

PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER GROWTH OF SOCIAL WORKERS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

ODBORNÝ A KARIÉRNÝ RAST SOCIÁLNYCH PRACOVNÍKOV Z RODOVEJ PERSPEKTÍVY

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ABSTRAKT

Predkladaný príspevok sa venuje problematike odborného a kariérneho rastu sociálnych pracovníkov a pracovníčok. Hlavný cieľ príspevku predstavuje porovnanie možností kariérneho rastu mužov a žien. Autori analyzujú faktory, ktoré ovplyvňujú možnosti odborného a kariérneho rozvoja medzi sociálnymi pracovníkmi a pracovníčkami. Výskum uvedenej problematiky bol skúmaný kvantitatívnou výskumnou stratégiou. Hlavnú metódu výskumu predstavuje dotazník, ktorý bol distribuovaný sociálnym pracovníkom a sociálnym pracovníčkam. Štruktúra dotazníka pozostáva z dvoch základných častí, a to identifikačnej a výskumnej. Identifikačná časť popisuje demografické premenné ako rod, vek a vzdelanostná štruktúra. Výskumná časť je zameraná na konkrétne otázky k problematike odborného a kariérneho rastu. V tejto časti výskumu sú uvedené aj faktory, ktoré predstavujú motivátory, ale aj bariéry v profesionálnom rozvoji sociálnych pracovníkov a pracovníčok. Získané dáta od respondentov budú štatisticky vyhodnotené prostredníctvom vhodných štatistických metód. Výsledok výskumu predstavujú zistenia, ktoré predstavujú pre sociálnych pracovníkov a pracovníčky faktory, ktoré umožnia ich odborný a kariérny rast a rovnako aj faktory, ktoré ich v tomto raste obmedzujú.

Kľúčové slová: sociálny pracovník, sociálna pracovníčka, odborný rast, kariérny rast, rod.

ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with professional and career growth of male and female social workers. The main goal of the paper is to compare career growth opportunities between men and women. The paper analyzes the factors influencing the opportunities of professional and career development among male and female social workers. To conduct the research, a quantitative research strategy was used. The main research method is a questionnaire distributed to male and female social workers. The questionnaire consists of two basic parts: respondent's profile and mere research. The respondent's profile provides demographic variables such as gender, age, education level. The research part is focused on specific issues of professional and career growth. The research part also provides for the factors that represent either motivators or barriers in the professional development of male and female social workers. The data obtained from the respondents are statistically evaluated using appropriate statistical methods. The findings identify the factors that enable the professional and career growth of male and female social workers, as well as the factors that limit them in this growth.

Key words: male social worker, female social worker, professional growth, career growth.

INTRODUCTION

We live in an environment that is marked by constant development and change. Our lives have been affected by the COVID 19 pandemic and many people have become

dependent on state aid. One of the sphere that helps people who depend on others is the social sphere; it provides help through social workers. In order for these workers

to be able to carry out their work successfully and be able to help people who rely on them, they need to grow professionally. Only a quality and qualified employee can provide the needs and activities that are expected of him. Social workers, through their professional and social maturity and practical skills, are of great benefit to social service facilities. The paper presents research into the issue of professional and career growth of male and female social workers. It emphasizes the need to explore career growth opportunities and analyzes the factors that influence this development. The main idea of the paper is to present the factors that motivate social workers to strengthen their professional skills and enable them to achieve a shift in their careers. The paper also mentions the factors that demotivate social workers to develop their professional knowledge and do not allow them to make a career shift within their employment.

The paper is divided into several parts. The first part is focused on the theoretical definition of social work theory concepts. In the second part, we present research methods, describe the research sample and the chosen questionnaire method. The third part interprets the statistically evaluated research results. It also includes the verification of hypotheses using selected statistical methods. The fourth chapter contains a discussion; the research of various studies from Slovak and foreign authors is presented. Within this chapter, we also compare the existing research with the results of the present research.

