

SOCIAL SERVICES THROUGH THE LENS OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEMANDS OF THE PROFESSION

SERVIÇO SOCIAL PELA LENTE DAS COMPETÊNCIAS PESSOAIS E PROFISSIONAIS NO CONTEXTO DAS EXIGÊNCIAS DA PROFISSÃO

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Abstract: Every professional profession places certain demands on its workers. Social work is a profession in which certain specificities appear. Clients face various limitations, they may have specific needs, they move in difficult life situations. Therefore, even a social worker who works with these clients must have certain characteristics in order to be able to work satisfactorily with these people and was thus able to help them. Therefore it is desirable to deal with this topic in order to be able to say which individual has for the profession of social worker of the capacity and which is not. The qualifications of a social worker can be viewed in this way as a set of qualities and skills that are necessary and necessary for this profession. The basic assumption represents, of course, the obtained, legally determined minimum education in this field, which will provide the future worker with the necessary knowledge and to a limited extent also practical skills. Character traits and personality assumptions however, education does not affect a person too much. So this work will deal with just that the personality of the social worker, i.e. what psychological qualities a good social worker should have worker to have in order to meet the needs and requirements of the social work profession.

Keywords: Changes. Competence. Czech Republic. Legislation. Profession. Social worker.

Resumo: Cada profissão profissional impõe certas exigências aos seus trabalhadores. O serviço social é uma profissão em que aparecem certas especificidades. Os clientes enfrentam várias limitações, podem ter necessidades específicas, movem-se em situações de vida difíceis. Portanto, mesmo um assistente social que trabalha com esses clientes deve ter algumas características para poder trabalhar satisfatoriamente com essas pessoas e, assim, poder ajudá-las. Portanto, é desejável abordar este tópico para poder dizer qual indivíduo tem capacidade para a profissão de assistente social e qual não é. As qualificações de um assistente social podem ser vistas desta forma como um conjunto de qualidades e habilidades necessárias e necessárias para esta profissão. A suposição básica representa, é claro, a formação mínima legalmente determinada neste campo, que fornecerá ao futuro trabalhador os conhecimentos necessários e, até certo ponto, também habilidades

práticas. Traços de caráter e suposições de personalidade, no entanto, a educação não afeta muito uma pessoa. Portanto, este trabalho tratará exatamente da personalidade do assistente social, ou seja, quais qualidades psicológicas um bom assistente social deve ter para atender às necessidades e exigências da profissão de assistente social.

Palavras-chave: Mudanças. Competência. República Tcheca. Legislação. Profissão. Assistente social.

Introduction

The term helping profession refers to a group of professions that are based on the professionally qualified assistance of other people. Health, pedagogical, psychological and therapeutic occupations as well as occupations focused on social or psychological assistance are usually categorised among them.

The helping profession represent a system that has on one side those who help – the nurse, teacher, social worker or psychologist and on the other side those for whom the help is intended – the patient, pupil, client or user (Géringová, 2011).

Vybíralová (2018) defines the helping professions as the general designation for professions concerned with helping others. The term includes the medical field, psychology, pedagogy and social work. In addition to employees working in these fields, nurses, people working in the social services, teachers, marriage and family counsellors, physiotherapists, etc. may be included among those active in the helping professions. Some activities performed by professionals are also done in certain instances by volunteers.

Assisting professions are much more of a service and a calling than a routine job. Therefore, it is very difficult to imagine this activity in the absence of an ethical context (Jankovský, 2003).

It is clear from the definition above that the term helping professions essentially entails doing a specific job that, in accordance with specifics, focuses on the assistance or support of a given target group of people regardless of age, gender or other defining characteristics of a person.

Kopřiva (2016) regards the helping professions as those primarily aiming to help people. He lists doctors, nurses, educators, social workers, carers and psychologists as examples. At the same time, he contends that ...unlike the other professions, the relationship between the helping professional and his/her client is key in the helping professions because the patient needs to trust the doctor and feel the concern of the nurse;

the pupil wants to respect his/her teacher, and the client would like to have confidence in the social worker (Kopřiva, 2016).

