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Paraprofessional Social Service Personnel in Spain

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This study reveals the importance of front-line paraprofessional personnel in the rapidly expanding social services in Spain and identifies the functions they perform, the different kinds of training they receive, their opportunities for advancement, and several issues that must be addressed if they are to make their best contributions to Spain's social services.

In most countries of the world, the bulk of front-line or face-to-face helping activity is carried out by people (often local community residents) who have had little or no formal training for their important service roles (United Nations, 1980). This paper focuses on the ways in which front-line personnel are used to meet the needs of people and communities in Spain.

Previous research has shown that paraprofessionals (whether they be neighborhoods workers in Israel, home helps in Britain, village workers in India or day care workers in the USA) perform a variety of crucial functions in the social services around the world. These workers play a vital role in safeguarding the health and well-being of large groups of needy people. An international study recently reported by Schindler and Brawley (1987) confirmed the importance of the work being done by these front-line paraprofessionals, produced data on their characteristics, and identified the conditions under which they make their best contribution to human well-being. The international comparative nature of that study was especially useful. It included data from thirteen countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and Oceania. However, there was no Spanish-speaking country in their study. Given the size, significance and growth of the Spanish-speaking population of the world, this gap in the available data needed to be remedied.

The present study was intended to be an important step in that direction.

Visits to Spain in 1986 and 1987 enabled the author to lay the groundwork for a study of front-line social service personnel in that country. As well as sensitizing him to the gap in available data on paraprofessional social service personnel around the world, these visits alerted him to the dynamic social development and social service activities that are going on in post-Franco Spain, provided the opportunity to do some exploratory research, and gave access to the sources of data necessary for a formal research project.

Research Methodology

In carrying out this study, standard procedures followed in international comparative research on social welfare policies and services were used (see, for example Kahn and Kameron, 1976; Rodgers, 1979; Higgins, 1981). National, regional, and provincial social welfare legislation and government reports, relevant locally-generated research findings, and appropriate sections of the professional literature in Spain were reviewed. Faculty and administrators at the University School of Social Work of Barcelona, the Higher Council on Scientific Research in Madrid, and the Province of Gerona Social Services Department provided assistance in locating and gaining access to the relevant documents. As well as serving as informed sources themselves, they helped identify additional experts (primarily government officials) who should be interviewed. Direct field observations of professional and paraprofessional social service personnel at work and in training in the Province of Gerona were made over a three-month period in 1989 and an effort was made to corroborate these observations in shorter visits during the same period to the Provinces of Lérida, Barcelona, Madrid, and Zaragoza.

Background: Spain at the End of the 1980s

Perhaps as a result of its relative isolation from the rest of Western Europe caused primarily by the geographic barrier of the Pyrenees and also on account of the political, economic and

social differences that separated it from its neighbors until very recently, Spain has retained a certain distinctiveness or individuality that matches the typical individualism of its citizens and the distinct differences that exist between the separate regions of the country. In fact, Spain can probably best be described as a land and a nation of differences — in climate, in terrain, in language and, perhaps most importantly, in regional versus national identity. One of its greatest challenges at present is to retain some semblance of national identification and unity while responding to substantial pressures toward regional separatism and self-determination, most notably but not exclusively in the Basque Country and in Catalonia (Presidencia del Gobierno, 1980). Upon Franco's death in 1976, King Juan Carlos (who had been designated by Franco as his successor) became head of state. The King made clear his commitment to the restoration of democracy and the first general election in 40 years was held in 1977. Despite threats to the new democracy (an attempted military coup in 1981 and continued terrorist activities by Basque separatist extremists) the country has moved ahead and prospered. The granting of a high degree of autonomy to Catalonia and the Basque Country in the early 1980s and the later division of the whole country into sixteen self-governing regions has strengthened the commitment to democracy by signaling an end to the concentrated centralized power of the national government that has been abhorred and resisted historically and that is strongly associated in the public mind with the oppressive Franco regime. King Juan Carlos and the present moderate three-term Socialist government of Felipe González have successfully steered the country to recovery from the forty years of economic stagnation and political oppression that followed the Civil War and an end to isolation from the rest of Europe. What is remarkable is the degree to which this has been accomplished without isolating either the far left or reactionary right.

