

**CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN GREECE:  
THE PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL WORKERS AND USERS IN  
COUNTY WELFARE DEPARTMENTS AND MUNICIPALITIES**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool  
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by

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**“You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train...”**

**H. Zinn**

## ABSTRACT

Social work in Greece is undeveloped despite its relatively long history. One reflection of this under development is that there is very little literature on Greek social work. This thesis is an attempt to fill this gap by providing, from a critical perspective, an in depth understanding, explanation and critical analysis of contemporary social work practice in Greece.

Through qualitative research and specifically through a case study strategy in several Social Services Departments (SSDs) in the County Welfare Departments (CWDs) and municipalities the role and nature of social work is examined from the perspectives of front line social workers and users. These perspectives, the thesis argues offers the chance to grasp the actual realities of official Greek social work in a way which would never be revealed by official papers, legislation and other literature.

The thesis is structured in eight chapters. Combining data from interviews with users and social workers, with other relevant policy and historical data the chapters uncover the contemporary realities of Greek social work and seek to offer an explanation for the difficulties facing Greek social workers and the users.

In this thesis, through the findings and the analysis, the close link of social work with politics and the impact of the latter on social work are made apparent. It is particularly evident through the findings that the SSDs are neglected by the state which results in practitioners having limited resources for helping effectively their users who in the majority are poor. The poverty of the users and the close link of poverty with social work are some of the main findings of this thesis.

Additionally, one of the central arguments of this thesis is that the virtual abandonment of social work and its users by central government stems in part from the class specific character of the profession and the welfare system which systematically ignores the needs of the disadvantaged and their carers. On the other hand, the response of social work to the poor is contradictory and in any case is affected by the politics of welfare, the organizational context, the education as well as the beliefs and attitudes of the practitioners towards the poor.

The thesis shows how social work struggles to survive day to day while the practitioners do their best in their attempt to respond to users' social problems. As it was revealed, there are several actions that practitioners take and techniques that they use within the framework of their commitment to the values of the profession. In parallel, users welcome the "good" social worker meaning the humanitarian social work and ask for further co-operation with these social workers.

The need for a social work that acts for social justice on the side of the oppressed is more than ever topical given the current period of austerity. In Greece, there are signs that further coalitions and partnerships between practitioners and users are emerging demanding their common rights.

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>CPP</b>	CHILD'S PROTECTION PROGRAMME
<b>CWD</b>	COUNTY WELFARE DEPARTMENT
<b>EAM</b>	NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT
<b>EC</b>	EUROPEAN COMMISSION
<b>EETAA</b>	HELLENIC AGENCY FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
<b>EFS</b>	EMERGENCY'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT BENEFIT
<b>EKKE</b>	NATIONAL CENTRE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH
<b>ESY</b>	NATIONAL HEALTH SYSTEM
<b>EU</b>	EUROPEAN UNION
<b>GDP</b>	GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT
<b>GSEE</b>	GREEK GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR
<b>HiHP</b>	HELP IN HOME PROGRAMME
<b>IASSW</b>	INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK
<b>IFSW</b>	INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
<b>INE</b>	LABOUR INSTITUTE OF GREEK GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR
<b>ITA</b>	INSTITUTE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
<b>KAPI</b>	OPEN-CARE CENTRES FOR THE ELDERLY
<b>KEDKE</b>	CENTRAL UNION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND COMMUNITIES IN GREECE
<b>KEPE</b>	CENTRE OF PLANNING AND FINANCIAL RESEARCH
<b>LG</b>	LOCAL GOVERNMENT
<b>NGOs</b>	NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
<b>NSS</b>	NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE
<b>OECD</b>	ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
<b>PASOK</b>	PAN-HELLENIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT
<b>POSOPSI</b>	PAN-HELLENIC FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH
<b>SKLE</b>	GREEK ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
<b>SSD</b>	SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
<b>TEI</b>	TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS
<b>XEN</b>	CHRISTIAN UNION OF YOUNG WOMEN

## Introduction

This research attempts to illuminate contemporary social work practice particularly in the state SSDs in Greece. In general, social work research in Greece is limited. Some of the most recent exceptions in contemporary Greece are the researches by Dedoussi et al (2004), Georgoussi et al (2003), Papadaki (2004), Papadaki (2005) and more recently Ioakimidis (2008). The limited research and the consequent frustrations that I faced as a practitioner and later as a teacher, pushed me to attempt an understanding and critical analysis of contemporary social work practice in Greece.

Specifically, one of my strongest motivations for undertaking this research was the despair that I experienced as a practitioner and student in NGOs and SSDs in a public hospital and municipality: I had no resources to help my users who in their majority faced poverty; not even in cases where their life was threatened by a serious disease such as cancer. The dominantly taught method in Greek social work called “Social Work with Individuals” which includes counselling and so on seemed to be useless whenever people had urgent, uncovered material needs. This fact led me to rethink my everyday interventions but also to start thinking critically about social work interventions and raise questions; if that was the reality in the NGO’s, how do social workers deal with the users’ problems in the state SSDs?

The SSDs in CWDs and municipalities are some of the basic state agencies where the users apply to receive help. Usually, a number of people appeal to these services in order to cope with some of their fundamental needs such as lack of food, clothes and money, lack of care in home but also in order to find support information and so on. These SSDs could be perceived as “front-line” social services (Jones, 2001) and the practitioners probably seemed to help people with their multiple problems. However, in literature there is gap of the “how” and “why” of social work’s intervention, in these services and that was what incited me to do the research.

On the other hand, although it was obvious to me when I was a practitioner that poverty is a dominant characteristic of the users of social work, in Greek social work literature there is an absence of research and literature concerning the close link of social work with poverty. During my postgraduate studies at the University of Liverpool, I found out about many authors and researchers who had repeatedly

referred to the link of poverty with social work, and explained the relationship of a class divided society with the role of social work with the poor and the fact that usually the users of the state services face poverty and deprivation (Becker, 1997, Jones, 1983, Jones, 2001, Jones and Novak, 1999, Schorr, 1992). Moreover, I now had the opportunity to obtain further knowledge on radical and critical social work which is also absent in Greek literature. These approaches formed and influenced my perspectives and standpoint as a researcher in this specific study.

In general, in antithesis with quantitative research where the objectivity of the researcher is central, in qualitative research it is important the researcher clarify their standpoint and approaches. Therefore, the following paragraphs are a brief look at the perspectives that influence this study. To be more specific, approaches such as anti-discriminatory practice, anti-oppressive and feminist approaches, (Langan, 1992, Dominelli, 1998, Thompson, 2006), anti-racist social work (Dominelli, 1988) radical approaches (Bailey and Brake, 1975, Jones, 1983, Jones and Novak, 1999, Lavalette and Ferguson, 2007, Ferguson, 2008, Ferguson and Woodward, 2009) are the key-concepts that inform my standpoint. Some of these approaches have been named differently by several authors such as “emancipatory” (Dominelli, 1998:4) or, “socialist-collectivist views” (Payne, 1998: 127). According to Banks (2006:39) the concept of “radical” is

*“...to refer to approaches premised on a commitment to structural social change, which includes certain versions of ‘anti-oppressive’, ‘emancipatory’, ‘critical’ and ‘trans-formatory’ social work” .*

Healy argues that the above concepts and theories of social work can be put under the umbrella of critical social work based on a critical scientific paradigm:

*“Marxist social work; radical social work; structural social work; feminist social work; anti-racist social work; and anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory social work” (Healy, 2005:173).*

Hopefully, the above description which is the standpoint of the researcher provides the reader with a clear insight. To the best of my knowledge, no research has been done from the specific perspective that explores and analyzes the “how” and “why” of social work in Greece. Neither has there been any research which seeks to look at the state of Greek social work from the perspectives of both social workers and users with regard to the general political and social context. Particularly, research concerning the users’ points of view are very limited in Greece and this is one of the

gaps that this research attempts to fill. Moreover, this research contributes to the revelation of the common characteristics of poverty among the users of the SSDs, the class specific character of social work, the importance of poverty awareness (Becker, 1988) for Greek social workers as well as the impact of practitioners' attitudes on the poor-user. Most importantly, this research reveals the close link of social work with politics which is apparent in every aspect of social work: Legislation and organizational level, resources, social policy, social problems of the users and so on. Overall, the thesis is structured in eight chapters:

In Chapter One, the historical evolution of social welfare and social work including educational and professional developments from its first appearance in Greece in 1940s is discussed. The main political affiliations and social policy issues reveal the impact and importance of politics on the evolution of social work in Greece.

In Chapter Two, the research methodology is presented. The reason for choosing to research the specific agencies is explained whereas the basic characteristics of the general context of the SSDs in CWDs and municipalities are discussed.

Chapter Three demonstrates the working conditions, responsibilities and hierarchy in the researched SSDs with regard to the policy issues that affect these aspects in the everyday reality of the SSDs. Social workers are overworked with various and multiple responsibilities in difficult working conditions where the main power lies with the head of the departments, directors and politicians.

In Chapter Four, the data reveal that poverty is the common and dominant characteristic of the users. The implications of this issue for social work -such as its class specific character- are discussed as well as the possible causes of the "silence" of Greek social work concerning the close link between social work and poverty. Moreover, the "voice" of the users reveals the impact of poverty on people and their stigmatisation by the SSDs. The practitioners' awareness of poverty issues -such as the political causes of poverty- is crucial not only because there are high rates of poverty and inequality in Greece but also social work needs to pay more attention to the connection of the "personal" problem of its users with the wider political and social developments.

In Chapter Five, the beliefs and attitudes of the practitioners towards the poor are examined. It seems that there is a correlation between explanations for the causes of poverty and practitioners' attitudes. Although the majority explains poverty in social and political terms, dominant perceptions of the poor affect significantly social workers' behaviour which in turn has a clear impact on users.

In Chapter Six, the findings reveal the main interventions of social work with regard to the poor. Social work with individuals dominates still in a rather fragmentary way. Furthermore, some of the core actions of social work interventions bear the power of the professionals over the poor. It seems that social workers are used by the state as both censors and helpers in a class specific welfare system. Social work acts as the temporary relief for the poor in a rather superficial manner. Greek social work is in a rather difficult position. Nevertheless, practitioners try to do their best and to find ways day to day to help their users, a clear sign of their commitment to social work's values but also a source of hope for social work.

In Chapter Seven, the effectiveness of social work practice through the perspectives of both social workers and users where the findings show that social work seems to be barely effective in solving the long term problems of the users is discussed. Although, social workers are highly stressed still the majority enjoy the contact with users. On the other hand, the users describe the desirable kind of social work they need by which they mean the humanitarian rather than bureaucratic practice.

In parallel, social workers associate their effectiveness with social policy and any of their suggestions for the improvement and effectiveness of the services are linked with the politics of welfare and the need for its change.

Finally, in Chapter Eight presents the conclusions and an overall discussion of the main findings of the research. Not only are further areas highlighted which urgently require further research, the conclusion includes some discussion of the severe impact of austerity policies for both users and social workers.

## **Chapter 1: The evolution of social welfare and social work in Greece from the 1940s**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will explore the historical evolution of social welfare and social work activity in Greece. Specifically, the chapter is divided into main historical periods: the first is the period from the 1940s until 1974 when the restoration of democracy took place. The second, in which contemporary welfare and social work is discussed is the period from 1974 until today. The basic objective of the chapter is to introduce the reader to the Greek context of welfare and social work but also to be aware of the main political aspects that have affected the formulation of social work in Greece.

The choice of analysing the welfare sector from 1940, rather than examining the totality of welfare evolution in Greece, was based on the fact that the first school of social work was established in 1937-1939. Moreover, given the limited research on Greek social work and particularly the absence of critical analysis, the specific chapter reveals the close links between social work activity and politics in some of the main historical periods. Finally, the basic characteristics of welfare sector and social services in contemporary Greece are presented.

## **The first period: 1937-1974**

In literature the first signs of an organized state social welfare sector referred to the constitution of the Greek state in 1828 by the governor Kapodistrias with the establishment of the first orphan asylums and hospitals (Panoutsopoulou, 1984). During the previous centuries – as well as in contemporary Greece- the church had a significant role in welfare activity (Stathopoulos, 2005).

Throughout the evolution of Greek history, the fact that foreign powers (with the cooperation of the Greek elite) intervened either in the political dimensions of the country or the social planning of welfare provision, couldn't but affect the form of social welfare. Choices made by foreign powers about who would lead Greek policy -like king Othon in 1833 whose designation was dictated by Britain, Germany and Russia, (Mosxopoulos, 1997) - were accompanied in this period by the appearance of charity organizations, by which the ruling class of this period expressed their philanthropy to the beggars in the street of Athens.

After the Asia Minor debacle in 1922 and the arrival of about 1,300,000 refugees the state had a more active role in the protection of the disabled, widows, and orphans (Stathopoulos, 2005, Petmesidou, 2006a). Historically, the role of the Greek state as far as it concerns social protection and social welfare is rather haphazard, with no continuity or planning. As Petmesidou claims:

*“during the periods where there is an acute problem (for example the rehabilitation of the refugees during inter-war years or the need for social protection for a great number of orphan children after Second World War) there is the establishment of specific institutions in Greece that offer a draft solution and there are some activities of social planning by the state.”* (Petmesidou, 1992:124).

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to refer in detail to the historical evolution of welfare in Greece it cannot but make specific references to the periods that ideologically and politically formed welfare activity and social work. To be more specific, the periods immediately before, during and after the Second World War, were coincident with the first steps of social work in Greece. Unsurprisingly, the appearance of social work is linked with the general political and social context of the period.



Social work made its first appearance in Greece in 1937-1939 with the formation of the first school named the “Free School of Social Welfare”<sup>1</sup> (Stathopoulos, 2005, Kallinikaki, 1998). In contradiction with its name - “free”- the specific school was established during the fascist dictatorship of Metaxas, and in 1940 the war started. Despite the significance of the political situation in Greece during this period, in the majority of the Greek literature there are only superficial references to the birth of social work in this political context. This characterizes in general the Greek social work literature, where very few publications study critically the political context with regard to the evolution of social work<sup>2</sup>.

On the social level in 1940 the majority of the Greek population faced poverty and deprivation:

*“... 35.0% of the Greek population were starving, 37.0% just covered the basic needs while 20% were petit bourgeois and only 2.3% rich bourgeois”*(Psiroukis, 1975:105).

Consequently, the upper class faced no particular problems at least compared with the majority of the population. Part of the Greek ruling class and elite co-operated with the occupation powers of the fascists (Psiroukis, 1975). The movement of “National Resistance” – which was created by a number of left organizations against fascists and their collaborators in the Greek elite - appeared in 1941 in Greece. The objectives of this armed movement weren’t fulfilled only through their conflict with the German occupation and fascism but were rather deeper which was common with similar movements in Europe during this period - and involved fights for independence on a national level (in Greek: *ethniko-apeleftheritikos agonas*). They were movements that embedded a left and socialistic perspective (Elefandis, 2003) and demanded social and national freedom. They were also popular with mass appeal such that:

*“... three quarters of the adult population was politically organized and took part in National Resistance”* (Psiroukis, 1975: 118).

The “National Resistance” was linked to some extent with the ideas of anti-imperialism and the revolution of the proletarians, although this wasn’t the goal of all the organizations that were part of it. Freedom in Greece from fascism was a fact by

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<sup>1</sup> This first school never produced any graduates. It was closed before doing so. We also have very little information about its curriculum and teaching staff. Therefore, the first school that actually produced graduates was this of American College in 1944-1945.

<sup>2</sup> One of the few significant contributions is Ioakimidis’ thesis (2008).

1944; however it was almost immediately followed by the 1946-1949 Civil War which is to some extent still a “dark” period of Greek history that took Greeks many years before they could discuss it freely. National Resistance as well as Civil War were the expression of conflict between social classes and they had a number of consequences for the political and social history of Greece, especially the persecution of leftists at least until 1974 when democracy was established in Greece.

As far as the welfare sector is concerned during the above period according to Ioakimidis (2008) the activity by EAM (National Liberation Front) besides the struggle for liberation from the Nazi occupation created:

*“a grassroots welfare network”* which included a number of welfare activities especially in villages such as: *“...encouragement of people’s self administration, massive effort for education and cultural development, following a bottom up structure”* (Ioakimidis, 2008:94).

Ioakimidis (2008) refers to the above unofficial welfare network as one of the important indicators of a “grassroots welfare” provision in Greece that flourished in this period. Additionally, he argues that it should be seen as an alternative path for an emancipatory and democratic social work practice that is supported by the popular classes. Moreover, and in antithesis to the grassroots welfare structure of the 1940s, Ioakimidis’ analysis focuses also on the “top-down” official social work that emerged after the Second World War, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Besides the significance of the above forms of welfare for the history of grassroots welfare and social work in Greece, it is important to highlight that the division between guerrillas and their supporters in the agricultural and mountainous parts of Greece and the urban places of Athens was also based on material reasons. For example, the main recipients of international aid by the Red Cross, Sweden and US were Athens and Piraeus with the co-operation of the local elite while the agricultural areas where the guerrillas held authority and power were excluded (Margaritis, 2000).

When Greece was set free from the fascists by 1944 and before the distribution of Balkan countries determined by Churchill and Stalin (Psiroukis, 1975) the Athens based elite vaunted Britain as the liberator of Greece and kept silent about the role of the National Resistance. Britain and America had important interests in the area not only because of Greece’s strategic position in the Balkans but also because the threat of communism was so apparent.

In the Free Greece of December 1944 the conflict between leftists and rightists with the help of British military powers- named as Dekembriana<sup>3</sup> (Decembrists) – led to the defeat of the leftists (Margaritis, 2000). Britain became the main leader of political affairs in Greece- with the co-operation of the Greek government - and the elimination of the leftists was one of its main goals. This period was later known as the “period of terrorism” where the devastation of left organizations, with thousands of leftists in prisons, tortured, murdered and the violence in agricultural areas permitted the right wing to come again onto the stage (Margaritis, 2000). Extreme right wing groups flourished and gradually people from the agricultural areas were again forced to the mountains as guerrillas. Consequently, the surveillance and the persecution of the leftists was part of everyday life in 1945.

As far as welfare provision is concerned from 1943 until 1947 the international aid by the Red Cross and other international organizations was estimated at about 40% or even 100% of the pre-war national income (Margaritis, 2000). However, the distribution of material help was again based on class criteria since the material goods which passed through the government’s hands never really reached the majority of Greeks who lived in poverty. During the summer of 1946 the civil war started. On the one hand was:

*“...the state with its gendarmerie and army while on the other were just some thousands of starving Greeks but they had nothing to lose”* (Margaritis, 2000:264).

The civil war is a complex story – where thousands of Greeks died- and for many years there was little open discussion about it in Greece. This war was a continuity of the National Resistance movement and the persecution of the leftists’ organizations. First Britain<sup>4</sup> and then America had no intention of allowing popular support for the leftists’ resistance forces. It led not only to the Civil War and significant repression and violence, but to decades of policy – economic, social and ideological – which

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<sup>3</sup> According to Margaritis the casualties of the war of December in Athens were “210 British dead, 55 missing, 1.100 prisoners by ELAS (army of the leftists). The Greek right-wing powers had 3.480 dead. (Margaritis, 2000: 73). The members of right-wing fighters were basically the police and Greek army. On the other hand left-wing powers “had about 3.000... dead people, 7.000-8.000 arrested without taking into consideration the arrests of citizens-members of left organizations... In total 15%-20% of the power of ELAS was lost” (Margaritis, 2000:74).

<sup>4</sup> The intervention of America was a result of the gradual withdrawal of British military and financial support during the summer of 1946 and its final departure in March of 1947. (Margaritis, 2000 and Close cited in Margaritis, 2000).

sought to ensure that the leftists' challenge was eradicated or at least seriously restricted.

From 1946 the American government guided by the "Truman Doctrine" started the "crusade" against communism in Greece as well as Turkey. Both these countries received the "help" of America which is amounted to 400 million dollars in order to fight the "dark power" – threat of communism. (Jones, cited in Margaritis, 2000:427). The majority of these funds were directed to the military in the first instance but then later in 1947 were broadened out under the Marshall plan introduced through the Secretary of State, George Marshall. The American "help" through Marshall Plan was channelled for covering basic needs of the population in such as food, clothes and contributed to the development of structures in the country. However as Margaritis (2000:447) states through this "help" America ensured its role and more importantly

*"...cemented the desperate crowds' absolute dependence on the charity...of governmental and American organizations....while also people were used with a low wage in the reconstruction of the country"* (Margaritis, 2000:437).

Moreover, in this way America sought to impose their control over much of Western Europe through a plan which cost 12 billion dollars (Margaritis, 2000:436) and as he also claims:

*"...created a solid social place, a ruling class... The control of social morale, the omnipresence of the state and its official ideology in any professional activity – professional licenses, licenses for kiosk, grocery, bus, taxi etc- protected this social class, closed it and tightened it with its political authority. This tie was kept for 25 years after Civil War"* (Margaritis, 2000:447).

For a number of professions (and later for social work) the "certificate of national probity" was needed. This certificate was obtained from the police (that kept records of the political actions and beliefs of the citizens) and was issued to those who were perceived as "national minded". The "national minded" person was practically anyone who didn't have an ideology or action on the left or was not connected with those who were said to have "prepared the betrayal" as the relevant legislation describes:

*"...The betrayal of the communist movement against the country. Additionally even if the person believes in the rhetoric of those who prepared this betrayal or follows anti-national ideas or propagates in favour of the Communist Party and its*

*collaborators, cannot be characterized as national minded (see legislation R.D. 690/1961)”*

(cited in Ioakimidis, 2008:129)

The people who belonged to this category of the non - “national minded” and couldn’t get the above certification were forced to sign a declaration by which they claimed that they were “nationally minded” and condemned communism; this infamous process was known in Greece as the “declaration of regret” (ibid).

In particular, whoever:

*“was suspected for their morale couldn’t:...work in the public sector (A.N. 516/1948), study in upper education schools (Royal Decree 28.4.51), have a driver’s licence (Law 1478/1950), become a priest, work in public transportation (Royal Decree, 11.6.1954)...”* (Psiroukis, 1976:97).

Through such a strict legislative context the state ensured that progressive citizens were excluded from the public sector. In parallel, the “Marshall plan” allowed for the establishment of charity organizations and the provision of help to the Greek people. Thus, after the intervention of the American advisors to the Minister of Health and Welfare, the Centre of Social Welfare was created based on American standards.

The political situation of the period couldn’t but affect social work where the first attempt in 1937 was interrupted by the Second World War and re-appeared in 1945 (Kallinikaki, 1998). In particular, the American policy favoured the creation of trained staff:

*“American advisors contributed to the establishment of the School of Social Welfare in 1945 by the American College, that functioned until 1975, and gave many competent staff to the Country”* (Stathopoulos, 2005:180).

American advisors highlighted the need for trained social workers, in a period when they had a crucial interest in Greece. The training of the first social workers, by the American College couldn’t but formulate the objectives of a new profession but also its methods and its ideology. According to Dedoussi et. al., (2004) between 1945 and 1960 the private schools of social work flourished based on a religious character and influenced by American social work (Koukouli et al, 2008). In a period of poverty and austerity for Greeks after the Second World War, the fact that the students had to pay fees influenced the class profile of the social work students who tended to be middle or upper class women (Ioakimidis, 2008).

Moreover the curriculum of studies was formulated by American professors based on American standards of social work. Patras professor of social policy referred to social work training in Greece until 1974, as inappropriate given that the methods and the approaches were based on the patterns of western societies that were already developed and not designed for developing countries such as Greece (Patras, cited in Stathopoulos, 2005). The formulation of the social work curriculum in Greece was based on “alien” approaches from abroad mainly through the import of American and British social work curricula. This issue is in accordance with the general political situation of the period characterised by the deep intervention of foreign powers in Greece’s internal affairs with the active support of the Greek political elite. Hence, the first steps in the development of a Greek social work curriculum were a “top-down” procedure.

In addition the combination of the religious physiognomy of social work education – where the church had an important interest in welfare and social work education (see Table 1, dates: 1948, 1956, 1957, 1960) - based on Christian ideology and philanthropic feelings together with the “alien” methods led to a profession with an apolitical and conservative if not reactionary ideology.

<i>Table 1: The historical evolution of social work education in Greece</i>	
DATE	SCHOOL
1937-1939	“Free School of Social Welfare” by the Ministry of Health & Welfare
1945	American College Pierce – Functioned until 1975
1948	Christian Union established a one year course school – In 1950 became two years and in 1954 three years
1953	Seminars in Panteio University by a group of graduates from Universities of the US
1956	The same group under the umbrella of Royal National Foundation established the “School of Social Welfare of the National Institution”.
1956	School of Social Welfare of American College by Christian Union and Royal National Foundation established the Permanent Committee of Education in Social Work later known as SEKE (Council of Education in Social Work) They translated basic text books of social work. Also the Royal National Foundation operated the Postgraduate School of Social Welfare but only for a short time.
1957	Greek Church established school of social welfare named “School of

	Deaconesses” one year studies and only for women
<b>1960</b>	University of Thessalonica department of Theology created Department of Social Deaconesses in order to work in the welfare sector (operated until 1967)
<b>1962-1963</b>	According to Royal Decree the training of social workers should be provided only by the state. Royal Decree 319/1962:2 defines criteria by the board of school through interview for the students referring to the “morality” of the students. In 1963 it required 3 years training of social work after High School. In 1963 the Juveniles Protection Association (supervised by the Ministry of Education) established School for Social Work
<b>1970 – 1973</b>	Social work training is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Welfare for the first time. Patras and Irakleio established two schools named as KATEE that had technological direction (polytechnics)
<b>1979</b>	-Compound course of study for KATEE - Christian Union established the Foundation of Development of Social Work (IAKE) and their school changed its name to “School of Social Work of IAKE”
<b>1983 until today</b>	Social work is taught through Technological Institutions in Athens, Patras, and in Crete. Until 1995 it was three years studies and after this date became 4 years studies. It leads to a BA degree.
<b>1996 until today</b>	Department of Social Administration in Democritus University in Thrace with two courses: Social Administration and Social Work and leads to University degree.
<b>Postgraduate studies</b>	Besides some attempts before democracy established for example 1953-1957→ Postgraduate studies in Social Welfare in Panteio University the postgraduate studies for social workers is a rather “luxury” (Dedoussi et. al, 2004). For many years attempts to press the Ministry of National Education & Religions for postgraduate studies in social work only in 1995 according to the law of 2327/1995 were the graduates of TEI allowed to participate in the exams for Master degrees in Greece. In practice there are no postgraduate studies in social work but only in similar areas such social exclusion, counselling etc. Moreover it is very difficult to find a post even in these masters and in the majority of postgraduate studies they are implemented abroad (usually in UK or in US). However in 2009 the Department of Social Administration announced a postgraduate course on social work and social policy. Moreover by the specific department the last years had provided PhD degrees on social work.

Sources: (Kallinikaki, 1998, Stathopoulos, 2005, Papatheofilou, 1981, Dedoussi et al, 2004)

Social work with the community “entered in the curriculum of studies in 1962” (Stathopoulos cited in Zaimakis, 2002:49) and articles translated into Greek by American professors for community development were published in the journal named *Eklogi* (Zaimakis, 2002) (see also Table 3). This development was probably a result of the need – due to the destruction caused by the Second World War and the Civil War- by the state to develop more community based programmes that initially had a rather paternalistic character<sup>5</sup> and reinforced the class divided character at a societal level. The political instability in the 1950s and the “war” against communism had consequences upon the initial steps of these programmes. Specifically, the fear of the central administration of possible communist perspectives averted any attempt for collective participation of the inhabitants from below (Zaimakis, 2002). In total, during the 1950s and 1960s a number of community programmes were initiated, many of them run by social workers, however these programmes lacked

*“...theoretical and methodological level....while also they weren’t connected with further attempts for confronting the structural problems of poverty and underdevelopment.”* (Zaimakis, 2002:53).

With regard to the emergence of social work education based on a combination of Christian ideology and an American model of social work, a number of Greek and foreign charity organizations appeared where the social workers were trained under the patronage of the United Nations in Greece (Psaras, 1961, Kallinikaki, 1998). Moreover under the Marshall Plan a number of measures were introduced such as the emptying of the mountainous villages and the transfer of the inhabitants to camps, as well as the creation of the cage–camp on Makronisos<sup>6</sup> and some initiatives for children’s welfare (Margaritis, 2001:610). In July 1947 the Royal Welfare Organization was established by Queen Frederica and created the children’s cities

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<sup>5</sup> For example, in 1951 the Royal National Foundation run in the community a programme named as “welfare through work” in order to renovate basic structures in the community after the destruction of the war. These programmes were planned by the central administration with limited participation and collective action of the people in the community due to the fear by the central administration that could “import communistic perspectives” (Daoutopoulos, cited in Zaimakis, 2002:47). The inhabitants were forced to work in this programme without payment, each of them for 10 days. However, “those that had money could exchange” this obligation with money and were perceived to have a high social status while whoever worked “was a sign of poverty ...a sign of a low social status” (ibid).

<sup>6</sup> Makronisos as well as Gyros were some of the principle prison-islands where leftists were exiled, tortured and many died (Margaritis, 2001).



(paidoupoleis). There is a rather contradictory role to these centres where the care - needed after the consequences of the civil war - was accompanied by propaganda from the militaristic right and the church in the hope it would immunize the children from the so-called contaminating ideologies of the leftist and popular resistance. The above charity organizations were directly used as a tool for the propagation of right propaganda focussed upon the new generation. Under the pretext of the provision of care for the children (through paidoupoleis) it actually functioned as a school for propagandising a right ideology (Margaritis, 2001).

Zouraris referred to these programmes as

*“The breath was very close to becoming the breath of America and the Right”*  
(Zouraris, cited in Stathopoulos, 2005: 183).

A critique of these programmes and the role and participation of social workers in this period is hardly ever discussed. However, Ioakimidis (2008) refers to the first social workers who worked in “paidoupoleis”. The practitioners’ role in this programme was contradictory. They attended to provide children with care while simultaneously they attended to shape the consciousness the “national minded citizen”. Moreover, as Ioakimidis (2008) argues, these social workers were characterised by pure philanthropic motivations in combination with an apolitical attitude that led them to be part of this historical contradictory character of “paidoupoleis”.

It’s important here to remember the general political and social context of this period where first Britain and then the US were involved in the internal affairs of Greek policy on a political but also on a social level with the co-operation of the Greek elite.

The requirement of “certification of social morality”, so that people could work or study, is one of the examples of the persecution of the leftists imposed on the peoples’ everyday life in this period. On the political level after the Second World War the monarchy was re-established in Greece, and with the upper class of the country tried to defeat the “enemy” of communism. The Communist Party was made illegal and leftists were imprisoned or compelled to emigrate. In keeping with the times, in 1950 the solemn oath (the official procedure for any student on graduation) in one of the first schools of social work run in Greece (Christian Union of Young Women, XEN in Greek) clearly expressed the Christian and national ideology expected of social workers:

*“The school that believes and teaches social work is upon every political antithesis or aim and consequently any kind of political propaganda is inconsistent with the aim of the schools. The ideological direction is Christian and nation, based on the convictions of Christianity and of our national tradition”*

(Panoutsopoulou, 1985:14).

And later all of the graduates collectively make the following oath:

*“In the name of Living God, I swear to dedicate myself to the service of other human beings and society, to respect and admit the other person as it is, to help the human being to utilise his own powers in order to become a socially responsible person, useful for himself and the society.*

*God is my helper...”* (Panoutsopoulou, 1985:14).

The combination of Christianity and national ideas with regard to the objectives of official social work for helping the user to be capable of self-help could not be clearer.

After the Second World War the right and reactionary ideological form is also clearly set out in the legislation of 1961 (Royal Decree 690/61 FEK 163/61) where it states that social workers should obey the law, have an ethical personal life and moreover to

*“abstain from activities or ideologies which aim – either directly or indirectly- to upset the existent political or social status, as well as any activity that is a political propaganda or aim to satisfy illicit interests or unethical targets”*

(R.D. 690/61 cited in Panoutsopoulou, 1984:204).

The ethos expected of social workers had two specific characteristics: first not being leftists and second to have a (Christian) ethos. In order to obtain a license as a social worker a number of documents were required and one of them in 1961 was the “certificate of spotless morality and health”. This required the “letter of national probity” (see above) (Royal Decree 690/1.8-24.9.1961). Consequently, as far as it concerns social workers in order to obtain a licence they should be law-abiding, meaning no political activity that may contribute to the sedition of the system and also have a “clear” file. The non observance of the specific law – and code of ethics as well- could mean the recall of the social work license (Panoutsopoulou, 1984). The above restrictions by the law starkly reveal the state’s guidelines for social workers in a politically distressed period. Specifically the state sought to impose a specific profile for its workers and demand that they be loyal servants of the

dominant ideology. Practically, progressive social workers were excluded and every attempt was made to restrict entry into social work to the non-political or the right. These issues are in accordance with the political situation of the period.

In parallel, as Ioakimidis (2008:115) revealed when he discusses his discovery of the archives in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library concerning the “Greek Program” 1962- the Americans had a close eye upon social work in Greece:

*“... I was surprised to find in the USC archive at Harvard University a detailed record of Greek social workers who participated in front-line, organising activities during this period. These records and internal USC communications included details about the personal lives and social backgrounds of practitioners and were so detailed that they even referred to their physical disabilities. Admittedly, I was astonished to find the best informed record on Greek social work, not in Athens but in Boston.”* (Ioakimidis, 2008:117).

The interest of the US in Greek social work activity continued until 1967:

*“...it was not until 1967 that the Americans completely withdrew their strict supervision over social work education and practice, which is more than 20 years after their first involvement”* (Ioakimidis, 2008:111).

Unsurprisingly, in the period after the civil war and the victory of the Right the authoritarian regime in co-operation with the Americans were interested to secure the control of any profession that had direct contact with the people in order to avoid any tendency for the “threat of communism” to flourish. Despite the authoritarian ideology and policies of the period, it would be rather simplistic to conclude that the practitioners of the period were in the main responsible. If anything, they could be described as often naïve being influenced by pure philanthropic motives to help their fellow human beings after the destruction of the country during the years of warfare. As Panoutsopoulou (1985:17) describes for the decade of the 1950s:

*“So our job has become our vocation and as a result we didn’t demand any rights or calculated the hours of work. Maybe we were wrong, maybe not...”*.

From 1950 until 1965 there was significant social work activity on a professional and educational level (see Tables 2 and 3). At the end of 1950 and specifically in 1959 social work is for the first time recognized as a profession by statute (Dedoussi et al., 2004, Kallinikaki, 1998, Panoutsopoulou, 1984, Stathopoulos, 1996, 2005). From 1950 starts the systematic appliance of social work as a science where trained social

workers work in the welfare sector. In 1950 the “Ministry of Social Welfare- with the co-operation of Royal Welfare- employed social workers all over Greece especially for applying the programme “Social protection to families” (Kallinikaki, 1998:105).

In 1954 the Juveniles’ Protection Association (Etaireia Prostatias Anilikon) used on a voluntary basis probation officers who from this period until now work in the Juvenile Courts. A number <sup>7</sup>of posts for social workers appeared from 1954 in the Ministry of Social Services (Panoutsopoulou, 1984) and in 1956 the Ministry of Health and Welfare introduced social services in hospitals where the graduates from the school of Royal Welfare worked (Kallinikaki, 1998). In the literature the development of training of social workers at least in the early years (mainly after the 1950s) was linked with the above gradual increase in public welfare services (Panoutsopoulou, 1984, Kallinikaki, 1998).

In yet another significant and “dark”<sup>8</sup> political period in Greece- known as the military dictatorship (junta) (1967-1974) - the role of social work is again rarely discussed. Few references concerning social work activity were found such as Stathopoulos (2005) and Papatheofilou’s (1981:48-49) where she wonders why social workers had stopped believing that they could “save the world” and why they “stopped to struggle”:

*“But why did we come up to this point? First of all, we shouldn’t forget that the profession and professionals survived through a 7 years dictatorship and the less that we could argue is that it created stagnant waters. Social work cannot flourish without freedom...”*

According to Ioakimidis (2008:150), SKLE<sup>9</sup> (Table 2) the main professional and scientific body of social workers in Greece, historically focuses on rather “sectional issues” rather encourage its members to follow any debates concerning major political and social “battles” that “shook the rest of Greek society”. Moreover,

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<sup>7</sup> The exact number of the social workers for this period is unknown, There are some estimations that in 1961 there were about 300 practitioners all over Greece (Ioakimidis, 2008) while data are available in 1975 (see later in the chapter). It is worth mentioning that in contemporary Greece as well the number of the professionals is not known and estimations are based on the members of SKLE. Moreover in contemporary Greece, as I will also mention later repeated visits in several ministries weren’t successful in figuring the number of the social workers in CWDs and municipalities.

<sup>8</sup> The military dictatorship with the contribution of the United States and Greek monarchy had a main interest to avert any progressive attempt by G. Papandreou – the grandparent of the prime-minister in 2009- to become the governor of the country. During the junta thousands of progressive and left citizens were chased and imprisoned, with a large number of exiles. Even gatherings of the citizens, and songs (for example the music by Theodorakis) that could have a revolutionary or progressive meaning were forbidden (Kosmopoulos, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Hellenic Association of Greek Social Workers (SKLE in Greek).

Ioakimidis based on his discovery of correspondence between the leaders of the junta and SKLE argues that there are signs of active social work collaboration in order to ensure the “social adjustment” of the citizens, to ensure societal and political order (Ioakimidis, 2008:153). In any case social work seems to have been influenced by the politics of the period where little activity of the profession is recorded due to the “limited welfare measures” (Stathopoulos, 2005:185) in a reign of terror.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>1950</b>	Starts the systematic appliance of social work as a profession
<b>1954</b>	Establishment of Hellenic Association of Social Workers (SKLE) with 96 members. From 1956 SKLE is member of International Federation of Social Work. In 2008 SKLE has 5,000 members
<b>1956</b>	- Starts the creation of social services in hospitals - Establishment of the “Committee of Constant Education in Social Work”
<b>1954, 1955</b>	After the earthquakes in 1953 in Ionian islands, and later in other parts of Greece in 1955 & 1957 more social workers were put in welfare sector (Mastrogiannis, 1960 cited in Kallinikaki, 1998)
<b>1959</b>	Enactment of social work as a profession (law decree 4018, FEK 247/12.11.1959)
<b>1961-1962</b>	- Royal Decree 690/61 concerning the preconditions of professional license for social workers & duties, ethical issues etc. - First Pan-Hellenic Conference of Social Workers by the “Committee of Constant Education in Social Work” under the authority of Queen
<b>1963</b>	First journal for social welfare named as “Eklogi”
<b>1964</b>	Establishment of SEKE (Council of Education in Social Work)
<b>1965</b>	Social workers are included by the law 4464/1965 in the first category of public servants
<b>1973-1974</b>	Posts for social workers in the Ministries of Social Services and Justice (law decree 1375/73 & 272/74)
<b>1977</b>	Establishment of the Department of Social Work in the Ministry of Social Services
<b>1978</b>	- Law Decree 891/7.12.78 defines the object of work of social workers (social welfare, health, social insurance, education, community organization and development, criminality, occupational guidance) - Second Pan-Hellenic Conference of social workers by SKLE
<b>1985</b>	Third Pan-Hellenic Conference of social workers with the title “Social work and Social Change” organized by SKLE
<b>1986</b>	First issue of the scientific journal “Social Work” by SKLE. The journal is published until today

<b>1989</b>	Law Decree 23/26.1.89 defines the professional rights of the social work graduates from TEI
<b>1992 until today</b>	According to Law Decree 23/30.1.92 defines until today the preconditions for obtaining professional licence as a social worker as well as issues of ethics, sectors of social work practice, duties to users and employers-organizations
<b>1993</b>	Pan-Hellenic Conference by SKLE with the title "Social services in local government"
<b>1996</b>	Pan-Hellenic Conference by SKLE with the title "Social services and social work in health and welfare: A need not a luxury"
<b>2010</b>	Pan-Hellenic Conference by SKLE with the title "Social state: Social work in peripheral and local network of social care services"

Sources: (Dedoussi et al., 2004, Kallinikaki, 1998, Panoutsopoulou, 1984, Stathopoulos, 1996, 2005, Papatheofilou, 1981)

At the end of the Second World War, many western European countries were taking decisive steps towards the development of what came to be termed as a "welfare state". However, Greece embarked on a quite different trajectory, typified by repression, emigration and minimum state social provision. In 1950 in Denmark, Britain, Norway, and Switzerland 70% of the workers had social security for illness, unemployment and accidents while in the same period Greece, Portugal and Spain didn't follow the same pattern (Mazower, 1998). More specifically, while in Britain the state expenditure for social services increased from 11.3% - of the Gross National Product- in 1938 to 23.2% in 1970, at the same period in Britain:

*"... the sum of public expenditure was increased by 30.0% of Gross National Product to 47.1% in 1970, where the social services were almost half of all the public expenditures" (Mazower,1998:288).*

On the other hand in Greece in 1963 state expenditure for health was 9.0% - of the total public expenditures -while for insurance-welfare and housing 3.4% and in 1975 it decreased to 7.5% and 1.0% and only at the beginning of the 1980s was there an increase (Petmesidou, 1992). Consequently, during the first decades after the Second World War the main focus wasn't on the development of a welfare state (Maloutas – Oikonomou, 1988). Between 1950 and 1970 thousands of Greeks emigrated, especially to western countries as an antidote to the poverty and unemployment that they faced in Greece.

## Contemporary social work and welfare: 1974-2011

After the military dictatorship (junta) and the establishment of democracy in 1974 there was a small increase in the role of the state in welfare provision (Stathopoulos, 2005) but that was also accompanied by the first signs of the crisis of the welfare state (Maloutas and Oikonomou, 1988). On the political level there is from 1974 the restoration of democracy in Greece and the halt to the hunting of communists and the legalization of KKE (Greek Communist Party) with the later recognition of National Resistance by the PASOK<sup>10</sup> government in 1981.

However, in the welfare sector at the end of the 1970s, while in much of western Europe, there had already began the “crisis of the welfare state” as well as disputing the function of state social services, there is the first attempt in Greece for promoting “*some of the estate of a welfare state (for example the establishment of the National Health System)*” (Petmesidou, 1992:15).

Greece was transformed from an agricultural society directly to a Western type of society – a capitalistic one with its particularities- without following the steps of industrialization that European states followed, this is seen by Petmesidou as one of the factors informing the particularity of what is called the welfare state in Greece after the Second World War (Petmesidou cited in Venieris and Papatheodorou, 2003). In addition the small number of paid workers in big factories was linked with the non existent pressure by the working class for state intervention while at the same time ensuring the existence of informal carers who substituted for state welfare provision. Moreover as Maloutas and Oikonomou (1988:35) argue:

*“the political demands for social provision were channelled towards the individualization of social problems and their troubleshooting was seen as a personal problem. Clientilism and later populism were some of the favourable factors for this direction”.*

The phenomenon of clientilistic relations is one of the basic characteristics of public administration since the Greek state was established in 1830 until today. It is reflected in the officialdom of the welfare services as well as in the provision of benefits.

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<sup>10</sup> Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement

The clientilistic relations are based, even from 19<sup>th</sup> century, on

*“the exchange of votes between citizens and politicians accompanied by accommodation to the circumstances and a personal relationship between the voter and the politician”* (Sotiropoulos, 2001:148).

Petmesidou based on the analysis of Ferrera<sup>11</sup> refers to specific characteristics in the social protection system in Greece such as “particularistic-clientilistic forms” where the welfare system promotes individuals or social groups

*“...on the basis of bargaining power and their position in clientilistic clusters, rather than on the basis of their needs and citizenship rights”* (Petmesidou, 1996:329).

In general clientilism is one of the integral characteristics of the Greek political system. For example, people exchange their votes with politicians in order to find a job for themselves or for their children. Familialism is one further significant characteristic in the Greek welfare system (Petmesidou, 1996, Koukouli et al, 2008). The informal network of care (usually the family) remains the basic provider of social care in contemporary Greece. According to Stasinopoulou (1992:113) the main providers of informal care in Greece are *“... the family, the relatives, the friends, neighbours, the colleagues in work”* with women having the main responsibility. Research by Stathopoulos and Amara (1992) has shown that women between 45-65 years old provide the biggest part of informal care in Greece. This highlights the responsibility that is upon the woman as the main carer for the elderly and the children that are traditionally placed. Welfare provision by the state may be available whenever the informal network is absent or insufficient. The provision is usually small in amount and restricted to the member of the family who suffers while at the same time ignores the carer, stigmatises the receivers and recycles the problem (Stasinopoulou, 1993).

Historically, the Church is also one of the basic providers of welfare provision in Greece. According to Aurilionis the Church is very strong in welfare provision based

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<sup>11</sup> According to Ferrera's typology for welfare systems, Greece – as well as Italy, Spain and Portugal – apply the Mediterranean model of Welfare. The basic characteristics of this model are: the inequality of welfare provision between different categories of workers, the existence of the National Health systems by which is assured hygienic cover of the population, the lack of income support of the indigents through the public welfare provision, and the domination of clientilism by which social provision and benefits are distributed (Ferrera cited in Amitsis, 2001). Additional characteristics are the common socio-economic level to some extent as well as the cultural similarities between the Mediterranean countries.



on its own rules and regulation while social work is still limited. As he argues, today there is

*“the co-operation among municipalities and priests which is based on the voluntary work, where naturally the presence of social workers is not anticipated...”*

(Aurilionis, 2006:87).

On the political level the relationship between the Greek state and Church is very close and the Church with its power often intervenes in political affairs (Dimitropoulos, 2001). In contemporary Greece, the Church and the informal caring network of women are an integral part of the four main sectors of its welfare structure (Table 3).

<b>Table 3: Sectors where social services are applied in contemporary Greece</b>
<p><b>Public sector:</b>  <i>State social services, Local Government, Legislative Organizations of Public Sector (named as Nomika Prosopa Dimosiou Dikaiou in Greek)</i></p>
<p><b>Private Non-Profit Sector:</b>            Church – NGO’s – Legislative Organizations of Private Sector<sup>12</sup> (Nomika Prosopa Idiotikou Dikaiou in Greek)</p>
<p><b>Market:</b>  <b>Profit Sector</b>            For example private agencies that provide care to children and the elderly</p>
<p><b>Self-Help:</b>  <b>Informal network of care</b>            For example the family or neighbours</p>

Source: (Seibel cited in Stathopoulos, 2005:225)

To return to the brief historical analysis of welfare provision, in general the public expenditure for the welfare sector was very low at least until the beginning of the 1980s (Petmesidou, 1996) when the demand of the Greek people for democratisation was expressed in the election of the Pan - Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in 1981. The main political slogan during this period, *allaghi* (change) was fulfilled and the “wind of change” was apparent all over Greece during this period. The election of the socialist government of PASOK in 1981 was accompanied by a number of

<sup>12</sup> The Legislative Organizations of Private Sector for example OKANA (Organization for the Drugs) is financed by the state by specific accounts.

state welfare initiatives, such as the provision of pensions for women farmers and the creation of the National Health System (ESY) by which every person had the right to get free medical and social services (Sassoon, 2001). In addition open-care centres for the elderly (named as KAPI in Greek) (Law 1416/1984) were created with transfer of responsibility to local authorities (Petmesidou, 1996). Although there was an increase in social expenditures at least during the first years of the PASOK government it is also important to note that these public *“expenditures were mainly for pensions and not for the provision of wider welfare services”* (Petmesidou, 1992:131) or as Robolis and Xletsos (1995:72) put it the

*“non completeness of the basic services that characterize welfare state” is evidence that the “welfare state in Greece passed from underdevelopment to crisis”.*

By the above quote is indirectly apparent the political choices of the 1980s. The social democratic character of the state during the first half of the 1980s for creating a minimum welfare state failed to complete a chain of organized social services and by 1986 curtailments in social expenditure mark the gradual shift to neo-liberal policies.

So for example, KAPI were understaffed and didn't succeed in fulfilling their aims while the Health Centres never really functioned and failed to meet the expectations set for them. A number of reforms during the second half of the 1980s and 1990s following the mandates of the European Union led to reduction of social expenditures. In the middle of the 1980s social expenditure decreased and in the early years of the 1990s was negative (Petmesidou, 2006a). More specifically, while in *“1989 total social expenditure amounted to 20.7 per cent of GDP in 1993 it fell to 15.8 per cent”* (Guillen and Alvarez, 2000, cited in Gravaris, 2006:70). In general the social transfers (within the exemption of pensions) *“remained negligible during the 1990s through to 2001”* (Papatheodorou and Petmesidou, 2006:58).

As Stathopoulos (2005) argues from 1980 until 1988 the government of PASOK attempted to replace the private welfare sector with the public one principally with regard to health care. But as the author highlights the policy of privatization by the right government of Nea Dimokratia which came to power in 1990 followed the international paradigm of “less state” and privatization of the public sector. But, from 1981 until 2000 the right wing government of Nea Dimokratia had a very short period of three years governance, while PASOK governed the country for about

twenty years and consequently the responsibility for the policies cannot be solely seen as the responsibility of Nea Dimokratia.

Through the accession of Greece to the European Union in 1987-under the governance of PASOK - there is an attempt to bring Greek policy in accordance with the EU's mandates. Unsurprisingly, from the middle of the 1980s the government of PASOK follows an austerity policy, in antithesis to its first years of governance. The austerity policy has led to an increase of social inequalities as it will be later discussed. Kazakos (2003) argues that the Greek governments of both PASOK and Nea Dimokratia attempted to be in accordance with the neo-liberal financial and economic policies of the EU. Specifically, in the early 1990s:

*“Social spending declined both as a percentage of GDP and in real terms” and a number of measures led to deepening “inequalities as the number of pensioners receiving the lowest pension increased significantly by the mid-1990’s as did the number of pensioners living in poverty” (Petmesidou, 2006a:41).*

In 1995 the Ministry of Health Welfare and Social Insurance was renamed as the Ministry of Health and Welfare (Amitsis, 2001) while in 2004 the government of Nea Dimokratia changed it to the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity which remains until today. These changes in the name of the ministry -besides the reforms at the legislative level - signal also the changes at the ideological and political level concerning the role of the state in welfare. Particularly, the new name of Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity signalled the entrance of the rhetoric that the solidarity and “civil society” is now on the stage. Although we will later discuss these issues, it is important however to mention that a number of developments during the 1990s, such as the expansion of the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as the growth in co-operation between the public and private sector and the gradual entrance of the private sector were now on the political agenda. Unsurprisingly the social welfare expenditure was in 1986 3.3 per cent of the total social budget and decreases to 2.7 per cent in 1990 when the reforms were implemented. However it increases in the middle of 1990s at 4.4% and fell in 2003 in 2.1% (Petmesidou, 2006b). The increase of the middle of nineties as Petmesidou claims is due to a great extent to the programmes funded by EU mainly in the areas of social inclusion and unemployment however *“expenditure for services to the disabled and to families and children remained stagnant as percentage of GDP and considerably shrunk as a percentage share of total benefits in kind” (Petmesidou, 2006b:329).*

Social work couldn't but be impacted by the above general political and welfare changes. In 1975 "1,251 social workers had obtained the licence (32 men 1219 women)" (Papadopoulou cited in Panoutsopoulou, 1984:202). Although there is a gradual increase in social workers' posts from 1974 it is worth noting that in 1986 – during the decade when there was the first attempt to establish a welfare state in Greece - there were only 212 social workers for programmes of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The ratio of social workers in 1981 to the population was 1:45,945 inhabitants (Ministry of Health and Welfare 1986, cited in Stathopoulos, 2005). According to Ioakimidis (2008) the interest of the state in social work activity is limited during the 1980s and signals the indifference of the state to social work. Some of the main indicators of this indifference are the non-existence of data for social workers and social work, the limited reference to social work from 1981-1989 in hardly any legislation, while unemployment appears for first time for some social work professionals, given that in 1981 the rate of unemployment amongst social workers was 33.0% compared with an average national unemployment rate of 4.1% (Sotiropoulos, cited in Ioakimidis, 2008:237).

However during the 1980s there is activity by SKLE which launched the publication of a scientific journal as well as holding regular conferences. The growth in social work activity can be partly be explained by the general political situation in Greece and the "wind of change" and greater freedom for the citizens in this period. It is worth mentioning that at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pan-Hellenic conference of social workers in 1978 the announcements have significant differences with those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Pan-Hellenic conference in 1961 that express the deep concern of the participants about the role of social work. The Iatridis announcement (1981)<sup>13</sup> at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pan-Hellenic Conference refers particularly to the need for social work to be involved in the planning of social policy while Papatheofilous's<sup>14</sup> announcement is a clear expression of the difficulties that social workers face for achieving social change in a restricted political environment:

*"What are the possibilities for the social worker in order to achieve a conscious professional participation for social change? Or even to achieve the change of attitudes? In a country where everyone is persuaded that if they want to achieve anything the only solution is to use clientilism (meson in Greece)....social work is*

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<sup>13</sup> Although the conference took place in 1978 its proceedings were published in 1981.

<sup>14</sup> Papatheofilou was a director in the National Welfare Organization.

