

SUMMARY

Professional Competences of Social Workers and Their Evaluation by Clients

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This monograph represents a synthesis of significant findings resulting from the realization of GAČR no. 406/034/0535 research project entitled “Professional Competences of Social Workers and Their Evaluation by Clients”. The aim of this monograph is to provide a relevant amount of both Czech and international professional information related to this issue and to report on the most important findings that were achieved in four smaller-scale research projects. Its purpose is also to provoke further professional interest in studies of this significant issue, which in comparison with international literature has been neglected in this country.

Chapter One – **Social Work as an Activity, Field of Study and Profession** – deals with the definition of social work as a field of study and its characteristic features, including its interdisciplinary nature and multiparadigmatic structure. Attention is paid to the relationship between social work and other disciplines, especially social education. The conception of social work in the sense of a professional activity is illustrated by a brief historical outline of its development, as well as by a description of essential activities related to this profession and also aspects related to the evaluation of its quality. Special attention is paid in this chapter to issues of the conception of psychological and social counselling and to important aspects that enable a distinction to be made between the two. At the end of this chapter social work is characterized/described as a field of study that has its own history, development and present.

Chapter Two – **The Competence Approach and its Application in Social Work** – focuses on the meaning of the term competence, a description of the inner structure of competences and an overview of the most frequent classifications used. The chapter outlines the process of identifying competences and lists the methods that are most frequently used for this purpose. The conclusion of this chapter deals with the possibilities and restrictions of the application of the competence approach in social work and also examines the definition of essential aspects of the structure of professional competences that are applied in it. Competences in social work are conceptualized above all as complexes of knowledge, skills and values.

Chapter Three – **Professional Knowledge in Social Work** – gives an explication of the term knowledge, briefly characterizing its most important forms and the process of its acquisition. Particular attention is given in this chapter to the relationship between professional knowledge in social work and its knowledge base, which is defined by its specific paradigmatic nature and its relatively high degree of inner inconsistency. The chapter discusses social work theories and puts forward some significant ways of classifying them. Special emphasis is given to a review of several knowledge taxonomies that are used mostly in social work abroad.

Chapter Four – **Professional Abilities and Skills in Social Work** – deals with the essential definition of the terms ability and skill, basic types and classifications of abilities and skills. The major part of this chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the capacity for empathy and issues involved in its conceptualization. This part also deals with the ability to cope with stress, which is seen in the systemic perspective of the set of variables that are

related to the categories of stressors, percipient stress, current reactions to stress, long-term consequences of stress and personality moderation of stress. At the end of this chapter the author gives an example of a utilisable taxonomy of abilities and skills that can be used in social work.

Chapter Five – **Professional Values in Social Work** – is related to the definition of the term value and its distinction from the term attitude. The key content of this chapter is a review and detailed description of certain psychological taxonomies of values and taxonomies that have come into existence in the social work profession. The author emphasizes the issue of value orientation in social work in the course of its development. At the conclusion of this chapter, the author discusses some relevant intercultural aspects of the values and cultural competences of social workers.

Chapter Six – **Selected Systems of Professional Competences in Social Work** – describes in detail some theoretical and empirically derived taxonomies of professional competences that were developed in the USA, Britain and the Czech Republic. The profession of social workers is also characterized through aspects of some important professional systems, i.e. the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) in the USA, the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Britain, and the Integrated System of Type Positions (ISTP) in the Czech Republic.

Chapter Seven – **Helping Interaction as the Basis of Social Work** – reflects the ways in which social services are provided, especially as helping processes. In general terms it outlines the system of determining factors of a person's interaction with his/her environment and characterizes in detail the helping process and its essential structural elements. The key content of this chapter consists of a part concerning the running of counselling sessions with clients. This running of sessions is explained by means of a description of its introductory, diagnostic, interventionist, and final phases.

Chapter Eight – **Evaluation of Social Workers by Clients** – deals with evaluation processes, giving details of a disposition questionnaire and the lexical approach to personality, which is often described in specialized literature as the Big Five approach. The issues of evaluation and problems relating to it are treated in this chapter in the context of the processes and regularities of social cognition, communication and interaction. Attention is devoted to specific problems resulting from the perception, communication and interaction of neurotic, personality-emphasized, and drug-addicted clients. The system of communication and interaction competences of social workers, the origins of which were inspired by psychotherapeutic literature, is described in the second part of this chapter.

Chapter Nine – **Research on Professional Competences of Social Workers** – is a summarized description of research activities and their findings that have been achieved in the smaller-scale research projects A, B, C, and D. The A research project dealt with the perception of a complex of professional competences by a set of social workers working in the social and legal protection of children. The B research project dealt with the perception of the competences of social workers working in the social and legal protection of children by their adult clients. The C research project carried out an empirical comparison of the perception of social workers' professional activities and personality characteristics by a set of social work professionals and by a set of non-specialists. The D research project involved the evaluation of the professional competences of social workers working in the social and legal protection of children in the eyes of their line managers.

Chapter Ten – **Research Findings** - in several essential and briefly commented theses summarises the most significant findings from the realization of research projects A, B, C, and D.

The publication represents one of the first efforts in this country at theoretical and empirical research into complex issues of social workers' professional competences from an

interesting interdisciplinary viewpoint drawing on both psychology and social work. Theoretical and empirical findings stated in this publication are recommended to be seen as heuristically preparatory and as results necessitating further theoretical study and research, particularly in subsequent follow-up projects that the team of authors plan to carry out in the future. In spite of this fact, it is possible to apply a number of the research findings at present, especially in university social work programmes, with the aim of improving curriculum quality. Many findings stated in this publication can also be used as a certain form of feedback for social workers who work both in direct and indirect social work practice.