What seems to hold the country together in the face of strong general sentiments against any semblance of central authority and powerful Basque and Catalonian independence movements is a general desire to be a respected and influential member of the modern European Community — an aspiration that can only

be achieved by a strong and united (although not necessarily centralized) Spanish nation. To this end, Spain has moved an enormous distance in a very short time. From being a backward, impoverished nation ruled by a totalitarian dictatorship, Spain had emerged in little more than a decade as a prosperous, stable, progressive democratic society that is poised to become a very significant economic, social, cultural and political force in Western Europe (*Banco de Bilbao*, 1988; *Banco Español de Crédito*, 1988; *The Economist*, 1987).

Social Welfare Services in Spain

Any attempt to describe the training and use of paraprofessional personnel in Spain must begin with a brief overview of social welfare services in that country. The new Spanish Constitution of 1978 continued the political subdivision of Spain into provinces and municipalities but soon afterwards a law was passed that divided the nation into "autonomías" (autonomous or self-governing regions) that had existed in pre-Civil War times (Montraveta and Vilá, 1984). The new "autonomías" can be regarded as rough equivalents to the states in the U.S. and were created in response to strong regional independence movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country in particular. The autonomous regions, unlike the American states, have varying degrees of decision-making capabilities depending on their particular circumstances, their individual historical relationship with the central government, and their legal right to levy or not to levy taxes. This latter difference is also the result of historical arrangements. Obviously, these general elements of political organization have some bearing on the organization and financing of the social services.

Following the creation of the autonomous regions, each of these passed its own law assuming responsibility for the provision of the personal social services (*Documentación Social*, 1986). Funding for the services is provided by the central government, except in the cases of the Basque Country and Navarra which have historically had the authority to levy their own taxes for social services and other purposes. In come maintenance provisions (Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, etc.) remain the responsibility of the central government (Casado and

Guillén, 1986; Alvarez, Ander-Egg, Casado, de la Red and Zanella, 1981; Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social, 1989).

Within the autonomous regions, most direct face-to-face social service activity is delegated to municipalities that have populations of over twenty thousand people. In the case of smaller municipalities, services are provided by provinces or "comarcas" (counties), depending on the social service laws of a particular autonomous region (Doménech, 1985; Comité Español de Bienestar Social, 1987; *Revista de Treball Social*, 1985; Peña, 1987; Torres 1987).

It can be seen, therefore, that the emergence of a relatively comprehensive system of social welfare services is a fairly recent phenomenon in Spain, really not much older than twenty years. Of course, there were charitable efforts before that, primarily a tripartite system operated by the state-approved "sindicatos" (unions), the Catholic Church, and the one approved political party ("el Movimiento") of the Franco regime. Social work as an identifiable profession also emerged only about twenty years ago in the body of a group of people ("asistentes sociales") employed to handle requests for supplementary assistance under the nascent Social Security system (Casado, 1987). Only relatively recently have schools of social work emerged in any significant number and the title Social Worker ("Trabajador Social") gained wide acceptance and legal recognition (Baeza, Cruz and Ordinas, 1988). Those persons who might be regarded as paraprofessionals are generally an even newer phenomenon although untrained child care workers ("cuidadores de niños"), caretakers ("celadores"), and other providers of direct personal care have been around for a long time.

The Emergence of New Types of Front-Line Personnel

It is clear that there are now a large and growing number of occupational groups (some very new) that are participating in the provision of human services at the local level in Spain. Many of them would be regarded as paraprofessionals in other countries because they carry out tasks that assist and complement the work of the more established professions (e.g., medicine, education, social work, etc.). The term paraprofessional is unknown in Spain and the concept is even more problematic than

it is in other countries since social work itself is not yet highly professionalized in Spain and some of the people who would be regarded as paraprofessional human service workers in other countries (e.g., trained child care workers) have a level of training that is quite comparable to that of social workers.