*difficult to be applied. Even social workers use clientilistic relations in order to help effectively the individual the group or the community....To what extent can social workers help for social change without being perceived as leftist or that they deny the establishment?" (Papatheofilou, 1981:54).*

Although, the obstacles of clientilism and the fear of social work to be connected with politics is apparent in the above quote the feature for social work to struggle for social change illuminates a different period for social work at least by some professionals and academics. These are new developments. Additionally, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pan-Hellenic conference in 1985 probably for the first time radical approaches in social work were presented by Mullender and Ward (1987) with significant references to the rights of the users. In both of the above conferences more progressive approaches as well as scepticism concerning the role of social work in Greece is apparent. The "wind of change" of the period where for the first time a socialistic government permitted social work to express freely some of their aspirations and concerns contrasts sharply with the 1<sup>st</sup> Pan-Hellenic conference in 1961 held under the authority of the queen.

On the educational level, social work for first time came under the authority of the Ministry of Education in the 1970s named as KATEE. From 1983 social workers studied in Technological Institutions (TEI), today with 4 years of studies leading to a BA degree, with the last 6 months in practice placements (Papadaki and Nygren, 2006) before the graduates can apply for the license. While in the past the professional license was provided by the Ministry, after 1995 with the so-called decentralization of public administration it is provided by the departments of social work in the counties (prefectures). In 1996 the Department of Social Administration in the University of Thrace launched a course in social work. Certainly, this is a significant development where for the first time in contemporary Greece social work enters the university level. Moreover, during the first decade of the 2000s there is an important and dynamic activity by the department in Thrace through research, postgraduate studies, programmes in the community and publications that struggle to fill the gap in the limited social work literature in Greece. However, the fact that this is the only social work department at university level is a rather tiny development.

Overall, in contemporary Greece, as far as social protection is concerned it is based largely on the provision of enhancements to income while the provision of public social services is still very limited. The responsibility of care for children and elderly

still rests mainly on women while a private sector is emerging and expanding through either increasing use of private institutions (children and nursing homes for the elderly) or by paying for private services in home through the employment of immigrants who have no national insurance (Matsaganis, 2003). Hence some basic characteristics of current welfare provision by the state in Greece are the low financing of welfare provision, lack of planning in social policy, with additional attributes of the welfare system such as clientilism and populism (Gravaris, 2006). In addition there are administrative problems, inadequate expenditure for social protection, acute problems in the Health sector, as well as low pensions and benefits (Venieris and Papatheodorou, 2003). The Greek system of welfare provision is basically oriented by the central authority to focus on minimum financial help and the provision of minimal material and personal social services. Additionally, at societal level there is an increase of poverty where 21.0% of the population lives under the limit of poverty (European Commission 2003)<sup>15</sup> and poverty rates as well as unemployment are increased (Eurostat, 2009, NSS, 2010) with correspondingly deeper social inequalities.

According to the report by INE-GSEE<sup>16</sup> (2009), the fact that public expenditure in critical sectors such as social protection and health based on the states' budget in 2009 had stagnated in 2.5% of the GDP, and for employment and education in 3.1%, demonstrates the gap between social and financial policy's measures and the social needs as well as the confronting of social inequalities in Greece. According the same report, during 2008-2009 the disposal budget of the Fund Against Poverty would practically mean that for

*“2,300,000 Greeks that live under the limit of poverty a provision of 152 euro per annum meaning 0,40 euros per day” is estimated to be provided by the state (INE-GSEE, 2009:4). In addition in 2009, the state's budget shows that the “poorest part of population (employees and pensioners), finance ...through the tax system and the states budget the richest parts of the population” (INE-GSEE, 2009:9).*

Subsequently, in this context the pressure upon the informal network of care, the users as well as social services in a restricted welfare system cannot but be increased

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<sup>15</sup> The definition of poverty as well as a general discussion of the poverty issue is discussed in later chapters of the thesis.

<sup>16</sup>INE is the Labour Institute of GSEE (Greek General Confederation of Labour which refers to the workers in the private sector).

however the reality of social services in contemporary Greece, will be discussed more analytically later in the thesis.

As far as the employment of social workers in contemporary Greece is concerned, the majority work in the public sector, in the fields of mental and health, in social and welfare services, or education. In the private sector posts are available in industry or business, or social workers can work as private practitioners. Finally, in the NGOs or the semi public sector there are a number of posts (Dedoussi et al., 2004).

In the private sector practitioners generally receive low salaries (about 700 euros per month) while in the public sector salaries follow the general standards of public servants (SKLE, 2010) starting from about 1,000 euros (as first salary) per month to about 1,500 (after years of work) euros per month<sup>17</sup>. More “flexible” forms of work have gradually appeared after the 1990s following the mandates by the European Union such as part-time work, the so called “stage” programmes<sup>18</sup> and the gradual entrance of the private sector by the middle of the 1990s. Finally, there are now more social work posts in NGOs as well as in short-term programmes funded by the EU. The new flexible forms of labour conditions as well as the increased posts in NGOs and programmes funded by the EU are in accordance with the rhetoric of the “third way” and “civil society” while the new labour conditions are in agreement with the EU’s mandates. Particularly for social work as Ioakimidis claims after the 1990s due to the above factors there is an increased interest by the state in social work named the “rediscovery of social work” (Ioakimidis, 2008:250). Moreover, during 1990’s “*the profession’s rights of social workers are better defined*” (Koukouli et al, 2008:220) and other attempts for upgrading the education of social work were attempted as it was discussed above.

There is however a lack of data concerning the exact number of social workers in Greece. The basic source is the SKLE where according to its database 5,000 are registered in contemporary Greece (Koinonikos leitourgos, 2008) but it is estimated

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<sup>17</sup> During the first semester of 2010, when the specific chapter was written the government of PASOK announced significant curtailments for the salaries of the public servants as well as to the semi-public sector to some extent. Consequently, the above salaries are now restricted.

<sup>18</sup> In theory, “stage” programmes were implemented for obtaining professional experience. However in practice young professionals worked in these programmes as an antidote to unemployment. They were paid very low salaries (about 500 euro per month) and had no national insurance or for these years to be calculated in their pension. Finally these programmes stopped in the public sector in 2010 and established in the private one.

that only about half of social workers are registered (Dedoussi et. al., 2004). In general, in contemporary Greece social work has a low professional status (Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008) and according to the same authors the limited research in the field is one of the indicators of this low status of the profession. To my mind, the reasons for the underdevelopment of the social services as well as the low status of social work are linked with its class specificity as a profession as well as the politics of welfare and educational policies. These issues will be gradually discussed through the thesis. In any case under a restricted and class specific welfare system it comes as no surprise that social services have a slow development, intervened to “*offer first-aid services aimed at acute cases*” (Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008:166) with no time available for preventative work (Georgoussi et al, 2003) while the system in the public sector stigmatizes the receivers (Petmesidou, 2006b).

Overall, as it has been shown through the historical evolution of welfare and social work, the state had a “close eye” upon social work in periods where there was the need to control the practitioners and the people while later the indifference by the state to social work and the welfare sector was linked with the general political interests of the period. Social work needs to be examined and understood not only in terms of its own dynamic but in a wider context of state policy and ideology as well as in the wider context of social and political changes on the European and global level.

In any case as has been shown in this chapter the relationship of social work with the state’s policy is crucial. Social work had a rather long struggle in Greece, starting from the “dark” years after the Second World War continuing to 1974 when democracy was established before finally being an integral part of the reforms in the politics of welfare. The evolution of social work both at the educational or professional level clearly follows the general political currents and trends in the country. This brief analysis of the historical evolution of social welfare and social work has shown the close link between politics-social welfare and social work. This issue is in antithesis to the so called “neutrality” of the profession as well as to the limited critical “voices” in Greek social work academia.



## Summary

- Social work in Greece has a relatively long history with its first school established in an undemocratic era during 1937-1939, interrupted by the Second World War while its recognition as a profession came later in 1959.
- The first steps of official social work in Greece followed a “top-down” trajectory by American professors and methods of social work with regard to the political involvement of foreign powers in the internal affairs of Greece during the post Second World war period. Moreover, an amalgam of religious and conservative ideology with regard to American curricula affected the first schools and practice of social work.
- Social work’s evolution at both the professional and educational level is closely linked with the politics of each period which significantly influence the formulation and evolution of the profession in contrast to the so called “neutrality” of the profession.
- It is questionable if a welfare state in Western European terms ever existed in Greece with the exception of the first years of the PASOK (1981-1985) administration.
- Some of the basic characteristics of the welfare system in contemporary Greece include the lack of planning and co-ordination, clientilism, limited funding, low benefits. The main responsibility for caring for some of the most vulnerable in Greek society rests upon the informal carers.
- Consequently under a class welfare sector social services are underdeveloped.
- In total the profession of social work has a low status whilst there is limited research in the field as well as constrained publications concerning Greek social work. Particularly, critical social work approaches are very rare.

## **Chapter 2: Research methodology and the researched agencies**

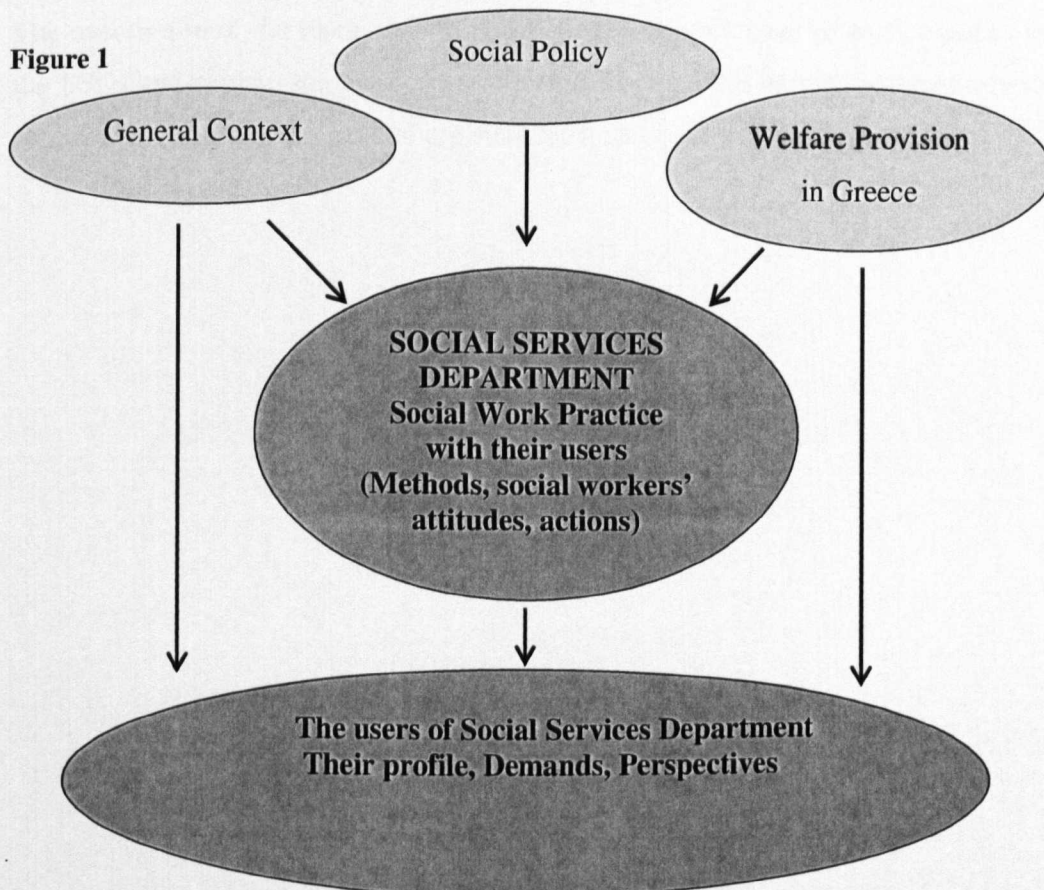
### **Introduction**

The present chapter examines the research methodology and justifies the choice of the specific SSDs to be studied. A chain of decisions have been made from the initial steps of the research process. Initially, the decisions concerning the choice of research methodology were based on the research questions and the literature. In particular, the purpose of the specific research, being an in depth understanding and explanation of contemporary social work practice in Greece, required qualitative research. The research took place in different cities in accordance with the case study strategy (in five different cases-Social Services Departments) over a period of three years on a part time basis. In particular, the research questions and the research methodology are initially discussed below before proceeding to a more detailed examination of the selected cases. This is then followed by other significant aspects of the research procedure such as the access, the data collection methods as well as analysis of the data and the ethical issues.

## The research questions

The research questions are essential factors for selecting the research strategy as well as determining the methods for collecting the data. The core of the research pertains to the fundamental questions of “how” and “why” of social work practice in both CWDs and municipalities.

Based on the hypothesis that the users of the Social Services Departments (SSDs) in the County Welfare Departments (CWDs) in Greece and in Municipalities are people facing poverty and deprivation, what is the practice of social workers with their users? How do social workers respond to users’ demands? What are their methodological tools? What do social workers believe? What do users believe? In order to answer such questions the awareness of the context of welfare provision in Greece as well as the general context of the CWDs and Municipalities are essential factors. The social work practice in the specific departments of CWDs and Municipalities is the main target of the exploratory research but at the same time we should be aware of the general context, which affects this practice as it is shown in the following diagram (Figure 1).



Therefore, the literature concerning the welfare and social work context as well as the policies applied by the state are also examined through this thesis. Consequently, in addition to data from the qualitative research which is extensively drawn upon in the development of the thesis, state documents, social work practice literature as well as the limited Greek social work literature available are embedded in library based research.

In particular, the research questions discussed in my research are:

Who are the users of the SSD in CWD and Municipalities in Greece?

What are the aims, structure and function of SSD with respect to the general context of the CWDs and Municipalities?

What kind of responsibilities and powers do the social workers of the SSD have?

How do social workers work with the users of the services?

Why all SSDs function in the specific way?

What are the perspectives of both social workers and users for social work practice?

What influences the social work practice in these departments?

Which is the most appropriate and effective practice, from the social workers' and users' point of view?

The overall aim of the research is to understand in depth the social work practice in the SSDs and explain the reasons for the situation in SSDs as well as practitioners actions with regard to the general organizational and policy context.

## Research methodology

According to Yin (1994:1)

*“..., case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” and “why” questions are being posed”, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. Such “explanatory” case studies also can be complemented by two other types-“exploratory” and “descriptive” case studies”.*

In our case two of the main questions are the “how” social workers work with the users of social services and the “why” of their practice but also of the general function of the SSDs. The need to be familiar with the field has been described by Robson as one of the factors for choosing the case study as the appropriate research strategy (Robson, 1993) and therefore the case study was selected firstly for the pilot study of the research (in CWD) but also for the main research.

Punch claims that in case studies

*“...while there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible”*

(Punch, cited in Silverman, 2005:126).

On the other hand one cannot ignore what other important authors, such as Schawrtz and Jacobs, Strauss and Corbin, Van Maanen, Dabbs and Faulkner, argue: *“case study should not be confused with qualitative research”* (cited in Yin, 1994:14). In our case, the necessity of obtaining an in depth understanding of the how and why leads us to choosing as appropriate methodology the qualitative research since this understanding cannot be obtained by quantitative methods (Iosifidis, 2003, Mason, 2003). Moreover, the description of how the system works is given in as much detailed as possible and it is enriched with the point of view of the “active actors” who are involved in the research process in our case social workers and users.

The advantages of qualitative research are particularly useful in understanding how social workers work with their users as well as in taking into consideration the interaction of as many factors as possible that affect the operation and functioning of social work practice.

The issues of validity and reliability will concern us in the next paragraphs while the representativeness of the sample and the generalisability of the findings - issues that are very important in quantitative approach - are not the “ambition” of this thesis.

The research took place in five different cases and probably the findings could be seen as quite representative. According to Silverman (2005:128) “*generalisability is present in the existence of any case*”. The specific cases of the field research take place in both urban and suburban areas of Greece. Although we cannot argue that the portrait of state social work presented here necessarily represents the whole of social work in Greece we expect that our findings will help illuminate some of the existing realities of social work in Greece.

In addition, as far as it concerns the sampling logic of representativeness in case studies, Yin (1994) claims that replication of the findings and of theories should be the criterion (at least in multiple case studies), for choosing either similar or extreme cases and not as many participants as possible in such a research. Therefore, “multiple case studies” were selected in the specific research by choosing as many “extreme” cases as possible.

The issues of validity and reliability have been discussed in literature as not important enough for qualitative research however Silverman argues that these issues<sup>19</sup> are of great importance in qualitative research (Silverman, 2005). Moreover, according to Yin the construction of validity and reliability of the case study research should be based on some specific tactics. Thus, as far as it concerns validity three steps are necessary: The use of “*multiple sources of evidence*”, the establishment of “*a chain of evidence*” and the third is to “*to have the draft case study report reviewed by key informants*” (Yin, 1994:35-36). As far as it concerns reliability, the “*case study protocol*” is recommended by Yin, in order to ensure that if the specific case study is repeated “*the latter investigator will reach at the same findings and conclusions*” (ibid).

For the specific case study, there is a need to use “multiple sources of evidence” and not to resort exclusively to data gathered from interviews. For example, in order to find out the user’s profile, I used administrative records, the applications register, social workers’ files as well as interviews and direct observation (see later collection methods).

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<sup>19</sup> Silverman gives the following definitions for validity and reliability where according to Hammersley: “*By validity, I mean truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers*” while “*Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions*” (cited in Silverman, 2005:210).

Robson argues that threats to validity tend to occur for quantitative research in the planning stage while for qualitative research these threats are more common during the process of gathering and analysing data (Robson, 1993) and in our case these “threats” are dealt with by using “multiple sources of evidence” and construct “a chain of evidence”.

As far as it concerns the recommended method of constructing reliability, the “case study protocol” and the “diary” I applied were used in this research as the tools that helped me to follow the same steps in the next cases. Moreover, the basic methodological steps made during the research procedure in SSDs are the following:

- Discussions with the social workers on whether they agree with my carrying out the research in their departments.
- Visits and discussions with the heads of departments and directors regarding the degree of my access to their services and information.
- Applications and letters to senior management for gaining further access.
- Physical presence in the department as an observer before interviewing social workers, in order to gain their trust and help them feel more familiar with the presence of the researcher.
- Observing directly and in some cases as a participant during my stay, before and after the interviews (in real life context the divisions between the different kinds of observation are not so clear).
- Studying of the files and records of the users. Especially focusing on the:
  - Profile of the users.
  - Users’ demands.
  - Actions and methods of social workers.
- Statistics: In most of the cases there were no statistics available and therefore I counted one by one the users in referrals books in order to figure out the profile of the users.

Thus, although my perspective derives from a qualitative approach a number of methods have been used in order to answer sufficiently the research questions.

## The case study

Stake argues that:

*“... a case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied”*

(Stake, 1994:236).

According to the same author, there is a need for being as specific as possible about what we regard as a case study given that the identification of a case study is a complex procedure (ibid). In this research, each SSD (in CWDs, municipalities and HiHPs) in which social work practice was applied was defined as case study. The next section clarifies the reasons for the choice of the specific cases-SSDs.

## Which cases and why?

I firstly chose these agencies because they are the main sites of state social work in Greece and employ a significant proportion of Greece’s social workers. If one needs to get a clear picture of contemporary state social work in Greece, where most social work takes place, then these are the agencies which must be looked at.

In the previous chapter there was a general discussion of the welfare system and social work evolution. The research takes place in contemporary Greece where the structure of the Greek public welfare system can be described as below (Table 4).

**Table 4: The structure of public welfare system in contemporary Greece until 2010**

### **Level 1 - Central Administration**

At this level the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity has executive authority and other Ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Work and Social Insurance have an ancillary role.

### **Level 2 - Peripheral Administration**

Each periphery has a department of welfare

### **Level 3 – Prefectures (Second – tier Local Government) -named also as Counties-**

County’s Welfare Departments apply the welfare programmes

### **Level 4: Municipalities (First -tier Local Government)**

Municipalities belong to the first-tier of local government where a network of social services can be applied.

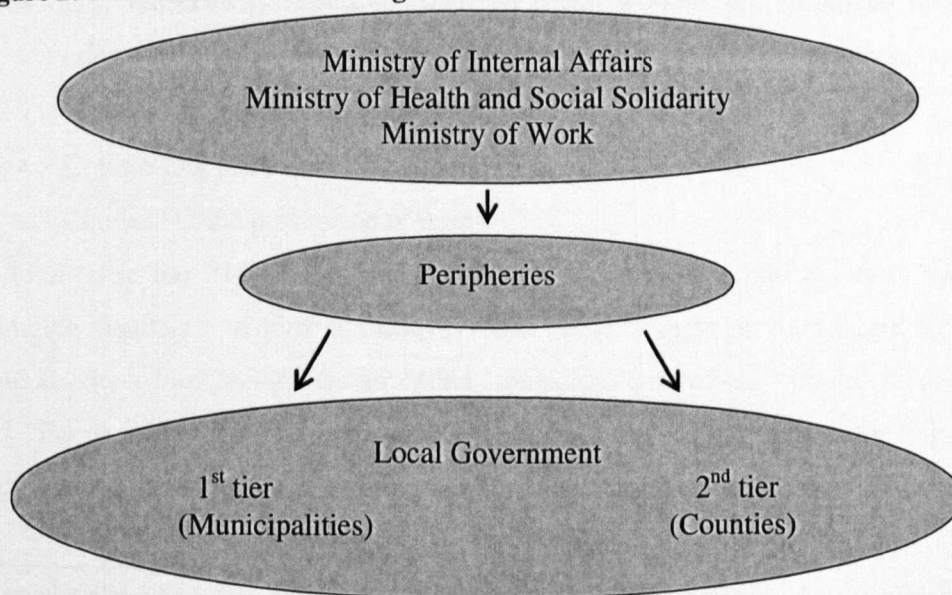
Source: (Amitsis, 2001:138)



The choice of researching state SSDs (CWDs and state SSD in municipalities) but also one semi-public (HiHP) on the first and second tier of the local government was based on a number of factors; Firstly, the gradual transfer of state's responsibilities to the Local Government (LG) mainly from the middle 1990s had brought about an increased interest in LG. In particular, there is rich literature<sup>20</sup> concerning the historical evolution of LG in Greece and more recently (especially during the 2000s) some studies which will be embedded later in the research findings, were published concerning social policy. Moreover, the number of welfare responsibilities gradually transferred to LG by the state increases. Whereas in the past the basic welfare programmes and benefit policies were managed directly by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in counties, in 1995 the specific programmes were transferred to the authority of the counties and specifically to the CWDs. Furthermore, CWDs can be perceived as one of the main sites for the provided benefits<sup>21</sup> given that benefits have been provided by the CWDs since 1950s.

Additionally, a number of social services are provided through municipalities. In general, social policy interest is focused on the function of these social services however limited research concerning social work practice has been applied. These services belong in the first and second tier of the local government as it is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: The structure of the local government**



<sup>20</sup> For example, Paparigopoulos, (1858), Kleosis (1977), Chlepas, (1999).

<sup>21</sup> The National Insurance system can also be perceived as another main provider of benefits.

Petmesidou (2006a:44) describes vividly the context:

*“...a serious attempt to systematically develop local social services would necessitate a radical reform of funding and organisation – in bureaucratic, professional and policy terms (especially at the level of municipalities)- which appears to be unlikely. Given that in Greece local government did not acquire a significant role in social service delivery during the period of welfare state expansion in the rest of Europe, one could argue that it is most likely that the country will bypass direct provision by local authorities and move directly to forms of local service delivery characterised by mix of quasi-state, third sector and private agents”.*

During the period of setting the criteria for selecting the agencies to be researched in one Municipality, there were found social workers who work in:

- A public SSD that belongs to the Municipality.
- SSD in KAPI (Open Centres of Care for the Elderly).
- Programmes financed to a great extent by the European Union, such as the HiHP, programmes for the unemployed, or for specific target groups such as gypsies or immigrants etc. The common characteristic of the majority of these programmes is that they exist and run for as long as there are finances provided by the European Union.
- Social services might also be found in Health Centres in the community with usually one social worker at the best of times.
- Day nurseries for children. Usually, social workers are employed there as educators or administrative staff and not as social worker practitioners.
- Centres for people with disabilities.
- Counselling centres.
- Centres for the prevention of drugs.

In total there are 914 municipalities in Greece. Each municipal authority can in principle maintain a number of these services. Some of these services might be state funded others run through the so called ‘municipal enterprises’<sup>22</sup> or/and funded by EU. For example, in agricultural areas or islands in Greece, there might be only one social worker who works in Help in Home Programmes or at the Health Centre. In

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<sup>22</sup> Municipalities have been able to create enterprises for providing services to the community even from the 1950s virtue of the law 1190/1951 while in contemporary Greece the legislative frame has been set by the law 1416/1984 (Vika, 2004). Many social care programmes are applied through the enterprises run in any municipality.

practice, these social workers provide their services to other groups of people who do not belong to the target- group of the specific organization but where there is a demand for covering needs of the general population.

In general municipalities are not obliged by law to have Social Services Departments; consequently, each Mayor can decide upon the level of provision on the basis of available research but more often of their personal assessments for the needs of the community or the demands that might have been expressed. Responsibility for the social policy in each Municipality rests with a political member of the Local Council and in most of the cases these people have no relevant qualifications but they do have the authority and power (as alderman of social policy) to decide about the social services and welfare programmes in the community (KEDKE-EETAA, 1995).

The following Table (5) presents findings from the research of KEDKE-EETAA concerning the services for health and welfare on a local level and hopefully provides a clearer picture of the social services in municipality.

<i>Table 5: The Complex of services on health &amp; welfare sector in Municipalities</i>	
<b>ATTICA IN 10 MUNICIPALITIES</b>	<b>REST OF GREECE IN 26 MUNICIPALITIES</b>
6 Open Centres for the elderly (known as KAPI in Greek)	25 KAPI
3 Borough Health Centres (Municipality's Health Centre)	1 Centre of health and social issues
5 Centres of Primary Health Care	2 Institutions for the elderly
1 Health Centre	2 Health Centres
1 Centre for family counselling in	1 Counselling Centre
1 Centre for children with disabilities	1 School for children with disabilities
1 Care Service Office in Municipality's level	2 Municipality's organizations for welfare
4 Day nurseries	8 Programmes for culture

Source: (KEDKE, EETAA, 1995:83)

This “mosaic” of the social services led the researcher to developing specific criteria for her choices. Therefore, rather than being lost in a number of services that apply specific services to specific groups of population (such as the prevention of drugs) it was decided that the research should focus on a state SSD. The SSD is the initial recipient of the users’ demands in the municipality and therefore their examination would provide an understanding of the profile of the users but also would permit in depth understanding and explain the why of social work practice. Secondly, other services such as KAPI provide services mainly to the elderly and wouldn’t allow the researcher to gain knowledge of social work practice with a variety of users who usually visit SSDs. Overall, the SSDs belong clearly to the authority of Municipality with social workers being paid by the state.

The choice for including the HiHP in the research was compelled by two factors: Firstly, the fact that a large number of social work practitioners and users participate in these programmes and also that HiHP runs in almost all municipalities across Greece. Secondly, the profile of the programme (semi-public) constitutes one of the main new forms of social services in the community. Additionally, these programmes are perceived as particularly effective in bringing practitioners into the community in order to work closely with the elderly and people with disabilities.

The first ever HiHP in Greece was developed in the Municipality of Peristeri-Athens. It begun as a pilot programme in 1997 but eventually it became part of the already established KAPI programme operating in 102 Municipalities in Greece (Mauris, 2005). The main objective of HiHPs is to cover the increasing health and welfare needs and demands of old people and people with disabilities, in their homes. The aim of the Programme is that beneficiaries maintain independence remaining in their own environment while they receive care services. These services are provided by a social scientist<sup>23</sup>, a nurse and a home cleaner. The personnel of the programme has all the required qualifications and skills and when necessary they also co operate with a doctor. In practice, the staff of the programmes visit users once or twice per week in their homes, but there are demands for more frequent visits (Pozios, 2005). The leader of the team is a social scientist (who in the majority of the cases is a social worker).

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<sup>23</sup> It can be either a social worker, a sociologist or even a psychologist.

In total, there are 1166 programmes all over Greece; 102 of these programmes which employ 300 workers are organized through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and financed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Package. The other 1064 with 3,500 workers are organized through the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity and funded by the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Package (Poziou, 2005). As Fotopoulos (2005) argues, the fact that three Ministries are responsible for the function of the specific programme (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Work and Internal Affairs) is problematic. He also proposes Help in Home programmes should be established through central social services departments rather than through KAPI which is now responsible for them. But one of the main problems of this specific programme is its funding as these programmes are 75% financed by the European Union and 25% by the state while the future of its funding is unknown (Fotopoulos, 2005).

The issue of the programmes' long term future is now an issue for debate in Greece and the Government hadn't announced by the time this chapter was written whether it will continue to financing this programme. A number of organizations such as SKLE, KEDKE, and Unions of the staff in Help in Home have been on strikes and demonstrated but there has been no clear answer yet. Consequently, 3,700 workers in these programmes all over Greece are "held hostage" without knowing whether they will have their job in next year or not. (KEDKE-SKLE, 2007). As a result, the character of the programme would add to the research to reveal social work practice in some of the "new" forms of social services.

In each of the counties (54 in total, in Greece see map below) there is one CWD with the exception of big counties such as Attica which has four CWDs due to the huge number of the residents (about 5,000,000 people live in Attica).



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In each of the CWDs there is one SSD where social workers work and apply the main programmes. As far as it concerns the social welfare sector in counties, it is mainly the resources by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity that fund the applied programmes by the CWDs (Getimis, 2006, Skamnakis, 2006).

Repeated visits to the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs were not effective in finding the exact number of social workers who work in CWDs and municipalities in Greece due to the lack of statistics available. Similarly, visits were made to EETAA<sup>24</sup>, KEDKE<sup>25</sup>, ITA<sup>26</sup> and SKLE concerning the number of social workers in municipalities. Data for the number of the social workers in HiHPs was obtained through their union and refers to 3,800 practitioners (including other professionals as well). Given the structure and staffing of the programme I estimate that approximately 1,000 of them are social workers.

<sup>24</sup> Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government

<sup>25</sup> Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece

<sup>26</sup> Institute of Local Government

Thus, this programme stands as the biggest single employer of social workers in Greece. The lack of statistics concerning social services is once again in accordance with the general lack of research in social services and social work in Greece but also it is an indication of the indifference of the state to the welfare sector as a whole and particularly to social services.

However, the criteria were more complex when I had to choose which precise SSDs were to be researched. Again, the lack of research, literature and data concerning the total picture of CWDs and municipalities in Greece was the main obstacle. Repeated visits to a number of organizations and ministries were not effective. Even for publications concerning social services and social policy I had to borrow books from the administrative staff in KEDKE given that they were not available to the public. Therefore, informal discussions were made with key-informant such as two ex-presidents of SKLE and practitioners<sup>27</sup> who provided me with the information for the general activity of at least those SSDs that they knew. Overall, the choice was based on the following criteria (Table 6).

*Table 6: Criteria for selecting the cases*

Criteria	Area of research	Cases
<b>I. "Extreme" cases</b> - Half of the population lives in Athens - Purely urban area	Attica	One CWD One central SSD in municipality
- Semi-agricultural area and city in the periphery of Greece	City in Peloponnesus and suburban out of the city	- One central SSD in municipality - Help in Home - One CWD
- Islands	Aegean island	- CWD - Help in Home (Only interviews with practitioners due to limited time and resources)

<sup>27</sup> The names of the key-informants and practitioners cannot be disclosed for ensuring anonymity.

<b>2. SSDs that cover large parts of the population</b>	For the total of the CWDs and the municipality in Athens the specific criterion is applied. In municipality and Help in Home Programmes in suburban areas the criterion doesn't fit	
<b>3. How we can learn more from a case (Stake, 1994)</b>	Access to users' files, and observation	In the total of the cases
<b>4. Access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easier in Peloponnesus for the CWD and municipality.</li> <li>- Problems in access in one municipality in urban area.</li> <li>- Delays in CWD in Athens.</li> <li>- Easy access in one municipality of Athens due to practitioners.</li> </ul>	
<b>Total number of cases: 5 (2 CWDs – 2 municipalities – 1 Help in Home)</b>		

Approximately, half of the Greek population lives in Athens therefore, two SSDs based in Athens were selected and particularly those that cover large parts of the population. In parallel, two other SSDs (and one HiHP) were selected in a city and a suburban area of Peloponnesus respectively. Finally, there were interviews with practitioners in one Aegean island (in CWD and HiHP) so that I could include an “extreme” case in my research. In this way the research covered different cities in Greece that could be perceived as typical cases.

But mainly as Stake claims, the selection of the case should be based more on the criterion of how we can learn more from a case and less on its representativeness (Stake, 1994). Therefore, the availability and willingness of practitioners to accept my presence during visits to users' houses, to allow me access to their files (in some cases) enabled me to understand in more depth the function of the SSDs.

Access to one of the CWD and one municipality was easier for me given that the majority of the colleagues there already knew me. However, for the CWD in Athens access was gained after three months of writing letters to the managers and visiting the service repeatedly. The ease of access was a criterion for the two cases.



In one of the municipalities that I attempted to gain access, the refusal did not come from the local council and the alderman but from the social worker who worked there and did not want me to stay in the department where the only source of data would be his interview. Consequently, this SSD was rejected given this practitioner's refusal. In total, the research took place over a period of three years on a part time basis.

## **Access**

According to Silverman, there are some basic ways in order to gain overt access such as: “Impression management”, “Obtaining bottom-up access”, “Being non-judgmental”, (Silverman, 2005:255-257). Specifically, by “bottom up access” I mean that I firstly talked to the practitioners and ensured the assent of the majority before making contacts or sending official letters to the directors and politicians. Social Services Departments are rather “‘closed’ or ‘private’ settings where access is controlled by gatekeepers”, but “overt access” was preferred where the subjects were informed about the aim of the research and had given their assent (Hornsby-Smith, 1993, Walsh 1998, cited in Silverman, 2005:255). Basically, access depended on factors such as:

- The general policy and context of each SSD.
- The power and control of the director of SSD.
- The trustworthiness of the researcher.
- The social workers’ sense that they needed the permission of their superiors.
- The role of practitioner – researcher which made access easier in some cases.

The aforementioned factors were at the same time and to some extent, valuable information to the researcher about the general context of SSDs and how the system works. The control by the directors over social workers affected the access of the researcher in some cases while other social workers had the “freedom” to allow the access without taking the official permission from their director.

## **Access to users**

Although I could easily interview service users in my agency<sup>28</sup>, who had repeatedly visited SSDs in both CWDs and municipalities, I decided from the beginning not to do this. Not only due to the consequences on the validity and reliability of the research but mainly due to the possible consequences upon the relation with my users and ethical considerations. However, the issue of gaining access for interviewing users was a problem; I found four users by myself, either among those waiting in the waiting room of a SSD, or at a Roma camp which I visited. But in most cases the “gatekeepers”- social workers gave me a list of users, or asked them if they wanted

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<sup>28</sup> During the research time, I worked as a practitioner in an NGO for patients suffering from cancer.

to be interviewed by me. That worried me because it could have a number of serious consequences upon the validity of the interviews:

First of all, social workers could choose the “good” users so that they would be sure that the users would not say “negative” things about the specific social worker. Unsurprisingly, that was the case. The users who were recommended by the social workers in their interviews rarely made “negative” comments about the specific social worker. But on the other hand, they did say “negative” things about the social workers in the same department or even in the same office and they had no problem talking about all the other social workers that they had met in their life. In most of the cases they had the experience of social workers from a wide range of different services and therefore the data they provided were very rich.

Another threat could be the users not telling me what they really think of the social workers because they were afraid that I might tell their social worker. Moreover, they might feel that given that I am “one of them” I have some kind of power over them and I might reproduce power relations. But what actually happened was that when I made clear to them that “what they were going to tell me would remain between us and their anonymity would be definitely kept as there were given to me so many telephone numbers that social workers couldn’t find out who I interviewed” the majority told me “I don’t care. This is an opportunity for people to hear how things are”. However, the process of gaining the trust of some of them was gradual. It developed during the interviewing process and it was not a “given” from the beginning.

Another problematic area was that I had many refusals from users (about 20), especially when I had to talk to people on the phone and explain who I am and what I am doing. This was not certainly a preferred way by the researcher given that the physical contact is better. However, the limited resources (self-financed) as well as the fact that Athens is a big city and takes a lot of time to travel in order to meet people did not allow face-to-face meetings. The tensions and dilemmas which I faced throughout the research procedure are discussed analytically in the reflexivity section (see Appendix 2).

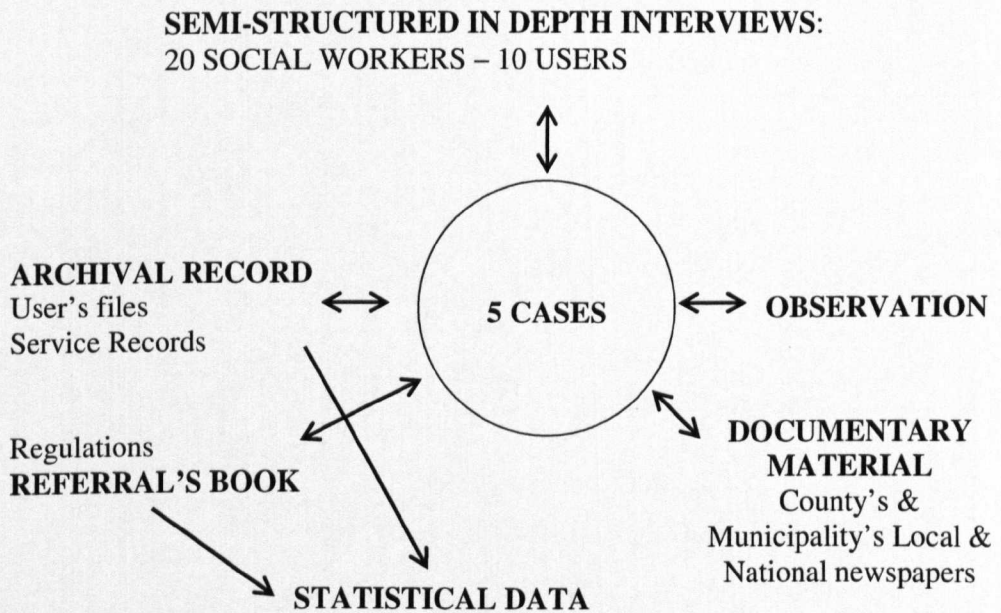
**The data collection methods**

Usually, in case studies a number of qualitative methods are applied having a complementary role to each other. According to Yin (1994:80):

“...a good case study should contain as many sources as possible” and he recommends “six sources of evidence: Documentation, Archival Records, Interviews, Direct Observations, Participant Observation, Physical Artefacts” (Figure 3).

Moreover, the methods that have been selected were the most appropriate for answering the research questions for the specific research (Table 7).

**Figure 3: The multiple sources of data for the case study**



Source: (Yin, 1994)

<i>Table 7: The research questions and data sources</i>	
<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data Sources for each of the cases</b>
Who are the users of the SSDs in CWDs and Municipalities in Greece?	Interviews with front-line social workers
What is their profile?	Interviews with users of SSD
What are their demands?	Administrative records
	Referrals' book
	Direct Observation
	Participant Observation
	Newspapers

What are the aims, structure and function of SSD with respect to the general context of the CWDs and Municipalities?	<p>Legislation of the CWDs and municipalities</p> <p>County's and municipalities' regulations</p> <p>Literature Review</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Informal discussions</p>
What kind of responsibilities and powers do the social workers of the SSD have?	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Observation</p> <p>County's and municipality's regulations</p> <p>Direct Observation</p>
How do social workers in CWD work with the users of the social services? Why SSDs function in the specific way?	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Observation</p> <p>Direct Observation</p> <p>Files</p>
What are the perspectives of both social workers and users for social work practice?	<p>Interviews</p>
Which factors affect social work practice?	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Direct Observation</p> <p>Participant Observation</p> <p>County's and municipality's regulations</p> <p>Literature</p>
Which is the most appropriate and effective, from the point of view of the social workers and users, practice for working with the users of SSDs?	<p>Interviews</p>

### - *Semi-structured Interviews*

The semi-structured interviews with front line social workers of the SSDs (20 practitioners) as well as with users<sup>29</sup> (12 users) permitted me to investigate the points of view of both of them, and reveal in more depth the basic elements which answer the research questions “capturing the individual’s points of view” (Becker, cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1993). The complexity of the beliefs, emotions and attitudes of the respondents can be obtained with this method. In addition the choice of the semi-structured interviews allows focusing on the main research questions. The “interview schedule” (Robson, 1993) was the base for the interview process (see Appendix 1).

Although the schedule contains a number of questions, its main purpose was to give enough “space” to the interviewees to “tell their story”. Thus, the “interview schedule” is a useful tool but given that one of the advantages of qualitative research is flexibility, I was aware that it is possible for some interviewees to be the “pathfinders” of other approaches or explanations that I hadn’t taken into consideration during the initial steps of the research design process. Consequently, slight adaptations were made in order to follow the rhythm and the order of issues posed by the interviewees.

Twenty interviews with front-line social workers have been carried out, each of them lasting about one hour or one hour and a half in some cases. Fifteen of them were with social workers who work in the CWDs and five with social workers from Municipalities. Three social workers refused to be interviewed while two refused to be recorded and notes were kept by the researcher. Initially, the issue of how many interviews were needed to do was a difficult question to answer. However, the multiple sources of data for each of the research questions but above all the fact that repeated themes and issues were raised by the interviewees assured me that there was no need to increase the specific number of interviewees. I would have done so had I encountered major diversities and varied experiences. But this was not the case. With only slight variations, the stories of the social workers pointed to the same concerns, issues and problems.

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<sup>29</sup> For more details concerning the profile of the interviewees see Appendix 3.

### ***- Observation as a participant***

This method permitted the observation of social work in practice, either during visits to users' homes or users' visits to the offices of the social workers. According to Mason, (2003) the limits between participant and non participant observation cannot be exactly clarified, given that there are always cases that the researcher should or will be more of a participant in the everyday process. In this research the choice of being "observer as a participant" (Adler & Adler, 1994, Iosifidis, 2003) has been selected as the appropriate one, still I was aware of the above.

The cases for visits were selected by the social workers while my prompt to them was to choose "typical cases". The issue of a visit to users' houses was a sensitive one and access was permitted to me only by a small number of social workers. In total, I visited ten houses with social workers and usually the visits lasted from 15 minutes to one hour. Another fifteen attempts were made for visits with the social workers but the addresses that the referrals had made either weren't correct or we couldn't find them. Notes were taken in a descriptive way before the visit by examining the file of the clients, and field notes were written after the visits to the houses.

As Mason (2003) argues the researcher in qualitative research should be aware that she is a part of the social process under examination and not pretend to be a "fly on a wall». Thus, although I intended to be as neutral as possible during some of the visits where users talked to the practitioner about their problems, I gave information about services in the town, the social worker talked to me as "a colleague" and generally I was definitely "part of the research process".

### ***- Direct Observation***

During my stay in the common room of the SSDs but also in the offices of the social worker, I was able to observe a number of activities in the department. Specifically in many cases the visitors/users to the department talked to me about their cases, asked me where and when they could find "their social worker", or asked me for information.

In addition, I spent many hours in the offices of the social workers either during the interviews or having conversations with them. During my stay in their offices a number of users came into their offices and I had the opportunity for direct

observation of their everyday activities. In these cases, notes were taken during my stay in the department as soon as possible afterwards. My stay in the SSDs varied from two months (full time basis) to six months (part time basis) for each of the researched agencies due to a number of factors; including the pregnancy of social workers that kept them away from their work the restricted time imposed by the hierarchy but also my own limited resources .

#### **- *Documentary Material***

This includes the following documents:

##### **- *Relevant Legislation***

For every provided benefit there are a number of referral preconditions set in the legislation with regards to the CWDs. The study of each of the main benefits led to an in depth knowledge of current governmental social policy towards those in need. Moreover, the legislation affects to a great extent the operation of the SSDs as well as the everyday practice of the social workers and consequently has an impact on the users of these services who receive the benefits.

##### **- *County's and municipality's regulations***

From 1998, each county in Greece has its own set of regulation concerning the aim, structure and responsibilities of each CWD as well as other services. For each Municipality there is a different set of internal regulations that describes the services and their power and responsibilities. Thus the general context of the CWD and the Municipalities will be revealed at least on official level while the responsibilities powers and aims of the SSD could be compared with the findings from the “real world”.

##### **- *Administrative Documents***

As far as it concerns the CWDs the number of the referrals for the benefits was obtained through the annual reports of the departments. But this only applied to some cases with two of the agencies either having no data at all or being reluctant to provide in providing the data. Therefore, I used the referrals book (see below service records) and I cross-checked the administrative data obtained from the one CWD.



On the other hand, in some Municipalities there were no official administrative records and the researcher had to count the users one by one by going through their files.

*- Local and National Newspapers*

The local newspapers offered the chance to become aware of the problems that groups of population like Roma - who are also users of the social workers- face. The name of the local press is not disclosed in order to ensure the anonymity of SSDs as well. In addition, information about the general social problems of the area like the rate of poverty was obtained from national newspapers, as well as articles concerning social workers.

*- Archival records*

The social workers in some cases kept a file on their users at least in the initial stages of their contact with them. The access to the users' files was permitted only by a limited number of social workers. Before visiting a user's house I was given the user's file by the social workers in order that I could get a general idea of the case. The way that the files were written and organised revealed to some extent the way that the "job is usually done", and is indicative of the level of organisation of the department as well as in some cases the attitudes of social workers towards the problems of the users.

Moreover, due to the lack of statistics in the total of the SSDs I obtained data concerning the profile of the users through the users' files, particularly those in the SSDs in municipalities.

*- Service Records*

Although there are no organised statistical data managed by the CWDs and Municipalities for the number of users served by the SSD, I used the referrals book that refer only to those who have the right to receive a benefit in CWDs, and also counted the users in other documents of the social workers as far as it concerns municipalities. The referrals book revealed partly the number of the users (given that not all the users were included in the referrals books) of the SSDs as well as some general characteristics of the clients such as gender and nationality.

## **Analysis of data**

The analysis of the data follows the general approach of qualitative research which doesn't include coding in numbers but of identifying key-issues, contextualising the text, thinking and rethinking the data and making broader links. Although the categorization of the findings of a "real-life context" is rather artificial there is an attempt to present the findings that are directly related with the core research questions. In addition there is an attempt to make the "voice" of the interviewees "audible" by putting their exact phrases in the text. In the following paragraphs, there is a presentation of the analysis of the data that was used.

Semi-structured interviews:

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in the following way:

The interview was listened to once.

The interview was transcribed verbatim. Punctuation marks were inserted and pauses were noted according to the instructions of Dunn (Dunn, cited in Iosifidis, 2003).

Thus the symbol ... was used for short pauses and ..... for long pauses. In addition the phrases in capital letters in the text indicated the intensity of emotions and the tone of voice.

The interview was listened to for a third time in order to ensure accuracy.

## **Categorization**

### *a. Interviews*

The interview transcripts were coded according to the key - research questions. A number of issues that were not anticipated in the interviews set up new categories or sub-categories (if they belonged to a broader category) and were named as emerging issues. The common elements of the different interviews that belonged to the same category were highlighted and put directly with their key-issue.

According to Kelly the systematic analysis of all the interviews based on the categorization-, and produced by their transcription and their reading, increase to a great extent the reliability of the findings (Kelly, 2004). The systematic analysis of the interviews which has been done taking into account the categorization as well as the transcription and the reading of the interviews, increases to a great extent the reliability of the findings.

*b. Observation as a Participant and Direct Observation*

The descriptive field-notes from the above sources have been read repeatedly, key-issues were highlighted and finally were coded and categorised as were the interviews.

*c. Documentary Material*

The documentary material followed the same philosophy of coding and categorisation as the previous sources of data. Particularly, for the referrals book and the files of the users, I studied and practically outlined the profiles of the users with regard the number of the applicants, the kind of the benefit received as well as their gender and nationality. These data were examined and have been put into tables in order to present a clear picture of the users' profile.

## **Ethical Issues: Information, Confidentiality, Anonymity**

One of the particularities of Greek counties and municipalities is that by publishing the county or municipality in which the research took place, the identification of the social workers as well as the administrative staff is unavoidable. While in the initial stages of the research that was one of my concerns it became ever clearer as the research progressed that I shouldn't disclose the specific county or municipality, otherwise I could harm the staff of the specific department.

Moreover, a number of ethical issues were taken into consideration by me during the research process. The interviewees were aware of the purpose of the research and the fact that they could refuse to take part in the research. Every interviewee was asked for their permission to be recorded and some of them refused either to be recorded or to be interviewed. As far as it concerns the observation during the visits to the houses, all users, had been informed of the role of the researcher by the social worker who was responsible for the case. For the observation during the visits of the users to the social services the users were informed whenever possible of the presence and purpose of the researcher in the waiting room.

The confidentiality and anonymity of information are extremely important issues. The names of the interviewees as well as any information that could identify either the social workers and their users, or the administrative staff are not disclosed.

This is the reason for not disclosing also the name of the areas or the cities where the research took place.

As far as it concerns the method of direct observation, it was not possible to inform everyone who visited the SSDs and stayed in the waiting area for a while, of my identity although in some cases I explained to them why I was there. It was also impossible to inform every social worker whenever I took notes of everyday processes but they were aware that I observed their everyday activities.

Overall, I faced a chain of tensions and dilemmas during the research procedure that will be discussed in the reflexivity section in Appendix 2.

## **Main concluding remarks**

- The basic research questions led to qualitative research and specifically to a case study strategy. In particular, the core questions of the how and why of social work practice led me to choosing case study by using also multiple sources of data such as semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, observation as a participant, documentary material, archival records, administrative records, users' files (Yin, 1994).
- The choice of researching social services in the first and second tier of local government was a result of a number of factors such as the gradual transfer of responsibilities from the state to LG with limited funding from the centre, the "mosaic" of services in municipalities which the last few years constitute a new field of social policy and social work activity, and the fact that these services could be seen as "front-line" social services. Moreover, an added reason was the limited research in the field particularly concerning social work practice.
- The research was carried out in two different cities in Greece covering both urban and suburban areas and on an island in the Aegean Sea in order to meet the "extreme" cases criterion. In total, 5 agencies (SSDs) were researched over a period of three years on a part time basis.
- Difficulties in access delayed the research in some cases. Furthermore, one of the major difficulties was the lack of statistics and the limited previous research on Greek social work.
- However, access was obtained by a "bottom-up" procedure that ensured the consent of practitioners before asking officially for permission from the hierarchy. This process facilitated access in some cases. Moreover, the fact that I was also a social work practitioner contributed to gaining trust.
- The analysis of the data followed the general approach of qualitative research by identifying key-issues with regard to the research questions, creating new categories for the emerging issues, thinking and rethinking the data and making broader connections.
- Ethical issues such as the awareness of both social workers and users of my role as a researcher and their right to refuse to be interviewed or recorded were deferred to while particularly for the Greek context anonymity and

confidentiality are extremely important factors for avoiding any possible harm to the subjects.

## **Chapter 3: The Reality of Social Services Departments**

### **Introduction**

The task of the chapter is to present and discuss some of the main aspects of the reality of the SSDs such as the responsibilities of social workers, their working conditions and the hierarchy in the agencies with regard to policy issues that affect these aspects. Although in everyday life the reality is governed by a number of factors that interplay and are interconnected, due to the limitations a written document has, the presentation of the findings has been grouped and divided in sections.

This examination will permit a general understanding of the structure and function of the researched SSDs. Moreover, it will reveal in the first place the reality of the SSDs while later in the thesis the picture will be completed by the examination of the users' profiles and social work practice. Specifically, through the comparison and contrast of the researched cases (SSDs), a number of commonalities emerged as well as differences in their regulations, aims and structure. These commonalities involve some common responsibilities and difficult working conditions while the power lies mainly in the upper levels of the hierarchy.

## **The responsibilities of social workers**

Traditionally, women social workers outnumber men in the field of social work in Greece. As Dedoussi et al. (cited in Georgoussi et al., 2003:70) argue, the “typical” social worker in Greece is usually a

*“...middle - aged woman, married or single, working in health or welfare services for the last 10 years...”.*

Unsurprisingly, the findings in the researched SSDs are similar with those of the above research, as far as it concerns age and gender, (19 women out of the 20 interviewees)<sup>30</sup>. However, as far as it concerns age, the practitioners in HiHPs are under or a little over 30 years old, a finding which is in accordance with Ioakimidis’ research (2008) where young social workers constitute the main body of workers in the quasi-market sector. Although there are differences between regulations and objectives throughout SSDs, commonalities as far as it concerns the responsibilities were found particularly between the CWDs and municipalities while the picture differentiates to some extent in HiHPs due to their different physiognomy and aims of the programme.

