

# SW

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Connecting theory and practice



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## Editorial

# Social Work and Empowering Communities

As we acknowledged in our 'call for papers' for this special winter edition of the journal, the terms *Community* and *Empowerment* have become popular catchwords, not only in the social sciences and a wide range of welfare services but also in everyday discourse. This makes them highly contested, 'intellectually messy' and somewhat slippery concepts to use. However, despite the challenging nature of the terrain *empowering communities* remains an important aim for social work practice and represents a broader vision of what the profession might achieve. It should be remembered that working at the micro, mezzo and macro levels has historical precedence, and revealed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century during the early development of the profession, with the community approach initiated by Jane Addams at the Hull House settlement (Addams, 1910; 1981). This has become especially important in more recent times of uncertainty characterised by social divisions, inequality and injustice.

Empowerment has rightly come to occupy a central place in the social work literature and can be defined in various ways. Malcolm Payne (2014) argues that empowerment 'seeks to help clients gain powers of decision and action over their own lives' (Payne, 2014:294). It does this principally by removing social and personal barriers, increasing individual's capability and self-confidence, and shifting power to the powerless. Community empowerment implies something broader and more ambitious involving community engagement and action that explicitly promotes wider social and political change. Hence, it may be seen as a multi-dimensional construct, informed by the classic work of Paulo Freire (1972), aimed at helping local people gain control over their lives, in ways that increase the personal life chances and power of the oppressed. This connects well with the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools

of Social Work (IASSW) definition, which links empowerment with human rights and social justice (IFSW, IASSW, 2014).

One of the issues that emerges from the debate is whether *empowering communities* is a theoretical construct, a process concerned with social change or something broader which encompasses both theory and practice? Perhaps it has developed into a fundamental paradigm underpinned by a vision that helps to map out the possibilities for a progressive social work practice (see Stepney, 2019) and informed by an emancipatory pedagogy (Sewpaul et al., 2015). Writers from the United States such as Janet Lee (2001) suggest it is a complex overarching process and framework for practice underpinned by a range of theoretical ideas. The process may be like a journey that develops and expands as we experience it. In planning this special issue what informed our thinking was the belief that a commitment to empowering communities, protecting human rights and promoting social justice would encourage everyone to consider new ways of thinking about and doing social work. This applies to us all, whether we are practitioners, managers, educators, academics, students or indeed journal editors.

It follows that one of the primary goals of this special edition was to encourage a sense of critical exploration – specifically to open up possibilities for working in dynamic and challenging ways that might help to empower local communities. Community social work is clearly one such method that very much reflects this approach (see Stepney, 2018) and this is helpfully referred to by a number of authors in the articles. In very general terms this method is premised on a clear commitment to community empowerment and change, working closely in partnership with clients and community members. One important way of doing this is by seeking to develop more preventive and inclusive local services combining

prevention strategies with protection plans, especially in high risk child protection and mental health work (Stepney, 2014).

The community approach has been found to be effective in working with new immigrants and refugees. In particular by helping to organize community based activities where people can meet and develop a shared sense of belonging and identity, as well as strengthen self-efficacy by adopting important roles in the community. One successful model developed in Tampere, Finland has involved utilising community open space for all local residents, organizing shared group activities, offering guidance by social and health services professionals and the social insurance institution, and developing local expertise and resources. In this model of two-way integration new migrants are treated as 'experts by experience' who take positions as intercultural volunteers working alongside social workers, and later some obtain paid positions in immigrant services (Kostiainen et al., 2019; Leppänen et al., 2019). Further, the aim of empowering communities can become an important component in other social work methods and can be applied to work with any client group (Payne, 2014; Thompson, Stepney, 2018).

The empowering community approach emphasizes the importance of relationships in people's lives and relation-based social work in facilitating conditions for the development of meaningful social participation, a sense of belonging, hope, coping and recovery. This may be seen as an alternative to neoliberal, managerial and technical approaches criticized in the article by Vishanthie Sewpaul and Princess Nkosi Ndlovu. Empowering community work has sometimes been referred to as structural social work, promoting new ways of achieving social and structural change in both policy and service delivery systems (Mullaly, 2007). Structural work has helped to increase grassroots democracy and, as early as in the 1970s, it was the main feature of empowering community work in the Nordic countries (Wahlberg et al., 1978). Many of the authors in this special issue make research based suggestions for structural changes in both services and policy.

Having set out the theoretical background and practice framework for empowering communities,

it is clearly important for the journal to play an active and leading part, for example, to stimulate discussion about the implications for social work practice, education, research and theory development. Social work is an established profession based on knowledge of the social sciences and a wide range of professional disciplines, bringing skills, interventions and resources that are knowledge-based and can contribute to community well-being. As a profession we must be open to new ideas and the exchange of expertise across the globe. We hope that this special edition will rise to the challenge and make a valued contribution here.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank every author who responded to our call for papers and submitted articles. A special thanks is due to the dedication and skill of the anonymous reviewers who provided fair, independent and critical judgement which crucially helped us to make a number of sometimes difficult decisions. The collection of articles that follows reflects a high level of knowledge and understanding of the international social work literature with contributions from authors in a number of countries. The inter-personal and social problems they identify and analyse in their research are often acute, and the solutions they recommend are not only justified but contribute to the aim of empowering communities.

One of the most basic needs that we all have is the need for shelter and the availability of good quality housing. However, in many western societies this need is not being met by the mainstream housing market and can result in the social exclusion of vulnerable people. When mothers with children find themselves homeless, for whatever reason, they become especially vulnerable and require emergency accommodation and often crisis intervention. The ensuing crisis places high demands upon the role of social workers as the first article reveals. Veronika Aresta's article on *Shelter Homes for Mothers with Children in the Czech Republic and the Target Group of Needs They Meet* surveyed social workers working with mothers in shelter homes in the Czech Republic. Shelters of course can only provide temporary refuge to the crisis. She found that apart from the need for social housing the mothers required

crisis counselling and help particularly in dealing with official agencies, child care and financial management. Empowering communities can be enhanced by policy reform and the author importantly highlights the need for new legislation in the Czech Republic to regulate the provision of social housing.

The issue of finding an empowering response to homelessness is a central theme in the second article on *“Help Me Do It by Myself” – About the Empowered Homeless from the Socially Engaged Perspective*. Here Małgorzata Kostrzyńska conducted participatory research out on the streets with homeless men and spent time in a local hostel. Her informative and insightful research, and use of grounded theory, led to developing a perspective that views the homeless as an empowered and resourceful group of survivors rather than fitting the stereotype of being hapless and dependent victims. This has some important lessons for social work, in particular, what might be termed ‘the paradox of helping socially excluded people’ but in the process disempowering them. The article highlights the danger of patronising attitudes of unintentionally instilling a sense of helplessness in keeping with the more disciplining approach consistent with prevailing social norms. What is clearly needed is genuinely empowering social work that will help to counteract the disadvantages and discrimination homeless people face.

Changes in the demographic profile of society is a topical issue in the Czech Republic as in many other societies. The proportion of younger people in the population is decreasing and, at the same time, the share of older people is rising. The consequences for social care are significant, such that, with older people now living longer this inevitably leads to an increasing demand for care at a time when resources and availability of people able and willing to care may be limited. This is the topic of an important article by Agáta Marková, Lenka Komárková and Zuzana Truhlářová on *The Perception of the Care Work and Its Importance: A Pilot Study*. The study was based upon a quantitative survey of respondents using convenience sampling. It was found that care work is commonly perceived as meaningful and necessary, but physically and mentally demanding, poorly paid, not prestigious and therefore largely unattractive. However,

despite these findings a majority of respondents acknowledged that they still felt a duty to offer informal care for their dependent relatives. This pilot study raises important questions about the public perception of caring both in the Czech Republic as elsewhere. Clearly more research and importantly resources will be needed to address the care crisis and its implications for social work. In particular, to consider how the status of formal carers can be improved and how to attract more people into the social care sector.

The need for empowering social work can be found in many fields but particularly in mainstream schools. This is the focus of the article by Shorena Sadzaglishvili, Nelly Akobia, Nino Shatberashvili and Ketevan Gigineishvili on *A Social Work Intervention's Effects on the Improvement of School Culture*. This is an important study which examined the effectiveness of social work intervention in two Georgian schools. Using a participatory pre-post intervention design the authors found that social work was particularly effective in enhancing the psycho-emotional and social well-being of students. In addition having social workers in school had a positive impact on both the wider school culture and importantly supported work of other staff with parents in the community. It is our view that the findings from this study in Georgia offer important lessons concerning the value of empowering social work for schools in many other countries.

Against a backdrop of economic globalisation, rising migration and the challenge of maintaining social cohesion in more culturally diverse societies is now occupying the minds of policy makers and practitioners across the EU. This makes the next article by Eva Dohnalová on *Development of Intercultural Work in the Czech Republic – Premises and Challenges in Establishing an Intercultural Worker Profession, Allied to Social Work that Promotes the Use of Skills that Migrants Have* very timely and highly significant. The article adopts a case study approach concerning the integration of new migrants into Czech society and the role of inter-cultural work allied to social work in facilitating this process. The article raises important questions about establishing inter-cultural work as a distinct profession, working closely with social work, or whether it would be better to develop this within social

work. The debate again has broader implications concerning the role of social work in facilitating the integration of migrants in other countries across the EU, as well as outside EU.

The issue of forced migration in Southern Africa features centrally in the next article by Tapfumanezi Kusemwa, Pius T. Tanga on *Exploratory Research on Community Empowerment for Women Victims of Forced Migration: Implications for Social Work in Sustainable Community Reintegration*. The research adopted a qualitative design, based upon semi-structured interviews with victims and informants, to explore the experiences and assess the coping strategies of women victims of human trafficking in Zimbabwe. The study also examined the social protection measures taken by social workers to assist the reintegration of women back into the community. It was found that the women survivors not surprisingly experienced many problems and faced stigma, blame and stereotyping in local communities. The need for an empowering and preventative community social work approach at different levels, better training and policy advocacy were all found to be crucial to better outcomes. The article has global relevance, because human trafficking has become an issue in every country today.

The sexual abuse of children has become a serious problem in many South African communities as elsewhere across the globe. This is the central concern of the article by Tasneemah Cornelissen-Nordien, Sulina Green on the *Empowerment of Sexually Abused Children in South African Communities*. The study adopted a qualitative approach interviewing participants from a number of non-profit organisations (NPOs) who provide empowerment services to communities scarred by child sexual abuse. The empowering approach by social workers involved the sensitive and systematic process of building trusting relationships, having clear goals, helping restore the boundaries, identifying individual children's strengths and developing action plans that empowered the children. The need for skilled work at the micro level was enhanced when supplemented by empowering the community to adopt good prevention strategies and establish appropriate protection systems.

The need for a more radical and empowering social work approach, encompassing both

prevention and protection, could not be more necessary and urgent as in working with people affected by HIV/AIDS. The final article by Vishanthie Sewpaul and Princess Nkosi Ndlovu entitled *Emancipatory, Relationship-Based and Deliberative Collective Action: The Power of the Small Group in Shifting from Adversity to Hope, Activism and Development* provides an authoritative and compelling account, as well as a fitting example of the very best in social work. It gives a very powerful voice to a service user, Princess, who is living with HIV, and has become an HIV/AIDS counsellor. Her story is extremely moving and important with enormous implications for developing empowering community based social work. The article calls for a shift away from neoliberal, new managerial and positivist paradigms in social work to participatory and democratic ways of working with people. In so doing it demonstrates the power of small groups supporting the transition from adversity, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS, to hope, activism and emancipatory development. The article makes a truly groundbreaking and outstanding contribution to the international social work literature.

We invited teachers, practitioners, students and researchers in European and global networks to submit articles on empowering community social work, which could be of interest to an English readership alongside Czech and Slovak audiences. We appreciate the effort made by everyone to answer our call for papers and are pleased that we are able to present this Winter issue 2020 of *Czech and Slovak Social Work on Social Work and Empowering Communities*.

Taken together these articles contribute to and, we would argue, progress current debates about empowerment in social work and different ways of empowering communities. In one way or another each article has demonstrated that social workers have risen to the challenge of engaging with different communities to develop more equitable, research informed and empowering practice. The changing social, economic and political climate, and the inequalities and injustices that derive from this, call for new forms of professional practice. These have important implications not only for social work practice, but education, policy, research and theory development. We hope that

this special edition will inspire everyone, whatever their background or role, to rise to the challenge to find new and more empowering and inclusive ways forward.

As always we welcome feedback on any of the articles published in this special edition and would hope that this will help stimulate and build upon the current debate about social work and empowering communities. This is likely to remain extremely important for social work in 2020 and the challenging times we will face in the years ahead.

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# Shelter Homes for Mothers with Children in the Czech Republic and the Target Group of Needs They Meet

Veronika Aresta

Veronika Aresta<sup>1</sup> is an internal doctoral student of the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. She currently works as an expert in the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (dep. socioeconomics of housing) and works as a Housing Advisor at the Agency for Social Inclusion (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic). She focuses on local social policies and their setting in the process of ending homelessness.

## Abstract

**OBJECTIVES:** The aim of the article is to capture the practice of social workers in shelters in their current form through the needs/goals of cooperation that refugee clients ask for during individual planning. **THEORETICAL BASE:** The problem is related to a number of disadvantages that clients have to face. Systemic inequality is considered to be pivotal, causing clients to face unaffordability of housing, which they cannot overcome on their own. **METHODS:** The needs/goals of cooperation were analysed by a questionnaire survey, which was always attended by one worker from a shelter for mothers with children in the Czech Republic. **OUTCOMES:** The research provided a description of the areas of needs/goals of cooperation. The dominant role is played by the needs that are fulfilled in the form of social counselling in the area of housing, dealing with common matters, childcare, financial management. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** The findings provide information on the form of social work in shelters and can contribute to the education of social workers specialising in helping homeless people. It draws attention to the link between social workers seeking housing for their clients and calls for a social policy in municipalities that can change the situation in localities.

## Keywords

shelter homes, social services, clients of shelter homes, needs, goals, homelessness, poverty

## INTRODUCTION

Social services for mothers in difficult life situations connected with loss of housing are primarily represented by shelters. A number of municipalities declare a lack of capacity in social services for this target group. Interviews with heads of social departments in various municipalities across the Czech Republic showed that they consider staying in a shelter to be a solution to the loss of housing for mothers with children, although it is legally enshrined that stay in a shelter is characterized by a temporary character (Aresta, 2019). Glumbíková and Gojová (2016) declare

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that the direct manifestation of ineffectiveness of shelters is the unsuccessful reintegration of shelters into permanent housing. A questionnaire survey among social workers in shelters revealed that most clients require support in the form of social counselling, which, however, is unilaterally oriented towards housing and state social support benefits and material need. The whole research issue is accentuated by the fact that up to 900 families with children are estimated to be in shelters that raise together 2,000 children (Klusáček, 2018). The aim of the article is to present the identified needs of mothers with children, to confirm or refute whether it is possible to meet these needs of clients in shelters.

The aim of article is to present the most frequently solved needs/goals of cooperation of shelter clients with their key social workers in shelters. To obtain this knowledge from social workers in direct work with clients we used a questionnaire survey conducted in all shelters for mothers with children in the Czech Republic. The respondents were social workers from each facility (always one for one shelter) working in shelters for mothers with children. A partial goal was to find out whether the shelter activities stipulated by the Act No. 108/2006 Coll., Section 57 are in fact addressed in the facilities. Two main questions were **(1) what needs are most often attributed to the subject of cooperation between shelter clients and their key social workers? and (2) are these needs satisfied as required by law?** The answer to this question clarifies the knowledge, competence and skill that a social worker from the shelter should have, so that the cooperation between him/her and the client leads to a successful transition to the permanent form of housing.

## THE CONTEXT OF SHELTER HOUSING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Having a good place to live is one of the basic needs of every person. *“Housing gives life to anchoring and is the starting point for building relationships with the environment, for establishing and supporting the family, for finding work, and for basic education for children. Its loss, the threat of involuntary migration and homelessness deprives a person of the opportunity to return quality, dignity and self-sufficiency to his own life”* (MLSA, 2015:25). The European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion (FEANTSA, 2013) classifies housing in shelters as one of the forms of homelessness.

Social exclusion is the common denominator of many social problems. Sirovátka et al. (2002) define social exclusion in a broader concept, including the relationship to poverty. Already in the late 1980s, the French sociologist Pitrou (1979) devoted herself to families with financial problems and their threats to social exclusion. Her attention in the context of finding inequalities is also paid to the areas of health and poor family quality of life and housing problems (Keller, 2014). Hora (2013) states that historically the concept of social exclusion is understood very generally, which causes problematic anchoring in the terminology. Social exclusion is defined as “insufficient participation of an individual, group or local community in the life of the whole of society” (Matoušek, 2003:217). For mothers with children, this aspect of life means living in poverty, without participation in the labour market, without adequate housing and sufficient income. Mareš (1999) states that social exclusion may not be the result of an individual failure, but may also be a failure of the democratic and legislative system, labour market, social policy asserted by states or families.

Clients of shelters are endangered by many types of disadvantages (Marhánková, 2011). The risks of single parenthood may be manifested in the form of increased psychological or economic burden. Solo parents are more at risk of unemployment, lack of access to adequate housing, social isolation, and social exclusion (Matoušek, Koláčková, Kodymová et al., 2005). In terms of economic disadvantage, about a third of single parents do not have income from work; overall, solo parents are more often dependent on social benefits. The most burdensome expenditure item for single-parent families is the cost of housing (Kuchařová et al., 2017).

These disadvantages then can cause discrimination in the housing market. I explain discrimination in the housing market in accordance with the concepts of Becker (1971) and Phelps (1972) and



Arrow (1974). Becker (1971) suggests money as a measure of discriminatory preference. Phelps (1972) and Arrow (1974) are propagators of the theory, which consists in limited knowledge of information about people seeking rental housing. From the individual responses to their advertising, landlords are not only able to adequately assess individuals. They assess applicants solely on the basis of information they have provided. The limitation of explicit information then leads to the assessment of the person interested in the lease on the basis of the average attributes and characteristics of the group to which the individual belongs or is classified on the basis of easily observable characteristics such as gender, race or ethnicity. The landlord's decision is mainly based on his/her own experience in previous negotiations with the group, according to traceable statistical data about the group, the experience of his/her surroundings, residence, employment and/or the credit history of rent-payers. The lessor does not assess the characteristics and attributes of that particular individual, but on the contrary it is subject to the average values applicable to the group or groups concerned. Therefore, any individual who deviates from the average typical of his/her group is discriminated against (Phelps, 1972). For example, the number of children, ethnicity, and reputation also often play a role (Hora, 2013). According to the aforementioned theories, which also contain measurement coefficients, no studies in the Czech Republic have been carried out recently, but it is known from practice that discrimination on the housing market is great for vulnerable groups of population (Plzák, 2013). These concepts declare that there is an increased risk of discrimination in the housing market for mothers from shelters.

Social services focused on crisis assistance and housing provision for at least a temporary time are being offered to people in need of housing. People draw from the social assistance pillar, they accept social services and financial benefits of material need, which are for this time the social policy instruments of the Czech Republic combating social exclusion (Tomeš, 2010).

Shelter homes can be considered as one of the social services people can use in housing distress. The usage is limited to a transitional period, which may not always ensure their long-term sustainable social functioning<sup>2</sup> (Glumbíková, Gojová, 2016). The operation and organisation of shelter homes is regulated by the Act No. 108/2006 Coll., and defines them as “*temporary residence services for persons in an unfavourable social situation associated with the loss of housing*”. In addition, the law carries out the basic activities of this service, including providing or assisting in the provision of food, claiming of rights, legitimate interests, and personal affairs. The Decree No. 505/2006 Coll. determines that duration of the stay must be one year at maximum. It also mentions that these services are provided to clients by law, the price for the service is limited

Social workers in shelters offer their clients various activities aimed at increasing their competences in the area of childcare, financial management, household care, orientation in the network of local social services, etc. (Navrátilová, 2013).