1. Results

Social worker as a profession mirroring the helping professions

The profession of a social worker arose in response to the need to address new adverse social situations that cause problems not only for individuals but also for society as a whole (Hanuš, 2007). It thus unambiguously follows that a social worker is a person whose profession is tasked with engaging with problematic situations of other individuals or groups and helping them to handle such situations. Subsequently, it can be said that the social worker belongs to the group of helping professions.

The main focus is usually a client/user who is perceived in social work as an individual who needs a certain form and degree of help or support. The aim of social work is in particular to support the client's ability to handle the situation in which he finds him/herself, to accept and work with the problems that surround him/her, and to develop and work to improve the current situation in the problem (Gulová, 2011). If we want to advance in terms of professionalism the topic of social work, it is necessary as part of this direction to systematically support the actors of social work themselves, i.e. people who offer or want to help and support from the position of professionals.

Social work will always reflect values (because it intervenes in important aspects of everyday life) and at the same time it will always be the subject of conflict (because its goals may not necessarily be acceptable to all members of society) (Nečasová, 2001).

Social work is therefore linked to the values on which we should base our professional role, whether it is a social worker or a professional in social services.

The public's understanding of the social worker profession can be quite problematic, in contrast to the understanding of other helping professions, such as psychologists or doctors. Like the aforementioned helping professions, the social worker should have a certain innate willingness and warmth to enter the service of others as part of his professional activity. However, it is important to perceive this fact as an ideal that needs to be approached, because the real reality is often different. The fact is that a social worker

is very often categorised in the mind of society as an official who has the task of conducting social investigations and then promoting various (usually unpopular) social measures (Jankovský, 2003). A social worker can certainly be an official, but such an understanding of the profession is insufficient and does not correspond to the actual number of conceptual roles that a social worker assumes.

The role of a social worker is understood as a position, function, role and mission. Matoušek then directly defines the role of a social worker as the standards of behaviour expected of an individual in a particular social position. They determine what to do, when and where (Matoušek, 2013).

According to Musil (2004), there are a total of three categories of ideas about the role of a social worker:

an official – a worker who carries out his/her activity on the basis of a predetermined procedure for processing an application, chooses a certain measure from the given variants. Its agenda is determined by laws and regulations. Professional autonomy manifests in the interpretation of standards and the provision of advice. Counselling outside the agenda is handled by the employee at his/her own discretion. The advantage of the role is the rapid provision of practical assistance. The disadvantage is the risk of addressing the same problem and then neglecting the problems of others;

a specialist – a social worker who conceives, implements and evaluates a long-term intervention. He/she operates in a unique and complex life situation of the given client, with the degree of his/her autonomy resting on the full scope of the handled task. The advantage of the role is, for example, the solution of mutually conditioned problems. The disadvantage is, for example, the neglect of clients whose problems can be managed “more easily”;

an individual – here the role of a social worker presupposes providing clients with exactly what each one needs, especially in terms of the relationship. The subject of the role focuses on the acute biological, practical, emotional and spiritual needs of the client. The autonomy of a social worker is then primarily grounded in the empathic knowledge of needs and lived experience with the client. The advantage is the fact of a relationship with the client based on empathy, helpfulness, participation, etc. A potential risk is the selection of such clients whose problems are mirrored in the social worker who is then sensitive to them.

However, it is logical that in practice, these categories of roles intersect in different ways, mainly due to the breadth that the field of social services spans. Another division of roles based on the approach to clients is described by Banks (1995):

- an engaged social worker applies personal moral values when working with clients, treating them as co-living human beings, with empathy and respect. The worker sees himself first as a person and then as a worker. The problem may arise in a situation where the professional relationship with the client grows into a personal one, or at a time when the employee's burnout comes due to a great deal of commitment;

- a radical social worker, like an engaged one, inserts personal values into work. However, it is not primarily focused on unconditional assistance to the client, but in the first place it is primarily a matter of changing laws, areas of social policy and practice that he/she evaluates as unfair. It is therefore primarily about working for social change;

- the bureaucratic social worker acts primarily in a radical manner, as the one who works with the client in order to change them. At the same time, he/she tries to create the illusion of client care. A problem in practice may be the fact that social workers feel guilty about this manipulation;

- professional social worker's priority is the rights and interests of the client. He/she is guided and bound by a code of ethics. He/she understands the relationship with the client as an active cooperation conducted with respect the individual under his/her care.

