Study on the constructive conflict management in students of the Department of Social Work at the Complutense University of Madrid[1]

Estudio sobre la gestión constructiva del conflicto en el alumnado de la Facultad de Trabajo Social de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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Abstract

If there is a reality in the professional social work practice, that is the usual coexistence with the 'conflict'. The social workers provide professional support and guidance to help individuals, families and groups with multidimensional and complex realities in which the conflict is emerging as a major element in the relations with its environment. The disagreement is many times present in the human society, and in that sense it is unquestionable that it acquires prominence in difficult situations where the people one works with, often turn into clashes and unrest that undoubtedly require professionals with appropriate training to enable constructive and peaceful management of such conflicts. This article shows the results obtained in the recent study on perception, coping styles and training in constructive conflict management students of the Faculty of Social Work at Complutense University of Madrid.

Keywords: Social Work, conflict, education, mediation, constructive conflict management.

Resumen

Si existe una realidad en la práctica profesional del Trabajo Social es la convivencia habitual con el «conflicto». Los trabajadores y las trabajadoras sociales constituyen un soporte profesional de ayuda y acompañamiento a personas, familias y grupos, con realidades multidimensionales y complejas, en las que el conflicto se perfila como elemento principal en las relaciones con su entorno. El desacuerdo está en multitud de ocasiones presente en la convivencia humana, y en tal sentido es incuestionable el protagonismo que adquiere en las situaciones de dificultad en las que se encuentran las personas con las que se trabaja, tornándose frecuentemente en enfrentamientos y malestar que, sin duda, requieren de profesionales con una formación adecuada que posibilite la gestión constructiva y pacífica de dichos conflictos. El presente artículo muestra los resultados obtenidos en el reciente estudio realizado sobre percepción, estilos de afrontamiento y formación sobre gestión constructiva de conflictos en el alumnado de la Facultad de Trabajo Social de UCM.

Palabras clave: Trabajo Social, conflicto, formación, mediación, gestión constructiva de conflicto.

Summary: Introduction. 1. Material and methods. 2. Results. 3. Discussion. 4. References.

Introduction

In recent times, it can be appreciated the strong interest risen by the study of the conflict, negotiation and mediation in the Social Sciences. This peak in conflict analysis and its different forms of management show a reality: conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships and therefore of the social reality and consequently, it is necessary to provide appropriate formulas for the management of such conflicts (Serrano, 2006).

At the same time, the increased complexity of social reality gives more diversity to conflict situations, which certainly need new analytical tools and new ways of effective treatment. Analysis and in-depth knowledge of their causes, their elements, their dynamics and their coping strategies are necessary content for the professional practice of social workers. However, as Serrano (2006) discusses, only this is not enough, since the structural reality of the conflict demands a change in the attitude towards it of all social agents.

In this sense it would be necessary to accept the everyday conflict but also we would have to consider that not all forms of coping are appropriate. And it is equally convenient to accept that the difficulty many times does not emerge as much of conceptual elements but personal «attitudes» to the conflict. In this regard Ibarra (2001) defines professional skills as the productive capacity of the person who is defined and measured in terms of performance in a particular work context, not only of knowledge, skills or abilities in the abstract; competition is the integration between knowledge, know-how and knowledge to be.

With regard to the relationship between social work and constructive conflict management, there are numerous studies in the marriage bet-ween social work and mediation: Rondón and Munuera (2009), Rondón (2010), García-Longoria (2006) Rondón and Alemán-Bracho (2011), Munuera (2012a and 2012b), García-Longoria (2000), García-Longoria and Conesa (2000), Curbelo and Del Sol (2010), Rondón and Cosano (2007). However, it is of interest to incorporate novel, central and conceptual elements in the aforementioned path.

The paradigm shift in the study is based essentially on the following units of analysis:

1. It is not just a question of incorporating or integrating the contents on mediation to professional social work practice but of advancing in line contemplating a more comprehensive concept of constructive conflict management, which includes but exceeds mediation as ADR[2].

Mediation is a cooperative system management and conflict resolution, through a non-judicial, voluntary and confidential process, which allows communication between the parties in order to let them to translate the common interests in a stable and viable agreement that is satisfactory to both of them. This process is facilitated by the mediator, who is an impartial, neutral, suitably trained and with no decision-making power (Villaluenga García, 2006).

