

## Short Communication

# Deafness, a Key for Approaching Intervention in Social Work with Deaf People

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## INTRODUCTION

The conformation and structure inherited from a dominant patriarchal system have motivated emancipatory reflections and the development of lines of research that are clear in social work publications over the last 10 years. Thus, regarding diversity, a review of productions on the intervention of social work professionals with individuals and families living with disabilities is conducted. This review made it possible to identify that there are other families that escape the categorical logics of disability, placing in the intervention discourse the processes of "other subjectivities" as emancipatory and resistance discourses of subjects who define themselves as in diverse conditions and who distance themselves from traditional classifications.

In the case of deaf people, the positions from critical paradigms lead to not only considering the analysis outside the rehabilitative discourses, the interactions, links, and adaptation processes of families but also incorporating intersectional analyses that involve the classifications of minority groups and linguistic minorities, when working with deaf population. In addition, the appropriation of the category "Diversity" should include in its approaches the use of multiple words to identify families and their realities.

From the results presented in the state of the research question, "Socialization processes in the family environment from the life stories of deaf people, an analysis from social work Bogotá, 2010–2016" [1], gaps in theoretical productions related to the traditional method applied from social work for family intervention were identified. This is how the question arises for the analysis of the state of the art in relation to social and family intervention from a social work approach in an interdisciplinary and multicultural way.

The objective is to bring social workers closer to the historical journey of the periods of publication in social work with respect to deaf people and, derived from this effort, to identify the categories anchored to deaf subjectivities. To achieve this, the possible needs regarding interventions were proposed, opening recommendations for generating new logics both for research and practices in relation to deaf subjects.

Thus, the document presented below contains an analysis

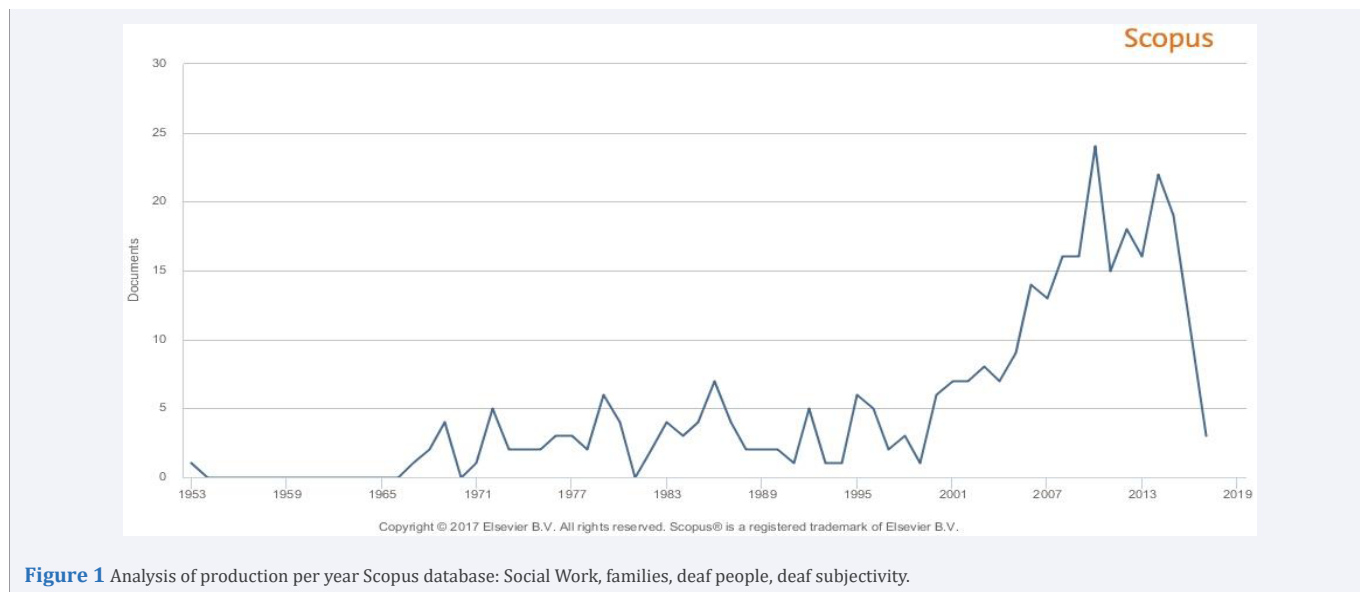
of the methodology for constructing a state of the art on deaf subjectivities, where the strategies for organizing information are essentially exposed, critically identifying some suggestions for exercises that use the same methodology. Second, some generalities of the taxonomic conditions of deaf culture are presented as a gateway to analyze interventions. Finally, within the discussion, the existing categorical system with the most used notions in relation to the deaf population is problematized, showing new demands for research and social work intervention.

