

# Between therapy, activism, and profession: Bertha Pappenheim's contribution to the formation of modern social work

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the life and work of Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936) as a significant figure in shaping the early contours of social work. The aim is to evaluate how her work – rooted in personal experience, ethical principles, and a gender-sensitive approach – resonates with contemporary concepts of social work as a profession that provides help. Based on biographical, historical, and professional sources, we have identified key aspects of her approach, including working with marginalized women, building community networks, cultural sensitivity, an emphasis on client autonomy, and a determination to change social inequalities. Of particular importance is the analysis of Pappenheim as a precursor to contemporary approaches, including intersectionality, trauma-informed care, empowerment, and community development. The results demonstrate that her life's work has enduring significance for reflection on professional identity, ethics, and practice in contemporary social work. Pappenheim thus represents a historical but also living model of value-based, critically oriented, and inclusive social work.

**Keywords:** Bertha Pappenheim, Anna O., women's activism, feminism, intersectionality, trauma-informed approach, community work, empowerment, psychoanalysis, gender equality, migration

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Date of Submission: 04-07-2025

Date of Acceptance: 14-07-2025

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## I. Introduction and methodology

Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936) is a significant figure in social work history despite often being overshadowed by other, more famous individuals in broader professional and public discussions.

She is best known in historical memory as „Anna O.“, Josef Breuer's first patient, whose case became the basis for the emergence of psychoanalysis (Reeves, 1982). A lesser-known but equally important aspect of her life was her work as a social reformer, feminist, child protector, anti-trafficking advocate, and founder of modern social organizations (Edinger, 1958).

Pappenheim combined her personal experience of mental crisis with a determination to systematically help others, becoming one of the first women not only to engage in charity work but to transform it into professional, community-based, and value-driven social work (Brownstein, 2024). Even in the early 20th century, she reflected on issues that are still at the center of attention today: trauma, poverty, gender-based violence, discrimination against minorities, community engagement, and the ethics of the helping professions.

This article aims to reconstruct key aspects of Bertha Pappenheim's life and work based on a thematic analysis of secondary literature and to interpret them as historical precedents for the development of modern social work. We analyze her approaches, values, and strategies from the perspective of today's challenges in the helping professions, demonstrating how her legacy transcends the historical framework and finds new applications in the 21st century. Based on the above objective, we have set the following research questions:

1. What is the significance of Bertha Pappenheim's life story for the contemporary understanding of professional identity in social work?
2. Which of Pappenheim's approaches to social work are relevant to the current needs of clients?
3. How can her legacy be conceptualized within the contemporary ethics and values of the helping professions?
4. Which elements of her work correspond to contemporary approaches such as intersectionality, trauma-informed care, and empowerment?

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This study employs a qualitative approach based on a thematic analysis of secondary historical, biographical, and professional sources to reconstruct the life, intellectual legacy, and social influence of Bertha Pappenheim. The chosen methodology is interpretive and contextual, drawing on secondary sources selected based on several complementary criteria: scientific quality, thematic relevance, interdisciplinary potential, and historical and contextual significance. Diverse interpretative traditions and how Bertha Pappenheim's personality was constructed in various scientific fields were also taken into account. The selection of literature was explicitly focused on biographical and historical studies, reflections on psychoanalytic literature, feminist and gender theories, as well as socio-historical analyses of the development of social work. The analysis was conducted through a thematic classification and comparison of the authors' approaches. Not all findings are based on explicit statements in the sources used; several conclusions represent an analytical reconstruction based on ideological frameworks, historical contexts, and a contextual reading of secondary literature. This research approach enables the linking of historical examples with the current challenges of social work as a helping profession and reflection on the multi-layered meanings that have developed around the personality of Bertha Pappenheim.

