



Project Professionalization of social work

The project is supported by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic. It is a joint project of three universities: Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno and Palacky University in Olomouc.

Basic research objective

The research will analyze the process of professionalization of social work performance and the form of its outcome, i.e. the jobs of social workers. It focuses on issues directly related to the training of social workers. They will reflect their educational path with regard to the requirements they are building on. The processes of professional development of a social worker from the student to the beginner "novice" to the social worker "master" will be examined. The possibilities of supporting these processes and the influence of contextual variables on these processes will be explored. The development of the professional competence of the social worker will be monitored especially in the fields of professional knowledge, skills and attitudes with regard to the methodological aspect of the work with the client as well as to the organizational contexts.

In the context of this research, a social worker is a worker with a social work education that performs an activity aimed at enhancing the social functioning of disadvantaged individuals and groups.

Modern social work has been developing in the Euro-American area since the 20th century as an independent domain. In the last thirty years, it has been dynamically developing in the Czech Republic as well. This is due, among other things, to new social demands placed on the profession of social work in connection with socio-cultural changes. A key trend is the professionalization of social work. It is characterized by the emphasis on professional knowledge and skills that are created on the basis of contemporary theory and research results, professional attitudes and values, clearly formulated ethics of the profession and a high degree of professional social worker autonomy. The "new" professionalism of a social worker builds on a construct of a professional competence; its core is reflection and self-reflection.

However, on the basis of existing research surveys and practical references, social work

seems to remain at the level of "semiprofession" in our country. There is even talk of an identity crisis. Research / media reports point to specific staff failures regarding the quality of social work performance which are interpreted as signs of unprofessionalism and incompetence of workers in relation to new demands.

The obstacles on the way to professionalisation are many; the problems lie outside the profession itself, on a societal level (inadequate support for social workers in their own organization and in contact with cooperating organizations, lacking systemic elements supporting the quality of social work performance - Social Work Act, Quality Standards, Career System, etc.) and research. Within the profession itself, there is an insufficient degree of acceptance of professional autonomy and responsibility, low professional self-confidence and considerable inertia in the concept of professional identity.

The PROSO project will link the theory of the profession with the practice. It will also link the "educational reality" to the "labor market reality". It seeks to understand the processes of professional learning, ie the development of the professional competencies of a social worker. It aims to support the professional development of social workers by optimizing the sources of support.

Specific aims

Clarification of the level and determinant of the professionalization of social workers

The method of research will be a representative survey and quantitative data analysis, on the basis of which it will be possible to describe the level of professionalization of the field and also the basic determinants of professionalization of social workers. The basic level will be a description of individual educational and career paths. From these descriptions, the state of the profession will be drawn in general.

Professional map

One of the outputs will be the so-called professional map, ie a comprehensive description of the jobs in which social workers in the Czech Republic work, what is their work (both in state organizations and in non-governmental organizations). Detailed job descriptions of 25 jobs will be created, covering the prevailing job opportunities for social workers in the Czech Republic. Several other positions include current positions (eg social worker at the center for disabled people, school social worker, social worker of the community center for mental health, social worker of the hospice), for whom we expect a rapid increase in job opportunities in the near future. Professiograms will be created based on a quantitative questionnaire survey, focus group discussions, attended observation, and case studies (which will be examples of excellent practice).

A professional map will be available to any user on the Social Work Educators Association website.

Dynamic image of professionalization in key positions

Based on qualitative interviews with representatives of social workers in key positions, the process of professionalization and key factors that professionalized social work accompany will be described. Examples of research questions are following: → How does a student become a professional → What characteristics of the profession is currently fulfilling social work → What prevents the full professionalization of social work → What does an organization represent supportive factors for the profession? → What does an organization represent an obstacle to the profession? What are the work activities of social workers and what are their demands? → Which knowledge, skills and attitudes are desirable for the job profession? → What are the most challenging events in the profession? → Are there common characteristics of excellent social workers? → What did the staff prepare for the profession during the study? → What did the staff lack during the study and was important for the profession? → What education did the graduates take in parallel with the performance of the profession and how it evaluates its contribution? → What should be the content of the specialized education for the most important job positions ?

The use of outputs

The results of our research will serve as a basic orientation for all educators of social workers in CR. It will be used by the National Accreditation Office, by the Commission approving educational programs at the Ministry of Education as well as by the Commission giving accreditations to courses for social workers at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The outputs will serve as a guide for the courses provided by the Institute for Local Government Administration which prepares social workers serving in the state administration. All these entities will be able to compare planned outcomes of the curriculum with the demands of the jobs. The material will also serve as a guideline for completing the prepared law on social workers. The material will also be used for the revision of the Minimum Educational Standard in Social Work, which is applied by the Association of Educators in Social Work in CR. It will be used for curriculum innovations at universities and also at higher professional schools teaching social work. At the same time, we expect the use of project outputs by employers of social workers in state and non-governmental organizations.