

**PUBLIC-PRIVATE INTERACTION IN CHILD WELFARE: LESSONS FOR
CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK FROM CHILE AND THE UNITED STATES**

*INTERACCIÓN PÚBLICO-PRIVADA EN POLÍTICAS SOCIALES DE
INFANCIA: LECCIONES PARA EL TRABAJO SOCIAL CRÍTICO DE CHILE Y
ESTADOS UNIDOS*

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Abstract

This article discusses the public-private partnership that exists in Chile and in the United States to collaborate on issues of child welfare. By comparing both countries, we look at ideologies and economic issues that have historically shaped the contemporary perspective of public-private partnerships in child welfare. Additionally, we probe the role of social work in this area to see its current position within the public and private sectors in child welfare provision. Some conclusions are that neoliberalism and a residual worldview about childhood have shaped this public-private partnership. Also, social work has historically played a relevant role in advocacy and development of child policies and in both countries, private sector primarily implements child welfare policies and public sector funds them. Some of the lessons for critical social work include the importance of promoting a change in the way we address social phenomena in child welfare, and demanding an effective installation of the human rights approach to guide public-private partnerships on child welfare in both countries.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza la intersección público-privada que existe en Chile y en Estados Unidos para colaborar en las políticas de infancia. Al comparar ambos países, observamos ideologías y elementos económicos que históricamente han moldeado la perspectiva que orienta la intersección público-privada en torno al bienestar infantil. A su vez, revisamos el rol que ha tenido el trabajo social en este ámbito. Algunas conclusiones que emanan del trabajo son que el neoliberalismo y una visión del mundo residual sobre la infancia han dado forma a esta intersección público-privada. Además, el trabajo social ha desempeñado históricamente un papel relevante en la promoción y el desarrollo de las políticas de infancia y, en ambos países, el sector privado principalmente ha implementado las políticas de bienestar infantil y el sector público las ha financiado. Algunas lecciones que emanan desde la revisión para un trabajo social crítico incluyen la importancia de promover un cambio en la forma en que abordamos los fenómenos sociales vinculados con el bienestar infantil, así como también la necesidad de exigir una instalación efectiva del enfoque de derechos humanos en ambos países a la hora de orientar la intersección público-privada en materia de infancia.

KW: Public-private child welfare; neoliberalism; comparative perspective; Chile-United States; Social Work intervention; Critical Social Work.

PC: *Intersección público-privada; políticas de infancia; neoliberalismo; perspectiva comparada; Chile-Estados Unidos; intervención desde el Trabajo Social; Trabajo Social Crítico.*

Introduction

In Chile and in the United States, private initiatives have been present in child welfare provisions since colonial times (Anríquez, 1994; Cortés, 1994; DiNitto & Johnson, 2012; Hager, McCown, Roper, Castro & Habibi, 2008). Today, the public-private partnership for the development of child welfare services constitutes one of the main characteristics of the social policy arrangements in these countries to address situations of vulnerability faced by children. From a historical perspective, examples of child policies with the involvement of the private sector in Chile include the diverse initiatives of rights protection developed by the National Service of Minors, a public agency created in 1979 that has the mandate of addressing violations of children's rights. Also, from a historical perspective, in the case of the United States, an example of an initiative that has incorporated the participation of the private sector in child services is the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. Considering the differences between these two countries, hereinafter, in order to provide a common framework to develop its analysis, this paper understands that "social welfare policy is anything a government chooses to do, or not to do, that affects the quality of life of its people" (DiNitto & Johnson, 2012, p. 2). This definition allows reflections from a comparative perspective about the situation in both countries around public-private arrangements focused on addressing social phenomena related to children as clients of welfare policies. In order to establish a common framework to address the reflection across these contexts, from now on child welfare will be understood as a specific area within social policy. This area operationalises through diverse services and interventions aimed at children and adolescents who have suffered at least one serious episode of maltreatment, abuse, or neglect of their rights (Andrade-Guzmán, Martín & Martínez, 2014; Martínez, Andrade-Guzmán & Martín, 2015), among other events that require professional intervention to repair or prevent new occurrences of negative episodes for children.