In particular, the services provided by HiHPs are applied to a specific target group such as the elderly and to - limited cases - people with disabilities (Chnaraki, 2005, KEDKE ANKA, 2006) while the basic aim of the programme is the support of the users so that they can remain in the community<sup>31</sup>. On the contrary the regulations and the reality in the other researched SSDs refer through a generalist description to different (vulnerable) categories of the population. Moreover, in HiHPs there is an interdisciplinary team of practitioners (usually involving a social worker, a nurse and a family assistant) who regularly visit the user while this is not the case for CWDs and municipalities. Specifically for HiHPs, social workers’ responsibilities include planning of the visits to users’ houses, visiting the claimant for the programme to assess the case, (KEDKE ANKA, 2006) finding the necessary resources, mediating between services for the provision of pensions and benefits, submitting documents on behalf of the users, writing annual reports for the above in the hierarchy

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<sup>30</sup> For more information concerning the profile of the practitioners see Appendix 3.

<sup>31</sup> Through the HiHPs a range of services are provided to the users by the interdisciplinary team such as “...social work, family’s counselling, care by the nurse ...cleaning of the house...cooking...personal care of the user...” (Kandylaki and Karakounis, 2005:335).



concerning the function of the programme. As one of the social workers characteristically describes their usual everyday work:

Vivian:

*“We go at least once per week to each user’s house to provide health care, buy some things such as medicines and food for those who cannot walk, talk and support them in their efforts to solve their practical, social and emotional problems. In general, we are the people who stand by the elderly. I also attempt to get a benefit for them, in co-operation with other services. In general, we visit at least 15 people per day and then we have to finish the administrative parts of the work. In fact, we are the key-persons for the above in the hierarchy or the practitioners; we write the reports, plan the visits, and solve problems...”*

In the literature (and through the findings of the research), a number of problematic issues are reported concerning the function of the specific programmes; where many of these problems are common with the reality of SSDs in CWDs and municipalities as it will be gradually revealed. For example, according to Kaifa (2005) only 16.7% of the HiHPs had electronic data about the profile of the users and files while there is also a chain of practical problems such as lack of drivers, lack of cars, lack of staff such as psychiatrists (given that many of the users have mental health problems), doctors and physiotherapists. Furthermore, the lack of education and supervision of the staff, the lack of clarity in the responsibilities for each member of the staff, interventions by the aldermen, the lack of planning, no Central SSD in municipalities and finally the insecurity practitioners feel with regard to their job’s continuity are some added problems (Kaifa, 2005, Chnaraki, 2005, Pozios, 2005, Fotopoulos, 2005). What is more, users are also afflicted with insecurity concerning the continuity of the specific programmes.

Today, the funding of the HiHPs (about 1,200 social workers work in HiHPs) is covered until 2013 by the European Union’s Third Community Support Framework (CSF) while its future is unknown. As it was previously discussed, HiHPs do not belong to the public sector and the practitioners are mainly employed through the “private entities” that the municipalities have created (Ioakimidis, 2008:344). This is consequent upon the ongoing advent of the private sector into the field for provision

of care in Home (and in general in the welfare sector<sup>32</sup>) (KEDKE-EETAA-Gnosi Anaptixiaki, 2008).

Moreover, according to a recent Common Decision on 27/08/2008 by a number of Ministries (Health and Social Solidarity, Internal Affairs, Financial Issues as well as Ministry of Work) the advent of the quasi-market or private sector into home care sector is facilitated. Specifically, in page 8 of the Common Decision it was noted that besides the public sector “*Sponsors of the provided services that their aim is the ...reinforcement of the social coherence and improvement of the quality of life of the elderly and people who need help in home*” can apply the programme with the synergy of the public sector but also by:

“...e) *Clearly Private Business whose aim is the social development or welfare or other goals ..... according to their statutes*”

(Common Inter-Ministries Decision, 2008:8).

Unsurprisingly, the advent of the private sector in home care is correlated with the general promotion of the private sector within the public one, an increasingly common strategy in capitalism that comes with the gradual abandonment of the public sector. To be more specific, the facilitation of the entry of private sector in Local Government had been established by the legislations 3274/2004 and 3389/2005 as well as the promotion of the so called “*synergy between the private and state sector*” through which a number of projects such as HiHPs and other welfare programmes funded by EU have been implemented (Ministry of Internal Affairs Public Administration & Decentralization, 2006:592, Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2009).

Already from the 1990s, as Kazakos (2003:468) claims, the rhetoric by both politicians and some academics<sup>33</sup> promotes the need of the privatization in public sector and the shift of interest in competitiveness which “*public opinion has gradually accepted*”. Actually, through the legislation 2000/1991 the decisions for

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<sup>32</sup> According to Johnson the privatization in welfare sector can have multiple forms such as the “*increase of trust to the laws of the market...the transfer of responsibilities ...to the informal and voluntary sector...*” (Johnson cited in Kandylaki and Karakounis, 2005:333). “*In general, the underestimation of the role of the state in any of the above can be perceived as privatization*” while also the “*...contracts between the state and profit or non profit organizations*” are also some of the paths for the trajectory of privatization in welfare (Kandylaki and Karakounis, 2005:333-334).

<sup>33</sup> As Kazakos (2003) claims there were two opposite approaches among academics on financial issues. On the one hand, there were academics such as Alogoskoufis G. who promoted the neo-liberal policies and later became the minister of financial policy in the right wing government of 2004. On the other hand, there are academics such as Vergopoulos, K., Stamatis, G. (on the left) who were at the opposite side and have repeatedly argued against such policies until today.

privatization should be now made in a strict time-period while also public organizations could be abolished or “*be transferred to the private sector*” (Kazakos, 2003:469). In parallel, voluntarism was promoted both ideologically and politically in 1990s. In 1995, through the legislation 2345/95, it was determined that the function of the private sector as well as NGO’s (particularly those concerning the care of children, elderly and disabled) will be supervised by the state. Although this could be seen as a positive indication that the private sector can be controlled, in practice - given that the preconditions for including them in the National Care System of 1998 (law 2646/98) were so generalized (Amitsis, 2001) that a number of these organizations were allowed to enter the system. As a result, the “road” is opened for the development of the quasi public sector and later the private one into care and at the same time the apotheosis of the voluntarism is promoted. As Ioakimidis (2008:364) argues:

*“Civil society and NGO’s were largely utilised as vehicles for promoting the neo-liberal transformation of social welfare”.*

On the other hand, it could be argued that on the ideological level the promotion of voluntarism with regard to family responsibilities promotes the involvement of people in the community participation. However, as Craig (1998:3) claims:

*“This concern with community participation might be thought of as admirable but - more cynically - it might also be regarded as merely another means by which curtailments in essential services are hidden behind a rhetoric of voluntarism and community involvement: self-help can mean the route for democratic participation in decision-making, as on the political left, but it can also mean social services on the cheap (on the liberal right)”.*

The neo-liberal agenda has been gradually set in Greek society following the paradigm of western countries such as Britain. Now, in the Greek context, the privatization or sale of many factories and public companies which have been characterized as “problematic” -due to their debts- was now a fact that led thousands of Greeks into unemployment despite the massive demonstrations and struggles against this policy (Kazakos, 2003).

The above policies cannot but impact on the welfare sector, SSDs and social work. To begin with, the main resources for the funding of LG at the end of 1990s derive from the funding by the state. Specifically, a study published in 2009 highlights that

56% of the main resources of municipalities comes from the central state (KEDKE, 2009). Yet, the funding of both first and second tier of LG is particularly problematic. A permanent demand by both the counties and municipalities is for an increase in their funding. For example, Mihas -a member of the board of the Unification of Counties Local Government- refers that the resources of the Counties in 2008 from the central state remained at the “ridiculous 0.52% of the GDP of the country”, much less than the 11% or 20% of the other member-states of EU (Mihas, 2009:34). Although between 2003 and 2008 a number of responsibilities have been transferred to the municipalities, this was not followed by an equal transfer of the necessary central funding of 2 billion euros which had been expected (Tegos, 2010). In any case, the lack of funding of municipalities by the state is one of their main problems and this reflects on social care as well.

The funding of the social services is not clearly defined given that it is part of the general grant by the state to local authorities through the “Central Self-Contained Resources” (KAP):

*“...where the total grant for local authority’s social functions, broadly defined, amounted to 10% ...”* while *“...8.5% concerned school buildings....resources for child care services amount only to 0.18% and cares services for the elderly to 0.62%”* (Goupios et al, cited in Petmesidou, 2006b:332). Indirectly, the above quote indicates the limited social funding for the SSDs in municipalities.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the state SSDs in municipalities are limited. More specifically, according to the study by KEDKE and ANKA (2006) about 90% of the researched municipalities (the sample refers to 401 out of the 1031 municipalities) didn’t have a state SSD while politicians perceived the HiHP as the main SSD. What is more, social workers are limited in the municipalities according to the data by in Ministry of Interior in 2002:

*“...in a total of 1,033 municipalities...there were only 224 social workers  
....working on a permanent basis”*

(Petmesidou et al., cited in Petmesidou, 2006b:335-336).

Though as Petmesidou claims, the above data do not include the number of practitioners in municipal’ enterprises which might double the above number and those who are under a short-term contract (Petmesidou, 2006b) still, the findings clearly demonstrate the shrinkage of the state SSDs in municipalities and welfare sector.

In parallel, the legislation through the Code of Municipalities and Communities by the Ministry of Internal Affairs Public Administration and Decentralization in 2006 sets the context for the welfare sector in municipalities where general and vague references are made about the vulnerable parts of the populations such as the elderly (for example KAPI), children (day nurseries), gypsies and refugees or about the support and care of the poor and homeless:

*“Care and support of the homeless and financially powerless through the provision of benefits and land as well as material goods that belongs to Municipality, and care for those who face serious difficulties getting by ”*

(Ministry of Internal Affairs Public Administration & Decentralization, 2006:129 - 130, article 75). Additionally, once again voluntarism is promoted *“promotion of voluntarism through the creation of groups of volunteers and organizations for developing networks”* (ibid).

The vague references of the legislation to the care of the most vulnerable groups of the community are correlated with the imprecise aim of the SSDs and the poorly defined responsibilities of the social workers. The research took place in specific municipalities where a state SSD exists however, as Helen, one of the social worker interviewees in Peloponnesus argued:

*“To the best of my knowledge, there is no other municipality in the county that has a central SSD; the law doesn’t obligate the mayors to create them”*

Moreover, in the above municipality there was no reference made to the regulations for the SSD, as Helen describes:

*“There are no specific duties mentioned in the regulation of the municipality; actually, the SSD doesn’t even exist in the regulation. Basically, the duties and responsibilities are created by me to some extent; it’s a matter of what I learnt and what I did in the previous municipality where I worked in Athens, what I have learnt here, what I want to do, what the needs in the community are , what the citizens tell us and it’s also an issue of what is coming up.”*

In parallel, in the municipality of Athens the regulation describes the aim of the department, through generalities:

*“Social Policy Sector: Department of Welfare*

*The department performs any service concerning the application of the Municipality’s welfare. It collects data and makes suggestions for the measures that have to be taken in order to achieve a harmonic appliance of Social Welfare. The*

*department also applies all the necessary procedures in order to organize any activities (such as one day conferences) in the Municipality concerning the welfare sector.*

*The department also communicates with other private or public organizations about its issues” (Regulation of the municipality in Athens, 2008).*

In reality, the duties and responsibilities are not clear and social workers practically have a range of duties as Rebecca, one of the two social workers working in the SSD in Athens, describes:

*“It’s not clear at all. Whatever we do, it is not clear why we do it. We do the work either because it was given to us, for example the cases by the prosecutor<sup>34</sup>, or because we found it like that”*

While later she describes the aim of the department and their work in general:

*“Basically, the SSD exists for facing the needs of the population...on the level of social and financial help support etc. There are some programmes that run here, as you know, which have an administrative role and unfortunately we do participate to some extent, but we try not to. Then, there is social investigation which belongs to social work...”*

The wide range of responsibilities and the confused character of the kind of social work which is applied has been a suspicion of mine since the initial steps of my research. Especially, when one of the key-informants, an ex-president of SKLE told me:

*“In SSDs in municipalities maybe assigned any kind of duty or responsibility. There is a label on the door which states “Social Services Department” but it is unknown what they do there”*

Overall, the findings indicate that the social services provided are not based on research and social planning but are rather a result of the needs that come up from the community and personal assessments made either by social workers or those in the hierarchy such as the aldermen of social policy. Social workers practically are in the “front-line” of any case that refers to the SSDs.

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<sup>34</sup> The cases by the prosecutor refer to demands by the judiciary system to SSDs for investigating the living conditions and in general families for whom there are complaints of potential abuse or neglect of children or isolated elderly and people with mental health problems. In some cases, the procedure is the opposite. That is there are complaints by neighbours concerning neglect or isolation of elderly or people with mental health problems to SSDs which obligate social workers to visit the house and in some cases ask the prosecutor to intervene.

Helen:

*“Mainly, I see whatever kind of case comes here, cases sent by the police, the members of the local council, the citizens, as well as cases by the prosecutor. Initially, I didn’t do all these but gradually there was no other way. There are also other kind of interventions in the community such as open discussions and programmes for the prevention of health problems such as breast cancer, osteoporosis etc. I also try to co-operate with schools, to persuade them to send us families whose children might have learning disabilities or any other kind of difficulties. We try to show them how to co-operate with us...”*

Rebecca:

*“Besides the cases, anyone can call us and ask anything; police stations call us to find solutions for people who have mental health problems, people that call us and grumble about problems which they might have with their neighbours and believe that social workers should have solved them. Or, other crazy situations like people abandoned in the centre of the city and it’s you that are asked to go and solve the problem. We have to put down limits all the time, I am not here for doing everything, social workers cannot be used for every difficult situation. We eat the shit everyday, who eats the shit? Those from above? Of course not, everyone comes to the social worker to solve any difficult case, and to do the “dirty job”.*

Sofia:

*“We are used for every difficult situation”*

In general, the practitioners in CWDs and municipalities could be seen as the “ambulance service” for any difficult and emergent case in the community. This is not usually the case for HiHPs where the physiognomy of the programme restricts the target population, although it is possible that in the periphery of the town and the most distant areas where other social services are absent, social workers in HiHPs cover emergent cases in the community<sup>35</sup> while also their users (elderly) face multiple problems.

Additionally, the practitioners in municipalities might also organize a number of activities in the community such as one day conferences concerning health issues (such prevention of cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes etc) or activities that refer to the

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<sup>35</sup> The specific argument derives from informal discussions with social workers that cover agricultural areas but also indirectly has been shown by the research of KEDKE – ANKA (2006) where the aldermen and mayors received the HiHPs as the main SSD (see above).

general population. Moreover, the study of the annual reports for 2005 and 2006 in the municipality in Athens revealed further activities by social workers for the general population such as:

*“Organizing camps for children of the area who were selected “by the directors of different schools in the community according to social criteria”.*

*“Organizing blood donation in the community”*

*“Providing public transportation to the sea for every citizen of the municipality”.*

The findings revealed that the above activities might take place after being proposed by a social worker like in the municipality in Peloponnesus or whenever the alderman for social policy issues decides such activities. Interestingly, this demonstrates a kind of freedom for practitioners in municipalities to determine their work in contradiction with their colleagues in the CWDs. A further discussion of this “freedom” of the social worker will be discussed later in the thesis, however, it is important to mention here that to a great extent this “freedom” is formulated (and controlled as well) by the organizational context and the policies applied by aldermen and mayors.

Nevertheless, and to continue the discussion of the findings, administrative work as well as paperwork is also “on the shoulders” of the practitioners in both municipalities and CWDs. As Rebecca describes:

*“We also do administrative work, we started for practical reasons as there was not enough administrative staff in the past, and we still do it, for example we give coupons to people who have the right to travel free to the sea, or do administrative work for the children’s camp of the municipality. It’s an absolutely paranoid situation, it’s difficult because everyone asks things from us and we need to determine our job all the time and establish the limits”*

During my stay in the CWD in Athens, I saw social workers stamping transportation vouchers whenever the administrative staff couldn’t cover this task.

Vivian, a HiHP social worker noted that:

*“The paperwork covers a big part of the job, every day I spend at least three hours in bureaucratic procedures and paperwork, so I don’t have enough time for working with the users. I make visits, then it is the recording, reports, administrative work which I do on my own, there is no secretary nothing.... I already have 225 cases while more and more are entering the programme”*



Moreover, through observation it was apparent that a large part of everyday work referred to paperwork, such as reports, letters, collecting documents for a case. In many cases, social workers didn't have the time to complete the reports during their working hours and took their files home in order to write the reports.

Overall, the findings of this research are in accordance with the findings of a previous research by KEDKE-EETAA (1995) which outlined the problematic situation of the welfare and health sectors in Municipalities such as: Lack of data on the profile of the users; limited research; lack of resources; under-staffed social services; social planning which is not based on scientific research but on the personal assessments of the politicians and the professionals; where there is no participation of the citizens in the local councils; limited funding by the state; clientilistic relations; informal care network; and centralization of the services (mainly in Athens and other big cities in the country).

Even for the EU funded programmes<sup>36</sup> in social welfare, the Greek state rather than developing more stable services as Papadopoulou and Ligdopoulou (2008:99) claim "*...they are either discontinued*" when the funding expires "*or forgotten*". This demonstrates once again the low importance attributed to welfare by the Greek state and an indication of short-termism which is characteristic of much welfare policy and practice in Greece. As Petmesidou (2006a:45) claims:

*"...the Community Supports Frameworks (CSFs) and various other EU programmes have become almost the exclusive point of reference for orienting policies and sources of finance. Interestingly enough, the state has even abandoned the practice of preparing any strategic national five-year plans encompassing major policy areas"*

On the other hand, given that the researched SSDs in the municipalities have been created recently (in the latter years of 1990s and the initial years of 2000) one could argue that their recent establishment contributes to the above characteristics of unclear responsibilities that are not based on planning and research. But, if organized social services were the intention of the state, there are a number of announcements and publications by academics, practitioners and members of the executive board of SKLE (Vezirakis, 2005) in which the need of a Central Social Services Department that fulfils specific characteristics – such as research, social planning, co-ordination

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<sup>36</sup> From the late years of 1980s until today a number of successful programmes funded by EU have been implemented (for example EQUAL).

of the SSDs and participation of the citizens - have been mentioned as a crucial need (Vagia, 1993, Venetaki, 1993). Even when through a pilot project the model of the central SSDs with the above characteristics was applied in Eleusina and Elliniko one of the main obstacles to the implementation of this model was the absence of a law that establishes the existence of a Central Social Service in any Municipality and therefore the practice of these services is not legitimated and respected by other organisations or services. Bureaucracy, financial problems, lack of social services for covering the needs of the population, and poor co-ordination were also some of the problems that they faced in the application of the model (Venetaki, 1993). It therefore comes as no surprise that once again the policy context affects significantly any attempt of social work to flourish.

On the other hand, given that CWDs have been running for decades, one could expect these services to be better organized than the SSDs in municipalities. On the contrary, the picture here is worse. Similar to the municipalities' regulations in CWDs there are general descriptions<sup>37</sup> of services for vulnerable parts of the population where the use of the term "protection" is used both for mothers and children, while on the other hand it also refers to more bureaucratic procedures such as the provision of licences to welfare professionals and licences for the operation of institutions.

All the interviewees in CWDs describe as a basic aim of the department the provision of benefits. Overall, social investigation as well as social reports that follow the social investigations for both benefits and cases by the prosecutor is one of the common responsibilities for the practitioners in the researched SSDs and they will be analytically discussed in Chapter 6: Social Work's Interventions. It seems that the main role of SSDs in CWDs is similar to the one they had when these departments clearly belonged to the Ministry of Health and Welfare and Social Insurance and they mainly focused on a means-tested procedure for marginalised people (Matsaganis, 2000).

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<sup>37</sup> In particular, according to one of the two County's Regulation in 2001 the aim of the department is:

*"Protecting, training and sensitising families and children,... the protection of the elderly,.... people with special needs (disabled) and those with financial weakness,... dwelling house, licences for the operation institutions, companies, public benefits' organizations and the provision of licences to the welfare professionals".*

As Koukouli et al claim these characteristics in public welfare services lead “to the increased bureaucratization of the profession” (Koukouli et. al., 2008:222). This is also apparent in the fact that there has been no change in the benefits provided many of which are based on the legislation from the 1960s such as the Programme for the Protection of Children (see later in the thesis) but also it seems that in general these departments have been left to function automatically and bureaucratically over the years. As Skamnakis (2006) argues the statutory context of the counties with regard to the state’s policy seem to keep these departments in the same role as in the past and focus mainly on the means tested procedure for benefits.

However, this does not prevent the state from adding responsibilities on social workers such as administrative work, investigation and reports for the cases by the prosecutor and the role of the social counsellor<sup>38</sup>. Particularly this last responsibility as well as checking addresses is considered irrelevant to social work practice by the majority of the interviewees in CWDs. Aggeliki’s response captures the view of many of the interviewed social workers:

*“We need to do social investigation for a number of benefits as well as, for the disabled but only when their address is changed”<sup>39</sup>,*

*We have also the role of the social counsellor that is we are censor in institutes who checks their function but this is not social work, it is totally irrelevant, they simply didn’t have other staff to give this responsibility... ”*

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<sup>38</sup> An added responsibility when the CWDs were under the authority of counties was that of the social counsellor. This specific responsibility was established by the Law 2345/1995 according to which a number of private and charity organizations have been transferred to the supervision of the county. Specifically, the social counsellors of the county have responsibility for controlling the welfare services that run in the community by the above organizations as far as it concerns their function and organization while they should also make reports that evaluate the specific services (Amitsis, 2001). Although on theoretical level social counsellors should have a number of qualifications such “as *“the experience and knowledge of the welfare services...the methods and techniques for evaluating services...”* (Amitsis, 2001:376) probably due to the lack of other social scientists in CWDs this responsibility was put on social workers. Social workers have repeatedly referred to this duty as “irrelevant” to social work.

<sup>39</sup> In some of the CWDs whenever someone doesn’t receive the benefit for the disabled (death, or change of address) and the administrative staff cannot find them, or they “suspect that something is happening” as social workers describe, the social workers are expected to go to their homes to find out. In the past, it was necessary that social workers write a social report so that a close relative could receive the benefit of the disabled. Today, social workers are sent particularly to such cases. Social workers argued that this is irrational and said so to the director; however in the CWDs this procedure is usually applied every year. They call it “review of the cases” where social workers are expected to visit all the cases not only for the disabled but also for the children’s benefit (CPP) in order to “review the case”.

In general, the everyday reality is disclosed by the practitioners in CWDs:

Vassiliki:

*“Our main work is the programmes that are run by the county; the CPP benefit, the benefit for the disabled, the housing benefit, the EFS benefit that is a big part of our everyday job, we have to do the social investigations and the social reports for all of them. I am here every day for about 8 hours for co-operating with the cases, we have one day on duty, we take as many cases as we can. I go out twice per week for visiting the cases or for co-operating with other services”*

Ioanna:

*“...there are the benefits, the people who come here and ask for information and directions, social counsellors to the Day Nurseries, institutions for the elderly, now we have also the cases by the prosecutor, the adoptions EVERYTHING ,EVERYTHING we just do EVERYTHING<sup>40</sup>”*

Virginia:

*“There are so many things that you have to do. If you are on duty, you have to see many people who come here, to give information to them, to answer phone calls, to communicate with other services about your cases. And then, you have to make visits to their homes, to write the reports, to collect documents, the pressure is too high here everyday”*

Through the above quotes the range of responsibilities and workload (see also section working conditions) are apparent. The dead ends that these departments face have been well known to the state for at least the last 25 years but it seems that the story is getting harder. Specifically, as far as it concerns welfare provision with regard to public social services, there were some repeated studies by the Centre of Family and Economical Research from 1974 until 1992. In these studies, a number of problems have been revealed, such as

*“the absence of research on social problems... the lack of evaluation of the provided services...the absence of organization in the welfare departments, lack of “in service-training”... as well as supervision of social workers, and the lack of statistics”*

(KEPE, 1985: 314, 322).

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<sup>40</sup> The uses of capital letters, as discussed in the Methodology chapter describe the intensity of social workers' emotions and voice.

Almost ten years after the research carried out by KEPE, in 1992, the Ministry of Work and the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) made a study of the public social services where again the lack of research and statistics was a major problem that confined their research to informal conversations with administrative staff, and the above studies by KEPE.

The findings of the above study refer once again to the absence of planning in the public social services in Greece and the lack of co-ordination between the welfare services. Centralization and hierarchy were referred to as an obstacle for the staff in the social services (both administrative staff and social workers), while the quantity and the quality of the staff were also considered as problematic. In addition, there was no evaluation of the provided services as well as no statistical data that can be analyzed (Ministry of Work and EKKE, 1992). Altanis argued that the welfare sector is dominated by

*“... bureaucracy, overlaps, gaps, random development, lack of scientific personnel, lack of control, lack of planning as well as confusion of targets”* (Altanis, 1993:3).

He also refers to the lack of social workers in CWDs, hospitals and Health Centres and in addition to the fact that there are no (until today) social workers in schools, police stations, however

*“...everybody wonders where the social workers are? But, they do not know that social workers are limited and their scientific work (ergo in Greek) is supervised by administrative staff, basically those who have graduated from financial schools”*

(Altanis, 1993: 23).

Overall, the present research revealed some common responsibilities particularly between the SSDs in the CWDs and municipalities that permit us identify some general characteristics of social work practice which will be analyzed later in the thesis.

- Social investigation for a number of benefits, and cases by the prosecutor.
- Social reports that follow the social investigation.
- Provision of information and support.
- Connection with other social services.
- Paperwork and administrative work.

These common responsibilities are also apparent in the annual reports of 2005 and 2006 in the Athens municipality where social workers' activities refer to a number of actions (Table, 8).

<b>Table 8: Annual reports (2005 and 2006) concerning social worker's actions in Athens's municipality</b>
Social investigation in poor families and people and distribution of the "gift for the poor" at Christmas and Easter
Dinner for the poor during Christmas of 2006 for 320 people and "distribution of food to another 254 residents who couldn't move from their houses"
Provision of the EFS benefit (600€) by the municipality to 7 people in the community
Social workers " <i>worked with special cases of citizens and organizations concerning health and welfare issues and the protection of the family and children. The social workers visited a large number of people with no income as well as multi-problematic families...people with disabilities, homeless and reported the cases while at the same time they gave directions and help in order to solve their problems</i> "
"For the protection of the minors there was a co-operation with the Counselling Centre of the municipality, the prosecutor and schools of the area for the care of the minors that live in dysfunctional family environment" "Also, the office cared for people with mental health problems and followed the necessary procedures so that they could be transferred to psychiatric hospital"
There was a close co-operation with a number of organizations...
Certifications for the burial of poor citizens" (the cost of the funeral for the poor is covered by the municipality)

In general, the findings with regard to the policy's analysis demonstrate that all the researched SSDs have a main common characteristic meaning the implications of the politics of welfare. The gradual advent of the private sector into care sector, the low funding by the state for the social care sector in LG, the lack of long-term social planning and so on cannot but affect the state SSDs. Social workers' duties and responsibilities are not clearly defined due to the legislative and policy's context. The practitioners have a number of responsibilities and they are in the "front-line" of every difficult case in the community while they also fill the gaps from time to time of the understaffed administration. Moreover, there is pressure and much paperwork that cannot but reduce the contact with the users. Consequently, it comes as no

surprise that the working conditions of social workers are more than difficult as the following section discusses.

## Working conditions

While social workers in the (state) SSDs in CWDs and municipalities have stable jobs with rather low salaries (Koukouli et al, 2008) the practitioners in HiHPs not only face the insecurity for the future of their work but they are often unpaid for months:

Vivian:

*“I haven’t been paid for 7 months, and this happens very often. I don’t know what will happen with the funding of HiHPs, we all live in insecurity and you know, I have children.... I get about 800 euros per month and I am the leader of the team which means that I have to solve everything. Additionally, I don’t get the benefit for using a PC, neither the family’s benefit that we are supposed to receive, this issue makes me feel more and more tired...”*

The above quote is similar to the findings of Ioakimidis (2008). In fact, these new forms of work for practitioners in the welfare sector constitutes the reality for the practitioners who work in the semi-public or quasi-market sector facing insecurity with short-term contracts, and unpaid work which in turn is increasingly casualised in accordance with the concept of “flexible” labour conditions<sup>41</sup> under the guidelines by EU. Unsurprisingly, the short-term contracts have now entered the public sector in CWDs as well where I found young social workers working with an 18-month contract. As Koutendakis and Kretsos (2005:27) argue, in a few years the public sector has been transformed into *“the basic provider of occasional work”* where workers are employed on short-term contracts, working for the public sector albeit with private sector contracts.

On the European policy level, the “flexible” labour conditions (such as short-term contracts) are used as the path by which theoretically the rate of employment will increase however, the *“labour rights have shrunk”* (INE-GSEE, 2009:20). The “flexibility” in welfare sector signals the increasing insecurity of practitioners working in private entities of local authorities, NGO’s and the private sector with lower wages than in the public sector.

Additionally, excessive workload is one fundamental and common characteristic shared by all the researched SSDs. During the time of my research in SSDs, I noticed

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<sup>41</sup> Through the report of the Body of the Inspectors of Work that belongs to the Ministry of Work concerning labour conditions in Greece in March of 2010, an increase of 12.0 % of the flexible forms such as part-time work, and short-terms contracts is described (Kopsini, 2010).



that heavy workloads were particularly apparent in CWDs and HiHPs while the pace of work in municipalities was not so intensive. Probably, this is due to two factors: Firstly, due to the fact that during the period that I stayed in municipalities was the summer period when there are extremely high temperatures and consequently work is less and secondly because of the fact that in CWDs there are a number of benefits provided for which social investigation needs to be finished quickly. However, the testimonies of the practitioners and their files revealed excessive workloads:

Vivian in an HiHP noted:

*“I have 225 cases and I have been working here for the last 2 years, so you can imagine what will happen the following years”*

Sofia in the municipality in Athens also observed:

*“There has been an increase in the cases by the prosecutor; I don’t know the exact percentage because we don’t have statistics, we don’t even have a PC. We might have 10 new cases per day and then 1 new case per month. If you want to see how many times we visit the users you should check the files<sup>42</sup>. The good thing is that we have a very good relationship with the colleagues here and visit the cases together”*

According to Aggeliki:

*“There is huge increase in the cases. In the first semester of 2006 I had 196 cases that means that by the end of the year I had more than 300. I keep my personal statistics and as you can see in 2004 I had in total 243 cases, in 2005 235 cases”*

On the other hand, the reality of the three CWDs I visited revealed agencies with a large number of empty posts. Only 5 social workers worked in the CWD in Peloponnesus (with a population of about 200,000 people) while according to the County Regulation as well as the records of the Home Ministry, the SSD should have had 18 social workers -16 graduates from Technological Institutions and 2 University graduates- one psychologist, one sociologist and one secretary . Similarly, there were only 11 social workers employed in the CWD in Athens (with about 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 inhabitants<sup>43</sup>) with another 14 posts for social workers unfilled.

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<sup>42</sup> In the specific SSD I had access to the files of the social workers and as Sofia describes, social workers visited particular cases several times. However, the files weren’t always updated neither was every case written up and consequently the number of the cases in the files is smaller than in the reality. This is in accordance with the findings by Georgoussi et al, 2003:68) where “...53% of respondents keep records for all cases, 37% keep records for appointment cases only (i.e. no records are kept for walk-in clients), and 10% do not keep records”.

<sup>43</sup> The population that the specific county covers was calculated by the researcher based on the data of the municipalities through their websites and from the testimonies of the practitioners.

Jane describes the situation in Peloponnesus:

*“What can you do with 5 social workers? We had to cover an area with about 250,000 people. Consequently, you are making more and more discounts in the way that you work, more and more. If I should have gone to a village 5 times I go once, I learnt that from the older social workers here, or I just call the users”*

Kleopatra in the CWD in Athens said:

*“We are 9 social workers to cover an area of about two million people in 10 municipalities. There are posts for 25 but they are not filled. During the last one and a half years we had in total 4,000 cases. They only bring in people on one year or eight-month contracts to work part time. Each of the colleagues has exceeded her limits... Besides the range of responsibilities we have the problem with the building, we are 3 or 4 in the same office, it's very difficult to hold an interview, many, many problems...we come in the morning and we are under pressure all day, we have no stamina, no patience and our brain cannot work and gradually we burn out”.*

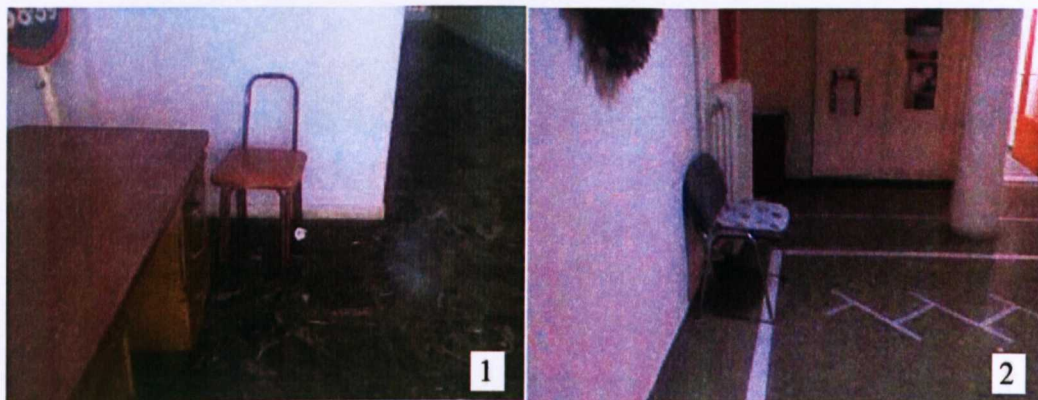
Specifically, as far as it concerns the lack social workers, in the County Welfare Departments between 1983 and 1987, “...only the 22.2% of the posts are filled in these departments” (KEPE, 1985:311). Moreover, in 1983 a study by the Department of Social Work in the Ministry of Health and Welfare disclosed that there is a need for 1 social worker for every 10,000 inhabitants in most urban areas, and 1 for about 8,000 people living in the suburbs. Thus, for example in one of the districts of Athens in 1981 the needs of the CWD were for 129 social workers but only 28 were employed, and the situation was similar for all the Counties of Greece (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 1983).

Another study in 2005 estimates that about 8 social workers are needed for 10,000 inhabitants in order to intervene for the prevention of social problems (Altanis et al, 2005). In both the Pan-Hellenic Conferences of social workers in 1978 and in 1987, there are references to a range of announcements concerning the understaffed state welfare sector, bad working conditions, and lack of resources as noted referred by Kafandari at the Pan-Hellenic conference of 1981 (Kafandari, 1981). In 1987 Stefanidou referred once again to the same picture with the added reference to the provision of low benefits (Stefanidou, 1987). The “wish” of social workers in 1987 to see the “social workers standing by the users” (Stefanidou, 1987:250) seems to remain a wishful dream.

Moreover, through my visits to the Ministry of Welfare and Social Solidarity I had the opportunity<sup>44</sup> to study a number of reports by the Department of Social Work in the Ministry from the 1980's through to the early part of the 1990s. Specifically, repeated reports to the minister referred to the massive lack of social workers in CWDs and highlighted other problems such as the inadequacy of office equipment, low benefits to users but still by the end of the first decade of this century nothing has improved and the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity seems to have completely abandoned these specific agencies.

As far as it concerns office equipment and the provision of general facilities before starting the research I was more or less aware that there were difficulties here but I wasn't prepared for the complete abandonment that I witnessed. The users wait usually in a common room which in some cases was more a corridor than a room (Pictures 1, 2) with very old furniture and without a reception desk where people can ask for information. Therefore, for any kind of information they had to enter social workers' offices where chaos was usually a common phenomenon particularly in CWDs and in the municipality of Athens.

Pictures 1 and 2: The waiting areas for the users in the CWDs



<sup>44</sup> In Greece gaining access to files or data in public administration is sometimes a matter of the clerk that you happen to meet. In the specific ministry, I was lucky enough to gain the trust of the clerks and the director so I was allowed to have access to some of the files concerning reports of the Department of Social Work that ran during the 1980s without having to get official permission. This probably was due to two factors. Firstly, due to the sensitivity of the workers and their sympathy for anyone who cares to research this area but also probably due to the fact that it is a common secret that if someone asks for official permission, they will probably never be successful in gaining access due to the bureaucracy and the circumspection of the hierarchy. These good intentions of many workers in the Greek public sector - who in many cases dispense with bureaucratic procedures in order to help people - are valuable and frequently experienced by both researchers and users of public services.

Furthermore, social workers are packed in their offices at least in one municipality and one of the two CWDs (Pictures 3, 4). In HiHPs, the team shares one office while for the CWD in Peloponnesus each social worker has her own due to the fact that there are so few social workers. Particularly for the municipality in Peloponnesus the situation was better, however as Helen describes:

*“Ok, I have my office, the administrative staff gradually learnt that they shouldn’t enter my office when the door is closed and a user might cry and feel uncomfortable, it took me ages to persuade them. However, the fact that the SSD is in the same building with administrative services discourages people from coming. You see, here it is an agricultural area and everybody knows each other, people don’t feel comfortable to come to the social worker, they feel stigmatized”*

Pictures 3 and 4: Social workers’ offices in CWD in Athens in 2007



Ioanna

*“The working conditions....To tell you what? You can see it on your own, we are all packed in one office, there are 4 of us in here. I go to the corridor to hold interviews with the users because many people don’t want to be heard by others. It is their right, or I struggle to find paper for photocopying or envelopes to send letters and I go through the offices to “steal” envelopes, yesterday it was a hard job to find envelopes...”*

Dimitra:

*“We work 4 social workers in one room that only has 3 desks”*

The situation was similar for the municipality in Athens and HiHP where social workers shared the same office with other members of the department. Rebecca in the municipality of Athens noted:

*“Although the building is very good, we are four people, as you can see in a very small room, while two of them belong to the administrative staff. One of us can also sit at the back in a very small room, actually it is a small corridor where there is an old PC. There is not even space for us to move our chair. But for the users it is very bad. Someone comes in and suddenly they are in front of four people, some of them might start to whisper ‘I would like to talk to a social worker’ and they are very shy. And you have to run all over to find an empty office to do the interview. Some others directly start to talk about their problem and you cannot even PROTECT them because normally your job is to protect them and you can’t. Or, I want to talk with my colleague about a case and they can hear us, it’s not that I don’t trust people, it is that they live in the area so they know the users.*

*I don’t feel free to do my job. I cannot even think, there is noise all the time. In other departments in the municipality they have PCs, they have everything, clerks get in contact by e-mail, but here we are the last wheel... ok, we don’t also bootlick them we are not the service that will do their favours so...”*

From the above response of Rebecca, a number of problems are apparent that are in accordance with the findings of the research. The privacy for the users was out of question in this specific municipality and in the CWD in Athens where the users talked with their social worker in front of other social workers or in the corridor.

In the municipality and CWD in Peloponnesus and Aegean Island, privacy was more achievable due to the space available, while in HiHPs in some cases the social worker talked with the user and the interdisciplinary team with the driver present.

Secondly Rebecca refers to the noise in her office and generally to a chaotic situation which was similar to my findings for the one HiHP and the two CWDs. During observation it was more than apparent that the situation was problematic with people coming into the offices, telephones ringing and social workers having to answer them, whilst interviews with other users taking place. Practically, the working environment didn’t permit effective work while simultaneously it was extremely stressful for anyone working in these offices. Many times, after having stayed in the CWDs for 5 or 6 hours I was so tired due to the noise and the chaos that dominated that I started wondering about the stamina of the practitioners.

Thirdly, Rebecca refers to the “favours” done for the politicians in the hierarchy and reveals indirectly the issue of clientilistic relations in the welfare sector. This issue was raised mainly in municipalities and it seems that – at least in the specific SSD-

the office equipment depends to some extent on the “favours” (ministerial jobs or jobbery) (rousfeti in Greek) that social workers do for the politicians (for more see Chapter 6).

The above difficult working conditions are in accordance with a recent quantitative research project with 136 social workers in Greece where:

*“The incidence of various problems in the work place was examined, and the results show that 42% of respondents very often or often face problems related to a lack of organisational framework, 25% to a lack of space, 16% to a lack of technology, and 8% to a lack of resources”* (Georgoussi et. al., 2003:68).

I will complete the picture of the realities of Greek social work with a quick glance at the sources of support to and training of social workers. Specifically, supervision, in-service training and support are all considered to be luxuries. This issue is common for all the researched SSDs in CWDs, municipalities and HiHPs. Whenever this question was asked (although I was perfectly aware of the total absence of such resources to support to practitioners) social workers either laughed or looked at me as if I were an “alien”. The most common responses are given below:

Ioanna:

*“Training? Is this a joke? Their only aim is to burden us with more and more programmes in which we have a role nobody has informed us about.*

*We don’t know our exact role-is it going to be the role of the “social counsellor?-, our limits, we do whatever we think we should do. In Greece everything is based on the filotimo<sup>45</sup>”*

Anna:

*“Nothing at all, we might have some discussions not all together but you know, if I trust someone I talk with her about my case. There are obstacles even for getting permission to attend a seminar. I think that supervision is very important in our job, I wished I had it, then, I might not have been feeling all this burden on my shoulders while also it is very important in how we work with the cases”*

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<sup>45</sup> The literary translation of the Greek word filotimo is earnestness. In Greek, it means “the intense sense of personal honor and dignity” (Babinotis, 2008:1886). Often Greek workers refer to filotimo as the way in which they are urged to do parts of the work that is not their responsibility. “I put somebody on their mettle.....in order to have something done, you need to bring somebody on their mettle, telling them that they are the only person who can help you efficiently” (ibid). That’s the meaning of Ioanna’s response but she probably also refers to social workers’ altruism due to which they do their best despite the pressure and hard working conditions.

However, the research in one of the biggest municipalities in Athens revealed that supervision, training and support are out of the question.

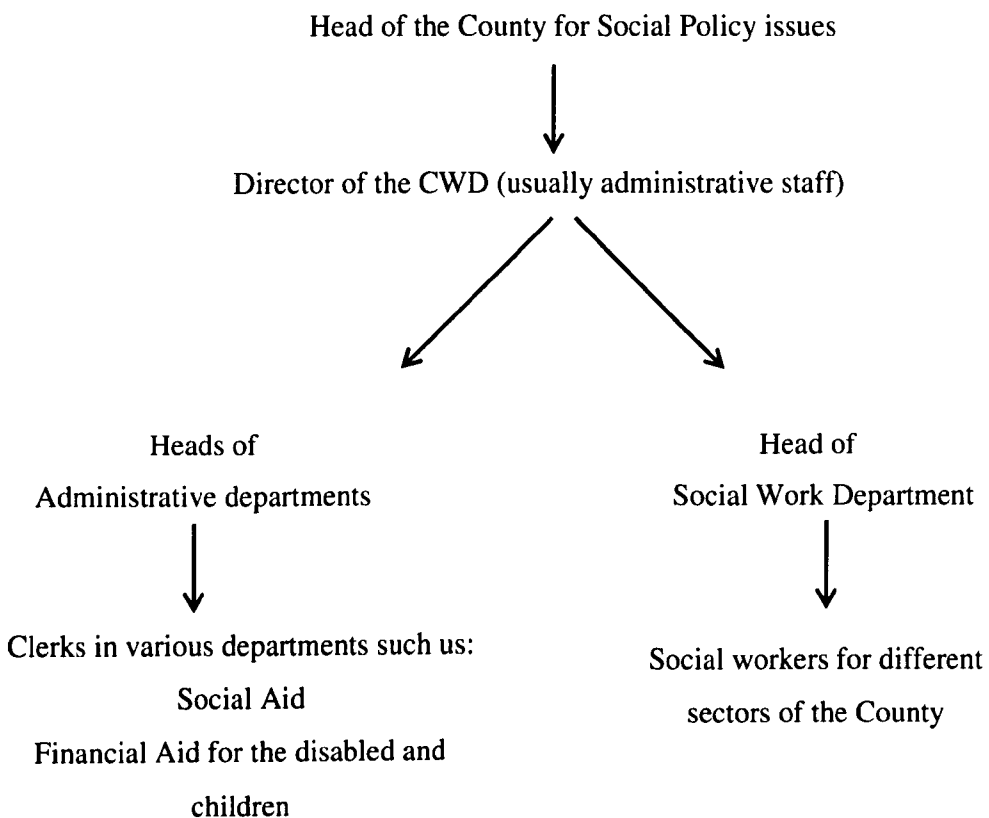
Overall, this section described the working conditions of the social workers characterised by lack of sufficient equipment, old furniture, lack of office space, heavy workload and limited staff for all the researched SSDs while the labour conditions seem to be harder in HiHPs which is regarded as a semi-public agency. In one of the few researches in the field the findings are similar where as Papadaki and Papadaki (2006) claim, professional supervision is underdeveloped in Greece and a cause of dissatisfaction for practitioners with regard to other organizational factors for example bureaucracy and limited autonomy. In parallel, social workers have limited opportunities through their agency for promotion and few resources of time and money for continuing their education (Dedoussi et al, 2004). The findings of this study are also supported by research by Agelis (2007) looking at 983 workers in welfare services in North Greece which revealed that for 93.7 % of the respondents there was no educational department in their agency.

The difficult working conditions of the social workers in the researched SSDs offer clear indications that SSDs and practitioners are not among the state's first priorities. This is linked with the politics of welfare but it is also correlated with the users' profile and the class specific character of social work as it will be discussed in the next chapter. However, before moving to the next chapter, the following section concerning the hierarchy in the SSDs will hopefully complete the general picture of the reality of the SSDs.

### Hierarchy in the SSDs or where the power lies?

In all the researched agencies, the power lay mainly in the hierarchy<sup>46</sup> (for the usual structure of hierarchy see figures 4 and 5) in accordance with the findings by Papadaki (2005) where limited autonomy by social workers was found.

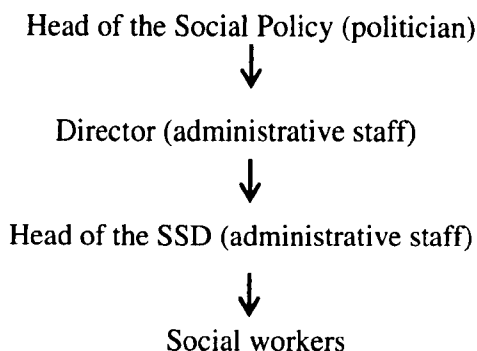
**Figure 4: Hierarchy in County Welfare Department**



<sup>46</sup> It is noteworthy that in none of the SSDs where the research took place was it possible to find any organogram (organisation chart) consequently, the following diagrams are the result of the study of the regulations with regard to the interviews, the social workers and informal discussions with administrative staff



**Figure 5: The hierarchy in SSD in municipality**



In any case, the role and actions of hierarchy is nothing but a result of the politics of welfare. In the present research, the findings demonstrate the implications of the strict hierarchy for social workers and the users. To begin with, the approval of the benefits is given either by administrative staff and directors in CWDs or the mayor/aldermen in the municipalities. Additionally, clientilistic relations are particularly apparent in municipalities and HiHPs where aldermen or politicians pursued them by intervening in the services provided by social workers, while this phenomenon was limited in CWDs. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that the participation of social workers in the planning of the services is out of the question in CWDs due to the excessive bureaucracy which governs them, a finding which is in accordance with literature (Stathopoulos, 1996, Kallinikaki, 1998, Papadaki and Papadaki, 2006, Georgoussi et al, 2003). Moreover, according to Koukouli et al., (2008:222): *“The welfare organisations do not give opportunities for promotion in Greece”* while even if this is achieved, it is not accompanied by “authority” or “financial rewards”.

Additionally, through the present research it seems that the degree of the involvement of practitioners in the planning of the services particularly in municipalities depends on the policy and perspectives of the politicians. But, even if social workers’ proposals are approved by the hierarchy, limited funding prevents the development of structures in the community. In order to create services in the community the municipality needs to find its own resources for example programmes funded by EU, funding by companies or/and cooperation with NGO’s and so on due to the low funding by the state. Moreover, it seems that the control by the hierarchy

on social workers is achieved in various ways such as through social workers' reports and documents particularly in the CWDs:

Dimitra:

*“There is the head of the Department, the director, the head of the county for social policy issues and there has recently been added another Department. We always have to follow the hierarchy if we want to send a document in order to demand or complain about things”*

Aggeliki:

*“We have very often come up against obstacles and barriers set by the hierarchy when we try to send documents above and complain about the responsibilities of social workers”*

Vassiliki:

*“For any document that we need to send the rule here is that it must be approved by the head of the department and then by the director. The director will decide whether the document is to be sent or we have to change it. For example, they decide whether the words that we use are correct, what we should write for the cases by the prosecutor, this is the case for any document leaving the department.”*

In the CWD in Peloponnesus, both the director and the head of the department had the main authority while the behaviour of the head of the department was perceived as particularly problematic by the practitioners. Specifically, through observation the inappropriateness of the specific social worker for this post was more than apparent given that she shouted at the users and social workers in the corridors and there were major problems in her communication with both the staff and the users. Although the situation was perfectly known there had been no attempt to remove her from the specific post.

Anna:

*“You saw the head of the department ... you understand what I am talking about, she is totally unsuitable for this position, she shouts at the users, at us, many times she has cancelled benefits or curtailed them, we cannot communicate with her but nobody cares, the hierarchy know the situation very well, they simply don't care”*

In contrast, the head of the department in CWD in Athens was very different. She repeatedly attempted to send documents to the head of the county but these documents were returned by the director who clearly had the main power.

Kleopatra:

*“I sent a document to the head of the county about the situation here, the lack of staff, the workload, the cases by the prosecutor, these little “bombs” that we have here. I didn’t send it through the director because I knew that she would keep it. So, when the head of the county asked for explanations by the director, she sent a document in which she wrote that everything is ok here and my document had been sent by mistake. I struggle all the time to be heard, I constantly come up against the same stops and obstacles”*

Similarly, in the municipality in Athens the practitioners were faced with obstacles when they voiced their complaints or with complete ignorance in their attempts to suggest further services in the community.

Rebecca:

*“We are the last wheel of the coach, and we eat the shit. The director and the head of the department belong to the administrative staff. The head of the department check on the level of the administrative work that we do, she cannot check us on the level of social work activity as she doesn’t know how to do it. We need a social worker as a supervisor, to have someone to protect us to represent us, to have a structure here, to have a specific hierarchy. Whenever we try to demand something we fall into the trap: we cannot do that directly but through the supervisor, and then through the director so nothing happens, all of them cancel us. We cannot go higher in order to make demands, things stick at the supervisor and the director”*

Sofia:

*“We have made so many proposals about structures and services which need to be established in the community but whether anything is done depends upon the will of the politicians. They simply don’t care about the welfare sector”.*

In many cases, social workers have repeatedly visited the heads of the counties in order to complain about the working conditions as well as the low benefits available to users.

Christine:

*“We do complain to the County about the EFS benefits, we made reports in the past to the ministry and now to the County, but nothing has happened. There are families in real need but they cannot take the benefit, we said that to the head of the county, but nothing happened”*

The social work's Code of Ethics argues that social workers have an obligation to challenge unfair policies while the definition of social work refers to the values of social change and social justice as crucial (IFSW and IASSW, 2004). Through my visits to the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity I found documents and reports by social workers from all over Greece from 1980s. Social workers had tried through their reports to the Ministry of Health to raise issues concerning the low benefits, the understaffed social services and generally the endless limitations and difficulties that they face due to organizational constraints or welfare policy however, little if no change has been achieved.

Papadaki (2005) in her research refers to the "culture of silence" as the main behavioural attribute of social workers where social workers usually attempt to provide a kind of first aid help to their users, however, they do not attempt any major changes. She refers to a variety of factors ranging from organizational ones such as the power of hierarchical structure and the limited authority of practitioners, to the issue of gender where according to her findings the family was more important and a priority for the practitioners while also the concept of femininity refers to the silence (Papadaki, 2005). Moreover, elsewhere (Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008) they also point out the role of education as crucial to the preparation of the professionals for the challenges to the profession in such a context.

Although these factors should be taken into consideration, to my mind, the day to day struggle for surviving in the SSDs had led to demoralized and tired practitioners (see Chapter 7) and there is crucial need for (both) support and in service training of social workers as well as the need for coalitions with wider progressive movements, which will be discussed later in the thesis, so that social workers can challenge these policies more effectively and social work can reclaim its role (Ferguson, 2008).

Nevertheless, to return to the discussion of the findings, the power of politicians particularly in the municipalities is significant; however, the way in which this power is used depends on the will of the politicians.

For example, in the municipality in Peloponnesus for both the SSD and HiHP the mayor neither intervened, nor asked for "favours" nor made any decision without the opinion of the social worker.

Helen:

*“Actually, the person who is responsible for social planning in the municipality is the mayor. I go directly to him ok, I also co-operate with the person responsible for financial issues but the mayor is the one who I will discuss any ideas or programmes with. I have a very good co-operation with the mayor. In fact, the applied programmes and services in the municipality occurred after my proposals with the co-operation of the mayor while the way that I work is upon me, he doesn’t intervene. However, this is not common in municipalities....”*

It is possible that at least in some municipalities social workers have the chance to participate in the planning. However, this tends to be the exception rather than the rule and the limited resources in the first tier of local government usually prevent further development of social services.