As is true in the human services of other countries of the world paraprofessionals greatly outnumber professional social workers. However, it is worth noting that Spain has done an admirable job in developing a sizeable cadre of trained social workers in a relatively short period of time. Unlike the situation in other countries, a shortage of trained social workers does not seem to have been an important factor in the emergence of large numbers and diverse types of paraprofessionals. The newness of the social work profession and its relative weakness as a professional and political force in Spain may, of course, have prevented it from having much influence on whether certain jobs were defined as requiring persons with social work training. However, this does not seem to be a matter of much concern or debate among social workers in Spain.

A number of factors seem to have contributed to growth in the use of different kinds of paraprofessional human service workers during the past decade. These include the rapid expansion in the volume and range of social and community services in Spain in the post-Franco (and newly democratic) era. From a very low level of public investment in social provision, Spain has taken giant steps in a very short time to catch up with the rest of Western Europe. Its recent entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Parliament has increased pressures to achieve parity with its new European partners in a variety of spheres, including human service. A period of unprecedented economic prosperity has made this possible, although there are signs that resource limitations are beginning to make themselves felt. Rising numbers of elderly and disabled claimants on the Social Security system and the fiscal demands of the new National Health Service are causing some alarm about future resources among some officials interviewed.

The very rapid expansion of the social services in Spain has occurred in a fairly uncoordinated and unregulated fashion. A

multiplicity of new tasks and functions have been created, many of which are beyond the traditional boundaries of the established professionals. These tasks or functions are being carried out by a wide variety of personnel who bring a variety of backgrounds and types and levels of training to their work.

Another factor contributing to the creation of a range of human service jobs is the persistence of large pockets of unemployment, especially among young people, despite the remarkably high level of prosperity that Spain is currently enjoying. Job-creation efforts (either through active government stimulation of economic activity or through a wide range of initiatives in the public sector) are a high priority in current government policy (see, for example, Díaz, 1986; Instituto de la Juventud, 1986; Plan Joven, Zaragoza, 1989). A significant portion of the new jobs that are created fall within the ambit of the social services. Although government stimulation of private sector economic activity greatly exceeds public sector employment, there is recognition at various levels of government (national and regional, in particular) that the service rather than industrial sector is where future growth will occur. Within the service sector, social welfare activity (broadly defined) is seen as a relatively small but very important element. (Generalitat de Catalunya, undated; Treserra and Altarriva, 1988).

An additional interesting factor in the emergence of a variety of new occupations within the human services is the oversupply of certain established professionals (most notably teachers, psychologists and lawyers). This has led to the recycling of some of these professionals in to different but related human service fields — for example, teachers into residential and day care of children (“educadores especializados”), psychologists into drug and alcohol treatment programs (“psicopedagogos”), and lawyers into community action jobs (“animadores socio-culturales”). The schools of education in various universities (e.g., Universidad de Valladolid, 1988) have broadened their focus beyond teacher preparation to include a variety of selected human service occupations. There are interesting parallels here with the early service education movement in the U.S. (See Chenault and Burnford, 1978).

While there appears to be no explicit government policy that promotes the use of what could be regarded as paraprofessional personnel in the social welfare services, it is clear that specific action by government bodies at different levels implicitly supports the training and employment of a variety of new kinds of personnel in the human services. The creation of the Institut Català de Noves Professions (Catalonian Institute of New Professions) by the government of the autonomous region of Catalonia is but one example. The mandate and actions of the Institute encompass all occupational spheres; however, it has already identified health care and gerontology as prime areas of employment growth in the immediate future (Generalitat de Catalunya, undated). Sponsorship of schools and institutes for the training of family aides by regional governments (see, for example, Escola De Formació de Treballadors Familiars, undated) and other front-line workers by provincial and municipal governments are other examples of specific government actions that directly support the training and employment of paraprofessionals (Díaz, 1986; Institut Municipal d'Animació de Barcelona, 1988; Escola d'Educadors Especialitzats de Girona, undated).