Řezníček (2000) also mentions the separation of roles as part of the performance of various roles in his/her professional activities, which are intertwined in various ways:

- caregiver - a worker who helps clients to manage their daily lives in those areas that they are unable to manage on their own due to disability, illness, weakness or another impediment;

- service provider – helps clients to navigate their way through the network of social services and provide them with specific contact with the necessary service;

- trainer (teacher) of social adaptation – causes clients to modify behaviour so that they can manage their problems more effectively;

- counsellor or therapist – deals with clients in such a way as to ensure their personal growth, more adaptable behaviour and insight into their attitudes, feelings and ways of acting;

- case manager – mainly ensures coordination at times when the client needs to use more social services over a longer period. He/she makes case-study diagnoses, plans services or therapies, establishes contacts with other service providers and defends the interests of the client;

- duty manager in a facility – organiser of extra duties, schedules and apportionments of interventions, monitors the quality of services provided;

- personnel manager – provides education, training, supervision and consultation of employees of a facility;

- administrator – in other words a manager or director of the facility. His/her function is managerial, coordinating especially in the long-term planning of equipment development, and last but not least evaluating – regarding the expertise and quality of services provided.

It is clear that in terms of the theoretical division of roles of social workers, there is a huge range of different types of activities, as well as their interconnectedness and complementarity. This is currently how the roles which social workers can perform in practice, roles they may assume, have been divided. Subsequently, it is necessary to look at the assumptions crucial for social workers in actually carrying out the mentioned roles and in the professional activity of social work in general, and which are expected from the worker.

Assumptions of a social worker

The professional literature (Gulová, Matoušek, Musil, Nečasová...) lists a number of necessary personal prerequisites for the profession of a social worker, whose cultivation, development and learning depend directly on the specific worker, and which the authors define and describe differently. Furthermore, these are assumptions that are clearly defined by Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services, such as necessary education, definition of professional activity, etc. It can therefore be argued that a social worker must satisfy two groups of assumptions – professional and personal. At the same time, I consider it

necessary to mention that the two groups of assumptions are interrelated and it is not possible to distinguish them completely dichotomously.

Professional Prerequisites

Working in the field of social work entails a number of possible necessities related to clarifying who is a social worker and what his/her helping profession entails. This is also due to the fact that social work is a field that works very closely with other scientific disciplines. The social worker conducts social surveys, ensures social agendas, including the solution of social and legal problems in facilities providing social care services. It also provides social and legal counselling, analytical, methodological and conceptual activities in the social field, professional activities in facilities providing social prevention services, screening, crisis assistance, social counselling and social rehabilitation, identifies the needs of municipalities and regions and coordinates social services (Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services). The prerequisite for working as a social worker is full autonomy, integrity, medical fitness and professional competence in accordance with the above-mentioned act. For this reason, the social worker must meet certain prerequisites that allow him/her to work with the knowledge of other disciplines. This presumption is to be ensured by the legislative regulation of the conditions for the performance of social work, as defined in Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services.

Professional competence to perform the profession of social worker is:

- higher professional education obtained by completing an educational programme accredited according to a special piece of legislation in the fields of education focused on social work and social pedagogy, social pedagogy, social and humanitarian work, social work, social legal activity, charity and social activity;
- higher education obtained by studying in a bachelor's, master's or doctoral study programme focused on social work, social policy, social education, social care, social pathology, law or special education, accredited in accordance with a special legal regulation;
- passing accredited education courses in the areas stated in subparagraphs a) and b) with a total time of 200 hours and practical experience in working in their profession as a social worker of no less than 5 years in the case of

completing university education in the area of study that is not stated in the letter b) and d); passing accredited educational courses in the area stated in subparagraph a) and b) with a total time of 200 hours and practical experience in working in their profession as a social worker for no less than 10 years in the case of secondary education with a leaving exam in the field of social-legal studies finished no later than 31st December 1998.