### **1. From personal trauma to public engagement: The emergence of a helping identity**

Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936) is one of the figures who significantly influenced the development of social work in Germany (Kniephoff-Knebel, 2015) and in the European context. Paradoxically, however, her entry into the public consciousness was the result of problems in her personal and mental life, which she overcame in her youth. At the age of 21, she was a patient of Dr. Josef Breuer, who diagnosed her symptoms – hallucinations, convulsions, loss of speech, and dissociative behavior – as hysteria by the medical norms of the time (Breuer - Freud, 2009). During treatment, Breuer applied a cathartic method based on hypnosis and the associative recall of traumatic memories. This form of therapy, which Pappenheim herself described as a 'talking cure,' became the basis for the development of psychoanalysis, later developed by Sigmund Freud (cf. Brownstein, 2024). Pappenheim's identity was concealed in professional literature for a long time under the pseudonym 'Anna O.' (cf., e.g., Kimball, 2000), which also created a specific mythologized version of her story as a psychological case rather than that of an active social actor.

However, the real power of Pappenheim's story lies not only in her role as a pioneering patient but also in her subsequent transformation into one of the most prominent social reformers of her time. After completing her treatment and several further periods of crisis, she moved with her mother to Frankfurt am Main in 1889 (Borch-Jacobsen, 2021). It was here that her second life began – as a publicly active, socially conscious woman. Initially, she was involved in volunteer work in local Jewish soup kitchens and charitable initiatives (Steer, 2015). However, she gradually realized the need for a systematic and professional approach to addressing social problems, particularly in the areas of care for women and children. Her experience and deep personal convictions motivated her to found institutions that were unique in their concept – women's homes, educational institutions, and professional social assistance networks.

Pappenheim's personal experience with illness and recovery significantly influenced her understanding of the needs of people in crisis (Blechner, 2022). She represented a model of so-called transformed trauma, a process in which individual suffering becomes an impetus for social engagement (cf. Brownstein, 2024). This phenomenon, known in contemporary literature as recovery, embodies the concept of active recovery through meaningful activities, community integration, and the restoration of personal identity (Howell, 2020). In this sense, Pappenheim is a precursor to today's approach, which recognizes the importance of personal experience in the helping professions and promotes the involvement of peer workers in social services.

Reflecting on her past as a woman who was stigmatized, isolated, and psychologically broken, Pappenheim gained a deep understanding of the dynamics of vulnerability and power. Instead of viewing her experience as a weakness, she transformed it into an ethical strength – a foundation for empathy, respect, and commitment (Loentz, 1999). Her transformation from patient to social worker was not only a personal metamorphosis but also a symbolic act of redefining the status of women: from passive objects of help to active subjects who create new institutions, formulate values, and influence public policy.

From a historical perspective, Pappenheim's story is a unique example of the interconnection between personal trauma, social awareness, and professional reflection (Kaplan, 2004). Her life journey shows that personal experience can also be a source of systemic change – provided it is approached with courage, responsibility, and vision. This legacy remains relevant in contemporary social work, which faces similar challenges: how to integrate experience, empathy, and ethical principles into effective and respectful assistance.

### **2. Pappenheim's approach to marginalized women and communities**

Bertha Pappenheim was a social reformer who was aware of the deep structural inequalities faced by women and sought practical tools to overcome them. Her work focused primarily on groups of women who were on the margins of society: single mothers, juvenile delinquents, orphans, women experiencing violence, and Jewish prostitutes. Pappenheim's approach to these groups was unique in that she consciously refused to operate

within moral or disciplinary categories, instead developing a concept of social work based on understanding, protecting, and strengthening the autonomy of her clients.

A fundamental shift in her work came at the beginning of the 20th century when she became actively involved in the fight against so-called 'white slavery' – the phenomenon of trafficking in women and their forced prostitution, which was particularly acute in Jewish communities (Hackett, 1976). Pappenheim was confronted with the fact that many Jewish women from Eastern Europe were becoming victims of prostitution as a result of poverty, migration, and social exclusion (Wilson, 2017). Instead of the moralizing attitude that prevailed at the time, even in reform circles, Pappenheim emphasized the structural causes of this phenomenon: poverty, lack of education, legal discrimination, and social prejudice (cf. Freud-Strachey, 2024). Through her work, she sought to eliminate these determinants, not only through individual assistance but also by building systemic support.