Tasks and Functions of Front-Line Workers

Paraprofessionals are employed in a wide variety of fields within the social welfare services in Spain, including child care, services to the aging and programs for the physically and mentally disabled. The largest numbers are probably employed in these areas. However, they are also found in the following fields — drug and alcohol abuse, adult and juvenile justice, youth work, family service, and community of various kinds. They perform a wide range of tasks in these different areas of social welfare activity. These include caring for children in day care centers or residential settings; providing practical assistance or personal care to the elderly or disabled at home, in day centers or in residences; helping communities address specific problems and work toward appropriate solutions; providing supervision and guidance to young people in clubs, recreational programs or informally in the street; and helping appropriate groups or individuals to develop jobs for the unemployed.

There is an enormous range of job titles in use in the human services in Spain at present and it appears that new ones are emerging constantly. These include the fairly common types of direct care jobs that are found in the social service systems of most countries of the world; for example, "cuidador de niños" (child care worker), "trabajador de la casa" (home help or homemaker) and "celador geriátrico" (aide or attendant in residential care for the elderly) are found throughout the country. The holders of these jobs may or may not have much formal training for the work they do. In addition to these, a number of newer jobs have begun to be developed, some of which require substantial training. For example, the "animador sociocultural" (community organizer), "trabajador familiar" (family worker) and "educador especializado" (trained child care worker) are becoming quite widely used in Spain. Newer and less common are the "educador de calle" (street worker), "agente de desarrollo" (job and employment developer), "gerocultura" (specialized worker with the elderly), "educador de tiempo libre" (leisure time organizer), and "monitor de actividades infantiles y juveniles" (supervisor of activities for children and youth).

Especially noteworthy are the "animadores socioculturales" whose role it is to help urban and rural communities to address local problems (for example, needs for day care services for young children, social and recreational programs for teenagers, centers for the elderly, etc.) and develop constructive responses (see López de Ceballos and Salas, 1987). Their work is based on the French "animateur" model which was developed to reorganize and revitalize urban neighborhoods and rural communities after the devastation and disorganization suffered in World War II (Grosjean and Ingberg, 1974). In some forms, it incorporates concepts from the liberation theology of elements of the Catholic Church in Latin America, Freire's "conscientizacao" approaches to adult education and community development, and the mutual aid, self-help, and cooperative movements in Britain, the United States and West Germany (López de Ceballos and Salas, 1987, pp. 32-33). However, the manner in which these different models and traditions have been blended and adapted has resulted in a unique and interesting role for the "animador sociocultural" in Spain. Although their numbers and functions

vary across the different regions of the country, they are obviously an important and growing group of front-line human service workers.

Also of special interest are the "educadores especializados" (or trained child care workers) who are emerging as a new and important group of workers who have been trained to provide specialized services to children and young people with a wide variety of problems and needs. They work with poor or vulnerable children in their own homes, in day care centers, or in residential facilities; they provide specialized care to children with physical disabilities, psychological difficulties, or problems in daily living. As has occurred in certain other European countries (for example, France and Belgium) during the past forty years, the "educador" is emerging as a unique occupation for persons interested in working with children at a relatively sophisticated level but who are looking for an alternative to the more traditional professions of teaching, medicine, psychology or social work (Escola d'Educadors Especialitzats de Girona, undated).

As a group, paraprofessionals tend to undertake a much wider range of jobs than social workers in Spain who seem to focus on responding to requests for specific kinds of services on a case-by-case basis. Paradoxically, individual paraprofessionals appear to provide more specialized services than social workers who are more generalist in their orientation. While social workers undertake more complex work than relatively untrained home helps and paraprofessionals performing routine personal care tasks in residential settings, there is not a great deal of difference between the functions of social workers and some front-line workers (e.g., "animadores socioculturales", "educadores especializados", etc.) in terms of the level of complexity, responsibility or difficulty inherent in their work.

Lines of authority and responsibility are often unclear or de-emphasized in Spain so that it is difficult to determine who is responsible to whom for the performance of what tasks in the provision of social services. In a country with a highly ambivalent attitude towards authority, such concepts as accountability and supervision are problematic, especially in the public sector. People are uncomfortable with and resist the idea of one person

being responsible to another or being supervised by another in the performance of their work. Therefore, it would appear that human service workers of all kinds and at all levels function with a great deal of autonomy. The concept of the team as a model of service delivery at the community level is one that is attractive to and quite common among social service personnel in Spain.