(Act No. 108/2006, Coll. on Social Services, Sec. 110)

Personal Requirements

It is relatively complicated to create a complete and exhaustive list of all the personality prerequisites from the complete scale because the authors are presenting various fields and types of prerequisites. Nonetheless, Gulová (2011) provides a relatively extensive list of them:

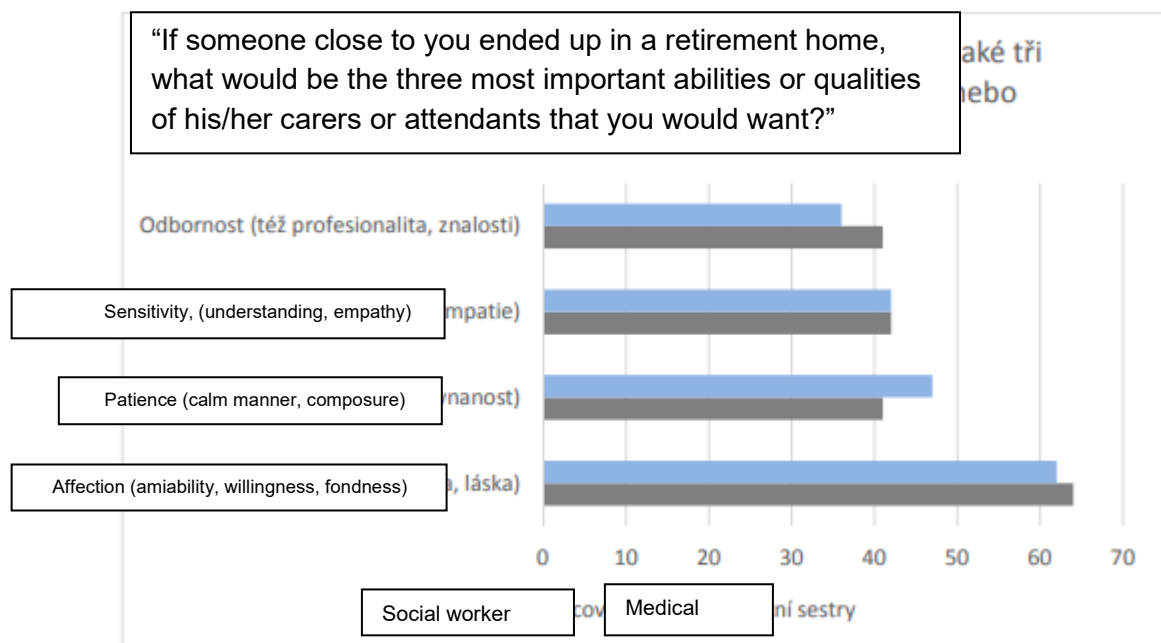
A social worker should be trustworthy. He/she should be able to be a participatory listener and have deep empathy. (...) Among the other qualities are listed purposefulness, initiative, independence, a sense for recognising connections, independent decision-making, abstraction and forethought, resourcefulness, self-criticism, a sense of humour, high motivation, resistance to failure, ability to accept risk, ability to express a lack of confidence toward authorities, rejection of stereotypes, interest in information, rejection of drawing fast conclusions, need for participation in management, need to communicate with colleagues and interest in further expertise.” The author prioritises trustworthiness, participatory listening and empathy. These three prerequisites in comprehensible cooperation with further prerequisites, suggest one common prerequisite, namely that the social worker should be able to establish an authentic relationship with clients, which will guarantee effective cooperation. If the social worker would be able to create such a relationship, e.g., because of a lack of empathy or inability for authentic participatory communication. Becoming untrustworthy in the eyes of a client can be presumed, and the social worker’s cooperation would not have a positive effect.

Řezníček (2000) offers a similar opinion and sees the prerequisites for successful helping relationships in empathy, warmth and authenticity on the part of the helping professional. At the same time, he/he emphasises with this the capacity to have insight into the client’s situation, respect regarding him/her and unambiguous communication. He sees

the relationship between the social worker and client without these three prerequisites as significantly problematic.