Shelters as a temporary home in a crisis situation can be included in some Czech municipalities in the concept of permissive housing. This approach to addressing housing emergency currently prevails in most municipalities that decided to address housing issues. It is a system based on transition of households between different forms of housing - according to the merit, the family can climb in case of loss of housing until it acquires a permanent form of housing (Kocman, Klepal, 2016). The Strategy to Combat Social Exclusion for 2016–2020 (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2015), approved by the government in 2016, points to the failure of transition between different levels of the system, declares the lack of homes for social purposes assigned by municipalities, lack of housing units for people with specific needs (e.g. large families) and it particularly highlights the fact that social work is not provided sufficiently, so that the needs of households are not solved in a comprehensive way.

<sup>2</sup> Social functioning – in this context is seen as coping with life situations, tasks and problems in balance with environmental requirements, so that there is no failure between an individual and social environment.



In the context of the above, it was important to find out what needs/goals can be most often addressed and felt by clients of shelters. Needs are understood in this text according to the psychological concept. Thus, needs stimulate human behaviour and experience, explain why people behave in this way, and when individual behaviour patterns are revealed, it is possible to determine what motives lead to meeting a particular need. "*The motives serve to induce an activity that is focused on a goal and to maintain it*" (Vágnerová, 2016:329). Motives determine what a person will do to achieve satisfaction, how much effort he or she is willing to spend to achieve the goal and also how long the activity will last (whether ending after satisfying the need, or vice versa a long time to satisfy him and discouraging the individual's preferences). The need as a motive becomes an impulse for activity in terms of the internal state. The aim is to satisfy any character of need. From the external environment, individuals are motivated by an incentive. It stimulates the individual to behave that is necessary, at the same time avoiding problems and gaining something that will satisfy them. The value of the incentive depends on the importance of the satisfied need for humans, it is very subjective (Vágnerová, 2016).

Knowledge about needs/goals of cooperation between clients and social workers can contribute to streamlining social work not only in shelters but also in fieldwork in the prevention of housing loss and preventing the overall housing shortage of mothers with children. As social housing in the Czech Republic has not yet been anchored in legislation, it is crucial to eliminate the number of potential shelters and reflect the most frequently identified needs/goals of cooperation in social work methods so that they are as effective as possible.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the key questions of my research, I chose a standard questioning - I sent an electronic questionnaire to selected social workers of shelter homes using the scaling method. The questionnaire was selected, that it could potentially be addressed to any shelter home in the Czech Republic. The questionnaire answer file consisted of all shelters for mothers with children in the Czech Republic as of 30 January 2017 listed in the register of social services. This group included one hundred and thirty-five shelters for mothers with children spread all over the Czech Republic. The aim of the quantitative survey was to collect the necessary data on the frequency of solving the individual defined needs always from one worker from shelter.

In the pre-research, emphasis was placed on clarity of the questionnaire and consistent categorization of needs = objectives of individual plans. The questionnaire was divided into ten thematic areas, each devoted to a certain area of needs: housing, relations with the social environment, childcare, taking care of yourself, household care, enforcement of rights, handling official matters, planning and money management, field of work, spiritual needs of clients.

Needs<sup>3</sup>/goals of cooperation are considered as what the clients consider most important, they want to work on it and make efforts to achieve these needs = goals. It is important to mention that it is the clients of the shelters who speak of the aims of cooperation as their needs. Specific needs in individual areas were defined through the objectives of cooperation between social workers and clients of shelters. The main purpose of the questionnaire for social workers in shelter homes was to identify how often each predefined need/goal of individual plan is dealt with clients within individual planning. The scale was constant and contained four possible answers. "Very often" meant that the problem was solved with more than 90% of clients, "often" was limited on more than 50% of clients, "rarely" meant less than 50% of clients or "never". Workers included their experience with current and past clients.

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<sup>3</sup> I realize that needs are difficult to measure and it is difficult to quantitatively research these concepts in the research.



Selected areas of needs were based on an analysis of individual plans from one of the unspecified shelter homes. One hundred individual plans<sup>4</sup> were examined. Three social workers from shelters homes expressed themselves in the pre-research which helped to clarify and understand the defined needs. The pre-research brought adjustments in terms of clarity of the questionnaire, small additions and movements in areas.

The pre-research part was followed by modification and creation of a questionnaire on the web interface. The constructed questionnaire was sent to respondents to e-mail addresses listed in the register of social services or according to their website. The link for one shelter was usually sent to multiple e-mails, primarily to the manager and then to the social workers there. After opening the link, the questionnaire was available for completion. Data were collected from February 2, 2017 to March 1, 2017. Out of the total of one hundred and thirty-five invitations sent, one hundred and six facilities opened the questionnaire; thirteen respondents left it (it means even after thirty minutes did not complete it) and eighty-seven workers answered it to the end. The overall return on the survey (the proportion of completed questionnaires in the total number of questionnaires displayed) was 82% that means the total number of questionnaires completed was 87. The average length of completion was nineteen minutes and fifty-five seconds. I think that the length and intensity of filling in the questionnaire was one of the limits of the research. Furthermore, I think that since the questionnaire response for the facility was requested, not all employees, the overall representativeness of the sample was not ensured - not all social workers of shelters were addressed. Due to the feasibility of the research, it was not possible to address all social workers of shelters.

As the author of the text, I realize that the results are influenced by the knowledge and experience of social workers. Their answers also had to correspond to a predetermined template. The results are not linked to the perception of the needs of shelter clients. Therefore, I do not focus on conclusions that could be generalized, I try to provide insight into the process of social work in shelters so that we can find the needs/goals of clients most often work on and to what cooperation contracts social workers must respond.

### **FINDINGS – THE NEEDS/GOALS OF USERS OF SHELTER HOUSE FOR MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN AS SEEN BY SOCIAL WORKERS**

The areas mentioned in the following paragraphs were most often represented in the responses of social workers, and thus represented the dominant topics of consultation and intervention in shelters for mothers with children in the Czech Republic. The diagram below contains needs/goals to which social workers responded – more than 90% “very often” and “often”. It is a summary of the answers displayed in areas of the needs/goals. It was necessary to set a response frequency limit so that the interpretation of the data was understandable. The following paragraphs have a description character.

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<sup>4</sup> Individual plan - an instrument for individual planning, setting out the goals and steps of cooperation between a key social worker and a social service client. The purpose of individual plans is to motivate clients to improve their social functioning in the areas the client chooses to return to normal life. Individual plans in asylum facilities are inclusive (Navrátilová, 2013).



Figure 1: Areas of needs and goals that were analysed as the most frequent according to the statements of social workers in shelter homes<sup>5</sup>

<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment of possibilities of follow-up housing</li> <li>Assistance with mapping options where to look for follow-up housing</li> <li>Assistance in gathering the documents needed to obtain a follow-up housing</li> </ul>
<b>Childcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possibility to provide a safe environment for your children</li> <li>Strengthening of parental skills</li> <li>Advice on searching for school facilities for children</li> <li>Possibility to provide health care for children</li> </ul>
<b>Handling official matters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Counseling in handling state social support benefits</li> <li>Counseling for the handling of material emergency situations</li> <li>Strengthening orientation when dealing with authorities</li> <li>Support for independence in dealing with common issues</li> </ul>
<b>Planning and money management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning how to manage family finances</li> <li>Leading to independence in the management of finances</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own design

The following paragraphs describe specific areas and needs, and the Pivot Table lists all the items in that area and highlights those most frequently identified by social workers.

The first category, where more than 90% of workers agreed on a very frequent and frequent assistance with solving needs, is housing. Specifically, the need of assessment of the possibilities regarding follow-up accommodation (96% of questioned workers) and assistance with mapping the possibilities where to find follow-up accommodation (98% of questioned workers). The survey, therefore, proves that although the service provides secure accommodation for a certain period of time, the clients are immediately activated to find follow-up accommodation. Non-profit organisations, cities or churches that run shelters usually do not own follow-up housing, for example apartments for further use. The use of the market segment of the housing market is also often unreachable for the clients of shelters, due to the high bail for the apartment, the high rent or the discriminatory behaviour of the owners of houses, which set criteria for tenants (e.g. citizenship to majority, childlessness or limited number of children in family). These identified needs/goals in this area reflects that for clients in shelters support is also important, security, sharing. Ensuring adequate housing is a very demanding task, as reflected in the Family Report (Kuchařová et al., 2017), which identifies single mothers and young families as disadvantaged in this respect. These people spend most of their income on housing, even though they are housed in a social service that provides discounted pricing for their stay.

<sup>5</sup> Selected needs/goals whose relative frequency was more than 90% in categories “very often” and “often”.



Table 1: Area of needs/goals in housing where relative frequency was more than 90% in categories “very often” and “often” (n=87)

	“Very often” <sup>6</sup>		“Often”		“Rarely”		“Never”	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
<b>Assessment of the possibilities of follow-up housing - decision on what form of housing the client will look for</b>	70	81	14	16	1	1	2	2
<b>Assistance with mapping where to look for housing</b>	68	78	17	20	1	1	1	1
<b>Assistance in collecting the documents needed to obtain follow-up housing</b>	40	46	31	36	14	16	2	2
<b>Understand the lease agreement</b>	26	30	33	38	23	26	5	6
<b>To learn to comply with the tenant’s duties (timely payments, house cleaning, reporting of technical defects, etc.)</b>	44	51	25	29	13	15	5	6
<b>Acquire the tenant’s rights</b>	23	26	23	26	30	34	11	13

Source: Author’s own design

The second most frequently represented area of social work is childcare. The need for providing a safe environment for their children (91% of questioned workers), strengthening of parental skills (95% of questioned workers), counselling for finding school facilities for children (90% of questioned workers), helping to provide clothing for their children (92% of the questioned workers) and the possibility of providing health care for children (93% of the questioned workers) were significantly represented in the category of childcare.

Growth in poverty, according to Bäckman and Ferrarini (2010), has serious consequences for further life. The risk of poverty and social exclusion is, to a certain extent, trans-generational. Children from low-income families have a higher incidence of health problems, are less well-educated to deal with difficult situations in adulthood, and the likelihood of inappropriate behaviour in adulthood is increased (Roosa, Deng, Nair et al., 2005). Survey results have shown that in this area, the most common needs that mothers are trying to meet with social workers in shelter homes are health care for children, provision of clothing, safety, and the provision of appropriate school facilities. These needs state that children also have an important place in individual planning and that the service also emphasizes their situation. The service therefore responds adequately to the needs of clients in this area.

<sup>6</sup> Very often = workers deal with more than 90% of clients, often = more than 50% of clients, rarely = less than 50% of clients, have never met before.



Table 2: Area of needs/goals in childcare where relative frequency was more than 90% in category “very often” and “often” responses (n=87)

	“Very often” <sup>7</sup>		“Often”		“Rarely”		“Never”	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
<b>Possibility to provide a safe place for your children</b>	68	78	11	13	7	8	1	1
<b>Help to provide food for your children</b>	52	60	23	26	11	13	1	1
<b>Strengthening parental competences</b>	53	61	30	35	2	2	2	2
<b>Strengthening parental skills</b>	46	53	26	30	12	14	3	3
<b>Advice on searching for school facilities for children</b>	41	47	37	43	9	10	0	0
<b>Advice on health care for children</b>	32	37	36	41	16	18	3	4
<b>Possibility to provide health care for children</b>	58	67	23	26	6	7	0	0
<b>Possibility of escort to a paediatrician</b>	9	23	11	55	48	0	19	22
<b>Help with providing leisure activities for your children</b>	26	29	39	45	18	21	4	5
<b>Work to improve the relationship between mother and child</b>	22	25	16	18	32	37	17	20
<b>Help with the provision of clothing for children</b>	61	70	19	22	7	8	0	0

Source: Author’s own design

The third area where clients need help and support is, in the opinion of social workers, the area of handling official matters. From this category, there was a significantly higher proportion of counselling in the handling of state social support benefits (98% of questioned workers) and benefits of material need (99% of questioned workers), as well as the strengthening of orientation during negotiations with the authorities (94% of questioned workers) and assistance towards independence when dealing with routine matters (97% of questioned workers). The occurrence of these listed needs defines the characteristics of the target group of shelter homes for mothers with children. The results show that the benefit system of the Czech Republic is often unclear for its users. As part of their stay in a shelter, clients have the option of consulting social benefits with a social worker to obtain advice which is tailored to their needs. This provides a great advantage for the clients, on the other hand, in the context of preventing system forfeiture, counselling should

<sup>7</sup> Very often = workers deal with more than 90% of clients, often = more than 50% of clients, rarely = less than 50% of clients, have never met before.



be provided as a prevention of the loss of housing. The system should therefore be able to provide counselling at the beginning of an unfavourable social situation. The Labour Offices in the Czech Republic are responsible for this type of counselling, for the payment of state social support benefits and benefits of material need. Glumbíková and Gojová (2016) recommend that the need to understand the system of benefits could be saturated by an appropriately set training, which would be targeted at the recipient of the social work.

Social workers in direct work with clients of shelter homes can provide advice on dealing with official matters and are thus able to assist clients with official affairs. The service thus fulfils the statutory activity.

Table 3: Area of needs/goals in handling official matters where relative frequency was more than 90% in category “very often” and “often” responses (n=87)

	“Very often” <sup>8</sup>		“Often”		“Rarely”		“Never”	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
<b>Counselling in handling state social support benefits</b>	67	77	18	21	2	2	0	0
<b>Counselling for the handling material emergency situation</b>	76	87	10	11	1	1	0	0
<b>Advice on obtaining personal documents, e.g. identity card</b>	33	38	34	39	20	23	0	0
<b>Strengthening orientation in dealing with authorities</b>	52	60	30	34	5	6	0	0
<b>The possibility of escorting to the authorities</b>	12	14	21	24	44	51	10	11
<b>Support for independence in the dealing with common issues</b>	57	66	27	31	3	3	0	0
<b>Assistance with grant applications</b>	17	19	16	18	38	45	16	18

Source: Author’s own design

The fourth and last category with a high percentage of responses relates to the area of planning and management of finances. This area contains three specifically defined needs which have been evaluated as more important, namely to learn how to manage family finances (94% of questioned workers), to plan family budget (90% of questioned workers) and independence in financial management (93% questioned workers). In the permeable housing evaluation document (Kocman, Klepal, 2016), the authors focus on the problem of poverty associated with the lack of financial income in reflecting the experience of users of the system. The obstacle often lies in the fact that the client is disadvantaged by the dependence on the system of payment of benefits from different pillars. Therefore, the recipient of the benefit may not even have to raise all its resources together, which prevents him, for example, from organizing finance through the envelope method. Management of unbearably low incomes in relation to spending thus makes regular payments and

<sup>8</sup> Very often = workers deal with more than 90% of clients, often = more than 50% of clients, rarely = less than 50% of clients, have never met before.



efficient management impossible. Clients of shelter houses must also face this disadvantage. Social workers responded that the area of planning and management of finance is also a very demanding support or aid. They have methods using with clients to develop and build skills, and service is able to satisfy downstream needs, not only in the law of enumeration activities.

Table 4: Area of needs/goals in planning and money management where relative frequency was more than 90% in category “very often” and “often” responses (n=87)

	“Very often” <sup>9</sup>		“Often”		“Rarely”		“Never”	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
<b>Learning how to manage family finances</b>	52	60	30	34	5	6	0	0
<b>Being able to plan a family budget</b>	47	54	31	36	9	10	0	0
<b>Leading to independence in management of finances</b>	54	62	27	31	6	7	0	0
<b>Mapping out the opportunities for additional revenue</b>	33	38	36	42	16	18	2	2
<b>Mapping out past debts</b>	37	43	36	41	13	15	1	1
<b>Support in debt reduction</b>	33	38	38	44	15	17	1	1
<b>Debt prevention (prevention of current and future debt risk)</b>	32	37	33	38	21	24	1	1

Source: Author’s own design

The second question dealt with meeting the needs/goals of cooperation according to the activities set out in the Social Services Act. The results of the questionnaire were then compared to compare what activities from the results fall within the description of activities in the Act. The shelter service according to Section 57 of the Act No. 108/2006 Coll., provides the following basic activities:

- a) provision of food or assistance in providing food,
- b) provision of accommodation,
- c) assistance in the exercise of rights, legitimate interests and the handling of personal matters.

The provision of food or assistance in providing food has often emerged in the context of childcare in the “often” addressed needs of social workers. 86% respondents met this contract during their practice. The research declares that this activity is justified in the law and that clients request it. Accommodation was not included in the questionnaire. It can be taken for granted that shelters provide shelter accommodation because of their existence. They fulfil this activity stated in the law. In the future, it might be interesting to examine the size of the overhang of applicants for accommodation and the capacity of functioning shelters.

<sup>9</sup> Very often = workers deal with more than 90% of clients, often = more than 50% of clients, rarely = less than 50% of clients, have never met before.



The last defined activity in the law is assistance in the exercise of rights, legitimate interests and handling of personal matters. Most of the most commonly identified needs/goals of cooperation – this can be included – Assessment of the possibilities of follow-up housing – decision for which form of housing the client will look, assistance with mapping where to look for housing, assistance in collecting the documents needed to obtain follow-up housing, counselling in handling state social support benefits, counselling for handling material emergency situation, strengthening orientation in dealing with authorities, support for independence in dealing with common issues, leading to independence in management of finances, learning how to manage family finances. Most of the results from the questionnaire survey, where a significant proportion of frequencies corresponded to activities are enshrined in the law.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire survey show the views of social workers on the needs of their clients. In 2016, however, research focused on clients' needs was presented and respondents were shelter clients. The research interprets the data in a different way and suggests solutions to satisfy clients' needs. We can look for similarities in both research results. Glumbíková and Gojová (2016) emphasize the need for clients to have a good relationship with their family/appropriate family relationship solutions and the need for friends outside the shelter. Focusing on this topic in a questionnaire survey, 67% of social refugees responded that “very often” and “often” address the need to promote family relationships. 62% of social workers reported a high level of need / objective for promoting cooperation to re-establish contact with their immediate family. 58% of social workers provide “very often” and “often” support in establishing new social contacts and 53% support their clients in maintaining social contacts (friends, friends, acquaintances). Glumbíková and Gojová (2016) interpret this need as necessary for clients in the field of social relations. It can be argued that social workers also attribute an important place to the needs described above, with a relative frequency above 50%. Both surveys mentioned support for a relationship with a friend, but social workers responded vaguely to this need, half experienced “very often” and “often” and the other half “rarely” and “never”. However, as clients of shelters consider this need to be important (Glumbíková, Gojová, 2016), it would be interesting in the future to examine why only half of the nurses turn to social workers in shelters with this contract.

In the area of childcare, shelter clients mention the needs of children related to their exclusion from social relationships as a result of their stay in a refuge and the perceived stigma of “bad addresses”. This need can be correlated with the testimony that 90% of social workers responded that counselling in finding school facilities is a very frequent and often frequent plan of their clients' individual plans. It was also important for clients to understand the benefits system that social workers confirm in the most common needs/goals of cooperation. Shelter clients also mentioned the need to pay a deposit for housing, which proves their thinking about the following housing as one of the important needs of solution during their stay (social workers consider it an essential need). The authors also identified the need for increased self-esteem as essential for clients; social workers agreed on an increased frequency of 43%, but interpreted it through mental health promotion. Needs that were not reflected in the questionnaire survey, presented by Glumbíková and Gojová (2016) in their analysis: need to separate from a friend, share experiences with relationships, need to settle father-child relationships, need to settle/clear the stigma of imprisonment, the need to replace the second income after the partner leaves prison, the need to understand the minimum wage system in relation to job search, the need for dependence and the need to stay in the refuge, namely empathy and the professional attitude of social workers.



This brief summary of both surveys gives the reader an insight into the needs and cooperation of social workers in shelters and their clients. At the same time, another concept of “needs” is perceived by the eyes of social workers and clients. Research can thus be an inspiration and complement for a comprehensive view of the issue.

