SOCIETY. INTEGRATION. EDUCATION
Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference. Volume III, May 24th -25th, 2019. 159-169

POLISH SOCIAL WORKERS, POSITIVE ORIENTATION AND THEIR READINESS TO CHANGE

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Abstract. *The author has researched the relation between social workers' positive orientation and their level of readiness to change. The study included 103 Polish social workers from social welfare centres in Lublin Province, which is classified as one of the poorest administrative regions in the EU. Random sampling of cases for the study was used. Lublin, Poland, is a city in which the prevalence of social assistance provided by social workers is on an average level compared to the entire country. The aim of the presented studies was to verify the correlation of the positive orientation of social workers employed in Lublin, Poland, with their readiness for change. The results of the research have revealed that most subjects presented a low level of all the traits which were analysed and which define the readiness to change. The study also revealed statistically significant correlation between the positive orientation and the readiness to change in general and in the following traits: confidence, drive, optimism, and resourcefulness.*
Keywords: *change, positive orientation; readiness to change; social worker.*

Introduction

Well-being of social workers at work is currently becoming the main subject of interest of international psychosocial literature. Most of the research conducted to date focused on negative aspects of social work (e.g. work-related stress, professional burnout, professional dissatisfaction were analysed), while only few diagnoses included positive effects (including health-related ones) of the profession (Aielo & Tesi, 2017, p. 73-84). The perspective of professional coping with social issues in terms of deficiencies or pathologies (Davies, 2012). One can notice a shortage of research on the capital of persons who provide social services, while at the same time, the need for such research. Analyses focused on the search for resources among social workers make it possible not only to better understand the regularities governing their occupational functioning but also to enforce those of their competences which have so far been marginalised or even left unnoticed. Polish practice of the support for social workers stressed the reduction of negative effects of various obstacles and shortcomings in the quality of their professional life, while the attempts at recognising any potentials have been made rarely.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.17770/sie2019vol3.3949

Social workers' professional activity frequently bears an emotional burden as they are committed to a difficult relation with persons on a dire predicament. Furthermore, Polish social workers, on the one hand are, required a high level of professional competence conditioned the requirements of formal professional qualifications. On the other hand, a systematic supervision conducive to professional development is now only being introduced (Czechowska-Bieluga, 2013).

International Federation of Social Workers defines social works as a profession that promotes social change, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. From its very beginning, the practice of social work has focused on the fulfilling human needs and developing human potential (https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work). At least these two issues emerge from this definition. Firstly, theoretical and empirical analyses must be directed towards broadly understood potentials. Secondly, factors that distinguish social work from other welfare professions, i.e. categories of change as its main object of interest, must be taken into account. Social workers should be able to cope with changes. Skills related to the readiness to change have yet to be the subject of research. The aim of the presented studies was to verify the correlation of the positive orientation of social workers employed in Lublin, Poland, with their readiness for change.

Literature review

Previous research on social workers mainly dealt with the level of professional burnout (Aielo & Tesi, 2017; Hamama, 2012; Tae Kuen, Salomon, & Jang, 2012; Kim, Ji, & Kao, 2011), experience of stress (Wu & Pooler, 2014; Wagaman, Geiger, Shockley, & Segal, 2015), or depression (Siebert, 2004). Only few analyses had a form of positive diagnoses but they dealt with the satisfaction from social work (Fleury & Bamvita, 2017; Czechowska-Bieluga, 2013).

A current research, conducted after the year 2000, covered social workers registered in California (N = 406). It analysed the correlation between professional burnout experienced by social workers and their physical health, using the data gathered from 3-year long longitudinal study. The results showed that social workers with higher initial levels of burnout voiced more complaints about their physical health. Moreover, a higher level of burnout lead to a more rapid deterioration of physical health within one year (Kim, Ji, & Kao, 2011, p. 258-268).