1. Theoretical background

Social workers are workers who come into contact with many professional areas and institutions. They help people cope with the challenges they face in their lives. At present, these are primarily clinical social workers or therapists who, in terms of clinical work definition, work mainly with clients with mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders. Income and work responsibilities of social workers may vary depending on the clientele and work environment. Social workers support individuals and their families in difficult life situations and ensure that vulnerable

clients, including children, are protected from harm. Their role is to help and improve the position of clients in order to increase their quality of life. They maintain professional relationships and act as guides and advocates. Sometimes they need to use their professional judgment to make difficult decisions that may not always be well received by those they are trying to help (Strolin-Goltzman et al. 2007). Social workers work in a variety of settings and support individuals, families, and groups within the community through appropriate legislation and practices. They specialize in supporting children and families or vulnerable adults. As they find themselves in difficult situations, they themselves become vulnerable. As a result, social work fosters measures that sustain and develop the skilled workforce of social workers. Qualified social work professionals are sometimes supported by other helping professionals. In particular, they work closely with health and nursing professionals (Airila et al. 2014; Wermeling 2013).

Social workers can work in state, non-state, and private facilities. These workers have to comply with the legislation and have the power to enforce it. In non-standard tasks, social workers still work with a similar group of clients but are not specifically responsible for law enforcement. Workers employed in the third sector or in other specialized facilities focus on providing support to difficult clients, e.g. clients with different types of addiction, homeless people, and people with mental health problems. They also work in early intervention environments to prevent the escalation of problems in the community, where statutory services are required. Many social workers work with young people and their families. Their performance is distinctive in that the government legislation focuses on the integration of health and social work services, which means that social workers often work in multidisciplinary teams (Kim and Lee 2009). According to Sanchez-Moreno et al. (2015) and Yürür and Sarıkaya (2012) the tasks of these workers usually include (our translation):

- providing specialized counseling for individuals or families in order to assess and appraise their situation,
- elaboration of an assessment of the client's life situation (always in cooperation with other experts) that meets the set standards and time frames,
- offering up-to-date information and social support,
- organizing and processing stages of social support which allows clients to enjoy the full value of life,
- recommendations and sometimes deciding on the best course of action for a particular person or family,
- establishing contacts with other institutions and their networking,
- participation in multidisciplinary teams, whether in case or family conferences,
- keeping accurate records and preparing reports for further legislative action,
- proving in court or providing mediation,
- participation in trainings, probation activities, and team meetings.

To define the career and professional growth of social workers, we have been inspired by research conducted by e.g. Beddoe et al. (2019), Thoburn et al. (2021), Luo, Lei (2021), or Graham et al. (2013). At the same time, we draw on Beddoe et al.'s (2019) statement who suggest that the individual level be supplemented with the involvement of the social service facility. Each facility should prioritize the issue of equal opportunities in relation to the creation of conditions for professional growth for both men and women; of course, with emphasis on gender specifics, such as motherhood, childcare, or care for a dependent family member, which today should not be just a woman's responsibility. Gender equality means equal status and equal participation of women and men in all spheres of public and private life (Pietruchová and Mesochoritsová 2007). "Its aim is to promote the full-value participation of women and men in the society. Formal (de jure) equality is only the first step towards real (de facto) equality" (Bosá, Filadelfiová and Minarovičová 2009, p. 73; our translation). Gender equality,

therefore, takes into account, recognizes, evaluates, and promotes the diversity of women and men in terms of their behavior, needs or aspirations to the same extent. It focuses on the removal of structurally conditioned social barriers, prejudices, and hierarchy in the society (Pietruchová 2013, [cit. 2021-10-02]).