From the point of view of research focused on social workers, the conclusions can also be interpreted as very demotivating for shelter clients. Given the need for housing, as attributed to social workers as one of the most frequent contracts, shelter-seekers face a number of disadvantages that limit them in the housing market. Factors conducive to social inclusion are personal motivation, finding work, financial literacy, responsibility, cooperation with social workers, health, family background, relationship with a suitable partner, social capital of the user, duration of stay in crisis conditions, personality and education (Lux, Mikeszová, 2013). Personal motivation is a prerequisite for admitting an applicant to a refuge, finding work can be one of the client’s personal goals, so this factor can be influenced during her stay, financial literacy can be supported by social workers as well as responsibility for solving the situation. Social workers cannot interfere with the client’s health and family background and partner choice. The barriers to reintegration of homeless people into permanent forms of housing are debt, inaccessibility of housing, age and gender discrimination in the labour market, dependence and low self-confidence (Lux, Mikeszová, 2013). According to the experience of the organisation “Home Like”, which deals exclusively with the homelessness of women, poverty barriers, limited job opportunities can be added to the barriers to returning to everyday life; health problems, loss of motivation to change as a result of long-term homelessness (Homelike, 2014). These factors therefore declare that clients have to deal with a large number of circumstances leading to the transition to a permanent form of housing, but they cannot overcome the barrier such as unaffordable housing by themselves.

Affordable housing is thus a crucial problem for their situation and intensive social work aimed at building and practicing competence in housing does not need to be ensured. This is completely contrary to the theory of permeability, which is based on the vision of building competences for independent living. Within the Czech Republic, it is therefore necessary to build social housing systems for people with difficult access to the housing market, whether due to childcare, unemployment, limited financial income, mental health problems, ethnicity, health problems, etc. for mothers with children in social services could effectively provide assistance and support to people with complex needs through intensive social work, not just accommodation and social benefit counselling (however, social workers testify that identified areas of needs can only be addressed through social counselling). Effective social work should thus be able to identify the failure factors, which are due to the “incompetence” of the client and those caused by systemic shortcomings. Thus, non-functional system elements – such as lack of job opportunities, discriminatory behaviour in the housing market, lack of social housing legislation which hinder the reintegration of people into the regular housing market, deepen social stigmatization and do not address the availability of housing for all.

The Czech Republic is still addressing the issue of housing solutions for disadvantaged people in the housing market by various forms of assistance (Supreme Audit Office, 2018). There are several approaches in cities and towns, who help people with difficult access to the housing market, though their solutions are different (Klusáček, 2018). The trend of social services and strategies leading to housing provision in recent years has been aimed at decentralizing services using the community potential in the form of “housing first”. It emphasizes first the need to live and then the possibility to stabilize the social situation of an individual or family leading to permanent reintegration into society. It is a move away from building permeable housing, which in the Czech Republic has often operated among municipalities. However, its inefficiency, as evidenced by statistics (Kocman, Klepal, 2016), leads to a constant search for new ways to eliminate homelessness. Housing first projects, which have been gradually tested in Brno, Liberec and Prague 7, can bring new experience. Unfortunately, although we know the evaluation of individual housing policies, local policy sees



a lot of obstacles and uncertainties in approaches to housing in flats. The merit of housing is regarded as paramount and in many municipalities as unchangeable.

Legislative regulation of social housing has been in preparation for several years, however its future is uncertain under the influence of political decisions. Housing emergency experts (from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, government organisation – Agency for Social Inclusion, non-profit organisations and academia) in the Czech Republic are more and more insisting that without a law on social housing it is not possible to systematically solve housing emergency (Matoušek, 2019), which was also confirmed by the conclusions of the Supreme Audit Office in the Housing report of 2018. The upcoming legislation on social housing should at best reflect the long-term experience of actors from the ranks of politicians, experts, practitioners who have been setting up social housing systems for many years without anchored legislation and trying to find functional solutions in locations throughout the Czech Republic taking into account the different specificities of local needs and target groups.

## CONCLUSION

The results presented are based on the statements of social workers. For the users, shelters are satisfactory as a place where they can live for at least a certain period of time, and get some adequate information service. However, clients with a lower need for solution of their needs are burdened by the necessity of intensive cooperation with a social worker, they are obliged to participate in the contractual requirements of the social service, even though their situation is defined by the unavailability of housing. The results prove that a high percentage of shelter clients face the question of a follow-up housing. Thus, there are two groups of shelter clients, namely those who need affordable housing and those who, during their stay, need to address the ongoing problems or deficits.

The results allow an insight into the practice of social work in shelters through the most frequently addressed needs/goals of cooperation in shelters in individual planning. They also reflect the position of shelters in the social services system and their statutory activities that correspond to clients' demands. The results can contribute to anchoring the position of the shelter social worker within the professional specialisation currently being carried out by the PROSO<sup>10</sup> research team. The collected data should be subjected to further examination, such as internal consistency analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Project “Professionalization of social work in Czech Republic”. More information about project is here: <http://www.socialniprace.cz/index.php?sekce=62&podsekce=80>



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# “Help Me Do It by Myself” – About the Empowered Homeless from the Socially Engaged Perspective

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## Abstract

**OBJECTIVES:** My aim was to present the homeless as an empowered group – as resourceful, surviving, contrary to the stereotype, in a way indicating a high degree of social knowledge. **THEORETICAL BASE:** This article is a reflection on participatory research that I conducted from 2005 to 2013, among the homeless living on the streets, outside the social welfare system and among homeless people staying in hostels and joining homeless associations there. I adopted the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Sensitizing concepts in my study were the concepts of empowerment and participation. **METHODS:** I adopted a qualitative approach to collecting data. I used the grounded theory, including its constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2009). I had the opportunity to get to know the perspective of the Participants. Social engagement on my part as the researcher-participant revealed areas of the Participants’ empowerment. **OUTCOMES:** Interactional work undertaken by them for their survival, is divided into: work on securing their continued existence and work on developing leisure-time activities. I show some paradoxes of help provided to the homeless as tactics instilling helplessness. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Empowerment should focus on the awareness of both the homeless and society, becoming the purpose and effect of work for them.

## Keywords

empowerment, homelessness, social work, interactive work, symbolic interactionism

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<sup>2</sup> Skrzynka “Domni – Bezdomni”.



## INTRODUCTION<sup>3</sup>

In the public discourse, socially excluded people are quite easily forced into boxes of inaction, resentment, “resignation, learned helplessness”; as being “devoid of the skills to live in society and who in some way are socially crippled [defective]” (Rakowski, 2009:363); they are considered unorganized, “without their own cultural background or bottom-up mechanisms of modernization” (Rakowski, 2009:363). This media-imposed identity presupposes an order of appropriate response by aid institutions towards socially excluded people, involving recreating ‘civilizational competences’, activation and reintegration. The typical interpretations of the ‘clients’ of these institutions marginalizes the unpopular images of the homeless, showing them instead as resourceful and active because they undermine the legitimacy of the typical ways of providing help. The image of the socially excluded, circumscribed in this way, as being burdened with a scarcity of resources, skills, and social competences, representing the ‘wrong’ life, calls for more and more support programs, focusing on restoring their efficiency and *“activating (...) the economic, social and cultural void”* (Rakowski, 2009:364). At the same time, social pedagogy as a practical discipline, with its tradition of disagreement with reality and focus on introducing change, suggests siding with socially-engaged research. According to Gulczyńska (2013:253–254), the specificity of such research *“...is the transformation of the researcher’s identity that takes place in the space of communication with the Actors”*. In other words, the participatory perspective leads to a change in the role of the researcher from an external observer to the engaged, understanding participant that can reach the internal perspective. This is helped by a quality methodology providing tools for recognizing social problems from the perspective of the Participants<sup>4</sup>. This viewpoint allows for, on the one hand, accommodation of the voice of the representatives of the minority in building theories about them, by showing them as empowered entities, active in many areas. And on the other hand, it makes it possible to trace the paradoxes of conventional activities that – based on professional, inter-subjectively shared theories – construct contradictory actions.

The conclusions presented below are based on two research trips I made amongst the homeless. The first (2005–2008) focused on understanding the reality of homeless men living on the streets of my city, outside institutional support, with particular attention paid to the obstacles to their reintegration with the society<sup>5</sup>. The second (2007–2013) was with the residents of a hostel run by an association founded by homeless men, and concentrated on the process of forming the association, taking matters into their own hands, and bottom-up building of a democracy there<sup>6</sup>. Common features of both studies are that they each consisted of several years of participatory observation, the engaged attitude of the researcher, and an interpretive orientation. The world so explored revealed itself in interactions, in the ‘happening’ and ‘occurring’, and thus the natural choice for the theoretical perspective of both studies was symbolic interactionism, and the method – the Grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2009). Conducted in this way, the research allowed for the discovery of dimensions of the homeless reality in which, instead of fixed stereotypes, one can see the potential for empowering the homeless.

<sup>3</sup> Parts of this text have been published in the article by Kostrzyńska (2014).

<sup>4</sup> I am writing ‘Participants’ with an uppercase letter to emphasize their importance, and to empower them, at least symbolically.

<sup>5</sup> More in: Wujcicka (2008).

<sup>6</sup> More in: Kostrzyńska (2018).



## RESOURCEFUL LOSERS – THE EMPOWERED HOMELESS

Empowering social work with the homeless must be based on individual diagnoses (different levels of assessment). It is very important in this respect to understand their potential, which often means unimaginable life resourcefulness, despite the fact that they are commonly considered to be social losers, and this can encompass different types of non-standard activity (work).

Writing about these “resourceful losers”<sup>7</sup>, I think of those areas of their life in which it is difficult to talk about them as being socially excluded. Contrary to the stereotypical perception of them in terms of failure, instead of being inertly stuck in their trajectory, the homeless often do gain “control of their life” (DuBois, Miley, 1999:141), which is one of the important determinants of their empowerment.

Understanding the homeless in the category of interactions allows one to notice these spheres of life, in which they turn out to be more ‘socially included’ than many representatives of the world of “normals”<sup>8</sup>.

### The potential for life experience and social representation

In accordance with the ingrained stereotype of the homeless, society often defines them from the perspective of their current social role, thinking about them as if they have been homeless since birth. Hasty observations of homeless people passed in the streets allows only for a premature assessment, without being able to gain more sensitive insight into their perspective. Meanwhile, among the Participants of my research, there were homeless persons who had extremely rich and varied personal and professional experience. For instance, a policeman, who recalled how before he “...chased away the homeless from the railway stations, cleaning up the city,” and that today he is “...chased and batted away by his former fellow policemen”. A long-time history teacher, extremely lettered, would explain difficult-to-understand (for homeless people) concepts about daily life, and a law graduate lead his fellow homeless colleagues through their court letters – a highly challenging task, because of the legal language. Finally, some of the homeless I talked to were once private entrepreneurs running their own companies, and they told stories about their standard of living ‘before’, when they and their families never lacked for anything. They continued to make use of their professional experience and ‘life’ experience, even if they had been incarcerated<sup>9</sup> (by writing parole applications, cultivating relationships with prison educators, curators, etc). On a daily basis, they skilfully weave their experience into their homeless life, sometimes utilizing it as a trump card with which to build their social status.

Tomasz Rakowski extends these observations about the organization of the life of the homeless, by writing about “*socially imagined resourcefulness*” (2009:187). For example, situations in which former miners examined by him engaged in illegally extracting coal or post-mining scrap, which activity is accompanied by an informal agreement with the police. This peculiar ritual can be disrupted at any time, exposing the miners to legal sanctions. The exchanging of opinions among these former miners, supportive of the atmosphere of agency and “*coping*” with the hardships of everyday life, expressed through statements confirming their “*easiness*”, allow for their survival, but according to Rakowski are also extremely important in building inter-social relationships<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> This concept is introduced and described by Rakowski (2009).

<sup>8</sup> The terms ‘normals’ and ‘stigma bearer’ are adopted here following the theory of stigmatization proposed by Goffman (2005).

<sup>9</sup> In the text I use terms derived from the everyday language of the research Participants (after Glaser, Strauss, 1967 – “in vivo codes”), denoted by quotation marks and italics.

<sup>10</sup> Similar strategies for “*getting by*” were constructed in the days of continuous shortage during wartime and German occupation. Wyka calls informal trade (1984) “*the offed economy*” and Sulima (2003) refers to street trading as “*poverty entrepreneurship*” (Tymiński, 2002:3).



Individual familiarity with the homeless seems to be necessary in order to look past the stereotype and see the potential of their experience, and to therefore design empowering actions.

### Working on securing their existence<sup>11</sup>

The activity in which homeless people must engage in order to survive in a “*hostile*” world, demonstrates the high degree of their organization and resourcefulness. Taking into consideration their skills and social competences, they sometimes locate themselves in the category of “*private entrepreneurs*”. Anyone trying to survive on the street needs to secure their wellbeing through the development or selection of strategies that, in my research, were categorized as interactive work on “*roof-finding*”, “*food-arranging*” and profit-making<sup>12</sup>.

Working on “*roof-finding*”. “*Roof-finding*” in the world of the homeless means finding accommodation. In the case of homeless people staying in shelters, their work will be focused on improving the living conditions at that shelter (better furnishing, renovations etc). This is especially true for homeless who gather together to create their own place “*to live*”. In the case of homeless people staying on the streets, there are two kinds of “*roof-finding*”: “*taming*” a piece of urban space, and “*hustling*” temporary shelters.

“*Taming*” of urban spaces is aimed at creating a substitute home, a place of “*normality*”, something “*own*”, that gives a sense of security. This “*home*” might be a rubbish chute, a loft, a gazebo, or a place in a park or a train station. One of the homeless people I spoke to talked about it as: “*Today I’m homeless, but I’m okay with it, I got used to it. I sleep on staircases, when it is warm I spread some cardboard out, arrange some blankets [...] Yesterday, I slept here [...] among the trees. There, I spread my cardboard, there’s my place. [...] I made a sort of a tunnel, put the cardboard, the nights are warm, this is where I slept. Nobody pries in here [...] I hid a leather jacket, two sweaters, put them in a plastic bag so that they wouldn’t get wet. Well, I have no other place*”.

The “*tamed*” section of a street, chosen by the homeless and decorated “*in their own way*”, constitutes a place that they get used to, to which they “*return, as if to their own place*”, and which they call home.

Because of the strong attachment on the part of the homeless to “*tamed*” parts of the city, depriving them of such a place often results in suffering, deep resentment and a sense of home deprivation. The second variant of “*Roof-finding*” is “*hustling*”, which is an alternative to staying on the street because of a dislike for “*being closed in*” in homeless shelters. It takes the form of short-term stays in shelters (usually when it is difficult to survive because of the cold weather outside), or in arranging other temporary shelters (in the apartment of a friend, in a vacant building, etc).

A special example of “*roof-finding*” that does not fit into this simple division, and seems to be an interesting indication of an empowering action, is the example of one research Participant who, irritated by his prolonged homelessness, decided to go to the city council, lie outside the office of the President of the City, stating that he would not move until he was given social housing. After two days, he received an apartment in which he arranged “*accommodation facilities*” for several of his homeless friends.

In addition to the previously described spatial dimension of searching for a space that one can call home, “*Roof-finding*” also has a social dimension. According to this, home is a place in which there are people one feels close to – “*ours*”, i.e. other homeless people who share the same feeling about their situation, support one another and form a little community. As stated by the Participants of my research, the choice of such people is not easy. Sometimes they are “*connected*” by the difficulties they have experienced, giving them confidence that they “*can rely on one another*”. This kind of group integration is particularly strong, so sometimes the homeless refer to such groups as a “*new family*” (for example, the homeless man described above who “*won*” a social flat was called “*dad*” by his friends, because of the care he surrounded them with).

<sup>11</sup> To find more on the subject cf.: Kostrzyńska (2012).

<sup>12</sup> I refer here to the understanding of interactive work according to Strauss et al. (1985).



To summarize, working on “*roof-finding*” in the form of “*taming*” and “*bustling*” reveals a message that is quite crucial to empowerment, according to which it should not be limited to individual work with the homeless (even that meant to provide them with housing), but it should involve working with the whole group (sometimes even a community), of the homeless. This work should be done carefully, so as not to induce uprooting individuals from the intricately constructed communities they form with others “*of their kind*.”

**Working on “*food-arranging*”.** Food-arranging is almost always associated with subordination of the homeless to the scheduling of various social institutions. Homeless people not only develop precise logistics in terms of receiving meals, food packages and clothes offered by charities, but also regularly update their knowledge of them and modify their plans accordingly. This “*schedule*” determines the sequence of their activities during the day, indicating where and when a meal will be distributed. These periodically repeated “*rounds*”, covering different institutions, typically include several meals and end with the closure of the distribution of aid. Therefore, it is difficult to reduce this process only to obtaining food, because it is also a specific way of arranging their daily activities and meetings with other people. As one of the Participants of the study said: “[...] *they plan their whole day based on walking to all the charities [...] I mean – when in one place there is breakfast at 9.00, they’re there. If at 1.00 there’s lunch elsewhere, they’re there; if there’s dinner at 14:00 somewhere, they’re there. They have a list of assistance centres, and they walk around all day, and they even bring home a lot of things... and so it goes, day after day. They have something to eat, they arrange something to drink, and so the day goes... just to go on...*”.

A good “*schedule*” means the homeless don’t miss any “*offers of the day*”. This precisely planned work on “*food-arranging*” is subject to further specialization in situations where meals are distributed at two different places at similar times. Then, well-planned sharing of responsibilities allows the homeless to gain from all of the meals. They group together, dividing the tasks between themselves (everyone obtains food not only for themselves, but also for a friend with whom they are sharing resources). This can mean cooperation between a married couple, partners living in concubinage, or two friends. It is not so important who the people implementing it are, but what satisfaction they gain from the achieved goal.

Awareness of the work on “*food-arranging*” projected by homeless people in such a way makes it possible to once again include it amongst the empowering activities of the entire group, or community, that is connected by similar ways of organizing their survival on the streets. Empowerment of an individual outside their reference group would not bring the expected results<sup>13</sup>. But the way in which the homeless organize themselves offers important tips for empowering social work, revealing areas of their potential as well as those requiring better management and strengthening.

**Working on profit-making.** The study participants briefly referred to paid work as “*wandering and earning*”, available in three possible variants: **begging**, **collecting** and “**car security services**”. When the homeless engage in begging, it often involves approaching people, telling them about their situation and asking for cash or material support (shopping). The homeless employ a number of tactics to achieve this goal (including going from door to door, waiting for clients at the door of shops, and “*cultural begging*” – in which the location of the begging is not important, but how it is performed). My research allowed me to distinguish three categories of homeless people: those who are able to beg, those who beg only under the influence of alcohol (alcohol softens resistance to the act of begging and becomes a source of encouragement), and those who refrain from begging (because of shame, lack of courage or self-esteem issues). Begging, according to the Participants of the research, allows them to interact with society, which is sometimes one of the few opportunities

<sup>13</sup> Sometimes, the factor integrating the homeless is alcohol. Then, as they say, the only recipe for support is “*snatching an individual away*” from the environment, reducing the influence of “*snipers*” (those encouraging alcoholism). In this case, the need for working with an individual rather than the reference group is particularly evident.



they have to remind passers-by of their presence. These meetings reveal a range of social reactions (positive and negative), to the homeless.

Another form of interactive work with the goal of earning money is gathering<sup>14</sup>, which consists in traversing the city, searching the streets, rubbish bins and other places for materials that could be useful (food, clothing, equipment), or that can be exchanged for cash (cans, scrap metal, bottles, waste paper). As emphasized by the homeless themselves, this way of earning money is often a great source of income – one just has to know where, when and how to look.