Similar analyses examined the correlation between professional burnout with demographic features of social workers (age, family status, education, and job seniority), external and internal work conditions as well as social support from colleagues, immediate superiors and directors of the organisation. The subject of

the study was the sensation of professional burnout in 126 social workers who work directly with children and young people. The results showed the a moderate intensity of burnout in social workers who directly cater to children and young adults. Burnout was significantly negatively correlated to age, job seniority, internal (psychological) working conditions and social support in the organisation. On the other hand, support from a colleague and a protector significantly contributed to the explanation of the differentiation of professional burnout intensity (Hamama, 2012, p. 113-125).

The research on the level of professional burnout are, undoubtedly, important, for example, due to their correlation to the will to leave the job. Further diagnoses revealed that a higher level of professional burnout experienced by social workers was correlated to a stronger will to quit the job. A higher level of organizational justice in social welfare centres, in turn, correlated with a reduced intention to quit the job. More importantly, organizational justice weakened the effect of professional burnout on the social workers' intention to quit the job (Aielo & Tesi, 2017, p. 73-84). Authors of subsequent studies analysed the effect of organizational justice on the Korean social workers' intention to leave the job. In particular, they focused on the moderating effect of organizational justice on the correlation between professional burnout and resignation form work. The authors studied 218 first contact social workers from 51 Korean social welfare centres. The researchers used a linear mixed model to analyse a multi-level data structure. The results of the study confirmed that a higher level of professional burnout among social workers was related to a stronger intention to leave the job, whereas a lower level of burnout was related to a higher level of organizational justice. Organizational justice in social service centres was also found to weaken the effects of professional burnout on the intention to change the job (Tae Kuen, Salomon, & Jang, 2012, p. 31-39).

Empathy, which constitutes the subject of the research by Wagaman, Geiger, Shockley, & Segal (2015), is a tool assisting in overcoming the issue of professional burnout and STS. It was hypothesised that higher levels of empathy, which is the combination of physiological and cognitive processes, would be related to lower levels of professional burnout and STS and with higher levels of satisfaction from compassion. The results suggest that the elements of empathy may prevent or alleviate professional burnout and STS, at the same time increasing the satisfaction from compassion and that empathy should be included in training and education programmes for an entire duration of the social worker's career (Wagaman, Geiger, Shockley, & Segal, 2015, p. 201-209).

One of the studies, the results of which may be used in practice, deals with the areas of Social Workers' Caregiver Identity and their feeling of stress. The results show that there is an increase in distress along the increase in the level of Social Workers' Caregiver Identity. Furthermore, self-esteem (as an internal

resource) and social support (as an external resource) offer protection against dysfunctions of professional identity. Those scholars have concluded that low self-esteem and a low level of social support increase social workers' vulnerability to experience negative effects of their realisation as caregiver. Helping social workers to develop and maintain high self-esteem, as well as good social support may be beneficial not only to the social workers but also to entities and families whom those workers support (Wu & Pooler, 2014, p. 237-249).

On the other hand, D. C. Siebert's research (2004, p. 30-40) analysed depression among social workers. The researcher analysed potential negative professional consequences - i.e. impairment - and personal and professional variables related to depression. The study included anonymous testing of one thousand social workers in North Carolina. The study revealed that 19 % of the subjects attained the result above the threshold – in the depression scale measuring depressive symptoms, 16 % seriously considered suicide at some point of their lives, 20 % were taking antidepressants at the time of the study, and 60 % assessed themselves as depressive - at the time of the study or at some point in the past. The results of the study are alarming, but it is worth mentioning that both professional and personal variables were related to depressive symptoms (Siebert, 2004, p. 30-40).