## METHODOLOGY

From a qualitative approach to document review, a research path was established that was divided into three major steps: first, a total of 120 articles containing the topics of family, deaf people, and social work were classified by keyword filter. From a random convenience sampling criterion, these selections were organized by year from 2016 to 2019 [Figure 1]. From the searches carried out on the Scopus, Dialnet, Science Direct, and Scielo platforms and having selected the Scopus database as the main reference, an initial analysis of works was generated.

Second, the references were organized in Excel databases, categorizing the following: year, description of the author (favoring texts written by social workers), full title, keywords, abstract, categorical system used, and epistemological and paradigmatic position (selecting the writings produced from the critical paradigm or with feminist exposition or from subjectivities).

Subsequently, a critical reading analysis form was designed for each reference, breaking down components, theoretical frameworks, and references to experiences in intervention or with evidence of the voice of deaf subjects. These records were analyzed to identify related groups of results or authors, which were organized to lead to the presentation shown in this document. Professor María Esther Fernández Mostaza of Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona accompanied and reviewed the selections and filtered the relevant topics that contribute to the consolidation and analysis of social workers in light of the analysis of deaf communities. The sociological vision in a taxonomic key derived in the organization of some of the results found.



The selected publications had explicit multicultural and intersectional references. The selection included texts that incorporate the ideas of gender, race, ethnic groups, and the use of sign language.

From the intervention method for family support, references to parental and conjugal bonds were identified in the texts as the main interest. Some texts that mentioned sign language interpreters as agents in the dynamics of interaction were considered. All these aspects were selected from current discussions proposed primarily by the deaf communities of Colombia and Spain.

### Analysis of the methodology for the construction of a state of the art on deaf subjectivities

The selections were organized using graphs obtained through technical tools such as those provided by the databases, in order to understand the events or situations that accompanied peaks of theoretical production in social work. Below is the graph obtained from the analysis of production by year, which constitutes one of the possible analysis criterion. This selection is made at the discretion of the researcher, who uses the data to identify historical milestones that influence the variability frameworks of the data; in addition, researchers can focus on author production, geographical conditions, or any other criteria that they find susceptible to analysis, finding reasons that are not only of a historical nature. Providing context for the data is a current suggestion within mixed methods, but one that qualitative research makes use of to configure the referents, especially in case studies. The analyses can also be carried out with multiple criteria methods, where the matrixes present relational crosses between the data, or cross-referencing data from various sources to identify theoretical gaps with greater accuracy.