Gathering also includes a social dimension, within the community of the homeless as well as outside it, (in terms of interactions with the “*non-homeless*”). One example of an interaction within a group of homeless people is the making of an agreement between them, setting up “*common interests*” and thus sharing responsibilities (each person searches different sites, they assist one another carrying heavy objects), and sometimes also profits. Another example is the agreement on “*common expenses*” (everyone works individually, “*on their own account*” and then they meet somewhere, “*chipping in*” to buy alcohol). Thanks to this “*they can afford more*”. In turn, interactions carried out outside groups of homeless involve establishing understanding with owners of landfills, residential communities, or City Treatment Plants (from whom the homeless get “*tips*” about “*commodities*” to be collected). They acquire some income, and the other party – without the use of any financial resources – “*cleans*” the area for which it is responsible.

Another way of earning money is by “*protecting*” cars, which consists in providing “*forced*” favours to drivers parking on unguarded parking lots. A particularly interesting example of this type was the case of a large, unguarded, municipal parking lot, which a group of homeless men – properly equipped with safety vests and traffic cones – effectively “*transformed*” into a “*guarded*” parking lot by charging appropriate fees for the use of this “*adopted*” urban space. Their organization and professional equipment did not raise even the shadow of a doubt in the “*clients*” of their newly-created business.

Summarising the above-described forms of earning money, what’s noteworthy is that they are attempts “*to deserve*,” “*to earn*” support, instead of just “*using*” other people.

These earning efforts demonstrate once again the high level of organization of the homeless, contrary to the stereotype rooted in society. In addition, they provide a space within which to establish interactions with the public – thus allowing the homeless to reach out from their own environment. They reveal a kind of a social “*niche*” assumed by homeless persons performing socially important work. In view of this, empowering activity should be designed not so much to force the homeless to adjust to society, as to allow them to help decide, share obligations, and negotiate their presence in society. This is important when it comes to planning activities empowering them not only at the level of their own homeless community, but also from the social perspective.

### Work on using leisure time

The lives of the homeless predominately happen in the world of “*ours*”<sup>15</sup>. This is typical of representatives of excluded and marginalized social categories. The criterion differentiating time in the world of the homeless is the degree of institutionalization of their lives. Due to the fact that the subject of this paper is focused on empowerment of the “*roof-less*” homeless, further considerations herein will tackle the dimension of time outside the realm of the various homeless help institutions, with only certain references to time spent at them.

**Non-institutional time** is characterized by the freedom of the homeless who, not being associated with an institution, are therefore not limited by their rules. Outside the institutions, the homeless usually spend their time **at train stations**, “*at friends’ places*” and “*in the street*”.

<sup>14</sup> The category of gatherers is defined in the literature in various ways. Rakowski (2009:378) writes about “hunters and pickers”; Golczyńska-Grondas about “hunters-hustlers” (2004:75).

<sup>15</sup> The existence of the world of “ours” (the homeless) as opposed to the world of “strangers” (non-homeless) is analogous to the concept of social worlds by Strauss (Denzin, Lindesmith, Strauss, 1975:469).



A train station and its surroundings form a space where they can come in order to – as they say themselves – “do anything”. Because of the large number of homeless people who spend time in train stations, some of them are called “railway station ants”.

An alternative way of spending time, namely hanging out “at friends’ places” involves visiting acquaintances from the world of “strangers” (the non-homeless), or from the “world of ours”. Friends who have homes can co-organize the time of the homeless, taking them home and feeding them. Assistance provided by a non-homeless friend is usually temporary – kind of a rescue in a difficult situation. On the other hand, help provided by homeless friends need not be so temporary and ad hoc, and can have other conditions. The possibility of spending the night somewhere (rubbish chute, allotment shed, attic), can result in the need for “funding alcohol” and “accompanying drinking”, which consumes most of the money earned by the homeless. At the same time – as highlighted by one of the Participants – “a friend is a holy thing” which reveals another dimension of their interactive work, namely work on relationships.

In comparison with spending time at train stations and “at the place of a friend”, time spent “on the street” is, according to the Participants of the research, particularly marked by a feeling of senselessness, because “nothing comes of it”, although in many cases it fills their daily lives. They say: “Well, on the street I did nothing... nothing at all. In the summer I sat on a bench and waited, someone came, we talked, a friend and sometimes someone brought some beer or vodka, we drank it, we sat together... That’s the kind of life it was”.

The specific rhythm of life outside aid institutions is considered by the Participants of this research as being a kind of “day trance” – the monotony leads to “the days blending into one another”, and thus a loss of awareness of dates and of passing time generally.

Work on arranging things to do in leisure time once again makes reference to empowering actions for the benefit of the homeless community. Only actual knowledge of the way of life “without a home” can be a basis for designing possible changes in this respect.

In terms of the resourcefulness of homeless people, the Participants of the research repeatedly indicated that one has to demonstrate entrepreneurial approach to everyday life. Only this attitude can guarantee survival. If empowerment is a state of mind, a sense of life competences, self-esteem, the ability to influence and control one’s own life (thus leading to reallocation of power through changes made to the social structure (Swift, Levin, 1987; after: DuBois, Miley, 1999:141), then *homeless entrepreneurs* seem to constitute a partially empowered group (and thus also one that is vitally resourceful). This stands in contrast to the label of “losers” attributed to them, but without the reallocation of power and impact on social structures. Since a large part of the homeless are resourceful enough to accept the challenge of independent life in society, then social work – in contrast to its dominant focus on the individual – should instead focus on wider social determinants (structures) in order for this potential to be fully revealed.

## THE PARADOX OF ASSISTANCE FOR THE HOMELESS AS TEACHING HELPLESSNESS

The activities undertaken by social workers, based on professional, inter-subjectively shared theories (built mainly on theoretical knowledge, or derived from stereotypes) seem to favour denying the desirability of aid institutions. Below, I present some of the paradoxes of the help provided to the homeless, which take the form of tactics “teaching helplessness” and instilling homelessness, rather than leading the homeless towards changes in their circumstances.

According to Oliwa-Ciesielska (2004:60), “*Infecting with helplessness*” in aid institutions for the homeless occurs when “*shelter homeless, observing the mutual helplessness, automatically perceive their own position as uncontrollable*”. In this way, the homeless seem to “infect” one another with the situation they find themselves in, reasserting to other the hopelessness of their situation, sometimes even giving up doing anything (Łukaszewski, 1984:52). Trying to break this mutual apathy should be reflected – from both the individual and collective perspectives – in “*breaking down*” groups



stuck in a “day trance”. From the social perspective, this should occur by striving to overcome the stereotype of the homeless person, perhaps by showing their activities and thus proving their resourcefulness and organization.

“*Getting infected with homelessness*” seems to be associated with the phenomenon of learned helplessness, i.e. a passivity in life so often nurtured by institutions providing assistance. In ensuring constant support, doing things for their homeless patrons and controlling all of their activities, it must sooner or later occur to them that “*there’s always someone who’ll do it instead of me*”, and they will “*often do it better*”. Getting used to receiving help leads to helplessness, lack of autonomy, even complete passivity. This transforms a “*client*” into a “*help receiver*”. The “*learning*” of such an attitude is contributed to by workers in social professions providing assistance. This is even noted by the homeless themselves, about themselves: “[...] *I cannot understand these people, that when they are in these conditions, they cannot get organized, do things themselves and deal with it. I do not know whether it’s out of habit or when they’re like this, they think they’re entitled to it and must get it. Maybe they are somehow un-resourceful, but most are just unwilling. But it is also the fault of our country, because the deeper into this [we get], the harder it is to get out of it*”.

The situation of learned helplessness causes individuals to not be able to undertake activities that were once no problem for them. This in turn evokes a sense of helplessness outside the institution, and a demanding attitude. “*And when they got the finger, they caught both hands at once*”, says one of the Participants of the study. Moreover, such an attitude perpetuates the stigmatized identity, because it is homelessness that justifies the claims: “*This is a habit, because he himself thinks that he deserves it. Why strain, or do anything, if they must give it to me? Because I’m that kind of person, and they must give it to me*”.

The above-described mechanisms of “*infecting with homelessness*”, learned helplessness and a demanding attitude could be summed up in a statement by one of the homeless people I spoke to, who claimed that when “*entering*” into homelessness, one gets “*receiving aid in the blood*”, as a natural ritual, and it is difficult to break with.

As can be noted, the homeless are conscious observers and analysts of their own world. They also indicate practically ready-made ideas on how to break out of that “*circle of powerlessness*” projected by the social welfare system, and how to prevent their “*power*” from being taken away – and not only by themselves, but also by “*professionals*”. According to them, from the perspective of individual work on oneself, one should: “*take the responsibility for their own lives into their own hands*”; always “*be oneself*”; “*never give up*”; “*take every opportunity*”; “*be active*”; “*not duplicate patterns*”; (following their parents’ or other homeless peoples’ bad behaviour); “*give up alcohol*”; “*have a strong psyche*”; “*treat their situation as transitional*”, and “*want to leave*”. However, they add that “*there is no recipe, it’s all in the head. These are all individual cases*”.

Self-conscious individuals, however, tend to collide with the realities of institutionalized support. Conflicts of expectation present in aid institutions are most clearly reflected in the context of the analysis of self-presentation. A person becoming homeless seems to have two symbolic identity-building strategies – “*as a normal*”, and “*as a homeless*”. At the beginning of their path, they usually present themselves “*as a normal*” – they have appropriate attributes (mobile phone, wallet etc), they won’t admit to being homeless and stay away from homeless people in institutions. Such people are not recognized as homeless (“*neat, clean-shaven, nice-smelling*”) and don’t fit in the social standards of homelessness. At the same time, they attempt to obtain support which often ends in failure, due to their “*not fitting the image of someone [worthy of assistance]*”, i.e. the stereotype of “*looking like a homeless person*”. Deprived of aid from those appointed as “*professionals*”, they begin to look for support in the “*community of experiences*”, namely other homeless people, increasingly identifying with them and subordinating to the social (and unfortunately, also institutional) expectations of self-presentation “*as a homeless*” (in accordance with the applicable stereotype of a “*dirty, stinky, lousy*” man on the social margins). This process is illustrated by the following quote, from another study Participant: “*...because they do not want to keep people there who are physically*



*capable and look neat. I was there, cross my heart. I talked to a Sister... Sir, you are capable of working... We don't need you... why, you can go to work, earn for a month and get a flat for yourself... We take those from the margins, that lie in the street, stinky, with gangrene in their legs... lousy, dirty... And there is nothing wrong with you... you are clean, neat... But Sister... I say, I would like to stay here for a while... It's not possible...".*

This statement reveals the lack of ideas in society about how to help the homeless – a homeless person building up a social identity “as a normal” is expected to show signs of degradation or adopt the symbolic attributes of homelessness. Meanwhile, a homeless person presenting themselves “as a homeless” is expected to manifest behaviours representative of the world of the “normals”.

Another example of contradictory expectations is (contrary to the considerations above), the expectations of social workers and ordinary passers-by who wish to see the homeless being neat and tidy and motivated to change their fate and looking for work. Presentation (or not) of this idealised image is the factor determining their willingness to help the homeless. This therefore leads to the obvious situation in which the homeless find it difficult to read the expectations of society towards them, and so become distrustful of it.

These conflicting expectations make the homeless regularly change their self-presentation, depending on the situation and attitude of those they're interacting with. In public situations, such as at railway stations, the homeless must strive to resemble average people. This is usually not possible, and so they are symbolically stripped of their status as citizens, and the services which should ensure peoples' safety become the main antagonist. The following quote demonstrates the interaction between the homeless and officers of the SOK<sup>16</sup>: “[...] *it does not fit in my head... how these, you know, how the authorities act... they cast them out... a homeless comes to the station, he wants to warm up... and the Municipal Police, the Railway Guards chase them away. The RG [SOK] believe that it's their own private station... That the station is just for them to sit in... Or, this can be the fault of the homeless – maybe they misbehave... they are treated as useless in society. If he could, such an RG would shoot a homeless man.*”

On the other hand, the same SOK officers are sensitive to the problems of the homeless if the homeless person adopts a strategy of self-presentation “as a normal”. They can gain a lot from this, even being allowed to stay overnight in unused cars in railway sidings or storing things in locations shown to them by the SOK officers.

Appropriate self-presentation is therefore enough to (re)direct this relationship in a positive way for the homeless. However, taking into account social and practical conditions, such metamorphoses are not easy, because even social aesthetic models are tailored to individuals with apartments with bathrooms, washing machines and irons. The lack of such equipment often represents a symbolic withdrawal of civil rights.

In summary, the strategies presented herein of helping the homeless tend to, paradoxically, consolidate homelessness, instead of supporting the process of overcoming it. At the same time, they systematically teach the resourceful and organised homeless person to skilfully read the expectations of society. Their ability to adapt, expressed in efficient handling of stigma, can be seen as one of the symptoms of “*getting cosy*” in their homelessness, which is what the entire system of social assistance is supposed to counteract. This is, according to one of the study Participants, a “*side effect*” of this assistance, and at the same time an impulse to design an empowering kind of social work, rather than a disciplining one.

## CONCLUSION

Conducting qualitative participatory research is, for professionals in the field of social work, an invaluable opportunity to design empowering activities based on a first-hand understanding of the perspective of its recipients.

<sup>16</sup> SOK – Railway Guards.



Presenting homeless people in professional literature as internally empowered (resourceful “(un)successful losers”) is in itself empowering. Display of a non-stereotypical image of a homeless man to some extent modifies the awareness of practitioners and introduces another point of view to the institutional discourse. The popularization of such a perspective can open up new sources of knowledge for professionals. This can then serve as a starting point for action based on the inherent potential of marginalized groups, which can be an alternative to the schematic orientation on “*the return to society*”.

The results of this and similar studies also promote – in the scientific discourse, and indirectly in the public discourse – the prospect of a minority group empowering the discourse in these areas. In turn, the paradoxes in helping the homeless highlight the areas of co-responsibility for homelessness, excessive control mechanisms, and obstacles in the way of ensuring even institutional empowerment. Empowering work should here rely on raising awareness of colonization and discrimination activities, by working on changing professional and social awareness. This should be carried out in three areas. Firstly, in changing the self-perception of the homeless. They tend to internalize the perspective of the majority, which might stand in the way of their escaping homelessness. Secondly, in raising the awareness of professionals, who often subconsciously use categorizations that then translate, to a significant extent, to their actions. Thirdly, it should be in improving overall public awareness of the conflicting demands (paradoxes) of this particular group. Work on public and professional awareness outlined in this way yields an understanding of empowerment as direct and indirect effects of participatory research.

The ultimate goal of each relationship based on providing support should be to make oneself unnecessary for the person who needed our support, as this would mean that the support provided at a specific stage of his or her life, when he or she experienced particular difficulties, actually worked, and from now on that person is able to manage his or her affairs unassisted. Thus, however paradoxically it may sound, the goal of social aid is to become unnecessary.

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# The Perception of the Care Work and Its Importance: A Pilot Study<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

**OBJECTIVES:** The article aims to demonstrate how caring is perceived in Czech society and investigates willingness to become a formal or informal caregiver. **THEORETICAL BASE:** Considering the growing demand for social care as a consequence of the ageing population, the issue of social care personnel has increased in relevance. Occupational prestige could prove to be a way of attracting more people to the field. **METHODS:** The study is based on questionnaire data (122 respondents) which was analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. **OUTCOMES:** The findings show that 97% of the respondents admire the work of care staff. This profession is perceived as meaningful although physically and mentally demanding, poorly rated, less attractive and less prestigious. The respondents would rather not do this job and would not recommend it to their children or friends. However, 65% of the respondents would still like to care for their relatives and 52% even perceive this as their duty. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** The findings of this study are consistent with the bad reputation of care work concerning the

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poor financial rating and immense difficulty. Therefore, the social importance and necessity of this work should be communicated, and occupational prestige should be consciously increased to avoid a lack of caregivers.

### Keywords

care staff, occupational prestige, social care, ageing population

## INTRODUCTION

The demographic development of society is now one of the topical issues in the Czech Republic. The structure of the Czech population is gradually changing because the share of children younger than 15 years old is decreasing and, at the same time, the share of seniors is rising and has recently outweighed the proportion of the young. In 2018, there were 15.7% of children aged 0–14 years old in comparison to 19.2% of seniors (age 65+). The medium variant of the Czech Statistical Office (2018) projection for 2018–2100 assumes a further increase in the share of people aged 65+; in 2040 it should exceed 25%.

The consequences of the ageing population affect all spheres of social and economic development. The concerns most frequently mentioned are related to the sustainability of pension system financing, an increase in social security and healthcare costs and the lack of workforce on the labour market (Smrčka, Arltová, 2012; Fiala, Langhamrová, 2013; Kulik, Ryan, Harper et al., 2014). Nevertheless, considering the growing proportion of seniors, social care provision should not be neglected, especially its service offer, capacities and personnel issues (Průša, 2015).

Since staff are a crucial input in the service sector, the growing demand for social care will result in a growth in the required number of social care staff. The Czech Social Services Act classes social care staff into social workers, workers in social services, healthcare workers and volunteers. Healthcare in social services is a separate topic. Social work is one of the most important instruments in creating and implementing social help systems. In connection with long-term social care, social workers are initiators, coordinators and implementers of care (Hrozenská, Dvořáčková, 2013). Although system solutions will also have to be sought considering demographic development, care itself, provided by workers in social services (professional care) and by volunteers (informal care), will have to be ensured first. Therefore, our study is focused on both professional and informal caregiving.

Note that for the purpose of our study, we conceptualised “informal care” as a broader term than “family care”. An informal caregiver is specified in the Czech Civil Code as a close person – a direct relative (child, sibling, wife/husband, etc.) or another person (friend, neighbour, volunteer). Informal caregivers are not primarily trained in caring although they often provide the same services as professional caregivers. In addition, informal caring does not have to be contractually defined (Triantafyllou et al., 2010). According to OECD data, informal caregivers represent 70%–90% of all caregivers in long-term care (two-thirds of which are women; Wija, 2012).

Professional caregivers play a particularly important role in cases where informal care is impossible. Professional caring is conditioned by acquiring the necessary competences. As informal care is mostly connected to caregivers’ leaving work (Wija, 2012), which will not be desirable with respect to the future employment situation, professional caregivers will probably grow in importance in terms of covering the increasing need for social care.

As a result, the main point of our article is that new caregivers have to be attracted to the field to meet the growing demand for social care. The attractiveness of any profession, including social care, is probably affected by the public perception of the profession (Kaufman, Raymond, 1996). In view of the fact that there is a lack of actively building a positive image of social work in the media and that such work is connected to many stereotypes (Tower, 2000), there should be an attempt



to change the perception of social care. Ideally, the young should be interested in this profession because the earlier in life that people make their career choice, the better (Biggerstaff, 2000). Based on this theoretical background, our pilot study aims to answer these four research questions: RQ1: How is care work perceived/evaluated by the public (in terms of job characteristics)? RQ2: What personal attitudes to caring do the respondents have? RQ3: What personal qualities are associated with the work of caregivers? RQ4: Is caring perceived as a gender-segregated occupation?

The answers to these questions will also be analysed according to the respondents':

- a) demographic characteristics (gender, age),
- b) caring experience (direct, indirect, both direct and indirect, no experience)?

## DATA AND METHODS

The pilot study was based on quantitative research using convenience sampling. In particular, the primary data was collected using an electronic questionnaire survey from July to September 2018. The questionnaire, consisting of 31 questions (including both closed and open questions), was published on two different questionnaire platforms with open access so that as many respondents as possible could access it and complete it. The final sample consists of 122 respondents (not all of them answered all the questions so the totals in the tables could differ). Considering the sample was not large and the internet population was actually investigated, the results cannot be generalised for the whole of the Czech population (Pecáková, 2016). The pilot sample obtained is relatively diverse as implied by the basic characteristics of the respondents (Table 1). Both women (76.2%) and men (23.8%) were in the sample, and all education levels were represented. The average age of the respondents was 29.9 years old and varied from 15 to 73 years. Moreover, the respondents came from all Czech self-governing regions (14).