The above attitude of the mayor in the municipality in Peloponnesus could be seen as an issue of personal choice concerning the use of his power. However, in my opinion in the above responses by the social workers there is one common characteristic; the importance of the kind of politics of welfare applied both in CWDs and municipalities. More specifically, the attitudes and decisions of the directors in the CWDs could be explained by their lack of interest in the social services provided, which in turn is yet more evidence of the pervasive abandonment of social services and their users. On the other hand, in municipalities where it seems that social workers do have more freedom in their work this still depends on the political programme and decisions of the aldermen or/and the mayors. Naturally, politicians represent political parties and ideologies that bear specific policies which in turn affect both social workers and their users.

Yet, it would be an oversimplification to argue that power relations lie exclusively between the directors of the agencies and social workers without taking into consideration the power issues between the social worker and the user that will be discussed later in the thesis.

## Summary

Although there are differences between the researched agencies due to their different regulations, aims and character, the research revealed a number of commonalities. The low funding of the state welfare sector, the lack of long-term social planning, the gradual withdrawal of the state's responsibility for welfare given the promotion of neo-liberal policies contribute significantly to the hard reality of the SSDs. Everyday reality refers to a range of responsibilities for practitioners where workload, administrative work and pressure is part of their "routine" while they also face a growing demand from the community regarding people with multiple problems.

Furthermore, the study of the working conditions disclosed major difficulties faced by the social workers through all the SSDs due to the lack of staff, limited equipment and space in their offices, difficult labour conditions particularly for the workers in HiHP, and in general an almost complete absence of supervision, in service-training and support for the practitioners. New "flexible" labour conditions have also made their appearance in social services as in HiHPs following the general trends for "flexibility" recommended by EU, leading practitioners to face insecurity and long periods of being unpaid. Finally, the hierarchy in SSDs reveals that the major power lies with the hierarchy and administrative staff, while social workers face a number of obstacles in their attempts to demand both their rights and those of their users'.

One of the main arguments in this chapter is that the hard reality of the SSDs is nothing but the result of the politics of Greek welfare. The puzzle will be completed when we add the "pieces" of the users' profile and their perspectives and social work's interventions which will hopefully contribute to a more holistic understanding and explanation of social work practice in Greece.

## **Chapter 4: The poverty of the user and its implications for social work**

### **Introduction**

The users of the SSDs are integral parts of social work practice and the findings of the research indicate that the majority of the users are confronted with poverty. This matter *per se* constitutes the need for social work to examine in more depth its role with the poor. However, this cannot be done without exploring the bigger picture such as the structural causes of poverty, policies that reproduce and maintain poverty which in turn affect practitioners and their users. While social work is directly involved with the poor, little attention has been given in Greece to examining the role and the link of social work with the poor. This chapter fills, hopefully, a gap in Greek social work research and literature concerning the poverty of the user and its main implication for social work.

## Users' profile

One of the most common characteristics of all the researched SSDs is that the users face poverty. This is apparent through various indicators - sources of data such as the criteria for the benefits, interviews, records by referral's books in CWDs, observation and the demands of the users. We begin with the criteria for the benefits and the services mainly directed at the poorest part of the population (Table 9).

**Table 9: Criteria for the benefits and services in the SSDs for which social investigation by social workers is needed**

<b>CWDs</b> <b>Basic Preconditions for</b> <b>benefits<sup>47</sup></b>	<p><b>Emergency's Financial Support Benefit (EFS)</b></p> <p>This benefit amounts to 235€ once per year and is provided only for "extreme cases".</p> <p>Its preconditions refer to a very low income (about 5.000€ per person per year at the most) a sudden incident such as health problems, death from physical disaster like earthquakes, fire and poverty.</p>
	<p><b>Child's Protection Programme (CPP): 44€ per month per each child under 16 years of age.</b></p> <p>The benefit is provided only for women, and its basic precondition is financial. That is, it can be received by families with 3 children given that the total family income in 2009 does not exceed the amount of 235€ per month (having deducted the money spent on rent). Additional documents should account for the user's assertion for the absence of the father (such as death, divorce, imprisonment, disability). Furthermore, the unemployment card or the woman's payrolls are additional certificates.</p>
	<p><b>Maternity Benefit is 440€ and it is provided only once for all.</b></p> <p>Certificate of financial weakness that confirms "mother's inability to confront her needs on her own" (decree 57/1973) which is derived by the CWD. Women whose family income does not exceed 586,94 € per month (P2B/3904/96)</p>

<sup>47</sup> In the specific table are presented only the benefits for which social investigation is needed given that there are other benefits that a claimant can receive from the CWD such as the disability benefit (220€ per month) for which in contemporary Greece social investigation is not needed (in contrast with the past, before 1997, when there was also a precondition). In parallel, in some CWDs the social investigation by the social worker is not a precondition for the housing benefit while for others it is. In general, slight differences can be found in each CWD as far as it concerns the social investigation as a precondition for benefits, the review of the cases etc.



	<p><b>Housing Benefit for the elderly amounts to</b> 266€ per month only for those aged 65 or more whose income exclusively derives from their OGA pension and/or disability benefit or have no income, do not live with their children and live in a rented house.</p>
<p><b>Criteria for the provided services by HiHPs</b></p>	<p>“These programmes are targeted at the elderly or people with disabilities with priority to those who</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot fully take care of themselves</li> <li>• Need special care</li> <li>• Live alone or are abandoned</li> <li>• Don’t have enough financial sources in order to improve the quality of their life and to be included – themselves as well as their families- in the social network by staying in their social environment” (Governments Paper, 1997:11374)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Benefits provided by Municipalities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Food or vouchers for the Super Market</b> Vouchers from 50€ to 150€ are provided according to the number of family members. Usually they are provided at Christmas and Easter depending on financial criteria as well as social criteria in some cases.</li> <li>• <b>Emergency Financial Benefit</b> is provided once by some municipalities and it’s different for each of them for example it can be 600€ or 300€. The criteria are based on the very low income of the claimant, and/ or an emergency situation such as serious illness.</li> </ul> <p>The decision of who deserves the benefits is based on income and social factors as well. Some municipalities might provide additional welfare provision such as reduced water bills, cheap groceries “koinoniko pandopoleio” (in Greek) etc.</p>

Sources: (Regulations of the CWDs and Municipalities, Matsaganis, (2004:76-77), County of Athens (2010), Testimonies by social workers, Social Services Department of Volunteers’ Organization Against Cancer, (2010), Government Paper, (1997)).

The benefits as it is shown by the above are particularly low while being accompanied by strict criteria that apply to the poorest. These are in accordance with the state’s policy towards the poor and in general with the class specific character of the minimum welfare sector in Greece. In parallel, the demands of the users are mainly financial while the majority of the users claim a benefit (Tables 9 and 10).

Another basic characteristic is that women are the dominant group of the claimants (with the exception of the year 2005 for the CWD in Athens for unknown reasons).

**Table 10: Applications/ claimants for EFS benefit in the CWD in Athens**  
**CWD in Athens: Applications for the EFS benefit**

Year	Applications	Profile of the majority of claimants	Rejections through years <sup>48</sup>
2002	1,074	289 women (18 immigrant) 745 men (7 immigrants)	40
2003	587	262 women (29 immigrants) 275 men (7 immigrants)	50
2004	582	243 women (19 immigrants) 151 men (11 immigrants)	188
2005	539	216 women (42 immigrants) 190 men (21 immigrants)	133
2006	638	225 women (67 immigrants) 80 men (31 immigrants)	333

**Table 11: Applications for benefits (EFS and CPP benefit) in the CWD in Peloponnesus**

Year	Applications	Gender
2003	702	570 women/ 132 men
2004	780	562 women/ 218 men
2005	820	588 women/ 232 men

Sources: Study of the Applications and referrals books cross-checked with administrative records that in one case were accessible.

Additionally, there are a number of people who haven't visited the SSD of their own will: The SSD having been informed by the police department, the prosecutor or the neighbours about cases such as child abuse, elderly desertion or people with mental

<sup>48</sup> In the specific CWD the rejections were easy to be counted while this wasn't the case for Peloponnesus. Moreover, it seems that although there is a decrease in the applications for benefits, there is an increase in the rejections. It wasn't possible to find statistics for the reasons for the rejections but it could be argued that this is either due to the lack of the preconditions by the claimants or to the smaller available budget by the state or both.

health problems living alone in the community, visit these people for applying the social investigation. Moreover, a small percentage about 10.0% of the cases<sup>49</sup> in CWDs visits the SSD in order to adopt children. This is due to the need for interviews with the social workers and their reports which are preconditions for adopting a child. In both CWDs and municipalities social workers mentioned also a small percentage of people asking for advice regarding their family's relationships as well as for information concerning various issues such as other services and their welfare rights. Some of the most typical responses by social workers which reveal the needs and also the profile of the users are given below:

Georgia:

*"They ask for financial help while some of them want to talk with us about how they should behave to a member of their family. The majority are interested in the EFS benefit and the CPP benefit...there are also many gypsies as the preconditions apply to them"*

Artemis:

*"They are very poor. People have few or no means to survive... All groups come here; People with no national insurance, people with every kind of disability, homeless, lone mothers, drug users, elderly, alcoholics, people recently released from prison"*

Sofia:

*"People seeking information for other services, for our benefits, people with mental health problems, lone parents, recently released from prison, elderly and many, many cases by the prosecutor. The majority of the users are of a low or very low financial standard (status), many of them are unemployed or have no national insurance. Some don't have a stable job while others are elderly who receive the OGA pension which is at most 320€ per month, or the IKA pension which is at the most 500€ per month. All of them lack even the basic means of living. As for the cases from the prosecutor, the majority are also people of a low financial standard many of whom may never have visited social services. In some of the cases by the prosecutor the parents belong to the middle class where there is a fierce conflict between them regarding the custody of the children"*

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<sup>49</sup> According to the social workers' testimonies.

Sofia's description of the profile of the users refers to some of the most deprived parts of the population such as lone mothers, elderly with low pensions, disabled, and families in poverty. Given that they face a number of urgent needs, naturally their main demand is financial help. The following table (12) demonstrates besides the profile, some of the urgent needs that lead people to being claimants of benefits.

**Table 12: Some of the most typical cases that depict the profile and the urgent needs of the users**

- A 60-year-old man without national insurance. In 2007 he was in prison because in the past he owed money to the state. Now, he owes again due to the limited proceeds from his work. He lives in his shop, has no home and he hasn't paid the rent for the last 2 months. He has a 30-year-old son who is unemployed.
- A 36-year-old woman with 3 children whose monthly income is 274€ from the CWD. She is unemployed and lives with her partner who has cancer. Their apartment has only 2 rooms and the rent is 300€ per month. The income of her partner is 722€ per month.
- A 77-year-old woman with serious mental health problems and alcoholism. Her daughter is a lone mother also with mental health problems. The woman used to take the Benefit for the Disabled by the CWD but they cut it. Her income is the OGA pension, 218€ per month, plus the benefit for those having many children, 180€ per month. She faces the danger of eviction.
- A 73-year-old woman suffering from depression. Her monthly income is 218€ by OGA plus 180€ from the benefit for those having many children. She also faced the danger of eviction.
- A 39-year-old woman who works as a cleaner (earns 15€ per day), she faces the danger of eviction.

Source: Files of the users in the municipality in Athens in 2007.

Finally, through observation at social workers' offices and visits to users' houses it was more than apparent that they had a number of uncovered needs and many of them lived in extremely bad living conditions. For example, among the people sitting in the waiting rooms of the SSDs it was obvious there were urgent needs such as lack

of money for paying the rent, the bills, and even the food. There were also ill people unable to work, divorced women and lone mothers with limited or no income, families with many unemployed members and/or low income; that is, urgent needs which led people to asking help from the SSDs. Particularly, through my visits with social workers to users' houses or my visits for interviewing the users the deprivation was more than apparent through the limited space, the lack of furniture and equipment. Poverty was everywhere on material level but also in the desperation that people expressed. Additionally, whenever I visited houses of people with serious mental health problems, they were completely abandoned, they didn't take their medicines regularly and their houses were full of garbage and old clothes since there is no available service in the community (except for HiHP) for people with mental health problems. In these houses I experienced the most extreme, the worst living conditions and complete desertion ever.

In Greek literature there are some references to the poverty of the users of SSDs. According to Kafandari (1987:38) the usual problems that the users in CWDs face are:

*"...social and emotional problems such as problems in the relationships among the members of the family, neglect of individuals (children, disabled, elderly), difficulties concerning accommodation due to unemployment, and a number of problems as consequences of the contemporary life style like alcoholism, use of drugs, prostitution, attempted suicide"*.

The above quote rather focuses on life style, morality issues and not poverty. This is a common description in social work literature and indirectly keeps silence for the poverty of the user and its causes. More recently Vergeti (2009) carried out research from the perspective of crisis intervention model in families, in two CWDs. She also refers to testimonies by social workers where again unemployed, homeless, lone mothers and so on who constitute the profile of the users. Similarly to the above, announcements by front-line social workers in SSDs in municipalities describe the categories of the population that face problems and use the public SSD in the Municipality of Athens as parents, children, young people, adults who face multiple socio-economic problems, people with disabilities, families and people who face poverty, elderly, minorities and refugees, people that are not aware of their welfare rights, unemployed, homeless, drug users, lone mothers (Papathanasopoulou, 1993, Restemis, 1993, Gialouridou, 1993).

For HiHPs the profile of the users' research by KEDKE and ANKA (2006:56-65) showed that:

*“the biggest percentage of the users 91.0% are of a low standard of living, under the limit of poverty and their monthly income is from 0€ to 500€ per month... “while almost the same are the findings for the county of Trikala with only 10% of the population of the study to receive pension more than 501€ per month”.*

The researchers suggest that it is the low pensions for both the elderly and those with disabilities that lead them to living under the limit of poverty (KEKDE-ANKA, 2006). The elderly, aged 65 or more is the dominant group of users, with the 62.32% of the total users to be elderly and the rest people with disabilities (Kaifa, 2005). The majority of them are primary school graduates while 18.0% are illiterate. They have been informed about the provided services of Help in Home either by the staff of the programme or other people who work in Municipality, such as administrative staff (ibid).

For the programmes funded by EU even more data are available due to the character of these programmes as research and reports are demanded from them. For example, a study of Kondiadis & Apistoulas (2006) concerning the Network of Social and Supportive Services reveals some interesting data. Because of the character of the programme, the target-population were people “that are threatened” or face exclusion from the labour market. Consequently, the profile of the users is similar to the above where the majority of the users were unemployed 62.33%, employed 16.44%, lived on their pension 5.75%, and women who cared for their home and families 6.34%. To be more specific, for 46,598 people who used these services all over Greece from March 2003 to October 2005 their income for

- 70.71 % ranged from 0 to 3.000€ per year,
- 18.09% ranged from 3.001 to 6.000€ per year,
- 8.38% ranged from 6.001 to 10.000€ and only 2.83% had an income of more than 10.000€ per year (ibid). As far as it concerns their family situation: they were married with children 43.66% and unmarried without children 37.54%. Regarding their health 35.13% were people with mental health problems, 22.66% people with other disabilities and about 35.0 % with other health problems. Again, 62.0% of the users were women. To sum up the profile of the users of these services can be described as people with low income, poor, unemployed with health problems,

immigrants (8.87%), Roma (5.05%), some refugees (0.19%), and the majority of them were women (ibid).

Some interesting findings for the characteristics of the general population were found by a research of a social worker<sup>50</sup> who worked in an agricultural area. The research took place in 2003 in her municipality (Population: 13.000 people, N: 1.500 people) which included both agricultural and urban areas. As far as it concerns the characteristics of the population, 15.0 % of the population has no national insurance at all. The unemployed were about 11.0%, the temporary workers were 9.6% and 7.4% had part time jobs. As far as it concerns the health condition of the population 6.1% have a physical disability, while 4.9% have a serious illness. About 4.0% claimed another kind of health problem (either mental or other) and finally 21.0 % had finished primary school, and 41.0% were analphabetic check spelling (Records of the municipality in Peloponnesus)<sup>51</sup>.

The above literature review with regard to the findings of the research reveals some added characteristics besides poverty such as age, disability, gender and race. Similarly, in studies of poverty in Greece there are frequently references to at least some of the above issues. Specifically, a longitudinal study from 1974 until 1999 indicated that poverty is more common in families living in agricultural areas, whose heads are people of low educational level, the elderly and the unemployed (Mitrakos & Tsakloglou, 2003). But the rise of unemployment in cities seems to reveal that the problem is growing in the urban areas as well. Additionally, there are several references in Greek as well as English literature concerning the women's poverty. Lone parent families and specifically those in which the lone parent is a woman appear to have high percentages of living in poverty while they also experience social stereotyping and stigmatisation (Maratou-Alibradi, 2002). Moreover, the researchers point out a number of problems that lone mothers experience in Greece such as the lack of day nurseries and, in general, state care and health care for their children, "high percentages of unemployment", low income, "lack of information about the welfare system" and about the "labour market" (ibid:28). Particularly women are at high risk of poverty.

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<sup>50</sup> This research was the only applied research that was found in the total of the researched SSDs by a social worker. It was undertaken by Helen in the municipality in Peloponnesus.

<sup>51</sup> The records as well as the regulations are not disclosed so that anonymity and confidentiality of the agencies will be kept.

As Glendinning and Millar (cited in Rurspini, 2000:108) claim:

*“Female poverty is the outcome of an accumulation of deprivations within the three resources systems (family, labour market and welfare systems)”.*

More recently according to Eurostat (2009:302):

*“The household types most at risk of poverty are single parents with dependent children, single elderly people and single females”*

During my research in SSDs I noticed that a limited number of immigrants - and particularly the undocumented ones - applied to these services. Unsurprisingly, the preconditions and criteria for the benefits apply only to the poorest and to the documented immigrants leaving aside a big part of the excluded. Undocumented immigrants, asylum seekers<sup>52</sup> and refugees have limited access to social services, and limited welfare provision by the state which consequently places this population among the most marginalized groups (Sitaropoulos, 2002). A number of NGO's and anti-racist organizations have repeatedly reported the extremely bad living conditions of refugees in detention centres and in the streets (Migreurop, 2010), their limited access to asylum procedures and services (NOAS, Aitima, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2009a), and illegal deportations by the authorities (NOAS, Aitima, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2009b). Sitaropoulos (2002) argues that there is a shift by the state to put the responsibility of care upon the NGO's while the preconditions in state SSDs exclude the undocumented. Therefore the rare appearance of immigrants in the state SSDs can be partly explained by the above. Additionally, the findings by the Eurobarometre indicate that there is obvious discrimination against various groups of the population:

*“As in previous similar surveys, discrimination on the ground of ethnic origin is seen to be the most widespread form of discrimination in the EU (61%), followed by discrimination based on age (58%) and disability (53%).”*

(Social Agenda, 2010:12-13).

Specifically, discrimination based on nationality, age and disability has increased in 2009 across Europe and this is perceived as an issue in accordance with the general

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<sup>52</sup> The asylum provision in Greece is particularly low. According to the statistical data by Greek department of UNHCR, in 2007 25.113 refugees asked for asylum and only 0.04% was accepted on “first decision” while for 2008 the provision of asylum 0.05% (for 25.113 applications) and for 2009, 0.04% (UNHCR, 2009). An unknown number of refugees do not apply for asylum given that it is taken for granted that their application will be rejected.



financial recession (Social Agenda, 2010). The authors express concern that the economic recession might lead Europeans to more discriminative attitudes and behaviour. These trends need further attention particularly from the practitioners who work with the oppressed given that social workers due to the nature of their profession need to challenge discrimination.

However, to continue with the previous discussion on the findings concerning the profile of the users, it is apparent that the poor in SSDs don't have a common profile. They are rather different people with different needs but the class specific character of social work is more than apparent. As the researchers from KEDKE and EETAA (1995:45) argued:

*“...the target – population of social services is not the general population but the groups that face inequality based on the parameters of sex, class, age, racial origin...”*

According to Langan (1992:3-4), traditionally, radical social work analysis emphasized the “*working-class character*” of social work’s clients with regard to the “*oppressive relationships*” that they experienced. However, she argues that after 1980s there was an attempt to illuminate the oppressive relations by taking into consideration the “*growing recognition of the specificities of oppression, according to gender, race, class, age, disability and sexual orientation*” and including “*anti-discriminatory*” (Langan and Lee cited in Langan: 1992:3) approaches in critical<sup>53</sup> social work. These issues are important for social work and its interventions in various vulnerable groups of the population/ users. The practitioners need to take into consideration the power and oppression that is produced by the dominant ideology and is reproduced on societal level in order to be aware of their role. Overall, it seems that according to the above findings, all the above categories of the population, often the users of SSDs, share some “common characteristics” such as the fact that they “have the marginal if any relationship to waged labour” and they are the “poorest of the poor” (Jones and Novak, 1999:79-80).

In the Greek social work literature there are some references to the poverty of the user but the analysis remains as a narrow description of the phenomenon rather than one analysing this common characteristic of poverty with regard to the role of social work.

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<sup>53</sup> For the description of the term critical social work see Introduction.

Overall, in the Greek social work literature it is common to find material for some of the above categories of population for example material on social work with families mainly from a psychological perspective that focuses on the therapy of the family while their poverty is rarely discussed in contrast with the English literature and research. Specifically, according to a number of authors the majority of the users in British and American (state) Social Services Departments are poor people (Becker, 1997, Jones, 1983, Jones, 2001, Schorr, 1992). Becker (1988) in his 1986 British study revealed that the majority of the users of social services were benefit claimants. The authors show that the main users of social services are probably among the poorest people in the population while they also examine with a critical view the role of social work with the poor. In the absence of Greek literature in this area, the largely British based research on the relationship between social work and poverty is more developed. The findings, the approaches taken and some of the key findings have proved to be helpful to this research in suggesting areas and relationships that required exploration in the Greek context. Nevertheless, given that the findings indicate that the poor are the usual clients of the SSDs this couldn't but have implications for social work that will be discussed in the following section.

## **The implication of users' poverty for social work**

If poverty is one of the basic characteristic of the users in state SSDs then social work needs to examine in more depth poverty and its link with social work for various reasons; Firstly through the findings the involvement of the social workers with the poor is clear. Secondly the knowledge and the understanding of the social and political causes of the user's problems as well as the impact of poverty upon the people are crucial for those that work with the most marginalized. The general social and political context affects social work but also has an impact upon the user's lives: Social workers deal with the social problems of their users and consequently the critical examination and understanding of the context with regard to the social work's role (particularly with the poor) is important. Additionally, social work affects through its practice peoples' lives - that deal with the SSDs - and issues of power and authority emerge that cannot but impact upon the relationship between the practitioner and the user. Finally, given that social work is a humanitarian profession whose aim is the emancipation of the people, tackling unequal policies and struggle for social justice (IFSW and IASSW, 2004) social work cannot but examine and re-examine its role in order to ensure that its activity is committed to the values of the profession.

All the above reasons constitute the necessity for social work to have more interest in its link with poverty in Greek context, but also to shed more light on the link between policies and its impact upon people and social work. Therefore, in the following pages the main aspects of social work and poverty are discussed.

### ***- Social work's involvement in "defining the poor"***

The practitioners in SSDs are clearly involved in the procedure for providing benefits and services for the poor. To be more specific, social workers' social investigations and social reports are some of the preconditions for the social provision (see Table 9, in the previous section). These actions by the social workers will be discussed analytically later in the thesis; however in this part it is important to focus on the assessment of poverty by the practitioners. Specifically, the estimation of who the poor are was based by the social workers on various criteria. To begin with the official limit of poverty, this wasn't taken into consideration by the social workers in CWDs (in many cases it wasn't known) where social workers claimed that who is

poor is based on the preconditions for the benefits but also through their experience by day to day contact with the poorest.

Anna:

*“There are the criteria for the benefits”*

Artemis:

*“Ok, there are the preconditions for each of the benefit, it’s the limit of 5,000€ income per year. But, here, we are talking about situation where poverty is all around you, you go into their houses and they have nothing at all, so you see the poverty in front of your eyes”*

Jane:

*“You can see the poverty by getting into their house: there is nothing to eat, no furniture, no electricity their house is damaged after earthquakes. They may have a very old car, but you know if the administrative staff finds out that they have a car they will argue that they are in no need”*

Given that the practitioners in CWDs visit some of the poorest parts of the population in their houses, this experience of “seeing the poverty all around you” is a strong indicator of their poverty for them. Maybe the practitioners didn’t need to be aware of the official limits of poverty as well as the debates concerning the definitions of poverty probably because their empirical knowledge was seen as enough.

On the other hand, in municipalities the limit of poverty has been set by social workers in agreement with the local council and the mayors, but they also take into consideration other social factors as well. Interestingly, rather than focusing only on income criteria they have also considered factors such as the health, the lack of care network, or emergency situations in their life, disability, the housing conditions and so on.

Helen:

*“We have put a criterion of an income of 3,000€ per year for one person or a family, and 6,000€ for a family with more than 3 children. But we also count other factors such as the disability, whether they pay rent, or something serious happened to the family, I check all these and, ok, if there is a need I won’t be so strict with the preconditions. If someone has an income of 3,000 per year and has their own house and social support by relatives they can manage. But an old woman with a pension of 250€ per month, she has hardly 3,000€ per year, she pays rent, she pays for her*

*medicine, uses a taxi for visiting the doctors and things like that so she cannot get by on these, therefore we help her”*

Rebecca:

*“We don’t have a specific limit. In other services for example for the benefit of housing there is the limit of 11,500€ per year plus 2,500€ more for every child. You may consider that to be a limit but in our job we take into consideration some other factors such as the absence of social support, whether they live alone or they own something which we don’t count in because, what can they do with it? It isn’t eatable, and these people need food, at least”*

Similarly, in HiHPs the practitioners attempted to include claimants for the provided services:

Kostas:

*“Whenever I can, which means when I have the time, I try to include other claimants for services that are not the poorest. For example an elderly couple that might have a pension of 800 € pension per month in total but they have serious health problems. I do what I can but we cannot include all the people”*

Overall, in all the researched SSDs the majority of the practitioners attempted to include claimants and provide benefits, however particularly in municipalities the social workers had some kind of freedom to include further social criteria than just the income. This is important and indicates social workers intentions and commitment to do their best in order to help their users. It is also connected with the approaches that argue that poverty is more than a matter of income (see below discussion and Novak, 1988). Moreover, this flexibility by the practitioners could also be seen as a strong achievement by social work that keeps this kind of freedom in a bureaucratic environment. In any case it is also significant to be aware of the context in the municipalities. One of the emerged issues/findings of the research is the clientilistic relations by the politicians with the claimants/ users. Therefore the flexibility of the social criteria could also be also seen as a convenient option for politicians in order to gain some possible “voters”. On the other hand, it can be also seen as an indicator of a closer relationship by the politicians and practitioners with the people in the community on the contrary with the CWDs that cover bigger parts of the population. In any case this kind of freedom and flexibility in the municipalities is a useful tool that can be used to the advantage of the excluded; Besides the contradiction of the causes that lead to including social criteria in the

assessment of the poor, this flexibility is an advantage on account of the claimants that do not satisfy the official and strict criteria.

Nevertheless, the social workers have limited power given that those higher in the hierarchy take the final decisions. Additionally, as it is discussed throughout the thesis the stops by the senior functionaries in CWDs, the bureaucratic procedure, the limited welfare provision by the state, as well as clientilistic relations, particularly in the municipalities, are serious obstacles to social work practice in general and particularly for the procedure concerning the provision of benefits and services. Still, the practitioner has more power than the user/claimant. The social worker is the one that recommends the provision or not of a benefit. This power cannot but have an impact on the relationship with the user. Consequently, their empirical knowledge *per se* for estimating poverty and assessing the needs of the poor is not enough. The personal judgements of the practitioner, attitudes and beliefs affect their actions and interventions (Becker, 1988). In parallel, these attitudes and beliefs are affected by the dominant perceptions, education and policies towards the poor.

In my opinion, one of the core-elements in the awareness of poverty is its definition (and the debates as well) as that could be useful knowledge for the social workers in Greece. Firstly, because it informs the practitioner and adds knowledge that in turn affects their criteria of what poverty is, who the poor is and so on. Secondly, it contributes to the arguments of the social workers as professionals for persuading those higher in the hierarchy for the provision of benefits. Additionally, this knowledge can be used as a tool for the policy makers to be persuaded about the need of services, cash and material provision for those in need. Finally, the so-called as poverty lines as well as the definitions of poverty include or exclude parts of the population and affect policy measures (Serr, 2004).

The official estimation of poverty line according to the European Community Household Panel (ECHP)

*“has been set as the 60.0% of the average ...of the person’s income in the country”*  
while if *“we have taken into consideration a common poverty line through all the European countries...then the percentages of poverty in Greece are more than doubled”* (Papatheodorou and Petmesidou, 2004:324),

compared with the percentages of poverty in other European countries (ibid). Moreover, groups of population such as homeless, immigrants and asylum seekers are not included in the above measurements and therefore significant parts of the

population in Greece are left out. The poverty line according to the National Statistical Service of Greece is estimated at 4,741.12 euro per person per year that is to say 350 euro per month per person. Unsurprisingly, this monthly income is not even enough for buying food in Greece. These official poverty lines are set in a way that the poor is the person close to starvation. It is a convenient option by which the percentages of poverty are estimated in such a way that does not disclose the austerity that households face. For a couple with two children the equivalent poverty line is estimated in 9,956.35 euro per year (1659 euro per month) (Logos, 2005). Additionally, inequality is another commonly used indicator. Papatheodorou (2004) argues that the inequality includes a specific concept of what is perceived as equality while Jones and Novak argue that:

*“Measurements of income inequality are only one aspect of inequality, and are themselves reflections of a number of factors, including not only the operation of capitalism and its labour market (from which most incomes are derived) but also the role of the state in mediating the effects of the market through its systems of taxation and social security benefits”* (Jones and Novak, 1999:36).

This approach is based on a more holistic concept of inequality that includes more aspects than just “income-distribution” in contrast with the usual official statistics. In parallel, the last two decades the terminology of social exclusion has entered the dialogue posing an added discourse besides poverty and inequality. It’s beyond the aim of the research to examine in depth each term; however a comprehensive description of the three discourses that has been set out by Williams (1998:13) is useful:

*“ ‘Inequality’ constitutes a key overarching structural dynamic which can operate at interpersonal, local, national and international levels, in a wide variety of social economic, political and cultural spheres; ‘social exclusion’ is a consequent process, though not a necessary one, linked to inequality; ‘poverty’ is a state or condition, but a not necessary one linked to both inequality and social exclusion.”*

Unsurprisingly, the interest on social exclusion and the common use of the term is linked with politics. For example, on European policy’s agenda the shift from 1990’s is now on the paid work through the integration in work “...as exclusion is seen as the problem then insertion or integration into society is seen as the solution” (Williams, 1998:14).

Although the terminology of social exclusion comes to describe the complexity of factors that set people in the margins of the society as Levitas argues, the European Commission's (EC) social policy agenda focuses on the "*connection between exclusion and unemployment and not between exclusion and poverty*" (Levitas, 2004:206). Additionally, the causes are not looked for in capitalism but to generalist description of the causes of "contemporary financial and social conditions" (ibid). Moreover, the focus of the EU's policies is on the paid work, an "emphasis" that comes to "devalue unpaid work" which is mainly done by women "*and to distract attention away from economic and social inequalities (of 'race', gender, disability, age) that already exist in the labour market*" (Levitas, cited in Williams, 1998:14). This approach leaves aside parts of population such as the disabled or people that are not able to work but also the problematic issue with the term of social exclusion is the way that it is used by policy makers. Firstly, they respond to exclusion through integration and particularly through paid work and leave aside the other marginalised groups. Moreover, the above argument that the causes are the "general conditions" draws attention away from the real cause -capitalism *per se*- that seeks ways to increase and secure the profits rather than the well being of people (ibid).

Overall, there is a long debate about the appropriate definition and measurement of poverty referring to those arguing for more positivistic approaches while the others include many more factors than just income. According to Townsend (cited in Becker, 1997:24):

*"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the kinds of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary...."*

Gordon et al claim there is a need for measuring both income and standard of living: "*Standard of living includes both the material and social conditions in which people live and their participation in the economic, social cultural and political life of the country*" (Gordon et al, 2000:91).

In addition Novak (1988:21) claims that "*measuring poverty must always be relative*" because of the necessity to be examined with regard to the context of each society at a particular time. Thus poverty is not just about income, but it also refers to the social aspects of deprivation. Low income is also linked with reduced access to a number of social activities, to education, health and social services (Schorr, 1992).



The above and following approaches and discussion on poverty are important for the professionals that deal with the poor and participate in defining who the poor is and the “deserving poor” (Becker, 1997) for receiving the benefit. It is only one of the aspects of poverty awareness (Becker, 1988) which for the Greek context are necessary due to the direct involvement of the social work with the poor.

Becker (1997) claims that the debates about the definitions and measurement of poverty are mainly expressed in technical language while Serr (2004:139) argues that they are defined by “experts” while the voice of the poor contributes to

*“...an alternative approach to defining poverty based on human needs, rather on numerical aspects such as poverty lines”.*

Taking into consideration Serr’s (2004) approach, the following pages attempt to contribute to the understanding of the perspectives of the poor and make their “voice” be apparent.

#### ***- The “voice” of the user in the SSDs: Implications of poverty upon the people***

The lack of income is one strong indicator of poverty. However, poverty is more than that. It comprises lack of social life, resources and power accompanied by stigma, powerlessness and low status (Novak, 1988). The interviewees-users describe their experiences of living in poverty in the following pages where their perspectives contribute to an in depth understanding of their position. To begin with Cesaria, she was one of the few undocumented immigrants that I met in the CWD in Athens struggling to communicate in English with the social worker. When I asked her permission to interview her she replied sadly *“I don’t have anything else to do”* an expression that showed how empty the day was; she was unemployed without money in a foreign country:

*“You see, Dora, the problem is not only how to buy the food. There are the bills, the clothes. Many times I don’t have money to buy anything for my children. I don’t eat so that I can buy them just a small toy. The social workers ask me to come here again and again to talk... but they do not ask me whether I have the money for the bus... I cannot sleep during the nights I keep thinking and I don’t want to get up in the morning ...sometimes I think that is better to kill myself but then, what will happen to my children? (She burst into tears). The only way is to become a prostitute, many*

*black women become prostitutes in Athens, we have no other way... the Greek state is very bad with black people”*

Maritsa was referred by the social workers to the municipality in Athens and I called her before visiting her house. She was “very afraid of the criminals” as she later apologized for having me prove my identity to her by passing my ID under her door before she opened it. Gradually, after half an hour, when she felt that she could trust me she said:

*“I am 75 years old and until recently I had been working as a cleaner in houses, my son has mental health problems he stays all day into the house he smokes a lot he has nobody except me what will happen to him if I die? My pension is very low and the benefits by the CWDs are nothing, we can hardly buy food and medicines, you know the medicines are very expensive (she bursts into tears) what will happen to my son? Who is going to listen to me? Nobody cares. I feel alone”*

Vassilis is Roma. As many Roma in Greece they live in specific areas out of the borders of villages or cities. I visited his house, he is married with four children all of them live in a house of two rooms that he has built on his own:

*“As gypsies we have many problems, see where we live, we are out of the village, isolated in shelters, my house is one of the good cases. We don’t have work, we work occasionally if we find something for little money, most of us are not educated, the majority has never been to school. Then, there are our children, they are teenagers, they cannot go to the village to drink a coffee. They are gypsies, they are not acceptable, they have to travel to the town, here it is not good to be a gypsy. If you are a gypsy, you are stigmatised”*

Katerina is a lone mother with two children, recently divorced and unemployed:

*“It’s not only the money, it’s the dignity that you lose, you have nothing, no job, nothing, and then all these documents that you have to fill at the CWD for receiving such a humiliating benefit of 44€ per month for each child or the EFS... I need to work to stand on my feet, other municipalities give food twice per year but how do they know what I need, in the municipality of (...)”<sup>54</sup>. They give us oil and expired pasta but I need specific things for my children. In my municipality here they give vouchers for the super market, it’s good but it’s only at Christmas and Easter, I need a job Dora, when I was nineteen years old it was easier to find one but now it’s more*

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<sup>54</sup> The name of the municipality is not disclosed for preventing possible identification and harm of the social workers and/ or users (see Chapter 2).

*difficult and there is no place to leave the children...and then it is the society, after the divorce I am isolated by everyone I am alone”*

Eleytheria is a young lone mother:

*“I was pregnant I had no job and at the bank I had only 300€, I couldn’t sleep at the nights, so I visited the CWD”*

Fotini another lone mother:

*“ I had no idea that there are some benefits, I had no other choice but ask for help from the SSD in the municipality, I live here with my 4 daughters, I am a lone mother and I don’t have a problem to say that. The majority of lone mothers hide it because you know is that people look at you strange, and the neighbours told me that if social workers come here they might take my children away, but I wasn’t afraid and visited them, others don’t”*

Nicolas had recently been out of the prison:

*“I know that I am on the side of the failures, you know people say no you do not deserve the benefit, you count for nothing, you cannot manage your life and you see other bastards who don’t play clear but they always succeed ... I feel like a failure I don’t know maybe I am thinking like this due to my disorder but that’s the way I feel...”*

The social image of the unemployed as a failure has been adopted by Nicolas. Additionally, powerlessness is common characteristic of whoever lives in the margins of the society along with the stigmatization. As Jones and Novak (1999:24) claim:

*“In general, to be poor is to be confronted by a society which condemns you as a failure”.*

Overall, the above quotes include a vivid portrayal of the damage of poverty upon people that can never be portrayed by stark statistics. During the interviews with the users I experienced their despair, depression, anger, isolation, stigmatisation, self criticism low self-esteem. Undoubtedly, poverty damages people’s lives on several aspects (Jones and Novak, 1999). Wilkinson (1996) has shown that the problem of poverty is not just about food and unmet basic needs but is also an issue of what kind of life we have. As Wilkinson (1996:5) argues:

*“You can be happy eating chips. But sources of social stress, poor social networks, low self-esteem, high rates of depression, anxiety, insecurity, the loss of a sense of control all have much a fundamental impact on our experience of life...”*

Additionally, Wilkinson (1996) argues that it is not only the lack of material goods but he also refers to the inequality of society as one main factor which impact upon the physical and psychological health of the people. As he argues:

*“...the quality of the social life of a society is one of the most powerful determinants of health and that this, in turn, is very closely related to the degree of income equality”*(ibid).

The access to health services and particularly to medical tests for the prevention of several diseases is proportional to the financial status of the person. A study by Mergoupis (2003:323) had shown that in Greece *“...the less the income the least the possibility of prevention and timely therapy”*.

Panayiotopoulos' (2005) research in Greece showed how the unemployment has been experienced by the people. He illustrated the sense of humiliation that the daughters and sons at the age of 30 experienced due to the fact that they had to ask money from their parents (given that family is the basic provider of care in Greece), the “free” time that is not experienced as free but as a torture, the image of their failure and the stigmatization of the unemployed, the powerlessness and depression and so on (ibid). Additionally, the sense of insecurity for the future is also strong (Panayiotopoulos, 2005). The appearance of the working-poor comes as no surprise in the contemporary labour context of flexibility, part-time jobs and low wages. According to Ketssetzopoulou (2006:66) *“the part-time work increases the danger of poverty as much as unemployment”*. Furthermore, in contemporary societies the labour status of some of the poor – 58.0% of those referred as working poor – work occasionally and part time (Gazon and Ziomas, 2006:114). The new more flexible forms of work following the EU's conventions although appear through the official statistics to reduce the rate of unemployment, in real life they have created the new working poor that bring more people close to poverty and increase the sense of insecurity.

The above discussion of the working-poor which is linked with the labour status and the discussion concerning the understanding of poverty as it is expressed from the point of view of the poor are added useful aspects for the social workers. Given that the practitioners are clearly involved in the assessment of the needs of the poor, the in depth understanding of their situation informs further social work and its practice. In general, the “voice” of the user/poor illuminates social work and its practitioners. Their perspectives reveal not only the difficulties of their life – that in turn contribute

to the knowledge of the practitioners in the assessment procedure - but these perspectives reveal also their experiences by the SSDs. For example the stigmatisation of the user-claimant in SSDs was one of the emerged-issues in this research.

### **- Stigma and SSDs**

Some of the users–interviewees described their loss of dignity due to the bureaucratic procedure for gaining a very low benefit. The bureaucracy was referred to also by social workers as one of the deterrent reasons for being claimant of a benefit.

As one social worker Kleopatra said:

*“The procedure is difficult for a specific reason meaning that practically disinclines people to claim a benefit. For example, if someone has to fill all these forms for taking 235€ once per year many prefer no to do it. Also many times the administrative staff disinclines people from claiming a benefit, they tell they don’t have the preconditions, they won’t get it...”*

While SSDs seem to be the last hope for financial help, stigma accompanies their visit to SSDs and users are well aware of this. Particularly for agricultural areas where Kondiadis and Apistoulas (2006) claim it is more common in these areas or areas with a small number of inhabitants where the fear that others in the village may know about their problems is an obstacle to visiting social services.

Helen:

*“Here, everybody knows everything, if someone passes the door given that my office is in the same building with the administrative departments everyone will know, that’s why I asked the SSD to be in a separate building”*

Other studies indicated that not all the poor visit the social services such as the study by Kanellopoulos in Perama in 1992 – an area with a high concentration of poverty-revealed that many poor people didn’t know of the existence of the social services (Ministry of Work and EKKE, 1992). According to the Second Report by the Observation Tower for Social Exclusion (Ministry of Work and EKKE, 1992) the lack of information about how to have access to benefits, prevents many people from becoming claimants in Greece. This is also verified by Kondiadis and Apistoulas (2006:199):

*“...64.71% of the users said that their visit to the Network was their first visit to any organization or service that can offer social services”.*

As the authors highlight, 28.04% said that they hadn't visited any other local social service in the past because simply there was none. But also the users of the above programme felt uncertain about visiting any social service in the past. The reasons were for 46.13% of them that they couldn't figure out their demand, 14.57% of them were afraid to be stigmatized, while 11.26% were afraid that the social scientists may talk about their demands and problems to people around the community (Kondiadis, Apistoulas, 2006). Another study by Zaimakis and Kallinikaki (2004) in Thrace showed that only the 16.0% of the inhabitants knew the existence of SSD in their area. Finally, the findings by Chandanos and Xatzibarnaba (2005) showed that many of the families hadn't ever heard about the provided benefits while also their visit to the SSDs would be their last resort. Moreover, the families argued that they didn't want to talk to strangers about their problems and they felt ashamed to be in this condition while also their past experience of public services was negative which prevented them from visiting to visit SSDs. However, another study by Maratou-Alibradi (2006:247) showed that *“more than half of the poor households... use the public social services”* and specifically the CWDs and SSDs in the municipalities.

It seems that not all the poor ask for help from the SSDs but still many of them visit the CWDs and the municipalities. The reasons why the SSDs are the last door to be knocked are several; such as the fact that family is the main provider of care (Maratou-Alibradi, 2006, Stathopoulos, 2005) social services are underdeveloped or do not exist in the area but even when they exist not all the poor know about what they offer or of their existence. It is important for social work practice to question how the information about the social services is accessible to the poor and to re-examine its campaigns and interventions. Additionally, the bureaucratic procedures and the low benefits put off possible claimants while also the delay of the provision (Matsaganis, 2004) is an added factor. Finally the people feel ashamed and stigmatised by asking help from SSDs, and when they visit them it is their last hope (Jones and Novak, 1999). The majority of the interviewees- users (8 out of the 12 interviewees) referred to the above issues such as lack of information and the stigma that accompanies asking for help from the social services. Some of the most representative responses are given below:

Eleytheria refers to the stigmatization and the shame of being a claimant:

*“I felt very ashamed to visit the SSDs in CWD and in the municipality, I didn’t want to have the need to go there, because it’s like being a beggar, people look at you in a strange way when they know that you go to ask help from these services, it’s the last step on the ladder of the society, it’s like you have nothing else, and then you know you have to tell your problems to a stranger ...”*

Fotini refers to the lack of information and knowledge of social work and benefits, the humiliating benefits, and the stigma:

*“I learnt about the SSD in the municipality by chance. A friend of mine works in the municipality and suggested I go, I had no idea that these services exist. I knew that social workers exist as a profession but I had no idea what they do and what they can offer, I didn’t know about the benefits here, the social workers here also told me about the CPP benefit by the CWD, THIS BENEFIT IS VERY HUMILIATING, IT wasn’t WORTH filling in all these documents for 44€ per child...However, when I visited these services it was a very strange feeling... I don’t really know how to describe it... before you go there you know there is this general image that you are a miserable pitiable that it is humiliating to ask for help from the social workers, it means that you have nothing. I was feeling bad for visiting these services”*

Nicky:

*“I already felt very embarrassed because I had failed in my life... to have a job, to stand on my feet, to have a good life, to offer to my children, to be a happy person, to have a partner, you know that if you ask help by the SSDs you are already a failure”*

People do not easily ask for help from the SSDs, the stigma is synonymous to the poor and the SSDs that provide help to them. Their self-image and self-esteem is damaged not only due to the effects of poverty upon their personalities and lives but also by the need to visit services that are perceived as for those at the bottom of the society. These issues reveal once again the class specific character of social work but also indicate the stigma and the sense of failure that the users experience by visiting social workers. Still, many of the poor people that experience the damage of poverty and inequality upon their life come to the door of the SSDs as their last resort bringing with them a number of problems.

### **- Poverty as a social/political problem**

The social problems that users face is the core of social work practice where as Clarke argued:

*“Every ‘social’ problem is political in one way or another reflects the class tensions inherent in capitalist society”* (cited in Jones and Novak, 1980:157).

Jones and Novak (1980:157-158) go further with this argument and claim that the social and political problems such as:

*“Unemployment and poverty, for example, are never just about being without work or adequate resources: they also involve fundamental issues of power, the status of wage labour, and of human rights and needs, all of which are contentious in a class society”.*

The authors refer to social problems that rather than just be seen as problems *per se* have been put in the context of the class divided societies under capitalism while they also illuminate the importance of power as well as the labour status in poverty's issues. These concepts are useful for social workers to understand the nature of the social problems with which they deal. Similarly, in this context, the explanation by Townsend for the causes of the poverty goes further to reveal the political nature of poverty. Specifically, Townsend refers to the “triad of the global authority” as the *“the richest governments, the international organizations and the biggest and most powerful multinational companies) are the basic inciters or introducers of the politics that deepen, perpetuate or reduce poverty and inequality”* (Townsend, 2004:120).

He also makes particular references to the intervention of the “triad” on a political level including the withdrawal of the state, the increase of privatization policies as well the reduction in labour rights (ibid). The political causes of poverty and inequality are apparent in a capitalistic environment where the focus is on the profit and the function of the markets rather than on the needs of people. Ferguson, Lavalette and Mooney (2002:12) refer to the *“rising levels of inequality...on global level”* and that *“less than 4 per cent of the combined wealth of the richest 225 people”* is enough for covering the additional cost of the basic needs such as nutrition, access to health services and education for the entire population around the world.



*“Poverty may be created by an economic system whose inequalities in the ownership of wealth and in the distribution of income are self-perpetuating, but it is maintained by a set of social relationships that keep this system in place”*

(Jones and Novak, 1999:26).

These authors refer to the economic and social relationships in which power superiority and oppression are reflected and reproduced which contributes to the maintenance of the system. Greece is part of this context. Like other southern European countries, Greece has very serious financial difficulties in households compared to northern countries as 60.0% of the households in Greece face financial difficulties (Eurobarometre 56.1 cited by Gallie and Pagan, 2002). In 2001, poverty was estimated at 20% in Greece while in the 15 members-states of European Union it was estimated at 15% (European Commission, 2003). According to Eurostat in 1997 23.0% of the population was under the limit of poverty (Papatheodorou and Petmesidou, 2004). In parallel, there is an increase in poverty in Greece. According to a study by EKKE in 2004 there were 250,000 more people under the poverty line, compared with 2003, while for 2005 it is estimated that the poor increased by 320,000 people. Thus considering the total population of Greece which is about 11 million people, 2,165,000 Greeks were under poverty line in 2004 while in 2005, the estimation is about 2,500,000 (EKKE cited in NEA, 2005). According to the same source, there is an ever-widening gap between the poorest and the richest in Greece given that

*“the income of the richest 20% part of the population is 7 times bigger than the income of the other 20% of the poorest part of the population”* (ibid:18).

During the last year where the financial recession is apparent across Europe things seem to be harder for those at the bottom of the society. According to a recent Report by Eurostat (2009), concerning the social situation across Europe, as far as it concerns poverty income, it is estimated that after the social transfers the total risk for poverty across Europe in 2007 was 17.0% of the population while for Greece it was about 20.0%. The report estimates that “a complete absence of social transfers (except pensions)” will lead to “26.0% of the population being at risk of poverty” (Eurostat, 2009:303). Although these estimations took place before the consequences of the austerity policy could be felt in Greece, they do however show to some extent the current trends.

Specifically, during the first 6 months of 2010, the Greek government of PASOK under the directions of International Monetary Fund (IMF) European Central Bank and EU chose the most extreme austerity policy with cuts in salaries; pensions, social provision, labour rights and rising taxes (for more see Conclusions and Discussion). It is estimated that over the next five years poverty and unemployment rates will raise due to this austerity policy and it will also touch the middle class. For example, during the first three months of 2010 the unemployment rose significantly compared with the corresponding period in 2009. Specifically, from “January to March 2009” the official percentage referred to 9.3% while for the same period in 2010 it was 11.7% (NSS, 2010:2). Consequently, the impact of the above austerity policy will bring SSDs to deal with more claimants for benefits, more users with urgent uncovered needs while the resources will be more restricted. The contemporary reality is another clear example of how politics affect social work and its users while inequality prevails.

In parallel, the followed policies by the state on national and European level reproduce poverty. Robolis claims that on the European level the criticism of the role of welfare state with regard to the neo-liberal perspective and policies – where the responsibility is put upon the individual- has gradually led European countries to the restriction of social expenditures (Robolis cited in Zaimakis, 2005:70):

*“...these procedures reinforced the social inequality as well as social exclusion and poverty. At the same time ...the gap between the included and the excluded is increased, social insecurity is increased...”.*

On European level a number of neo- liberal reforms during the decades of 1990s and 2000s lead to curtailments in welfare and social expenditure that in turn lead to an increase in poverty:

*“The end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third have been marked by rising mass poverty and deepening social polarization within and between countries. This has occurred on a world scale, following significant cutbacks in social spending (both in developed and developing countries) and a residualization and marketization of social programmes and welfare provisions”*

(Papatheodorou and Petmesidou, 2006a:1).

Particularly for Greece, Townsend and Gordon (2000) refer to the social transfers. In 1996, 39.0% of the social benefits referred to pensions and only 19.0% referred to

other social benefits. Moreover, they argue that the benefits are particularly low in Greece as well as Portugal, UK, Ireland and Spain

*“...social benefits payments are relatively low and raise average household incomes by less than the European average”* (Townsend and Gordon, 2000:12).

The authors highlight “the failure” of “most ‘economic studies’ of poverty, income and wealth” that leave aside the importance of services such as “*(in-kind benefits provided by the welfare state (e.g. health, education, local governments services etc))*” that often have a great impact on the living standards of the poor (ibid:13).

Additionally, the Greek state’s policy for the poor - in contrast with many European countries - has no “guaranteed minimum income” (Chletsos, 2008:108, Matsaganis, 2004). Moreover, the welfare provision refers to “*a fragmented sum that leave out a big number of poor families without any social protection*” (Matsaganis, 2004:78) such as long-term unemployed, families with low wages, people unable to work without any right to get benefits (ibid). Additionally, the benefits are low with austere criteria and leave aside big parts of the population that live in poverty such as the unemployed, elderly and immigrants (Matsaganis, 2004). Furthermore, as Robolis (2007:42) argues the contemporary applied policies centre the attention on two subjects: “*the cost of social protection and the competitiveness of the economy*”. This focus indicates how the main interest is upon the market and its function rather in the needs of the people. For the people these policies have been proved ineffective due to the worsening of labour and social conditions across Europe (ibid).

However, if social work deals with the poorest it is crucial for the practitioners to obtain such an understanding and explanations of the structural and political causes and reproduction of the social problems of the users. This can bring some more light to the role of social work with the poor and hopefully inform further social work practice. Still, this perspective presupposes that we want practitioners that do not simply do their job but they think and act (Jones, 2011). Moreover it presupposes that we need practitioners that include in their perspective a social work that is close to its social dimension rather than individualistic perceptions for the treatment of the individual. It also presupposes that if through social work we want to help people:

*“thus ‘helping people’ – if we are to provide long- term solutions – involves addressing the material, social and personal needs of those we work with”*

(Lavalette and Ferguson, 2007:3).