However, we believe that mediation is not the silver bullet that «fits all». Here, Parkinson states:

> *Mediation is not a universal panacea and its benefits are not automatic, but it depends largely on the motivation of the participants to reach an agreement, the issues at stake and the skills and experience of the mediator. Mediation is not a suitable or possible method in every case, and therefore it is essential to assess carefully whether it is potentially appropriate... (2005: 80-81).*

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[2] The Alternative Dispute Resolution (Alternative Dispute Resolution, ADR onwards) began as a discipline in the United States since the 70s, under the influence of the U.S. citizen movement struggle for civil rights (Civil Rights Movement), which questioned the traditional, authoritarian and punitive methods of treatment of the conflict in areas of family, community, school and business coexistence. It was established as a transdisciplinar professionalized space, which was academic and professional, studying all kinds of conflicts, including the techniques, methods, strategies and systems for treatment and positive transformation (Farré, 2004). The term «alternative» refers to the use of this path as a viable alternative to traditional court. The alternative conflict management means allow people themselves or with the assistance of others to get more participatory arrangements, within a framework of flexibility and in a shorter time than if you opt for the courts» (Cerini, 2004).

So we find ourselves facing different possibilities for intervening in conflicts with the assistance or not of a neutral third party to facilitate the process. This is a continuum regarding the type of power that is given to the parties during the conflict management process, being the intervention of the judge the method that confers no power on the parties to the co-decision in their conflict management: negotiation, mediation, arbitration and conciliation.

The concept of constructive conflict management[3] that we propose for professional social work practice goes far beyond, exceeding the uncrossable limits that mediation occasionally projects. Managing conflict constructively has to do in many situations with the institution of mediation (mainly family...), but on many other occasions constructive conflict management meets the terminals of mediation. Voluntariness of the parties for the commencement of the mediation process, the power imbalance between them, limits of our legal system and many other causes can motivate the inability to start the mediation processes. However, this may not lead to erroneous statements as to think that the conflict does not exist, and therefore it does not need an adequate response to meet the needs of people who are immersed in it. The skills necessary for the worker and the social worker cannot be restricted therefore to the exclusive methodology of mediation since in many situations; the necessary tools for our practice would be beyond our reach. The expertise and know-be (personal attitude) of the professional needs to be enriched as completely as possible by a repertoire of tools and techniques of constructive conflict management which enable him to develop his professional work under the criteria of effectiveness and efficiency.

2. Moreover, the constructive conflict management cannot abide to restrict the scope of family social work as it is usual in the studies discussed above. The contexts of social work practice are as multiple as the environments are varied where conflicts arise. Conflicts appear in educational, health, organizational, community, neighborhood and intercultural contexts where the social work professional interacts as a social change agent. Therefore, the approach should be expanded to offer a constructive response to the conflict management in any context in which it is generated.

While there are specific studies about it in some areas (Munuera, 2012; Munuera, 2006; Carbonell, García-Longoria, 2012) bibliographic tour is almost seated in the family probably motivated by the legislative development in this regard.

Based on the foregoing, our study lies in promoting a new debate in the professional perspective of conflict management for social workers. Below we show the results of a recent survey conducted among students of the Faculty of Social Work at the Complutense University of Madrid. In this study we have tried to influence unusual aspects in the existing analysis on the relationship between social work and constructive conflict management, namely, perception, personal coping styles and knowledge about the constructive management of conflict of future social workers trained in the Complutense University of Madrid. This article will attempt to estimate the differences, if any, on the results of the students upon their arrival at the Faculty and at the time of starting the Practicum.

Considering this, the following objectives were formulated:

1. To describe the perception of the conflict of the student body that is the object of study of social work and estimate the differences if any between the group of first year and the fourth year.

2. To identify personal conflict management styles of students and estimate the differences if any between the students of first year and fourth year.

3. To analyze the perception and satisfaction of personal conflict management of students, and estimate the differences if any between the students of first year and fourth year.

4. To know the importance that the students of the first and fourth year give to training on constructive conflict management, and estimate the differences if any.

1. Material and methods
It is a descriptive study whose design is based on the quantitative approach and more specifically in the non-experimental research, in which the phenomenon under study is observed as it appears in its natural context. The term «design» refers to the plan or strategy used in an investigation to obtain the desired information. In this case, following the classification of Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado and Baptista (2010) it would be a transactional or a descriptive, cross and correlated research.