With respect to data of population in child welfare, according to the Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence (Observatorio Niñez y Adolescencia, 2015), in 2015 Chile had 4,445,426 children (persons under the age of 18 years old), which represents the 24.7% of the total population of the country. In this vein, according to the National Service of Minors (Servicio Nacional de Menores, 2015), the same year, 234,292 children were served by the agency in child welfare services. Of these, 1,388 were in the area of adoption, 33,792 in the juvenile justice system and 199,112 were part of rights protection cases. In the case of the United States, according to the 2014 data from Children's Bureau (Children's Bureau, 2017), from a total of children estimated at 74,356,370, around 415,000 were in foster care.

In turn, the same year, approximately 702,000 children were confirmed as victims of maltreatment.

Regarding privatization of child welfare policies, currently, both countries have developed diverse initiatives to promote privatization. In Chile, the main legal instrument that regulates the child welfare protective services in terms of subsidies is the Act 20,032 (Ministerio de Justicia, 2005), which establishes the system of attention to children and adolescents through a network of collaborators of the National Service of Minors (Servicio Nacional de Menores - SENAME). In turn, this law seeks to build a more in-depth relationship between the SENAME and civil society organizations in the development of policies. The National Service of Minors has a Civil Society Council to work with private agencies in enhancing child welfare protective policies and services. In turn, in the case of the United States, the country has promoted different grants administered by the Children's Bureau that are allocated to diverse private agencies through competitive mechanisms (some of them are "community-based grants for the prevention of child abuse and neglect (CBCAP)" and "abandoned infants assistance"). Additionally, in 2005, the Children's Bureau funded the Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services (QICPCW) to promote knowledge development regarding public-private partnership in child welfare (Collins-Camargo, Mcbeath & Ensign, 2011). In 2006 the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), developed *The Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives Project (CWPI)* to assist and provide information to child welfare policymakers regarding privatization issues (Lee & Ensign, 2007).

Regarding the scope of privatization, non-profit organizations play a significant role in implementing interventions. In the case of Chile, in 2016, within specialized protection, 97% of the SENAME provision was delivered through private organizations (Irarrázaval, 2016), a number that represents the relevance and magnitude of this issue in child welfare. In the United States, in turn, according to Mcbeath, Collins-Camargo & Chuang (2012), in 2011, 89% of private organizations surveyed had contracts with public agencies to provide child welfare services.

In this context, even after an extensive literature review looking at the experience of public-private child welfare, on the one hand in Chile (highlighting the works of Anríquez (1994), Andrade-Guzmán (2009, 2010); Andrade-Guzmán & Arancibia (2010); Andrade-Guzmán et al. (2014); Cárdenas, Andrade-Guzmán & Arancibia (2012)) and, on the other, in the United States (highlighting among others, the contributions of the Chuang, Collins-Camargo,

McBeath, Wells, & Bungler, 2014; Collins-Camargo et al., 2011; Hubel, Schreier, Hansen, & Wilcox, 2013), we found that little attention has been given to the public-private partnership in child welfare from an international south-north perspective that could yield lessons for critical social work.

Considering this scenario, this paper synthesizes the literature on public-private partnership in child welfare services from a comparative perspective and seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What ideologies and economic issues have shaped the contemporary perspective around public-private partnerships in child welfare in Chile and the United States?
- What has been the role of public and private sectors in this domain?
- What has been the role of social work practice within this spectrum?
- What lessons in terms of implications for current critical social work can be gleaned from the review of this public-private partnership in Chile and in the United States?

1. Paradigmatic position

We address the research questions in this study from a critical paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), understanding the relationship between social work and human rights as indissoluble (Al-Nashif, 2018; Rubilar, 2018; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). In this scenario, considering that social work plays a crucial role in, among others, advocating for the development of better conditions for allowing children-clients of welfare policies to exert their rights. This, even more, when child welfare policies are developed in both countries within the framework of a neoliberal system that promotes, among others, the competition between private actors for grants for implementing the initiatives. Thus, we adhere to the belief that a neoliberal system is inimical for the protection of human rights (O'Connell, 2007) of children that need protection and, in some scenarios, the reparation of their rights.

2. Methods

The study was based on a bibliographic qualitative analysis, synthesizing literature, mainly peer-reviewed research articles, on child welfare services within the context of the public-private partnerships. The review paid attention to, on the one hand, material focused on the

Chilean experience, and, on the other, on material focused on the U.S. The comparison between these two experiences was justified in the neoliberal imprint that both countries share.