What is an integral component of personal prerequisites is the communication skills because communication is intertwined with the whole process of cooperation with the client, and it is not possible for the social worker to get by without it. It is worth mentioning, for example, the communication skill of active listening.

Kopřiva (2016) also points out the fact that it is necessary to know how to communicate, which he presents in the results of a questionnaire survey in homes for the elderly, where it received answers from 266 nurses and 107 social workers to the question below.



Source: Kopřiva, 2016

From the graph above, it is evident that among social workers who work in the helping professions a considerable emphasis is placed on the abilities and skills that cannot usually be acquired through teaching: namely affection, patience and helpfulness.

Řezníček (2000) again includes creativity and flexible emphasis among the other personality prerequisites. It follows from problematic situations of clients who are offered a range of solutions. The social worker should have the ability to select such a solution that will adequately correspond to the problem of the client and help him/her manage. This is of course linked to the fact that several solutions must be remunerated in some cases. In certain cases, workers have to improvise in order to reach an optimal solution. However, all

of this falls under the stated creativity and flexibility. Simultaneously the ability to adequately evaluate the given fact and situation of clients based on a specific experience and the maturity of the employee is bound up with various forms of problem solving.

Matoušek (2013) then mentions attractiveness. He does not have in mind in this sense the physical appearance of the social worker but rather the attractiveness of his/her personality from the side of expertise, his/her reputation as the social worker and his/her ability to handle clients. Reliability and discretion in the sense of a client being able to trust the social worker and share personal information with them without fear can also be mentioned on top of this.

Navrátil (2001) further claims that: Social work is an 'art' that requires a large range of skills. It primarily means the comprehension of the need of others and the ability to help people so that they do not become dependent on our help. He adds - the personal prerequisites of the social worker, such as talent and creativity, are the foundations.

It can be claimed on the basis of the information stated above that there is a precisely defined overview of personal prerequisites that would have to be necessarily available to each social worker. However, it is clear that all the mentioned prerequisites stem from a shared foundation. Nevertheless, looking at the stated prerequisites from a different point of view is still possible.

The previous list of personal prerequisites definitely suggests a surfeit of requirements demanded of social workers. At first glance, it may seem impossible for social workers to be able to fulfil all the listed prerequisites to their fullest. We believe that even here it is necessary to perceive the range of prerequisites as a certain ideal, to which attention must be directed and which must be gradually met.

Under the list of assumptions, it must be pointed out that a social worker is first and foremost a person who certainly has to address his/her own personal problems, who has certain plans, visions and desires and who, despite all efforts, may make mistakes or be subject to pressures that then can cause him or her to burn out. It is therefore not possible to separate out the social worker's side as a person and load on him/her the list of required assumptions. At the same time, however, it is necessary to educate the social worker in these areas, to lead him/her to be prepared, to try, to fulfil the prerequisites and at the same time to be able to face problematic situations and thus also manage his/her role.

As shown above, the social worker's prerequisites are derived from his/her skills and knowledge. Hanuš (2007) also reflects this spirit: In order for a social worker to be able

to fulfil his mission, he/she must sufficiently understand the object of his/her work and have the necessary skills and tools at his disposal. That is why the training of future social workers is very important.

With the example of social work, Úlehla (2009) presents three pillars on which a quality helping profession should stand in order to ensure consistency:

1) Standards of society – laws, regulations, obligations and possibilities arising from them, social rules and standards representing the permissible boundaries in human relations.

2) The client's manner – behaviour, actions, thinking, attitudes, beliefs, lifestyles and desires that make a person a client. The general reason why a person becomes a client is that his/her ways do not compare with norms. They are often not compared to the standards that the client carries within himself.

3) Worker's expertise – a necessary point to balance and stabilise the previous two. The worker's expertise here is like the art of being a mediator between norms and clients. It is a skill that requires work on oneself, its commencement, maintenance and development.