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[3] We used the term «management» instead of resolution to adapt more to a conception of conflict as a psychosocial process.

Universe and sample

For the selection of the sample it was performed a random stratified sampling[4] which could respond to one of the fundamental objectives of the study, namely, to estimate and relate the results obtained among students of first and fourth year of the Degree in Social Work. Stratification, that is, the division of the population segments or layers increases the accuracy of sample and involves a sample size for each segment.

In our case the allocation of the sample was proportional to the population of each stratum and multistage, per course and per turn. The size of the sample was as follows:

$$N = 643, \ n = 366, \text{ siendo } N_1h = 365, \ n_1h = 192$$
$$\text{y } N_2h = 278, \ n_2h = 175$$

This sample size sets the maximum a priori error ± 5% at a confidence level of 95% (1.96 σ).

Questionnaire

The instrument selected for data collection in our study was the self-administered questionnaire that is provided directly to the informants in group context. This context was the classrooms of first and fourth year of the Faculty of Social Work, where after an initial presentation of the study, and after seeking the voluntary cooperation and ensure the confidentiality of responses, the questionnaire was administered to informants randomly by draw.

The questionnaire was administered in classrooms of students of the Faculty of Social Work during the second fortnight of October to the informants of first year and during the first and second fortnight of November to the students of fourth year. The choice of dates is motivated by our interest in collecting relevant information on perception, knowledge and personal coping styles of conflict when the students of first year start the degree and once the training of students in fourth year has finished, excluding the Practicum due to they might acquire knowledge that can vary considerably depending on the assigned center of Practice.

Previously a pilot test was applied to identify possible inaccuracies of the questionnaire sample units of different segments randomly chosen. This test did not produce changes on the questionnaire.

Based on the purpose of study, the dimensions or variables which would permit their knowledge and the analysis of results were established and we could obtain relevant information to enable us to develop conclusions.

Considering all the above, the design of the questionnaire was organized around four themes, in which the fundamental variables of our study and its main dimensions were inserted.

Theme I: classification variables

Socio-demographic variables of students are included in this block.

Theme II: the conflict

In this section, the perception that students have about the conflict as an element of interaction and their potential is explored.

Theme III: personal conflict management

The dimensions for this variable measures were:

Personal style of conflict management based on the type of the accumulated literature, personal skills for managing conflicts and personal perception and satisfaction in managing personal conflicts.

Theme IV: the conflict management training for professional practice

In this section the main items that make up the variable formation on conflict management for professional practice are discussed. The established dimensions for assessment are: learning conflict management skills, personal interest in receiving training on conflict management and assessment of the importance of training in constructive conflict management for professional social work practice.

As shown, each of the research variables are built by various variables of the matrix, i.e. they are composed variables, and the estimation of the data obtained from the different items that form it will determine the final interpretation of the values obtained for each variable.

The questionnaire consists of 33 questions; most of them closed, but also includes open questions for the items that were considered appropriate to incorporate qualitative elements for proper interpretation. These questions were coded later, once overall response patterns were estimated and numerical values to each pattern were assigned (Hernandez Sampieri *et al.,* 2010).

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[4] The selection of the sample, i.e. the sample elements were chosen randomly to ensure that every element has the same probability of being chosen, Hernandez Sampieri *et al.* (2010).

Lastly, the analysis of the data from the questionnaires was conducted through SPSS software, version 19.0. by obtaining the percentages and descriptive and inferential statistics relevant to the research.

2. Results

2.1. Description of the sample

Since the population object of study is the students of first and fourth year of the degree in Social Work from the UCM, the description of the sample was carried out based on the classification variable «academic year» of students, in the interest of finding possible similarities and differences. As shown, the sample of our population is not a matched sample and needed to verify that there was no bias towards students of first or fourth year respect to the socio-demographic characteristics analyzed.