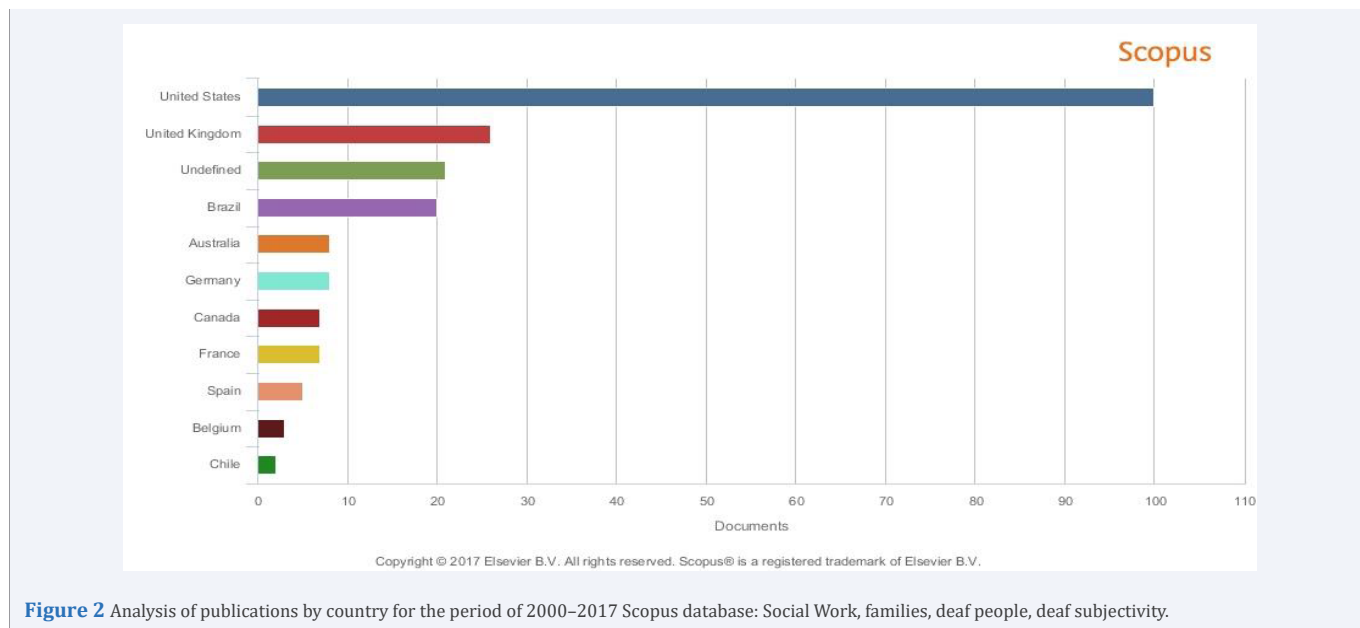
The findings of this first approach allow us to identify three periods of different behavior in the written production of social work in relation to deaf people. The first period includes the years 1953–1966, in which no academic articles are recorded. This phenomenon can be associated with the rehabilitative

posture and the predominant medical paradigm in society that led to the concealment of pathologies and their treatment only from the healthcare field.

A second period comprises 1967–1999, where the beginning of productions such as academic articles is evident, mainly because the emerging positions were influenced by the global mobilization of groups, the critical and emancipatory reflections of social movements, as well as analysis and concern for the conditions of the vulnerable population. These references produced by social work show the marked influence of the welfare approach.

A third period of analysis covers 2000–2019 [Figure 2]. In these years, the boom in academic productions is reflected, associated with the appropriation of and debate on “deaf culture” together with the debates around subjectivity. The publications participate in the international debate promoted by British anthropologist Paddy Ladd [2], who had an impact on social networks that is still valid today. This participation focuses its arguments on the diversity of deaf subjectivities, disputes medical advances (especially those related to cochlear implants), and claims the condition of *being deaf* is part of a linguistic minority. It is important to point out that the emancipatory processes of the deaf community have impacted the discourses that are produced in writing, and the appropriation of the notions is more strongly present from 2014 to 2018. The influences on social work from the dissemination in networks, as well as the active work of the international deaf community, define a large part of the published contents.

Notably, the peak of academic productions during the indicated period was determined by the influx of publications that, in the tendency of vindicating the cochlear implant in medical journals, produced a greater number of publications related to deaf people in all disciplines. In addition, the period wherein the publication of social work began coincides with the times of disciplinary reflection and reconceptualization in Latin American countries, which led to the circulation of a greater number of articles written by social science professionals.



**Figure 2** Analysis of publications by country for the period of 2000–2017 Scopus database: Social Work, families, deaf people, deaf subjectivity.

