PECULIARITIES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGUES IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIENTS' SOCIAL INTEGRITY PROBLEMS

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Abstract. *The importance of psychological empowerment with regard to employee behaviour and results of their activities was disclosed in various research. However, there is a lack of data about peculiarities of empowerment among specialists, aiming to empower subjects of their professional activities. These data would be helpful for social workers' and social pedagogues' work organisation, qualification, acquiring necessary skills for solving different needs of clients. Thus, the aim of this study is to disclose the peculiarities of social workers' and social pedagogues' psychological empowerment with regard to their clients' social integrity problems, which they need to solve.*
Keywords: *empowerment, competency, decision-making meaning.*

Introduction

The topic of empowerment in social work has been analysed since 1970 (Solomon, 1976) and has become particularly popular in recent decades. Meanwhile, in Lithuania, education of social work and social pedagogy specialists does not have such deep traditions, as these specialties appeared only after gaining independence. Thus, the analysis and research on peculiarities of educating social workers and social pedagogues, personality functioning, including empowerment, are particularly relevant. The obtained data would help to improve curricula of studies, professional development, organize field practice, increase the effectiveness of the supervisory process, the structure of the workplace and its functioning.

Empowerment in social work theory and practice is understood as one of the most important functions. The following synonyms of the term empowerment are given: power, control, right, authority (Browne, 1995). Thus, on one hand, empowerment can be understood as influence on other people, decision-making, control of the situation and one's life, and on the other hand,

help for others, assisting them to control their lives (Siu-ming, 2007; S. Wendt, & Seymour, 2010). Other authors further elaborate the concept of empowerment and point out three aspects of it: intervention, process and skill. Intervention as one of the aspects of empowerment refers to the strategy of a social worker's behaviour with regard to clients (Solomon, 1976; Browne, 1995). The procedural aspect of empowerment describes the social worker's participation in the client's decision-making process while managing his or her life (Guterriez, 1990; Browne, 1995). Empowerment can be understood as the skill to help various clients (Mandell & Schram, 1985; Browne, 1995). The latter aspect is particularly important educating social workers and social pedagogues, improving their qualification. Although there are attempts to elaborate the phenomenon of empowerment and its role, it can be noted that there is no well-established unified concept of empowerment in social work, and it is further discussed and developed.

In recent years, there was more emphasis on self-empowerment of both the student who has chosen social work studies (Garner, 2006; Wendt & Seymour, 2010) and of the social work practitioner (Seibert et al., 2004). In the latter case, the focus is on the ability of social worker's personality to influence decisions, self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation to seek results (Wendt & Seymour, 2010; Seibert et al., 2004). It is stated that the social worker who experiences self-empowerment himself / herself can effectively empower his or her clients too. Therefore, the results of the research on social workers' self-empowerment would help to efficiently organize work with clients, this way ensuring satisfaction with their work results.

In this study, psychological self-empowerment is understood as an experience of one's power, consisting of three constituents: autonomy in decision-making and influencing them, perception of trust in one's competence and of the meaning of one's work (Tvarijonavičius et al., 2016). As the range of social worker's and social pedagogue's professional activities is very broad, the question is to what extent self-empowerment is a universal phenomenon that is equivalent to a personality trait and to what extent it relates to the specificity of the clients served, socially integrating them. Among different categories of clients, social workers and social pedagogues work with clients in law enforcement agencies, where clients' empowerment is regulated by formalized instructions. Providing services to clients in children's institutions, empowerment is also restricted by their age, child rights, etc. Thus, this study will aimed to at least partially answer these questions.

Thus, **the aim of this research** is to disclose the peculiarities of social workers' and social pedagogues' empowerment, considering the client groups with which they work.

The research subject is peculiarities of social workers' and pedagogues' psychological empowerment.

Methodology

Investigated persons. The study was attended by 171 respondents: 104 (61 %) social workers and 67 (39 %) social pedagogues; 67 (39 %).There were 163 (95 %) women and 8 (5 %) men among respondents. The respondents' age varies between 23 and 57 years.

Methodology of the research: for estimation psychological empowerment of social worker and social pedagogue was used *The Lithuanian Employee Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (LPEQ – 9)*. (Tvarijonavičius et al., 2016). The questionnaire consists of 9 statements, which respondents need to rate from 1 to 6 points: 1 point – *strongly disagree*; 2 points – *disagree*; 3 points – *somewhat disagree*; 4 points – *somewhat agree*; 5 points – *agree*; 6 points – *strongly agree*. The statements of the questionnaire identify three dimensions of psychological empowerment: *decision-making, trust in competence, meaning*. *Cronbach's alpha* ($\alpha = 0,842$) of the questionnaire shows a sufficiently high level of internal consistency of this methodology, which is suitable for group research. This coefficient corresponds to Cronbach's alpha coefficient 0,82 established by the authors of the Lithuanian scale (Tvarijonavičius et al., 2016). *Cronbach's* α for the dimension of *meaning* $\alpha = 0,724$; *Cronbach's* α for the dimension of *trust in competence* $\alpha = 0,729$; *Cronbach's* α for the *decision-making* dimension $\alpha = 0,739$ with regard to this sample are close to internal consistency coefficients for separate dimensions established by the authors of the questionnaire (Tvarijonavičius et al., 2016).