The criteria selection of the material were: 1) allow to identify ideologies and economic issues shaping public-private child welfare provision from a contemporary perspective, 2) allow to recognize the role of public and private sectors in child welfare, 3) allow recognizing the role of social work profession and discipline in this domain.

3. Public-private partnerships within a neoliberal framework

Neoliberalism is defined as

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey, 2010, quoted in Spolander et al., 2014, p. 303).

It is, in effect, an expression of contemporary capitalism with principles of individualism, rationality, freedom of choice, self-interest, the utilization of market mechanisms, and the non-intervention of the state in social welfare provision (Caplan & Ricciardelli, 2016).

It should be noted that for the purposes of this work, the public sector will be understood as the “legislative, executive, and judicial branches” (DiNitto & Johnson, 2012, p. 2) in all of its territorial levels: national, regional, local and so forth (Forselledo, 2002). Considering the international perspective of this work, the public sector will be equally referred to as the public sector, government, or the state. In turn, the non-profit sector or civil society organizations will be understood as a sector located between the state and the market (for-profit sector) (Miller-Stevens, Taylor, & Morris, 2015).

In this context, Hasenfeld & Garrow (2012) mention that neoliberalism reflects the institutional dynamic of business management (or new public management). This last one includes, among other characteristics, the use of competition between public sector providers, management tools, measures of performance, quality assurance mechanisms,

and prioritizes focus on outputs (Hood, 1991, Gruening, 2001, Deem & Brehony, 2005, Ferlie, Musselin & Andresani, 2008, quoted in Bessant, Robinson & Ormerod, 2016).

Among the assumptions related to the work with the private sector, economic factors would justify its involvement in public issues. In fact, the participation of non-profit organizations is often seen as a strategy to achieve the goal of reducing public spending (Caplan & Ricciardelli, 2016; Donahue 1989; Sclar 2000 in Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012; Sandvin, Bjørgo, Hutchinson & Johansen, 2011), as states will be in position of accessing provision of services at a minor cost (Donahue 1989; Sclar 2000 in Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012). Also, technical elements linked to the intervention's quality would justify the work with private organizations. Hasenfeld & Garrow (2012) mention that "the logic of privatization claims that the introduction of market mechanisms, especially competition, will motivate private contractors to deliver services of higher quality than that possible from government sources and to deliver them as efficiently as possible" (p. 305). This idea relates to the assumption that because of competition, clients will receive enhanced services. In this sense, there is an assumption that non-profit organizations have attributes that will increase the effectiveness of welfare provisions, such as innovativeness, receptivity to clients' demands and flexibility to address needs (Salamon, 1995; Kingsley et al., 1997; Osborne, 2002 in Sandvin et al., 2011).

Here, privatization refers to "the transfer of government activities to support its citizenry to private firms, such as businesses, non-profit organizations, and other non-governmental organizations. It reflects neoliberal normative ideals, mainly in the emphasis on market-based solutions" (Caplan & Ricciardelli, 2016, p. 28). In this framework, social policies have suffered the shift to privatized provision. This is clear "when a task or responsibility for social protection, once held by the government, is relegated to the private sector. Privatization may be enacted through outright funding or subsidies, or in a complete turnover of responsibility" (Caplan & Ricciardelli, 2016, p.28). About contract services, Caplan & Ricciardelli (2016) argue that this "is a major expression of privatized social welfare and describes the practice of the government paying private organizations to provide services. Contracting reflects principles of utilization of market mechanisms and non-intervention of the state" (p. 29).

4. Public-private child welfare in a south-north comparative

4.1. Chile

In Chile, the origins of private child welfare focused on vulnerable children can be found in colonial times with the arrival of the first religious congregations (Cortés, 1994). As in other parts of South America, in Chile, the early child welfare initiatives were generated in the private sector before state intervention (Farías, 2003; Tello, 2003). In this context, the first private initiative for which there are registers dating back to the 1760s when the first orphanage was established in Chile (Anríquez, 1994; Cortés, 1994), specifically in 1761 (Cortés, 1994). In the beginning, the worldview about vulnerable children was based on the control and disciplinary actions that sought to prevent future delinquencies (Farías, 2003).