	First year students	Fourth year students
Age of the student		
Media	20.10	23.7
Standard deviation	3.421	3.426
Sex		
Woman	83.9	85.7
Man	16.1	14.3
Order of choice of degree in Social Work		
First	63.5	65.1
Second	26	26.2
Third	7.3	5.7
From fourth	3.1	2.5
Region		
C. Madrid	2.1	3.4
Others	26.7	25.7
Residence area of Madrid		
Capital, Center	32	22.4
Capital, Periphery	18.9	22
South C. Madrid	20.7	26.8
North C. Madrid	13.6	11.6
East C. Madrid	7.3	7.3
West C. Madrid	8.9	7.9
Stay at home		
Yes	88.3	81.1
No	11.7	18.9
Studies level reached		
Secondary	96.4	94.4
Higher	1.6	3.6
Others	2	2

	First year students	Fourth year students
Studies level reached		
Secondary	96.4	94.4
Superior	1.6	3.6
Others	2	2
Branches of previous qualifications		
Science	0	2.3
Art/Humanities	4.1	0
Soc/Legal	81.6	86
Health sciences	14.3	11.6
Engin/Architect	0	0
Studies level reached father		
No studies	1.1	2.3
Primary/Elem	26.7	29.3
Secondary	45.7	38.7
Higher	25	28.2
Dk/Na	1.6	1.7
Studies level reached mother		
No studies	2.1	3.4
Primary/Elem	26.7	25.7
Secondary	44.5	48
Higher	25.7	22.9
Dk/Na	1	0
Annual income		
10,000/20,000 €	24.3	33.1
20,001/30,000 €	14.8	20.3
30,001/40,000 €	9	8.7
40,001/60,000 €	6.3	7
More than 60,001 €	0.5	1.2
Dk/Na	45	29.7

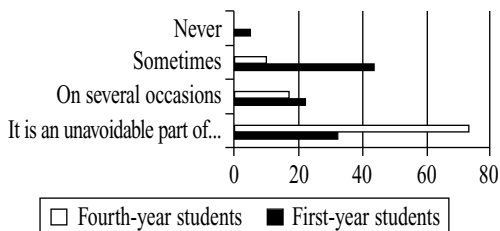Table 1. Demographic characteristics of students.
Fuente: Own elaboration.

Figure 1. Do you think that conflict is normal in co-existence?
Fuente: Own elaboration.

As a result of the statistical analysis performed in the classification variables, we conclude that there were no significant differences between the proportions of students from first and fourth grade for each demographic characteristic analyzed. In order to observe this, tests of hypotheses of differences have been made in population proportions, and most have not rejected the null hypothesis of equal population proportions. With this, we justify that the sampling biases have been no to the students and the students of first and fourth year in sociodemographic characteristics analyzed.

2.2. Conflict
Speaking of conflict certainly implies that common situations of coexistence and human relations in which the values, needs, desires, expectations or interests are, or are perceived as opposites (García Villaluenga and Bolaños, 2006).

In order to explore the perception of the surveyed population around the conflict, an initial question was established so that students will po-

sition the conflict as an element of coexistence. To perform a hypothesis testing population means to difference (without assuming equal variances, F = 46.204, p-value ≅ 0), the value of the difference in sample means is 0.816 and p-value ≅ 0. Therefore, we accept that there are statistically significant differences between the students and the students of first and fourth year on the conflict as a regular part of coexistence.

As seen in Figure 1, 73.1% of students in fourth believe that conflict is an inevitable part of living together, 21.4% think that many times, 9.7% think that sometimes and only one pupil thinks that it is never part of coexistence. These values are significantly different in first-year students being «sometimes» the highest response rate with 42.7%, followed by 31.8% who inevitably considered part of coexistence.

In the interest of deepening the attitude of the students, an open question was asked to provide the informants the opportunity to associate the word «conflict» without first defining the alternative answers. To codify this question, categories or broad general patterns of response were established, as it can be seen, they refer to different units of analysis in the interest of encoding as many possible answers. This, together with a frequency response of around 20% of does not know/does not respond in first-year students, and exceeding 15% in the fourth-year students, it shows, indeed, the «absence» of appropriate language when defining the conflict.