Thus, the main variables are: the total empowerment coefficient and indicators of psychological empowerment subscales: *decision-making, trust in competence, meaning*.

Additional variables: clients' solved problems. They are divided into three groups:
− social workers and social pedagogues working with children in child care and supervision institutions, schools;
− social workers and social pedagogues working with adult convicts or former convicts (representatives of the exclusion group);
− social workers and social pedagogues working with adults in care institutions at social services centres.

The research process. The questionnaire together with demographic variables: gender, age group, profession, the qualification category, the share of the post, the amount of income, the type of workplace, solved social problems

and the request to complete the questionnaire were placed on the website www.apklausa.lt. The online questionnaire was distributed to the members of The Association of Social Pedagogues of Lithuania and The Association of Social Workers of Lithuania, e-mails with the request to complete the questionnaire were purposely sent to various institutions providing social assistance, social supervision and care as well as to educational institutions where social pedagogues work[1].

Methods of statistical analysis of research data: The research data are calculated using 17.0 SPSS software. The strategy for processing the statistical data is orientated to variables. Additional variables belong to the nominal scale; therefore, cross-tabulation was used to establish links between empowerment indicators and categories of solved problems. Cramer's V coefficient was employed because the distribution in the frequency columns is uneven.

Discussion

As it can be seen from Table 1, most respondents work and solve problems of children in care institutions or schools, day centres. Twice fewer respondents work with adults who work in supervision institutions and social services centres. A fifth of all respondents work with the representatives of the exclusion group - convicts or former convicts. The results presented in Table 1 show that the respondents with moderate empowerment indicators prevail, the indicators of the minority of respondents are high, and the indicators of the significant minority of respondents are poor. An analogous distribution of indicators can be observed among social workers and social pedagogues working with different problems of clients. Such regularity of distribution of empowerment indicators is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Thus, it can be assumed that the majority of representatives of this sample feel able to cope with challenges that they face working in their institutions, addressing their clients' problems, helping them in the socialisation process.

The structure of empowerment consists of the dimensions of decision-making, trust in competence and meaning (Tvarijonavičius et al., 2016). Thus, in further analysis, it will be sought to disclose the regularities of distribution of indicators representing the above-mentioned empowerment dimensions among different groups of respondents.

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[1] Data was collected by Eglė Drungėlaitė, student of social work and social rehabilitation study program, during her scientific practice

Table 1 **Distribution of Empowerment Indicators by Groups of Respondents (n,** %)

Group of social workers and social pedagogues, who:	The level of total empowerment indicator			Total	p (Cramer's V)
	Low	*Moderate*	*Very high*		
Work with children	8 (5%)	68 (40%)	14 (8%)	90 (53%)	
Work with adults who are in the exclusion group	3 (2%)	21 (12%)	6 (4%)	30 (18%)	0,086 p>0,05
Work with adults who need care	5 (3%)	40 (23%)	6 (3%)	51 (29%)	
Total	16 (10%)	129 (75%)	26 (15%)	171 (100%)	

As it can be seen from Table 2, the majority of all respondents with moderate and very high indicators of the decision-making dimension work with children, solving their problems. Indicators of the decision-making dimension of the majority of respondents working with adults who need care and occupation, are moderate; they are followed by the respondents with low indicators, slightly less respondents have very high decision-making indicators.

Table 2 **Distribution of the Empowerment Dimension – Decision Making – by Groups of Respondents (n,** %)

Group of social workers and social pedagogues who:	The level of decision making			Total	p (Cramer's V)
	Low	*Moderate*	*Very high*		
Work with children	9 (6%)	69 (40%)	12 (7%)	90 (53%)	
Work with adults who are in the exclusion group	5 (3%)	21 (13%)	4 (2%)	30 (18%)	0,08 p>0,05
Work with adults who need care	5 (3%)	42 (24%)	4 (2%)	51 (29%)	
Total	19 (12%)	132 (77%)	20 (11%)	171 (100%)	

Similar distribution of decision-making indicators can be also recorded among respondents who work with adults who belong to the exclusion group. Besides, indicators of the significant majority of respondents are moderate; of the significant minority, low and very high. Although such regularity of distribution of decision-making indicators is not statistically significant (p> 0,05), the qualitative analysis of the distribution of indicators enables to assume that respondents of this sample who work with children feel able to make decisions independently, influence decisions (Tvarijonavičius et al., 2016) and

influence children while representing their rights (The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1992). Meanwhile, the respondents working with adults both from the exclusion group and from the socially adapted group but in need of care and occupation feel that they have less influence on decision making. This could be also explained by the fact that in case of adults, the social worker and the social pedagogue encourage adults to become autonomous and make decisions themselves. This in turn could reduce social workers' and social pedagogues' possibilities to make decisions for them.