In this last period, 2000–2018, the information found is analyzed under the following guides: i. Countries that produce the most content and their geographical location in relation to their social work discourses. ii. Authors with greater academic relevance, by their citations, by the number of publications, and by the thematic relationship with this research. iii. Presences and absences, that is, what aspects are pointed out, where there are information gaps in relation to the socialization processes of deaf people from the international context and, in the national context, looking for specific characteristics among families in Bogotá [1].

Thus, the countries where more information is produced and more research projects are developed, in relation to deaf people and social work, are English-speaking countries, where production is focused on content related to subjectivity and education. It is important to point out that the options for publication in English-language journals are also related to global positioning or rankings presented by the publications, which leads authors to seek to have their writings published in places where they can obtain greater visibility.

In terms of subject matter, we note that there is a greater volume of publications containing family analyses, which concentrate their study topics on interaction with educational processes, with factors such as inclusion in the classroom, and didactic aids for deaf people. These publications issue information primarily about the parental subsystem, the school, and what happens with boys and girls in the processes of adapting to the classroom.

In the case of publications written in Spanish, the countries that produce the most content are Chile and Brazil. These contents place the relationship between social work and deaf people from the deficit intervention. Chile has published about the deaf subjectivity—the publications about it with a social work approach focus their interest on the school and interactions that occur in this environment.

It is established that the reference criterion for approaching

deaf people involves the case and group social work method, where family approach methods stand out. The problems related to people with disabilities does not merely affect people with diagnoses but mainly the development of bonds and communication in the parental subsystems, with mothers, who are identified as the main figures of support and care, being the most affected [3]. A broader development of research in English-speaking countries is observed. The number of publications is directly proportional to the recognition of the universities in the countries by continent, and a greater number is seen in countries that allocate more resources for research. It can be indirectly correlated with the international rankings of the best universities in the world (QS, ARWU-old Shanghai, and THD, among others), where the first positions are usually occupied by American and European universities. At the Latin American level, the universities of Mexico, Brazil, and Chile stand out.

These relationships are an example of the types of multicriteria analysis that can be developed in the presentation of the state of the art in social work. They are thus tools that allow us to analyze the current situation at the level of study and research in relation to social work and deaf people. The family category is also an option that serves as a filter to identify gaps in the research and intervention of social workers with deaf people.

### Taxonomic status of perspectives on deaf culture

The discourses produced by academia generally make a distinction between a deaf culture and a hearing culture. The perspectives from which these differences have been approached are very recent and present a mainly taxonomic condition. These perspectives, presented in chronological order of results, can be categorized in nine groups, which are briefly described below.

**Symbolist Perspective:** Proposes to work from the deaf identity and present the symbolic relationships from anthropology. It questions the image of the self, learning to be deaf, the meaning of sound, and historically created lives. It is an approach deeply influenced by the theory of Clifford Geertz [4].

**Normative Perspective:** This perspective is developed mainly in the United States and combines the social category with the cultural category in order to deal with issues related to norms, values, and traditions [5]. In this perspective, the definition of deaf culture is presented as follows: “It is a set of learned behaviors and perceptions, which shape the values of deaf people, based on their shared or common experiences” [6].

**Anthropological Perspective:** Combines the hypotheses of the linguistic, membership, ethnicity, and structuralist perspectives. It analyzes, from an anthropological approach, the notion of diversity as one of the most important phenomena of deaf culture. In this perspective, the contributions of Mindess [7] opened a window toward intercultural communication, and have been able to establish contributions in the relationship between deaf people and interpreters. This perspective places in its postulate the role of interpreters as active subjects in deaf culture.

**Linguistic Perspective:** The previous perspectives identify sign language as the central component to talk about deaf culture. This perspective proposes that the use of sign language is the only cultural characteristic of the deaf community [8].

**Membership Perspective:** Presents the audiological, linguistic, social, and political criteria for belonging to the deaf culture. Distinguishes in writing being deaf (lowercase) from the Deaf (uppercase) subject. It appropriates the study of hearing children of Deaf parents and their internalization of Deaf culture in their interactions, sometimes more appropriately than Deaf subjects who have attended integrated education. That is, it includes hearing people in the deaf community who meet the aforementioned characteristics, it also includes missionaries who have worked with the deaf, lay people who use sign language and appropriate the values and culture through interaction with the deaf community. This perspective also includes professionals in social work, who contributed to the community’s discourses of resistance [9].