One of her most important achievements in this area was the establishment of a home in Neu-Isenburg in 1907, which provided shelter for endangered Jewish girls and single mothers (Loentz, 1999). This home did not function merely as an institution but as a comprehensive support system, including accommodation, education, vocational training, and psychological support. It was in this institution that Pappenheim's concept of reparative work – work that is not only aimed at 'correcting' the individual but also at restoring their dignity, identity, and social position – came to full fruition (Seidman, 2024).

Advocacy was also an important part of her approach: Pappenheim was not afraid to speak publicly about topics that were taboo at the time – illegitimate children, sexually transmitted diseases, rape, and domestic violence (Chesler, 2018). She spoke at international conferences, published in the press, and appeared in smaller communities and large cities. Her aim was not only to help individual women but also to change the social discourse about them – from shame to respect, from guilt to systemic responsibility.

Pappenheim's social work was also firmly rooted in the community. She paid particular attention to the specifics of the Jewish community to which she belonged (Loentz, 2023). At the same time, however, she was also critical of her environment, especially where she identified the persistence of patriarchal models, discrimination, and hypocrisy. Her fundamental contribution was that, unlike many of her contemporary charity workers, she did not promote conformity to the ideal of the 'virtuous woman'; instead, she supported the plurality of female identities and life paths.

In the context of contemporary social work, Bertha Pappenheim's approach can be interpreted as a precursor to 'trauma-informed' (In: Fortin, 2022) and 'gender-sensitive' (In: Hyman, 2002) approaches. Her emphasis on understanding the client's experience, recognizing her autonomy, avoiding secondary victimization, and building safe and stabilizing environments aligns with today's standards for working with women at risk. Equally relevant is her understanding of social work as a system that must combine individual assistance, community organization, and social criticism.

Pappenheim's work with marginalized women is therefore not just a historical case of charitable activism (cf. Loentz, 2023), but in many respects, corresponds to the modern model of critical, respectful, and reflective social work, which recognizes power inequalities and seeks to overcome them through solidarity, organization, and ethical transcendence.

### **3. Community work and women's networks as forms of empowerment**

As part of her social engagement, Bertha Pappenheim consistently promoted the idea that women's social problems can be most effectively solved by women themselves – through cooperation, organization, and collective empowerment (cf. Kaplan, 1978). This concept of community work rooted in gender solidarity became one of the pillars of her approach and remains an important source of inspiration for social work practices focused on participation, empowerment, and networking.

A key tool in this strategy was the establishment and leadership of the Jüdischer Frauenbund (German Jewish Women's Association) in 1904. This organization, which she led as chairwoman until 1924, was founded to unite Jewish women from all over Germany in addressing specific social problems: trafficking in women, poverty, neglected children, lack of access to education, legal disadvantages, and discrimination (Weismann, 1998). Pappenheim's vision was not just to create a charitable association but a network of autonomous and active women who would participate in the creation and implementation of social services, influence public debate, and take systematic steps to improve the position of women in the Jewish community and society at large (Rappaport, 2001).

In terms of social work methodology, her approach can be described as a community-oriented model that emphasizes the participation of the target group, decentralization of power, and the integration of individual assistance with collective responsibility. Pappenheim rejected the idea that women should only be the recipients of assistance provided by men or institutions (Dresner, 1981). Instead, she called on women to become active agents of change, not only as social service workers but also as organizers, educators, and political actors (Kimball, 2000).

An important aspect of her work was promoting the professionalization of women's aid. She supported the establishment of vocational schools for social workers (e.g., in Berlin, Hamburg, and Frankfurt) and the development of systematic education in social policy, hygiene, education, and law (Edinger, 1958). Under her leadership, workshops for unemployed women, kindergartens, orphanages, and rehabilitation facilities were established (Brentzel, 2014) – all based on the principle of respect for the client and her active involvement in the assistance process.

As part of her community work, Pappenheim created alternative spaces for women's authorship and decision-making in conditions that were inaccessible to women in most public and religious institutions. The feminist core of her concept was based on the idea that women are best equipped to understand the problems of other women because they have experienced them themselves – and are therefore competent to solve them (cf. Brownstein, 2024). This gender-sensitive approach to social work is now recognized as one of the key tools for empowering clients and fostering community cohesion.