Social Work Attitudes Towards Front-Line Personnel

Unlike the situation in most other countries of the world where the social work profession tends to be either actively supportive or more or less antagonistic toward paraprofessional human service workers (Schindler and Brawley, 1987), in Spain social workers seem to be unaware of or disinterested in the other occupational groups that participate in the social service enterprise alongside them. This may be due to the fact that the social work profession is quite new in Spain and is not yet a very strong organizational or political entity. Furthermore, most social work practitioners are very recently qualified, are relatively inexperienced, and do not seem to have a very broad view of the social welfare services, the various components that make it up, and the range of people engaged in the total enterprise. They focus rather narrowly on the central tasks of their specific jobs, paying little attention to the broader scene.

Where individual social workers come into regular contact with paraprofessionals, their attitudes vary from full acceptance and cooperative work in team models of practice to some feeling of reservation about the activities of paraprofessionals, a fear that they may be invading professional territory, and a greater willingness to accept them if status differences between them are maintained.

As a consequence of the general lack of awareness of the range of other occupations engaged in social service provision, Spanish social workers are only marginally involved in efforts to support the work of other human service personnel. Some provide supervision to home helps or other paraprofessionals who are part of their team or unit and they may provide some rudimentary in-service training for these auxiliary staff but they do not appear to play a significant role (individually or as an

organized profession) in the deployment, development, or training of paraprofessionals. A notable exception is the School for Family Workers that has been developed by one school of social work, the Catholic Institute for Social Studies of Barcelona (Institut Católic d'Estudis Socials de Barcelona, undated).

On the other hand a number of governmental and educational institutions have been active in supporting the training and employment of front-line human service personnel. At the national level, for example, the Instituto Nacional de Empleo (INEM) has provided incentives to local municipalities to hire unemployed persons (particularly young people or others newly entering the job market) in a variety of public service capacities including in the social services. A number of home helps employed in the "Comarca" (county) of La Garrotxa, Gerona Province, are supported by this program. Examples at the regional level are provided by the government of the Autonomous Region of Catalonia which has recently created the Catalan Institute of New Professions and sponsors the School of Family Workers, both of which have already been mentioned in this paper. To mention only one of several examples that could be cited of provincial government support of paraprofessionals, the Province of Valladolid has sponsored several initiatives intended to develop new and valuable employment and training opportunities in the human services (see Diaz, 1986).

Training of Front-Line Workers

While many Spanish paraprofessionals receive little or no formal training for their work, some receive training or have educational backgrounds that match and, in a few cases, exceed that of social workers. For example, home helps may or may not receive some kind of minimal in-service training provided by their employers and other paraprofessionals (for example, untrained child care workers or community workers) may attend short-term (anything from a half-day to four weeks) training courses, seminars or workshops offered by employers, government agencies, government-supported training institutes, or educational institutions (see Escola Taller, 1989; Escola Educadors en el Lleure, 1989; Institut Municipal d'Animacio de Barcelona, 1988). On the other hand, some persons that are included in

this study receive substantial training for the work they do. For example, some "animadores socioculturales" and "educadores especializados" have participated in two-year or even three-year training programs that are comparable in length and level to the training required to qualify as a social worker in Spain (See López De Ceballos and Salas, 1987; *Animació*, 1987). Furthermore, a significant number of these more highly trained workers are persons with prior university or other types of education (as teachers, for example) who have been retrained for their new professions in the human services.

Most formal training for paraprofessional human service workers is a combination of theoretical and practical instruction, with the latter usually including some practical field instruction. The training program for "trabajadores familiares" offered in Barcelona, for example, is made up of about 30% theoretical classroom material, 15% practice-related classroom material, and 55% field instruction (Institut Catòlic d'Estudis Socials de Barcelona, undated). The training program for "educadores especializados" in Gerona, which is of three years duration, is about equally divided among theoretical material, instruction in applied subjects, and direct experience in different practice settings (Escola d'Educadors Especialitzats de Girona, undated). These are fairly typical although all kinds of patterns and lengths of training exist.