**Structuralist Perspective:** The main model is Stokoe; his commitment is to map the communities that use sign language [10]. He presents the characteristics of the dominant culture against an emerging one such as the deaf culture. In this perspective, the factors that promote linguistic and educational rights for Deaf people are more relevant.

**Ethnicity Perspective:** Focuses on social anthropology and the sociology of language. Its main examples are Robert E. Johnson and Carol Erting, [11], providing elements for locating a Deaf ethnic group. This perspective distinguishes the cultural process from the social process: “In this vision, the interaction between role, personal, interrelational, and structural variables are considered fundamental for the production of social forms” [6].

**Biological Perspective:** Its main advocate is William James Hall, who moves away from the pathologizing conditions to open the space to the cultural. There is a close relationship between this perspective and the symbolist [12], as it places culture in a tacit, deeply personal role and ponders individual agency.

**Political Perspective:** It proposes, primarily from the

writings of, that deafness can be treated as a sociopolitical experience with a cultural meaning and with a position of individual resistance [13].

In the previous grouping, there is evidence of proposals aimed at the individual and the world around them, these being orientations developed by the psychologist, empirical pragmatic and individualist approaches. The perspectives presented study the socialization processes in relation to hearing people in their social dimension, in the rise of a culture of resistance and weighting academic discourses.

A growing incorporation of the multicultural and intersectional can be observed, referencing the notions of gender, race, ethnic groups, and the use of sign language. The socialization scenarios most often described are those related to the couple and parents, mainly from the systems approach. The most analyzed socialization interactions are those that occur at school, where the focus of observation is the teachers, students, and interpreters. All these topics of reflection in the social sciences in recent years, which are current debates in the academic communities and, therefore, are more likely to be published in the databases consulted, favor the category of disability without making specific distinctions with deaf people [14].

In the publications, a link between the discourse of justice, rights, politics, and practice of disability is identified. The responses of social workers in exercising social justice and rights as an approach for populations with disabilities are pointed out. A new demand emerges for the protection, improvement, and development of people’s capacity for autonomous action. There is also a recent critical stance on the need to move to a rights-based approach to policy and practice as a strategy for direct intervention in social work. It is argued that structural constraints “limit the ability of social workers to fully function from a rights-based approach to disability” [15].

### **Main category analyzed from the publications related to social work**

The family as a category of study presents a multi-paradigmatic approach, with historical variability, and with enunciative continuity. However, the most recent proposals, especially those that consider diversity as an annexed category for the approach, suggest the use of the word in the plural, to give space not only to the multiple approaches for its study, but also to the mobility of dimensions, structures, and multidisciplinary statements. This is what “families” imply to the professionals who are involved, to adjust their belief system and their theoretical strategies to a world of meanings proposed by the historical evolution of the same unit of analysis.

Within the background for approaching families, there are specific nomenclatures for interventions. These nomenclatures have had significant development in recent years, where families that live with the world of disability have been classified, given the robust complex assessment that has been made about them. In this regard, it is worth noting the studies of [16-18], who have placed them on the multi-problematic spectrum with the nomenclature, namely, “multi-problem families.” Other classifications have referred to them as “families in a situation of

special chronicity,” as well as “multi-stressed families” [19-21], “families in multi-problem situations” [22], “excluded families” [23], because of what it means to live with the variations of disability in the different stages of the life cycle [24].

Within the nomenclatures, the terms “families in special distress” are also presented [25]. The classification “families with situations of extreme complexity” has been presented when there is variability in the associated conditions, because they present various disabilities in one or several of their members. Situations are classified as “complex” because an approach from multiple perspectives is required. In addition, the classification “families with low income and accumulation of disadvantages” [26], has also been used in the publication of information related to families that have members with disabilities.