The social worker is one of the most important factors that influences the actual social work. Social work requires personal commitment of the social workers in addressing the issues of their clients. Personal and value neutral requirements place a considerable demand on the emotional balance and professional endurance of social workers. Those doing this job are at a high risk of burn-out syndrome.

In order to better highlight our ideas, it is necessary to use real research/surveys that have focused on identifying the assumptions and attitudes of social workers themselves. As an adequate tool, we chose a systematic literature search of books and articles.

The development of a systematic literature search is very beneficial and allows to obtain a higher rate of knowledge of the selected issue. This approach can draw attention to a variety of experts, including providing space for them to connect (Pittaway and Cope, 2007) and also gives greater scope to eliminate some bias.

This is also pointed out by Petticrew and Roberts (2008), who state that this approach can limit the criticism of traditional literature search in terms of bias or arbitrary selection of articles. To illustrate, this method is characterized by several aspects (Thorpe and others, 2005), (Pittaway and Cope, 2007):

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- (a) equality (no distinction is made in the sources used);
 - (b) accessibility (the search is made through the use of available databases);
 - (c) transparency (each search is recorded, search criteria are set clearly);
 - (d) clarity (the steps of the search are clearly presented, allowing possible audit of the steps of the search with reference to the final list of selected sources.

The research process was carried out in 3 basic stages:

1. Creation of a search plan.
2. Implementation of the search itself.
3. Processing the outputs and their subsequent dissemination.

Given the limited capacity dedicated to the search and the number of existing studies, it was not efficient to conduct a completely exhaustive pre-selection based on one criterion. Instead, we proceeded by identifying several effective search combinations, which we applied with varying success in different databases, and included in the pre-selection only studies that, according to the abstract, were relevant to the topic under investigation. Thus, already in the pre-selection process, there was some qualitative filtering of the retrieved studies.

Searching directly in the databases Scopus, Web of Science, Ebsco. After trying different keywords, we established a basic search pattern. This consists of three groups of words linked by logical operators: SOCIAL WORK - PROFESSIONS - PREDICTIONS. Supplementary search via Google Scholar. We then searched through the Google Scholar interface using various combinations that were set as complementary, the penumbra of texts that Google Scholar relies on largely overlapping with the databases above. We limited our search to articles from 2015 onwards. For our own pre-selection, we prioritized more recent studies, systematic reviews, longitudinal studies and experiments. Studies were included primarily if they were key texts (identified by a large number of citations in Google Scholar).

Social work, like other fields, opens up new topics and findings, where it is important to apply not only the professional, but especially the personal assumptions of social workers. An example can be the issue of children's lives in institutional facilities. The problem is described by Daněk (2022) - it cannot be argued that children and young people are educationally and socially behind solely because of institutionalisation. According to our

findings, children come to the children's home with pre-existing difficulties. The narrative analysis helped us to penetrate the period of development of children and young adults before their arrival at the Children's Home Klánovice. It was clearly shown that a significantly important period preceded the stay in the children's home when the child was exposed to pathological influences of dysfunctional family environments and the efforts for rehabilitation by the authorities of social and legal protection of children were not successful.

A suitable professional topic is also a look at social work in prisons. Research (Stárek, Víšek, 2022) shows that, the targeted effort of the social worker is to secure conditions for the person serving a sentence and provide him/her with the necessary help to prepare him for an independent way of life. The work of these social workers and other professional workers in prisons deserves recognition and greater attention not only from professionals, but also from the general public. Care should also be given to the workers themselves, not only in the context of professional development, professional therapeutic support and reflection of one's own needs and feelings. The challenge is also the reflection of new trends and concepts in social work, where an exemplary use is a multidisciplinary team of which a social worker should be a member.

Significant findings from the systematic search

Kwan, Reupert (2019) participants' personal experiences were found to be associated with their motivation to work with certain clients, in the way they practise, as well as the intervention goals they pursue. Their experiences challenge the appropriateness of the technical-rational model and the dualist view of the personal-professional relationship. Findings suggest that social work practitioners not only should be concerned with making use of formal knowledge, but also encouraged to critically and reflectively examine personal knowledge.