From today's perspective, Pappenheim's style of community work represents an early example of gender-sensitive, participatory, and professionally oriented practice, integrating individual assistance with systemic change. The emphasis on creating women's networks and support across social classes and regions marks a modern approach to community development, advocacy work, and capacity building.

Contemporary social work repeatedly returns to the principles that Pappenheim intuitively implemented: promoting equality, working with communities from the bottom up, an ethic of respect, and creating spaces where marginalized people can have a voice (cf. der Bne Briss, 2007). Her legacy thus transcends its historical context and remains relevant in shaping inclusive, democratic, and ethically sensitive approaches to social work today.

#### **4. Ethical and value principles of her social work**

Ethical anchoring was at the core of Bertha Pappenheim's social work. Unlike many contemporary reformers, whose activities were framed by the female charity or Christian paternalism expected at the time, Pappenheim shaped her activities as a conscious act of values based on a deep conviction of the dignity of every human being and the need for active intervention in unjust social structures (Offen, 2000). Her work was guided by a combination of Jewish ethics, humanistic universalism, and personal responsibility, which created a framework for a professional yet committed and deeply reflective form of social action (cf. e.g. Dietrich, (2010).

Pappenheim repeatedly emphasized that help must not be a passive gift or a moralizing intervention but a relationship based on respect, truthfulness, and empathy (Loentz, 2023). She rejected any form of humiliation, paternalism, or superiority. In her view, it was not just about 'rescuing' women in need but about jointly building a dignified space in which women could gain control over their own lives (Shepherd, 1994). This philosophy foreshadows the current principles of ethical practice in social work, which emphasize partnership, trust, and consideration of the client's subjectivity and perspective.

Pappenheim's understanding of social work as a religiously motivated responsibility warrants special attention, particularly within the Jewish ethical tradition (Sachße, 1994). The principle of *mitzvah* – the commandment to do good – was not only a theological but also a practical imperative for her. She often expressed the view that helping others was a 'duty that cannot be delegated', rejecting so-called passive philanthropy in favor of active social work. She often expressed the view that helping others is a 'duty that cannot be delegated', rejecting so-called passive philanthropy in favor of active presence at the scene of need' (der Bne Briss, 2007). However, this religious aspect did not remain confined to a dogmatic framework; on the contrary, her spirituality was inclusive, open, and oriented towards social justice and human rights.

Closely related to her ethical principles is her emphasis on client autonomy and independence. Pappenheim believed that real help lies not in dependence but in developing a person's abilities, knowledge, and decision-making skills (cf., e.g., Dresner, 1981). This concept predates the current empowerment model and corresponds to the principles of self-government, responsibility, and inclusion, which are now considered the fundamental ethical principles of professional social work. In practice, these values were manifested, for example, in the form of participatory management of homes and support for education and employment, as well as in the rejection of rigid disciplinary measures against women and girls who were clients of her institutions.

Finally, it is also important to note her principled integrity and courage to oppose authority. Pappenheim was known for openly criticizing not only the external structures of oppression (such as the state or patriarchal society) but also the shortcomings in her religious community (Brentzel, 2014). Her attitudes often provoked controversy, but at the same time, they emphasized a key dimension of ethics – the ability to stand up for a principle, even if it meant personal risk or isolation. In this spirit, Pappenheim can be seen as a pioneer of critical social work, which seeks to foster systemic reflection on power, inequality, and responsibility.

From the perspective of contemporary practice, her concept of social work offers a rare example of the connection between professional expertise and moral commitment. At a time when social services were at risk of becoming formalized, technocratic, and alienated from values, Pappenheim created a model of work that integrates expertise, empathy, and social vision. Her work thus represents a lasting legacy for social work today,

especially in areas where assistance is confronted with moral dilemmas, power imbalances, and the risk of stigmatization.