Recent hypotheses have included the problematization of the word “disability” in the discursive scenario. In this regard, the abolished terms cut from the discourse such as dysfunctionality, anomaly, deficit, abnormality, special condition, disability, atrophy, and other terms that in the discourse poorly portrayed the subjects or made them more detailed in the face of a majority discourse that compared the conditions as in need of repair or rehabilitation. Thus, there is a growing questioning of the terms used to describe the relationship between those who evaluate, question, and those who receive the services of social professionals. Discussions are proposed to incorporate alternative terms, while suggesting a possible way forward to avoid negative connotations of any particular term [27].

In general, these are the classifications to establish analysis criteria in the family category, which can be used to conduct future research and propose intervention alternatives from the social sciences. While these categories relate to families living with a disability, it is clear from the reviews that there is a need to differentiate conditions in the ranges of families of deaf people. This would be the main categorical scheme, but the differentiations for the approach to deaf culture are still absent from the written works. This theoretical approach opens a new point of view for future studies.

## DISCUSSION

First, it is important to note that in structuring states of the art, searches are made in recognized scientific databases, which come from reliable sources to identify antecedents and problematic formulations. This strategy, used in the context of the method of identifying theoretical gaps, is an alternative for diagnostic processes and problem formulations in social research. But this logic loses what has not yet been written, coming from the realities of deaf subjects in the care of social professionals.

In topics such as the one addressed, to identify bibliographical references on social work intervention for deaf people, a theoretical absence is visible from the different methods (case, group, community, and family). Although in topics such as the one addressed, from deaf subjectivities, the reflections emerge from interest groups themselves. In the case of the publications in Spanish, these references are from other disciplines and not from social work.

Thus, in the case of groups of deaf people, due to the use of a

language that does not shape their periodic advances in writing, they are reflected late in the databases of academic works that account for their discursive developments. That is, only until a user of oral, written, and signed language manages to interpret the advances in the reflections of the groups and is willing to transfer or translate these contexts to the theoretical world, with sufficient qualities to enter the record of the databases, can we enjoy this background. Databases have recently incorporated audiovisual publications, but text written or mediated with traditional languages continues to be favored.

The absence of traditional autochthonous languages of the regions, such as indigenous languages, or sign language, continues to be absent from the contents that allow the construction of antecedents. Therefore, reflections continue to be demarcated by the works of the majority, despite the fact that the paradigmatic critical social positions invite giving voice to those who have no voice (literally and figuratively).

As can be seen in the section “Taxonomic condition of the perspectives on deaf culture” the written commitment of social workers has very low indicators with respect to other disciplines. This would be a wake-up call to review the ancestral academic parameters of our profession. Specific reference is made to Mary Richmond’s text where her early case studies document care with a woman who is deaf-blind. Today, this section undoubtedly becomes an invitation, which is updated in the procedures and practices that evolve in the analysis of social work approaches with deaf people.

Within the bibliographic references, there is a progressive differentiation in the terms that define “deafhood” in Spanish. Prior to 2015, in publications in Spanish, the term was translated as *sordedad* and in the discussion groups in Colombia, the option of using the word *sorditud* was proposed. In the discussions, the option that both words be used with an initial capital letter was raised, to recover the assumptions made by the membership perspective. However, this position may leave out some forms of being a deaf person and exclude the participation of people with hearing loss who are part of the spectrum of the deafness classification.

In the academic world, it seems that there is still no recognition in sign language production. Despite the above, some social work training schools have incorporated sign language courses as an elective option within the training programs for social work professionals. These experiences have not been systematized in academic productions that reflect the challenges of the intervention.

In the publications found in the databases, the process of instrument construction or the software used, as well as the strategies used to decode and analyze data, are often omitted. As a whole, they present the results already organized and the data ready for understanding; most of the time tables are used to condense the data. It is important to consider that, in this regard, social work within its methods and ways of doing research considers the registration system and conformation of instruments to be an important part of the evidence and results, which is a factor to be considered that is absent in the publications related to deaf people.