Then, during the 19th century, according to Ponce de León (2011), “state and church shared the colonial world view of the educational value of charity to reform poor people” (p. 39). Novel at this stage, with an independent and republican state, was to appreciate how its practice modeled the moral of the citizens. In this context, state authorities provided economic support to private institutions through the Ministry of Interior, but these endeavors were not linked to any public regulation for its work with children (Farías, 2003).

In terms of legal instruments to address the situation of vulnerable children, in the twentieth century, the state enacted the first Helpless Childhood Act in 1912, which gave judges the instrument to put children in private facilities (Cillero, 1994).

Regarding the role of Chilean social work practice in child welfare, it emerged as a profession in 1925, marking a move to differentiate itself from charity and promoting a scientific outlook (Vidal, 2015), and incorporating child protection as a core domain of training (Castañeda & Salamé, 2015b; Vidal, 2015). That being said, the first Chilean social workers played a crucial role in developing the field of social assistance to children (Castañeda & Salamé, 2015a). This occurred very close to the enactment of the first Minors Act in 1928. As a result of the increasing development of social laws and policies, Social Service professionals were increasingly required in the implementation of social services. (Ramírez, 2004). The first and second Minors Act of 1967, has continued to legally guide action around childhood in the country until today. Regarding public-private partnership, Andrade-Guzmán (2009) mentions that the Act generated the legal figures of “collaborating institution” and “institutional maintenance”, through which “the requirements for an organization to receive subsidies are defined” (p. 33). Also, the Act created the National

Council of Minors, in charge of supervising, and coordinating the actions implemented by civil society organizations in child welfare (Andrade-Guzmán, 2009).

In the mid-1960s, Chilean social work highlighted in terms of the reconceptualization process in the countries of the South cone, making possible improvements in the profession in terms of, among others, contents and methodologies (Gómez, 2011). Regarding this process, Castañeda & Salamé (2015a) highlight how within this framework is present a social work vein that advocates for political and ideological discipline that promotes a shift away from the capitalist system. It should be noted that in 1973 began the Pinochet military dictatorship. Under his regime, the Hacienda Ministry and Economy Ministry started to develop a neoliberal program that, among other actions, promoted free-market mechanisms, including within the social welfare field (Alvarez, 1994). Alvarez notes that the ideology and political economy of neoliberalism influenced a variety of social programs. The belief of inefficiency of the state in economic resource-management in comparison to the private sector, the high value assigned to the market as a privileged mechanism of resources distribution, and state subsidiarity, took a central place in public discourse and become embedded in structural reforms in diverse state fields (Alvarez, 1994). According to Vidal (2015), Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile allowed the country to become "the laboratory of neoliberalism in the world", also manifesting in the privatization of social policies. Regarding child welfare policies, in 1979, during the dictatorial period, the current National Service for Minors was created, an entity which corresponds, among other functions, to promote, coordinate and supervise the work carried out by public or private collaborating institutions (Decree-Law 2465, art. 1). During this dictatorial period and in terms of social work practice, social work schools were closed down and the profession lost its university status (Muñoz-Arce, 2016). Social work was relegated to its original assistance role (Quiroz, 2011). However, a significant part of practitioners started to develop child welfare initiatives in new non-profit agencies with economic support from international cooperation, with a relevant focus on the defense of human rights (Sepúlveda, 2016).

In 1990, Chile regained its democracy and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). Currently, the public-private partnership in child welfare services is regulated by the 20,032 Act, which establishes the system of attention to children and adolescents through the collaborator's network of the National Service of Minors and its subsidies regime through competitive mechanisms. In terms of the reasons to privatize child welfare, a possible explanation could be the centuries in which civil society organizations have participated in child welfare provision and in the

subsidiarity or residual approach in the operation of the public sector in addition to the belief that the private sector can provide better services and have a higher capacity for innovation and flexibility, while counting on the additional economic resources at their disposal for the provision of services (Andrade-Guzmán et al., 2014).

Regarding orientations about child welfare, even when Chile ratified the Convention, the contemporary public-private partnership is developed in the absence of an integral policy to protect children in the form of a legal instrument to protect rights (Andrade-Guzmán et al., 2014). In general terms, the public sector in Chile, within the public-private partnership, takes on the role of legislating, administrating and generating policies and regulations related to child welfare (Cárdenas et al., 2012). In this context, the public sector plays the role of financing public-private interventions (Andrade-Guzmán & Arancibia, 2010; Gómez & Andrade, 2015) monitoring and supervising child welfare services (Andrade-Guzmán, 2010) and implementing some programs. The non-profit sector, in turn, plays a central role in the implementation of child welfare services (Andrade-Guzmán, 2009; Andrade-Guzmán & Arancibia, 2010; Gómez & Andrade, 2015). In addition, Andrade-Guzmán (2010) found that in the public-private partnership, non-profit agencies have the possibility of being laboratories of intervention experiences and these private agencies play a relevant role in advocacy within child welfare.