Ariza, Belén and Ruiz-Olivares (2022) conducted research in which the study involved 442 members of professional social workers' associations in Spain, comprising 91.1 per cent women and 8.9 per cent men, with ages ranging from twenty-four to sixty-three years. The results showed that social responsibility is significantly lower and personal distress is higher in emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, whilst the personal accomplishment variable correlates positively with the positive variables of prosociality and

negatively with personal distress. Social responsibility, perspective-taking, self-reported altruism, prosociality factor 1 (other-oriented empathy) and prosociality factor 2 (helpfulness) were found to be significantly higher amongst professionals without burnout, while personal distress predominates in professionals with burnout. The study also found that personal distress and mutual concerns moral reasoning are risk factors for burnout, whilst perspective-taking is a protective factor. It was concluded that prosociality acts as a protective factor against burnout—a novel idea of great importance when developing prevention programmes to alleviate this problem amongst professionals.

Stárek (2022) conducted a survey of 501 students who may pursue a position as a social worker after successfully completing their studies. One of the sub-objectives of the research was the area of personal aptitude assessment. Almost half of the students identified empathy as the most important personal quality (47%), and no other personal quality was identified as frequently as empathy. The second most important was social awareness, identified by 24% of respondents. The third was the ability to resolve problematic situations and conflicts (24%). Another pertinent area explored by students was the area of professional identity. In relation to studies, professional identity for 40% of the respondents means professional level of knowledge, skills and experience. For almost one-third of the respondents, professional identity means a positive relationship to their work with a high level of expertise and a human approach to the target group. For the rest of the respondents, professional identity means personal attitudes, goals in their profession or moral and other values. However, more than four-fifths believe that professional identity is important for their studies and future career. None of the respondents think that professional identity is not important.

Byrne (2019) conducted general career research suggesting that many factors can influence career choice, including career information or exposure. This research focused on how contact with a social worker, either personally (e.g., a friend or family) or therapeutically (e.g., social work therapy received), may influence the decision to become a social worker compared to other disciplines. Results showed that 63% of the 64 social work students had personal and/or professional exposure to social work before making their career decision. Compared to other students ($n = 447$), social work students were significantly more likely to have utilized social work services (themselves or family members). The influence of having a friend who was a social worker and working with a social worker was notable among mature-aged students. These results emphasize that any

interaction social workers have with the community provides valuable insight into the profession and provides insight into social work as a career. Additionally, the results suggest that the increase in the number of social workers and the impact of this contact with a social worker has led to an increase in the use of social work services by students and may continue to grow in the future.

Considering the focus of the text, we should not forget the social influences that go across society, not only in social work. Specifically, we are thinking of the COVID-19 pandemic. This exploratory study focuses on the personal and professional concerns of Israeli social workers in hospitals and community health settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Other studies omitted health care social workers' needs and concerns. Participants included 126 social workers (120 females, 5 males and 1 other gender identity) in hospitals and community health settings who completed an online survey during the height of the first wave of COVID-19 in Israel. Measures included questions on exposure to COVID-19, sense of safety at work, perceived support, and personal and professional concerns. Two open-ended questions about the social workers' concerns and the perceived concerns of their patients were included. The results showed that 17 per cent reported one of their inter-disciplinary team testing positive for COVID-19. Only one-third of the social workers felt safe from COVID-19 infection in their workplace. Mothers of dependent children were more concerned about income loss and about balancing work and family requirements than mothers of older children. 'Home-work conflict' was also a main theme in the qualitative data. In conclusion, the work-home role conflict took an especially heavy toll during the COVID-19 pandemic on social workers who were mothers to dependent children (Schiff, Shinan-Altman and Rosenne, (2021).

2. Discussion and Conclusion

The final summary raises the question of who is currently the competent social worker? Although the topic of the quality of social work and social workers is not new, they do not exist in the Czech Republic defined qualitative criteria of social work. Requirements for a quality social worker, an expert can thus be defined differently, according to the type of service, target group, goals of the provider, the character of clients' needs and the personal professional goals of social workers are also reflected in them. ...