The study by Fleury and Bamvita (2017, p. 1-12) took a slightly different dimension compared to the previously presented ones. The researchers identified many social, professional and team variables concerning efficiency, based on the Input-Mediator-Output-Input (IMOI) model and tested their relation to job satisfaction for three categories of mental health professionals, including social workers (nurses, psychologists / psychotherapists). Independent variables were broken down into four categories: 1) Socio-occupational characteristics; 2) Team attributes; 3) Team processes; and 4) emotional commitment to the team. The variables were successively entered into a hierarchical regression model. The results show that team processes, including team support, brought the greatest number of variables into occupational satisfaction. Social workers' satisfaction with their job was related to a greater level of commitment to the decision-making process and with lower levels of conflicts within the team (team processes), knowledge sharing (team processes) and emotional commitment to the team (Fleury & Bamvita, 2017, p. 1-12).

Summing up, high risk of professional burnout is well known but little is known about the correlation of social workers' physical health with professional burnout (Kim, Ji, & Kao, 2011, p. 258-268). Social workers are exposed not only to the risk of professional burnout but also to secondary traumatic stress (STS) due to the characteristics of their work and contexts within which they work. Little attention has so far been paid to the factors which may prevent burnout and stress experience as well as increase social workers' compassion satisfaction

(Wagaman, Geiger, Shockley, & Segal, 2015, p. 201-209). Results of numerous studies suggest that decision-makers and team leaders should provide adequate support to social workers, get them involved in the decision-making process as well as implement procedures and mechanisms conducive to the prevention or settlement of team conflicts with a view to improving the level of job satisfaction in this category of workers (Fleury & Bamvita, 2017, p. 1-12). Moreover, Monnickendam, Savaya, & Waysman (2005, p. 21-30) suggest the introduction of social worker computer support systems which should be designed so as to help social workers think out cases, in particular atypical ones.

Methodology

In recent years, human development potential, satisfaction from life, happiness and health have been stressed in human sciences. The development of sciences, possible thanks to analyses conduced in a positive dimension, including those of pedagogy and psychology, has yielded the conceptions which constitute the foundations for research on the most adaptive methods of psycho-social functioning and its pedagogical conditions (Łaguna, Oleś, & Filipiuk, 2011, p. 47; Czechowska-Bieluga, 2013).

Positive orientation theory is one of the theories which are based on this direction. "Positive orientation is the basic tendency to notice and to attach importance to positive aspects of life, experiences and the self. It is to a great extent responsible for adaptive functioning as it means natural inclination towards a beneficial assessment of the self, high level of satisfaction from life and high rating of the chances for the achievement of goals, which translates into commitment to life's endeavours and high rating of the quality of life (Łaguna, Oleś, & Filipuk, 2011, p. 48).

The aim of the presented studies was to verify the correlation of the positive orientation of social workers employed in Lublin, Poland, with their readiness for change. Readiness to change was analysed in terms of resourcefulness, optimism, adventurousness, drive (understood as having a passion), adaptability, confidence, and tolerance to ambiguity.

Participants and Data Collection

Social workers in Poland can be employed in social welfare centres which, in some regions of Poland, are called family assistance centres (nursing homes, homeless shelters, shelters for domestic violence victims), adaptive nursing facilities, penitentiaries, residential medical care facilities, community centres, nursing homes for the elderly and the intellectually disabled, addiction treatment centres, refugee centres, and support centres.

Data were gathered in the Municipal Family Support Centre in Lublin, Poland, which, in 2017, was staffed with 190 social workers who constituted 36.40 % of the total staff of the centre. 179 of them performed social work in a community, performed family community interviews, and received a monthly allowance (Sprawozdanie z realizacji zadań Miejskiego Ośrodka Pomocy Rodzinie w Lublinie za 2016 rok, [Report on the performance of the tasks of the Municipal Family Support Centre in Lublin for 2016, unpublished materials]). The staff of the Centre, performing tasks under the act on social assistance which governs the principles of social assistance in Poland (Act of 12 March 2004 on social assistance, J. of Laws of 2004, No. 64. Item 593), is composed mainly of social workers (including those employed at various positions, e.g. senior social workers, social work specialists, and senior social work specialists). 122 employees were subjected to the study, 103 of which completed the sets of questionnaires correctly. Lublin is a city in which the number of social assistance beneficiaries who are social workers' clients i average compared to the entire country.