Currently, the role of social work practice is multipronged in this public-private partnership. Social workers play a crucial role mainly on the frontlines implementing social services within the public or private sector (Quiroz, 2011; Saracostti, Reininger & Parada, 2012), as well as developing research for creating and nurturing advocacy actions in child welfare.

4.2. United States

Vulnerable children have been one of the most marginalized and underserved groups in the history of the United States (Briar-Lawson, Naccarato & Drews, 2009). The Elizabethan Poor Laws was the first instrument used in colonial times that focused on the situation of poverty. This instrument has had a tremendous and lasting influence on social welfare in the U.S. (Axinn & Stern, 2005). The objective was the control of poor people who were not in a position to be employed and who could cause disruption. (DiNitto & Johnson, 2012).

Since colonial times, children were considered as “deserving” of non-public charity initiatives. Regarding this, the first services they received originated in the private sector (Embry et al., 2000, quoted in Lee & Samples, 2008). According to Axinn & Stern (2005), “the first

American institution for children was founded in 1729. This was a private institution for girls established in New Orleans by the Ursuline Sisters” (p. 58). In this scenario, the private sector has always played a relevant role in providing child welfare services; on the one hand, providing interventions for children in the care of the state and, on the other, providing prevention support services to families at risk (Hagert et al., 2008).

Over time, several measures were developed to address the needs of vulnerable children, highlighting the creation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1874), and other initiatives such as Mothers' Pensions for poor families, health programs, child labor protection, public schools, and juvenile courts, among others (Briar-Lawson et al., 2009). Regarding the initiatives until the 20th century, faith-based charities and other organizations provided child protection, with governments mostly administering grants or subsidies but the implementation rested with private organizations (Lee & Samples, 2008).

It should be noted that

the need to coordinate the activities of the different charities became a major concern of philanthropic leaders. As a result of their efforts, several coordinating agencies emerged. One of the first was the Charity Organization Society which not only sought to improve the coordination of philanthropic efforts but formulated new techniques that resulted in the creation of professional social work (Midgley, 1999, p. 17).

Since its emergence as a profession in 1898 (National Association of Social Workers - NASW, 2019), social work practice has played a relevant role on the one hand, in child welfare provision and, on the other, as promoters of reforms. The first social workers in the United States played a critical role in promoting better conditions for children, highlighting the contributions of Mary Richmond as significant in this regard (Miranda, 2015). Other social workers who played an important role in this domain were Jane Addams, recognized as the first referent of critical social work (Campos-Vidal & Cardona-Cardona, 2018). Also, Florence Kelley and Lillian Wald played a relevant role in the promotion of better conditions for children and families (Kemp & Brandwein, 2010). Wald and Kelley were the social workers who conceived the idea of the creation of the Children's Bureau in 1903 (Children's Bureau, 2012). This office that finally emerged in 1912, was the first federal agency within the U.S. Government, representing the moment in which a federal public agency started to focus exclusively on improving the lives of children and families.

As part of the New Deal, in 1935, the country established the Social Security Act, a legal instrument that provided the first federal grants to support child welfare in addition to overall

social protection schemes (DiNitto & Johnson, 2012). Through this Act, the public sector provided funds for child protection taking on a more significant role in this domain (McBeath et al., 2012). It should be noted that in 1974, “federal requirements for state child welfare systems were formally established via the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act” (Kahn & Kamerman, 1999, in McBeath et al., 2012, p. 461). However, even in this period, the public sector relied on non-profit organizations to deliver child services (Brodkin & Young, 1989; Salamon, 1995, in McBeath et al., 2012). In this sense, Howard (2011), on the basis of the work of Greene (1996), mentions that between 1982 and 1992, the country exhibited an increase of 175% in child welfare privatization, which was indispensable, “due to the intensification of federal mandates and increase in federal funds; both emanating from the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act passed in 1980” (p.116).