Table 1: Respondents' characteristics

	Total	Women	Men
<b>Number</b>	122	93 (76.2%)	29 (23.8%)
<b>Average age</b>	29.9	29.3	31.8
<b>Education level</b>			
<b>Primary</b>	6 (4.9%)	2 (2.2%)	4 (13.8%)
<b>Secondary</b>	49 (40.2%)	40 (43.0%)	9 (31.0%)
<b>Tertiary technical</b>	6 (4.9%)	4 (4.3%)	2 (6.9%)
<b>Tertiary (University)</b>	61 (50.0%)	47 (50.4%)	14 (48.3%)

Since we want to analyse if the results are influenced by the respondents' care experience, the questionnaire investigated if the respondents currently work or have worked as caregivers (formal/professional care) or if they are or were caring at home (informal care). A positive answer to one of these questions represents a direct experience of caring. Furthermore, the respondents were questioned if they know of any formal or informal caregiver, which means indirect experience. The remaining options were if the respondents had both their own and mediated experience, or if they had none of those experiences. The results (Table 2) show that all options were covered in the sample; the largest portion accounted for the respondents with only indirect caring experience (37.7%).



Table 2: Respondents' experience with caring

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>No experience</b>	26 (21.3%)	19 (20.4%)	7 (24.1%)
<b>Direct experience (only)</b>	20 (16.4%)	17 (18.3%)	3 (10.3%)
<b>Indirect experience (only)</b>	46 (37.7%)	36 (38.7%)	10 (34.5%)
<b>Both direct and indirect</b>	30 (24.6%)	21 (22.6%)	9 (31.0%)

For a better interpretation and a better understanding, secondary data and information about caregivers was also used, which was provided by the Czech Ministry of Work and Social Affairs and concerns demographic data and other information on caregivers working in social care services in 2017. Table 3 shows that in 2017 there were over 24,000 caregivers (recalculated number per full-time equivalent employee) in the Czech Republic of which 93.3% were women. Moreover, the characteristics are divided by the form of social care provision into two groups. The first is residential social care services such as retirement homes, homes with special regime or relief services. The second includes non-residential services, i.e. services provided in terrain or outpatient form (e.g. home care, day or week care centres, etc.). This group represents just 12.1% of the whole formal caregiver population.

Table 3: Caregivers' characteristics for the provision of social care services in the Czech Republic in 2017

	<b>Residential</b>	<b>Non-residential</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Recalculated number</b>	21 491	2 967	24 458
<b>Average age</b>	43.6	44.2	43.6
<b>Women</b>	93.3%	92.6%	93.2%
<b>Education level</b>			
<b>Primary</b>	12.4%	6.9%	11.8%
<b>Secondary</b>	83.9%	83.6%	83.8%
<b>Tertiary technical</b>	1.3%	2.4%	1.4%
<b>Tertiary (University)</b>	2.4%	7.1%	3.0%
<b>Average wage (CZK)</b>	22 040.7	20 275.5	21 634.5

Source: Authors' own calculation based on data from the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and standard statistical methods. Open questions were prepared for further statistical processing by content analysis. To analyse the differences considering the respondents' gender, age, and caring experience, multiple linear or logistic regression models, with respect to the type of dependent variable, were used. All results were interpreted at a 5% significance level.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Public perception of caregiving

RQ1 investigated how the respondents perceived care work. Six statements focused on this issue in the questionnaire. The respondents evaluated these statements on a seven-point scale (1 – totally disagree, 7 – totally agree). Table 4 shows the average score for each statement expressing



their perception of care work. The respondents evaluate caring as very meaningful work (6.6/7) although mentally and physically demanding, poorly remunerated and less pleasant, attractive and prestigious.

The meaningfulness of this work cannot be questioned. The evaluation of physical difficulty probably corresponds to reality. Although physical resistance is individual, caregivers, in 93% of cases women, often have to handle heavy and immobile clients. On the other side, the organisations providing social care are usually equipped with auxiliary devices (adjustable beds, electric lifting equipment, wheelchairs, etc.).

Undoubtedly, aged care is also mentally demanding. Again, the psyche, stress resistance, or coping with stress is highly individual. Nevertheless, the risk of burnout syndrome is frequently mentioned in connection with the care profession. Caregivers encounter dying and death in their work, and improving the client's condition is only temporary; satisfaction from suffering is difficult. Moreover, care for clients with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia brings further difficulties.

It was shown that the longer caregivers work with demented clients, the less they like their work, and the less they feel successful (Pines, Maslach, 1978). However, previous studies imply that there are personality factors connected to the ability to avoid burnout and to better cope with stress (Narumoto, Nakamura, Kitabayashi, et al., 2008; Majerníková, Obročníková, 2017). Therefore, these findings can be used when recruiting the "right" people to the field to prevent their future psychic exhaustion.

The lowest score (Table 4) was obtained by the financial remuneration for caring. In addition, the respondents estimated caregivers' salary in the open question as 20,600 CZK, which is one thousand CZK less than the actual situation in 2017 (see Table 3). On the other hand, the estimate is very close to the caregivers' salary in non-residential social care services. For comparison, the average gross wage in 2017 was 29,635 CZK, and in the Q – Human health and social work activities sector, it was 30,934 CZK (Czech Statistical Office, 2019).

Our results show that the respondents tend to underestimate the financial remuneration of caregivers and such an estimation could deter them from choosing or recommending this occupation. Since the potential salary range could impact an individual's evaluation and perception of the profession, people should be made aware of the real financial remuneration (Dennison, Poole, Qaqish, 2007). Particularly for men, the potential salary range influences their career choice (Heckert, Droste, Adams et al., 2002).

The evaluation of the attractiveness of care work or if it is pleasant represents the respondents' opinion. Nevertheless, a recent Czech study showed that 56.1% of social workers and caregivers are satisfied with their work. The highly-rated job satisfaction factors were management, the work itself and colleagues. On the other side, a source of dissatisfaction can be impossible career growth, the working conditions and the financial remuneration (Mrhálek, Kajanová, 2018).

The occupational prestige of caregiving has not been sufficiently researched. Foreign studies are mostly focused on global social work or on social workers (LeCroy, Stinson, 2004; Dennison, Poole, Qaqish, 2007; Varžinskienė, 2009). The social work profession is mostly placed in the middle rankings in the occupational prestige list (Davis, Smith, Hodge et al., 1991; Varžinskienė, 2009). However, this profession has a higher position within the organisational structure than caregiving. In addition, tertiary education is required for this position in the Czech Republic. Similarly, in the Czech study (Červenka, 2018) investigating the self-evaluation of the respondents' occupation, the field of Public and Social Services scored 56 points out of 100; however, this evaluation does not go into detail. Our results indicate a poor public image of caregiving (2.4/7). In summary, more attention should be focused on the occupational prestige of caregivers, its evaluation, and a systematic increase to attract people to the profession.



Table 4: Evaluation of statements focusing on care work perception and the results of their relation to the respondent's demographic characteristics and care experience using a linear regression model

Statements (Dependent Variable)	Perception	Gender		Age		Experience
	Average	Effect	p-value	Effect	p-value	p-value
Care work is meaningful	6.6	0.11	0.62	0.01	0.18	0.40
Care work is mentally demanding	6.5	0.18	0.41	0.02	0.03**	0.46
Care work is physically demanding	6.2	0.66	0.01**	0.02	0.03**	0.75
Care work is pleasant	3.0	0.38	0.20	-0.03	0.07*	0.05**
Care work is attractive	2.4	0.22	0.48	-0.02	0.16	0.99
Care work is prestigious	2.4	-0.62	0.02**	-0.01	0.36	0.92
Care work is well remunerated	2.2	0.09	0.75	-0.03	0.01***	0.10

*Comment: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate statistically significant results at a 10%, 5% and 1% sig. level*

The analysis of the differences in the perception of caring took three factors into consideration (Table 4). It was shown that gender has a statistically significant effect in two cases (physical demand and prestige), the age variable in three cases (psychical demand, mental demand and good remuneration) and the caring experience in one case (pleasant work).

Women perceive care work as more physically demanding and less prestigious than men of the same age with similar care experience. Men are generally considered to be physically stronger, so the same burden is easier for them. The lower female prestige evaluation could be caused by underestimating themselves and “women’s” professions. For example, Czech nurses self-evaluated the prestige of their profession; they perceived it as average or low prestige (Bártlová, Tóthová, 2006). However, in another study, nurses were identified as the third most prestigious in the Czech Republic after doctors and scientists (Červenka, 2018).

In addition, with increasing age, the respondents perceive care work as more physically and mentally demanding and poorly remunerated. A possible explanation is that older people are able to imagine working in poor working conditions, which they assume are in the social care field, and at the same time, they expect a higher salary in the current stage of their careers.

Furthermore, the respondents with direct care experience perceive nursing as more pleasant than the respondents (of the same age and gender) with absolutely no experience. Based on the model, the estimate for such a difference is 1.15. This result brings the promising finding that caring has a worse reputation and is perceived as unpleasant work. However, its performance (direct experience) could change this opinion. The reason could be the fact that caregivers receive immaterial compensation for their care, e.g. a feeling of being needed, of happiness from helping others or from meaningful work.

### Personal attitudes to caregiving

Contrary to the previous research question, which analysed respondents' impartial evaluation of the nature of care work, RQ2 analyses respondents' personal attitudes and inclination to caring, in other words, to become an informal or formal caregiver. To explore this, there were four statements with a yes or no answer and three statements with the seven-point scale (1 – totally disagree, 7 – totally agree). The proportions or average scores of the fulfilled evaluations are summarised in Table 5.

According to the respondents' answers, most of them (96.7%) admire the work of caregivers, simultaneously, 35.0% answered that they feel sorry for them because of their work. The answers to the additional open explanatory question show that the respondents who feel sorry for caregivers do so because of the working conditions and the nature of the work. On the other hand, the respondents, who do not feel sorry for caregivers (65.0%), take into account the voluntariness of working in this sector.



The next two statements investigated the respondents' willingness or sense of duty to take care of their relatives or friends as informal caregivers. From these, 65.4% would like to care at home in the future and 51.6% perceive this as their duty. Although the willingness to care for family members seems to be high in the Czech Republic, potential informal caregivers have a differentiated picture of the way and extent of this care (Jeřábek, 2013). Therefore, the reality could be different when the need for care arises.

The answers to these statements did not differ at the 5% significance level considering the gender, age or the caring experience of the respondents. However, at a 10% significance level, women would like to take care of their relatives more often than men of the same age and experience. The odds of such care are 2.4 times higher for women than for men. This is probably related to that fact that women prevail in both formal (Table 3) and informal caregiving (Wija, 2012).

Finally, three statements were related to the attitude to the caring occupation. The respondents evaluated if they would like to work as a professional caregiver and if they would recommend this occupation to (maybe hypothetically) their children as very close relatives or to their friends. The average scores for these statements were similar, between 2 and 3, on the seven-point scale. The lowest score (2.4) was for their own desire to work in the social care sector while a slightly higher score (2.7) was given to recommending it to their children and the highest score given for recommending to friends. However, as mentioned above, in all cases the score is low, and the respondents are not inclined to work as professional caregivers and would rather not recommend it to the close friends and relatives.

Table 5: Respondents' personal attitudes to caring and results of the multiple logistic (for proportion) and linear regression (for average)

Statements (Dependent Variable) Yes/No	Proportion YES	Gender		Age		Experience
		Effect	p-value	Effect	p-value	p-value
I admire the work of caregivers	96.7%	0.43	0.72	0.07	0.39	0.24
I feel sorry for those who have to do this work	35.0%	-0.36	0.43	0.01	0.56	0.13
I would like to take care of my relative(s) at home when necessary	65.4%	0.88	0.07*	-0.00	0.85	0.83
I have to or will have to take care of my relative(s) (it is my duty)	51.6%	0.21	0.63	0.02	0.18	0.44
<b>Scale</b>	<b>Average</b>					
I would like to work as caregiver	2.4	0.55	0.11	-0.02	0.07*	0.06*
I would recommend the caring profession to my children	2.7	-0.11	0.75	-0.02	0.10*	0.19
I would recommend the caring profession to my friends	2.9	0.01	0.97	-0.03	0.04**	0.20

Comment: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate statistically significant results at the 10%, 5% and 1% sig. level

A more detailed analysis showed only one statistically significant dependence of response to the demographic or experience variables at the 5% significance level. Namely, it showed that the higher the age, the lower the recommendation to the respondent's friends. At the 10% significance level, there was the same tendency for the personal inclination to care work and recommendation to the children (the higher the age, the lower the score). It is probably related to the fact, as shown in previous results, that older respondents perceive social care as more physically and mentally demanding and worse-remunerated than the younger respondents.



Additionally, the willingness to work as a caregiver is higher (by 1.03 points) for those who already have direct care experience than those with no experience. As mentioned above, these people are probably able to imagine that this work could have some advantages that outweigh the disadvantages. Similarly, previous studies showed that people with a better knowledge of social work (Kaufman, Raymond, 1996) or having direct or indirect experience (Dennison, Poole, Qaqish, 2007), perceive the professions in this field more positively than the others and have a deeper understanding of these professions. In accordance with these findings, Le-Doux (1996) also identified interaction with a social worker or employment in this field as influencing factors for choosing the social work profession.

**Personal qualities of caregivers**

The third research question asks what personal qualities caregivers should have according to the respondents. The respondents could choose from one to four qualities; 73 respondents answered this question. In Table 6, the most frequent qualities are five, i.e., empathy, patience, psychic and physical resistance, and positivity.

The probability of naming each of the five personal qualities does not significantly differ between respondents by sex, age, or experience. However, the results indicate that older respondents place more emphasis on the patience of caregivers (OR: 1.06, p-value 0.06); men place more emphasis on the psychic resistance of caregivers (OR: 3.19, p-value 0.08).

Caregivers helping people with serious mental illness (Piat, Ricard, Sabetti, Beauvais, 2007) were identified in four categories of caregiver’s qualities that are important for caring, namely, the qualities of the heart, of will, of intellect, of spirit. Except for physical resistance, which is probably not so important in the case of mental illness (people are mobile and self-sufficient), all the qualities we found are included in the list of recommended qualities according to the caregivers themselves. Middleton, Stewart, Richardson (1999) focused on the psychological resistance of formal caregivers in the framework of long-term care. Staff in units with a special regime for clients with dementia appeared more resilient.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on this topic in the Czech Republic and a deeper analysis of the qualities needed from the clients’ and caregivers’ point of view is desirable for better caregiver recruitment. At the same time, there is also a lack of research on the personal values of caregivers. The values of people working in the social sector are different from those in the business sector (Houston, 2000). Moreover, there are also differences between social and health care (Itzhaky, Gerber, Dekel, 2004). Therefore, a better understanding of caregivers’ personal values should lead to greater motivation, caregivers’ job satisfaction, lower turnover intention and, thus, higher care quality.

Table 6: The most frequent personal qualities associated with caring and the results of multiple logistic regression

Personal Quality	Proportion	Gender		Age		Experience
		Effect	p-value	Effect	p-value	p-value
Empathy	54.8%	0.30	0.60	-0.04	0.15	0.60
Patience	46.6%	0.03	0.96	0.06	0.06*	0.72
Psychic resistance	19.2%	-1.16	0.08*	0.00	0.88	0.65
Physical resistance	15.1%	0.48	0.58	0.03	0.28	0.45
Positivity	13.7%	-0.10	0.91	-0.11	0.14	0.64

Comment: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate statistically significant results at the 10%, 5% and 1% sig. level



### Gender-segregated occupation

The last research question analysed if the respondents perceive caring as a gender-segregated occupation. Given the results in Table 2, where 40.9% of women and 41.3% of men had direct experience of caring (only direct + both), it appears that caring is not a gender-segregated profession from the respondents' point of view. This assumption is supported by the answers to two statements in Table 7; 82.8% of the respondents, who evaluated the related statements, said that caring should not primarily be done by women. On the other hand, they admitted (98.3%) that this profession cannot be done by anyone – not in terms of gender but of personal qualities (e.g. interest in caring, psychological resistance, emphatic and positive person, etc.) as open answers to the additional question specified. When using logistic regression analysis, there is no statistically significant effect of the considered explanatory variables to the response in the model, which means that the respondents agreed with this opinion.

Table 7: Respondents' gender segregation of caring and the results of multiple logistic regression

Yes/No	Proportion YES	Gender		Age		Experience
		Effect	p-value	Effect	p-value	p-value
<b>Anyone can do this occupation</b>	1.7%	-1.13	0.44	0.03	0.59	0.57
<b>This occupation should (primarily) be done by women</b>	17.2%	-0.61	0.26	-0.01	0.69	0.33

*Comment: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate statistically significant results at the 10%, 5% and 1% sig. level*

Although the respondents do not evaluate caring as a women's occupation, our results indicate that the majority of caregivers working in this sector and the majority of informal caregivers are women. At the same time, the public perceives caregiving as less prestigious and poorly remunerated. Therefore, the devaluation theory comes into being. This theory assumes that women are devalued in society and, consequently, professions with a higher share of women are less prestigious and worse remunerated. There are many studies from the 1990s that support this theory (Magnusson, 2008). However, the results of two more recent studies, based on Spanish (García-Mainar, Montuenga, García-Martín, 2018) and Swedish data (Magnusson, 2008), reported a non-linear relation between occupational prestige and gender share among employees. It was shown that integrated occupations have the highest prestige followed by male-dominated occupations and the least prestigious female-dominated occupations. Although the devaluation theory was not confirmed, both studies do not deny the gender pay gap or some suggestions of a certain level of devaluation of women's work. Thus, another explanation should be found.

Magnusson (2008) supports her results refuting the devaluation theory by mentioning care work, which has the highest percentage of women in occupations but does not have lower prestige or lower wages in Sweden.

However, her findings are not in line with ours. There could be two possible reasons. First, the necessity and importance of this profession have not been understood in the Czech Republic. Swedish social care sector development and research are on the top level and this is probably related to the public perception of this work. Second, since the Czech Republic is a post-communist country, this can influence caregivers' self-evaluation, women's self-evaluation, and also the public perception of both social care and women's work. The communist era hindered social care development and restructuring (Kubalčíková, Havlíková, 2016) as well as negatively influencing the psyche and self-confidence of citizens.

Either way, several steps should be undertaken to change the status quo. The Czech government should work on social sector development and initiate research in this field. A positive image of social work should be created and improved by the government, media and people working in this field. And through this, the public should change their attitudes towards this work.



## CONCLUSION

In view of the fact that the Czech population is ageing, social care provision has become a topical issue. The growing proportion of seniors in the population raises the question of who will care for them. Since the attractiveness of the profession is connected to the public perception of the profession (Kaufman, Raymond, 1996), our pilot study wanted to start with investigating how caring and caring staff are perceived in Czech society. At the same time, it explored the willingness to work as a caregiver or to care for family members in the future.

The findings show that 97% of the respondents admire care work staff. This profession is perceived as meaningful but physically and mentally demanding, poorly rated, less attractive and less prestigious. Considering these facts, the respondents would rather not do this job, and they would rather not recommend it to their children or friends. On the other side, 65% of the respondents answered that they would like to care for their relatives in the future; 52% of the sample even perceive it as their duty.

The pilot study has its limitations by nature (low sample size, non-random sample selection, online collecting data) which may cause a bias in the results obtained. Therefore, it is not possible to generalise the results for the whole of the Czech population. Nevertheless, the sample is relatively diversified in terms of gender, age, education level or region of origin. Thus, the study provides interesting insights into the issue of caregivers. However, the findings need to be further elaborated on and explored in the future using more extensive study. Moreover, in the discussion of respondents' salary evaluation and estimation in social care, we compare these results with data from 2017, although our study took place in 2018. Nevertheless, the interpretation that the respondents underestimated the caregivers' financial remuneration, was not affected – all the more so in that salaries in the sector were increased at the turn of 2018 and 2019.