Moreover it presupposes that we want a social work to be aware of the structural causes of oppression on people's lives and attempts through its practice to help and emancipate users. However, such a perspective is naturally out of the priorities of a state that desires to retain the status quo. Social workers are not employed for asking questions or alleviating poverty and inequality although the poverty and inequality is an everyday basic problem for their users. As Searing describes:

*"....social work cannot ignore fundamental problems at the heart of our society. Income inequality and poverty remains a serious issue but social services departments do not address issues of poverty and inequality in society. The organizations that employ social workers rarely mention poverty in statements about their purpose or the key tasks of social workers (Davis and Clark, 1997). Social workers might address such problems for individual clients but they only work within the existing social and economic arrangements to access resources. Much social work is essentially about mediating between the most vulnerable people and the rest of society and accepting the status quo" ( Searing, 2003: 319).*

In Greece, as it was discussed previously, social workers have a range of duties and responsibilities in SSDs with many difficult cases from the community but also paperwork and administrative work. They are used by the state in several ways that are convenient for its function such as the combination of social control and care (see Chapter 6) covering the empty posts of administrative staff, organizing several actions in the community. Also they are desirable to the mayors or aldermen, while the relinquishment of state policy to the SSDs highlights its indifference for practitioners and users. Moreover, if the aim is the job to be done then it is convenient for the state to have practitioners that just do the job and work with the marginalised quietly without attempting to challenge further structural organizational or policy aspects. In parallel, the indifference by the state to the most marginalized people of the society through the limited welfare provision and in general the state's policies maintain and reproduce poverty in a country where the percentages of poverty are particularly high. On the other hand Greek social workers deal with the poor and experience the consequences of the state's policy upon their work with the deprived. Social work is in a rather difficult position.

### **- Social work and poverty: A close relationship**

Mainly, in the British literature it is common to find studies that referred to the link of social work with poverty. As it was previously mentioned, although in Greece there are often references to the poverty of the users this issue is not connected with the general social and political context nor is the role of social work examined critically. Exceptions to this are the approaches of some academics such as Mouzakitis (1995), Iatridis (1987), Zografou (1989). More specifically as far as it concerns poverty Altanis (1986:240) argues:

*“Poverty is not a personal problem but it is a result of a structural inequality of the society”* while he also calls social workers for *“social action”* (ibid:242).

These concepts are important for Greek social work where they put the profession on a more social basis and raise questions about the role of practitioners in an unequal context. However, approaches such as the above are rare. The reasons for such a limited interest are multiple; In general the public concern about poverty issues is restricted in Greece (Papatheodorou and Petmesidou, 2006b) and consequently this couldn't but have an impact on social work's interest as well. Additionally, Walker and Walker (1998:46) argue that in social work practice it is possible that *“poverty and deprivation can be overlooked”* due to the fact that they are seen as “normal” for social work and its users. This might also be one added reason for the lack of interest in Greek social work. However, in my opinion there are some added reasons such as the lack of research in social work, the politics of welfare, educational policies<sup>55</sup> and the curriculum of the studies as well as the applied models and methods of social work practice in welfare services.

Blaming policies that lead people to in poverty and reproduce inequality could lead Greek social work to being on the 'other side'; In alliance with the powerlessness and against those in power (including the state), a role that is not desired by the policy makers. Historically, as Ioakimidis (2008) showed official social work hasn't played such a role in Greece while in contemporary Greece social work's voices are

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<sup>55</sup> For example there is a lower funding in TEI by the government compared with Universities (Apekis, 2001, Stamatis, 2008), limited permanent staff for hundreds of students per year, and an absence of postgraduate studies. Moreover, in the Greek educational system the entrance to higher education (universities and TEI) is depends upon the mark in highly competitive exams. According to Papadaki (2001), Kasimati, (1991) due to the above a major part of the social work students see their studies as a compromise rather than reflecting the students' choice of social work. In other words for many students they are allocated a place on a social work course rather than it being their first choice.

limited in the public dialogue concerning the deprivation that people face. Furthermore, the focus on social work education and practice in Greece is on individualistic approaches that lack the connection with the politics (Ioakimidis, 2008). As it is discussed throughout this study the politics of welfare and politics in general affect significantly the SSDs, social work but also its users that confront a number of social/political problems. Consequently the so called as “neutrality” of the profession is in antithesis with the reality.

It comes therefore as no surprise that in this research the majority of the practitioners responded that their training in social work was irrelevant to their everyday work. Specifically, when the social workers in this study, were asked “if the education had prepared them” the majority of the responses referred rather to a limited preparation with little connection or relevance to the reality of SSDs.

The most representative responses are given below:

Dimitra:

*“What we were taught was totally irrelevant with the reality here. The education didn’t prepare me at all”*

Helen:

*“What I learnt during three and half years in TEI was not useful, we didn’t learn anything, only theory. Ok, theory is good but when you come to practice...I had some general knowledge but in practice this doesn’t work”*

Vassiliki:

*“They gave us a rather ideal picture that doesn’t exist. They told us for the social work with individuals, that we say to people I understand you or that you see people in your office and that there should be confidentiality. But these things do not exist. First of all you cannot say to people yes I understand you all the time, they know this attitude by social workers they don’t believe you. But also you see in practice that there is no confidentiality we are packed 4 social workers in one office, everyone can hear the user, you know these things that we were taught are in practice are unachievable in practice”.*

The lack of connection of the academic departments to the social problems and the reality of SSDs has been noted by Jones for the British context such as: “*divide between social work practice and education*” (Jones, 1989:207) and that is also the case for Greek social work. Papadaki and Papadaki (2008:177) claim, although there are some attempts by social work departments to provide students with more

*“generalist social work practice”* still *“casework dominates”* in the placements for students. This in turn leads to insufficient knowledge by practitioners for tackling organizational constraints in their work environment (Papadaki, 2005).

However, as radicals in social work have argued the problem is not the casework *per se* (Bailey and Brake cited in Ferguson 2009:133). The problematic issue is the kind of casework that focuses:

*“...on those forms...that involved ‘blaming the victim’ by consistently locating the source of individuals’ problems in the alleged moral or developmental deficits while ignoring the poverty and oppression that formed the backdrop to their lives”.*

Therefore the problem is the lack of linking the personal problem of the user with the wider context. The connection of the problems of the users with regard to the economic and social structure that they live are rarely discussed. As Jones (1998:37) argues:

*“Mainstream social work, despite its immersion in poverty and amongst the least powerful sections of the population has rarely ventured to seek explanations for these difficulties beyond family and interpersonal relationships and dynamics. Questioning the legitimacy of social, economic and political systems and the manner in which patterns of inequality and oppression systematically disadvantage women, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, children and young people, especially located within the working-class poor, has not been part of social work’s agenda”.*

Similarly in Greece these issues rarely concern social work literature although it is common secret among the practitioners that the users face poverty.

In parallel, the *“therapy-oriented model/Residual model”* is the main applied welfare model in social services Papadaki (2005:17) that deal with the “weak” parts of the population and the *“emphasis is put upon social pathology”* (ibid) without covering the needs of the users (Amitsis, 2001, Stathopoulos, 1996). This model seems to be still the preferable one in SSDs. If the poorest and in general the most marginalized are the clients of these services, the class specific character of the welfare system and in general the state’s policies that reproduce inequality and poverty have as a natural consequence the abandonment of social services. This abandonment is one of the findings of this research and it is also linked with the class specific character of social work’s users or as Jones (1998:40) puts it:

*“Part of social work’s problems rests with the status of its client population”.*

On the other hand, if the social work remains with the individualistic approaches that focus on the behaviour and therapy of the person without examining the role and actions of the profession in the general context, the social nature of the profession is eroded. The individualistic approaches deprive social work of one of its unique characteristics of marking its social aspect. The users face social problems and social work can have the privilege to connect the personal problem of the users with the wider context. As Ferguson and Lavalette (2006) argue:

*“One of the great strengths of social work at its best has been its capacity to link the structural and the personal best summed up in C. Wright Mill’s notion of the sociological imagination as linking ‘public issues’ and ‘private troubles’ (Miles, 1959)”* (cited in Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006:315).

On the contrary, by individualistic approaches social work cannot even think about some more collective responses to the problems of the users (Ferguson, 2009), cannot intervene at a social policy level to tackle unfair policies for their users (Graig, 2002) or even attempt to fight against the organizational constraints that the practitioners face in their work (Papadaki, 2005). Particularly, for poverty issues as Becker claims if the “social” problem of poverty is seen in individualistic terms the construction of the social attitudes towards the poor is based on the distinction between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” poor. These social attitudes mainly explain poverty in individual terms by “blaming the victim” (Becker, 1997).

In general, the link of social work with poverty is more than apparent according to the findings of the present research. In this section the discussion of the literature concerning the social work practice and methods with the poor put the basis for examining in more depth the social work practice in Greek SSDs, later in the thesis.



## **Concluding remarks**

In this section some main issues concerning the profile of the users of SSDs, and its implications for social work were discussed. The findings of the research reveal that the users of the researched SSDs share the common characteristic of poverty however their profile indicates added aspects such as gender, race, age and disability.

- The role of the social work with the poor is hardly discussed in Greece. In this section I argued that the lack of interest is due to several factors such as the limited research in social work, the educational policy, the state's policy and the interest of the social work in psychodynamic and person-oriented approaches rather than linking social work with its social aspect and with the politics of welfare. The implications of these approaches were discussed with regard to the literature and research in social work which had shown that individualistic perspectives tend to manage and regulate the poor rather than eradicate poverty (Becker, 1988). Moreover, it was argued that the therapy model that prevails in welfare services (Papadaki, 2005) is a convenient option for a state that needs those workers that deal with the poorest to do the job quietly and to use them in a way that accommodates its function and maintain the status quo in the capitalistic environment which in turn retain and reproduce poverty and inequality.
- Therefore, while the limits of poverty inequality and the trends of unemployment are high - and it is expected to increase during the next years-, policies on national and European level maintain and reproduce poverty and inequality due to the class specific function of capitalistic societies and the neo-liberal policies that lead to shortcuts on public welfare and limited wages and benefits for the poor.
- Issues concerning the structural and political causes of poverty, the definitions of poverty with regard to the approaches that make the voice of the poor to be heard, the implications of poverty and inequality upon people's lives as well as dominant images for the poor should be part of the awareness (Becker, 1988) of social workers on educational and professional level. These issues are important for social workers in Greece for various reasons; Firstly, because the social workers are involved in the procedure of defining the poor and setting poverty lines with the co-operation of the politicians in

municipalities. Secondly due to the fact that knowledge affects their attitudes and practice while also its interventions should be examined critically given that it affects the most marginalized groups of population where power and authority are more easily applied. Finally, given that they deal almost exclusively with the poor it is important to consider issues such as the “context” and the consequences that poverty has upon people’s health, education, social life and behaviour.

- At last, if we want a social work that is linked with its social role, a profession that attempts to help people by understanding, explaining and connecting their “personal” problems linked to its social political and structural causes and the social relations of power and oppression we need to re-examine and think critically upon attitudes and actions of social workers with the vulnerable parts of the society. The findings in this chapter indicated that social workers participate in the procedure of defining who the poor is and determining who deserves the benefit. Although their power is limited at least the power that the social worker has over users is significant and cannot but affects the relationship between the practitioner and user.

## Chapter 5: Attitudes towards the poor and the users' perspectives

### Introduction

In the present chapter the findings concerning the attitudes of social workers towards the poor will be discussed. As Cook (cited in Dowling, 1999:162) claims:

*"Poverty awareness suggests that the position of the poor cannot be considered without considering the attitudes and actions of those in positions in power"*

While in the US and Australia the importance of the attitudes of social workers towards the poor has been examined since the 1970's:

*"...social worker's attitudes are a crucial factor in the way they will deliver services to the poor and how clients, in turn, will react to the services they receive" (Grimm and Orten, cited in Becker, 1988:243),*

in the UK it was only in 1986 that Becker examined social workers' attitudes towards poverty (Becker, 1988). To the best of my knowledge, there has been little Greek research in this area such as that of Markopoulou's, (1989) concerning attitudes of practitioners towards ethnic groups, Kogidou's (1995) concerning attitudes to lone-parenthood and finally a pilot study by Altanis et al. (1996) concerning how social workers perceived co-operation with the users. Therefore, English literature was once again useful in exploring attitudes towards the poor. Specifically, Becker's 1986 research in Britain revealed, for example, some significant points. His findings illustrated that

*"...individual social worker's attitudes are associated with a number of different personal characteristics, experiences, backgrounds and ideologies"*  
(Becker, 1988:246).

He also argued that social workers who had strong supportive feelings about the poor had some specific characteristics (for example, they were young (25-40) highly educated and trained, with the experience of being unemployed). He describes the attitudes of social workers as ones which range from positive to negative towards their poor clients (ibid). As far as it concerns practice with the poor, Becker argues that social work defines those families with financial problems as dysfunctional families and focuses on the individual or family treatment *"rather than confronting and engaging with poverty as a structural and political issue"* (ibid). Consequently, social work teaches the individuals how to manage their poverty instead of dealing

with the poverty in social terms. Therefore, social work usually acts for “*managing the poor rather than managing poverty*” (Becker, 1997:113).

According to Satyamurti, one of the main factors which affect the

*“...ideology of social workers is the organization in which they work and the interaction with the other members in this organization”*

(Satyamurti, cited in Dowling, 1999:110).

Although Satyamurti was mainly concerned with the sociology of work, her findings about social workers in a local authority department are significant because of the fact that they led her to determining some important factors which affect social work practice. To be more specific, Satyamurti argues that both social workers and clients are isolated in their roles. Social workers could see their clients either as a “hero”, a “victim”, or a “manipulator” (Satyamurti, 1981:132) and these points of view raise different emotions like admiration for heroes, sympathy and concern for victims, anger for and fear of manipulators. Satyamurti also refers to a number of factors which affected social work practice such as the “*shortage of resources*”, “*limitations on the work process*”, “*meaninglessness*” and “*separation from fellow workers*” (Satyamurti, 1981:182-186).

Dowling referring to these previous researches concludes that using different epistemological approaches (social construction theory and social psychological theory) we could be led to different conclusions. From her research – into social workers, users (poor clients) of social services and students of social work - she concludes that:

*“...individual (social worker) attitudes and actions are sometimes influenced by the organization or interactions with colleagues and sometimes by individual pre-formed attitudes”* (Dowling, 1999:110).

In this research, the responses by the social workers concerning their explanations for poverty were compared and contrasted with their attitudes and behaviour towards the poor. The sources of data are derived from the observation in SSDs, the visits in users’ houses, the interviews with both social workers and users and finally from the informal discussions. The intention of this section is to understand in depth but also to explain possible associations between the practitioners’ explanations for the causes of the users’ poverty and the social workers’ attitudes. It is, however, at this point important to clarify that the aim of the analysis is not to judge individuals but to illuminate aspects of social work practice.

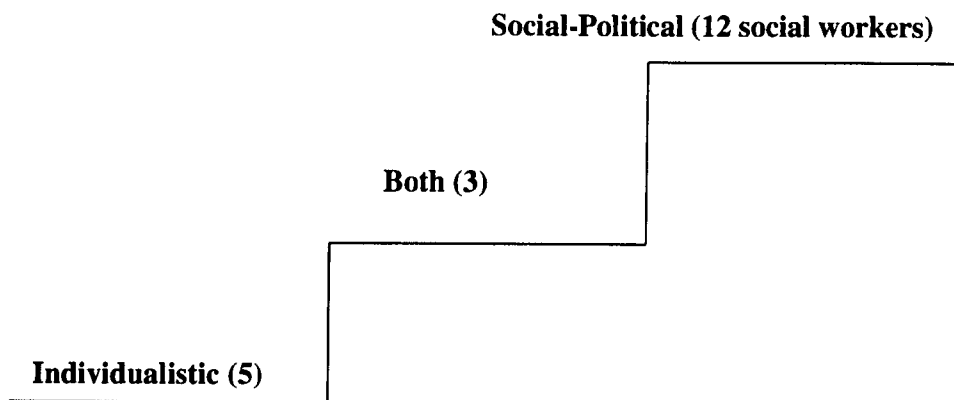
In order to analyse in more depth the complexity of the social workers' attitudes, the chapter has been separated into sections. Firstly, the general picture of the findings is presented. This is followed by two sections; the first one analyzes the "individualistic" explanations of poverty while the second looks into the "social/political" explanations. In turn, the social workers' points of view for the users' behaviour and attitudes are given. Finally, in the last section the perspectives of the users have been included thus -hopefully- illuminating the importance and the effect of the social workers' attitudes upon them.

The analysis of the attitudes and actions of the practitioners can contribute to a deeper understanding of how the practitioners' perceptions with regard to organizational and policy factors influence social work practice which in turn affects people's lives.

## **Social workers' explanations for poverty and their attitudes towards the poor**

The findings reveal that social workers' explanations for the poverty of their users vary. Following -to some extent- Becker's (1988) pattern, the range of answers have been classified as those that are clearly individualistic explanations, those that are both social/political and individualistic, and finally those that are social/ political ones (Figure, 6).

**Figure 6: Explanations for poverty**



The majority of the respondents gave social/political explanations for the causes of the users' poverty and in general these practitioners tended to have more "positive" attitudes towards the poor. On the other hand, the social workers who gave individualistic explanations tended to have more "negative" attitudes towards the poor. Finally, three social workers attributed the poverty of the user both to social/political factors and individualistic ones. Simultaneously, two out of these three had contradictory attitudes towards the users but also negative attitudes towards specific groups of the population. The third one had quite positive attitudes and focused on the "here and now" of the users' situation, rather than on the users' previous 'mishandling of their life'.

At a first glance one could assume that there is a consistency between the explanations that social workers give for the causes of poverty and their attitudes towards the poor. However, comparing attitudes with actions is a more complicated issue. Some of the social workers who gave individualistic explanations and had negative attitudes seemed to have a close relationship at least with some of their users.

This finding is in accordance with the literature where as Dowling (1999:110) puts it:  
*“social workers who had in some cases quite hostile attitudes to users with financial problems and made pre-judgments as to who was ‘undeserving’ and ‘deserving’ had a more pragmatic approach and could be more successful in their actions for users and carers”*

On the other hand, the majority of those practitioners who gave social/political explanations and had positive attitudes had also a close relationship with their users. Still, some of those belonging to this category tended to “manipulate” the poor and in some cases to act in “regulating” the poor. Again, the findings are in accordance with the literature. Silberman (cited in Becker, 1997), Becker, (1988) and others indicate that the

*“...contradiction, between how social workers view the causes of poverty and how they respond to it, is a prominent feature of the research on social worker’s attitudes to poverty”* (Becker, 1997:114).

Thus, I had in mind that what people argue for their attitude is not always in accordance with the way in which they behave and act or as Dowling (1999:99) puts it:

*“Consistency between attitudes and actions is a common problem for every individual, and social workers are not different”.*

The following sections discuss in more depth the categories as they emerged from the findings.

#### **- Individualistic explanations**

In total, five out of the twenty interviewees gave clearly individualistic explanations by “blaming” the individual and the family for their poverty. When it comes to comparing these beliefs with their feelings and attitudes three out of the five see users rather as “manipulators” and “enemies” (Satyamurti, 1981) or a cause of anger while the other two gave contradictory answers which included both positive and negative attitudes. The most representative responses will be discussed in the following.

Aggeliki:

*“The problem is the poverty of their mind.... In my opinion, for ¾ of the users the cause of their situation is their own personal responsibility but they cannot see that.*

*They might also manage to get some other benefits but they still insist on coming here every year in order to take the EFS benefit. Some of them demand that the state solve their problems, we are obligated to solve their problems but they have screwed up their life...I feel frustrated by the attitude that says I go to the CWD to find me a solution”*

Although later she also blames social policy for the situation of the users she expresses herself negatively towards them:

Aggeliki:

*“More and more paupers come here year after year. In a few years, half of the population will be here. Every year there is an increase in the number of people with no national insurance, we have 320 applications per month, and the committee rejects 32 and approves 300 per month only in this sector of Athens. This social provision is provided free by the state, the state pays for the health insurance of these people. In 10 years, we will have a state of poor and those who receive benefits. The paupers have increased. And it is you and me who pay for them. They come here and they tell me “I pay you”*

(Her voice gets louder and she seems to be angry)

*“Who do you pay, you miserable person? It’s me who pays, I pay you through my salary, I pay taxes for your benefit, you don’t pay taxes because you are not productive, and you don’t work”*

Whenever in Greece a citizen uses the phrase “I pay you” when talking to public servants it usually means ‘I demand you do your job and I am entitled to be given by you what the state ought to provide me with’. The right of those in need to have a basic income is seen by the social worker as a burden which middle class people who pay taxes have to bear. Additionally, the social worker feels frustrated that more and more people come to the CWD asking for a benefit since she regards their problems as their fault which they should attempt to solve on their own instead of counting on the help given by the state. Indirectly, this attitude expresses the power of the public servant as well as the assumed superiority of the middle class person (social worker) over the poor who is seen as unproductive. She also expresses disparagement for those who demand their rights using phrases like “miserable person”. The social worker seemed to be rather angry with her users and the user is seen as an “enemy” (Satyamurti, 1981). This perception creates a gap between the social worker and the user. This division put more distance between the social workers and their clients a



concept that according to Satyamurti (1981) and Packman et al. “often works against partnership and sharing” (cited in Jordan, 1988:345) and the “chances of co-operation are reduced” (ibid). However, later in her interview Aggeliki revealed that when she first came into social work, she acted differently.

*“I liked social work; I wanted to do things for people’s lives, to change things, I tried to do the best for them ...but later I changed...because nobody cares for the welfare sector, and I realized that I am just a clerk...”*

The organizational and policy’s context affected and changed Aggeliki’s attitudes. Similarly some of the social workers-interviewees mentioned how their attitudes gradually changed through the years. The majority, particularly in the CWDs, described how the fatigue and workload affect negatively their attitudes:

*“We have too many cases, and many people come to the CWD. After some hours of work, given that I have talked with at least 20 people I have no stamina; I might talk badly to some of the users. It happens to the majority of us here...”*

Undoubtedly, the organizational factors and policy’s context affect importantly social workers attitudes (see below discussion). This is also linked with the alienation of social workers which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

However and to return to the discussion of the individualistic perceptions for users’ poverty Georgia, shared the same views as Aggeliki, and describes the causes of the users’ poverty as:

*“Bad choices in their life, unlucky choices in their work, various kinds of addictions, all of them... (She remains silent for a long time). I don’t know...I am thinking now. The majority is women who have a problematic husband but also they rely on the benefit, they get lazy so they come again and again. For some of them it wasn’t their fault, others made bad choices. Usually they come from problematic families”*

In the above quote there are some significant concepts; such as the “laziness” of the poor, the “problematic husband” and lastly the “problematic families”. During the informal discussions particularly in the CWDs, these concepts were frequently used by the social workers. Therefore, a more careful look into these perceptions is needed.

To begin with the explanation that the cause is the laziness of the poor and their reliance on the benefit; this explanation puts directly the blame on their behaviour. This approach is a convenient one for the state which shifts the responsibility to the individual -a concept which is dominant in capitalism- instead of focusing on the

political and structural causes of poverty. Moreover, the social image of the lazy-poor can be seen as a simplistic explanation of the apathy that poverty and unemployment causes to people. For example, Pearson (1989:52) refers to the *“apathy and despair”* that unemployment creates for people as well as to how the poor have gradually “adjusted” to this situation over the years with no hope of getting out of it.

Secondly, the social worker uses the phrase “problematic husband”. The man is seen here as the main provider of material needs for the family, a concept which is related to the dominant patriarchal ideology. The man/husband is traditionally seen as the *“primary breadwinner”* while women and children are the dependent members in the family (Day, 1992:14, Stratigaki, 2007). This patriarchal conception is related to the dominant one for the role of women and men in the society where women’s role is traditionally the one of the main carer in the family and the person who is responsible for household chores, the care of children and so on, meaning practically the unpaid work in households. In parallel, the women face poverty more frequently than men (Stratigaki, 2007, Kogidou, 1995):

*“...due to the gender function of the labour market (low wages due to temporary and flexible forms of work....) and the patriarchal structure of the family (financial dependency by the men)”* (Stratigaki, 2007:137).

Women experience multiple forms of oppression and discrimination such as sexism and racism however this is experienced differently depending on the class which they belong to. Additionally, the oppression and discrimination that they face are based not only on their social status but also on their race, disability, sexual orientation (Day, 1992). The social class (according to the Marxist approach) however, is still a crucial factor, given that *“oppression has material roots”* (Ferguson et al., 2002:100). In any case, as Day (1992:16) argues the dimensions of class, gender as well as race are crucial for the understanding of *“the experiences of the working-class female social work clients”* in a class divided society. As various authors such as Townsend, Walker and Walker and others support:

*“Poverty can be explained structurally in terms of social inequalities in the distribution of incomes and resources. These inequalities are reinforced by social class, gender, age, disabilities, ethnic and regional divisions”*

(cited in Hardiker and Barker, 1988:106).

The authors state that social workers need to “*ensure that their policies and practices do not reinforce the associated inequalities*” (ibid) and examine how through our practice our interventions can contribute to the opposite direction rather than reinforcing inequality and oppression. In my view, critical social work has an important role to play to this direction.

Another common finding in this category is the blame which is put on the mother. Georgia above like Jane below put the responsibility upon the personalities of the mothers.

Jane<sup>56</sup>:

*“It’s not easy to answer that, it’s complicated. I believe that the problem.... is the mother...I mean, it is the image of the mother...and the child adopts this image. The mother, the daughter and the granddaughter have broken marriages, or they are addicted to a man even if he abuses them. They have never been to school, they have never had any other social image. They may suffer from depression or have low self esteem, they don’t even know about the importance of using a condom. The role of the mother makes them feel better even if they abuse their children. They say ‘ok at least I am a mother, I am something’, they have very low self esteem.”*

The blame on the image of the family/mother explains the poverty as an acquired experience through the family. This approach has been referred to in the literature as the “culture” or more specifically the “*sub-culture*” (Harrington cited in Kongidou, 1995:584) of the poor which is bequeathed to following generations. This approach explains poverty and put the causes down to the lifestyle and behaviour of the poor. Such explanations ignore the socio-economic and political factors that produce poverty. However, as Kriešberg shows: “*lifestyle is adopted due to present living circumstances and it is not a way of living through generations*” (cited in Kogidou, 1995:588). Particularly for lone parenthood as Kogidou (1995) argues it’s not the image but the social and financial circumstances that can lead people in or out of poverty. Additionally, the image of the mother as the main explanation for the poverty reproduces the dominant ideology and the oppression of women as the main carer of the family.

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<sup>56</sup> Although Jane gave clearly individualistic explanations her actions were perceived as positive by some of the users (see section Users’ perspectives).

Moreover, according to the findings of the present research, the women are the majority of users in the SSDs; either as a claimant for the benefits in CWDs and municipalities, or as a user of the HiHPs. Particularly the lone-mothers were very often the users in CWDs and to some extent in the municipalities where

*“...especially those with at least one dependent child are considered as particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.”*

(Kogidou and Pliogou, 2006:6, Kogidou and Pantazis, 1990, Kogidou, 1995).

Although over the years there has been a stable increase in the number of lone mothers in Greece (Ledaki, 2006), Rega shows through her research how the traditional form of a family with two parents, enjoys positive criticism (attitudes) from the society while lone mothers are usually perceived as “*unlucky*”, “*immoral*” and “*frivolous*” (Rega, 2006:158). The dominant perception of lone parenthood in contemporary Greece is characteristically given by Mousourou (2005:189):

*“The public opinion, at least in Greece, considers lone parenthood families as a proof of the “crisis” of the family.”*

The above dominant perceptions of lone parenthood cannot but affect social workers attitudes if education and in service-training is absent on these issues. Fortunately, during the last decade women’s issues are often part of the curriculum of studies, however the lack of in-service training and supervision do not ensure that prejudices are out of the picture for the front-line practitioners. In any case there is a need by social work to put more attention on the above issues in order to avoid the reproduction of the dominant perceptions.

More specifically, Georgia referred to the term of problematic and multi-problematic families. The specific terminology was frequently used by many of the practitioners during the informal discussions with the researcher. As it was earlier discussed, the focus of social work through this perspective is on the function of the family and its members’ relationships. In parallel, the “problematic” relationships and behaviour of the poor are also seen as the cause of their poverty and social work’s attention is to the pathology of the family. I asked Georgia what exactly she means by the term problematic families. Her response is given below:

*“A family that receives a benefit by the CWD gets used to it and their grandchildren will also be clients of the CWD. This is what my experience all these years in CWDs has taught me. If the mother does not get stronger, the child will adopt her way of living. There is also unemployment in the area, some have psychological problems.*

*Others have become accustomed to pauperism; they try to find the easiest way to live, these are the people that usually come here. On the other hand, sometimes I think that they may have begun their life differently, I could have been in their position, too”.*

The social worker attributes the perpetuation of poverty in users’ next generations to the images and situations which prevail in their families and which they become to accustomed. However, it’s important here to highlight that in the last lines of the paragraph Georgia puts herself in the user’s position. This is significant as such an understanding makes the gap between the included (social worker) and the excluded (user) narrower. Yet, when it comes to examining social worker’s attitudes, the user is seen as a “manipulator” (Satyamurti, 1981) a concept that seems to be in accordance with the individualistic explanations of the poverty:

*“Some of them are the ‘welfare type’, they have this face... They live in poverty but they are also devious, they are trying to cheat you. But they will do it once or twice at the most, they tell you ‘I can’t afford to feed my children’ but they use a mobile phone so you understand what is happening. There are also chaotic families. Other families have very tidy houses although they are poor, it’s a matter of personality, particularly that of the mothers”*

The social worker sees the user as the “manipulator” who lies to them in order to get the benefit. The mobile phone is perceived as evidence that the claimant has enough money and lies to the practitioner. This is some social workers’ way of thinking which I have been confronted with both as a practitioner and a fellow teacher. In some of the SSDs the personal perceptions of the practitioner about who the poor is and who deserves the benefit are in some cases based on the quality of the furniture in houses, the existence or not of mobiles phones and so on. Social workers are also gate-keepers of the resources and their perceptions of who deserves the benefit provide them with power. Interestingly, the above perception of Georgia is in contrast with Dimitra’s who gave social/political explanations for the poverty and had in general positive attitudes towards the user:

Dimitra:

*“Usually the co-operation with the users is good. Whenever there was a problem it was because of me, I was too tired, I had no stamina. So, when I understood that the user was lying to me, I wanted to show him that I knew what was going on, but I knew there was no point in doing that. Ok, he lied, so what? He did and he does that*

*for a reason. Even if I show that I understand that he lies, is this going to help to achieve anything? But when you are too tired, you know you may act like that, at least me, I don't know about my colleagues"*

The social workers' awareness that people who face urgent needs may try to "lie" in order to get a benefit is an important knowledge; it needs to be understood that people do that because they have learnt that if you want to survive in Greece, you have to tell lies to the state otherwise they will give you nothing. It has nothing to do with the social worker themselves, it is a way to survive in a society that provides 235€ once per year for those who live on the minimum if no income at all.

The social worker seems to know this and she knows that people "do that for a reason". Dimitra recognizes that the fatigue caused by the workload can make her have -in these cases- a negative attitude towards users which naturally won't promote the relationship between users and social workers. Social workers' lack of stamina is caused by the bad working conditions, the lack of resources and the limited welfare provision by the state for those in poverty. This lack of stamina affects the social workers' attitudes in the SSDs in various ways. During the days when many users came into the social workers' offices, or the practitioners had a heavy workload it was more than apparent that their fatigue affected negatively their behaviour towards the user. The impact of the organizational factors upon the attitudes of the social workers couldn't be clearer.

Other practitioners in this category such as Ioanna and Sofia used phrases such as "it's a matter of personal responsibility" and described how bad choices in users' lives and limited chances in their life had led them to poverty. As far as it concerns their attitudes, Sofia focuses on the "here and now" without examining and judging particularly the past of the user while her behaviour was in most of the cases positive towards the users.

Ioanna gave, to my opinion, one of the most honest responses as far as it concerns her feelings and attitudes in general:

Ioanna:

*"I get angry with some of them, I like others, I feel sympathy for many of them, I don't have the same feelings for everyone. There are some who are in major need, you give more attention to them. We like some while others not. For example, we say 'my God, he is here again, I cannot stand him' or 'here is my grandmother or my grandfather', you know, people who we like, ok it's an anti- professional attitude but*

*it happens. Ok, I have nothing against them but when there have been two cases in one day which made me angry then it is the third one that will stand the damage, you know, we have feelings and, you know, we can't control them sometimes"*

From Ioanna's response it is apparent how variable social workers' feelings and attitudes can be. The causes of the sympathy for some users and groups of users need to be researched further, however, besides the personal feelings of the practitioners, it seems that other factors such as social and dominant images for the groups of population intervene as well; for example, discrimination of Roma and Albanians (see below). However, we also need to take into consideration the fact that social workers just like other professionals are human beings and the interaction with other people stirs feelings in them while personal experiences as well as social images cannot but intervene in their attitudes and actions.

#### ***- Social/political explanations of poverty***

Still, the majority of the social workers explain the poverty of the user as a result of social and political reasons. To begin with the practitioners in HiHPs, all of them belonged to this category while they also expressed positive feelings towards their users who are mainly elderly. The client populations of HiHPs are generally considered positively unlike lone mothers in CWDs and municipalities. As far as it concerns the characteristics of the practitioners, Becker (1998) in his research shows that younger social workers had more positive attitudes than the older ones. Although the practitioners in HiHPs were young in their majority (from 27 to 35 at the most), the qualitative character of the research does not permit the representativeness of the findings. Undoubtedly, it needs further research, however, the practitioners in HiHPs worked for less than 5 years in these programmes compared with the majority of the social workers in CWDs and municipalities who in their majority worked more than 10 years. It's highly possible that fatigue and alienation become more intensive as years go by in a strict class specified welfare system.

Overall, the attitudes of the practitioners were positive towards the users according to the field notes as well. Through observation it was obvious that they behaved with respect, smiled, often encouraged them through words and moves and they used tender phrases to describe their users. The majority showed sympathy for the users' situation but at least in this research the image of the user as a "hero", a concept

which was used by Satyamurti (1981), wasn't found. Some of the most representative responses are given below:

Helen describes the causes of the poverty for her users:

*"The problems for the families are usually caused by financial difficulties. If you cannot cover your basic needs, you don't have enough income; these things cause other problems as well such as alcoholism, abuse, fights in the family, bad communication. Of course, not all of the users have such multiple problems, but many do"*

Anna refers to the unemployment and the low pensions/ benefits as the main causes of the poverty:

*"For the parents the cause is unemployment, and for the elderly the low pensions. The low benefits are also a problem for people with health problems because they cannot live on such low benefits. Mainly, it is the low income, the unemployment and the low benefits. Nowadays there is an increase in the material needs. Children need to be prepared for the university; these things are difficult for the families with a low income, so increased needs and low income lead to poverty"*

Anna had also positive attitudes such as:

*"The people that come here are in real need, they don't come here to tell lies and take advantage of the benefits, ok, there might be one or two cases but the majority have real problems. I reject the concept that says that people rely on the benefits; (To) rely on what? On such humiliating benefits? Of course not, the cause is their living conditions that harm them and urge them to resort to us"*

Anna's positive attitudes towards the users was apparent to both the users' and her colleagues' testimonies as well as through observation. She attempted to help each family as much as (it was) possible and she had a positive attitude towards her users.

As she described:

*"I couldn't do the social investigation by just visiting their home once. This is nothing; so I was more involved to help people, see them again and again. But I was alone, I had nobody to share this burden ("weight) with", I had no resources, it's the general atmosphere in these services, the above in the hierarchy (they) don't really care about how to improve the provided services, so you just check the family, do what you can but nobody cares more??"*

However, Anna quit the CWD after some years given that she had psychosomatic symptoms. The loneliness of the social worker (Satyamurti, 1981) is apparent here.



Moreover, the negative implications of the organizational context as well as the policy restrictions with limited resources not only prevent the social worker from doing more than just the bureaucratic part of work but in the case of Anna had implications for her health as well.

Virginia:

*“People have urgent needs, there is huge unemployment rate and the benefits are very low. People who come here are people in pain, they won’t tell you happy stories, they are not happy people... They have the welfare characteristics.”*

Virginia’s positive attitude was in accordance with her practice and this was apparent through observation in SSD and the visits in users’ houses. She always tried to keep her voice down; she didn’t yell at people and spent as much time as possible with them, given the workload. We visited with Virginia an old couple in one of the poorest neighbourhoods:

Mrs Maria and her husband lived actually in one room, with a toilet outside the house. The bad smell was very intensive however, the social worker didn’t comment on this at all. We sat on two chairs in Mrs Maria’s room-bedroom; she couldn’t get up due to health problems - in a place full of clothes. Mrs Maria smiled immediately when she saw the social worker and she welcomed her. The social worker gave time to Mrs Maria to talk, to tell her how things are going; she didn’t interrupt her and in general followed users’ rhythm. The social worker attempted to face the urgent needs of the couple such as trying to find money for the couple from charity organizations, finding a way to have their house painted, planning visits to doctors, visiting them as much as possible and so on. Mrs Maria had a present for the social worker; she had knitted a small tablecloth on her own:

*“Only for you” as she said “I’m giving it to you because I just want to thank you for what you do for us, I want to thank you because it’s you”.*

Although the interventions of the social worker haven’t changed their living conditions, her relationship with Mrs Maria and in general her behaviour and her attitude towards them was appreciated by the couple. They knew that the social worker couldn’t do much but Mrs Maria thanked her for what she did.

The social worker’s attitudes towards the poor were clearly positive and she attempted to exploit as many resources as possible, still based on her own initiatives (for more see Chapter 6).

Another social worker describes how her explanations for the poverty of the user changed through years:

Dimitra:

*“If you had asked me 10 years before I would have answered that the cause is their personality, the fact that they didn’t plan their life in a good way. But now I am telling you that the cause is the financial policy...the situation is getting worse and worse the last 10 years on a financial and social level, in a while all of us more or less will have financial problems.*

*Of course, there are also other reasons why the people come here for example the fact that they didn’t have the proper social or working conditions or they didn’t learn other ways from their families. However, taking into account all this as well as the raise in unemployment, I cannot say that it is their personality that makes them turn to us for financial support. Today, many people lose their jobs just before taking their pension, there are no opportunities for younger people to find a job, while those who have a job usually have no national medical insurance and they have no alternative (you may get sick but also many people do not have national insurance they work without it they have no choice) because if they ask for it, the employer will not give them a job”*

In antithesis with the social workers that changed gradually their attitudes into more negative ones through the years of work (see above), Dimitra realized how her individualistic explanations for poverty weren’t in accordance with the reality. It is possible this shift to attitudes derives from the personal as well as professional experience through years where the effects of the state policy are experienced by the social workers both in their personal and professional life.

Additionally, the majority of the social workers in this category blamed unemployment as the main cause of poverty for the younger users while the low benefits, the lack of resources and structures as well as the low pensions as the causes of poverty for the elderly.

Vicky:

*“The main cause is the unemployment. For some of the cases, the cause is the unemployment for others are the mental health problems...but it’s not only that sometimes you may face difficult situations and then go down. It’s the political situation because of the unemployment, but also the family doesn’t help as much as in the past. Basically, it is the unemployment. During the next years we will have*

*more and more poor people not only these special categories but also those who we call normal. You see, this government, as the previous one did, hire people in the public sector for 4 hours per day, ....you cannot fight unemployment in this way . This policy is disgraceful, not you need clientilistic relations in order to find a job in Greece”*

This understanding of the political causes of poverty is important to social work awareness of poverty issues which seem to be in accordance with the positive attitudes towards the user. However, the blame upon social policy, or the social/political explanations for the poverty of the users can also be used by the social workers as an alibi for no further action. It can also mean that although it is recognised by practitioners that unemployment, low benefits and in general the politics of welfare and state policy have implications for their users, it is not taken for granted that social work needs to find ways to affect and change these policies. This discussion is not held here in order to minimize the importance of the progressive responses by those social workers who explain poverty in political terms. Rather its aim is to highlight the importance of where social work puts itself and how it perceives its role as a humanitarian profession. Is it the one that retains the status quo or the one that challenges unfair policies and attempts to act on the social side in coalition with the user? These questions –that will be later discussed in the thesis- are crucial because without them we examine social workers attitudes and actions isolated from their context and the role of social work in the society.

Another significant point here is that according to the findings, many of the social workers referred to employment as an antidote to poverty while others combined the need for employment with raises in pensions and benefits. These findings are particularly important as they clearly suggest that some of the main problems of their users will be solved if material needs are satisfied or to put it differently they indicate that the material needs are central to their users’ problems. However, in contemporary Greece – and Europe- the concept of employment as the solution to poverty – as it was discussed earlier- is also linked with the EU’s political agenda where integration into work is proposed as the solution to poverty and social exclusion. In reality, this policy through the flexible forms of work create the working poor and interest shifts away from the structural causes of poverty and inequality. Additionally, as it was shown, if no added measures are taken by policy makers, the obsession with employment as the main solution does not offer much.

In this research at least three social workers adopted some of the policies from abroad and referred to the need there is for the state to introduce the workfare programmes according to which the user should accept any kind of job in order to get the benefit. Characteristically, as one of them said

*“Give them any kind of job in order to receive the benefit and if they don’t accept it, disqualify them from the benefit”*

This policy has been followed in the US and UK where the apotheosis of work had led to the “workfare programmes” (Chletsos, 2008:242) where the poor are forced to do any kind of job usually those with low wages. The significance of this policy lies both in the fact that it shows the trends in some of the centres of capitalism and how attitudes and beliefs with respect to the poor are developed. As Chletsos argues:

*“American society gradually obtain the attitude that the individual has the right to receive a benefit from the state only if he/she has strained all the possible alternative solutions” but also “...any job that will be offered should be accepted. Otherwise the people who refuse will have consequences” (ibid: 243).*

Although in Greece we haven’t yet seen such programmes, given that Greek policy is mainly influenced by EU’s political agenda, we have to be careful with such programmes but also to be aware of what we mean by employment. Employment might refer to the aforementioned part-time jobs which -as it was earlier discussed- gradually create the working poor but we need also to keep in mind that programmes like ‘workfare’ shift the responsibility to the poor and force them to accept any kind of job that is convenient for the job market. The importance of inequality is consequently ignored in a class divided society and shifts public attention to employment as the only solution even if the labour relations do not lift people out of poverty. Social workers can easily adopt such approaches if what is hidden behind the rhetoric of policy makers is not critically examined. This understanding can be mainly achieved by connecting and examining critically how the general political context, the rhetoric and policies affect people’s lives in other words if we put social work in its social and political context.

To refer back to the findings, while some of the social workers blamed policies and unemployment for the poverty of the users and they also had positive attitudes, in some cases their behaviour and actions focused on regulating the poor and specifically the mothers. Becker (1997:114) mentions a study in Australia in 1978 by Considine that showed that:

*“... while social workers were more likely to emphasise structural causes and structural solutions, social work practice at that time did not reflect a structural practice agenda”*

For example, Artemis blames social policy:

*“There is a lack of governmental social policy and this lack ties our hands, there is also injustice in the distribution of the benefits- the benefits for the disabled, for example. It’s the absolutely the responsibility of the social policy. I AM ASHAMED THAT I WORK FOR THIS SOCIAL POLICY”*

But the same social worker describes the contradiction of the role of social work which “handles the poor and not the poverty” (ibid):

*“I know that the income of the user is low but that’s it. I tell them ok, this is a fact; you have to survive with this. I try to teach them how to handle their money, not spending it on unnecessary things...”*

Another social worker describes her interventions:

*“I tell the users to stop nagging about their financial situation and the low benefits. Ok, they are right, the benefits are very low but they have to learn to live with it. For example, I tell the mothers: you are responsible for your children, you have to survive on this income”*

From the above quotes it is apparent how some of the practitioners that give social/political explanations for poverty and in general had positive attitudes, in reality their practice is typical of Becker’s (1988) concept of “managing the poor and not the poverty”. In my opinion, it is possible that these social workers have adjusted to the reality of the low welfare provision. This adjustment affects not only their attitudes but also their practice. If nothing can be done to change the situation, the poor need in turn to adjust and accept the situation. An anecdote that is frequently used in English literature reveals some connection with the mentioned social workers action:

*“During the depression years of the 1930s, cookery classes were organised for women in poor communities in an attempt to help them to provide nutritious meals for their families despite their low incomes. One particular evening a group of women were being taught how to make cod’s head soup- a cheap and nourishing dish. At the end of the lesson the women were asked if they had any questions. ‘Just one’, said a member of the group, ‘whilst we’re eating the cod’s head soup, who’s eating the cod?’ (Popay and Dhooge, 1989:140).*

Although, the above anecdote had been used by the authors in order to illuminate the response of social work to the unemployed and propose some good practices from the radical perspective, still demonstrates how practitioners could focus on handling the poor and leave aside structural causes such as the one of inequality.

Similarly, Christine blamed policies as the causes of poverty:

*“The unemployment, the young people who don’t pursue the job that suits them, the pensions for the elderly which are very low compared to the cost of living and the absence of social policy in Greece. Nobody has ever worked on social policy seriously”*

She also expressed herself positively for the users

*“They are people in real need; they come here to ask for help, they don’t have an alternative”*

However, through observation it was apparent that her attitude was distant and bureaucratic towards the users and she explained how she controlled the resources for the poor who lied:

*“There are some groups of people for example Albanians who go from charity to charity and take benefits”*

I asked her why she thinks they do that:

*“I don’t know. They don’t have a need in absolute terms. I do know a case that has no such a great need and I discovered that”*

The social worker proudly mentioned that she contacted the priest of the charity in order to inform him and so cut the user’s provision. I asked Christine why she did that:

*“Because, if a person gets two benefits it means that they deprive a benefit from another person who is in real need”*

From Christine’s comments above it is apparent that the social worker acts as the controller of the resources and her co-operation with the charities has been used for preventing the poor from receiving help from more than one resource. I was rather shocked by the social worker’s confidence that she did the right thing, and she described her “discovery” of the “liar” user proudly. Partly, this action demonstrates the social worker’s struggle to save the limited resources for those in greater need but also it shows the role of the social worker as the “gate-keeper” of the resources (see Chapter 6). Moreover, it is possible that Christine’s action applies to specific groups of the population.

As Becker (1997:116) argues social workers as well as the “...public more generally, make distinctions and judgments between different groups of the poor” such as the “deserving” and the “undeserving”.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the distinction is applied to groups such as immigrants and specifically Albanians. Triandafyllidou’s (2002) research in Greece -on behalf of the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations- reported the stereotypes that are reproduced through the mass media in Greece. She refers, amongst other minority groups, to the Roma and Albanians as groups which the media project negatively. Specifically for the Roma, the media referred to them as “criminals, dirty, sly and dangerous” who “sell their babies, force their children to beg in the streets” and get “involved in drug trafficking”<sup>57</sup> (Triandafyllidou, 2002:159). For Albanians, she claims that in Greece “Albano-phobia reached its peak in 1996-97” (ibid). Although the Albanian immigrants were also referred to as cheap labour for the Greek economy which was a positive aspect of their immigration, Albanians often were referred to in the media as the “usual suspects” for crime and in general the media portrayed them as “criminals” and “animals” (ibid:164). These stereotypes and dominant images for ethnic minorities and immigrants can lead to discrimination against specific groups of the users (see also section users’ perspectives in this chapter).

On the other hand, I noticed that in the CWD in Athens, the users who visited the SSD in order to adopt a child had – at least for the cases that I had the opportunity to observe- the privilege of being interviewed alone with the social worker. These users as it was previously discussed were the exception and belonged to the middle class. The social workers ensured that in the office no other colleague or user would be present on the day of the interview and they asked the candidate parent about my presence (while this wasn’t the case for the majority of poorer users).

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<sup>57</sup> Such dominant stereotypes can be used by the state and justify racist policies. For example in August of 2010 N. Sarkozy the prime minister of France and his government used such images of the Roma in order to destroy their camps and deport Romanian Roma. According to BBC news on line: “A statement issued by the president’s office after the meeting described the illegal camps as ‘sources of illegal trafficking, of profoundly shocking living standards, of exploitation of children for begging, of prostitution and crime’” (BBC, 2010).

When I asked the social worker the reasons, her response was that:

*“These are sensitive issues and the people need privacy”.*

However, from my point of view, the working-class’ demands were also if not more “sensitive” given that they had urgent needs and this response didn’t convince me. I thought that there is a distinction, a kind of discrimination for the middle class users compared with the “others”. Given that these users could make complaints to the hierarchy more easily than the powerless majority of the poor, social workers seemed to be more careful with them. Nevertheless, given the limited number of candidate parents, and the fact that I had access to a limited number of adoption cases during my stay in the SSDs, this needs further research.

Yet, another significant finding is that five out of the twelve social workers in this category criticized both the behaviour of their colleagues towards the users and themselves. The most representative responses are given below:

Vicky:

*“If we behave well to the users, they behave to us in the same way, but my colleagues and I make a lot of mistakes and we don’t even know that. For example, the way that we talk to people, the way that we ask the question “do you work” contains disparagement; it’s the tone of the voice, our general behaviour. I think that I also make a lot of mistakes and I don’t even know it. I am very angry not with the users but with my colleagues who do not care about such things, they just do the job”*

Dimitra:

*“The colleagues do not care; they just do the job, they don’t want to lose the privilege of BEING out of the office two days per week. It’s a privilege because they are not here in the misery and the chaos and they don’t demand anything more and I don’t either. It’s the whole system that pulls you down. You saw how my colleague treated the woman yesterday. I intervened because I could see that the social worker had lost control and the user cried and felt terrible, it was obvious that the user suffered from depression but my colleague didn’t pay any attention to this...”*

From the above, it is apparent how in this category of the respondents the role of social work is more critically examined as well as the way that social work responds to the poor, an issue that will be later discussed. In any case, the behaviour and actions as well are important to our users and have multiple implications for them. This was also apparent from the user’s “voice” as it is discussed in the following section.



### *- Social workers' points of view for the users' behaviour*

Unsurprisingly, -due to the physiognomy of the programme- all social workers in HiHPs referred to the users' response as very positive. In parallel, the majority of the social workers in CWDs and municipalities argued that the users are usually positive to the social workers but they also argued that many of them "just want the benefit and nothing more" while some others are "neutral". In Greek literature research by Altanis et al. (1996:96) of 136 social workers who worked in the welfare and health sector showed that 49.6% of the respondents argued that there is a good co-operation with the user but another 40.9% claimed that the co-operation "*is neutral and that the user is circumspect*". This finding caused surprise and prompted questions by some of the participants/ social workers in the conference where the above announcement was made (ibid). It seemed that the social workers took for granted that the user sees them positively and haven't questioned their role and its impact upon the poor.

The findings from the observation of the present research showed that some users had a good relationship with the social workers. Even if their co-operation had finished, they came into their offices to see them or bring them cakes or small gifts. The social workers seemed to have a good relationship with those users while the latter felt that they had been helped and needed to thank them. Moreover, during visits in users houses in the initial contacts there were users whose urgency of problems made them talk continuously and tell the social worker their problems one after the other in order to ensure that they will receive any kind of help. Some others were usually polite but also cautious. In the initial stages of the contact with the practitioner, the user is possibly gentler due to the fact that the social worker is the one whose social report will propose or not the provision of the benefit. This issue has also been referred to three social workers in total. As Virginia describes:

*"We are welcomed by the users because they know that through us they will take money"*

From the observation it was found that in the CWD in Athens the users' aggressive behaviour towards the social workers was more common. Still the majority of the social workers in the CWDs mentioned that the users burst upon the practitioners whenever they learnt that their application for benefits had been rejected. This is relevant to the fact that the social worker is regarded by the user as the "gate-keeper"

of the limited resources who has significant power. Only one social worker reported physical attack by a claimant when the practitioner collected the documents and asked questions. Through observation it was also apparent that a limited number of the users were aggressive towards social workers and this happened whenever they learnt that either they had no right to receive a benefit or their claim was rejected. As Lavalette and Ferguson (2007:2) say about the role of social workers:

*“...social workers increasingly find themselves expected to take part in the regulation and control of clients; to be the bearer of the ‘bad news’ that there are no resources or services to meet service users’ needs; to be the frontline implementer of local or national policy that leaves them feeling uneasy”.*

The fact that the social worker is the front line “gate-keeper” of the resources -at least as the users experience it- seems to affect the quality of the relationship at least in the initial stages. As Helen described:

*“Initially, the user comes here and thinks that they will find just a clerk (she laughs) but after some contacts they realize that I am here for more than that, I am here to help and then the relationship changes and becomes deeper”*

## The users' perspectives

In total 11 out of the 12 interviewees-users had met at least one good social worker (for more see Chapter 7), but in this section we will focus on the impact of the social worker's behaviour upon the users. To begin with the lone mothers, Kogidou (1995) refers through her research to the testimonies of lone mothers in Thessalonica where many of the lone mothers hadn't visited the SSDs due to their fear of social stigmatisation. Additionally, the mothers made references "...to the unacceptable ...interventions by the workers in these services" such as the CWDs- "and their lack of sensitivity and respect" for the choices of the lone mothers (Kogidou, 1995:462). Similarly, in the present research two of the lone mothers/users mentioned the social workers' behaviour and actions. For example, Nicky is a lone mother and had mostly negative experiences from her contact with the social workers:

*"I have met many social workers in my life...I have cried a lot because of their behaviour, tell them these things; the social worker in the jail when my husband was there told me 'how can an educated woman like you be involved with a drug user? What is your problem?' Another one in the CWD (she) was terrible; she almost interrogated me why do I not work? Why I am not married? Do I have to apologize all the time about my choices? Ok, I made bad choices and so what? Why do they judge me? This is not their role; they are supposed to help us. The disparagement in their voice... I can feel it... and all these questions "why you did this why you do that, the way that they talked to me, it meant to me 'you are nothing'. Ok, I already know that, but please don't make it worse for me... (She bursts into tears)... The good social worker in the CWD didn't judge me, she really cared about me, she listened to me carefully, she gave me information, she didn't make any comments on my life or my choices. I don't want to go to the social workers – unless there is a good one- I feel that they judge me and then I leave their offices and I feel worse than before"*

Nicky refers also to the good social worker as the one who didn't judge her and in general attempted to help her. The user describes also how negatively the social workers' judgemental comments based on the perceptions that she is the lazy-poor as well as judgments about choices in her personal life affected her self-esteem and in general how worse than before they made her feel. She questions the role of the social workers and refers to their behaviour through their comments and the tone of their voice as harmful for her. The way that the practitioners behave to the vulnerable

people affects them deeply and this is apparent from all of the users' testimonies which are embedded in this section. Some of the social workers acknowledge this issue and think critically about their attitudes as well as of their colleagues' ones as it was previously mentioned.

