

Abstract

This doctoral dissertation is a sociological analysis of the everyday professional lives of women employed in social welfare homes (SHPs), where the dominant resident category is the elderly. The aim of the dissertation was to analyze how these workers understand their work, how they describe its burden, meaning, and social position in the context of an increasingly aging society. The analysis focuses on everyday caregiving practices and how the institutional and cultural context influences the professional experiences of women performing this work.

One of the main theses of the dissertation is that caregiving in social welfare homes is complex, encompassing material, emotional, and relational dimensions. Despite its indispensability, work in SHPs remains structurally undervalued and economically disadvantaged. The dissertation utilizes a theoretical approach that combines perspectives from the sociology of emotions, care, work, and institutions, allowing for the understanding of care as a practice embedded simultaneously in social relations, the organizational order, and broader structures of inequality. The empirical basis is qualitative research conducted using participant observation and in-depth interviews. This allowed us to capture both the institutional rhythm of social welfare homes and the ways in which women who work there interpret their own work.

Analysis of the research material shows that care work in social welfare homes is not limited to performing nursing tasks but encompasses organizing residents' daily lives, managing relationships, responding to suffering, and constantly managing their own and others' emotions. Female workers function as co-creators of the world of institutional care, while simultaneously having limited influence on the conditions in which it is organized.

The most important conclusion from the research indicates that women's work in social welfare homes is socially necessary, yet structurally undervalued. This undervaluation manifests itself in low salaries, limited prestige, low social visibility, and insufficient institutional support. As a result, women performing work essential to sustaining the lives of dependent individuals operate in conditions that do not provide them with adequate recognition or real influence over the organization of their own work. The dissertation also demonstrates that social welfare homes

constitute a specific type of institution operating at the intersection of social assistance and long-term care, organizing the lives of dependent individuals in conditions of increasing dependency. In this context, care work emerges as a key yet systemically marginalized element of contemporary aging societies. The analysis also reveals the tensions inherent in performing this work, related to its low economic valuation, its social undervaluation, and the need to constantly negotiate the boundaries between emotional involvement and institutional requirements.