As shown in Figure 2, there are conclusive differences among students in first and fourth year when asked about the words associated with «conflict». When analyzing differences by cour-
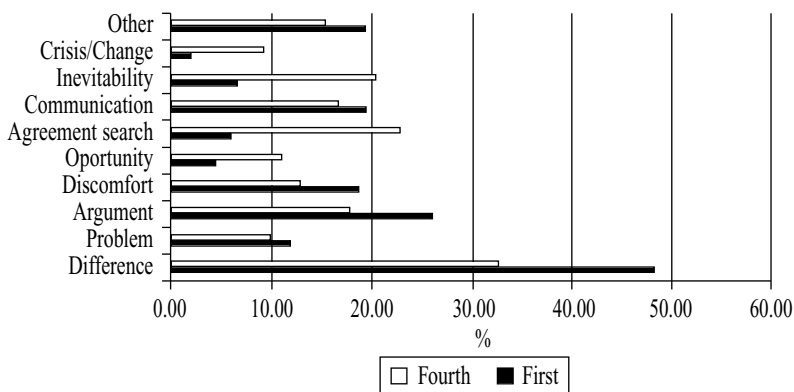

Figure 2. Words related with conflcit.
Fuente: Own elaboration.

se, it clearly appears how the students of fourth have a higher percentage of responses associated with positive units on the conflict analysis and structural («inevitability»), and how students of higher frequencies first obtained response linked to negative elements of the conflict. Thus, the percentages of conflict as «opportunity» in the fourth-year student almost tripled the values obtained with the first-year student and also the percentages of conflict as «seeking agreement» in the fourth-year student quadruples the values achieved by the students of first-year, relevant data, because as Farre (2004) discusses, this positive component that lies in the conflicts, lies the reason for the constructive management of conflict, providing, where appropriate, an opportunity for change and development.

Also it is important to emphasize that the highest response pattern in students of first percentage, 50%, is in the conflict category as «difference», i.e. placing the conflict away from «fight and fight». As for the association of the conflict to negative elements, the first-year students exceed the fourth-year students in all categories, conflict/problem, conflict/fight, conflict/uneasiness. One thing to note is the high response rates associated with «communication» in the first-year students, which we believe that shows the student perception of the conflict as a communication process.

Also the fundamental issue in the study of this variable inquired about the perception of students about the possibility of growth from a conflict situation by developing an item for it to allow us to collect their opinion about it.

The results are conclusive, and that 93.7% of students in fourth grade think it is always or almost always possible to improve a relationship from a conflict situation. Only 4% believe that almost never can be improved and only a student believes that one can never improve.

Percentages in first-year students are coincident in trend as 83.7% say they always or almost always can improve, although the value of «almost never» triples the percentage of students in the fourth-year students for that category (11.6% compared to 4% in first-year students). There is no first-year student informant who thinks you

can never improve a relationship from a conflict situation.

However, after carrying out hypothesis testing population means difference (without assuming equal variances F = 11,787 p-value = 0.001) the value of the mean difference is 0.286 and p-value = 0.43, I accept that significant difference exists between the students of first and fourth year, being p-value ≤ 0.05

The clarity of the reply in this item provides essential and prominent assumptions about the possibilities of change and development from common conflict situations in professional interventions.

2.3. Personal conflict management styles

Unlike other areas of human behavior, conflict behavior is expressed by multiple behaviors that are known as *conflict management styles*. The styles of conflict management can be defined as the general and consistent orientation toward the other party on the conflict issues, expressed in observable behaviors that are relatively stable over time (Thomas, 1976, Montes, Serrano and Rodríguez, 2010).

Following Rahim (1990) classification and the distinction between coping styles have been made to the conflict from different perspectives. Among them, the *two-dimensional approximation*[5] appears and it is considered that conflict behavior should be seen as a combination of the inclination of the person that appears to two different dimensions. The origin of this approach is based on the categorization made by Blake and Mouton (1964). Thomas (1976) reinterprets such categorization, and distinguishes between two basic dimensions that determine the different coping styles of conflict, the degree of assertiveness, i.e. interest in their own interests, and the degree of cooperative movement, namely the interest to satisfy the interests of the other. Both dimensions are part of a continuum, resulting in five styles of conflict behavior: *avoiding* (unassertive and uncooperative), *accommodating* (unassertive and cooperative), *engagement* (moderately assertive and moderately cooperative), *collaboration* (assertive and cooperative) and *competition* (assertive and uncooperative).