2. Research methodology

The present paper examines the issue of professional and career growth of social workers in social services. A questionnaire method was chosen for the research, as it represents the most suitable way of obtaining data from respondents in this type of research. The questionnaire consists of two basic parts: respondent's profile and mere research. The respondent's profile provides information on the respondent's gender, age, education level, and the number of years of work experience in the organization. The research part sets out questions related to the researched issues. They focus on the opportunities of career and professional advancement of social workers in social service facilities. The question types include questions with a predetermined choice, open questions with the possibility of supplying the answer at one's own discretion, and the questions in the form of the Likert scale. The Likert scale contained a five-point scale of options defined from strongly agree, through I can't answer, to strongly disagree. The research took place online and was created using the google form application. The selection of respondents was determined by the method of random selection, in which each respondent had the same probability of being selected. The subjects of the research were social workers in social service organizations and institutions. The number of completed questionnaires was 105. The research was focused on the career and professional growth of social workers in the field of social services. The questionnaire, as well as the research itself, was carried out on the basis of the stated hypothesis:

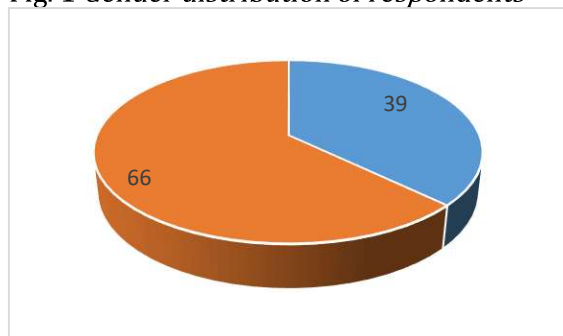
Hypothesis: We assume that there is a statistically significant difference in career and professional growth between men and women.

Statistical methods such as the chi-square test of independence were used to evaluate and interpret the data of the questionnaire survey. The method of correspondence analysis, which is one of the graphical methods of multidimensional statistical analysis, was also used to evaluate the obtained data. It is used to graphically display information and relationships from the contingency table. The obtained data were evaluated in the statistical program Statistica version 12.

3. Findings

The research aimed at examining the professional and career growth of social workers in the field of social services. For the purposes of the research, the basic research variables, such as the distribution by gender and education level were determined; 105 social workers took part in the research. The distribution of respondents by gender is shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 Gender distribution of respondents



Source: present research data

The distribution of respondents by gender shows that most answers were from women, which accounted for almost two-thirds of the answers in the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the relative frequency analysis of the hypothesis.

Tab. 1 - Relative frequency analysis of the hypothesis

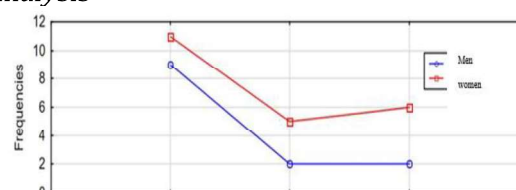
	Male	Female	Total
The social facility plans and supports my career development and	25.71	31.42	57.14

professional growth			
My job position does not allow for my further career development	5.71	14.28	20.00
I'm not concerned with my career a professional development	5.71	17.14	22.85
Total	37.14	62.85	100.00

Source: present research data

The answers from male social workers are as follows: 25.72% of respondents stated that the social facility plans and supports their career development and professional growth, 5.72% of social workers are inclined to the opinion that their job position does not allow for their further career advancement, and the same number of male social workers claimed that they were not concerned with further career and professional growth. For female social workers, the results are as follows: 31.43% of respondents stated that the social facility plans and supports their career development and professional growth, 29% of social workers are inclined to the opinion that their job position does not allow them to advance their careers, and 17.14% of social workers are not concerned with their further professional and career growth. The findings are illustrated by Figure no. 2.

Fig. 2. Frequency graph of hypothesis analysis



Source: present research data

The correspondence analysis shows that based on the value of the χ^2 test (1.25437) at the number of degrees of freedom $df = 2$, a significance level of $p = 0.0341$ is achieved. It is therefore possible to state that there is a significant relationship between the respondents' gender and their answer to the question "How do you assess the possibilities of career and professional development?" at the selected level of significance $\alpha = 5\%$. Hypothesis 1 is accepted. Tab. 2 shows the statistical evaluation of the hypothesis on the relationship between gender and career and professional growth opportunities.

