolidate their position in the healthcare system for a positive economic, academic and political influence overall (p. 286).

We recommend this book to all healthcare professionals, social workers, sociologists and students interested in the phenomenon of professionalization. Its instruments could prove seminal for any future research in the field or neighbouring disciplines.

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