### **5. Intersectionality and cultural sensitivity: Pappenheim as a precursor of inclusive thinking**

Although the term intersectionality as an analytical category did not emerge until the end of the 20th century (Carastathis, 2016), Bertha Pappenheim's approach to social problems in the first third of the 20th century already reflected the basic principles associated with this concept. In her work, she consistently took into account the interconnection of various forms of inequality – gender, religion, ethnicity, class, and age – and rejected reductive explanations of social disadvantage (cf., e.g., Gollance - Wallach, 2023). In this sense, her work can be interpreted as ahead of its time in understanding the complex identity of clients and as an early form of culturally sensitive and intersectionally aware social work.

Pappenheim was not only a woman in a male-dominated world but also a Jew in a Christian-oriented society and a member of the German middle class who worked with extremely poor or stigmatized women (cf. Rapp, 2011). All these positions enabled her to perceive differences and power asymmetries as something that fundamentally influences the reality of individuals' lives. Her deep understanding that one axis of discrimination (e.g., gender) is not sufficient to explain a social situation led her to always take into account the specific context of her clients – their religious background, age, health, economic possibilities, and social ties.

An important part of her inclusive thinking was sensitivity to the cultural and religious aspects of social work. As a committed Jewish woman, Pappenheim sought to reform the position of women within the Jewish community, facing resistance not only from men but also from traditionally minded women (Rapp, 2011). She sought to reinterpret religious traditions in a way that promoted women's dignity and participation. She wrote and published prayers and religious texts for women (: (Loentz, 2007), thereby directly challenging the monopoly of male rabbinical authority on the interpretation of faith. At the same time, however, she never questioned her Judaism as the value and cultural framework of her work, thus creating a model of combining cultural identity with emancipation and social justice.

Pappenheim's practice also contained many elements that are now considered standard features of culturally competent social work. These include the ability to reflect on one's position as a worker, to respect the identity and values of the client, to listen actively without prejudice, and to tailor forms of assistance to the specific needs of particular communities. In conditions of high diversity and increasing globalization, this approach is particularly relevant today – and Pappenheim's activities at the time (cf. Dietrich, 2010) show that it can be developed even without modern conceptual frameworks, provided it is based on deep respect, sensitivity and a moral commitment to marginalized people.

Her work with migrant women and Jewish women from Eastern Europe, who were often considered 'inferior' in Germany and subjected to double stigmatization – as foreigners and as women – deserves special attention (Beyer, 1999). Pappenheim openly criticized such attitudes within the Jewish elite and called for solidarity among women across linguistic, class, and religious boundaries. In this context, she appears as a precursor to contemporary intercultural and inclusive strategies for working with vulnerable groups, which emphasize equality of access and sensitivity to differences without exploiting them.

In contemporary social work, the concept of intersectionality is recognized as a crucial tool for analyzing complex social situations and designing effective and equitable interventions (Fook, 2022). Pappenheim's work, although not formulated in these terms, represents a practical application of this principle, rooted in an ethic of respect, justice, and recognition of difference. Her legacy thus presents a direct challenge to contemporary social workers to perceive their clients in their complexity and uniqueness and to create space for deep understanding rather than merely providing standardized assistance.

## **II. Discussion**

Reflection on the life and work of Bertha Pappenheim reveals an exceptionally relevant message for contemporary social work and other helping professions. Her work is an important precursor to several concepts that form the basis of the modern professional approach: integration of personal experience, respect for diversity, community engagement, ethical anchoring, and a focus on changing systemic inequalities. Although she worked in a historically, culturally, and socially distinct context, many of her principles offer solutions to the challenges facing contemporary social work in the context of globalization, deepening inequalities, and complex identities.

One of the key messages of her work is the emphasis on the value of social work. In an environment where social services are increasingly subject to bureaucratization, standardization, and managerial approaches, Pappenheimová reminds us of the need to preserve the ethical dimension of helping (Loentz, 2007), i.e., social work as a profession that is not just a technical solution to problems, but also an expression of social responsibility, solidarity, and justice. Her example demonstrates that the actual effectiveness of help stems from combining professional competence with moral integrity and the courage to advocate for those who are marginalized.

Equally important is her emphasis on interdisciplinarity and innovation, which are essential today for practical work in a complex and dynamic social environment. In her work, Pappenheim combined social, psychological, religious, ethical, educational, and community approaches (cf. Paulini, 2013), thus creating space for creative and contextually sensitive solutions. This type of flexible and reflective thinking is essential today, especially when working with clients whose situation goes beyond the scope of a single system or diagnosis.