Considering the theoretical contribution, our findings open up the research on the public perception of caring. Such research should contribute to understanding how occupational prestige influences recruitment and how to attract more people into the social care sector. Although there were several practical steps taken to eliminate the negative aspects of caregiving (salary increase, equipment modernisation, psychological support); our findings imply that social importance and the necessity of this work should be communicated with the aim to increase occupational prestige and to avoid a lack of caregivers in the future. As caregivers themselves cannot much change the public perception of their profession, especially when they do not fully understand its value (Olin, 2013), social workers and higher management levels should support their occupational self-confidence and focus on recruitment communication. Simultaneously, as co-creators of the social help system, they should also appeal to the government to support this field.

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# A Social Work Intervention's Effects on the Improvement of School Culture<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

**OBJECTIVES:** This study aimed to test school social work intervention using participatory research approach in two Georgian schools. **THEORETICAL BASE:** This approach links theory and practice and empowers participants through self-consciousness raising, and as well it emphasizes practitioner action for change in conjunction with rigorous reflection on practice and careful gathering and analysis of data. **METHODS:** The mixed methodology was used for collecting data from schools. Quantitative data were gathered at both schools in the total of 4 pilot classes (81 students of elementary grades), which had children with special educational needs (CSEN). The qualitative study involved students in upper grades, administration representatives, as well as parents and teachers of students from all grades. The effects of intervention were analyzed using pre and post intervention design. **OUTCOMES:** The study revealed statistically significant changes in terms of improvements in the class climate/school culture. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** The outcomes of the present study indicate that social work intervention in schools is effective. It is important for schools to have social workers who will work to enhance the psycho-emotional and social well being of students, as well as to improve the school climate and the work undertaken with families and the community.

**Keywords**

school culture, class climate, participatory action research, children with special educational needs, bullying, inclusive education, social work intervention

**INTRODUCTION**

School culture can be defined as patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structure (Guffey, Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). There is extensive research on school climate's impact on students' self-esteem (Hoge, Smit, Hanson, 1990), self-competence (Tsereteli, Martskvishvili, Aptarashvili et al., 2010) and emotional and mental health (Way, Reddy, Rhodes, 2007). Culture plays an important role in some type of school violence, such as bullying, verbal violence and social exclusion (Nesdale, Naito, 2005). Finally, school culture can influence academic achievements of individual students (Deal, Peterson, 1999). The earlier research from the authors showed that school culture dimensions had a statistically significant correlation with dimensions related to the quality of teaching in primary schools in Serbia (Glušac et al., 2015). In this latter research authors defined school culture as a complex concept in Education. In particular, the authors highlighted such aspects of school culture as teacher professionalism and goal settings, collaboration, communication, encouraging pupils, responsibilities and ethical development of pupils and etc. They also mentioned importance of further research of school culture as the main contributor of a "good school". In terms of reforming old-Soviet fashioned schools and maintaining long-term improvements, it is critical to change school culture and school climate which is formed over time and it derives from organization's vision, beliefs, values, and mission (Glušac et al., 2015).

Many interventions on improving school climate are not evidence based and their implementation does not bring positive results (Erickson, Mattaini, McGuire, 2004). Action research involved can be considered as a method of inquiry and as a means to mobilize and guide communities, classrooms, and other participants in taking action to improve existing problem situation (Rowell, 2006). This approach links theory and practice and empowers participants through self-consciousness rising (Reason, 1994). It emphasizes practitioner's action for change in conjunction with rigorous reflection on practice and careful gathering and analysis of data.

The present research focuses on action research for implementing school social work intervention to improve school culture in two Georgian schools. Social work intervention implies school social



workers' presence in schools where they take a number of diverse roles and tasks to meet the unique needs of each school. Using the ecological framework as an organizing principle, these tasks include advocating for at-risk students and their families; empowering families to share their concerns with school officials; maintaining open lines of communication between home and school; helping families understand their children's educational needs; consulting with teachers about students' living situations and neighborhood conditions; making referrals to community agencies; tracking students involved with multiple agencies; and working with the larger community to identify and develop resources to better serve the needs of at-risk students and their families. As members of a school's multidisciplinary team, school social workers are involved in a number of activities including: participating in conferences related to students' behavior and academic progress; collaborating with teachers and other school professionals to assess student needs and developing strategies to meet their needs; preventing inappropriate labeling of students by assessing adaptive behavior, cultural background, and socioeconomic factors that may interfere with a child's learning or impact a child's behavior in school. School social workers also provide individual and group counseling to students; conduct classroom activities; and design, implement, and evaluate school-based prevention programs (Rippey-Massat, Kelly, Constable, 2015).

### **GEORGIAN EDUCATIONAL REFORMS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SCHOOL CULTURE**

Since 2004 Georgia has been reforming its educational system and has made significant progress in general educational system in terms of development and step-by-step implementation of the National Curriculum, improvement of educational infrastructure in public schools, facilitating teachers' professional development and the teachers' scheme of commencement teaching activities, professional development and career progress, increasing autonomy of schools, strengthening school management, implementing inclusive education and etc. In order to create a safe, tolerant, and free environment for each pupil, more attention is paid to the development of services aimed at physical safety of pupils and the development of security systems, psychological and medical services, and preventive activities. All these reforming activities are for ensuring high quality results-oriented education, for achievement of better academic results of pupils, quality of education management, quality of study and learning process, promotion of development of education environment, as well as increasing the access of education for all pupils (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2017). One of the main objectives of general education is to ensure equal access for all pupils, including disabled children, ethnic minorities, pupils with special learning needs, socially vulnerable (e.g. street connected children) and living along the demarcation line of the occupied territories of Georgia and pupils of mountainous villages and etc. The Ministry of Education and Science's special attention is given to the development and expansion of inclusive education (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2015).

The quality of inclusive education and the number of pupils with special educational needs involved in all stages of general education increases annually. During the last years, their number has increased from 167 pupils with special education needs and now over 7,000 pupils with different educational needs use educational service. More than 1400 additional specialists (special teachers, psychologists, inclusive education coordinators, etc.), whose qualification requires development, provide services to them. However, the quality of work with individual curriculum in the educational process of pupils with special educational needs still remains a problem (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2017). The main goal of inclusive education is to ensure an appropriate environment for children with special educational needs (the majority of which are children with disabilities) and to give them full access to education and social integration. Inclusive education is also important for children without disabilities, because they learn how to live with a disabled person and realize that some people may require special environment that meets their needs (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2015).



Regardless of the positive changes made by the Government of Georgia in recent years in the disability policy and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013), children and youth with disabilities still face numerous problems and barriers – poverty, non-adapted infrastructure, limited access to medical programs tailored for the needs of the disabled, supporting facilities, rehabilitation/habilitation and other social services, education and employment. Today, none of the levels of the public education system meet the needs and the rights of children and youth with disabilities that often becomes the ground for children and their parents to leave school or get an incomplete education. Obviously, this creates serious impediments for social inclusion, employment of children and youth with disabilities and preparing them for independent living. There are problems related to the issue of the school graduation certificate for children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities etc. One of the main barriers for children with disabilities to adequately enroll and remain in inclusive education is the lack of qualified human resources, such as special education teachers. Thus, there are insufficient numbers of specialized teachers. Some of the specialized teachers have to work with a large number of children with disabilities; such workload makes their work unproductive. Some children with special educational needs (CSEN) do not have a specialized teacher at all, which makes the school and the pupil totally incompatible with each other and deepens the related stigma. Moreover, delegitimation of specialized teachers is another serious problem. In particular, formally they do not belong to the corps of teachers. As a result, they cannot participate in the scheme of professional growth and have the expectation of career success and improvement of financial conditions (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2015).

The specialists working in the field of inclusive education mention that the low level of public awareness is a serious problem. Moreover, parents of typical children lack sympathy for the disabled and children with SEN in general, which results in stigmatization and marginalization. Typical children tend to have more tolerance towards disabled children than some of the teachers and parents. Some teachers do not want disabled children to participate in the academic process because they think that it may hinder the learning progress for the rest of the class. Also, there are parents who do not want disabled children to be in the same class as their own children because they think that this will affect the quality of teaching. Not only negative discrimination, but also so-called “positive discrimination” is also a problem: teachers, pupils and parents who treat disabled children with extreme attentiveness facilitate their marginalization and exclusion (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2015).

Children with special educational needs (CSEN) have individual study plans elaborated by the multi-disciplinary group. However, plans are mostly formal and static and do not meet with the dynamic needs of children with Special Educational Needs. Therefore, it is important to observe the child’s development, make reassessments and modify the individual study plan as needed. As of now, the multi-disciplinary group makes reassessment of children only if the school or parent officially requests it. However it is important to make regular assessment as an institutional standard of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. Even though it is necessary to have an individual study plan for each child with Special Educational Needs, some teachers do not prepare it of their own initiative unless requested by the parent. Another problem is that some parents do not want individual study plans for their children, because they fear that it may cause stigmatization of their child (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2015).

One of the strategic objectives of the National Curriculum is to improve the educational environment by ensuring an inclusive, safe, equal, non-violent, high educational expectations culture, healthy, motivating environment for all students and teachers. The schools are expected to meet the development of collaborative relationships and the best practice of sharing the experiences of teachers with the aim of ensuring better academic achievements of the students. The schools are also meant to acquire additional functions and become multi-functional, cultural-sport and educational centers.



In addition, the schools are expected to be oriented at holistic upbringing and the development of a full-fledged value system for each student. For this purpose all possible resources need to be used in formal and informal formats including creating relevant conditions for healthy lifestyle, improved medical care, sanitation and hygiene standards, and provision of safe and healthy food (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2017).

Thus, the great challenge for the teachers is to create inclusive classroom climate where all students feel supported intellectually and academically and are extended a sense of belonging in the classroom regardless of identity, learning preferences, or education. Such environments are sustained when teachers and students work together for thoughtfulness, respect, and academic excellence. Research indicates that many students prefer collaborative and student-centered, caring and supportive environment rather than competitive classroom where they more likely to prosper academically and personally (Kaplan, Miller, 2007).

The following problems are related to lack of expertise of teachers in providing effective classroom management as well as facilitating student-centered teaching and learning process. Moreover, teachers are not prepared for involving parents in students' teaching and learning process and building and gaining growing trust between school/teacher and parents, which is paramount to a successful school year for kids who are not enough motivated for school. In fact, existing school culture in Georgian schools does not allow parents to be involved actively in their children's school lives. Furthermore, schools are not familiar with existing services in the community and do not seek their support. School professionals lack practices to facilitate better understanding of pupils' problems (behavioral problems, health, mental health problems, learning difficulties etc.) that could be part of their family related contexts. Disabled children as well as economically and socially disadvantaged children need community support in order to overcome their problems, promote their learning and adaptation to the typical children and regular school settings. In order to link children to services that are in the community/neighborhood, multidisciplinary teamwork is essential, especially, existence of school social worker who can play role of mediator between schools and families, families and community, pupils and teachers and parents and pupils. Moreover, the role of school social workers is critical as many current school professionals are old-fashioned and they need to learn new practices that will assist them to better understand children's problems. Moreover, a school social worker can be a good resource person who knows the community and can support school staff and pupils and community members by bringing them together to form a network of support for pupils. Thus, the main objectives for the schools are not only to ensure that student is getting an adequate education through an inclusive, non-violent and safe class climate but also to link schools with other human service agencies that could help them address issues that keep children from learning (Streeter, Franklin, 2002). The present study recognizes the need for school social work in Georgian public schools. On the legislation level, school social work is neither mentioned in Georgia nor in Czech and Slovak contexts. For instance, several authors highlighted that in the Slovak legislation on schools social work is unrecognized and activities identified as school social work responsibilities, carried out mostly by pedagogues (Matulayová, Hrušková, Pešatová, 2013). Musil (in Matulayová, Hrušková, Pešatová, 2013) suggested to identify unique social work services so social workers in school can "gain appreciation and a mandate" in the Czech society as school professionals. Analysis of the relevant Czech legislation in the area of education system demonstrates that there are no legislative prerequisites for establishing the position of school social worker (Pešatová, Matulayová 2013). Moreover, social workers employed in the school sector are involved only in administration tasks rather than in social assistance (Matulayová, Pešatová, Michalova, 2015).

It should be noticed that the law on Education of Georgia does not even distinguish that students might need social help as it is mentioned in Slovakia, where social help is defined as *"observation and evaluation of children's behavior by methods, techniques and procedures corresponding to the latest findings of social pedagogy and the current state of practice; social counseling; socio-therapy; using the*



*diagnostic methods of social pedagogy*" (Matulayová, Hrušková, Pešatová, 2013:321). Thus, it is very critical to provide research on the need for establishing of school social work roles in the countries where school social work is not recognized. Moreover, description of school social work activities and roles and identification of specific school problems that can be solved by school social workers as experts in this field is a high priority (Matulayová, Hrušková, Pešatová, 2013).

## STUDY PURPOSE

This study analyzed how an intensive school social work intervention specifically concentrated on four elementary classes influenced improvement of school culture in two highly vulnerable schools in Georgia. The effects of intervention were analyzed using pre and post intervention design. School social work intervention involved individual interventions on the micro, mezzo and macro level. On the micro level social workers provided casework with CSEN, on the mezzo level group work with children, teachers, parents and administrative staff were conducted, and on the macro level school level activities were completed. The school intervention was launched with the initial study, which aimed at gathering both quantitative and qualitative data from schools. A qualitative study was conducted in the form of a participatory action research and within the frames of this study, 4 task groups of students, parents, teachers and administration representatives identified problems, planned activities to eradicate these problems and implemented these activities at schools during the whole duration of the project.

The initial study searched for the answers to the following qualitative research questions:

- How class climate can be described in the elementary classes?
- How motivated are students in the elementary classes?
- What behavior management strategies are utilized by school teachers in their classrooms?
- What is the nature and scope of behavioral difficulties exhibited by students at the class level including bullying, abuse and addictive behaviors?
- What are the strategies for identification of CSEN and utilizing appropriate inclusive approaches at the school?
- What are difficulties in regards to implementing inclusive education?
- How can schools increase parental engagement with their children?
- What behavioral management methods do parents use?
- How engagement of parents in school life affects integration of their children at school, as well as their social and emotional development and educational results, etc.

Thus, the study aimed at identifying the needs of participating schools and supporting systemic implementation of specific school social work intervention based on these needs. The long-term goal of the study was to implement student-focused approach at school, which includes establishment of student-focused school culture (educational climate), which is equipped with various support mechanisms for students, in particular, school social work services. The main purpose of this study was to describe the process of school intervention that took place in two Georgian schools. In addition, to measure some effects of the above-mentioned intervention on four elementary classes, where school intervention was mostly concentrated, the following data were analyzed from pre and post intervention quantitative study:

1. Pre and post-test outcomes: class climate evaluation: student-student relationship, student-teacher relationship, usage of effective learning/teaching methods by teacher, usage of methods of managing behavioral difficulties by teacher, nature and prevalence of bullying behavior in class; extracurricular activities organized to enhance motivation to learn, etc.
2. Pre and post-test outcomes: family related factors: parent-teacher relationship, trust, parental involvement in school life and attitude towards school/teachers, behavioral management (upbringing) methods used by parents, student's feeling of happiness at home, family's economic condition, etc.



3. Pre and post-test outcomes: issues related to the integration of students with special educational needs (attitudes towards students with special educational needs, their engagement in the educational process, etc.).
4. Pre and post-test outcomes: student's school motivation, self-evaluation of school success, feeling of happiness at lessons, self-evaluation of academic skills by student (academic self-concept); self-evaluation of social skills by student (social self-concept).

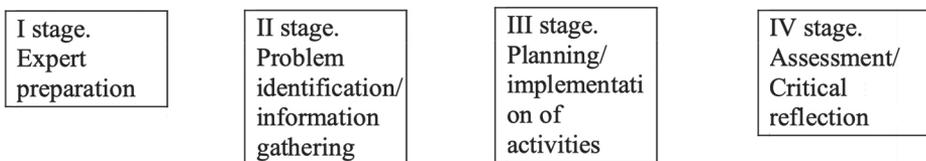
## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Study instrument and procedures

Mixed methodology was utilized; in particular: (1) Quantitative study involving students (lower elementary and upper elementary classes). The questionnaire administered with the students consisted of several blocks: demographic information about the student; classroom climate (classroom harmony and friendliness) and school culture ("the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors which characterize a school"); parent's involvement in school life and attitude towards learning (frequency of parent's contact with teacher, parent's help and advice towards learning and future, etc.); student's learning outcomes, such as student's self-competence - sense of success, school motivation, independence, etc. And the nature and scope of behavioral problems of students, including addictive behaviors. Before finalizing the quantitative research tools, they were tested on 20 students of the relevant age using an individual cognitive interview. Based on the noted, the tool was simplified and tailored to the age related specific characteristics of students (wording was simplified, some questions were taken out, the questionnaire became short, etc.). Results were analyzed using standard descriptive and inferential statistics methods in SPSS.21. (2) Qualitative participatory study involving students from upper classes, teachers, parents and administration representatives.

Participatory study consisted of the following stages:

Figure 1: Stages of participatory study



I-stage: Expert Preparation – “experts” or so called “change agents” from school (teachers, administration, parents and students, in total 18 experts from two schools) were trained in research methodology of the present study.

II-stage: Problem Identification / Information gathering. On this stage researchers in close collaboration with school “experts” conducting focus groups with the goal to identify the existing problems in the school.

III-stage: Planning / Implementation of activities – developing task group plans on the basis of the problems identified through task group meetings.

IV-stage: Assessment / Critical Reflection – organizing final meetings with the task groups for critical reflection on the whole intervention process.

Qualitative data results were analyzed for prioritizing the main patterns and themes.



### Study participants

Targeted selection was utilized. Two schools in Tbilisi were selected for the study. Inclusive education has been ongoing at these schools since 2015 (starting from 2015, both schools have a special education teacher; however, students without the needed status of a student with special educational needs had been studying at these schools before 2015 as well). The schools were located in the neighborhoods with high numbers of socially vulnerable families. Accordingly, the number of socially vulnerable students<sup>6</sup> at these schools is quite high (school #1 – 39%, school #2 – 23%). Two elementary classes were selected at each school for the study purpose. The above classes were selected as most of the CSEN studied in the selected classes. It should be noticed that the Georgian Association of Social Workers signed a memorandum with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport to get permission to allow this intervention to take place in two schools. It was quite a long and challenging process and very rare case of a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) to obtain all rights to be able to intervene on school level.

Table 1: Distribution of students in the selected classes according to various parameters of vulnerability

	Students of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade (class) at school #1	Students of the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade (class) at school #2	Students of the sixth grade (class) at school #1	Students of the fifth grade (class) at school #2
Students with low academic performance	4	3	5	9
Students with special educational needs	1	3	2	2
Socially vulnerable students	2	2	4	2
Students deprived of care	1	0	0	0
Students living and working in the street	0	0	2	1
Total	8	8	13	14

In total, at both schools quantitative study was conducted with 81 students of elementary grades (36 at lower elementary and 45 at upper elementary) at pre and post-stages (girls – 44%, boys – 56%). 18 school experts participated in the qualitative participatory study (see table #2) and they involved the majority of the school members: students, teachers, parents and administrative staff (see table #3 and #4).

Table 2: Distribution of experts as per the schools

School	Student	Teacher	Administration	Parent
School #1	2	3	2	1
School #2	2	4	2	2
Total	4	7	4	3

Expert students conducted working meetings with the students at their own school; expert teachers conducted meetings with teachers, and expert administration members with administration representatives, while expert parents conducted meetings with parents. They were supported by the research team in terms of facilitation of these meetings and providing experts with the guidelines for providing focus groups. The research team was made up of 2 social workers at each

<sup>6</sup> Socially vulnerable students such as CSEN, children without parental care, children whose families are in social assistance program, street connected children.



school, the research manager and the main researcher. Each meeting lasted for approximately 1–2 hours. Experts took part in the development of focus group guidelines together with the main research team.