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[5] Blake and Mouton initially developed a categorization that could lead to 81 different coping styles of conflict based on concern for production and concern for the person. Subsequently it was reduced to five main styles: domination, withdrawal, smoothing, compromise and problem solving.
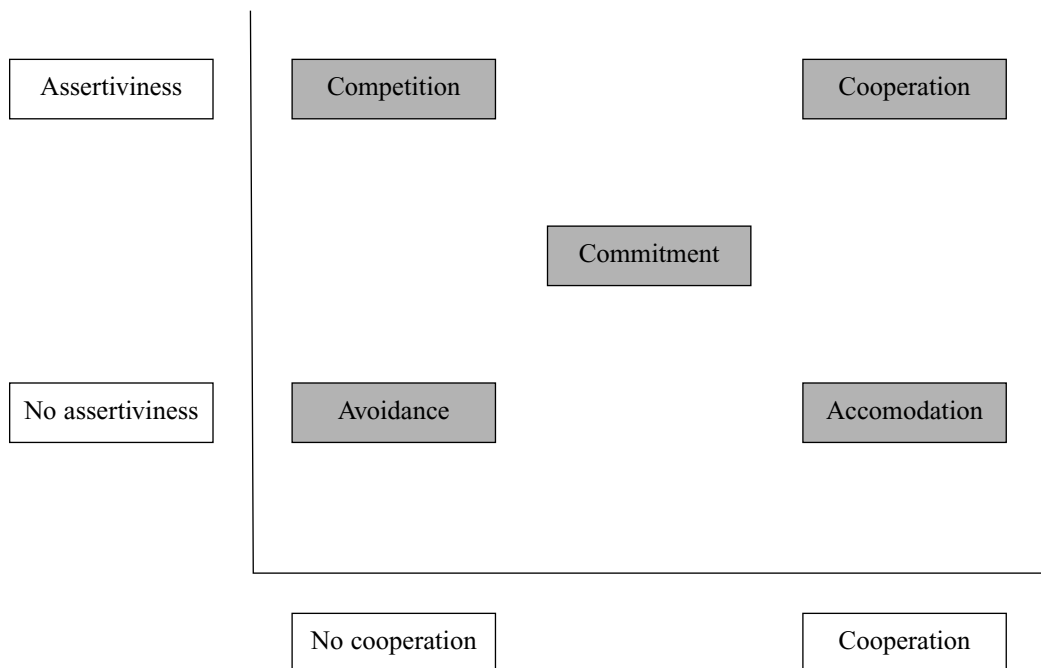
Figure 3. Conflict management styles, Thomas (1974).
Fuente: Own elaboration.

The classification of Thomas (1976) has been the source of reference for the preparation of the response categories of the variable «conflict management styles», transcribing, however, in a clear, precise and understandable language for the population surveyed. Response categories developed were:»I talk to the person/s to try a compromise», «I avoid the situation», «I'd rather lose than face it», «I like to achieve my goals, even if the other loses», « I try to know what the other wants and feels not only to meet my needs».

The results show significant differences between first-year students and fourth-year as a percentage. Thus, 48% of fourth-year students «talk to the person/s to try a compromise», 43.8% «is to know what the other wants...», followed by minimum percentages between 1.8 % and 3% for the categories of «avoid the situation», «I'd rather lose than face it» and «I like to achieve my goals but the other off ...». The 57.6% of first-year students claimed «I talk to the person / s to try a compromise», 30.5% «is to know what the other wants...» followed by 7.3 % of «avoid the situation» and 2.3% for the categories «rather lose than face it» and «I like to achieve my goals but the other off...» On this basis, we can say on one hand that students from fourth year slide along the continuum of the dimensions of cooperation vs. non-coope-

ration and assertiveness *vs.* no assertiveness toward cooperative styles and assertive collaboration and commitment, showing irrelevant percentages for not assertive and uncooperative styles, and second, that first-year students are also sorted to the same coordinates, (though with lower percentages in cooperative/assertive style, as we have seen), but showing somewhat higher percentages avoidant style (unassertive and uncooperative).

As for the perception of the students in reference to the ease/complication of managing conflicts, several items that allow management of different types of conflict were made (family, work, friends, family and colleagues were drawn), so you can make an assessment independently.

As seen in Table #2, both students of the first year as the fourth, consider neither very easy nor very difficult managing their conflicts in general, noting that the students of first year find it easier in general, that students in fourth, managing conflicts in all areas except in the labor. This may be probably due to lack of work experience, as the percentage of does not know/does not reply, obtained the highest values of the entire questionnaire. Moreover, students in the fourth year find their greatest difficulties in managing family conflicts, followed by the couple ones.