Table 3 **Distribution of the Empowerment Dimension – Competency – by Groups of Respondents (n, %)**

Group of social workers and social pedagogues who:	The level of competency			Total	p (Cramer's V)
	Low	*Moderate*	*Very high*		
Work with children	16 (9%)	64 (39%)	10 (5%)	90 (53%)	
Work with adults who are in the exclusion group	9 (5%)	14 (9%)	7 (4%)	30 (18%)	0,16 p>0,05
Work with adults who need care	8 (5%)	38 (22%)	5 (2%)	51 (29%)	
Total	33 (19%)	117 (70%)	21 (11%)	171 (100%)	

The results presented in Table 3 show that the indicators of trust in competence among respondents who work with children are distributed as follows: indicators of the majority are moderate; of the minority, low; and of the significant minority, very high. Similar distribution of indicators is also characteristic to respondents who work with adults of both categories. Such distribution of indicators is close to statistical significance (p=0,06). Thus, it can be assumed that most respondents can be characterised by perception of their mastery, realising difficulties, seeking results when they carry out the social worker's and social pedagogue's functions (Tvarijonavičius et al., 2016).

As it can be seen from Table 4, the indicators of meaning for representatives of this sample are moderate (the significant majority) and very high (the insignificant majority). The indicators of this dimension of the minority of all respondents are low. The indicators of meaning among the significant majority of social workers and social pedagogues who work with children are moderate and very high. A similar trend in the distribution of indicators is also demonstrated by the respondents who work with the representatives of the exclusion group. Meanwhile, the distribution of indicators of meaning among social workers and social pedagogues who work with adults

in need of care and occupation slightly differs. Indicators of the majority of these respondents are moderate as in the above-mentioned respondents' groups. However, contrary to the above-mentioned respondents' groups, the indicators of meaning of the larger minority are very high; while of the rest, are low. Although this distribution is not statistically significant (p> 0,05), it can be assumed that the respondents of this sample may tend to give a sense to their work with children and with adults, representatives of the exclusion group, more than with adults who need care and occupation. This can be explained by the perception of the relation to the perspective of one's age and corresponding psychological defence mechanisms. Verification of this assumption could be the subject of further research.

Table 4 **Distribution of the Empowerment Dimension – Meaning – by Groups of Respondents (n, %)**

Group of social workers and social pedagogues who:	The level of meaning			Total	p (Cramer's V)
	Low	*Moderate*	*Very high*		
Work with children	7 (4%)	67 (39%)	16 (10%)	90 (53%)	0,1 p>0,05
Work with adults who are in the exclusion group	3 (2%)	23 (14%)	4 (2%)	30 (18%)	
Work with adults who need care	8 (5%)	38 (21%)	6 (3%)	51 (29%)	
Total	18 (11%)	128 (74%)	25 (15%)	171 (100%)	

Thus, with regard to this sample, the peculiarities of the structure of psychological empowerment, considering the specificity of work with different client groups, disclose moderately expressed empowerment and respectively moderately expressed autonomy in decision-making, trust in one's competence and meaning among the majority of social workers and social pedagogues. The minority of respondents of this group may need improvement of professional skills, (self-)development of the sense of meaningfulness of one's work and of the professional relation with clients and their problems.

Several limitations of this study can be noticed. The sample of this study is not representative of Lithuanian social workers and social pedagogues, since it was drawn up using the convenience sampling method and it was influenced by the specificity of the online survey. Therefore, the conclusions cannot be generalised and can only serve to formulate assumptions. Besides, the data were

collected using a questionnaire, the statements of which had to be evaluated by the very respondents. Therefore, it was not possible to control the effect of social desirability. In addition, the social worker and the social pedagogue encounter such non-standard problems of their clients that are difficult to categorize according to the specificity of the workplace.

However, bearing in mind that this is one of the first studies on social workers' and social pedagogues' self-empowerment in Lithuania, a general conclusion can be made that self-empowerment is important in the social worker's and a social pedagogue's practice. Further research could continue analysing the nature of self-empowerment, self-empowerment (self-) development possibilities, the interaction of self-empowerment with the structure and dynamics of empowering clients and institutions serviced.

Conclusions

Most of respondents are working with children. Most respondents self empowerment is moderate.

The majority of all respondents with moderate and very high capacity of the decision-making work with children, solving their problems. Decision-making dimension of the majority of respondents working with adults who need care and occupation, are moderate; they are followed by the respondents with low indicators, slightly less respondents have very high decision-making indicators.

Trust in competence among respondents who work with children are distributed as follows: indicators of the majority are moderate; of the minority, low; and of the significant minority, very high. Similar distribution of indicators is also characteristic to respondents who work with adults of both categories.

Meaning dimension for representatives of this sample are moderate (the significant majority) and very high (the insignificant majority). The indicators of this dimension of the minority of all respondents are low. The indicators of meaning among the significant majority of social workers and social pedagogues who work with children are moderate and very high. A similar trend in the distribution of indicators is also demonstrated by the respondents who work with the representatives of the exclusion group.

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