Table 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> stage – number of focus groups conducted at the stage of problem identification

School	Student	Teacher	Administration	Parent
School #1	9	8	4	6
School #2	8	6	7	4
Total	17	14	11	10

Table 4: 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stage – number of working group meetings at the stage of planning/implementation of activities and reflection

School	Student	Teacher	Administration	Parent
School #1	5	7	3	4
School #2	5	7	2	4
Total	10	14	5	8

### Ethical consideration

The study obtained permission from the Research Ethics Commission at the Georgian Association of Social Workers.

Informed consent was obtained from each student's parent on their child's participation in the study. Parents of students signed the informed consent form which defined in detail the study goals and possible risks of participation in the study. Students had a right to terminate their involvement in the study whenever they wanted to do so.

### Study duration and limitations

Before and after the intervention, students were surveyed using pre and post-test design. Before the intervention, at the initial stage of the study (pre-test), needs at the class level were identified according to which intervention was planned in experimental classes. The intervention was implemented from October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The intervention with the students was interrupted due to summer holidays. However, planned activities with the parents and teachers still continued in the summer. After the intervention, the post-test was administered with the same students in selected classes. During the implementation of the quantitative survey, school students were provided with the detailed instruction on filling in the questionnaire. Lower elementary class students were interviewed individually, while upper elementary class students filled out self-administered questionnaires during several days. Mainly, they filled out the part on school factors one day and the part on family factors the next day. This prevented children from exhaustion, as the questionnaire was quite lengthy. In addition, three experienced interviewers gathered data simultaneously and provided additional support to students in case of need.

However, we should note the limitations of the intervention research conducted. Namely: (1) part of the students surveyed in pilot classes had transferred to another school by the time of post-test administration. There were 5 such students in total, 3 lower and 2 upper elementary class students; (2) Approximately 20% of students were unable to fill in the pre-tests due to various reasons (including disability). Accordingly, these students were automatically removed from the second stage of the study as well; In the future, it is important to spend more time and to involve a multidisciplinary research team (including psychologists, neurologists, special educators, speech pathologists and etc.) in adaptation of the questionnaire to CSEN' abilities; (3) The intervention



was interrupted, as it began in the spring of 2016–17 academic year and was completed in the fall of 2017–18 academic year and did not include summer holidays. Because of the summer holidays, the work on the plans developed by students, teachers, administration and parents, as well as, partially, the work undertaken on individual cases slowed down; (4) Students transferred to the next grades and their class environment changed, including new students entering classes, as well as some teachers being replaced by new ones; (5) Students with special educational needs could not take part in the study and/or were unable to fully fill in the questionnaire due to the level of their abilities. The questionnaires were not tailored to their abilities; (6) Only elementary classes (2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades) were selected as pilot classes as students with special educational needs were mainly concentrated in elementary classes.

## RESULTS

### Identified problems in schools

The initial quantitative and qualitative study identified the condition at schools including important difficulties, especially, in the following directions:

- Problems related to safety, especially, emotional safety was identified in regards to bullying from the side of students or teacher. The school culture which accepted bullying provided a high figure associated with bullying among students and towards students; for example, 64% of the fifth and sixth grade students noted that a teacher yells with a medium frequency; in addition, 45% noted that cynicism is always expressed from the side of their classmates, while 38% noted that aggression is always coming from their classmates. In addition, the qualitative study revealed that teachers verbally insult and humiliate students.
- There were important problems revealed in terms of the inclusion of students with disability and students with special educational needs. The problems related to, for example, inadequate individual educational plans and/or that these plans were not used in the educational process due to the lack of competence and motivation of subject teachers, as well as the lack/nonexistence of human (special education teacher, individual assistant, etc.) and material resources (developmental resources, a ramp, etc.). In addition, problems related to the lack of acceptance on the side of students, teachers and other children's parents towards students with special educational needs / disability are very important.
- Resources of teachers and other school staff are often insufficient to carry out their direct obligations – head teachers have special difficulties to carry out the functions defined in their job descriptions related to care for the psycho-emotional condition of the student, contact with the student's family, identification of psycho-emotional and social problems and responding to these problems with the relevant professionals, especially, when these functions have to be carried out in addition to teaching specific subjects.
- There are significant difficulties, especially, with teachers in terms of usage of positive behavioral management methods which are very important for preventing problems as well as for adequately responding to them.
- Important difficulties are revealed in terms of student's motivation to learn, especially, starting from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.
- There are difficulties revealed in terms of parents' engagement in the school life; these difficulties have significant impact on their children's academic performance and level of engagement in school. In addition, the need to receive knowledge and consultations on the positive upbringing methods by parents is also evident.
- School has very limited contact with the community and community organizations and resources and has quite limited information about them, whereas these resources can be very important for the school students and their families.
- Social work intervention was planned based on the outcomes of the initial study. The



intervention had a goal of addressing the above noted problems and as a result, improving the school culture.

### **Implemented social work interventions in schools**

Within the School Strengthening Initiative, 4 social workers employed by the Georgian Association of Social Workers at 2 schools in Tbilisi made use of micro, mezzo and macro interventions, including the following:

#### ***Work on individual cases***

Work on individual cases included the following steps: initial contact with the child, the parent/family/guardian and the relevant school staff, assessment of needs and strengths, development of an action plan, implementation of the plan and periodic review of the case.

Social workers utilized the following methods in their work on individual cases:

- Case management (working on the goals identified together with the client from the initial contact until the termination of the work on the case).
- Task-centered practice, which included breaking down relatively long-term goals into short-term tasks for the child, the family, the school staff and the social worker.
- Work on individual cases was most often undertaken in the following directions.
- Undertaking advocacy activities for the rights of the student and his/her family with the goal to mobilize the needed resources and support at school and the organizations/services outside school (for example, day care center, individual assistant at school, etc.).
- Working on increasing the level of motivation (of the student, the parent or the school staff) with the goal to support positive changes for the child and the family.
- Supporting the development of students' social skills (communication, conflict management, stress management, anger management (and management of other negative emotions), etc.) through working individually and in a group.
- Working on parental skills with parents and families.
- Providing consultations for teachers in regards to the behavior and engagement of a particular student.
- Supporting the process of developing an individual educational plan with the involvement of the child (considering the age of the child), the parent and the involved community organizations.
- Holding case conferences with the involvement of the school staff and community organizations in order to ensure better coordination of work.

Table 5: Number of individual interventions implemented by social workers

Number of individual cases in total (2 schools)	41
Among them, # of students with special educational needs #	18
Among them, # of students with disability	8
Among them, # of students who were victims or perpetrators of bullying	9
Among them, # of students living or working in the street	4
Among them, # of students facing suicide risk	3
Among them, # of students in the state care system	7
Among them, # of students with behavioral difficulties	12
Among them, # of cases which required mobilization of resources from other agencies	17



## ***Group work***

Group work was undertaken with teachers (group meetings), students (working in classes and students' clubs) and parents (parents' clubs). Group interventions within clubs and group meetings were mainly undertaken in the following forms:

- Trainings.
- Discussions.
- Invitation of guests (various helping professionals, famous persons, etc.).
- Showing films.
- Advocacy activities together with students, parents and teachers with the goal to implement changes at school.

One of the most important directions of the project included class interventions which were implemented with the highest frequency in 4 pilot classes selected within the frames of the quantitative study; however, throughout the project, class interventions were implemented in a significantly higher number of classes (please, see below). Class interventions were conducted using non-formal educational activities and through the cooperation of school social workers and teachers the goal of which was to ensure implementation of part of similar activities independently or together with other helping professionals by the teachers in the future. Class interventions focused on the following topics:

- Bullying/abuse.
- Effective communication.
- Management of emotions/anger/conflict.
- Raising awareness on diversity/disability/special educational needs.
- Healthy life style.

## ***Work on changes at the school level***

School social workers worked on raising awareness on the following topics at the school level:

- Disability.
- Special educational needs.
- Bullying.
- Child's rights.
- Healthy life style.

As for advocating for the changes at the school level, work was undertaken in the following directions:

- Supporting improvement of the system of prevention of/responding to bullying/abuse and risky behaviors.
- Advocating for hiring the needed staff by school.
- Advocating for issues related to the physical adaptation of the environment.
- Linking schools more closely with community organizations and services.

As a result of the school social workers' support and activities, students' clubs were established at both schools. Students' clubs had weekly meetings in the fall semester on the following topics: communication, bullying, conflict management, gender equality, healthy life style, individual and the society, importance of students' clubs, project writing, etc. Various guests were invited to the meetings of the clubs from community organizations. One of the guests was a famous Georgian writer, Dato Turashvili. The students' clubs at both schools have continued functioning with the support from a designated responsible teacher. In addition, students planned and implemented the needs assessment at schools, which will serve as the basis for the future functioning of the club. Also, students developed and posted hygiene rules and advocated with the administration for allocating the needed resources to properly adhere to the hygiene rules.



Career and reading days were conducted in classes with the active engagement of teachers with the goal to increase parents' engagement. In addition, in order to increase fathers' engagement, special fathers' meetings were organized. Class interventions were implemented by social workers with the cooperation with teachers using various activities, films and other resources, which were also provided, to schools. Individual development plans were developed for students with special educational needs and these plans were used in practical work. Teachers were provided with trainings/working meetings on individual development plans, behavioral management, abuse, bullying and the psycho-social services existing in the country. Special lessons/activities were conducted with children in classes on the topic of disability. Outing activities were organized for teachers and students, for example, to the art museum, Kojori (resort near Tbilisi) and the Botanical Gardens. Questionnaires were developed for students to gather information on their interests and the desirable teaching methods from their perspective; these questionnaires will be used by teachers in their classes.

Parents' clubs were established for parents at both schools. The clubs had weekly meetings together with the project staff and invited guests on the following topics: behavioral management, positive upbringing methods, cyber bullying, bullying/abuse, psycho-social services in the country, childhood trauma and its impact on the future of the child, etc. Statutes were developed for the clubs and these statutes are planned to be approved by the councils at schools. In addition, parents developed draft amendments to the school statutes on bullying. They also advocated for hiring/ensuring adequate number of psychologists, doctors, special education teachers, individual assistants and social workers at schools. The following projects are undertaken with the parents' initiative: raise of awareness on bullying, and organizing New Year's activities. Parents took part in the planning and implementation of safe games/entertaining activities for lower class students at brunch break.

The administration started to work on amendments in regards to bullying in the internal statutes of schools in order to ensure just and impartial response to each case. The administration also started to work on initiatives such as: organizing free circles/groups for students at schools; and physical adaptation of the school environment with external grants. In addition, the administration organized environmental protection activities (for example, cleaning the school yard, meeting on healthy life style organized by the school doctor, etc.).

Through the work undertaken by the project, the level of cooperation of schools with state and non-state organizations in the community was increased. This cooperation continued after the completion of the project. These organizations include: state agencies – Ministry of Education Multidisciplinary Team, Psychological Assistance Center under the Office of Resource Persons, Social Services Agency and Mediation House; academic institutions – Ilia State University and Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University; nongovernmental organizations – Children of Georgia, Center for Applied Psychology and Research, Non-abusive Communication Institute, First Step, Green House, Young Pedagogues' Union and McLain Association. In addition, individual psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers and child development specialists cooperated with schools on voluntary basis. Additional work is undertaken on future grant opportunities to better meet the school's needs, as well as on several memoranda with community and academic organizations.

Throughout the project implementation period, class interventions (each intervention lasting during one academic lesson, i.e. 45 minutes) were conducted on the above noted topics through the cooperation with teachers and by using non-formal educational activities (relevant resources were provided to the schools for future usage). The number of class interventions implemented is provided below:

- School #1: In total 16 classes and 45 class interventions.
- School #2: In total 17 classes and 62 class interventions.



### **The impacts of intervention on improvement of school culture based on quantitative study (4 pilot classes)**

The intervention utilized is based on the specific evidence, which provides statistically significant outcomes for four pilot classes in two selected schools for 81 students in total.

1. Class climate (in particular, student's assessment of class being very friendly, being in one group, divided into groups and less friendly/almost everyone being on their own) became more positive. This is proven by multiple correspondence analysis of pre and post individual cases<sup>7</sup> according to which *Chi Square* =15.408; *df*=4; *p*=0.004. Specifically, the students who were less friendly with one another with almost everyone being on their own became closer and friendlier after the intervention, while the students who were close with one another, divided in groups by the time of the post-test administration. These associations are statistically significant.

2. Students' became more involved in doing joint homework together. This is proven by multiple correspondence analysis of pre and post individual cases according to which *Chi Square* =9.605; *df*=4; *p*=0.05. Specifically, after the intervention, the students who almost never did homework together did so with medium frequency after the intervention. These associations are statistically significant.

3. Frequency of occasions of students spending free time together, namely, taking walks together, increased. This is proven by multiple correspondence analysis of pre and post individual cases according to which *Chi Square* =11.79; *df*=4; *p*=0.02. Specifically, the students who took walks with their classmates with medium frequency, almost always took walks together after the intervention, at the post-test stage; the students who never took walks with classmates, did so with medium frequency at the post-test stage. These associations are statistically significant.

4. After the intervention, the competitive environment in class slightly changed and became less competitive. This is proven by multiple correspondence analysis of pre and post individual cases according to which *Chi Square* =16.13; *df*=4; *p*=0.003. Specifically, the students who always competed with others, competed with others with medium frequency after the intervention. These associations are statistically significant.

5. The number of students who never expressed aggression increased (44 % at the pre-test stage and 67% at the post-test stage). But there is no statistically significant difference between pre and post-test outcomes; however, a positive trend was revealed. In particular, students expressed aggression less frequently ( $Z = -1.77, p=0.07$ )<sup>8</sup> in the post test. Specifically, 16 students expressed aggression less frequently, the aggression expressed by 8 students increased and the situation with 57 students in terms of expressing aggression remained the same.

6. After the intervention, students' parents met with the school administration more frequently in order to take part in solving school related issues. This difference is statistically significant ( $Z = -3.400, p=0.01$ ). Out of 81 parents, 19 became more active in their interaction with the administration, 3 became less active, while in case of 59, the situation remained the same.

7. After the intervention, the percentage of supportive parents increased from 54% to 80%. In particular, there is a positive trend as more students are supported by their parents in doing homework; however, there is no statistically significant difference between pre and post-test outcomes. However, a positive trend has been revealed. In case of need, parents help their children more ( $Z = -1.706, p=0.08$ ). Out of 81 parents, 14 helped their children to a greater extent, 5 helped their children to a lesser extent, while in case of 62 the situation remained the same.

<sup>7</sup> Multiple correspondence analysis of pre situation to observe how they segment (or cluster) and the post situation (same variables to see if they segment in same way (or cluster).

<sup>8</sup> Wilcoxon signed-rank test for non parametric measures.



## CONCLUSION

The outcomes of the present study indicate that social work intervention in schools is effective. It is important for schools to have social workers who will work to enhance the psycho-emotional and social well being of students, as well as to improve the school climate and the work undertaken with families and the community. An important outcome of the present intervention was the increase in the level of participation of parents and their engagement in non-formal educational activities at school. In addition to the above noted, empowering vulnerable families by engaging them in various services and by supporting families to use the services in the community is critically important.

Individual and group interventions planned by social workers with students are especially important as these interventions are aimed at establishing an inclusive environment and improving the school culture in general. In addition to micro and mezzo interventions, social work intervention can be used to facilitate action research at school. Implementation of the activities planned through the action research increases the chances for positive changes.

The evidence based practices showed in the present study highlights that participatory school social work intervention can be successfully used for school culture/class climate change at Georgian public schools and can be adapted for further eradication of negative effects of the former soviet schools' intolerant and suppressed school culture and class climate. In addition, this approach can assist educational reform decision makers to think about more realistic, process-based school interventions aiming at creating motivating environment through active participation of school staff as well as students themselves. In fact, participatory approaches are promising in forming safe, equal, non-violent, inclusive school culture that enable teacher to provide student-based learning and teaching and as a result, children can achieve better academic and social-emotional results.

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# Development of Intercultural Work in the Czech Republic – Premises and Challenges in Establishing an Intercultural Worker Profession, Allied to Social Work that Promotes the Use of Skills that Migrants Have<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

**OBJECTIVES:** The aim of the presented paper is to answer the question: How is the profession of intercultural worker and its legitimacy developing within the framework of the helping professions in the Czech Republic? **THEORETICAL BASE:** The article links the social work and migration studies. It draws on migrant integration models, integration policies and intercultural social work. **METHODS:** The article employs a case study approach, including theoretical review of intercultural work followed by an online survey. **OUTCOMES:** The integration of motivated migrants into helping professions, occupying the role of intercultural workers and community interpreters, is increasingly demanded by non-governmental organisations and public authorities. Yet, the professional codification of the intercultural worker is supported only in non-mandatory strategic documents within Czech integration policies and the National Qualification System. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** In the Czech environment, there is an ambition to establish intercultural workers as a distinct profession that works closely with social workers. The discussion on the professionalization of intercultural workers deals with the possibility of integrating intercultural workers into the social services system or forming autonomous helping profession close to social work. How to ensure this on system level; is still open to question.

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intercultural worker, social work, ethno-cultural diversity, integration, interculturalism

**INTRODUCTION**

Effective integration of migrants and social cohesion in ethno-cultural diversified societies has recently become one of the main social and political topics discussed in EU countries in the 21st century (European Commission, 2016). The Czech Republic has also seen an increase in the proportion of migrants within the total population. Whereas in 2003 it was 2.3 %, today is approx. 5%. There is a growing trend towards permanent settlement as migrants with permanent residence now outnumber temporarily residing migrants (MICR, 2018).<sup>3</sup> Irrespective of the reasons for emigration, migrants, refugees and the receiving society must address multiple challenges related to the process of integration, which creates even more challenges for social work (Council of Europe, 2011). Czech social work reflects this fact and had to investigate the specific features of work with migrants and refugees (e.g. Musil, Navrátil, 2002; Günterová, 2005; Dvořáková et al., 2008; Baláž, 2012; Dohnalová, 2012; Dohnalová, 2013; Lukešová, 2015; Bejček, 2016; Baláž, Čemová, 2019).

Over the last 10 years, the involvement of migrants in the helping professions has tended to increase. This trend has helped to develop specialised interdisciplinary approaches that interconnect the interpreting, counselling and intercultural mediation skills. The names of the new jobs have appeared depending on the projects of various specialised organisations. The most widely used terms include: community/social interpreter, socio-cultural mediator, intercultural mediator, intercultural assistant, intercultural worker. Since 2014, two main streams have become prominent – community interpreting and intercultural work.

This article focuses on the profession of intercultural worker, its identity and legitimacy within the context of social work and integration policy. Intercultural workers are treated by many practitioners, scholars and policy makers as an established profession (Lukešová, 2015; Vláda ČR, 2016; Baláž, Čemová, 2019). As an implementer of the initial projects focused on the development of intercultural work profession, I do realise how fragile are the anchorage points of intercultural workers within the helping professions as well as the need to conduct expert debate on its further development.

This article intends to contribute to the expert debate on which path the profession of intercultural worker is going to follow and to find the answer to the question: How is the profession of intercultural worker and its position developing within the framework of helping professions in the Czech Republic?

To answer the question, I will (1) describe the development of the profession of intercultural worker since 2012, in both practice and education; (2) introduce the ideological accents of intercultural work in the context of contemporary integration models; (3) present results of an online survey on employment of intercultural workers in Prague and Brno. In discussion and conclusion below I will formulate the main challenges in establishing the profession of intercultural worker.

<sup>3</sup> As of 31 August 2018, the total number of long-term residents in the Czech Republic was 552,190 persons, which is about 5% of the total population. The share of third-country nationals in the total population of the Czech Republic is approximately 3%. The largest group of third-country nationals were citizens of Ukraine (126 068), Vietnam (60 745) and Russia (37 551). These three nationalities thus make up almost 70% of all third-country nationals who are the primary target group for integration policy. This was followed by citizens of the USA (9,231), Mongolia (8,805), China (7,333), Kazakhstan (6,022), Belarus (5,965) Moldova (5,774), and India (4,014). Almost two thirds of third-country nationals reside in the Czech Republic on the basis of a permanent residence permit (202 223) and this share has increased in recent years (Vláda ČR, 2019:1).