The graphs in relation to multicriteria analysis on the subject of disability are not very common in the literature. In the few times they are presented, the graphs lack an in-depth analysis and explanation of the results they represent. The selection criteria within the process are sometimes omitted, meaning the criteria that were considered in the interaction with deaf people cannot be identified. This constitutes a possibility of improvement in related publications and thus a possibility of training in research.

## CONCLUSION

A critical look at these findings allows us to identify the absence of deaf people researching within the discipline of social work. Due to the disciplinary reflections of recent years, the participation and voice of deaf women in written works related to family is essential. In general, the absence of a reflective position, typical of social work, can be observed in interventions with deaf populations, especially if one considers that in the theoretical bases of case intervention, Mary Richmond presents her emblematic case with a deaf-blind person.

Due to the emergence of scientific works that make use of logics that deviate from the written strategy, the discussions of deaf communities worldwide have become more visible. This makes it possible to identify a greater dissemination and circulation of information in deaf communities, because they have traditionally made use of digital media in video format, which generates questioning about the possibility of including in the databases the standardization of formats of tutorials, videos, web pages, in general the platforms that had traditionally been excluded.

Establishing a general balance, there is not much development of topics related to deaf culture, produced by social work. Most of the research involving this population is English-speaking and focuses on education and health processes. The theoretical gap emerges in relation to family socialization processes of deaf people, within the family system, specifically in the approach to deaf paternity and maternity, and the support of social workers.

The emergence of differentiating terms in the bibliographic production embraces the cultural and linguistic dimensions as a way of resisting, inviting those who discover these categories in the consultations to broaden the ethical-political positions that constitute them. In addition, the epistemological, methodological, and technical inventory from social work in these productions reveals the need to propose co-research exercises, questioning the positions of researchers, understanding intersubjective dialogues, and continually problematizing the eternal objective/subjective dichotomy.

It is also possible that, to address the complexity of the emerging terms, it is proposed that the theorization regarding the term "deadhood" translated as *sordedad* and evolved in the bibliographic references as *sorditud*, be located in its multi-complex. Similar to what happened with other study categories such as "families" or "diversities." Vector crossings in the searches also allow new research problems or analysis routes to be formed. For example, "memories, body, deafness" and "body, work, deafness."

Within the case studies, it is also important to identify the

methods, techniques, and instruments used in bibliographic productions. One of the possibilities for the analysis is to identify if there is research that intersects with the options, for example, life trajectory with life history, identifying the relevant authors used.

Making method application tables can become a favorable laboratory for innovation within the study processes that use the states of the question as a practice. It is important to point out that there are many options from critical theory. In the process of constructing techniques and instruments, there is a procedural knowledge that is omitted in the research deliverables. The vicissitudes of instrument reformulations may also be susceptible of being systematized, with the purpose of accompanying the research training processes. It is desirable to identify the relationships between story-time presented in the life history, life trajectory, and life story techniques, in order to put together options in applications, especially with regard to events such as the preventive isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other knowledge that can be systematized for the purpose of finding gaps is related to ethical relationships and validity criteria. By identifying gaps in these research interactions, proposals can be made to remedy the missing aspects, or to assert in the productions the exercises that are carried out with high standards of reliability. This knowledge is very helpful for people who create software for the social sciences.

The implementation and use of software can also be structured as a diagnostic path to find new uses for the tools, establish networks in research, and find new comparative paths.

Finally, it is recommended to present papers or articles that report on exercises in which social work plays an active role. It is necessary that, in order for the indicators in social work publications to rise, not only should there be a high number of professionals in the field publishing, but the journals of the discipline themselves must also raise the level in classifying criteria of international databases such that the products are more visible in the consultations. It is important to recognize that universities make an important effort to strengthen their libraries with affiliations to different databases, whose allocated funds can only be justified to the extent that they are consulted and used in works. To use these strategies, it is necessary to socialize new methods of interaction with the databases and search for new logics in the analyses.

These reflections invite the use of qualitative and quantitative methods developed in social work research to more actively implement analysis and graphic interpretation of results with the multicriteria options discussed throughout the document.

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