However it is certain that the personality of the social worker has a great influence on the quality of social work, respectively especially personality and qualification prerequisites.

Social work is a profession that is both horizontally and vertically structured, it is performed not only in the public sector, but also in the private sector, and it is not only bound by the Social Services Act.

The importance of the role of social workers is growing in Europe, which today faces new social problems and new challenges, such as significant changes in demographic and employment structures, growing inequalities between the population, which cause increased demands from the public on social work. Social work and social workers as actors must become professional.

In the Czech Republic, this process of professionalization should be based mainly on legislative changes, which consist in adjusting the position of the social worker and the system of lifelong education of social workers. An appropriate amendment of the legislation will enable control the quality of educational programs of social workers, will strengthen the adequacy of their content and thereby meet the expectations for social work arising from public service standards in the EU.

The legal regulation of the position of social workers in the Czech Republic mainly contains general requirements for the performance of this profession, as well as some specific duties. In no law no provision was found in the Czech Republic that would provide, for example, a legislative definition of the position social worker (as is the case, for example, with state employees, armed employees forces etc.). The status of a social worker as an employee is therefore in most cases governed by general labor law regulations, with a few exceptions contained, for example, in the regulation probation and mediation services.

The Act on Social Services or any other legal regulation governing the activities of social services of workers does not regulate the requirements for association of social workers. At the same time, they apparently are precisely association in the field of social work is one of the important aspects of the quality provided social work. Professional associations serve not only mutual assistance and representation common interests, but also to exchange experiences, better security and coordination of education in the field of social work and, last but not least, to better orientation of clients of social workers.

It is clear from the above that social work is a very broad field and professional activity and that for social workers there is a relatively considerable number of duties, the proper fulfillment of which requires the acquisition of many skills from different fields. It is

basically an interdisciplinary activity in which several expertises must be combined if it is to be carried out professionally and at a high level of quality.

A fundamental and important fact is also obvious, namely that the social worker performs his/her duties work comes into daily personal contact with social work clients. Unlike others occupations that work with people are the social worker's clients in most cases socially weak or socially excluded persons. It means that social work is personal and psychologically, it is undoubtedly one of the most demanding activities, comparable to, for example with the work of nurses or doctors. But this work is not particularly valued socially and social workers do not have the social status that seems to belong to them.

At the same time, it should be noted that when performing such demanding work, it is appropriate to assume fairly significant educational requirements for students who intend to study this in the future engage in demanding activities. If this profession is to attract quality students, it must also adapt their status and remuneration, commensurate with similar specialized services, comparable eg with secondary medical staff or teachers at the level of education at which social the worker works.

We are constantly on the threshold of realizing whether social work is understood as a profession or an occupation. In our experience, we know that views of social work are different. Social workers in our organisation see their profession as autonomous and highly skilled. They have to be able to deal with challenging situations not only in the context of counselling, but above and beyond that they have to be able to communicate with applicants, clients, families, professionals and other providers. Knowledge of the law, methods and procedures involved in social work is also important. For the general public, it is more or less a "normal" job where people are helped. But it is not that "normal" a job. Continuous education is necessary for professional development, growth and familiarisation with new approaches that reflect the specifics of the time, all of which can be described as the basis for doing social work in a professional way - its professionalisation. According to our practical experience, we believe that public awareness of social work and its demands is still very low and in the background compared to other professions, although social work and its quality are very important for society. Few of us can admit that health is not a given and a person's life can change from minute to minute, and who will people turn to? Primarily to health care, but then also to social care.

Of course, we are aware that within the application of the situational approach, the personal setting of the social worker is only one side of the coin, the other side being the

organizational and legislative conditions for the performance of social work by a given worker. However, based on our findings, it appears that personal setting plays a slightly more significant role: situationally oriented social workers were able to apply this orientation to a large extent even in procedurally set environments, and conversely procedurally oriented workers apply this approach even in environments that are not primarily procedurally set. However, an in-depth analysis of the organisational and legislative conditions of the different environments in which social work is applied in the Czech Republic was not the subject of this report.

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