Stereotypes, social and personal images, as well as the dominant ideology affect social workers' attitudes however; this is not always correlated with their practice. For example, Eleytheria (user) referred to Jane (a social worker that gave individualistic explanations see second section) as one of her favourite social workers. Although Jane had individualistic explanations and mostly negative or/and contradictory attitudes her practice seemed to be characterized by sympathy, close relationships and attempts to help the user as much as she could.. As Eleytheria describes:

*"I felt wonderful that I had someone to share my problems with, the social worker from the CWD was like a friend to me. She was nice and polite to me , she wasn't formal, she was real, she was human, she cared about me and my child, she found clothes, food, even this small benefit of 44€ was important for me, I felt that at last I had someone. I liked her, she helped me a lot"*

Given that the user had been recommended to the researcher by the social worker, it is possible the social worker's choice was based on the fact that the user had a positive attitude towards the social worker. Moreover, it is also possible the above practitioner's behaviour and actions are applied to specific persons/users who the social worker sympathized more than others and do not express their general attitudes/ actions. Even so, the practice of the practitioners is not always in accordance with her attitudes and explanations for poverty. This is also verified by the literature and it is also one of the findings of this research.

Discrimination against Roma was one of the issues reported by the majority of the Roma, particularly when they referred to some of the social workers in the CWD. For example, Tasos one of the Roma-users that I have interviewed referred to the behaviour of the social workers in CWDs:

Tasos:

*"In the CWD they hardly talk to us, they have a lot of gypsies you know, they see us as being different from the others, ok we understand them, they have a lot work to do and many people go there to ask for a benefit, but we expect them to show at least*

*some understanding given that they know how bad our living conditions are. In some cases some of them talk to of us really badly...*"

According to research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2009) on 500 Roma from Greece – as well as from other European countries – showed that 55.0% of the respondents had experienced some kind of discrimination during the last 12 months. Specifically, for the discrimination by the social services the percentage was 14.0% of the respondents, a relatively low percentage compared with other categories - such as discrimination by the employers 24.0%, by the health services 23.0% or the private services 30.0% - but still shows some trends. Markopoulou (1989) has also reported discrimination by the social services and specifically by the practitioners the Muslim-Turks in Komotini. Moreover, she refers to their practice such as:

*"The superficial and individual centred social services do not facilitate the social interaction of the ethnic groups and the minorities of Greek origin"* (ibid:188).

The author refers also to the marginality of the Muslim-Turks in the area as "...a problem for those practicing a humanitarian profession such as social work" (ibid:189).

Another finding is that many of the users (7 out of the 12) had criticized both themselves and the practitioners. At the same time, they showed understanding for the limitations of social work. For example, Nicolas criticizes both himself and the social workers. However, he also refers to how the attitudes of the social workers affect his self-image and his feelings:

*"I know that sometimes I behave like a manipulator, sometimes I do that just to see what kind of person , you are , for example if you smile at me and you don' t react negatively, then I am ok. I like people smiling, it encourages me. The one moment I am extroverted and I tell you everything and the other I am aggressive. I know this is part of my mental health disease ...but at least I admit that, I say this to the social workers because I want to share things with them, I want them to understand me and have a good communication, this is therapeutic for me. If you are ok with me, if you are honest, even if you don't provide me with anything, I just want to be treated HUMANELY; I need understanding and good communication. These things matter to people like me. I know that the social workers have limitations, it is not their own decision whether they will give us the benefits, but at least they should not treat me as if I were dishonest person...It's possible that the social worker had never thought*

*that through her questions and the tone of her voice would make me feel stupid. She may have thought that I am the bad guy that wants to hide things. They make all these questions. We are interrogated in order to be given just 235€ once per year, They don't do that intentionally, for sure, but they have to understand that this behaviour has consequences. At least for me, it does. I go back home and I keep thinking about what I told her, what she told me., Maybe, she forgets it but I don't... it's important to me, I don't have many people to share things with and if you are the person that supposedly is there to help me and you don't, then I go home and I blame myself that I did something wrong again and then I feel I am a failure and so on... "*

Katerina referred to the behaviour of the administrative staff and the director of the CWD when she applied for the CPP benefit:

*"It was the worst ever, they asked me to collect a number of documents for this silly benefit and they treated me very badly. I remember the head of the administrative department told me 'That's why husbands abandon women like you, because you don't work'... I felt terrible... The social worker in the CWD was nice but I saw her only three times during the last three years, she told me to go to her office but this is not easy for me, where can I leave my children? Thank God, I found the social worker here in the municipality, her behaviour was very warm very kind she didn't blame me for anything. You know, she didn't say things like "you are lazy, you are useless" NOR ALL these things that they usually say or think of but you can see it in their eyes and in their moves, Helen did her best to help me..."*

Vassilis (a Roma) talks about the social workers:

*"....those who come door to door are good, the others sit in their offices on their comfortable chairs, they take the documents and that's it, nothing more, they are bureaucratic clerks, they don't really listen to us we can't share with them our experience of living in tents or shacks with rats all around us and our children without clothes..."*

Maritsa:

*"The girls from the municipality are good... they did their best to find some resources for me. The one from the CWD stayed here for about 10 minutes, and then she RAN away maybe she was scared or maybe she felt sad for us, I don't know why, but she ran away. But, in the same CWD when I went there later, the head of the department did her best to provide me with the benefit, God bless her.*

*The social worker from the HiHP treated me very badly when I asked to be included in the programme. She told me -, you know - with this bureaucratic, cold and distant behaviour 'I do not have adequate personnel'. After some months, I had to call her again because I was in hospital and my son was alone at home. She told me 'What do you want? Why do you call me all the time? I told you we cannot come to you' I was very upset, she treated me as if I were the worst beggar in the streets, you can see how many problems I have if the doors are closed by them, where can we go to ask for help?"*

From the above descriptions both the harm and the benefit to users because of the practitioners' negative and positive attitudes respectively are apparent. In general, the attitudes of the users towards the social workers were also different. However, it is important to note that they were positive towards those who had done their best but they were particularly positive to those who had treated them in a warm and humane way, provided them with information and seemed to understand and be on their side. There were a number of users who had strongly negative feelings for social workers as professionals due to their past experiences of practitioners who blamed them directly or indirectly for their situation. Given that they already had low self-esteem, felt despair for their financial dead ends before visiting the SSDs, it seems that the practitioners' attitudes are crucial for increasing or minimizing such feelings.

## Summary

To sum up, it seems that in general there is a correlation between the explanations that the practitioners give for the poverty of the users and their attitudes. The majority that gave social/political explanations had mainly positive attitudes towards the users, while those with individualistic explanations tended to have more negative attitudes. Finally, the practitioners that gave both social/political and individualistic explanations had contradictory attitudes.

However, when we come to examine behaviour and actions, things are more complicated. Some of those who gave social/political explanations behave and act in a certain way in order to regulate the poor. On the other hand, some of those with individualistic explanations who had negative attitudes were perceived as “good social workers” by some users. Undoubtedly, social workers’ attitudes towards the poor need further research. Still, the majority explains poverty in social and political terms and also has positive attitudes towards the poor. This is important and demonstrates how the beliefs and explanations for the causes of the social problems affect practitioners’ attitudes. However, the realization of the political/social causes of poverty is not enough if social work cannot examine critically its role in a context which reproduces inequality and injustice.

Dominant perceptions; for example those for the “lazy” poor, the lone mothers and so on can easily be adopted by the practitioners due to the lack of in-service training, supervision as well as organizational factors such as workload. These factors maintain if not reinforce negative attitudes towards the poor which in turn, according to the findings, are clearly harmful for the users. Additionally, some of the social workers who had positive attitudes towards the poor adopted easily dominant policies such as the workfare programmes, without examining in more depth its implications for the users. The findings indicate that some of the social workers are sceptical for their role and criticized themselves and their colleagues for their negative attitudes towards the users. In parallel, the majority of the users showed understanding for social workers’ limitations. This tendency could be an indicator of hope for minimizing the “isolation” (Satyamurti, 1981) that both social workers and users confront and reducing the gap between the “expert” and the user -a concept that will be discussed in the next chapter.



In any case social work needs to examine and understand the whole picture and examine the political context in which social work acts. The profession has the responsibility to question its role given that works with the poorest. In this direction the awareness for the social and political factors that affect both social work and its users can be enriched by approaches such as “*self-awareness*” and “*critical reflection*” (Lishman, 1998:94, Payne, 1998)<sup>58</sup>. Finally, the fact that social work is a class specified profession needs more attention with regard to the connection of the common problems that both social workers and users share.

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<sup>58</sup> According to Lishman (1998:93-94): “*We need to develop self awareness and capacity for critical reflection in order to ensure that our motivation and past experience are used to enhance our practice*” and also “*to meet the complex demands of social work*” and mainly to “*ensure...that our responses arise from the client’s or user’s situation rather our past or needs*”.

## **Chapter 6: Social Work Intervention**

### **Introduction**

The findings demonstrate that Social Work with Individuals is the dominant method in the researched agencies accompanied by other core-actions such as undertaking the social investigation and compiling a social report. Moreover, through a number of actions the professionals struggle day by day to do their best in order to help their users. Importantly, a number of issues emerged such as the techniques which professionals apply for providing support, the subjectivity of the practitioners, but also issues such as the fact that professionals work with difficult cases such as the abuse of children, all with limited resources. In this chapter, social works' main actions are analytically discussed and illuminate aspects of social work practice which has been rarely examined in the Greek literature.

## **The dominance of Social Work with Individuals**

In all the researched SSDs, Social Work with Individuals dominated (19 of the 21 social workers). Social workers work with families as well, but in none of the researched cases with groups, (with the exception of a group for parents in a municipality of Peloponnese). Some of the most representative responses of the social workers are given below:

Ioanna:

*“Here, we work only with individuals and families, neither with groups nor with the community, we just use the services of the community”*

Vassiliki:

*“Basically, we work with individuals. We might co-operate with the community or the family but not in a systematic way, not all the methods are used to the same extent”*

A study, published in 2003 by Georgoussi et al, in various agencies in Greece, showed that 85% of the respondents –social workers, work very often or often with individuals (n=136). The reasons for the dominance of Social Work with Individuals are various. Firstly, it is related with the person-oriented methods and the “clinical” courses that are the dominant taught modules in the curriculum (Ioakimidis, 2008). This comes as no surprise given the historical evolution of social work in Greece which followed the western pattern of individualistic approaches in social work. Consequently, the dominance of the person-oriented methods in social work courses cannot but lead the practitioners to using regularly the well-known approaches to them.

More importantly, as it was previously discussed in the thesis, these approaches do not challenge the structural causes of poverty. They are convenient for a class specific welfare system and the desirable one for the maintenance of the status quo of the system. Therefore -and this leads us to the third reason- the legislative context and the policies which in turn define and influence the social workers’ responsibilities and practice unavoidably leading practitioners to working mainly with individuals. Specifically, the means-testing procedure through the assessment of the case in order to provide a benefit, in CWDs and municipalities presupposes the interview with the claimant and the gathering of information concerning the users’ financial and social situation. This information is gathered through social

investigation in users' houses or/and social workers' offices and then practitioners proceed to writing their social report. Social workers interview the claimant; ask questions about their life and living conditions and the person-oriented method is the preferable one as it facilitates the procedure.

In addition, due to the organizational constraints such as the lack of space and the unsupportive organizational context, other methods such as group-work are limited (Georgoussi et. al, 2003). In the researched agencies and particularly in the CWDs, the group-work wasn't achievable either due to the working hours of the practitioners, the workload or the rejection of this method by the hierarchy:

Nancy:

*“I work mostly with individuals. You cannot imagine how much I would like to gather lone mothers in the afternoons in a group in order to talk about their problems. I asked permission for this many years ago but the answer from the head of the department was that this is not possible; the services operate during the morning. It's very disappointing, you want to work more creatively and they just don't let you”.*

On the other hand, although Social Work with Individuals dominates in the SSDs this is applied in a rather non-systematic and fragmentary way in both the CWDs and municipalities while things differ – to some extent- for HiHPs as it will be discussed later in the chapter.

However, in all the researched SSDs the social worker gets into the house of the poor makes the assessment and then faces the lack of resources and solutions to their problems. Specifically for the CWDs, given the workload and the lack of resources the assessment of the case is made quickly. Social workers attempt to keep records and files (koinoniko istoriko in Greek) of the users but this wasn't achievable particularly in the CWDs and in the municipality of Athens due to the very heavy workload. Therefore, for most of the cases limited information was written in the files, concerning mainly the financial, family and living situation. Likewise, the testimonies by social workers in the CWDs demonstrated the pressure from the hierarchy on practitioners so that they will make the assessment quickly:

Virginia:

*“We have to make the assessment quickly. The claimant should take the benefit quickly so we have to be in a hurry all the time given that there is a limited number*

*of social workers. There is a priority for the cases concerning child abuse. However, the social investigations for the CPP and EFS benefit should also be made quickly*

According to the social workers' testimonies in CWDs and municipalities, cases forwarded by the prosecutor usually have priority over the cases concerning the provision of a benefit. While the main demand by the hierarchy is that the social worker should finish the assessment quickly, they are not particularly interested in the development of the case. As one social worker describes:

*"The hierarchy simply does not care about the case. They just want us to finish the assessment quickly, provide or not the benefit and that's it. Only if the case is shown on the media will they care more. Nobody asks whether we work in depth with the case or not, this is a personal issue"*

Unsurprisingly, in this context, the findings demonstrate that in the CWDs and in the municipality of Athens the meetings with the users were two or three at the most. The social worker has neither the time nor the resources to work further with the users:

Ioanna:

*"To just make the diagnosis gives me only disappointment, I would like to get into the problem, make the diagnosis but also HAVE SOME SOLUTIONS, I HAVE NO SOLUTION TO GIVE PEOPLE, I HAVE NO SOLUTION FOR THE ABUSED WOMAN, I am very disappointed, in many cases I don't want to make the diagnosis, for what? This will only give me disappointment..."*

The multiple social, financial and psychological problems of the users beyond a single demand for a benefit are issues that are left to social workers to solve. The state provides a minimum benefit but besides that, social workers are left alone to deal with a number of social problems. In general, social workers attempt to do their best in order to respond to users' problems. The social worker might work long term with the individuals but this is achieved only for a few cases due to the aforementioned constraints. Besides the issues of resources and workload, the majority of the social workers mention that the way in which they work with the users is a matter of personal will. This was also described by some practitioners as "subjectivity" or "freedom".

As Jane describes:

*"You find multiple problems beyond a demand for a benefit. There is little you can do. Practically, it depends on the will of the social worker how she will work and*

*how often she will visit users' homes. People usually come here for the EFS benefit; they come to ask for financial help. You go to see their living conditions, to have a general picture of the family relationships, whether they have a job or not, and you find deeper problems that usually push them to this situation. Then, it depends on the will of each social worker how they will work with them. What is more, it is a matter of time while at the same time it depends on the available resources"*

Georgia:

*"We have freedom in our work, we can work in the way that we want because nobody checks us, each of us can work in their own way, and this is very good"*

Vicky:

*"The way in which we work with them is an issue of subjectivity. For example, when I was a student, I had been taught that I should motivate the user and that's it. Personally, I do whatever I can and if I haven't achieved something, I will phone them, I may fill in the documents for them. It's a very subjective issue, it depends on the attitude that each of us has, on the way we act as professionals"*

However, "will", "freedom", "subjectivity" or "personal responsibility", should be examined with regard to the isolation, alienation, (see Chapter 7) strict hierarchy, as well as the workload and limited resources that is, the reality of social workers as it is described throughout the thesis. What is more, although social workers' so-called "freedom" could be seen as a tool to working more creatively in the community, - due to the lack of strict control by the superiors - the aforementioned constraints lead practically the practitioners to working only with the most urgent cases.

Virginia:

*"Ok, we have the freedom to work in the way that we want. Each of us has a sector and works in the way that she knows, in the way that she wants, in the way that she can. But, along with the freedom there are also many negatives; There is so much workload that it is impossible to handle, many cases, you have to write many social reports, you don't have the time. The citizens' demand to get the benefit should be satisfied quickly. But also, you are alone out there; you have no support, no guidance. More or less, our superiors' comment is 'we don't care, do whatever you can, it's your own problem"*

Apparently this "freedom" is mainly a characteristic of an underestimated profession. Nevertheless, this kind of freedom encompasses subjectivity which is one of the findings which emerged, closely linked with the attitudes of the practitioners. The

subjectivity in the way that the practitioners handle the case was mentioned by the practitioners with regard to counselling.

Dimitra:

*“More or less, all the colleagues here follow the general directions, but each of us works alone. I mean, what she will ask the user, the way that she makes the questions, there is nothing specific, each of us does what she herself thinks best on her own”*

Sofia:

*“It’s a matter of personal choice how you want to help the cases, ok, the intention is always to help but this is very theoretical”*

Vicky:

*“Some of us- although we don’t really know how to do that - may also do counselling or give some advice to them on how to raise their children. Each of us does this based on their own perspective of how to work with the user. We have neither enough knowledge nor enough experience; we are very subjective in our judgments. I believe that we don’t even apply what we learnt at school, we didn’t get enough practice and I am convinced that we make a lot of mistakes. We may have the experience but we make many mistakes either in the interview or with the handling of the case”*

Still, the majority of the social workers in the CWDs and municipalities perceived counselling as the core of social work activity. Kandylaki, (2008) argues that counselling has many commonalities with social work. This argument demonstrates once again that the main focus of Greek social work is on clinical approaches. Therefore if counselling is seen as the most important intervention by the practitioners it comes as no surprise that some of the practitioners in this research complained about the unwillingness of the users to participate to counselling sessions in contrast with their willingness to take the benefit:

*“I tell mothers to come and find me at the SSD to talk; you know, to have counselling sessions. But usually, they don’t come; they do not want to confront their problems, to see them. Although I am one of the few social workers that I am available to help them do that, I get disappointed with the fact that people do not react positively to counselling”*

Jane:

*“Many of the users do not want counselling, they just want the benefit. So, I give it to them and that’s it. Although they have many problems and they need counselling, they cannot see this”*

Moreover, many of the practitioners described the users as indifferent to counselling or unable to value the importance of the procedure. However, as one of the users explained:

Cesaria:

*“What’s the point in coming here and talking? The social workers ask me to come here but they do not ask whether I have the money to pay the bus fare. I don’t want words, Dora, I need solutions”*

Similarly with the above quote by Cesaria, five social workers had another perception of the effectiveness of counselling. The most representative response is given below.

Artemis:

*“People do not need words, they need actions. They need to see their problems solved; Counselling doesn’t work for many people”*

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Social Work with Individuals is applied in a fragmentary way due to a number of constraints with no particular scientific justification. More or less it is left up to the practitioners whether and how they will work with the user further. The main concern of the hierarchy is that social workers complete the means-tested procedure or intervene in the most emergent cases in order to act as the “break-water” of the social problems while they have no particular interest in the further development of the cases. A closer examination of some of the core actions of the practitioners will permit further analysis.



## **Social investigation: Care or control?**

Social investigation is another core-action of social work practice in CWDs and municipalities. Again, for HiHPs the nature of the social investigation differs; in these agencies it is the user that asks the services to visit them as many times as possible. Thus, the social worker in these agencies makes initially the assessment through one visit and if the claimant fills the preconditions for their inclusion into the programme then the co-operation between the social worker and the user is close and at least once per week. On the other hand, in CWDs and municipalities social investigation is a precondition for the benefit provision and for the cases by the prosecutor (see chapter: The poverty of the user and its implications for social work). As Virginia describes:

*“We conduct social investigation for the EFS benefit, for the CPP benefit, for adoptions, for the cases by the prosecutor, for neglect of the elderly or the children.  
The social investigation is part of the everyday job”*

Aggeliki:

*“We don’t do social work, we mainly make social investigation. I have 196 cases and only for 10 of them I did social work giving directions to people. Social work is a method by which you help people to solve their problems and stand on their feet, that’s why it is called social work. I cannot do this because I have plethora of cases...”*

To begin with the social investigations concerning benefits, some of the social workers arranged an appointment with the user while others visited them without any warning. This matter left me wondering why practitioners make these unannounced visits. My experience as a student and practitioner indicated that these sudden visits were taken for granted without further analysis in education, placements and agencies. In total, the responses of the practitioners included several but also contradictory themes and paradoxes of state social work.

Four in total social workers didn’t apply the social investigation concerning benefit provision; these social workers perceived this procedure either as useless, given that poverty was apparent at a first glance at the claimant and their supporting documents, or because it stigmatizes the user.

Dimitra:

*“The visits to users’ homes have no meaning for me. Why should I visit their home? I can understand their situation, they have very old clothes, they smell, what will change if I visit their home? The only thing that changes is that I may have more time to talk with them in their houses than I have here and maybe they feel more comfortable to talk in their house but it’s not so important because I can forge a good relationship with the user anywhere”*

Helen:

*“...the people feel very bad if you go to their home, they are stigmatized by the neighbourhood, they feel very upset and uncomfortable when you go to their home and see how bad their living conditions are. They are embarrassed...”*

Social workers’ refusal to make home visits could be caused by various reasons. For example, some of them perceive it as a “resistance” to a bureaucratic and oppressive way of working with the user and try to spend their limited time they have for each case by finding ways to provide as much support as possible. Helen takes into consideration the users’ position and feelings and attempts to treat them with respect. Other practitioners (3 in total) claimed that there are mainly practical reasons which inhibited them from arranging an appointment with the user:

Christine:

*“I don’t know the exact day and hour. I may first visit another family and if there are many problems there, I need to stay longer, so I don’t know whether I will have the time to visit the other family the day that I told them I would do so...”*

For the CWD in Peloponnese two social workers mentioned that the lack of access to a telephone line in their offices and the use of the director’s phone would facilitate the negative involvement of the director into the cases. Again, the power of the hierarchy has implications for social work and its users. As Virginia said:

*“I don’t use the director’s telephone line because I don’t want her to hear the names of the users, to know everything about the case. Because then, she will intervene more, she will make comments or even not approve the benefit”*

However, the majority of the practitioners in the CWDs claimed that the main reason for these unannounced visits is to check the reliability of the users’ arguments about their financial and social conditions:

Dimitra:

*“The users are informed by the administrative department that a social worker will visit them. It’s at our discretion whether we will call them before or not. I don’t usually call them before in order to see the real picture. I have never had any complaints from them for these visits, nor do they perceive it as an infringement”*<sup>59</sup>

Georgia:

*“To see if they are telling the truth about their situation but also to find out if there are other problems we can help them solve. There are cases where a family might be receiving a benefit for an elderly but they don’t take care of them so we have to intervene”*

The contradictory role of social work is apparent in both the above quotes. To begin with the role of censor, the social workers act as investigators that testify the reliability or not of the claimant for a benefit. The power and control of the practitioner are apparent through this action (see also Chapter 4) but the majority of the practitioners in the CWDs haven’t questioned this role. This comes as no surprise. To the best of my knowledge, in Greek literature the contradictory role of the social investigation hasn’t been examined although it is a core action in state social work practice. In order to seek the origin of this action, a quick look at the historical evolution of social work sheds more light. Once again, the British literature is useful for this exploration with regard to the roots of the social investigations for the poor in the Greek context, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain, the action of the philanthropic organizations like the Charity Organization Society (COS) was based on the distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving” while the COS used moral rather than social criteria for assessing those in need. Thus, the first appearance of social work in Britain was associated with a specific ideology for the poor. The distinction between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” was essential in order to make the necessary “assessment” of those who were “deserving” or not the aid of the philanthropists. The COS is described by many authors as the origin of modern social work (Dowling, 1999, Jones, 1983, Novak, 1981). Hence, social work in its first steps was

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<sup>59</sup> There is a contradiction within the arguments of the specific social worker later. Although she argues later that she can see no meaning for her these sudden visits because she “can understand the situation” without going to users’ homes in the above quotes she argues that she doesn’t call them because she wants “to see the real picture”.

linked with poverty in order to regulate and control the poor. "*Personal reform was the primary aim of the COS*" (Dowling, 1999:14) and this personal reform could only be achieved by using individualistic approaches in order to explain poverty. Consequently, the casework model was considered and developed as the most appropriate method. These approaches are often examined with respect to the general context of the social policy as a method for the state to obtain – through social work- "social control" over the working class and to "regulate the poor" (Becker, 1997, Novak, 1988, Jones, 1983,1998, Jones and Novak, 1999).

In Greece, the first steps of social work were made in the 1940s as it was previously discussed, but significant research by Korasidou (2004) for the nineteenth century revealed similarities with the above context as far as it concerns the dominant policies and ideology about the poor. Besides that, these concepts are useful for exploring the historical social construction of the image of the poor while they indirectly reveal the possible origins of the social investigation for the poor in the Greek context.

Specifically, the research of Korasidou (2004:38) reveals that during the first half of the nineteenth century the main focus of the state was on the police enforced removal of the poor from the centre of Athens where the poor were seen as a "threat" to social order as well as "criminals" and in this way the state "attempted to increase the sense of social insecurity and...fear" in order to make the suppressive methods used by the state against the poor more acceptable. The main target as Korasidou (2004) argues was the maintenance of the status quo and the ensuring of the dominance of the upper classes over the working class in this period. In other words, the central focus was on the suppression of the poor. Later, in the second half of the same century, private charity organizations - that are run to a great extent by middle class women - made their appearance. Their welfare activity functioned in the "houses for the poor" where discipline and strict rules dominated (Korasidou, 2004). Moreover, then the interest was in distinguishing "*the really disabled person that has no bread*" from the "*...lazy one that sponges on the society*" (ibid: 91). Therefore, the first signs of who were 'deserving the help' or not made their appearance. Another significant point is that the precondition for providing material help to the poor presupposed the "*visits to their houses and the confirmation of their condition*" (ibid: 93). This action has similarities with the social investigation which is applied by the social workers in contemporary Greece. On the whole, the use of the "repression-welfare" (Korasidou,

2004:40) concept by the state with regard to the social construction that demonizes the poor was a useful tool in the hands of the ruling class of that period in order to ensure their interests. In contemporary Greece, the state seems to use social workers as censors into the poorest houses of the population. This cannot but have implications not only for the role of social work as a humanitarian profession but also for the relationship between the practitioner and the user. For example, in Table 13, a conversation between a user who complains about the sudden visit of the social worker to his father's house and the social worker reveals the impact.

*Table 13: Conversation in the social worker's office between the social worker and the user concerning unannounced visits of the former to the user's house*

**SW:** I have visited your house several times ...nothing, I have called you... nothing

**User:** Why should I reply? Hasn't it ever happened to you not to be at home?

**SW:** Mr... I'm trying to explain to you that I came to your house

**User:** Tell me why should I open the door to you since you come without any previous warning? You left a note saying that the name on the door bell was my father's name, so what? Did I tell you that the house is mine? You hinted that I had hidden it from you

The social worker seems to feel uncomfortable, she loses her composure and the tension is obvious in her voice

**SW:** Listen to me, I am obligated to come and see your house given that you applied for a benefit, it is my job to do that.

**User:** Yes, yes the great amount of 200€! Such a huge trouble for this ridiculous benefit!

**SW:** Mr... you will co-operate, I have to write the report so that you can take the benefit

**User:** I will co-operate

**SW:** You are out of prison now, and you live with your parents

**User:** Sometimes yes, I like to be around, I don't always sleep at my parents' house

**SW:** What do you mean, where do you stay?

**User:** What's the point in this question? I might sleep at my friends my girlfriend's, why does this matter to the report?

**SW:** Mr ... I have to do my job that's what I'm trying to tell you

**User:** Ok, go on ...

**SW:** Do you have any particular health problems?

**User:** Not physically, mentally I suffer from personality disruption

After this information, the tone of the voice of the social worker is changing, she is trying to be more careful and calm

**SW:** I know that you are married and you have a child, who looks after the child?

User: My wife, we are not actually together, we agreed that she will take the child without lawyers, I see the child, you know, things are very difficult for me, I cannot find a job, its' difficult.

The majority of users in this research mentioned that the first unannounced visit made them feel rather uncomfortable. Particularly women mentioned fear for *“taking my children away”* or others mentioned feelings of guilt *“this sudden visit made me feel they suspect me, that I have something to hide”*. However, the totality of the interviewees-users wanted the “good” social workers to be more often in the community, talk with them and in general to have a closer relationship with them (see Chapter 7).

On the other hand, as far as it concerns the sudden visits for the cases by the prosecutor, these are necessary parts of the assessment procedure in children’s abuse or neglect. For these cases this is unavoidable; however, the lack of services needed in order to work preventively in the community does not permit the social workers to do much. In at least fifteen cases, the researcher and the social workers didn’t succeed in finding the users due to the lack of sufficient information in the prosecutors’ document. Therefore, I wasn’t able to observe any cases concerning abuse and relied on the testimonies of the social workers. Moreover, given the fact that these cases are perceived, naturally, as extremely sensitive I had no access to interviewing users.

According to Reder et al, (1993:83) the assessment procedure is particularly important as a “guiding action”, a step by step procedure for the understanding and selecting the best actions with regard to the “inter-professional collaboration”. However, these procedures are out of the question for the Greek context where the practitioner is practically left alone to handle these cases with no in-service training, supervision, inter-professional teams and so on. According to the social workers’ testimonies the contradictory role of social work is present again where unannounced visits are made in order to diagnose possible abuse.

Rebecca:

*“At a theoretical level, we work on the prevention as well as on the support which people should be provided with. But there seems to be a contradiction in our role since we have to be supportive as well as repressive with the same people. This is oxymoron because if you go to a mother threatening to take her child away, given*

*that you go with the document by the prosecutor in hand, how is it possible that this woman will trust you so that you can build up a relationship through which you will help her? This is impossible, she sees you as an enemy and not only me personally but also the SSD. Automatically, you lose a number of people because they are afraid to come here in case you take their children away. We have this double role of helping and being repressive. Things have a contradictory character here”*

The sudden visits to users' houses are part of social work practice in each case sent by the prosecutor. These sudden visits with a document by a prosecutor which is shown to the user put the social worker on the other side -as the social workers describe it- and practically obstruct any further intervention. As for the relationship of trust, it cannot be built if not destroyed. This is unavoidable in Greece given the lack of preventative programmes in the community (Xatzifotiou et. al., 2003, Xatzifotiou, 2005, Agathonos-Gergopoulou, 1991, Mouzakis and Salkitzoglou, 1987, Papaioannou, 2000). The social workers mentioned that they face a number of difficulties when it comes to diagnosing the abuse which are also well referred by Mouzakis and Salkitzoglou (1987) such as; the lack of sustainable education and in service-training of the social workers, the lack of the legislative context for the establishment of the profession, lack of staff, and unsurprisingly the lack of structures and enough services which affect significantly the social workers' intervention in child abuse or neglect. Xatzifotiou et al, (2003) based their research on 67 social workers refer to the multiple and complicated roles of the social workers starting from the assessment of the case, and going on to evaluating the danger, writing the social reports, being the representative of the law, finding out the available agencies in the community and so on. Similarly, these roles were also found in the present research. Due to the sensitivity of the issue of the children's abuse, the role of social work will be discussed further later in the chapter.

As far as it concerns the discussion of the significance of the social investigation, the social worker in both the cases presented by the prosecutor and those concerning benefits acts also as a helper. The social investigation is part of the assessment procedure in social work practice by which a number of problems in the family are identified and social workers intervene.

Jane:

*“It's very important to go to users' houses, because only in this way you can see the real situation. The documents they have submitted show that they own a car and you*

*may think that they have no financial problems. But when you visit them, you see a very old car, an empty fridge, no electricity, nothing. You get the best picture of the case by visiting their house; you cannot see the reality by just reading the documents.”*

Another important issue is that by visiting the users' houses and the community the social workers confront the reality of the poor. No matter what the reasons of these visits are, checking them or other reasons, the fact is that social workers confront the hard reality of the user in their personal environment and can see, feel and smell the poverty.

Virginia:

*“You see the reality there, personally there are many times that I find it extremely difficult to go into the next room, the conditions are extremely bad”*

According to Jordan, (1990:82) the contact of social workers with the poor communities could be seen in another way:

*“When injustice, inequality and exploitation are most evident in a society, the temptation to isolate the client-worker relationship<sup>60</sup> ...is strongest. It is the theoretical equivalent of seeing all one's clients in one's office, and never in their homes or communities- a defence against recognizing the factors in client's lives that seem beyond their reach or our helping powers, and the social distance that separates our lives as citizens of the same society.”*

The visits in the communities and houses of the users may reveal the reality given that both the social workers and the users are citizens of the same unequal society. The practitioners experience the injustice and inequality both in their everyday reality through their working conditions, - as it has already been shown - and the everyday reality of their users. This realization is important for the understanding of the common issues that the practitioner shares with the user and dynamically could reduce the gap between the expert and the client. Furthermore, the social investigations give social workers a unique privilege of gathering information about the users' condition/state and using social research as a tool for changes on the policy level. Papatheofilou in her announcement in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pan-Hellenic conference of social work in Greece argued that it is imperative social workers should use this contact with users in order to gather data and information about their state in order to

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<sup>60</sup> Earlier Jordan refers to this “temptation” of focusing on this relationship without taking into consideration the “wider social relations” referring to the inequality and injustice (Jordan, 1990:82).



promote the changes on policy level in the ministry and reveal the “huge gaps” in the welfare sector (Papatheofilou, 1987). According to Everitt (1998:114) the role of the practitioner as a “social investigator” is important in revealing

*“the harmful effects of structures and policies such that some people live in fear in their own homes and neighbourhoods without the means to participate as full members of our society and without hope for the future”.*

Similarly, Humphries (2008) argues that social workers as researchers “are well placed” in order to gather evidence of the impact of policies upon users’ lives, to reveal their living conditions as well as to make known the user’s “voices”. The specific concept is described by Humphries (2008:31) as the “*ethical social work research that is committed to social justice*” and describes social research as a tool for achieving social change “from below” rather than performing researches “from above” that reproduce and maintain the oppressive structures. However, as it was also mentioned in the first section of the chapter it seems that the practitioners in the researched SSDs didn’t proceed to such initiatives. Still, the problem is not the social investigation *per se*. The problematic issue is the way that it is applied in the specific organizational and political context and the way in which (social work is used by the state. Rather than focusing on the enhancement, support and liberation of the people, social work in this context is used as a censor if not the scapegoat of the system, particularly for the cases by the prosecutor (see Conclusions of the chapter).

## Social reports

Another core action of the social workers in CWDs and municipalities is the completion and submission of social reports. In HiHPs the social workers' reports usually refer either to reports sent to other agencies for the provision of benefits or for the limited cases of neglect of the elderly. Therefore, in this section, the analysis focuses principally on the social reports in the CWDs and municipalities where mainly there are four types of social reports:

- The social reports which are sent to the hierarchy concerning the social workers' suggestion for the provision or not of a benefit. These reports are sent either to the administrative staff and the director in the CWDs or to the aldermen and local council in the municipalities.
- Secondly, there are the social reports sent to the prosecutor concerning the abuse or neglect of children, elderly and people with mental health problems.
- Thirdly, there are those reports that are sent to other social services describing the case and asking for the provision of benefits or services.
- Finally, the reports in the CWDs that are sent to the domestic relations court concerning the adoption of children by the candidate parents.

The social workers are not particularly trained in writing the reports and usually this activity caused them anxiety.

Vicky:

*“I have to make the assessment for the adoptions. But I haven't been trained for something like this. I didn't even know what to write and how to write it. It's a great responsibility particularly when we have neither training nor supervision. I am very anxious whenever an adoption case comes to me”*

For the provision of the benefits in some of the CWDs a specific pre forma style was found where the practitioner mostly ticks boxes concerning the income of the claimant, health problems, and family relationships and so on. Still, in other CWDs as well as in the municipalities they write the reports on their own. For the other types of social reports, no particular pre-forma was found and the style and the content of them is usually based on the culture of the agency and what is demanded by the judiciary system. Furthermore, in none of the researched SSDs was the content of the reports shared with the clients. The users weren't usually aware of what the report contained, the social worker did not inform them nor did the user ask.

This comes as no surprise, given that the users in Greece are not aware of their rights nor do the social workers seem to be aware of them. In some cases where the users obtained access to their reports (particularly for the adoptions) the social workers' negative suggestions became a cause of tension between the candidate parents and the social workers.

In general, the social reports contained factual material but also in some of them there were moral judgements by the practitioners. For example, in some of the reports concerning investigation for possible abuse or neglect of children the social workers used phrases such as "it seems to be a good mother" while the description of the living conditions and the tidiness of the house was also embedded. It is obvious that social reports comprise the power of the professional for the provision of a benefit, the removal of a child and so on. However, a further discussion on each of these types of the social reports demonstrates supplementary and contradictory issues.

Given the limitations of the thesis but also due to the fact that the first two kinds of social reports are the most common in the CWDs and in the municipalities, in the next sections the focus will be on those concerning benefits and the cases by the prosecutor.

#### ***- Social reports for providing benefits***

The involvement of social work in benefit provision is crucial, and the report of the practitioner is usually taken seriously into consideration by the hierarchy.

Ioanna:

*"Yes, yes our proposals through the report are very important, they take them into consideration in order that someone will receive the benefit. OK, there are other preconditions as well so if someone fulfils them, they will take it"*

However, there is a number of filters before the state provides the benefit; such as a set of preconditions which apply to the poorest (see Chapter 4) as well as the senior managers in the hierarchy who have the power to decide upon the provision or not of the benefits. This finding emerged both in CWDs and municipalities:

Dimitra:

*"Usually our reports are positive but it's not our decision whether they will get the benefit or not, we don't have the power to decide. I cannot understand why the law*

*defines that the social workers make a suggestion since that there are specific preconditions. Therefore, if the user fulfils them what's the point holding the social investigation and writing the social report? Let's say that I propose that someone should get the benefit and they don't fulfil the preconditions, will they get it? Of course not, it's a fake report. Only for the adoptions may they rely on our reports, in order to decide whether the couple is suitable or not. According to the law, the judge takes into consideration our report, but that doesn't mean that they decide based only on our report".*

Particularly in the CWDs, the heads of the department and the directors could also decide whether they should provide or not or even curtail the benefit. This is due not only to the budgetary constraints but also to their moral judgements of who deserves the benefit.

Vicky:

*"In the past, the EFS benefit was given very fast. Now, it is not only our director but also the policy of those above her in the hierarchy that delay such decisions."*

Jane:

*"You may find accidentally the director in the corridor and she shouts at you the name of the user and that she gave him 200€" while you have suggested 230€. They deal with it as if they have given the money from their own pocket, but the money does not belong to the agency, it's not her personal property"*

An added issue which emerged more frequently in the municipalities is the problem of confidentiality concerning the users' names, with the exemption of a municipality in Peloponnese, where the social worker had the freedom not to give the names of the claimants to the mayor of the municipality.

Rebecca:

*"Actually there is no confidentiality of the cases. Due to the lack of space, the administrative staff is present during the interview. There is also the problem with the reports: these reports should be signed by the director, she will read them, the head of social policy sector will also read them and these users live in the area, they might live in the same block of flats as the director or the head of the social policy sector. The director, even the mayor, has access to our reports. You want to protect people and you simply cannot. We now take it for granted that confidentiality cannot be kept. We had repeatedly asked for our protocol to be a confidential one but they refused. What is more, the cases by the prosecutor are sent by fax but we share the*

*same office and the same fax machine , so anyone can read the case sent to us, the names of the people, everything. Additionally, the fact that we belong to the administrative department and there is no separate department for social work makes matters worse as everyone can have access to the cases and we cannot do anything about it”*

Confidentiality, one of the basic aspects in social work ethics in the international codes of ethics (IFSW and IASSW, 2004) as well in the Greek legislative context (Proedriko Diatagma, 23/1992) is practically set aside in the Greek context of the social services. Particularly in the municipalities, I was rather surprised by the fact that all the social workers both in municipalities and in the HiHPs referred to the interventions in social work practice of politicians who demanded access to the users' names. But, why do the politicians care about the names of the users? Rebecca provided the following explanation:

*“They use everyone. They have the lists of the poor people who take the vouchers for the supermarket from us. These lists go directly to the office of the Mayor in order to send them letters, especially during the pre-election period. What else do you want me to say? Or, some people go directly to the mayor or the head of the social policy issues to ask for a benefit. The politicians often pressed us a lot to write a report suggesting that a benefit should be given to people who didn't fulfil the preconditions, which they themselves had set in the Council.. But even so, they pressed us a lot. We always refused to do that and we told them that they shouldn't expect us to do that, they should do it themselves with a letter from their office, they shouldn't try to use us, we don't do special favours (in Greek, the word is rousfeti). They intervene in our job for these issues. Therefore, we had big conflicts and in some cases very bad relationships with our superiors and as a result, they don't help us to do anything”*

Similarly, Sofia mentioned:

*“They have the lists for the programme “Gift for the Poor”; Or, they have the lists with the names of the people who are offered free transport to the beach in the summer by the municipality. The politicians have everything including their address and, telephone number, and they send the ballot directly to them. And you know, especially the lists of the poor, these are many votes, the previous alderman's votes were even more than the mayor's”*

Clientilistic relations, as it has been discussed previously, are one of the basic characteristics of welfare and the public sector more generally in Greece. Although this is “whispered” among social workers, to the best of my knowledge there hasn’t been any open debate about its prevalence in practice except for limited references such as Kandylaki and Tsairidis’ (2008), research in HiHPs. The findings of this research were rather contradictory as 37.7% of the practitioners argued that are “satisfied” with the involvement of the politicians and 35, 3% “little or not satisfied at all”. In the present research, the findings show that the users are indirectly used for political reasons actually for the “profit” of a politician and their party. The social workers’ refusal to give the lists is relegated to being a personal issue; a “struggle” which many social workers fight alone but often without legal protection and support by the union, little can be achieved.

My research also revealed considerable political involvement and interference in the everyday practice of social work. According to Helen:

*“...besides the mayor, the members of the local council, try to intervene in several issues and to a great extent. For example, each of them tries to intervene in order to provide the people they want with a benefit thus gaining votes or just helping their acquaintances. But, they also intervene in the way that I do my work. They say “we will help someone in this way” or “you don’t have to check this case, I’ve checked it myself”, things like that, or they interfere in how I will organize a seminar or a public exhibition, who will be invited. This happened a lot in the past, now they gradually get the message from me. Sometimes I listen to them, sometimes I take into consideration what they say because they might know a case that really needs help, a person who is really in need and I don’t know about them and they honestly tell me things that are ok. But I tell them that we will see to it and that’s all, I don’t do favours to anyone”*

Similar are the testimonies by the other social workers in the municipalities but also in the HiHPs:

Voula:

*“The alderman attempted to intervene in our work, we had big fights. She wanted to read the files, to know everything about the users and of course, to use them as possible voters for her party”*

The interventions by politicians in social work practice hadn’t been taken into consideration before starting the research. It’s an issue highlighted extensively by the

interviewees in the municipalities and only by one social worker in the CWD in Athens. The local authorities use social work to the advantage of the politicians and their parties. Clientilism ought to be rejected by social work. To my mind, there is a clear infringement upon the code of ethics where the confidentiality, protection of vulnerable people and so on, such that, core ethical commitments in social work are invalidated. Although some of the social workers succeeded in not providing the lists to the politicians, it is still a lonely struggle and without further collective action and demands, little can be achieved.

Nevertheless, the paradox of freedom in the way that the practitioners work (see above) and the interventions of the politicians should be understood in its context meaning the structure and function of the welfare sector. The politicians are interested in the names and addresses in order to gain votes and there is no particular interest in the development of the case or the social work. It is clear that the hierarchy is both using and manipulating social work for their personal and political gain.

Moreover, another finding which emerged was that particularly in the CWDs the practitioners had limited if no feedback at all after sending the social reports.

Virginia:

*“Almost all our reports are positive for the provision of the benefit. But this is not an issue that is in our authority. We will find out whether they receive it only if we go to ask about each of the cases, there is no formal feed back, we need to make a number of telephone calls in order to find out if each user gets the benefit and this is impossible. Sometimes people come here to complain and we are in a very difficult position”*

Still, the social workers often worked in coalition with the user and in many cases they attempted to do their best for the social provision. All of the interviewees mentioned that their reports for the 99.0% of the cases were positive, as also one of the most representative responses below shows:

Ioanna:

*“Our reports are mostly positive. As far as I know, all my colleagues make positive reports in order that the users will receive the benefits”*

Moreover, the data obtained through observation indicate that the practitioners go further and act as if they were allied with the user. Specifically, either by hiding from the administrative staff part of the claimant's income, or by giving advice to the users

on how to prove their poverty by submitting additional documents, they attempted and often achieved the social provision. This is particularly important for social work where it acts in coalition with the user in a strict welfare system and attempts to find exits to helping the users. In parallel, the practitioner tries to act as the 'safety valve' in an unequal and unfair welfare system with such low benefits and limited services. This was particularly apparent in the CWDs concerning the very low CPP benefit. This specific benefit started to be provided in 1950 (Labropoulou, 1987) and has always been extremely low (Stellou, 1987, Stamatelou, 1987). The strict criteria in contemporary Greece (see Chapter 4) date back to the 1950s when the specific benefit provided by the state was intended mainly for the post-war orphans. Iatridis' (1981) research makes references to the specific benefit and highlights the fact that state policy through the social provision increases inequality in the society. The support of the lone parents is provided only to the poorest and it is disgraceful. In fact, the strict criteria exclude a large number of families from receiving it, while the pre conditions fit only lone mothers.

Yet, the social worker faces once again the dead end of this policy that puts the practitioner in a difficult position and urges the user to claim and receive the disgracefully low benefit of 44 euros. All the social workers in both the CWDs and municipalities mentioned this problem.

Aggeliki:

*"I feel very ashamed to tell the woman "you will take 44€ (CPP benefit) and you also need to bring a number of documents and you are forbidden to work because if I find out that your income is more than 234€ per month, the benefit will be cancelled. I feel very ashamed, this is awful. So, what I did in the past in another county was that I told the women to make fake statements that they pay a lot of money for the rent or bring bills they are supposed to have paid themselves so that the income of 300€ they claim they have will be justified. But gradually, I became stricter because there is a law and I may be accused of some offence. You know, you have a good intention but they won't believe that. So now, if the woman has an income of 250€ per month, I tell her 'I am very sorry, you cannot receive the benefit'. This is not a benefit for the protection of the children, this should be called the benefit for the humiliation of the mothers, and this benefit is a rape of their dignity"*

The above argument by Aggeliki is one of the most representative ones concerning the opinions of social workers for this benefit and also indicates a coalition with the



user. Although Aggeliki stopped -as she said- this tactic after a few years the majority of the social workers keep doing it secretly.

As it was discussed earlier, the state welfare provision for the family is very low (Symeonidou, 1997 cited in Flaquer, 2002, Matsaganis, 2002). Practically, given the low benefits, as Papadopoulos (1998) argues, the specific policy, in southern countries, shapes and reproduces the general acceptance that the family is the main provider of care in its members. The social workers through their involvement in the provision of the benefits face the restrictions of this policy.

Ioanna:

*“When I give them 44€ per month, they think “go to hell, I don’t have milk for my children and you give me 44€ to do what? And you tell me how to talk to my children when they wake up?” I mean, people worry about how to find the food they need to survive, I absolutely understand that, when they don’t have money to pay the rent or the electricity bill, the progress of their children at school or their behaviour is not their priority, they cannot see that as a problem because they have more serious problems. So, I give them what we have, and people cannot even survive, they live on nothing, they move to a house, they cannot pay the rent for 6 months then they leave it and go to another area, therefore there is an instability for the children, many, many problems. I told you before, I feel like a soldier fighting in a battle without having weapons, that means I cannot just say words to people, they might feel slightly relieved that they have someone to talk to but as a professional, I do not feel satisfied with that”*

Practically, the social workers attempt to remedy, albeit in a superficial way, the injustice of the provided benefits by ensuring that the majority will receive the benefit. However, social work acts in an unequal and unfair welfare system and its attempts on the micro level to fill its gaps do not fundamentally challenge injustice.

The state policy for the family affects significantly social work but also its users such as the mothers, the children and so on. This is particularly apparent in the cases by the prosecutor which is the second main activity with regard to the social reports.

#### **- Social reports to the prosecutor**

Given the above observations, one can conclude that the social workers’ powerlessness is more than apparent. Moreover, as far as it concerns the social

reports for the prosecutor, the story gets wild. The prosecutor sends a document to the social workers who are asked to investigate the prospective users' living conditions. In the past, these cases run through the Institution for the Protection of Children (Etaireia Prostasias Anilikon). However, due to the lack of personnel, they are now transferred to the CWDs and municipalities. Unsurprisingly, the social worker is used once again by the state to fill the gaps of its policy.

Vassiliki:

*“There is a “battle” here over these cases. These cases should be done by the Institution for the Protection of Children (Etaireia Prostasias Anilikon -EPA). But there are no personnel there, so they send them to us. The law defines that if there is no service in EPA, these cases should be sent to the Centres of Mental Health, but in these centres the cases take time, the psychologist will see them again and again. So, they sent the cases to us because we will see to them promptly. The prosecutor doesn't ask us to examine the family but to examine the living conditions and that's it. So, we now give these cases back because we don't have the time and the cases aren't protected either. ”*

The testimonies by social workers indicate that these cases and the following social reports are some of their main sources of stress and dilemmas. Undoubtedly, any kind of decisions which –for example- may affect users' freedom, may prove to put children's life in danger and so on are always and should be a dilemma for social workers. However, in the Greek context the 'usual' professional dilemmas are simply multiplied, because of the lack of guidance, lack of staff and training, the lack of resources; it's almost as if you are left to drown.

For these reasons, social workers are highly stressed and many of them spend a lot of time on these cases because the risks are so high and the solutions so few.

Sofia:

*“The DISAPPOINTMENT is huge. Because you make suggestions for various things to the prosecutor over and over again [her voice is getting louder, she is rather angry] and nothing happens, nobody listens to us and the next year they will ask you again to carry out the investigation and to see again the same case, but we know that nothing has happened although we have suggested things. Sometimes people intervene in the judiciary system and the removal of the child is cancelled. Then, there is the lack of infrastructure for the abused children and the elderly. Even if I*

*diagnose the abuse, there is a lack of services, I have no solutions. But also, if I want to work further with the family, this is not achievable in this SSD”*

In 2007 the report of the independent Greek Ombudsman<sup>61</sup> (2007:7-8) refers to the problematic situation concerning the protection of children and makes specific references to the social services:

*“The psycho-social services have neither the necessary trained staff nor the expertise to confront serious family problems. The services in counties have been burdened with a number of duties and the staff are not enough to apply social investigations and actions for the protection and care of children. There is no legislation obliging municipalities to provide social services and consequently there is a lack of sources for the municipalities as well as no control over the provided services”*

The above statement and the following quotes from the report of the Greek Ombudsman describe the reality that has also been found through this research in CWDs and municipalities with regard to the family policy and children care. This reality consists of:

- the low benefit of CPP.
- the lack of social services.
- The lack of certification of the public institutions for children’s protection as well as the fact that they are understaffed.
- Similarly, lack of control and certification of the institutions that are run by NGO’s and the church.
- The time-consuming procedure of adoptions that lead to private adoptions and babies’ trade (ibid).

This report takes a holistic approach to the problems in child care and highlights the problems in a policy context as well as highlighting the dead ends that social services face. Naturally, “...*child protection is only one aspect of child care*” (Waterhouse & McChee, 1998:281), and therefore children’s protection cannot be seen without taking into consideration other aspects such as poverty of the children and families, and child-care policy. Consequently, the rudimentary family policy in Greece should be taken into consideration whenever the issue of protection of children is discussed. The dark picture of the report concerning the abuse of children is integral part of the family policy in Greece, as it has previously been discussed in the thesis. Once again,

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<sup>61</sup> Sinigoros tou Politi in Greek

the users and the practitioners with limited resources available are confronted with the dead ends of this policy. As Ioanna stated so clearly, the result is that:

*“I have been sent to the war without weapons”*

## **Other types of social work's intervention**

Social workers attempt to answer users' demands and problems in various ways. For HiHPs Abramidou (2005) mentions provision of information about the benefits, practical help in filling forms or taking the necessary steps so that users will receive pensions or benefits, emotional support, working for the self esteem of the users, confronting conflicts, creative programmes with activities for people with disabilities, as well as the treatment of some urgent cases. Similarly, the practitioners in the CWDs and municipalities attempt to take the aforementioned actions, however the organizational context does not permit either continuity in their interventions or stable, long-term co-operation with the users.