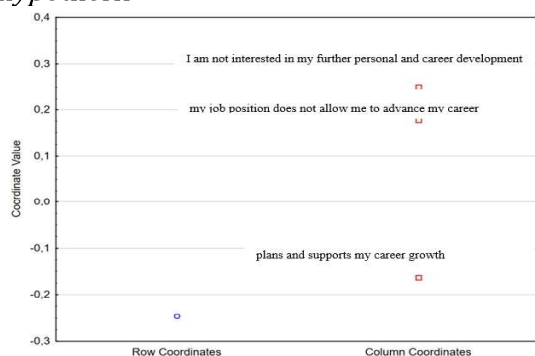
Tab. 2 – *Statistical evaluation of the hypothesis*

Pearson's chi-square test of independence	
Calculated p-value	$p = 0,0341$
Probability of error	$\alpha = 5\% (0,05)$
Degrees of freedom	$DF = 2$
Critical value	$\chi^2 = 0,01$

Source: *present research data*

Figure 3 shows a correspondence analysis based on the respondents' responses

Fig. 3. *Correspondence analysis of the hypothesis*



Source: *present research data*

The correspondence analysis of the respondents' answers presents the conclusions that social facilities support professional and career growth of male social workers. The results of the correspondence analysis also show that women are not concerned with their further career and professional development to the same extent as men or the job position does

not allow them to advance further. It is interesting to examine the factors that may affect the current state of professional and career development depending on the gender. It can be assumed that one of the reasons may be that women hold lower positions in social service facilities; another cause is motherhood or women's care for minors and the household, which many perceive as an obstacle to further self-development.

4. Discussion

The research focused on the issue of professional and career growth of social workers in social service facilities. Thoburn et al. (2021) conducted a study and stated that success and career satisfaction are also related to the fact that social workers keep pace with current developments in practice and research. They develop their mental and organizational approach, which helps them face the workload and emotional impact of their profession. Beddoe et al. (2019) examine the complexity of professional identity in social work and argue that in order to achieve career and professional growth of social workers, the involvement of the organization in which they work is necessary. Further research into professional and career growth was carried out by Luo and Lei (2021) who focus on the use of the dual JD-R model. This model is a process that examines the skills of social workers and compares them with motivation in the social service sector. In their research, they concluded that the demands of social workers affected their intention to leave the organization, while the labor resources of social workers predicted their commitment to the organization. This research is in line with the findings of the present research: female social workers are more prone to leave the organization than male social workers, e.g. due to caring for the family. It is the appropriate motivation for professional and career growth that will enable social workers to find a suitable work-balance life for the practice of this profession. Graham et al. (2013) examined female and male social workers in terms of work and professional satisfaction. Work commitment, fluctuation, and organizational culture represented the

satisfaction of the organization. Research and theory in social work aimed at the professional and career growth of workers in this sector should go beyond the characteristics of work, profession, and environment, and should include personal life factors. In our research, we list factors showing that male social workers have higher support for their career and professional growth than female social workers. These factors can help to better understand the role of the social worker, which they need for their professional and career growth.

CONCLUSION

The present paper focusing on professional and career growth offers an analysis of factors that act as motivators, but also demotivators in this area. The research offers a space for professional discussion in the field of social work. Male and female social workers are now gaining more and more attention due to the pandemic, as more and more people, whether children or adults, depend on help. It is therefore important that social work experience offers skilled employees who have healthy ambitions in their career advancement and offer quality workforce for social services. In this way, it is necessary to support the competences of social workers of the relevant social service facilities so that they can flexibly and creatively apply, within the possibilities provided by the valid national legislation, especially the document EUROPE 2030, inspiring elements of interventions, on the basis of both local and foreign research findings.

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