It should be noted that the implementation of neoliberalism in the United States was mainly based on the opposition to the social welfare doctrine espoused by the New Deal (Spolander et al., 2014). According to Hasenfeld & Garrow (2012), the rise of neoliberalism “is epitomized by the administration under President Ronald Reagan” (p. 301) and privatization of social welfare remained a principal characteristic under the Bush administration (DiNitto & Johnson, 2012). In this context, it has today achieved a predominant role in the social welfare configuration as a provisioning mechanism (Caplan & Ricciardelli, 2016). Currently, local states “rely upon private agencies to deliver core child welfare programming and, in some jurisdictions, have begun contracting out services previously delivered only by public agencies (e.g., foster care case management)” (Collins-Camargo et al., 2008, in McBeath et al., 2012, p. 461). This situation is reinforced by the belief that by working with the non-profit sector, quality of services will be enhanced, greater flexibility and innovation in intervention will be achieved, an efficiency improvement through lower costs will be gained due to the open competition (Hagert et al., 2008) as well as a higher sense of mission and responsiveness to clients (Lee & Ensign, 2007).

It should be noted that today, in general terms, social work in the United States in the public or the private sector, is focused on the development of policies and the public-private partnership in child welfare is present in developing interventions in their diverse stages (Collins-Camargo & McBeath, 2017), and advocacy and promoting and participating in reforms, for instance, at the legislative level (National Association of Social Workers - NASW, 2019). This occurs in the absence of a comprehensive policy or an integrative framework that guides strategies that public and private sectors will develop in order to address children’s needs (Briar-Lawson et al., 2009), perpetuating the focus of child welfare

on the perspective of children's needs instead of an approach based on their rights. Regarding this, Scherrer (2012) has mentioned the need for the United States to subscribe to the Convention on the Rights of Children in order to adopt guidelines for a rights-based child welfare provision across the country (Briar-Lawson et al., 2009; Scherrer, 2012).

Currently, the roles that public and private sector play in child welfare provision are diverse and complementary. The first has the legal responsibility to protect and to promote children's well-being through legislation, administration or other kinds of policies and regulations. Regarding this, Chuang et al. (2014), mention that "child welfare systems exist because legal mandates require states to investigate allegations of maltreatment and when necessary, intervene to ensure child safety, permanency, and family well-being" (p. 103). It provides services (Collins-Camargo & Mcbeath, 2017; Hagert et al., 2008) and funding to support public-private child welfare services (Hagert et al., 2008; Mcbeath, Collins-Camargo, & Chuang, 2012). In turn, it plays the role of monitoring and safeguards quality standards in the provision (Lee & Ensign, 2007).

The private sector in the public-private partnership plays the role of delivering child welfare services and interventions on the frontline (Chuang et al., 2014; Howard, 2011; Hubel et al., 2013; Pindus et al., 2008). It also plays the role of building community relationships with stakeholders and generating better conditions for the interventions (Smith, 2012 quoted in Chuang et al., 2014; Hagert et al., 2008; Lee & Ensign, 2007). A third role the non-profit sector plays is policy advocacy and generation of policy proposals (Briar-Lawson et al., 2009; Chuang et al., 2014; Steen & Smith, 2012), actions that can be connected with finding resources and ensuring representation of marginalized clients (Mosley, 2012; Schmid, Bar, & Nirel, 2008, quoted in Chuang et al., 2014).

Currently, the role of social work practice in the United States is diverse. It is present in the implementation of child welfare public-private policies. However, it also plays an important role in helping and advocating for shaping the direction of social policies focused on this area (Briar-Lawson et al., 2009; Scherrer, 2012).

Conclusions and implications for critical social work

This paper sought to provide answers to four questions, first, what ideologies and economic issues have shaped the contemporary perspective of public-private partnerships in child welfare in Chile and in the United States; what has been the role of public and private sector

in child welfare provision in these countries; what has been the role of social work practice in this area and, finally, what lessons in terms of implications for current critical social work can be recognized from the review of these public-private partnerships in both countries.