	First year students (%)	**Fourth year students (%)**
With your family		
Very easy	13.1	12
Easy	59.2	40
Difficult	25.1	39.4
Very difficult	1.6	8.6
Dk/Na	1	0
With your partner		
Very easy	11.2	11
Easy	47.9	47.4
Difficult	26.6	31.2
Very difficult	4.3	3.5
Dk/Na	10.1	6.9
With your friends		
Very easy	9.4	16.6
Easy	68.6	64
Difficult	19.9	17.7
Very difficult	1	1.7
Dk/Na	1	0
With your colleagues		
Very easy	9.9	8.6
Easy	69.9	66.3
Difficult	16.2	24
Very difficult	0.5	0.6
Dk/Na	3.7	0.6
In your job		
Very easy	2.4	6.7
Easy	38	45.1
Difficult	30.1	27.4
Very difficult	4.2	5.5
Dk/Na	25.3	15.2

Table 2. Normally, how do you find resolving conflicts? *Fuente:* Own elaboration.

We conclude the analysis of this variable with the acceptance of statistically significant differences among students in first and fourth year once hypothesis testing difference in population means managing conflicts with family (assuming equal variances, F = 3.312 and p-value = 0.07., the mean difference is 0.0221 and p-value = 0.018), and conflict management at work (without assuming equal variances, F = 14.668 and p-value ≅ 0, the difference in average 0.748

and p-value = 0.012). Also it is not accepted that the mean difference in conflict management in couples (assuming equal variances, F = 2.024 and p-value = 0.156, the mean difference is 0.19 and p-value = 0.317), in the management of conflict with friends (assuming equal variances F = 1.952 and p = 0.163, mean difference is 0.153 and p-value = 0.064) and in the management of conflict with fellow university (without assuming equal variances F = 5.872 and p-value = 0.016, the mean difference is 0.124 and p-value = 0.302).

Regarding personal skills, 47.6% of students in first year considered that have personal skills to manage their conflicts, 50.8% considered to have some, and only 1.6% think he does not. In the fourth-year students trend is reversed, but with closely matched values, 50.3% believe that they do, 48% think have some, and 1.7% think he does not. Upon completion hypothesis testing difference of population means (assuming equal variances F = 0.064 and p-value = 0.801), the value of the mean difference is 0.025 for p-value = 0.654, not accepting therefore statistically significant differences.

The students that believe that have personal skills to manage their conflicts, 89.2% of first considered almost always successfully managed their conflicts; always 7.5%, and rarely, 1.6. These percentages are virtually repeated in the fourth-year students, and 89.4% say that they almost always successfully managed their conflicts; always 7.1%, and 2.4% rarely. In this case no statistically significant differences among students in first and fourth year allowed once hypothesis testing of differences in population means done (assuming equal variances F = 0.251 to p-value = 0.617), the value of the mean difference is 0.018 for p-value = 0.844.

2.4. The conflict management training for professional practice

Conflict is inherent in human beings and requires a deep understanding of its causes, and dynamic elements in order to find ways to manage it (Cerini, 2004).

We begin this series of questions asking about the perception of students about the possibility of improving personal skills of conflict management through appropriate training, absolutely conclusive results obtained in both courses, and that 53.6% of first-year students think

that the skills to manage conflicts can always be improved by appropriate training, reached heights of 68.4% in the fourth year. We are talking about the 92.7% of students in first year who always or almost always can improve conflict management skills through appropriate training, and 99.4% of students from fourth. Only 1.7% of first-year students thinks seldom or never can be improved and none of fourth year thinks in that way. Hypothesis testing for difference of population means (not assuming equal variances $F = 12.847$ and p-value $\cong 0$) shows a value of 0.520 mean difference and p-value = 0.001, accepting therefore that there are significant differences between students in the first and fourth year.

Regarding the importance of conflict management skills for the professional practice of the worker and the social worker, again the data are inconclusive, since 85.3% of students first think it is very important followed by the «important» option with 12.6%, i.e. 97.9% of the students of first year think it is important or very important. As for the fourth-year students, high values on these percentages are reached, since almost 93.7% of the respondents think that is very important, and 6.3% is important. There is no student in the room that does not value education in conflict as very important or important. Hypothesis testing for difference of population means (not assuming equal variances $F = 19.661$ and p-value $\cong 0$) shows a value of 0.168 mean difference and p-value = 0.013, accepting therefore that there are statistically significant differences between students in first and fourth grade.