Her approach to gender equality and women's leadership is also of fundamental importance. As a woman who worked in male-dominated structures (Engelfried - Voigt-Kehlenbeck, 2010) while actively creating women's networks, she offers a model of feminist and inclusive social work. Her ability to empower women not only as recipients of help but as actors and decision-makers is particularly inspiring in areas where gender stereotypes and discrimination are still present, such as in work with migrant women, single mothers, victims of violence, and women from marginalized communities.

Another area in which her legacy is particularly relevant today is her work with trauma and recovery. Pappenheim's transformation from patient to active helper (Kimball, 2000) serves as a prototype for the current recovery-oriented approach, which emphasizes the client's strengths, personal journey, and ability to transform experiences into positive change. This perspective is critical in working with people after mental crises, refugees, people who have suffered loss, or women who have experienced violence.

Finally, Pappenheim's work also provides a model for critical social work, which is not satisfied with simply helping clients adapt to existing conditions but strives to change those conditions. Her ability to identify systemic inequalities, critique her community, engage in advocacy, and put pressure on public institutions (Offen, 2000) demonstrates that social work can also be a political act. This act aims for greater equality, inclusion, and human dignity.

In the context of the 21st century, marked by migration, climate crisis, digitalization, and growing social fragmentation, Pappenheim's legacy remains highly relevant. Her life and work are not only a historical contribution to the development of the profession but also a lasting challenge for its contemporary form: to be professionally strong, culturally sensitive, ethically sound, and socially engaged.

This study has several significant limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. First, the analysis was based exclusively on secondary sources, as it was not possible to work with primary archival materials (e.g., personal correspondence, manuscripts, and contemporary documentation from institutions led by Pappenheim). This may limit the depth and historical accuracy of some interpretations. Secondly, the analysis focused primarily on the European context and the German-speaking environment, which may limit the universal applicability of the conclusions. The perspectives of other cultural and social contexts (e.g., American, postcolonial, global South) were not systematically reflected. Another limitation is the interpretative nature of the study – it is not empirical research with hypothesis testing but a contextualized reading and comparison of contexts. The outputs are, therefore, dependent on the selection of literature and the author's interpretation, which introduces a subjective dimension. Despite these limitations, the study offers new insights into Bertha Pappenheim's legacy and provides a platform for further reflection within contemporary social work and the helping professions.

Bertha Pappenheim's legacy offers several thematic directions for further research. In the future, it would be beneficial to conduct:

- comparative studies comparing Pappenheim's approach with other female pioneers of social work (e.g., Jane Addams, Alice Salomon, and Mary Richmond)
- analyses of the reception of her legacy in different cultural and geographical contexts (e.g., in Central European, Jewish, feminist, or postcolonial frameworks),
- empirical research on the professional identity of social workers, which would verify whether and how they are inspired by historical role models such as Pappenheim,
- more in-depth archival research based on primary documents (e.g., manuscripts, letters, internal materials from women's homes) that could supplement existing knowledge about her daily work,
- and finally, interdisciplinary reflections at the intersection of history, gender studies, ethics, and social work, which could further develop Pappenheim's contribution as a model of a committed and value-based approach to helping others.

### **III. Conclusion**

This study aimed to analyze Bertha Pappenheim's contributions to the development of social work and to evaluate how her life's work and value-based activities resonate with contemporary theory and practice in the field of social work as a helping profession. Within the thematic analysis, we focused on issues related to transforming individual experiences into professional practice, approaches to working with marginalized groups, the formation of community structures, and the application of ethical and inclusive principles in social work.

The answers to the research questions are as follows:

1. What is the significance of Bertha Pappenheim's life story for the contemporary understanding of professional identity in social work?

Bertha Pappenheim's life exemplifies a unique case of personal trauma transforming into public and professional engagement. Her transformation from the patient „Anna O“ to an active reformer and founder of social institutions can be understood as a prototype of the concept of 'recovery through helping.' This model draws parallels with the current approach to social work, which emphasizes the use of personal experience as a legitimate source of professional reflection, empathy, and ethical grounding. Pappenheim's story also redefines professional identity as a process involving personal courage, moral imperative, and social responsibility.