Based on the literature on these issues, it is possible to surmise that in both countries, the ideologies and economic issues that have shaped its public-private partnerships have mainly been, on the one hand, a neoliberal approach and, on the other, a residual perspective conceiving of childhood based on needs rather than rights, with some institutional differences in particularities between the two countries. For instance, in Chile with the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but in the absence of a legal instrument to protect, and most of all, to reconstitute rights against violations that they can suffer and, in the United States with an absence of the ratification of the Convention as the international instrument that can guide child welfare provision from a human rights approach (Briar-Lawson et al., 2009). In this context, these main ideologies or structural forces do not oppose each other but, on the contrary, can be reinforcing, generating a framework that has resulted in a lack of priority of childhood rights and services. Concrete expressions of the results of this concatenation are that both countries' social phenomena that affect children are addressed by residual public sectors that tackle childhood phenomena from a residual or subsidiary approach, generating conditions for privatization and competition mechanisms instead of rights instruments that can configure an integral protection system for children that have suffered violations of their rights and that are clients of child welfare services.

Regarding the current role of the public and private sector in this public-private partnership, in both countries, the first plays the primary role of regulating and legislating child welfare services, while private non-profit sector primarily exercises the role of implementing welfare provisions. This situation is related to a diverse set of beliefs or assumptions associated with privatization and contracting under the neoliberal ideology that has shaped the public-private partnerships in child welfare in both countries. These can be understood as enmeshed social and economic factors. Regarding economic elements, the supposition of achieving a lower cost in child welfare provision when working through the non-profit sector has prevailed over time. In turn, social elements associated with working with private entities refer to the belief that clients will receive a higher quality intervention because private entities have incentives to provide these at a lower cost. Nevertheless, there are studies that have highlighted that this is, at the very least, an issue to be carefully studied. In this context, Hubel et al. (2013) mention that "cost savings should not be a key reason for privatization, as they may not materialize" (p. 2053). This is related to, among others, characteristics of children's family

situations which, on occasion, are highly complex and, therefore, require high-quality workforce, regardless of whether it is the public or private sector that provides the intervention.

With regard to the role of social work practice in this spectrum, the discipline has played a central role in this policy arena in both countries in the form of advocacy actions and through the development of child welfare provisions. This was done, in the beginning of social philanthropy and, in the second stage, as a technical and political discipline with expertise to intervene and promote the generation of better conditions for children. Also, in both countries critical practice has played a crucial role regarding child welfare provision.

The elements discussed in this paper provide lessons for current critical social work regarding policy implications across different interconnected areas. Firstly, even in cases where provision could be less expensive by working with the private sector, there is an ethical imperative that critical social work must address in order to demand that public and private sector provide the highest quality interventions for children. Regarding this, in Chile, Andrade-Guzmán et al. (2014) found that when privatization is addressed by lowering subsidies that do not allow provision of market competitive salaries, there is a high attrition among frontline practitioners. This has implications for clients, especially when they are working with caseworkers in order to overcome highly complex situations in which, for instance, the practitioner-clients relation or rapport is crucial for achieving positive results from the intervention. Similar worries in the United States are highlighted by Hubel et al. (2013) who mention that private organizations “can reduce costs and increase profits through methods that diminish the quality of services for children and families, such as hiring less experienced staff, increasing worker caseloads, and providing lower levels of supervision” (p. 2050). Critical social workers must advocate and demand accountability on both the public and the private sector about these issues.

Even while both countries have developed measures to address social phenomena that affect children, it is imperative that both move forward to an effective implementation of a human rights approach to child welfare as opposed to a needs fulfilment approach. In the case of the United States, the country should ratify the UNCRC. However, as the case of Chile illustrates, mere ratification is not enough. Both countries need to tailor their policy and institutional configuration to guidelines specified in the Convention. Critical social work can play a crucial role to demand that, first, this be achieved and, second, child welfare provision (public, private, or public-private) promotes and safeguards its orientations. In this regard, critical social work should be present not only during the implementation of public-private

child welfare but it must have more presence and a say in the design and evaluation of the initiatives as well.

Finally, lessons for critical social work in terms of implications for research regarding the public-private child welfare are recognized. While there is strong evidence of advanced knowledge, for instance, for Chile and for the United States, there is a need for more in-depth research that observes and studies the complexities within child welfare (and other welfare areas), including their implications for clients. Critical social work research that reveals and determines the challenges that practitioners face in this field is critical in enhancing social policies and interventions for children and to advocate for the permanent and continued improvements in public and private sector performance in addressing childhood social phenomena.

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