Opportunities for Career Advancement

Since this is a period of great dynamism and fluidity in the human service field in Spain, one might expect that there would be many opportunities for people to move around between jobs and among various fields of service. However, this does not appear to be happening to any substantial degree. Most job incumbents tend to view their current jobs as relatively long-term situations. A major barrier to the advancement of most front-line workers is the absence of academic qualifications for entry into professional-level training as a social worker or the like. Few of the aforementioned training programs lead to formal qualifications for a legally-recognized occupational field or serve as a stepping stone to professional status. This is a problem because most jobs in government service in Spain, including in

the social welfare services, are fairly rigidly classified. To some degree, professional social workers are also victimized by inflexible categories. For example, they may not qualify for senior administrative positions in the social services since these are frequently restricted to persons with higher academic qualifications than social workers typically possess. Although participants in training programs, even the many types of short-term in-service training that are widely available, receive certificates upon completion, these do not usually qualify people for different or more senior positions. As a consequence, therefore, there does not appear to be much opportunity for vertical or horizontal mobility in the social services. In this respect, the situation of paraprofessional human service workers in Spain differs little from their counterparts in other parts of the world (Schindler and Brawley, 1987).

Summary and Conclusion

Most face-to-face helping activity around the world is performed by people who have little or no formal training for their service roles. Previous research has shown that front-line paraprofessionals play a vital role in safeguarding the health and well-being of large groups of people. A gap in that research was the absence of data from Spanish-speaking countries and it was the purpose of the study reported here to remedy that situation. A three-month-long research project carried out in Spain in 1989 revealed the important role played by front-line paraprofessional personnel in the rapidly expanding social services of that country. It identified the different kinds of personnel that have emerged, the broad range of functions they perform, the kinds of training they receive, and the opportunities for career advancement that are open to them. In addition, several issues emerged that must be addressed if these valuable workers are to make their best contribution to Spain's social services.

There is an excitement and dynamism in the social, cultural, economic and political life of present-day Spain. It is evident that there is a strong public and political will to address human needs more adequately than in the past and to develop a range of social services appropriate for a caring society that is committed to promoting the well-being of all of its citizens.

Public support for the social services and for the people who staff them is remarkably high and is in sharp contrast to the retreat from social provision that has occurred in other parts of the world during the past decade (Brown, 1984; Graycar, 1983; Mishra, 1984; Morris, 1987; United Nations, 1985).

While this positive social climate prevails in Spain, it may be opportune to address a number of important issues in regard to the training and deployment of front-line social service personnel. For example, present approaches to job definition in the human services and the deployment of front-line workers appear to be more haphazard and expedient than systematic. Likewise, training programs seem to be developed and offered on an ad hoc basis and are often dependent on the initiative of local individuals or groups. In fact, the majority of front-line workers have been employed without specific training for the important work they do and the training received by the rest is of a great variety in terms of its length, rigor, content, and auspices. Institutes sponsored by regional, provincial and local government agencies or by private organizations are the most important formal training resources available for the kind of personnel discussed in this paper. While some of these institutes are affiliated with universities, most are not. Because of the enormous diversity of functions performed and training received by front-line social service workers in Spain, it is extremely difficult for them to develop a distinct professional or occupational identity. Only those trained as "educadores especializados" have come close to achieving legal recognition ("título") for their occupational group. The great majority of front-line workers are a long way from that goal.

So far there has been little pressure and limited effort to address the issues mentioned above. This is attributable in large part to the newness of the social services that have been developed and of the persons who have been hired to provide them. However, as the system begins to stabilize and mature, there is a growing need to pay attention to and make sense out of the complex array of personnel involved in the provision of social services, the types of training needed, and the most appropriate ways to maximize available resources. Important first steps have been taken in this direction by trying to identify pro-

grams across Spain that prepare "animadores socioculturales" (López de Ceballos and Salas, 1987) and "animadores juveniles" (*Animació*, 1987). These research activities need to be expanded to include the full range of social service personnel, followed by some initial efforts to develop conceptual models of human resource development and utilization in the social services.

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