Measures

Positive Orientation Scale (P Scale) was used for the study (Łaguna, Oleś, & Filipiuk, 2011, p. 52) and Readiness to change questionnaire by Kriegel and Brandt (Paszkowska-Rogacz & Tarkowska, 2004, pp. 209-215).

Positive Orientation Scale (P Scale) was developed on the basis of the positive orientation theory. The P Scale is used for research aiming to verify which aspects of human functioning positive orientation is related to, and what is its adaptive significance (Łaguna, Oleś, & Filipiuk, 2011, p. 52).

Readiness to Change Questionnaire by Kriegel & Brandt (Paszkowska-Rogacz & Tarkowska, 2004, p. 209-215), translated by A. Paszkowska-Rogacz, makes it possible to check strong and weak points of an entity. It has been assumed that a person's readiness to change may depend on the nature of the changes themselves. The questionnaire is composed of 35 questions which the subject answers by means of a six-grade scale, which makes it possible to identify the seven traits: resourcefulness, optimism, adventurousness, drive, adaptability, confidence, and tolerance to ambiguity.

Resourcefulness, as the first of the trait examined, is understood as being effective at making the most of any situation and utilizing whatever resources are available to develop plans and being able to do "something from nothing". Resourceful persons are characterised by the capability of finding proper sources and resources which offer the possibility to implement their own plans. They believe that every problem can be solved and obstacles constitute a value and a challenge. They are able to notice various strategies of action, and have a creative

approach to stereotypical issues (Paszkowska-Rogacz & Tarkowska, 2004, p. 209-215).

Optimism, another of the traits in the Readiness to Change Questionnaire, is correlated with the readiness to make changes. Persons with high intensity of this trait are characterised by a positive, or even enthusiastic attitude towards change. They do not focus on obstacles, but see various possibilities. Moreover, they believe that passage of time is beneficial for them and they interpret the reality as beneficial as well.

Adventurous persons – persons with high intensity of this trait see life as an adventure. They are characterised by movement and unrest. They do not like the feeling of security and stagnation. They prefer challenges, while they get bored by repetitive and routine activities. They are the most frequent change initiators, acting efficiently in an stimulating environment (Paszkowska-Rogacz & Tarkowska, 2004, p. 209-215).

Drive, as another trait, is a kind of potential which reinforces all other traits. Persons with high intensity of this trait get tired less frequently, but a very high score may be related to being obstinate for an unjustified reason and may be conducive to a rapid professional burnout. While performing difficult tasks, people with drive are full of energy and are full of enthusiasm more often than fear.

Adaptability, analysed by means of the Readiness to Change Questionnaire, covers two components: flexibility, which allows for an easy adaptation to the changing environmental requirements, and resilience, thanks to which people do not get overcome by adversity, but rather learn from mistakes. Flexibility allows an entity to avoid disappointments and frustrations if the plan needs to be changed, taking into consideration options prepared beforehand. Besides, flexible persons set themselves realistic goals. Resilience, on the other hand, is a trait of people who do not attach much importance to their own status and functions which they perform, but rather they live for today and by the future, not by the past (Paszkowska-Rogacz & Tarkowska, 2004, p. 209-215).

Confidence, the penultimate trait, characterises people who truth their own capabilities and possibilities. High score on this scale characterises people with high self-esteem and the conviction that they are in control of their own lives. If it is not possible to change the surrounding reality, they try to use it to the fullest. Moreover, they believe that mastery cannot be achieved if there are no defeats, so they learn from mistakes.