For personal interest in receiving training in constructive conflict management in the Degree in Social Work, 70.2% of students of first year think it would be appropriate to receive training in constructive conflict management. This percentage increases to 25% after the training degree, i.e. 88% of students in fourth year think that it would be appropriate to receive training on constructive conflict management. The «right» choice is chosen by 27.2% of first-year students, and 12.6% of fourth graders. There is not a fourth-year student informant that values as «inadequate» training on conflict management, and only 1% of students in first year. Here again there are statistically significant differences between students in the first and fourth year after carrying out the hypothesis testing of

population differences (without assuming equal variances $F = 27.55$ and p-value $\cong 0$) to obtain the mean value of differences of 0.293 and p-value $\cong 0$.

We conclude the analysis of the data obtained in the questionnaire with an item on the assessment of students on the importance of training in constructive conflict management for the worker and the social worker, obtaining relevant results, 85.1% of students in fourth year think it is very important for the worker and the social worker the training in constructive conflict management, and 14.9% think it is important. There is no participant who valued it as unimportant.

In the case of students of first year the percentages, although not as high, are equally emphatic, almost 70% think it is very important and 27% think it is important. Only one student thought it to be unimportant.

However, once the hypothesis testing mean difference of population is done (without assuming equal variances $F = 23, 305$ and p-value $\cong 0$) the mean difference is 0.293 and p-value = 0.001, so it is accepted that statistically significant differences among students in first and fourth year.

3. Discussion

To start the conclusions we return our starting reflection on the reality of living with the usual conflict and the professional Social Work practice. To speak about social work is speaking about conflict management and in this regard, as stated in the White Paper on Social Work degree, based on the skills defined in the Tuning Project, «problem solving» is the generic competition that is the most appreciated by professionals, graduates, students and teachers. This generic competition should be shaped by the knowledge, know-how and knowledge to be. Our main contributions have been outlined around the know-how and knowledge to be.

First of all, note that there are statistically significant differences in almost all variables studied among students of first and fourth year, which probably refers to the importance of training in the Degree in Social Work.

Also, that students of first and fourth year think mostly the conflict is an inevitable part of human society coexistence, it frames the professional intervention in routine conflict management and provides relevance to the need of trai-

ning that enables such professional work, shown by the results obtained. This coupled with the roundness of the response around the perception of students about the possibility of growth from a conflict, provides essential premises of the social intervention and professional competence that allows the professional skills for the creation of scenarios where the intervention in the conflict can positively located, thereby facilitating appropriate answers to the needs and interests of the people that are absorbed in conflict processes.

However, despite the association of the conflict to positive elements of fourth-year students far exceeds the results of first-year students, we believe that the achieved percentages are not the desirable for social work professionals. As relevant data, we can confirm the high rates associated with first-year students to the conflict as a communication process, which is an opening for communication training in the training of social workers.

Regarding personal coping styles conflict management, the profile of students is clearly settled in assertive and cooperative models. Possibly, personal coping styles of conflict management based on the assertive and cooperative models students can help professionals to predict future interventions seated in positive and constructive conflict management formulas. Moreover, the students of first year find it easier overall management conflicts that fourth-year students. If we associate this variable with the styles of conflict management, it is possible that this ease

in first-year students can derive from the highest percentage of cooperative styles and assertive conflict management in students in the fourth year, which can certainly involve greater difficulty, to meet not only the needs and interests but to consider the needs and interests of the other.

In addition, approximately fifty percent of students in first and fourth year consider that have personal skills to manage their conflicts, not existing in this case statistically significant difference between the two. However, almost all of the students in both courses believe that these skills always or almost always can be improved by appropriate training. It should be added therefore that although students think that personal conflict management skills always or almost always can be improved, there are no differences among students in first and fourth year in their consideration of whether they have skills to manage conflict, which shows that the training did not change in this area.

Finally note that almost all of the fourth-year students considered very important to have personal conflict management skills for professional practice, and also all of the students rated as very important or important training in constructive conflict management to the social worker, which in our opinion, it possibly shows the need to influence through training, know-how and know how to be social work professionals, considering the data obtained in our study, which are none other than those included by the future social workers at UCM.

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