The social workers in these agencies describe their actions just as Vicky does:

*"We have a smattering of everything"*

This "everything" consists of several actions:

### ***- The social worker as a source of information and support***

The social worker acts as one of the main providers of information to the users. The practitioners provide information concerning benefits, resources and other SSDs but also act as mediators and facilitators of the social provision. This is one of the unique privileges of social work where support is provided on emotional, social and practical levels. The provision of information is part of everyday routine in all the researched SSDs; either in their offices or during their co-operation with the user, the social worker is a valuable source of information about welfare rights. Given the social exclusion of the vulnerable parts of population, this specific action taken by the practitioners is crucial. At the same time, through observation and the testimonies of the social workers in the CWDs this action also proved a source of stress as day after day tens of people knocked the practitioners' office doors and asked for information. The everyday reality in the SSDs especially in the CWDs is a hard reality. Social workers have to talk with any person who visits the office when they are on duty that is, once or twice a week.

In parallel, the practitioners know the "loopholes" of the legislation for the social provision. To some extent, this knowledge comprises the power of the expert who knows the resources and the procedures leading to getting the provision their cases need. Is this knowledge provided equally and indiscriminately to the users? How has

social work ensured that it does not function as the “gate keeper” of the resources that prevents some of its users from having access to them? In some cases, the attitudes and personal judgments of the practitioner inhibited the equal distribution of information to the users.

Vassiliki describes such an incident in a CWD in Athens:

*“A man who had recently been released from prison called me. He had visited the X CWD<sup>62</sup> to receive the EFS benefit and they didn’t give it to him. I asked him why, he told me ‘because I had received the benefit from the job centre (for those who have recently been out of jail), so they don’t’ give the EFS benefit to me’. I CALLED THE SOCIAL WORKER THERE AND I TOLD HER ‘WHAT YOU DO IS WRONG’ (her voice is really loud, she is very upset and she emphasizes her words). THE AIM IS TO HELP HIM WHEN HE GETS OF JAIL, PEOPLE HAVE NO HOME, NO PLACE TO GO’, 200€ from the work centre is nothing, if he gets another 235€ from us, he might find a place to stay for a while. But it’s a matter of any clerk’s judgement and especially of the CWD’s director”*

In the same CWD, one of the social workers used expressions towards a claimant such as “*you had also the EFS benefit last year, why do you ask for it again?*”. The context that permits these attitudes and behaviour is but one example of the context of abandoned services where each social worker does what they think and what they can. Whether this stance is a struggle for being on the side of the user or a more oppressive one is an issue of personal choice or an issue of “subjectivity”.

Overall, throughout the research it became apparent that social workers provide the information orally to each user without leaflets or other information available in the agencies. Moreover, there were times when social workers had neither the time nor the stamina to inform every person who came into their offices about their welfare rights. Although the majority did their best, this wasn’t achievable under such difficult conditions. Moreover there were also practitioners who attempted to “save” the resources for other, more difficult cases so they didn’t inform the user about all the available resources. My personal experience as a practitioner was rather similar. In a public hospital, a fight between the social work student and the practitioner took place due to the fact that the practitioner refused to inform an elderly couple about

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<sup>62</sup> The name of the county is not disclosed in order to keep the anonymity and prevent any kind of harm in social workers in the specific county.

their right to receive care from HiHP. His attitude was based on the following argument:

*“If we sent them many cases, there will be no place in the future for other users who are in a greater need and therefore there will be no solution to give them”.*

The agony of the social worker to have “a solution” for their users converted them into the “gate keeper” of the resources in the community and a person who provides their users with information rather unequally. Moreover, the decision of “who deserves the help more” seemed to the social worker an unavoidable criterion in a strict welfare provision.

According to Aggeliki:

*“There are some charity organizations that provide benefits, food or clothes. However, we do not know that their budget is limited. Therefore, we have to be very careful and send them the most difficult cases. If there are more claimants in these organizations, they will give less to them. Practically, we do the rationing by ourselves; if the resources are limited, you have to have two strings in case there are urgent cases.”*

This attitude should be understood in its context given the limited resources available from the state for those in need and the everyday struggle of social work to give some solutions to its deprived users. But what should also be taken into consideration is how this context transmutes social work’s actions and role. Social work all too often, tries to find ways to “survive” in the context rather than intervene in order to change things. The knowledge of the resources provides social work with a power that can be seen as one of its strengths in the process of sharing this knowledge equally with its users in order to empower them as well as when demanding for them their right to live in dignity.

However, this knowledge could be manipulated by social work – given the everyday struggle for providing help to its users in an indifferent state- to keep this knowledge for itself and provide for those who “deserve” it. Undoubtedly, this needs further research; however, this paradox of social work activity is probably a decision taken by the practitioners in order to have some solutions in hand for the most urgent needs. The equal distribution is connected with the organizational constraints but also with the everyday struggle for finding resources.

### *- Struggling for resources*

In a strict welfare system, it comes as no surprise that the practitioners struggle day after day to find resources for their users. Many times, I heard the practitioners asking each other: *“is there any possibility this charity organization will give anything to Mrs...?”* or *“Is there any social worker in municipality X?”*. *How can I help the users? I have nothing*”. The agony and the struggle for offering help was part of the everyday reality for the majority of social workers. Others who have been working for years just provided the benefit and said *“I am sorry, there is nothing else”*. The stress social workers suffer when trying to find resources was expressed in various ways either in the interviews or through observation (for more see chapter 7). Moreover, social workers had to find resources on their own when they get into practice. There is little printed information concerning benefits and services, consequently, knowledge about the resources and the preconditions is gained by social workers through their everyday struggle for finding resources and information to respond to their users’ needs.

Kostas:

*“You will find me everywhere, attempting to find resources. I ask everyone in other services. Do you have any leftover food or clothes? Give it to me. You have to be like this, I think that if you want to find the resources, you have to be always on the run looking for them...”*

Kleopatra:

*“...we may start with the financial problems of the users but there also other problems, social or personal and then we send the users to other services. But the other social services are not known to us, we seek them by ourselves. For example I have no idea what kind of programmes the municipalities have, they may have another programme for financial support but it’s not permanent, at least ours are established”*

The struggle to find resources is part of the everyday social work reality in Greece. It’s not only the absence of an organized social welfare sector and the minimum provision by the state for the marginal but also there is no available knowledge for the network of services that do exist. Practically, in order to find out which NGO’s, charity organizations, or new programmes funded by EU in the community function, the social worker should “struggle” to obtain this information. Sometimes it’s an



issue of luck, as they may find out what exists out there in the community through discussions with colleagues or even users. During the observation there were social workers who struggled to find resources for their users, using their personal relations with other colleagues, making phone-calls to find out if any of the new programmes may provide anything.

#### **- Connection with other services**

The social workers refer users to a number of services and they attempt to co-operate with many of the available SSDs in the community. It comes as no surprise, that one of the most common findings was the absence of structures and SSDs in the community. Particularly, the lack of SSDs in municipalities or agencies that work closely in the community with people with mental health problems occurred very often. However, these services are not always known to the practitioners due to the lack of database and co-ordination of the SSDs in Greece (Kallinikaki, 1998).

Aggeliki:

*“We don’t know the services that run in the community; we learn them practically by asking colleagues, users... Particularly for the NGO’s or programmes funded by EU there is no official update,, you might find them accidentally or never. Each of us searches alone and then we share the information with each other in the office.”*

Ioanna:

*“Where are these services? Show them to me. No one else works with those who receive the EFS or the CPP benefits. There are some municipalities that give an amount of money, not a benefit but this depends on the will of each municipality. It is not mandatory, the municipality decides whether they will provide it or not, we cannot intervene. I know one municipality that offers this financial help so I tell people to go there and ask for it. What is more, if they vote the specific mayor, he may give it to them...I have no authority to intervene and demand the municipality give this money to the user. If I ask for it, it will interpreted as a personal good turn; that’s how the majority take it. I may refer people to Help in Home Programmes, or KAPI whenever there is a good co-operation, or sometimes to EKA, and then we may send people to specific services for example children with dyslexia, we have no services for the single mothers”*

All of the practitioners mentioned a close co-operation with services such as CWDs, municipalities (whenever SSDs exist), hospitals and so on. The issues of the understaffed services and the limited services emerge once again. Moreover, half of the practitioners mentioned the problematic co-operation with other SSDs. In many cases there was a kind of competition with or even depreciation of other services:

Helen:

*“...in the CWDs they do not do anything, they just provide the benefit...”*

Aggeliki:

*“...the state provides a great amount of money for the structures for mental health, it is not right, they should stop doing that, why do we need so many structures?”*

Rebecca:

*“...the HiHP in our area is very problematic, they refuse to visit people with mental health problems, and we have many problems with them...”*

It is possible that in some cases these complaints are justified due to the devalued role of social work in Greece. However, the competition between the SSDs divides the practitioners and keeps them far away from a holistic understanding of their common problems. The division for example, between those who work in the mental health sector and the others who work in other fields, does not promote the solidarity between the workers nor the common interests of their users. Certainly, there is a need for a more holistic and in depth understanding of the causes of the problematic reality of the SSDs rather than putting the blame on sporadic individuals or agencies. Another issue which emerged was the co-operation with the church and its charity organizations. Given the extensive philanthropic activity of the church (Stathopoulos, 2005) with the poor, the majority of the social workers referred cases to the church

Anna:

*“I use any kind of provision by the church, whatever I can find for the users, it's' not easy to find resources”*

Christine:

*“The church helps a lot...I do co-operate very often....”*

In total 3 social workers mentioned problematic issues arising from the involvement of the church:

Ioanna:

*“I never ask for the help of the charity organizations that are run by the church. They humiliate people. I had a case in which these “ladies” from the charity visited*

*a woman at her home and then they told me 'her furniture is better than mine, she doesn't need help'. So what? The woman had money in the past but now her husband left her, she takes care of herself, she does her hair, she uses make up, I like that, why do people, when they face poverty, have to look like beggars? These "ladies" refused to help her. Ok, even if she has nice furniture, what does that mean? Could she eat the furniture? And why should these "ladies" check her? I told them about the situation of this woman, why don't they listen to me? No, I don't trust them, I never ask for their help, I just tell the users that the church might help; if they want, they can ask for it but not through me"*

Some of the users such as Cesaria and Katerina mentioned similar behaviour by the 'ladies from charity'.

Historically as Ioakimidis (2008:176) claims "National-Christian" ideology affected significantly social work in its first steps in Greece. In contemporary Greece, Church is (and traditionally was) one of the main providers of care (Stathopoulos, 2005). The connection and close relationship of the Greek Church with the state has historical and political roots which this thesis has no intention of analyzing. However, it is a fact that historically and until today there is clear involvement and influence of the Greek Orthodox Church in public dialogue and politics (Dimitropoulos, 2001). Moreover, the church dominated by Christian-National and in some cases nationalist ideas affect the people both ideologically and culturally (ibid).

There are examples of the clear involvement of the Church in the means-testing procedure and the assessment of a case for the welfare provision. Previously in the thesis, the co-operation between a social worker and the priest in order to expel the "manipulator" users was discussed. Another example is the municipality of Patras where a number of structures such as the "Food, Clothes and Toys Bank" (Trapeza trofimon) the "Food Bank for the homeless", (Stegi astegon) the "Mutual Benefit Fund for the Poor" (Tameio Allilobothieas Aporon), which are supported by the Church (Skamnakis, 2006). Specifically for the "Food, Clothes and Toys Bank" in order that a claimant can receive food, one of the main justificatory documents has to be a report by the priest certifying the need of the claimant<sup>63</sup> (Skamnakis, 2006). As a practitioner in Patras, I experienced several times the refusal of priests to care for claimants who were not considered to be "good Christians" with the above

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<sup>63</sup> In 2006 the users of the specific service were 750 families (Skamnakis, 2006).

document. The religious and moral criteria could not be clearer for the poor however, to my mind, the problematic issue is also the involvement and the acceptance of such procedures by both social workers and the local authorities.

The social provision instead of being seen as a right of the people and a duty of the state is turned into philanthropy. For example, in 2008, the Church's news agency, reported that Geordios Papandreou, the leader of PASOK, then the main political party of the parliamentary opposition, met with the archbishop of the Greek church and in their announcements they both claimed that the co-operation between the state and the church is desirable and necessary for the welfare sector and those that "suffer in our society" (Romfea, 2008). Later in 2009, when PASOK came into power, this agreement went further with a decision to create joint committees for the treatment of poverty and the 'problems of immigrants (Newsroom, 2009).

In contemporary Greece, the state seeks co-operation with the church in the welfare sector in order to fill its gaps in public welfare provision. By shifting back to philanthropy or attempting to fill the gaps through the NGOs the state attempts to cover at least on a superficial level the needs of the excluded. This is part of the general political agenda which has restrictions in public welfare, retains the injustice and inequality and turns the right of being treated equally into an activity for the philanthropists.

This research came across social workers who do more than the above described actions. I found social workers who used their creativity to find solutions for their users. Some examples include programmes by municipalities for the covering of the cost of coaching school for children living in poverty, initiatives for providing food and clothes, organizing activities in the community, providing support to people, working with families on a long-term basis, although this is not demanded by their agencies. Many of the practitioners worked as mediators or advocates for the users' rights. Some had conflicts with the hierarchy over providing benefits to their users or keeping the confidentiality of the cases and the dignity of the people.

But much of this activity is dependent upon the will, the perspectives and the stamina of individual practitioners. As Mauris (2005:124) claims:

*"In total, as usually happens in Greece, success is mainly based on the patriotic feelings of the workers in the programme and particularly on social workers, who –as it has been proved- can throw off the "cloak" of bureaucratic administrative staff and offer real and recognizable social deeds, whenever they wish"*

In any case, to my mind, these attempts of the social workers are also an indication of the existence of hope for social work. Besides the bureaucratic structure and the restricted welfare system, many of the practitioners are committed to a kind of social work that will bring change in people's lives. Although, this is not attempted in a systematic way and its effectiveness is questionable (see Chapter 7), it still shows to some degree what Jones, (2001:555-556) characteristically describes for the British context through the social workers' voices:

*"I used to enjoy the freedom of being a social worker, to develop relationships with clients, to take a few risks, but now everything is controlled and other people make the key decisions and feed it back to you to implement."*

or as one of the practitioners in the present research mentioned:

*"I came into this profession to change things, to help people. I don't want any more to be a clerk, to be the wheel of bureaucracy"*

In Greece, each practitioner attempts to do their best, in the way that they know, in the way that they can. But how effective are social work's actions? This question will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusions**

Politics affect significantly social work in various ways: Firstly, through the legislative context, secondly, through the welfare policies but also through the policies applied by local authorities and the interventions by politicians in social work. The findings show that particularly in the municipalities, the politicians use the users' data which social services have in order to attract voters while they also intervene from time to time in the way that the practitioners work with their users. Although the use of the users' names is against the ethics and values of social work, each practitioner is left alone to struggle against the demands of senior managers. Some of the social workers succeed in protecting the users' rights but still this is a solitary struggle.

Paradoxically, these research findings demonstrate also that social workers have still some kind of freedom in the way that they work with the users. However, this should be understood and examined in the context of a bureaucratic and abandoned state welfare system in which this "freedom" is accompanied by lack of support, in-service training and supervision and virtually no resources. Naturally, due to the above organizational constraints and the increasing abandonment of welfare services, subjectivity and moral judgements are part of the practitioners' daily routine which cannot but affect their relationship with the users.

In this context, social work attempts to survive. The practitioners struggle day after day to find resources for their users, provide information about services and benefits, and bring users in touch with other services. They also attempt to take some initiatives in order to work more creatively and find solutions to the urgent problems of the poor.

Importantly, some of the social workers act in many cases in coalition with the users, sharing information, tricks and techniques about how the system works in order to achieve the maximum welfare provision for the excluded. To my mind, this is positive proof of these practitioners' decision to be on the users' side. In general, the majority of the practitioners attempt to provide as much as possible for their users and act as mediators and advocators inside and outside their agencies in order to do their best. This struggle of the practitioners is an indication that there is hope for Greek social work however; social work is still in a difficult position.

This is particularly apparent with respect to the cases brought by the prosecutor concerning the abuse or neglect of children. The practitioner is once more alone, struggling without support to find the best solution. Current welfare provision for the families is very low and prevention programmes in the community are non-existent. Unsurprisingly, social workers are used from time to time as the “scapegoats” of the system. As Kleopatra, one of the social worker interviewees, said concerning the neglect of children;

*“We have these “bombs” in our office, any time a child may die or be injured and all the blame will be put on us”*

Periodically, these “bombs” explode and the Greek media “discover” the problematic situation in the SSDs. In recent years the media have put the blame for deaths of children on SSDs. For example, in 2006 there was a case concerning the death of a 45-day-old baby and another concerning the abuse of a 2.5-year-old boy by his father.

In the first case, the director of the CWD claimed that they had never received the fax concerning the case from the prosecutor. In Eleftherotypia (2006a) one of the Greek newspapers with a large readership, it was written:

*“It was since the 4th January 2006 that the competent services of the County had been informed about the necessity of social care in order to ascertain the living conditions of the 45-day-old baby who found tragic death... Although the prosecutor sent the relevant document to the county immediately...the county still hasn’t replied to the prosecutor stating the moves that they possibly had made (or –obviously hadn’t) and ...the prosecutor now demands immediate investigation in order to find out whether the fax was received by the county...”*

This and other media cases like it (Ethnos, 2006:24) which sought to blame social work agencies and practitioners for the deaths or injury of children which have been brought to the attention of the prosecutor has made some social work managers very angry. This is how one social work manager reacted to the media coverage:

*“I cannot hear any more the TV channels asking “where is the CWD?”. I do invite them to come and see what we do. They should stop judging us. We don’t want anyone to give us congratulations... We just do our job. But, they should stop being unfair. Its unfair to put the blame on 9....social workers that cover 1,5 million people in Athens” (Eleftherotypia, 2006b:49).*

Using practitioners as “scapegoats” of the system is common in other countries as well. For example in 2008, a case of a child’s death in UK known as the “Baby P” case has led to the “witch hunting” of social workers where through the press the blame was put on the social services. Fergusson, Ioakimidis and Lavalette on behalf of Social Work Action Network wrote the “Petition: Stop the Witch Hunt of Social Workers” on the website of SWAN (2009) along with a number of other contributors, such as academics and practitioners, to comment on this. The article finishes with the phrase:

*“Neglect of social services will result in more neglect of children”*

Social work’s position is getting ever harder in Greece where at any time the “blame” for not taking the necessary measures, not intervening earlier etc could be put on them. Still, the blame should be put on the politics that retains people in the margins of the society and recycles injustice and inequality. Undoubtedly, the social workers attempt to do their best in the Greek context. However, these haphazard attempts without the realization of the political causes of the social problems, accompanied by decisions for taking action against unfair policies condemn social work to rather maintaining the status quo. As Jones (2001: 561) claims:

*“As long as we have societies which are prepared to treat some of their most vulnerable people in this way, then state social work will keep being a grim occupation...”*



## Chapter 7: Effectiveness of social work's interventions

### Introduction

In this research, the question of effectiveness was discussed with both social workers and users taking into consideration the broader context (political, social and organizational) in which social work takes place as it has been discussed earlier. The concept of effectiveness in this thesis doesn't follow technocratic and managerial approaches to measuring outcomes of social work practice and interventions but rather attempts to examine the perspectives of the significant "actors" of social work procedures namely social workers and users. As Shaw argues:

*"...evaluation is not simply about effectiveness of outcomes, with all the confounding variables and caveats identified. It must also encompass a developing understanding of how social workers themselves evaluate their practice"* (Shaw, 1996 cited in Lishman, 1999:3-4).

When the question concerning effectiveness of social work practice was put to Greek social workers and users the researcher was perfectly aware that evaluation or measuring effectiveness of social work practice is rarely considered in Greek social work. The question was mainly raised in order to reveal their perspectives and furthermore to discuss the findings linked with the general "political and resource context" in which evaluation is taking place (Lishman, 1998:101).

As Shaw highlights:

*"Evaluating in practice...is not about reflective rigour in empowering but concerns a practice which is legitimated only through the test of whether it empowers and emancipates...Effectiveness is truth"* (Shaw, 1996 cited in Kazi, 2000:762).

Following the above approaches, this chapter seeks to demonstrate and discuss the effectiveness of social work practice through the perspectives of both social workers and users. Moreover, the ambition of the chapter is to complete the picture of social work practice by having a quick look at the feelings of the practitioners about their work.

## **Social workers' perspectives concerning effectiveness**

The presentation and discussion of the findings will begin with the HiHPs given that the findings are totally different to those in CWDs and municipalities. Specifically for HiHPs, the social workers claimed that their practice with regard to the demands of the users is effective:

Kostas:

*“People say “good morning” to us and they mean it. It’s very important to them to have someone who visits them in their home, cares about them. The HiHPs are effective for people; we find solutions in order to help them solve the problems which come up, yes... I believe that we are effective”*

Vivian:

*“I believe that we are effective because through the provided services by HiHPs some of their problems are solved. For example, they can have a blood test without going to the hospital and waiting there for hours. Or, many elderly people who live alone and cannot take care of themselves have our free care and support in those cases when they need nursing care, their medicine from the chemist’s or their shopping from the supermarket brought to their home or their houses cleaned once a week. All this reduces their cost of living which is highly important to them.”*

Two out of the three interviewed social workers in HiHPs argued that social work and the HiHPs are effective. Research by Kandylaki & Tsairidis (2008) verifies the above arguments. This research was carried out among 178 workers in the HiHPs -45 of them were social workers- concerning their perspectives about effectiveness of HiHPs. The majority consider the programme to be effective for the elderly and handicapped as far as it concerns the targets of the programme. Specifically, 83.3% of the workers claim to be very satisfied with the fact that users stay in their homes, 81.0% very satisfied with the improvement in the health of the users while 91.1% of the social workers are very satisfied with the psycho-social support that they are able to provide to the users. In total, *“74.1% of the workers argue that the programme corresponds much or too much to the needs of the group-target”* (Kandilaki and Tsairidis, 2008:163). Undoubtedly, the specific programme provides a number of valuable services to the elderly and handicapped. However, the responses are linked with the narrow aim and objectives of the specific programme and do not take into consideration the more general problems of users such as low pensions and poverty.

Nevertheless, the third social worker that I interviewed had a different perception of the effectiveness of the programme.

Voula:

*“We do a lot of things and we really help people by providing a benefit, giving them information about their welfare rights, having their houses cleaned, visiting them etc but their main problems remain. The HiHP is not enough or effective with regard to solving their permanent problem of low pensions, of poverty. These are the main problems of the elderly, these issues are their main priorities and we don’t respond to these. If you are on the edge of becoming homeless, if you don’t have enough money to pay your bills, the HiHP you won’t solve these problems”*

Voula highlights the deep, unsolved poverty problems of her users. Her perception of effectiveness is related to a more holistic view of the needs of the users, a view which is not focused only on the restricted targets of the HiHPs. Moreover, the response of Voula is in accordance with the majority of the responses of social workers in CWDs and municipalities. Specifically, only three out of 18 social workers in CWDs and municipalities replied that social work is effective *per se*. Their responses are as follows:

Kleopatra:

*“Social work is always effective, ALWAYS I do believe that even when it seems that we cannot do anything or solve someone’s problems the fact that we have a conversation with them, or we try to activate them – up to the limit that the CWD permits us to do that- or we refer them to other services, you know we will try to find a way to help...and these attempts are helpful to them”*

Firstly, Kleopatra focuses on the fact that even when they cannot solve a user’s problems, the actions of social workers (such as bringing them in touch with other services and resources as well as talking to the user) are important for the people and this leads her to perceive social work as effective *per se*. The specific characteristics and interventions mentioned above by Kleopatra were also mentioned by users, as it will be discussed later, as qualities of “good” social workers. Similarly, the other two social workers in this category, perceived effectiveness as the acceptance and positive attitude of the users towards them. Christine’s response is the most representative:

Christine:

*“It is effective because people accept our interventions and provision of information and they feel that we support them, we give them directions and we are a point of reference. After cooperating with us they feel that they have someone to talk to and that we are their friends”*

However, the “positive attitude” of the user should not be seen *per se* as an effective practice. After all, such an attitude might indicate the user’s awareness that being polite rewards you with the social worker’s positive report which is conducive to getting the benefit. In all, when I asked the practitioners if there is effectiveness through their work the most common answer I received was:

*- There is effectiveness only for some of the users*

Virginia:

*“There is effectiveness only for some people. For example, a woman managed to get over the difficulties in one year and from such cases we get too much joy. Support offered by the family is also an important factor for cases such as lone mothers but these cases are very few. For the cases that come here again and again there is slight effectiveness. During the first years of my work here, I wanted to believe that after the second or third year of working with the users the problem would be solved. But over the years, I realized that not only are the problems not solved but also the users’ children continue this vicious circle so whatever has been used is not effective”*

The majority of the interviewees referred to similar cases. Social workers see that few of their users manage to “stand on their own feet” while the majority remains in the same situation and the vicious circle of deprivation continues in the next generation. The practitioners mentioned also the importance of the family as a key-factor in the improvement of the users’ life. This comes as no surprise given that, as it has been discussed throughout the thesis, the main responsibility of care is on the Greek family. Consequently, the absence of an organized welfare sector leads the people with no family support to the margins of the society. Moreover, all social workers in CWDs and municipalities mention that the absence of a welfare state and sufficient welfare provision in general is a crucial factor that undermines their effectiveness.

Specifically, for 18 social workers the effectiveness of their interventions and in general their practice is an issue that is not exclusively dependent on their actions and methods given that its success is influenced largely by the benefits, the social substructures and the unorganized welfare sector.

*- Effectiveness is linked with welfare and policy*

Dimitra:

*“Effectiveness doesn’t depend on my way of work; it depends on the provision by the state. The state has no provision so, no matter how I will work with them in order to relieve their pain caused by their poverty, I don’t solve anything, it’s only superficial. It’s not that I don’t want to do that, it’s just that these are the programmes that we have and there is nothing else”*

Artemis:

*“The criterion for my effectiveness should be my work, meaning whether if I have used all the methods and the means that I know. Because, there is NO EFFECTIVENESS; I might do one thousand things but they’re not effective because there are no Institutions for the homeless, for the abused women, for the children so you don’t solve the problems. Given that there is no social policy, I cannot succeed, I may try to find solutions through NGO’s or charity organizations but I have no solutions”*

The issues of the absence of an organized welfare sector, the low benefits, and the lack of welfare structures are repeatedly raised by social workers. The “front line” social workers link the effectiveness of their practice to the (absence of) state policy towards the disadvantaged. This finding reflects Iatridis’ comment that:

*“Social policy is not only the one that exists. It’s also the one that doesn’t exist, which can be more decisive even more than the one that exists” (Iatridis, 2002:5).*

Two other social workers see their work (and its effectiveness) as rather short-term relief for the poor. Moreover, Helen points out the inability of social work to confront the users’ structural problems tightly connected with the capitalistic system which should be held accountable for the constant reproduction of poverty and unemployment.

Helen:

*“We are not always effective, there are problems that I cannot solve, I can offer help up to a point for example as long as I can do something they will not die of starvation, they will not be evicted from their houses, they will not live in the streets. But you cannot help them to increase their income, to lead a normal life. I cannot solve the problems of poverty and unemployment which are to be dealt with by the state. They should provide these people with a minimum income, a house to live in, some food how can I solve these problems if I have nothing? We do a lot of things just by not letting people suffer too much or for too long”*

Helen gets to the core of the users' problems of poverty and unemployment. She believes that her interventions offer relief and not the desired solutions. Indirectly, she correlates effectiveness to finding the solution to broader political and structural problems such as unemployment and poverty and argues that these issues cannot be solved by social work if there are not suitable political decisions from above. These comments show the degree to which “front line” social workers consider social work to be linked to the politics of welfare. As discussed earlier, one of the usual and basic demands of the users in CWDs and municipalities is financial help which will remain as their main need as long as poverty dominates the lives of SSD's users.

Social workers try to use and access as many resources as possible in order to respond to these needs and demands, but it is more than obvious that the crucial needs of the users cannot be met given the specific state policy that widens the gap among the rich and the poor and is characterized by abandonment of the welfare sector. Helen argues that (political) problems such as unemployment and poverty cannot be solved by the social worker. Undoubtedly, social work cannot solve policy issues on its own however it can and ought to affect policies to be more just for its users. For example, on the issue of unemployment Popay and Dhooge (1989:161) suggest a number of strategies that social workers can adopt when working with the unemployed such as “monitoring the effects of unemployment” and “organizing propaganda” for pressing policy makers and politicians for change, and “*improving channels of information*” for the unemployed. Moreover, through their study they found that few social workers responded imaginatively to the financial problems of their users, such as “*working with claimants unions*”, “*running advice sessions in unemployed workers' centres*” (Popay and Dhooge, 1989:145) although some social workers created self-help groups. However, these ways of practicing require critical

awareness of the role of social work and understanding of its connection with the wider political agenda.

As far as it concerns the specific research, social workers seem to understand the link between their work and social policy and recognize the consequences. What is more, they feel that they do rather superficial work that has little effectiveness and only brings a slight if any change in users' lives. They try to keep motivated by the cases that "go well" and the few cases that "make it":

Vicky:

*"Listen to me...what keeps us here as social workers is that an absolutely destitute person takes 220€ per month, this is something, you help them, you feel that you have done something. I feel that I am effective in the cases where I worked with them a lot. For example, I worked with a family of gypsies, one of the children attended school, I helped them to buy a house, the other child learns English, I worked with them for a year. If you have the means to help on a financial level you do it because there are times when you want to help but you can't. Sometimes I am effective..."*

Vassiliki is very angry and disappointed when she describes the situation of the users and the "blame" put on social workers by the state:

*"I am not always effective. My effectiveness is correlated with the limits of the service but also with the provision by the welfare state. Basically, the welfare state at the moment is only the CWDs, and there are groups of population that are excluded, they are abandoned in the hands of God, I don't know how they survive. I feel very sad for these cases; many are homeless, people with mental health problems and so on.... If there are no services for these people, how can I help? The disability benefit is not enough. As for the homeless, the criteria for putting them in shelters for the homeless include: being healthy, not having a mental health problem, not having a disease that might be transmitted, so practically you cannot put them in these places.*

*They have nowhere to stay, how can they survive on the 200€ provided by the CWDs? You give it but IT'S NOT ENOUGH AND PEOPLE KEEP LIVING IN PAUPERISM THEY HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE. There are many things the state should do and they make us feel awful because we cannot do anything but IT'S NOT OUR FAULT. How is it possible to make the clerk feel responsible for the policy that the state hasn't created?"*

The social workers are angry while also trapped in their roles. The injustice of the system is in front of their eyes, in the lives of their users while social workers are

powerless with limited resources and time to work in more depth with the users. As it was previously discussed, social work appears to be used by the state more as a relief for the poor and as a “breakwater” of their pain and despair. The social workers’ phrases such as “we do half of the work” and “we do superficial work” reflect the powerlessness that they experience. Interestingly, this issue is also recognized by the users, as we will discuss later in the chapter. Ferguson and Lavalette (2004) claim powerlessness is an important issue for those who provide services in the British welfare sector but also for its users. Specifically, for social workers the issue of limited control upon their work in Britain, bureaucratization of the work, less contact with the users, workload, “speeding up” of everyday work, and budget control by managers (Jones, 2001) seems to have similarities to the situation in Greek social work.

Yet, social work’s mission to achieve social change and social justice seems to be out of the picture. Without tackling inequality and injustice “inside” the agencies, and “outside” in the lives of the users little can be achieved. Without understanding the connection of these issues as integral parts of a system in a class divided society which treats the social services departments in similar ways to its users’, social workers remain locked in the role of a “good woman” (see below user’s perspectives) who does her best but brings about only little change in users’ lives.



## **Users' perspectives for social work's effectiveness**

Some of the users seem to understand the limitations of and pressures on social workers. They realize the difficult conditions under which they work and the pressure and control exerted on them by the hierarchy. This understanding was a surprising finding in the research procedure. Given the fact that the users face many problems, I didn't expect to find this understanding concerning the limitations of social work:

Katerina:

*"I have met social workers in Help in Home, the municipality, CWD. They try to help but they are not given the latitude from above to do that, for example Helen tries to find resources for my children; I know she does but my problem is to find a job, to have a stable income, to raise my children. The social worker here in the municipality is very good, she helped me a lot and I talked with her a lot but she cannot do many things..."*

This matter came up with other users as well, such as Nicolas:

*"...look I understand them, they have the director breathing down their necks and they cannot be "Robin Hood" all the time The conditions are very bad, they also have private life, ok, I understand them..."*

This mutual understanding is worth further research. However, it could reveal more common characteristics between the helper and the helped and the interconnection of their roles in the broader political context of inequality and injustice. Moreover, this understanding by both sides narrows the gap between the "expert" and the user as it was previously discussed in the thesis.

Yet, as far as it concerns the effectiveness of social work, users' perspectives reveal interesting and important issues: The majority talked about some social workers who did their work distantly but at the same time 11 out of 12 interviewees have found at least one who helped them to some extent and this should be seen as effective up to a point. These so-called "Good" social workers tended to have specific characteristics: a positive attitude, willingness to try to find resources, to provide information concerning benefits and services as well as a "warm" relationship. They also treated users with respect, developed a close relationship with them and tried to use resources to the users' advantage.

Nicky had met a number of social workers in different services:

*“The social worker (A) in CWD was very effective; she was perfect, she helped me a lot, she talked to me and treated me as a human being, she cared about my problems and she did everything she could to find a job for me, to give me the benefits, and she knew a number of services and told me about them, we have already had a number of meetings and I can still go and talk to her whenever I face.*

*In the same office there was another social worker (B) that I had contacted in the past. She was very slow, doing everything lazily, she did nothing while being very distant, very cold, she didn't care, she took ages to write the report. The (A) social worker saw that and tried very gently to intervene so I have now social worker (A), I am very lucky. I had another social worker from the same CWD, social worker (C,) the only thing that she did was to give me the benefit and send me to other services.*

*But I liked the fact that she didn't come to my house (for more see social investigation chapter)... The social workers from the church were awful and they treated me like a shit, I don't want to go again but I have to... Other social workers that I visited knew nothing about benefits and services. The most effective social worker for me is social worker A in CWD and another one in Germany who didn't ask many questions, she didn't ask me why I was in their country or anything, she just listened to me, tried to find solutions, and finally they put the benefit directly into my account. These two social workers were the most effective; the others did nothing”*

Nicolas:

*“Although I had a fight with the social worker as you saw before, concerning her sudden visit to my house, she gave me a lot of information today. She told me about other services and benefits, I appreciate that as she could tell me nothing, I gained some information today, and this is something. But, in general so far in my life social workers haven't been effective for my problems with the exception of a student in the jail who informed me of many services I could refer to after getting out of jail”*

7 out of the 12 user interviewees described social work as ineffective in solving their long-term problems. At the same time, all of them had the experience of meeting a “good” social worker.

Maritsa:

*“I have been to the CWD asking for benefit, I have heard from neighbours about it, therefore I visited the CWD and the clerks told me ‘what are you talking about? We*

*don't provide benefits', and then I visited the social workers in the municipality so they mediated between the CWD and me and I got the benefit.. Also, the head of the department in the CWD sent some documents to the ministry so that I could get the benefit for the rent because they had refused to give it to me, God bless her. My son and I have many difficulties, we hardly survive, I am 77 years old and I clean houses, what will happen to my son if I die? Who will listen to our problems and do something? The state knows who the poor are, why don't they help us? ... ok, the girls at the municipality and the CWD did their best...but our problems still remain, we hardly survive"*

4 of the users-interviewees were Roma, who were interviewed in their camp:

Maria:

*"The social worker here in the health centre is very good, we have no complaint, she tries to help. You can see that even in the way she talks to us; this is very important for us (the gypsies), the way that she treats us when we go to her office and tries to solve the problems with our papers, to give us food, to do whatever she can. Also, the social worker at the municipality does whatever she can to help us, you feel that she is one of us, but her contract with the municipality was over"*

Maria's statement was verified by both Tasos and Vassilis who also described the social workers as "good' women/ girls:

Vassilis:

*"To be a social worker is not just a profession it is a vocation. Those who sit in their offices don't confront us as human beings, they listen to us for 2 or 3 minutes but they don't really hear what we are saying, we cannot share our problems with them so they don't give us things"*

Tasos:

*"The social workers in the CWDs came here for a while and never came back again. We have many problems here, our children live with rats and the living conditions are awful in the camp. They didn't work with us for a long period, we just talked for a while and that's it. Is this social work?...I remember once a social work student came here and saw the rats, she was shocked, and I told her: "What did you expect to see, hamsters? We don't live in luxury here. Tell these things to your classmates students, tell them not to become social workers if they don't really want it, tell them to quit the school now, this work is not for everyone, tell social workers to leave their offices and come here to see our living conditions, to do something about it..."*

*But, on the other hand, it is also our own fault that we don't act collectively to demand our rights, we have problems getting organized, we have to do something all together along with social workers"*

The organizational constraints and the bad working conditions in CWDs have direct consequences upon the users. They see overworked social workers coming to their camp only once while their living conditions are very bad and none of their long-term problems are solved. They question the nature of social work and reject the model of a bureaucratic social worker. Vassilis also points out the students' lack of training in dealing with the real living conditions of gypsies and the urgent need for social workers who love and care for this profession; issues that are related to social work education and need further attention by the social work academia in Greece.

Although Vassilis is critical of the role of social workers he also criticizes the attitudes of the gypsies and their incompetence in being organized collectively. The social workers' haste was mentioned by other users as well such as lone mothers and people with mental health problems. Undoubtedly, workload is an important factor which prevents social workers from spending more time in the community. Although services such as SSDs in municipalities and CWDs are, in theory, those that should work more in the community than the offices, the understaffed services, paperwork and bureaucratic procedures are a hindrance to spending more time in the community.

Fotini:

*"The girls (social workers in the municipality) were very good. They informed me about the benefits this was very good, and they did all the necessary papers very quickly, I liked that, they seemed to care... But that's it, we didn't have further cooperation, we didn't talk more about my problems about my efforts to find a job, a place to leave the children so that I can work, they didn't inform me of other programmes, I don't really know if they do such things, but if they did, it would be helpful....Now, I don't see them at all, it seems that they have disappeared, why should I go to the SSDs? They gave me a benefit, they did what they could but they didn't inform me of other services or programmes"*

Still, most of the users see social work as ineffective in solving their long term problems. Some of them recognize the limitations and monitoring control that social workers confront but on the other hand, the majority criticized the social workers'

distant formal official behaviour. All of them, with the exception of Cesaria, had at least one positive experience of a social worker who was seen as effective.

Cesaria:

*“I don’t know whether social workers are effective or not, I only just know that they did nothing more for me than provide me with a small benefit after months... Even for a little money here in CWD you have to wait. The social workers keep telling me that I have to wait for two months to get it but I have also tried in the past to get in touch with social workers, they don’t help”*

Four of the interviewees were so desperate during the interviews that they burst into tears while others tried to use irony and humour in order to describe their dead-ends. Two out of the twelve interviewees described clearly social work as ineffective to solve their urgent problems as described below by the most representative answer:

Katerina:

*“I don’t think that social workers are effective. I think that they do their job distantly, maybe they are more sensitive than other clerks but at the end of the day they are clerks. I don’t know what to say ... in CWD, the civil servants’ behaviour was awful while social workers were ok -they weren’t aggressive...I was lucky to find Helen, she did a lot for me and the way that she talked to me, her efforts were very important for me but she did not solve my problems”*

Is it enough for “good social work” to remain in the provision of a benefit and information and have a close and warm relationship with the user? Is this the mission and aim of social work? Has social work become the wheel of a bureaucratic machine which at best provides only a small benefit and then the co-operation stops? What kind of social work is effective? We will now proceed to consider the views of the users as to what kind of social work they want and could be seen as effective.

## **What kind of social work is seen as effective from the users' point of view?**

- *Need for pressing above – Collective action*

Three of the users mentioned that it is imperative social workers take action in order to exert pressure on policy makers to change users' living conditions, alleviate their poverty and increase limited benefits.

Katerina:

*“Social workers should press those above them. They see that I cannot survive on these limited benefits. Who will press politicians to change things if not social workers? They see the reality, the injustice that we face; the divorced women who are totally unprotected...What is also very important is social workers' manners, they might give us just a small benefit but it is their behaviour that will make me feel like a shit or a respected person. Fortunately, the social worker here in the municipality had asked the employees in the supermarket not to ask questions when I use the vouchers.... There are several ways to help us; to talk with us, to be communicative, to care but also to press the politicians to provide us with a minimum income per month, to release us from paying the water bill or municipal rates, things like that...But it's also our own responsibility to press politicians, we shouldn't remain silent”*

Nicolas:

*“I would like the social worker to listen to me, to understand my difficulties, to tell those above in the state about cases like mine and do something. To be co-operative with me and tell me what she can do what her limits are. But at least, not be formal doing her job like being in an industry, they learned a way of work and they do it copy-paste, this is not ok for me. It shouldn't be like this...I don't know, we need to do something all together, both users and social workers, to get over the obstacles and difficulties”*

Vassilis:

*“It's not easy to gain a gypsy's trust why should I tell the secret of the family to a social worker? She has to come closer to us, to sit with us, have a coffee with us not in an official way, to work door to door in the camp, to understand what we say, what we feel otherwise we don't accept them. It's not easy to accept someone in our house. Besides, they should do something to change our living conditions, to help us*

*have a playground for our children, a leisure centre for our teenagers - as they have no place to go and nobody accepts gypsies in their café, to go door to door to inform women about the PAP test - women here are afraid to go to the doctor's, to inform us about the funded programmes by EU for the gypsies - Social workers should say to those above that gypsies do not have even a wc, how can we possibly survive? How is it possible that other municipalities have programmes funded by EU for the gypsies? I know how it is a matter of clientilistic relations. Politicians come here only for gaining votes, nothing more. But we also need to try harder, we, the gypsies, need to make more efforts to be integrated, we have problems, we don't act collectively, although we have power, we don't really know it"*

The above statement describes the need for social workers to fight for the rights of their users. Social work that struggles to change the living conditions of its users by pressing for reform is described as effective. This "pressure to those above" should be combined with a close relationship with the user. They need a social worker who can understand, be empathetic, talk to them clearly and honestly about the existing limitations, be on their side, work door to door in the community and experience and understand in depth their situation.

Users need structural changes in their lives and describe the necessity for more collective action from both users and practitioners in order that the situation will change. It seems that at least some of users might be more open to acting more collectively and pressing policy makers for more humane and just policies. That the above interviewees criticized their own attitudes and acknowledged that they need to act and press more the policy makers and politicians in their area shows that they have considered these issues. Some of them such as the Roma in the camp had made repeated attempts to get organized as a group but there were rather unsuccessful.

Interestingly the findings demonstrate that some of the social workers (three in total) also perceive collective action in coalition with the users as one of the effective ways for changing the situation for both practitioners and users. This is important and could be seen as a hope for the future of social work.

Nicky asks for change on various levels. She asks for respect and dignity with regard to the struggle for structural changes:

- *"We want humane treatment and respect"*

Nicky:

*“I would like social workers not to have this formal, behaviour. I don’t want them to behave as accountants, I don’t want them to investigate, ok, they have to ask some questions but not to ask me so many things about my life, I want them to know the services and resources and to know how to guide me, I don’t want them to believe that I am a worthless person or to make judgments about me, I want humane treatment, I was lucky enough to cooperate with such social workers. One of them came to my house, saw that I had nothing, I don’t know what she did but after a few days she brought me pans, money and food. She brought me what I needed, nobody else did that. I want them to care, to try to use all the resources that they have. I think that they do just temporary things, provide a relief but they don’t act to change things. I would like social workers to change, it is necessary they play a new role in the society today. I don’t know what the code of social workers says. It’s good that you do this research because I want my voice to be heard, I have cried a lot over the behaviour of social workers...”*

Cesaria makes a very similar point:

*“Respect is all that I ask for. The social services here do not care; social workers just kill time in their offices. Why don’t social services provide houses for the people here? In Ethiopia social services help people more than Greek social services do here. I need help not just discussion with social workers; I need help to survive...  
This country is very bad for black people”*

- *“We just need a roof and a WC... we need help to survive”*

In total, four of the interviewed women expressed clearly their material needs when they were asked what kind of social work is effective and what they would like from social workers.

Antigone:

*“I would like help to change my living conditions. Our kids, what kind of future do they have? I would like social workers to come closer to us to see how we live and do something; things are very difficult for the gypsies. I don’t know what else to say, I don’t know exactly what they can do”*

Maritsa:

*“We need help to survive...”*



The provision of material help, financial help and the improvement of the living conditions are seen by the users as the basic demands for effective social work. Practically, the users need structural changes in their lives which presuppose absence of poverty and deprivation. Two users mentioned their need for socialization and the creation of groups. For example, Fotini proposes the creation of a group for lone mothers that can be helpful in practical issues as well:

Fotini:

*“I would like to have meetings with other people who face similar problems to mine, to discuss our problems all together, it might be helpful in our efforts to find solutions, to find a job, to have a person to stay with our children while we are at work. We are many lone mothers in Greece, women are embarrassed to say this in Greece but I know that we are many.*

Users seem to view social workers positively as people with the potential to make the difference and ask for a deeper and more essential co-operation with them but they undoubtedly ask for a different kind of social work which is not restricted and exhausted in the model of the “good woman”. As Lavalette and Ferguson (2007:4) argue:

*“...the experience of social work practice in societies structured by inequality and oppression means that, more than any other welfare profession, we work closely with people whose lives are blighted by forces beyond their control. In these circumstances dominant models of practice offer little in the way of long term-solutions and explanations which attempt to pathologise service users as worthless-they do not offer solutions to the problems individuals face, indeed they make their lives worse”.*

For the majority of the users in Greece, the help received from social workers is welcome and positive but ineffective with respect to the long-term problems that they face. In Greece, users' lives become worse because of those social workers who blame the victim, (Becker, 1988) and who hold negative attitudes towards the poor and behave with no respect and dignity. This is not only unacceptable to users but also contrary to the internationally recognized Code of Ethics in social work (IFSW and IASSW, 2004) as it was previously discussed.

One could argue that these are “bad” social workers who don't work in accordance with the ethical commitment of social work values. I disagree with this point of view. The “bad” social work practice should not be seen as solely the responsibility of the

individual social worker but should be correlated with a number of wider political and social factors which influence social work practice.

## **What are the perspectives of social workers on effective practice?**

The improvement in working conditions was mentioned by all social workers and particularly in the CWDs it was a decisive factor:

Vassiliki:

*“It is crucial we have a better building with private offices for interviews and a sufficient number of social workers. Then, I wouldn’t see people only once just to discuss their candidature for the benefit, I could work more systematically with them, to help them stand on their feet, to find a job”*

Moreover, all social workers in both CWDs and municipalities argue that there is a crucial need for an organized and staffed welfare sector with welfare structures based on the needs of groups of population.

- *Change of policy*

In the following there is a presentation of the most representative arguments:

Artemis:

*“We need state social policy”*

Virginia:

*“Benefits, finding a job for the people, more professionals, a network of services.”*

Jane:

*“We need preventative programmes in the community; we need social workers in the schools. To have an interdisciplinary team of professionals in the CWD. To have a team of professionals in the camps of gypsies... To give information to the people, they don’t know; we need to advertise the CWDs and the programmes; users need to know their rights because in this way they can make demands on the administrative staff. Today, it is only by chance that the poor find out about welfare programmes; There should be provisions for the poor. For example enough food, money to pay their bills and support. There is also a need our services to be connected with other services. But also we need to have the opportunity to work with groups. Although some things can be “fixed” the problem of unemployment is very serious, this cannot be solved through social work”*

Christine:

*“If there is no social welfare, what can we do? We are not magicians, how can we solve the problems if we don’t have any means? There is the need to work constantly on the cases, but how is it possible to do that when more and more cases come to your office? You work on the case to some extent and then you stop because there are many new cases that you have to see”*

Other social workers mentioned the need for the creation of groups for users but also the need for an inter-professional team and a network of services in the community. Importantly, the majority of the social workers see it as crucial to have the time and the resources in order to develop co-operation with the user.

- *Time and resources for co-operation with the users*

Dimitra:

*“First of all, if I had better conditions, meaning place and time, and was properly informed about the programmes and services that exist in the community and in the municipalities I would be able to dedicate more time to the people in order to talk in a proper place and work in more depth with them”*

In municipalities, social workers added two other issues, one concerning legislation of social work and the other the termination of the clientilistic interventions of politicians. This subject was also expressed by social workers in HiHPs. The most representative response is given by Sofia:

- *Legislation of SSD in municipalities*

Sofia:

*“The work of social workers should be clearly legislated in the municipalities. There should also be a Central Social Service Department with people who know the field, because at the moment the heads of the departments and the directors are administrative staff. But also we need substructures; there is the need to fund the welfare sector, with money for social policy, money given exclusively for programmes in the community”*

Interestingly only 2 out of the 20 interviewed social workers referred to the need for change in the way that social workers work with the user.

Vicky:

*“If you want to help, you need to know what your mistakes are during the interview, to work on these mistakes and to believe that you can help by the interview. I believe that my colleagues have no idea how badly they work. Anyone with less knowledge could offer the quality of work that we do.. We do not utilize what we know, what is asked from us is just to do social control. We do not think that there is anything else you can do but just to create a kind of relationship with the user and that’s it. The conditions here facilitate this, but social workers don’t know what else to do and how to support people, while those above in the hierarchy don’t let us. We need many changes in the structure and hierarchy of services but we, social workers, need to change the way that we work with people...”*

To sum up, the suggestions and demands made by social workers could be classified in two categories; the first concerning changes in policy and reforms in the internal organization of the SSDs, and the second concerning changes in social work.

The majority of the suggestions made by social workers is at the level of social policy and can be seen as demands on the government and welfare politics:

- *Changes in social policy:*

- A rise in benefits.
- Reform of the welfare structures.
- An organized long-term social policy.
- Social services in the community based on the different needs of the groups of population (homeless, handicapped, elderly) which services should also be co-ordinated.
- Jobs for the unemployed.
- Better working conditions for the practitioners.
- Less bureaucracy and more time for direct contact with the users.
- Appropriately staffed social services and inter-professional teams.
- Termination of the intervention of politicians in social work practice and their clientilistic relations (particularly in the municipalities).
- Legalization of the social services in municipalities.

All the above suggestions/demands by social workers for a more effective social work practice are political demands. They are closely related to governmental policy which restricts the funding of the public welfare sector and increasingly transfers the

responsibility of care to NGOs or the private sector. These political demands not only prove the link between social work and politics but also show a “path” for a more effective social work that is absolutely necessary for Greece and which would place social work in the front line in advocating for the rights and dignity for both social services and its users.

Moreover, all the above demands of the practitioners are seen by them as preconditions to have the time and resources needed for working effectively with their users.

- *'Internal' changes to Greek social work:*

- Empowerment and emancipation of the users.
- Group-creating.
- Co-ordination among services.
- Inter-professional teams.
- Co-operation with the users.

For the “internal” reform of SSDs social workers suggested more creative ways of working with the users. These changes are seen as possible by the practitioners only if the general context changes. However, in the specific research only three social workers suggest collective action as a means of demanding and changing social policy while the majority is rather demoralized and pessimistic. Ioanna’s statement is one of the most representative of all social workers’ interviews in which the most frequently repeated phrase is the second one *“Nobody cares about the welfare sector. I don’t think that things will change”*

Ioanna:

*“Many things could change but there is no will. The welfare sector is the scapegoat. Nobody cares about the welfare sector. I don’t think that things will change”*

This pessimistic point of view of the practitioners is linked with their day to day experience of an abandoned welfare sector but also with their experiences and feelings about their work.

### **So, how do social workers feel about their work?**

All the social workers who I interviewed liked the part of the work that involved contact with the users. With no exception this was their basic source of satisfaction. Specifically, it was evident that 7 out of the 20 social workers felt positively about their work, although they referred to a number of problems when the question was asked. These social workers (two of them were sociologists who worked as social workers) are some of the youngest in the sample and didn't have many years of social work experience with the exception of two social workers in CWDs.

Rebecca:

*"Yes I do like my job. Ok, I don't like the part of the stink in the houses, but I do like the action. You experience great disappointment in this job but you also have the opportunity to get a lot of satisfaction. It doesn't matter if no one else can see it, you also take from the people; when a person tries to stand on their feet and you open a small window to them. As social workers, we do feel the need to save the world, we may not act so much on that but there is still the need to help and to push things forward. We do need to make changes but we don't have this opportunity. I do like the contact with the people, and I do like trying to find out solutions. It's also very moving when you hear people's stories; it's a very deep feeling. However, I don't know for how many years I will have the courage to do this job. I have the feeling that it is a job that you simply can't stand doing for many years under these conditions, you gradually get tired"*

Interestingly, these practitioners referred mainly to the part of social work that involved the contact with the user as the source of their satisfaction. Among these seven practitioners three of them worked in HiHP where they highlighted the issue of contact with the users but they also referred to their working conditions and especially the problem of insecurity that they face in their work due to a lack of stable funding.