Tolerance to ambiguity, the last trait on the Readiness to Change Questionnaire, characterises people who believe that nothing is certain. Those persons claim that they can be easily surprised while implementing any plan. They are patient and do not make hasty judgments as they do not expect quick fixes (Paszkowska-Rogacz &Tarkowska, 2004, p. 209-215).

Research results

The results of the study have revealed that most subjects presented a low level of all the traits which were analysed and which define the readiness to change, which is shown in Figure 1. Low level of tolerance to ambiguity characterised as much as 95.15 % of the workers subjected to the study, 88.35 % of the subjects are characterised by low level of propensity to take risks, whole 82.52 % of the responders are characterised by low level of adaptability. The analysis of the percentage of the subjects presenting low level of the consecutive traits revealed that as much as 76.70 % of the subjects are characterised by low level of Drive, 66.99 % - by low level of Adventurousness, 66.99 % by low level of Confidence. The subjects achieved much better scores in Resourcefulness - the final trait. Its low level characterised over a half of the subjects (58.25 %).

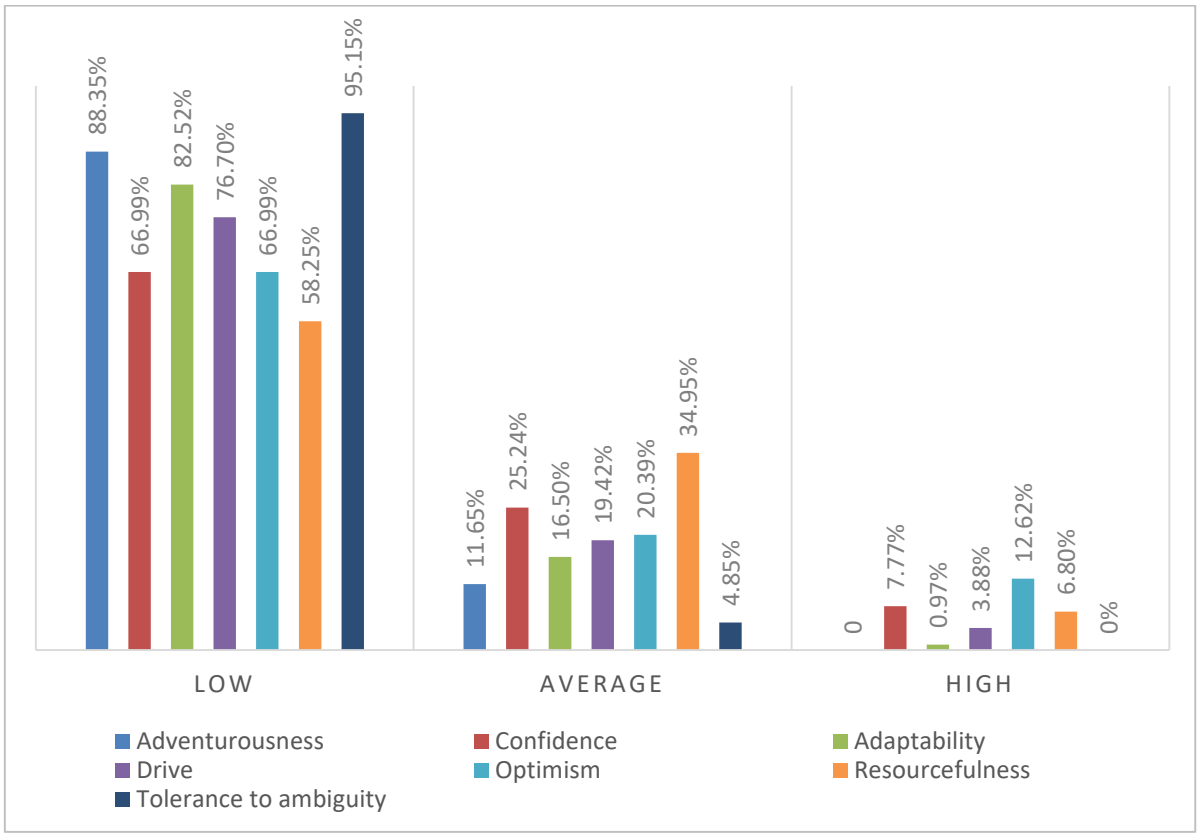

Figure 1 ***Readiness to change – percentage of social workers with low, average, and high level of all the traits highlighted***

