

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL DOCUMENTARIES IN THE TRAINING OF FUTURE SOCIAL WORKERS: CASE STUDY ON THE “CONVICTS” SERIES (2020-2024)

PhD Theodora Ene

University of Bucharest, **Romania**

ABSTRACT

The training of future social workers requires a constant blending of theoretical knowledge and exposure to the complex realities of the field. In this context, the use of innovative teaching methods, such as the analysis of social documentaries, becomes a particularly valuable pedagogical tool. Documentaries provide a window into otherwise inaccessible worlds - such as the prison environment - allowing students to directly observe human dynamics, investigate discourses and test their own preconceptions in a controlled environment.

This paper aims to examine the relevance of the documentary series “The Convicts”, aired from 2020-2024, as a tool for developing specific social work skills. A sample of 15 episodes will be studied, focusing on two key perspectives: that of the inmates and that of the show's moderator. On one hand, the analytical framework was based on a thematic analysis focused on highlighting the common subjects in inmates' interviews (experience of their first day/night in prison, adjustment to prison life, impact on family ties), while, on the other hand, the focus was on examining the moderator's discourse towards the interviewees. The critical analysis of the two perspectives - that of the prisoner and that of the moderator - equips future professionals with essential skills: the ability to look beyond the facts, to understand the causal complexity of social problems, to anchor their practice in sound ethical principles and to critically evaluate public discourses about vulnerable groups. The usage of these materials should not be passive. The role of the educator is essential in guiding discussions, providing theoretical context and ensuring that analysis leads to deep and nuanced understanding, thereby preparing competent, empathic and reflective social workers.

Keywords: social work training, social documentaries, prison environment, abilities development

INTRODUCTION

The training of Social Work students aims not only to transfer theoretical knowledge but also to develop certain essential professional skills, attitudes, and necessary competencies such as empathy, critical analysis, understanding of social context, intercultural communication, ethical reflection and increased awareness regarding social justice. In the context of globalization and the complexity of contemporary social issues, it is essential that social work education adapts and uses innovative pedagogical methods that promote critical thinking, empathy, and civic engagement. According to Ioakimidis and Sookraj [1], global standards for social work education emphasize the importance of a coherent education that respects diversity, equity, and inclusion, and adheres to the values and policies of the profession. As a result, academics look for pedagogical methods that