Vivian:

*"I do like my job a lot. I love working with the elderly. But I don't like the feeling of insecurity caused by both the fact that I don't know whether I will have a job next year, and the fact that that I haven't been paid for 6 months. These things make my colleagues and I feel tired. You feel disappointed and as you know; when you face*

*problems such as how to pay your bills you can't say you come to work feeling content"*

The insecurity of the semi-public sector of HiHP forced some practitioners such as Voula to quit their job and move to a post in a CWD. However, in the public sector as well some of the practitioners (four in total) looked for a way to get out of the CWDs and the municipality. Two of them managed to leave CWDs whilst this thesis was being written:

Dimitra:

*"Contented? No contented not at all, not even a little. I have put on 25 kilos in the 7 years that I have been here; I think that this describes everything"*

Dimitra was trying to find ways to get out of the county and be transferred to another service. She managed to do that in 2007. Other social workers such as Anna also quit their job in the CWDs. In general, the social workers were highly stressed and expressed anger and sadness:

Vassiliki:

*"I do like my job and this is the reason why I feel sad. If I didn't love this job, I could say to myself "do what you have to do and that's it". But when you love what you do, you want to do your best, not for yourself but for the user, for the user"*

Helen:

*"I am not content with my work; this is not what I had expected social work to be this is not how I had dreamt social work would be. Ok, the conditions are ok, the colleagues are good, I have the freedom to do things. But, despite the fact that there are these positives in this service, you don't make any serious change. I would like to have the opportunity to intervene more. I wanted to be able as a social worker to bring about change, to help people to change, this cannot happen in Greece.*

*I thought that it would be better, that we could have more possibilities as professionals...that's what I thought.*

*And this is the reason why I want to leave the job and stop being a social worker. You ...have to be patient for many years; you see things that slightly change year by year, the things that we can do for our users are TINY..."*

Helen referred to her perception of a profession that could achieve social change, and change people's lives. Over the years, she realized that social change can't be brought about by social work practice and therefore she is now one of those who are



looking for a way to quit social work. The transformation of social work to a bureaucratic profession is expressed by Aggeliki:

*“During the first 10 years that I worked in the counties I was very proud to be a social worker, I was really happy. Gradually, I realized that I am just a clerk and I just have to do the job, my opinion doesn’t count, nobody takes into consideration my suggestions. I am trying not to be formal and to do whatever I can... I am 80% dissatisfied, and 20% satisfied with my work here. I am satisfied when I really do social work and can be effective no matter how much time and energy I spend on a case but when I am just a clerk...”*

The same miserable atmosphere in CWDs, lack of support, no solutions to people’s problems the way that the system works were also pointed out by other social workers:

Nancy:

*“I do like working with the users all these years, I have never had a problem with the users. The problem is in here, they are breaking you down into pieces, you find many difficulties here caused by the director and the head of the department, and you have to struggle every day to secure a benefit for the users, the work here alienates you. You gradually become a different person, you do not demand, there is the heavy workload with too many cases, nobody cares, too much bureaucracy. The only good thing is that there is freedom in the way you choose to work. The head of the department has no idea on how to check you and this is a good thing, otherwise she would cut more benefits”*

The majority of the social workers describe more or less similar situations and experiences. All of them loved their work with the users and see this contact as valuable however, the workload, bureaucracy, isolation, lack of support gradually contributes to their becoming a “different person”. Nancy referred to the concept of alienation as a gradual procedure that turns the social worker into another person. We will examine this concept at the end of the chapter but before this, the consequences for social workers both in their professional and private life will be considered.

To be more specific, one of the social workers described how psychosomatic symptoms led her to leaving her job while other social workers reported that they cannot sleep during the night, and that they feel unhappy and depressed.

Jane:

*"I don't work in the way that I wanted to. There are many nights that I cannot sleep because I think about a case who might burn down their house, or a case of child abuse. I like the part of the work with the users, but things here are difficult. Each of us is alone, each of us does whatever she thinks is the best but we are alone in this struggle"*

Additionally, the social workers seem to be highly stressed while some of them mentioned symptoms of depression.

Ioanna:

*"I used to be a happy person, but look at me now, I am depressed, ok, I knew people who come here wouldn't tell me happy stories, but at least I want to have something to give - to have a solution, but I have nothing"*

In literature, the sources of satisfaction according to Balloch et al (1998), Penna et al (1995) stem from the feeling that they as social workers have helped their users, and the knowledge that a case makes good progress. In the Greek context, Papadaki (2005:212) refers to "*intrinsic work aspects*" in social work as sources of satisfaction such as: "*Working with clients...the challenge the work provides...the feeling of self-actualization/success as a professional...*" and the contribution of work to their personal growth were amongst the key aspects of social workers' job satisfaction (study 1). According to the findings of study 2 (Papadaki, 2005), social workers were also satisfied by the intrinsic work aspects (communication with clients and feedback/recognition from clients) and with the support they had from other social workers. These findings are in accordance with the present research; however Papadakis' research revealed an overall satisfaction amongst social workers with their work (Papadaki & Papadaki, 2006). These differences could be explained to some extent by the fact that Papadaki's research applied to a number of services<sup>64</sup> in the state sector and not exclusively to CWDs and municipalities where the abandonment of the welfare sector is most intensive and extreme.

This research reveals that the majority of social workers feel desperate, isolated, exhausted and disappointed. Some of them came to the profession with the expectation that they would make a difference to people's lives but gradually came to

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<sup>64</sup> "36.1% of the respondents worked in health/mental health services, 26.2% worked in Community Centers for the Aged, 18% worked in Social Welfare Centers, 16.4% worked in delinquency programmes and only 3.3% worked in programmes for the handicapped" (Papadaki & Papadaki, 2006:485).

wondering whether there is a slight if any possibility to change things or they will simply turn into “clerks” who do bureaucratic work. Others describe stress, with severe consequences for their emotional well being and, difficulties in sleeping and other psychosomatic symptoms. Particularly in the English literature, a number of organizational factors have been found to be related to the working stress of social workers. Bradley & Sutherland (1995) refer to a number of organizational factors such as the lack of resources to meet the problems of users, as well as excessive paperwork and time pressure. Others such as Collings & Murray (1996) have shown a main source of stress for social workers was their inability to solve users’ problems, as well as too much administration and paperwork. McLean (1999) highlighted the link between the stress of social workers and the lack of resources required for quality services for users. As far as it concerns Greece as Papadaki (2005:58) puts it:

*“The main sources of social workers’ stress were: not being able to give users what they needed and the accountability or responsibility they had without having power.”*

Papadaki’s research into state social services in Crete is a significant contribution that verifies many of the findings of this thesis. To be more specific, she refers to the “extrinsic” factors that affected social work practice and were also sources of stress including

*“limited organisational resources; heavy and increased workload; lack of support and supervision...lack of opportunities to affect programmes in order to meet client’s needs...limited professional recognition ...job routine...limited freedom and lack of respect and recognition by their superiors”* as well as *“lack of autonomy”*

(Papadaki, 2005:212-213).

Furthermore, she highlights the inadequacy of welfare programmes to respond to users’ needs as a major stress factor for social workers given that they have the responsibility for helping their users. Papadaki’s findings concerning the sources of dissatisfaction and stress on social workers seem to be in accordance with the findings of this research project.

Moreover, Jones’ research into 40 “front-line” social workers in local authorities in UK revealed a great depth of frustration and stress amongst social workers emanating “from above” meaning government policy and agency. Similarly, in Greece social workers refer to the political factors that affect their practice concerning the abandonment of the welfare sector by the state as well as by their

superiors and the atmosphere in SSDs that divert them from doing real social work and bringing about any positive changes. Finally, social workers referred to a gradual process that makes them depressed, bureaucratic and alienated. The concept of alienation<sup>65</sup> in social work has been discussed by Ferguson and Lavalette. They argue that Marx's concept of alienation is realized at all levels of social work and they provided specific examples of loss of control by social workers over their work, "alienated" relations with its users, and isolation. As they argue:

*"The concept of alienation, by contrast, analyses the human anguish, isolation, violence and competition that is generated by the society we live in—it locates the individual within the totality of the dominant social relations within society—and crucially, therefore, it offers a vision of a world free from alienation"*

(Ferguson & Lavalette, 2004:309)

The Marxist concept of alienation is useful insofar as it provides a more holistic approach that takes into consideration the wider social relations under capitalism rather than focusing on concepts such as work related stress and individual "burn-out" which tend to dominate the social work literature on stress and frustration.

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<sup>65</sup> Alienation in Marxism is referred to on 4 levels: Alienation from the "product" of work, from the "labour procedure", from our human nature and from fellow human beings (Fromm, 1973, 1975).

## Summary

To sum up, the effectiveness of social work practice has been discussed through the “voices” of both social workers and users. The majority of the social workers in HiHPs see their work as effective. On the contrary, the majority of the interviewees in CWDs and municipalities argue that their work is effective only for some of their users while their long-term problem of poverty is left untouched. These social workers also highlighted the absence and abandonment of the welfare sector as well as the absence of social policy as one of the most important factors that has direct consequences for their work and the lives of the users. The discussion of effectiveness through the voices of both social workers and users led to what Lishman argue about evaluation “.... which leads to critiques of the political context in which practice and programmes developed and are provided” (Lishman, 1999:4).

In parallel, users see little if no change in their long term problems, after social work intervention. They acknowledge the attempts of social workers and recognize their limitations due to their superiors’ control although the majority of them had met at least one “good” social worker. They tended to see social workers as “good women/girls” who try to do their best but they don’t see any essential change in their life. However, users seem to be positive about social workers in general and ask for a closer and long term co-operation which will respond to their needs. The effective social worker has specific characteristics. They are able to create a close relationship, show respect towards the user, they are not judgmental, they keep long term contact with the users and they are valuable sources of information and support. They also focus on a number of practical ways in order to offer help to those with financial difficulties. This is regarded as an effective social work for the users.

In addition, some of the users suggest that effective social work should include pressure on policy makers and politicians. These users suggest a more collective action by social workers while they also refer to their own responsibility for not having acted collectively so far. However, few social workers refer to collective action as a way of changing this depressing picture of “state” social work in Greece. The majority seem to be rather pessimistic and powerless with limited stamina for pressing policy makers and politicians. These findings are correlated with their views and feelings about their work. All the social workers who were interviewed

expressed that contact and work with the user is the most significant source of their happiness and satisfaction, although their users face multiple long term problems. The majority of the interviewed social workers seem to be desperate emotionally exhausted, with little control over their work, isolated, while they have limited resources for responding to the demands of their users. Many of them referred to problems of their health such as psychosomatic symptoms, stress during the day and the night while in total 4 of them tried to find a way to get out of their agencies. The causes referred to the general atmosphere in CWDs, the lack of means and resources for helping the users. Furthermore issues of high workload, bad working conditions, understaffed social services, and lack of welfare structures, low benefits and the general neglect of social welfare sector were identified as significant factors inhibiting their effectiveness. Consequently their suggestions for a more effective social work practice referred mainly to (political) changes in welfare sector and social policy. Particularly in municipalities the need to reduce the clientilistic intervention of politicians in their work as well as the legislation of social services in municipalities were seen as necessary steps for changing the picture. In addition in semi-public sector of HiHPs social workers suggest the need for interdisciplinary teams, an end to the insecurity of their work, and the importance of a regular salary as important preconditions for an effective service. Some of the “state” social workers (and users as well) suggest the need for working more intensively together with users, creating groups, and changing discriminatory attitudes towards users, in order to forge a meaningful relationship with the users, which in turn would empower them.

The link between social work and politics is more than apparent throughout the findings. The state policy through the governments of both PASOK and Nea Dimokratia systematically ignored the state welfare sector from the middle of 1980's and onwards. The consequences of this policy are all too apparent in Greece, where the gap between the rich and the poor is growing, with over one third of the population living under the official limit of poverty. The poorest are the principal users of SSDs but social work can do nothing but provide temporary relief for some of the users. The problems and dead ends that I faced as a practitioner in NGO's in my attempt to make positive changes in users' lives are similar to but not as intensive as in the state welfare sector. Social work and social workers seem to be in a difficult position.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions and discussion

The main objective of this study has been the in depth understanding and critical analysis of contemporary (state) social work practice in Greece. Additionally, the research attempted to reveal the reality of the SSDs and make audible the “voice” of both social workers and users whereas it also attempted to illuminate the “how” and “why” of social work practice in CWDs and municipalities.

In general, there is limited social work research in Greece with critical approaches being scarce whereas the “voice” of the users is almost nonexistent. The thesis revealed several aspects of contemporary social work practice in Greece with regard to the political and social context. More specifically, the findings of the research illustrate that (state) SSDs and social work in Greece are neglected. There is a lack of staff and co-ordination of services, limited resources in the SSDs for helping users effectively, while social workers are totally unsupported with no supervision and in-service training and with a wide range of responsibilities. Moreover, working conditions in both public (CWDs and municipalities) and semi-public (HiHPs) services are hard. The former have to cope with a heavy workload, limited equipment and inadequate space in their offices, while the latter experience the “flexible” forms of work -indicated by EU’s policy- which practically lead social workers to being unpaid for months and facing job insecurity.

Additionally, in contemporary Greece not only is (state) social work abandoned but also practitioners face increased tension day to day and contradictions in their agencies concerning their relations with the hierarchy. Therefore, while in the CWDs the hierarchy’s objectives varied from disinterest to control, in the municipalities as well as in HiHPs, intervention by politicians was mainly with a view to promoting clientilistic relations led to political patronage of social work. This could be partly explained due to the persistence of clientilism in Greece generally, however to my mind, it is an integral part of the function of the state SSDs in capitalistic societies through a class specific welfare system. This specific research revealed the versatile effect which politics has on social work through its legislative and organizational context, the welfare policies as well as through the interventions of politicians at a local authority level.

Contemporary social work in Greece is weak; with low status, limited research and literature. However, it seems that this history of weakness is long and closely linked with on-going political developments, contrary to the so-called “neutrality” of the profession. Historically, Greek social work in its initial steps followed a top-down course adopting the Anglo-American model enriched by the Christianity ideology. The above ideological basis was in accordance with political agitation in Greek history, a period where leftists were chased and the “certificate of morality” for future employees in the public sector excluded until 1974 whoever belonged to the left (Katrougalos, 1996). During the dictatorship 1967-1973, the first public social work colleges appeared (KATEE) highlighting the interest of junta in social welfare and social work. In periods of political instability such as the post-Second World War period and at least until the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974 the state kept a close eye on social work (Ioakimidis, 2008).

Similarly, during the following decades the march of political events affected welfare and social work. In 1980s after the assumption of power by PASOK the first steps in the formation of the welfare state were taken, yet the social provision wasn't channelled into organizing social services. The government of PASOK in the 1980s showed particular interest in the field of social provision such as the National Health System and pensions which could have direct results as well as gain recognition by the people who demanded “change”, (the main slogan used by PASOK), rather than invest in the foundation and development of social services. In any case, social services and social work seem to have been out of the priorities of the state during the 1980's signified by the high rate of unemployment in the profession (Ioakimidis, 2008). The picture deteriorated rapidly during the 1990s when major reforms took place following the EU guidelines which imposed restrictions on and curtailments of public expenditure. However, the “rediscovery of social work” (Ioakimidis, 2008) is in accordance with the rhetoric of civil society and puts the profession in a “new era” where the need for workers in NGO's and programmes funded by the EU has upgraded the profession. In parallel, private enterprises have gradually entered the care sector and practitioners face the first consequences of EU policy that is, job insecurity, short-term contracts and so on with one of the best examples being the HiHP project as it was shown in this research. Accordingly, in the early years of 2000s the private welfare sector and NGO's had greater financial support by the state – compared with that of the previous years- while on the other hand, the funding of



public organizations under the control of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity was considerably reduced (Petmesidou, 2006b).

The under funding of the SSDs is nothing but the results of the policies that ignore systematically the most deprived, their carers and social services in a class specified welfare system. Moreover, in contemporary Greece these phenomena are in accordance with the dominant neo-liberal policies of the EU for less public services while the neglect of state social services is part of the general usual method practiced by Greek capitalism: Namely, the public services are increasingly abandoned while simultaneously, private enterprises either enter the public sector or/and appear in the market. The vulnerabilities of social work, however, are not only due to the politics of welfare. Another significant factor is the profile of the users of the SSDs. Specifically, one of the central findings of this research is that the majority of the users are among the poorest and the most marginalized in society, if not the “lumpen”. The lack of users’ power both on a personal and political level cannot but be reflected in social work. If social work’s clients are the poor, it comes as no surprise that the abandonment of the SSDs and social work is linked with the class specific character of the profession (Jones, 1998).

Nevertheless, Greek social work literature has paid little attention to the close link between social work and poverty. As I argued in the thesis, this is correlated to the limited social work research, as well as to the fact that the social work education focuses on psychodynamic and individualistic approaches instead of acknowledging the importance of politics to social workers and users. From this point of view, this research contributes to revealing the reality in the SSDs and social work practice and highlighting the significance of the link between social work poverty and politics in Greece. Moreover, the significance of this contribution is proportionate to the reality of poverty in Greece. On national level, the rates of poverty seem to be the highest among the member-states of EU, (Papatheodorou & Petmesidou, 2006a) and the welfare provision by the state is restricted to very low if not humiliating benefits as it has been revealed (for example CPP benefit, EFS benefit and so on which are discussed in Chapter 4). Therefore, while on the one hand, inequality dominates Greek society, on the other hand, the response of social work to the poor reveals the contradictory role of the profession. Core actions of Greek social work such as the social investigation with regard to unannounced visits and social reports which are part of the assessment process for benefit receipt, clearly demonstrate the power of

social workers compared with that of the users. Moreover, according to the findings, the power (though limited) of the practitioner is also apparent through the procedures of defining who are the poor and who are deserving the benefit.

It seems as imperative that social workers become aware of poverty issues such as the structural causes of poverty and that social work itself examine critically its role with the poor with regard to the inequality and injustice of the system. Social workers' beliefs of the causes of poverty as well as their attitudes towards the poor affect significantly their actions and behaviour which in turn, as it has been shown through the users' "voice" and literature, have a clear impact on the latter. The state uses social workers as both censors and helpers but also as the "breakwater" for the pain of the poor. The therapy oriented model which according to Papadaki (2005) prevails in welfare services in Greece proves to be applied in a rather fragmentary way in the specific researched SSDs. Social work with individuals dominates yet in a non-systematic way while there are various attempts made by the practitioners to provide short-term and rather superficial relief for the pain of the poor.

A "silent" social work which deals with the most deprived is a convenient option for the state in order to maintain the status quo whereas such a role for the profession is in the opposite direction to its original aim of challenging unfair policies and struggling for social change and social justice. The findings demonstrate that although practitioners have made repeated attempts inside their agencies to achieve an increase in benefits and to cope with unfair policies, unsurprisingly, the hierarchical system is a serious obstacle to these attempts. However, their attempts have been rather fragmentary with neither a collective character nor in coalition with other trade unions or users' movements. Social work is almost absent from the public concern about social problems. To my mind, this is correlated with the narrow character of its union (Ioakimidis, 2008) the "culture of silence" which practitioners have in their agencies and prevents them from intervening for organizational changes (Papadaki, 2005). It is also correlated with the limited access to knowledge and particularly to alternatives theories of social work in Greece. Still, the person-oriented approaches dominant in social work training has little relevance to the Greek realities. It comes therefore as no surprise that the majority of the practitioners in this research argue that what they were taught and how they were trained in academic social work departments were mainly irrelevant to the reality out there. This is one more reflection of the weakness of Greek social work.

Unsurprisingly, the reality in the SSDs shows that many of the social workers are pessimistic about the future of welfare and social work; demoralized and highly stressed. Some of the practitioners seek ways to get out of the agencies while others had clearly developed psychological and psychosomatic problems. The concept of alienation has been adopted in this research which is in accordance with the general perspective of the researcher and explains sufficiently such phenomena in their social and political context rather than focusing on the responsibility of the individual. Still, given that practitioners are unsupported, emotionally exhausted and alienated it is crucial and a first priority to provide them with support, in-service training and access to knowledge of alternative theories and practices of social work. In this direction, academia has an important role to play, but this presupposes political consciousness in social work education understanding the interconnection of the social problems with the political factors.

However, social work struggles to survive and these attempts could be seen as a source of hope for social work. Although there are a number of organizational constraints and no systematic appliance of social work, social workers in their day to day practice, at least in their majority, attempt to do their best in such a restricted welfare system. Importantly, many of the practitioners act “in coalition” with the users, struggle to find resources, protect as much as they can the anonymity of the users and intervene as both advocates and mediators inside and outside the agencies. Moreover, many of the practitioners attempt to have a close relationship with the users and apply a more humanitarian social work. They feel sympathy and empathy for the users’ situation and try to be more creative in their everyday practice in order to find solutions for their users. Additionally, the vast majority enjoyed the contact with the users, a clear sign of their interest in their users and the profession whereas they also recognize the connection of the effectiveness of social work with the politics of welfare. This commitment of the practitioners to their users, uncovered in this research, is one of the hopes for the future of social work.

On the other hand, as it has been shown users welcome social workers who provide them with information and support, treat them with respect and dignity while they reject judgmental practitioners and in general bureaucratic social work. Interestingly, the findings demonstrate that at least some of the users seem to understand the limitations of the organizational context of the practitioners, an understanding which

reduces the gap between the worker and the user. Although the majority of the users argue that social work is barely effective in solving their long term problems still social workers are welcomed by the users who ask for a more stable and frequent co-operation with the practitioners into their community.

In this research, social workers and users had made a number of proposals for changing the picture in SSDs and for a more effective social work. The majority of these demands are connected with wider changes in social policy and political decisions. This is an important element which clearly demonstrates how the front line practitioners (Jones, 2001) connect social work with social policy. Interestingly, some of the users and social workers see their common collective action as a path to changing the picture in Greek welfare and SSDs. The common reality that both practitioners and users share in the SSDs as well as the practitioners' positive attempts and the users' positive attitudes towards the "good" social work demonstrate that not all has been lost.

However, the above actions and positive attitudes are not part of the general consciousness concerning the political nature of social problems and the need for action are condemned to remain sporadic, bringing about little change in users' lives. The problems of the under funded SSDs can only be solved by means of a wider political struggle which ensures that the most vulnerable and deprived in Greek society are given priority. These issues should be regarded as interconnected in a social and political environment that puts social workers and users in similar situations. In contemporary reality, social work is used as the "gatekeeper" or the "safeguard" of a system that reproduces injustice and inequality. However, a profession that acts in the society and its problems cannot be neutral not only due to its values but also due to the fact that it is interconnected with social and political changes that affect their users and the profession.

For these objectives to succeed, self-criticism and examination of the role of social work<sup>66</sup> are required. Besides, social work has to answer the question of what kind of social work is needed: The one that remains "silent" when it comes to the users' problems and the problematic structure and function of SSDs or another social work that struggles for social change and social justice and puts the needs of the people and their human and social rights as a top priority? In Greek literature, limited voices

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<sup>66</sup> Ioakimidis' (2008) research makes a significant contribution to the historical political role of social work in Greek context.

have brought to the foreground the need for struggling for social change and social justice. In my opinion, critical social work can contribute significantly to this direction by connecting the social problems of the users with the structural and political causes that create them and show a path to a more emancipatory and humanitarian social work.

This is more crucial than ever in contemporary Greece where the people face a “new era” of austerity. More specifically, in 2010, with the alibi of the financial crisis the Greek government announced the arrival of International Monetary Fund and on 15/04/2010 the Prime Minister G. Papandreou announced in parliament:

*“The International Monetary Fund is already here”* (Ethnos, 2010)

This statement marks a new era for Greece as the country is now under the supervision of both International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the EU for the observance of Stability Treaty. The country’s room for manoeuvre is significantly reduced as power is transferred to these trans-national bodies. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, these developments cannot be ignored as they lead to a raft of new measures which clearly signal that the burden of debt relief will fall disproportionately on the poor (curtailments of welfare benefits and pensions) and on workers in the public sector.

Rapid changes in the public sector are currently being implemented; Specifically, Pagalos the vice-president of the government announced the shrinkage of the public sector through specific measures such as *“curtailments in the salaries of the staff in public and private sector”*, *“promotion of synergy between the public and private sector”* the *“abolition of organizations in public sector”* and so on (Sokos, 2010:7). Moreover, reforms in the national insurance system will lead according to Romanias to the reduction of pensions for the elderly, and more ‘flexibility’ in working conditions (Romanias cited in Petropoulos, 2010). In contemporary Greece, ‘flexibility’ in the labour market is now more than ever apparent. As the Inspectorate of Labour announced, during the first 2 months of 2011 the flexible labour relations are now dominant in the labour market in Greece (Kondoroussi, 2011). In this research, the implications of flexible forms of work upon the people and social workers were clearly shown. In this new era, the implications will be even more serious.

In parallel, this austerity period is marked by major curtailments in salaries and pensions in 2010 followed by new curtailments during the first months of 2011

(Kada, 2011). The rate of unemployment is dangerously increasing (NSS, 2010). In the health sector mergers between hospitals and cuts to the funding of the health and education public sector are now a fact (News247gr, 2011).

Moreover, the new era also affects Local Government. During the first half of 2010 new reforms within the framework of a new plan called "Kallikratis" were announced by the government. Its agenda includes the abolition of CWDs (article 283 in Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2010) while in article 94 paragraph B a number of responsibilities which belonged to CWDs and SSDs such as the benefits for the disabled and the poor are to be transferred to the municipalities (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2010:90). While this chapter was being written the legislation of Kallikratis (Legislation 3852) was being gradually applied in municipalities and CWDs. The fact that - during the same period - social workers' and the reformed SSDs' responsibilities hadn't been clearly defined demonstrates once again the cursoriness and the lack of organization within the welfare sector. On the other hand, the central government continues to transfer as fast as possible its responsibility for the welfare, health and educational sector with limited funding and without long term social planning. This is certainly going to be problematic given the historic underfunding of Local Government. The implications for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable of the Greek society are likely to be dire. It seems that the "Kallikratis" reform will probably signal the total withdrawal of the central state's obligation to provide health, education and care for its citizens as it gradually transfers its responsibility to local authorities.

In this new era of austerity, social work has an important role to play. Not only due to the impact of the austerity policy upon the professionals and the SSDs but also due to the increasing poverty of the people, meaning the users of the SSDs. If the society suffers then it is crucial for social work to intervene in social problems and stand on the side of the oppressed. Social work needs to be activated socially and politically in order to be consistent with the values of a profession of social justice and social change (IFSW and IAASW, 2004). In this direction, the demand for social work to find its mission in 21<sup>st</sup> century is central to current radical and critical approaches. Ferguson (2008:132) for example, argues that there is the need to "*reclaim social work*" as a response to the crisis of the profession that has occurred due to the "*imposition of a business culture which is inimical to the values and practices of social work*". The onset of austerity politics in response to the fiscal crises in so

many European countries including Greece make it more than necessary for social work to reclaim its historical purpose. This position was particularly evident in the significant text entitled “Social work and social justice: a manifesto for a new engaged practice” written by a number of British academics in 2004 (Jones et al, 2004). The publication of the Manifesto was followed by a number of conferences in Liverpool under the title “*Social work: A profession worth fighting for?*” in which hundreds of practitioners, users, academics and students from different countries participated. These initiatives brought some new/old ideas about the importance of social work being connected with contemporary movements such as the social movements of users (disability and mental health) and global movements such as the anti-capitalist movement, against neo-liberalism or/and war issues and poverty (Lavalette and Ferguson, 2007, Ferguson, 2008).

In Greece, there are plenty of examples of initiatives by residents in several communities (i.e. against the IMF and the degradation of areas) whose aim is not narrow but connected with wider political demands for social justice. These are important initiatives and certainly need further research with regard to their connections with social and community work. However, for the purposes of the thesis, I choose here to discuss briefly some specific examples of collective action and users’ movements particularly in the welfare sector that could show a path for contemporary social work.

To begin with, the struggles of the workers in HiHPs are one of the most significant attempts in Greece where the practitioners act collectively. As noted earlier, the HiHPs face instability over their continuity while the practitioners are from time to time unpaid for months. This led in 2005 to the practitioners creating a union - the Pan-Hellenic Union of Workers in Help in Home - that brought together workers from different disciplines within HiHP. These practitioners, who included, social workers, nurses, psychologists and care helpers, created local branches and a Pan-Hellenic union to demand their rights and to some extent, the rights of their users. In the annual report of the Pan-Hellenic Coordinator they set out the initial targets which included the coordination of the struggles of the local unions through the creation of a web-page; the publicizing of their demands through the media; and the recording of the number of workers in the programme which came up to 3,800 practitioners while the number of users was estimated at 1,000,000 (Pan-Hellenic

Coordinator, Annual Report, 2005)<sup>67</sup>. Gradually, they started to escalate their action through a number of meetings with parties, other organizations, ministries as well as unions of pensioners and the Greek Federation of the Disabled. Over the years, their struggle developed a specific character. They demanded the permanent and public character of the function of HiHPs, staffed services and so on (Annotation to the minister of Internal Affairs Pavlopoulo P., 2008:3 in Greek)<sup>68</sup>. A number of strikes in 2006, followed by other strikes and protests in 2007, 2008 and 2009 (Annual Reports, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008)<sup>69</sup> demonstrate some initiatives taken for a more dynamic syndicalism in the welfare sector. Although the gains of these struggles - which at least assured the extension of time of these programmes -, are questionable given that the HiHPs still face insecurity, there are some significant points. Firstly, this struggle is one of the few examples of the collective organization of the welfare workers and secondly, these initiatives bring about the common action of practitioners' and at least some of the users' organizations, actions which still take place to some extent.

Another significant example in Greece is the struggles in mental health sector by both practitioners and users. This thesis has revealed the virtual absence of care services in the community for people with mental illnesses. Frequently, social workers referred to the 'blind alley' for the people with mental health problems who lived alone in their homes, without any permanent care. Although social workers either in municipalities, CWDs or Help in Home programmes strove to cover user needs, the limited staff and the absence of health specialists, such as psychologists, psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses, meant that these attempts tended to be rather haphazard and mainly restricted to being a kind a temporary help. In the mental health sector, there have been repeated attempts by both practitioners and users such as that on 24th May 2008 when a number of organizations including the users' movement, the unions of practitioners in the mental health sector, unions of welfare practitioners, the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Families for Mental Health, "Tetradia Psixiatrikis" came together and held a one day conference entitled "Mental Health,

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<sup>67</sup> The specific report has been sent to the researcher by a member of the union Mr Marmaridi who administered the [www.vss.gr](http://www.vss.gr) which is no longer accessible.

<sup>68</sup> The specific report has been sent to the researcher by a member of the union Mr Marmaridi that he handled the [www.vss.gr](http://www.vss.gr) which is no more accessible.

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Rights and Social Emancipation” followed by a demonstration in front of the Greek Parliament demanding respect for both users’ and workers’ rights through state policy (Disabled, 2008).

Moreover, in contemporary Greece users’ movements such as the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Families for Mental Health (POSOPSI) along with a number of similar local organizations from all over Greece represent about 200,000 families. They act in several ways, through conferences, demonstrations, publicity in media and in coalition with other unions for the rights of people with mental illnesses. Additionally, their perspective goes further and opposes the political choices that constrain and damage the lives of their children. The political dimension of their work is well reflected in their website. With respect to the general strike on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010 against the measures taken by the government and the IMF and EU guidelines they declared:

*“The Pan-Hellenic Federation of Families for Mental Health will participate with the national disabled movement in the general strike of 5<sup>th</sup> May...we express our agony, distress, disappointment and anger at the hard measures announced by the government on 2nd May....which will lead many of our fellow citizens to begging... We demand here and now a long term programme of public policy against social exclusion, social inequalities and poverty that the mental handicapped experience in the most impetuous and inexorable way in all the aspects of their life.. We call everyone to participate in the strike ... to say a strong “No” to the Greek people being condemned to poverty” (POSOPSI, 2010).*

These developments have partly grown from the professionals’ in the mental health sector agitating for the implementation of deinstitutionalization for people with mental health problems in Greece. What was especially noteworthy in this movement which started in the 1980s was the manner in which they drew attention to the wider societal and political context and connected it with the specific dilemmas concerning mental health. This approach is exemplified in their now famous journal “Psychiatry Notebook” (Tetradia Psixiatrikis in Greek) which from the 1980s until today constantly brings more progressive ideas to the sector including the demand for an “emancipation movement” (Matsa,1999). Katerina Matsa, a well known psychiatrist in a public hospital is one of key people in this movement and the following quote summarises her perspective:

*“...the demand for Psychiatric Reform is more than ever ...an imperative need. It constitutes the only alternative future of hope for those without hope. Its vision is emancipative...for the emancipation not only of the “crazy” ...but also the whole of the society...The struggle for breaking any kind of chains of mental illness, the struggle for their non- stigmatization...requires political speech and action with radical and revolutionary content...it's an issue of breaches and reversals on the ideological, scientific and social level. It presupposes another perspective for mental disorder and the role of psychiatry, another philosophical aspect that aims to the emancipation...of all human beings. This struggle requires agitation...through collective actions and revolutionary perspective. Today more than ever the slogan of the protestors is topical: ‘If you want Dream, Wake up” (Matsa, 2003:23-24).*

The above is one of the most significant contributions to Greek welfare and health sector. In fact, the specific perspective connects the scientific paradigm of emancipation with practice and struggles but also provides the professionals with the criteria to understand and analyze in each period the general political context that directly affects the welfare sector. The critical thinking and understanding of the wider socio-political context of social problems is crucial for social workers at the “front-line” (Jones, 2001). Without a wider perspective, social workers run the risk of being ‘tossed around’ prone to profound alienation, dismay and fear.

The above examples are some of the clear signs of connecting the users’ social problems with politics. In parallel, in contemporary Greece there is a chain of examples of movements developed by users of the SSDs such as the disabled or migrant workers. Undoubtedly, there is a need for further research in the field concerning the links of these movements with social work in Greece. To my mind these are some of the paradigms where the personal problem of the user are connected with the wider political and social causes and shows a path for more common action between the worker and the user. As it stands now, the Greek welfare sector is little more than a ‘dead end’ for the poorest and the most vulnerable. In parallel, the powerlessness of the practitioners, the low status of the profession, its limited knowledge and so on all demonstrate that the direction taken by official social work in Greece leads nowhere.

On the contrary a focus on the social problems that users face as a result of the politics and the connection of the “personal” problem of the user with the wider policies that reproduce and maintain social problems is a basic first step. Moreover,

this cannot be achieved by solely announcements without action. The involvement of social work with the movements can be a start for a social work that acts “from below” on the side of the oppressed in the Greek reality. More specifically, in my opinion mind there is a need for coalitions and partnerships on the front line of social problems between practitioners, academics, users but this coalition needs to link with other progressive forces. Social work cannot achieve social change and social justice on its own and certainly the vision of a justworld is not only social work’s privilege.

Overall, social work in Greece struggles to survive in a restricted welfare system. The humanitarian and authentic kind of social work which the thesis revealed in this state wilderness is to my mind, a source of hope. However, there is a need to connect social work with the society and the common struggle of both practitioners and users for their rights. This, however, presupposes critical thinking upon social work practice and an in -depth- understanding of the link between social work and politics. Critical social work can contribute significantly to this direction. However, without support and in-service training of the front line professionals little can be achieved given the complete abandonment of the SSDs, its workers and users. Still, the mission of social work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for social justice is more than ever pressing given the era of austerity in Greece. The response of a social work which is committed to social change and social justice could be used as a “lighthouse” that shows what to avoid and at the same time illuminates a “path” towards meaningful social justice and human rights for all the people who live in Greece.

Finally, I strongly recommend further research on the practice of social work with the poor and particularly to the examination of the “good” practices that promote change in users’ lives. The close link of politics and its impact on education, professionals and users lives needs additional research in order to illuminate further the implications of politics on social work. For example, I suggest research that examines the educational policies and its impact on social work departments or the implications of politics for the SSDs for the disabled and their carers and so on.

Moreover, the “voice” of the users in the SSDs needs to be further researched with regard to their perspectives on social works’ interventions. Additionally, a quantitative research project concerning beliefs and attitudes of social workers to the poor with regard to their ideological and educational background would also

contribute significantly to a deeper knowledge of Greek social work which in turn could inform social work training.

Furthermore, the intervention by politicians, particularly in municipalities, upon social workers needs also to be examined correlated with the values and ethics of the profession in order to contribute to debates concerning the role of social work in these agencies. Finally, the role of training in social work and its impact on social workers and their practice needs undoubtedly more research while more attention should also be drawn to the link of social work with the wider progressive social and political movements in Greece.

## **Appendix 1: Interview schedules**

### **Interview Schedule for the Social Workers**

- What are the aims structure and function of the SSD?
- Could you give me a brief history of the specific SSD?
- How many social workers work here (and also is there other personnel)?
- How many years have you been working here?
- Is it a permanent job?
- How many hours do you work?
- What is the hierarchy here? What kind of responsibilities and powers do the social workers of the SSD have?
- Who are the users of the SSD? (Their profile) Are they poor? What are their demands?
- How do you define poverty in your everyday job?
- What are the causes of users' financial situation (poverty)?
- How do you work with the users of the SSD?
- What is the behaviour of the users towards the social workers?
- Which methods do you use?
- Are these methods effective? (Why or why not)
- Which is the most appropriate and effective practice for working with the users of the SSD?
- How is the everyday routine?
- Describe one or two typical cases and how do you work with them.
- What influences social work practice in your everyday routine?
- Do you intervene in the way social policy is applied or changes? How and why?
- How would you describe your working conditions?
- Are there any support teams, training for the personnel or supervision?
- Do you believe that the modules that you were taught as a social work student (I ask here their educational background) are helpful and useful in your everyday reality?
- How do you feel about your job?
- Is there something else that you would like to add?

### **Interview Schedule for the Users**

- Have you ever met a social worker?
- In which services?
- Why do you visit them (or have they visited you?). What was your demand?
- Do you have any financial difficulties? To what extent?
- Tell me about your experience of co-operating with the social worker.
- How did you feel when you met a social worker?
- What happened next? Do you remember how many times you saw her or him?
- How was the atmosphere when you met each other?
- Did the social worker meet another member of the family? Why?
- What about your demand? What did you ask for, did they give that to you? (Why or why not)
- What did you like most from your co-operation with the social worker
- What did you like less?
- What more would you need?
- What did you expect from the social worker? Is there something else that you would like them to do?
- What do you want from these services?
- Were social workers effective concerning your demands? In which way could social work be effective for you?
- What do you think might help you to face and get over your financial difficulties? (if they face poverty)
- Is there something else that you would like to tell me?

## Appendix 2: Reflexivity

The procedure of doing qualitative research was a very interesting experience. Not only because of the specific subject which interests me but also because in the past I had done mainly quantitative research and this was a new experience. At the same time, the qualitative research revealed its difficulty given that I felt that I should check myself all the time so as not to let my subjectivity break open and influence the research.

The fact that I was a social work colleague facilitated my access to the field and I think that added trust to social workers to talk with me. As one social worker told me;

*“If it wasn’t you but another person [who wasn’t a social worker] there was no way to get the permission for you staying here”.*

Or, during the interviews social workers repeatedly told me *“you understand what I am talking about, you know how it is”*. The fact that “I knew” was helpful but also a threat as being so close to them could prevent me from “seeing” clearly. Thus, one of the hardest things was that I should check myself all the time, that is to say my “only enemy was myself” and that led me to being a severe critic of myself as well as trying to be as accurate as possible during the analysis and the presentation of data.

My visits and conversations with the staff, helped them become more and more familiar with my presence. In the beginning, I felt that I may have affected their behaviour towards their clients but gradually, I think that they got used to my presence. As far as it concerns the interviews, the fact that I started transcribing them right away was helpful as it led me to talking as little as possible and letting social workers “tell their story”. Later, when I succeeded in doing that, I noticed that even when I thought that what they told me was irrelevant, they actually revealed many more issues than I would have elicited through the questions I asked.

The wealth of data obtained through this qualitative research permitted an in depth understanding of the context.

## **Tensions and dilemmas in the fieldwork**

A number of tensions and dilemmas couldn't but be apparent in such a vivid procedure as qualitative research. Some of the core-issues are presented in a form of questions and responses as they were dealt with by the researcher during the procedure.

### **How to deal with the hidden or open demands of the interviewees?**

There were cases I was asked questions about since social workers wanted to know what their users had told me. I made it clear to them that I cannot reveal anything and that was acceptable. But there were also some cases with the interviewees-users that were more complicated:

In some cases, users asked me openly *“Given that you are also a social worker, you know how to help me with this or that”* or *“What do you think that I have to do? Tell me your opinion; you know...you work with people with problems”*. Moreover, during some of the interviews I realized that many of the users didn't know which services or benefits they could ask for. What I practically did: When the interview was over, I wrote down all the information, or called them another day to give them those addresses and telephone numbers they needed in order to visit some other services as well.

In two cases users asked me as a favour to do more for them:

In one of these cases the woman- who faced poverty- asked me to go with her to a SSD which belonged to the Church. She told me that their behaviour is “awful” and if they see her with me they may give her the benefit. Initially, I was rather cautious. She insisted, therefore I visited the specific SSD with her. Their behaviour, in my eyes, was at least distant and arrogant – we just stood in the middle of a room where there were about 5 people, they didn't even invite us to take a seat, but loudly asked “what do the women want?”. They already knew the user and it was only when they heard that I am a social worker and was there with the woman that one of them asked me to come closer and tell them more about the purpose of our visit. I used my identity. The woman told me after we had left the SSD. “Amazing, I was sure that if I were with you, they would listen to me. When I first came to this office, they only



made some phone calls. I hope that at least this time they will try to get the benefit for me”.

Certainly, the “power” a social worker has could affect the users’ everyday life even in simple things but this is an issue that will be discussed in the thesis. What is important here is that for them I was also a social worker and as a result, a source of information as well as their access to it and she clearly asked for it. While it was a rather difficult situation for me it was at the same time a source of information for my research. I had no idea how to deal with that. But as Mason (2003:378) puts it “...*ethical and political issues are ...formed into concrete contexts and while the research procedure is developed...*” and the “guides of codes very rarely give instructions about how... someone could face the ‘everyday’ ethical and political issues (ibid: 379).

I thought that it’s their right; they have the right to have access to information and she wanted to take the advantage given to her. I was the person that knew and had access to people and sources. Why not utilize me? I took from them; they wanted to take from me. It’s fair. Moreover, my standpoint as a researcher – social worker that believes in the emancipation of the people couldn’t but affect my choice.

### **Relations in the field**

The relations in the field work are important elements to the process of gathering data and understanding in more depth. The danger here was that in cases that the relation was evolved into a friendly one this could affect my point of view.

And for at least one social worker in each department almost from the first moment I knew and she knew that we talk the same language. These social workers were the most extroverted and talked to me free and openly about the reality. They told me things about their everyday dead-end, the complexity about trying to help and “be a soldier without weapons...” things about their personal life.

**Fighting with myself:** Trying to find excuses for the behaviour of colleagues or being too judgemental. Sometimes, I left the field angry and upset with my colleagues. Other times, I sympathised with them with regard to the bureaucracy that they had to deal with, workload, lack of benefits and control by the director. But mainly because they are in the front line and deal with the most difficult and complex

cases, with people who face urgent, uncovered needs. But I felt particularly angry about the provided benefits and the social policy context. Social work is a piece of this policy in which benefits are minimum, people are neglected because of the indifference of the state which exerts tight control and all this is clearly expressed through the context of SSDs. In the majority of the cases, I felt that I was on the users' side due to their apparent powerlessness and deprivation.

### **How my presence in everyday activity affects behaviour and practice?**

According to Mason (2003), the researcher could never be "a fly in the wall" during the observation. That was particularly accurate for me given that I am not a low profile person- certainly not "a fly in the wall".

- How would I deal with that in observation?

In practice I controlled myself: pressed myself to be silent and not intervene. While during the first days I felt that everyone was rather cautious and very often asked my opinion during the interviews with the users, they gradually forgot my presence or felt that either I won't judge them or I totally agree with their practice.

But there were still questions for some cases:

- What are the limits of the observation as a participant and to participant observation?

Although it is perfectly described on a theoretical level in practice as many researchers support there are cases that these limits are not so clear. For example:

- Dilemmas such as the aggressive behaviour of a social worker towards a user:  
Should I intervene?

An example: A 50 years old woman came to a social worker's office because some days before the social worker had visited her home and found out that her two children lived in their grandmother's house. The user had mental health problems but the social worker seemed not to understand that. The social worker was usually very anxious – as her colleagues told me- and started to criticize the user very aggressively using phrases such as "what are you doing with your life?" "Next time I will take your children away". At the same time, she looked at me and another social worker in the office and asked for our opinion – rather than our approval. The user burst into tears.

The second social worker talked first and she kindly explained to her colleague that the woman had probably some problems and couldn't understand her very well. The social worker tried to lower her voice and be nicer.

- In some cases social workers asked me to participate or intervene during their discussions with their users. In the majority of the cases I avoided it but the fact that I was asked to do so had clearly an impact not only on how the social worker acted but also could have an impact upon the behaviour of the user that was standing in front of someone that is called "colleague-researcher".

- Informal discussions on the cases affected social workers' decisions and practice. Some of the social workers asked for my opinion about their actions, and more specifically about how to deal with cases where they faced dilemmas. We discussed these cases a lot; I do believe that many informal discussions affected their practice and decisions at least for the specific cases.

The relation between researcher and subject can be very close in qualitative research. This is one of the advantages given that we are able to be very close to everyday reality, but it can easily turn into a disadvantage as well.

### **But also research affected my practice both as a social worker and a teacher**

The research procedure and particularly the in depth understanding of the users' point of view affected my practice as a social worker in multiple ways. For example, I found ways to make information more accessible to users, creating a guide of benefits for the users in my agency, changing methods in my work with cancer patients etc. Moreover, the research informed my attitudes towards the difficulties that practitioners and users face with regard to the politics of welfare and affected my teaching in the social work department in TEI of Patras.

### **The identity of the researcher: Researcher and social worker & more identities**

During the three years that I did the research I was also working as a social worker. Robson describes a number of advantages and disadvantages of a practitioner-researcher compared with "outside researchers" such as the lack of time,

“preconceptions about issues and/ or solutions” but also the “insider opportunities” “practitioner-researcher’ synergy” (Robson, 2002:535).

As a researcher and social worker as well, I had a “double role” for both social practitioners and users. During the initial steps of the research, I was afraid that this “double –role” could affect the interviewees but also affect my critical thinking or would lead me to becoming judgemental. What is more, it was highly possible that if I took it for granted that “I know how this works”, I wouldn’t be asking or thinking in more depth in order to understand their points of view.

### **Being a practitioner and a researcher: Is it a disadvantage or an advantage?**

On the other hand, what I thought it was a disadvantage was at the same time an advantage. For example, the double identity contributes to gaining access to users’ files more easily and being treated as a colleague. Both social workers and users felt that I knew what they are talking about because I live in Greece and most importantly, I am a social worker myself.

In addition, social workers when they started to describe the provided benefits, they stopped to remark “you already know how the Greek state is...” or “you know how difficult it is to help people effectively”. That was an indication that the social workers could feel that the researcher was a social worker as well and did not feel so threatened by her presence.

Consequently, this “double-role” that I hoped would stay hidden – before I started the research- gradually evolved into a useful tool, either for gaining access -as I discussed initially- or for gaining more trust. But, I am also perfectly aware that in some cases social workers initially felt that I could judge them. For few of them that was the case from the start until the end of my involvement with them. For others, given that I stayed in their departments and they got to know me better, I gradually gained their trust. At the same time, I had more “identities” those of class, gender, race that were automatically visible and allowed easier access to the interviewees who were women in their majority.

From my point of view, it was the quality of the relation that I built during the interviews that proved to be a useful tool while my other multiple “identities” could be an obstacle.

The personal guidelines which I set up during the research procedure are:

- Continuous struggle with myself such as:
  - Self-control
  - Reflecting upon research practice (diary)
  - Critical Thinking
  
- Being honest and clear:
  - Critical approach and in depth understanding of the aim to be achieved.
  - My perspective for social work theory & practice: Connection of social work with welfare and social-political movements that lead to social change and social justice

and

Keep always the anonymity and confidentiality. This is very crucial, particularly in Greece. The difficulty here is that I need to be very careful when I refer to any case. Never disclose any information – for example area of the SSD- that could identify either social workers or users.

But above all:

Let their “voices” to be heard for both social workers and users. Let the facts be apparent, don’t hide things, be honest. Say clearly your standpoint. Reflexivity and critical thinking was needed not only upon the facts but also upon myself.

### **Appendix 3: Profile of the Interviewees**

The names of the interviewees have been changed and slightly their age in order to avoid possible identification.

#### **The Users' Profile**

1. **Katerina:** 40 years old, has two children (16 and 10), divorced, living alone in Peloponnese, unemployed.
2. **Fotini:** 33 years old, living with her two teenaged daughters and her baby. She is working as a waitress.
3. **Eleytheria,** 38 years old, lone mother, unemployed, she has a 3 -year- old daughter.
4. **Nicky,** 45 years old, unemployed, University graduate.
5. **Nicolas,** 37 years old, unemployed, recently released from prison, TEI graduate.
6. **Maritsa,** 77 years old, pensioner of OGA.
7. **George,** 35 years old, unemployed, with mental health problems.
8. **Maria,** a Roma, 35 years old, with 3 children, unemployed.
9. **Antigone,** a Roma, 42 years old, mother with 4 children, unemployed.
10. **Vassilis,** a Roma, 50 years old, working occasionally, has 4 children.
11. **Tasos,** a Roma 52 year old, not having a permanent job, has 2 children.
12. **Cesaria,** 30 years old, black woman undocumented immigrant, living alone with her daughter.

#### **The Social Workers' Profile**

**A. CWD in Peloponnese:** 5 social workers were interviewed, the head of the department refused.

1. **Anna:** 37 years old, TEI graduate (3 years studies). She worked in CWDs for about 10 years and then left this post and found a post in another SSD.

2. **Georgia:** 40 years old. She has been working in several CWDs for 16 years the last 10 of which in the specific CWD. She is a TEI graduate, and had done postgraduate studies.
3. **Nancy:** 57 years old, has been working for 22 years in the CWD, she is a School of Deaconess graduate, social policy department.
4. **Jane:** 45 years old, has been working for the last 10 years in the CWD, she studied abroad.
5. **Virginia:** 44 years old, a TEI graduate, has been working in CWDs for the last 10 years.

**B. CWD in Athens:** 8 social workers were interviewed, 2 more were refused.

1. **Kleopatra:** 47 years old, a Etaireia Prostasias Anilikon graduate. She has been working in the CWD since 1994.

Has been working kai bazo kai to a sto graduate

2. **Ioanna:** 45 years old, she has been working in CWDs since 1993. She has graduated from the School of Diakonesses.
3. **Vicky:** 50 years old, has been working in CWDs since 1985. She has graduated from Etaireia Prostasias Anilikon. She has a University degree in Psychology.
4. **Dimitra:** 36 years old, has been working in the CWD the last 7 years. She graduated from TEI in 1990 and worked with people with mental health problems in the past.
5. **Aggeliki:** 43 years old, has been working in the CWD in Athens since 1988 and previously she had worked in a CWD in Northern Greece. She graduated from the School of Deaconesses.

6. **Christine:** 50 years, has been working in the CWD since 1984. She graduated from the School of Deaconesses.
7. **Vassiliki:** 28 years old, has been working in CWD since 2005. She is a TEI graduate. finished TEI.
8. **Voula**→ see below HiHPs.

Note: Besides Vassiliki and Voula who worked with a one –year contract, all the others have a permanent post in the county as social workers.

**C. CWD on an island in the Aegean Sea:** There is only one social worker covering the needs of other islands as well.

1. **Artemis:** 50 years old, has been working in the CWD for the last 2,5 years, graduated from TEI. She has a permanent post.

**D. Municipality in Peloponnese:** 1 social worker, she has a permanent post.

1. **Helen:** 34 years old, graduated from TEI, she works in the specific municipality since 2003. In the past she worked for about 3 years in a municipality in Athens.

**E. Municipality in Athens:** 2 social workers, both have a permanent post.

1. **Rebecca:** 40 years old, a Sociology graduate and has a master degree in social work. She has been working in the municipality since 2000, while in the past she had worked in various agencies.
2. **Sofia:** 39 years old, graduated from TEI, has been working in the municipality for the last 13 years.



**F. Interviewees in HiHPs:** 3 interviewees, all work with temporary contracts.

1. **Vivian in the municipality of Peloponnese:** 35 years old, a TEI graduate, she has been working in HiHP since 2003.
2. **Kostas in the municipality on the island:** 30 years old, sociologist, he has been working in HiHP since 2005.
3. **Voula:** 27 years old, she worked in HiHP in Northern Greece the previous 3 years. When the interview was taken she had only two months experience in the CWD, therefore her interview focused mainly on her professional experience in HiHP. She graduated from TEI.

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