The results of the study revealed a statistically significant correlation of positive orientation with the level of the readiness to change ($r=0.5293$; $p<0.000$). The subjects who scored higher on the SOP scale (more positive attitude) also scored higher on the general Readiness scale. Statistically significant correlations of positive orientation of the social workers subjected to the study were also

revealed within the scope of four scales: Confidence (r=0.498; p<0.000); Drive (r=0.217; p<0.05); Optimism (r=0.390; p<0.000) and Resourcefulness (r=0.477; p<0.000). Social workers subjected to the study who were characterised by more positive attitude were also more confident. This means that they trusted their own abilities and capabilities, had higher self-esteem and more profound conviction that they were in control of their own lives. Furthermore, those more positively oriented are less prone to tiredness, and are full of energy, feeling more enthusiasm than fear while performing difficult tasks. Correlations with the subsequent two traits suggest that the subjects who are positively oriented are also more resourceful, i.e. they are capable of using every possibility to achieve their own goals and are capable of doing "something from nothing". Moreover, they are characterised by the capability of finding proper sources and resources which offer the possibility to implement their own plans. They believe that a problem can be solved. They can see various strategies and are creative about stereotypical issues (Paszkowska-Rogacz & Tarkowska, 2004, p. 209-215). Positively oriented subjects are more optimistic, which means that they are characterised by positive, or even enthusiastic attitude towards change. Furthermore, they do not focus on obstacles, but see various possibilities. Moreover, they believe that passage of time is beneficial for them and they interpret the reality as beneficial as well (Paszkowska-Rogacz &Tarkowska, 2004, p. 209-215).

Table 1 ***The correlation of positive orientation with the level of the readiness to change. r-Pearson correlation coefficient***

	Readiness in general (scale average)	Adventurousness	Confidence	Adaptability	Drive (passion)	Optimism	Resourcefulness	Tolerance to ambiguity
SOP total	.529	.099	.498	.027	.217	.390	.477	-.001
p	.000*	.322	.000*	.785	.031*	.000*	.000*	.989

**The difference is statistically significant in this item.*
Source: own research
n=103

Conclusion and recommendations

The results of the analysis show a prevalent low level of readiness to change in terms of all traits analysed among social workers subjected to the study. The study also revealed statistically significant correlation between the positive orientation and the readiness to change in general and in the following traits:

confidence, drive, optimism, and resourcefulness. The need for taking actions for stimulating those traits in the study group has been highlighted. These data become meaningful in the context of a special kind of assistance actions taken by social workers, which are conditioned by the very level of the readiness to change (Miller & Rollnick, 2010, p. 8-16).

Based on the presented results, it can be suggested that social work teachers focus in their classes on competences related to the readiness to change and positive orientation. Persons who prepare for providing social assistance in a formal education process can be encouraged to increase their positive orientation by developing positive attitudes towards self, towards whose who need help and towards the world. As the readiness to change is very important for good professional functioning, one can suggest teaching the significance of its role to social workers.

Teachers can explain changes taking place in social life and that social workers must react to them in a knowledgeable way so they can cope with work-related challenges. In Poland, neither social work students nor social workers are educated to understand how hard it is to take care of oneself and how to do it. The presented research suggest that devoting time to lessons concerning the mastering of a sound concept of how to shape the concept of self as a social worker which includes positive orientation and the readiness to change, may improve the quality of social workers' lives.

Undoubtedly, it would be worth conducting further, more in-depth research on the readiness to change and positive orientation among social work students and professionally active social workers.

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