2. Which of Pappenheim's approaches to social work are relevant to the current needs of clients?

Pappenheim's work was characterized by an emphasis on client autonomy, respect for their experience, and the creation of a dignified space free from stigmatization. Her work with marginalized women – especially single mothers, female offenders, migrants, and victims of violence – led to the creation of support systems that combined protection with the empowerment of clients. Contemporary social work draws on her approaches in areas such as individually tailored assistance, community intervention, and consideration of the specific characteristics of the target group. Her work in religious and culturally specific environments is also relevant, as it enables her approach to be applied in work with minority groups and migrants.

3. How can her legacy be conceptualized within the framework of contemporary ethics and values in the helping professions?

Pappenheim's ethical thinking was deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition of mitzvah but, at the same time, permeated by a universalist belief in the dignity of every human being. Her approach rejected paternalism, moralizing, and power asymmetry in favor of a partnership-based, respectful, and empathetic relationship. In line with contemporary ethical practice, she emphasized client empowerment, support for their decision-making rights, and participatory forms of aid management. Her attitude towards social responsibility and her courage to criticize her environment (e.g., patriarchal elements in the Jewish community) rank her among the precursors of critical and reflective social work. From this perspective, her ethical attitudes remain relevant in the search for a balance between assistance and respect.

4. Which elements of her work correspond to current approaches such as intersectionality, trauma-informed care, and empowerment?

Although Pappenheim did not work explicitly with these concepts, her approach, in many ways, preceded their current form. Her ability to recognize overlapping axes of disadvantage – such as gender, religion, ethnicity, and social class – corresponds to the principles of intersectional thinking. In her homes and institutions, she consistently applied the principles of safety, stability, respect for trauma, and avoidance of secondary victimization – the cornerstones of trauma-informed care. She promoted empowerment through education, the creation of women's networks, and the involvement of clients in decisions about their own lives. Her institutions were not only places of 'help' but also spaces for building identity, skills, and self-esteem. These elements make Pappenheim a pioneer of inclusive and respectful forms of social intervention that are still used today.

The results of the study demonstrate that Bertha Pappenheim was an exceptional pioneer of social work whose activities align with the standards of contemporary professional and ethical frameworks. Her life and work provide a strong historical precedent for value-based and socially engaged practice. Pappenheim's legacy remains applicable in various areas of social work today – from working with traumatized clients to community and feminist approaches and educating future social workers in the spirit of reflexivity, empathy, and social justice. As a case of complex transformation of personal experience into systemic change, her story remains a vivid and relevant frame of reference for the helping professions in the 21st century.

The findings of this study confirm the importance of historical-biographical research for a comprehensive understanding of social work as a multidimensional phenomenon. At the level of social work as a scientific discipline, the analysis highlights the need to reconstruct and interpret historical sources from the field of social thought to enrich current theoretical frameworks. The case of Bertha Pappenheim illustrates the intersection between personal experience, social context, and the formation of paradigmatic principles, confirming the importance of qualitatively grounded analyses for the development of the epistemology of social work. At the same time, it shows the importance of incorporating historical female voices into the canonical corpus of social work theory, contributing to its inclusiveness and gender balance.

In the professional dimension, the study identifies the ethical, value-based, and methodological aspects of Pappenheim's work as enduringly relevant, particularly in the areas of working with traumatized clients, marginalized communities, and the application of participatory approaches. Although she worked in a different time frame, many of her approaches anticipate contemporary concepts such as trauma-informed care, intersectionality, and community development. These findings support the continuous re-evaluation of ethical practice and professional standards in the context of historical precedents.

For social work education, the study offers inspiration for innovation in the training of future social work professionals. Biographical analysis of historical figures such as Pappenheim can contribute to the development of critical and value-based thinking, sensitivity to power and gender issues, and reflection on professional identity. Historical figures serve not only as subjects of instruction but also as sources of ethical inspiration and professional guidance during the process of professional maturation.

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