From the methodological point of view, the article employs a case study approach, including theoretical review of intercultural work followed by an online survey. The theoretical overview summarizes the development of intercultural work in the Czech Republic since 2010. Online survey was realised in May and June 2019. It focuses on the situation of intercultural workers in the two largest cities in the Czech Republic, Prague and Brno. The sample consisted of all organizations in Prague and Brno which employ intercultural workers (11 respondents). These two cities have the largest population of settled migrants and are leaders in social innovation in the field of migrants' integration. The questionnaire return was 100%. I have drawn upon the outcomes of projects conducted by various organisations developing the intercultural work, strategic documents, Czech, English and German literature and my own work experience.

In this article, the term intercultural work refers only to activities performed by intercultural workers. We may encounter a broader concept of intercultural work carried out by various helping professions in an intercultural environment (e.g. Simon-Hohm, 2002).

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSION OF INTERCULTURAL WORKER IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

Involving migrant interpreters and mediators who do not have the proper formal education in counselling and working with migrant population has existed in the Czech Republic since the 1990s. Their services were used by NGOs, the police, local governments, schools, hospitals and other public institutions. Efforts to professionalize these services and ensure adequate education have led to the formation of the profession of intercultural worker. The intercultural worker was for the very first time named and defined within the project of the non-governmental organisation Inbáze "Forming the profession of socio-cultural mediator - inspiration drawn from the Portuguese model", No. cz.1.04/5.1.01/77.00416 (Formování profese sociokulturní mediator – inspirace portugalským modelem) between the years 2012–2014.<sup>4</sup> This is a completely new work position that generally aims at mediation of effective communication within an intercultural environment.<sup>5</sup> It is implemented mainly in the projects of migrants assisting NGO's, several integration centres and municipal authorities. The majority of projects take place in the capital city of Prague, which is inhabited by the largest number of migrants. Here, the intercultural worker services are offered in various scopes by non-governmental organisations, e.g. Inbáze, Integration Advisory Centre (Poradna pro integraci), Migration and Integration Association (Sdružení pro migraci a integraci), Integration Centre Prague (Integrační centrum Praha).

The Association for Intercultural Work (Asociace pro interkulturní práci) (AIP) was founded in 2014; its specific mission was to establish the profession of intercultural worker in the Czech Republic. Yet, the Association was forced to suspend its operations due to insufficient human resources. The platform for sharing experience in the field of intercultural work has been provided by the Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations in the Czech Republic (Konsorcium nevládních organizací pracujících s migranty v ČR) since 2017<sup>6</sup>.

Intercultural workers found their way even to the local self-government bodies and public authorities. Municipal district authorities in Prague outsource the services of intercultural workers, primarily within

<sup>4</sup> For detailed description of the generation process of intercultural work, see Dohnalová (2014:45–92) and for comprehensive information about the project, see archives at: <http://interkulturniprace.cz/oplzz/>

<sup>5</sup> At the beginning I wish to remark that the issue of interculturality is treated here only in the context of migrants, not that of ethnic minorities or any other minority groups. The narrowing of this topic is mainly due to the fact that the discipline was initially developed by NGO's working with migrants.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the Consortium organised a panel discussion concerning intercultural work on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018 and issued a Factsheet Foreigners in Prague and Intercultural Work (Factsheet Cizinci v Praze a interkulturní práce available from: <http://www.migracnikonsorcium.cz/cs/2018-07-spoluprace-vsech-akteru-lepsi-integraci-lokalni-urovni/factsheet-cizinci-v-praze-a-interkulturni-prace/>).



various projects of NGO's. Some municipal authorities (such as Prague Municipal Districts 14, 13, 12, 7) have already started to employ workers from a migrant background as specialists in intercultural communication and integration. The innovative project "Increasing the intercultural permeability of public institutions and authorities in the City of Brno" (Zvyšování interkulturní prostupnosti veřejných institucí ve městě Brně) has been implemented by the Brno City Council from 2017 to 2019. The project objective is to reduce the barriers to the integration of foreigners in public institutions and authorities. In practice, the position of intercultural worker is established within the staff of a Social Care Department along with the implementation of education activities for the purpose of supporting the cultural diversity across the self-government authority. This support is also incorporated within strategic documents. The project is based on the transmission of good practice in cooperation with the cities of Vienna and Malmö. The Prague City Council supports the development of intercultural work in Prague, both in terms of funds and strategic documents. (Dohnalová, Danyljuková, 2019). As regards the job description of intercultural workers in the aforementioned organisations, it primarily includes: contacting migrants, provision of basic social and legal counselling, interpreting, accompanying and attendance to public institutions, implementation of cultural and integration activities and networking (Čech Valentová, 2018). The employment of intercultural workers was also tested by the Labour Office through the Fund for Further Education between the years 2014–2018. Yet, this contributory organisation was disbanded in the year 2018 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

At the level of school education facilities, efforts have been documented to apply certain elements of intercultural work. Schools endeavour to manage the integration of pupils with a different mother tongue and communication with their parents by involving bilingual assistant mentors and intercultural workers, too. The non-governmental organisation META plays an important role in this sphere as it – on a long-term basis – specialises in the education of children with different mother tongues and offers accredited courses for the bilingual assistants (Čech Valentová, 2018; Dohnalová, Danyljuková, 2019).

### **Systematic establishment of the intercultural worker profession**

An intercultural worker was originally a project-based job position. The first people to struggle for the systematic establishment of the intercultural worker profession were the implementers of the Inbáze project, 2012–2014. A work team was formed, comprised of 19 representatives of the key organisations from the state administration, local self-government and non-profit sector. The team intended to find the paths to recognition of intercultural work as a profession. In close collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Social Service Department and the Ministry of Interior, Department for asylum and migration policy, possibilities were sought for a systematic anchorage of the intercultural worker profession. The Ministry of the Interior arranged for the incorporation of the profession within the Foreigner Integration Concept; and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs proposed to enlist the profession in the public occupational registers. Since April 2018, the qualification of intercultural worker is enlisted under the code "75-020-R" in the National Qualification System (Národní soustava kvalifikací) and as an actual position in the National Profession System (Národní soustava povolání). These systems delineate the competences and activities performed by the intercultural worker. The National Qualification System also offers the possibility to pass a profession exam. In reality, the exam is not accessible as it is not provided by any recognised professional entity. The use of these available registers for systematic incorporation of intercultural work as profession has brought forth only a partial success. These tools do not set out any obligation for the educator or the employer.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I have contacted the coordinators of these systems from the National Education Institute (NÚV) by email with the question on the binding effect of the exams and qualification. Blanka Vážná, working with NÚV, answered in her email of 10 July 2018: "If the professional qualification is not mentioned in the particular legal regulation or the Trade Licensing Act as a requirement for a certain activity or profession, it is of no binding effect for the employer".



### **Intercultural workers and integration policy of the Czech Republic**

The strategic document Procedure for implementation of an Updated concept for the integration of foreigners – In Mutual Co-existence (Postup při realizaci aktualizované Koncepce integrace cizinců – Společné soužití) (Vláda ČR, 2015:17–16) first mentions the intercultural workers. The document defines the priorities of the Czech integration policy. The priority of Mutual relationships between the foreigners and the majority of society mentions among other measures the use of intercultural assistants and community interpreters from the group of foreigners. Their involvement is supposed to facilitate and improve the communication between the foreigners and institutions. The Updated concept for the integration of foreigners – Respect for each other (Vláda ČR, 2016), speaks of the profession of intercultural worker referring to two priorities: (1) economic subsistence within active support of services of community interpreters/intercultural workers in working sites at the Labour Office; and (2) mutual relationships between the communities in the draft measure concerning adequate use of the intercultural workers' services, community interpreters, and assistant mentors who come from the group of foreigners and facilitate and improve the communication between the foreigners, institutions, and the general public. In the most recent version of Procedure for implementation of the Concept for integration of foreigners – Respect for each other (Vláda ČR, 2019) the intercultural workers area mentioned – in addition to two aforementioned priorities – also the priority of the foreigner's self-orientation in the society, in the proposed measures through the subsidy proceedings and/or the calls within the European union funds to actively support the use of community interpreters and/or intercultural workers while attending to the issues and matters of the foreigners. This primarily concerns the Departments for the residence permit at the Ministry of Interior.

Another concept material within the integration policy at the local level is Concept of the Capital City of Prague for the area of the foreigner integration (Koncepce hl. m. Prahy pro oblast integrace cizinců) which was formed in 2014 and updated in 2018. The concept perceives intercultural work as a follow-up service to social services. The objective in the measure 1.2 aims at the provision of financial support for the intercultural work for migrants in the territory of Capital City of Prague (Magistrát hl. města Praha, 2014; 2018).

### **Intercultural workers and social work**

Intercultural work profession can be seen as a tool of the integration policy as well as a helping profession closely related to social work or as part of social work. In the concept conceived by Baláž, Čemová (2019:102), with reference to Bartlett (1970), Washington, Paylor (1998), social work in its socio-ecological perspective is a specific supportive or control activity performed by helping professionals (social workers, intercultural workers, mediators, counsellors, etc.). Thus, social work is perceived as a metadiscourse covering multiple professions. Other authors (Weber, 2009; Saks, 2010) or definitions of social work as per IFSW (2014) interpret social work as a specific profession with specialised education. According to the wide definition above, intercultural workers do fit into the framework of social work. However, I believe that the narrower concept of social work as a specialization carried out by formally educated social workers prevails. In the Czech Republic, an intercultural worker is “only” a project-based position and intercultural workers do not need to have formal education of social workers. It can be said that there is a tendency to develop intercultural work as a distinct profession closely related to social work and community interpreting. The question of the interconnection between intercultural workers and social work is particularly important in the context of further establishment, as evidenced in the case study. As the social work definition has no legislative support in the Czech environment yet, the question remains unanswered. Discussion is still taking place as to the categorisation and inclusion of intercultural work into the social services. Dohnalová (2014:84) points out that the Inbáze project implementers in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs aimed at including the profession in the Social Services Act within the so called Major Amendment in 2015. This



would have brought forth the incorporation of the qualification requirements into the law as well as the financing from the social service subsidies. Similar efforts were evident among the sign language interpreters. These efforts however were in vain. The results of online survey, presented below, further explores the interest of employers of intercultural workers in interconnection with social services.

### **Education of intercultural workers**

The establishment of the intercultural worker profession is inseparably linked to the provision of tailor made training and certification. The goal of such training and certification is the betterment of the practice, as well as the recognition and advancement of the occupation in terms of status and salary.

The first education course for intercultural workers was given by the non-governmental organisation Inbáze between the years 2013–2014. It was a qualification course for social service practitioners aimed at counselling and assistance to migrants (accreditation number: 2013/1349 – PK). The accreditation holder was the Education Centre CARITAS – College of Social Work in Olomouc. Comprised of 250 lessons this accredited course offered its participants a professional qualification entitled “Social Service Practitioner” which opened up ample job opportunities in the field of social services. The course was designed for 6 language specialisations – English, Arabic, Chinese, Mongolian, Russian and Vietnamese. It was attended by 29 migrants, 17 of which completed it successfully (Dohnalová, 2014). The course took place only once, and the accreditation validity expired in 2017. Various projects offer courses<sup>8</sup> with smaller number of lessons which focus on specific topics and as such do not allow its attendants to perform their activity within the framework of social services. This situation is predominantly due to the financial demands of the courses as well as to the absence of adequate projects which would finance them.

It is very important to emphasise that the preparation not only includes training but also life experience. Course participants are migrants who have an expertise, based on their membership in the target communities they are supposed to serve. Secondly, it is necessary to mention that the project funded courses are intended only for migrants as a target group of social funds.

In the field of tertiary education at specialised colleges and universities, specialised subjects are starting to emerge within the discipline of social work. These subjects aim at the specific features of social work with migrants and refugees and intercultural competence<sup>9</sup>. The minimum standard for the social work education, as set out by the Association of Educators in Social Work (ASVSP) at the level of college and university education includes this topic in the discipline “Minority Groups” (Lukešová, 2015; ASVSP, 2019). The social work field of study does not include the key skills of intercultural workers, which is - according to the National Profession System - community interpreting, and according to the National Qualification System; mediation of effective communication in negotiations between migrants and public institutions and other entities.

Generally speaking, there is no field of study or continuously implemented accredited education course of further professional education which would prepare the intercultural workers pursuant to the standards required within the National Qualification System.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. in 2019 Inbáze, z.s. implemented the project Intercultural inclusion (Inkluze interkulturně) which offered 100-lesson courses for intercultural workers in the education system (<http://www.inbaze.cz/opppr-inkluz-interkulturne>).

<sup>9</sup> E.g. the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, offers an optional subject Intercultural Social Work; the Faculty of Health and Social Science of the University of South Bohemia offers the specialised studies Social Work with Minorities, Immigrants and Refugees within the undergraduate studies of social work.



## IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE OF INTERCULTURAL WORK

Most of the information on ideological discourse can be found in the document Recommendations for the development of intercultural work in the Czech Republic (2016) by Association for intercultural work. Other organisations performing the intercultural work often present it on their websites as a list of activities which the intercultural worker provides (assistance in public authorities, interpreting, networking, etc.). We can say that this is an ideological discourse of intercultural workers of the Association for intercultural work.

The priority base is formed by the concept of intercultural coexistence and civic participation. A detailed analysis and elaboration has been made in the discourse of “*common us*” (as opposed to “*us and them*”) where the authors accentuate the efforts to overcome the dichotomy of the society that builds on the difference between migrants and the so called majority. What they see as critical is the search for common values and interests instead of stressing the ethno-cultural differences. As an example they point out the safety and order in the streets, coexistence in a house or a municipality, good functions of the state, environmental protection, etc. The document also speaks of the necessity of mainstreaming the integration policies and cultural openness of public institutions.

The ideological discourse of intercultural work corresponds with the current theoretical models of integration of foreigners, post-multiculturalism and interculturalism (e.g. Bouchard, 2011; Meer, Modood, Zapata-Barrero, 2016; Zapata-Barrero, 2016). New approaches respect the diversity and support the common identity of civic society members. It abandons the definition of the state based on the ethnic principle and applies the civic principle instead (Baršová, Barša, 2005). Nevertheless, the discourse “*common us*” based on sharing the civic values and the denial of social segregation to a majority/minority, does not treat ethno-cultural diversity as a topic. It generally denies perceiving the ethnic identity of an individual as fixed or decisive (Recommendations for the development of intercultural work, 2016). Interculturalism respects the majority and searches for a compromise solution between the majority (which it recognises, unlike the multicultural paradigm) and the minority groups while negotiating over its own symbolical cultural expression within the public sphere (Meer, Modood, Zapata-Barrero, 2016). Interculturalism presented by Bouchard (2011) is based on a dual paradigm of a society comprised of the majority and minorities.<sup>10</sup> The majority culture is assigned the founding status which legitimises it so that it takes priority in ad hoc situations. Kymlicka (2003:147), a representative of multiculturalism, instead denies the perspective of superiority of the inherited mode of life of the majority. An intercultural citizen, according to Kymlicka, is supposed to exhibit a more positive attitude towards diversity. He/she should be curious, rather than afraid of different cultures, and be willing to learn something more about them.

The concept of intercultural coexistence leading to a new culture corresponds to the dialogue character of the intercultural model which causes a lower fragmentation of society into groups and helps individuals in achieving a pluralistic perception of their identity. Yet, mutual cultural interactivity does not stand for dissolution of identities and homogenisation. On the contrary, the resultant mix of languages, ethnicities, religions, cultures, regional identities, as suggested by Meer, Modood, Zapata-Barrero (2016), co-creates the “*superdiversity*”.

The (inter)cultural openness of public institutions and authorities, as mentioned in Recommendations for the development of intercultural work in the Czech Republic (2016) is

<sup>10</sup> Yet, Bouchard (2011:446) adds a warning to this paradigm: we must not slide into the reductive vision, which interprets the separation of majority/minority as an opposite between a homogenous majority and heterogeneous minorities. For the majority is considerably heterogeneous too. Apart from a common language and shared symbols, there are remarkable elements of diversity (differences in morals, faith, ideology, generation gaps, social stratification, regional identities, etc.).



a concept predominantly applied within a German environment (e.g. Riehle, 2001; Schröer, 2007; Griese, Marburger, 2012). Interculturality is not reduced to the relationship between the Germans and immigrants, it also includes the differences in gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, physical appearance, socio-economic situations and other differences in the institutional culture (Schröer, 2007:9). The intercultural openness or the intercultural competences in public administration bodies is an umbrella term for all institutional and personal prerequisites and skills which are necessary so that the people from other cultures coming into contact with the public administration and authorities are perceived and recognised in their moral demands as having equal rights and were not discriminated against. The intercultural openness should contribute to breaking down the barriers both on the part of migrants and employees of public institutions at the level of understanding (language, socio-cultural context), at the institutional level (legal and organisational conditions) and a personal level (behaviour, attitudes). Most of all, it should contribute to the well-balanced distribution of power in negotiations between the individual and the institution (Riehle, 2001:18). The intercultural openness includes, apart from intercultural qualifications of the staff, a targeted training and employment of the professionals with migration experience (Schröer, 2007:3). In Germany, the employment of migrants, engaged in the non-governmental and public sector, in the post of intercultural brokers, has been quite usual for tens of years, as in many other EU countries with a long history of immigration (Palaščáková, 2014).

### **ONLINE SURVEY ON INTERCULTURAL WORKERS IN PRAGUE AND BRNO**

Methodology of the online survey: Data were collected using a semi-structured online survey in May and June in 2019. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 20 questions. Thirteen of the questions were of a quantitative nature allowing comparisons between organizations. Seven of the questions were open where representatives of organizations shared the specific experience of the organization. The questionnaire return was 100%.

The research sample consisted of 11 organizations providing intercultural work in Prague and Brno. This is the total amount of organizations that employ intercultural workers in those cities. I chose these two cities for two reasons. These are the two largest cities with the highest number of registered foreigners – Prague 38% and Brno 5.5% of the total number of registered foreigners in the Czech Republic (MICR, 2018). Prague and Brno are also leaders in social innovations in the field of migrant integration, for example through the existence of their own integration policies and the implementation of innovative projects in the field of intercultural work. Taking into account that the research took place in cities where 43.5% of the migrant population live and the sample consisted of all organisations providing intercultural work, the informative value of the sample is quite essential. In the Czech Republic, there are approximately 20 NGOs and 11 integration centres under the Refugee Facilities Administration offering services to migrants. Not all of them provide intercultural work (MICR, 2019).

Respondents from individual organisations were coordinators and methodologists of intercultural workers. I received the contacts to the Prague-based organisations from Anca Covrigová, the methodologist of Integration Centre of Prague, who coordinates Regionální poradní platforma (Regional Counselling Platform) attended by the representatives of the Prague City Council, individual municipal district authorities, NNO, associations of migrants, state administrative bodies, school and education facilities and international organisations. In Brno, I received similar data from Mgr. Lenka Šafránková Pavličková, the counsellor for foreigners, coordinator of the foreign national integration projects, coordinator of intercultural work, from the Department of social integration and the Department of social care at the Brno City Council.

The survey focused on three fields. The first part deals with the definition of the intercultural worker profession in the organisations concerned. I tried to determine from when the organisations employed the intercultural workers and why they decided to use the term “intercultural worker”.



I asked about their requirements for performance of intercultural work, what the job description is and which financing resources they use. Furthermore, the respondents answered the question on the meaning and importance of potential interconnections of the intercultural work with social services, and the inclusion of the profession in the National Qualification System. The second part concentrated on the education and work experience of intercultural workers. The third part presented the questions concerning the future challenges in the field of education, employment and the systematic establishment of intercultural work.

Considering the ethics of the research, the respondents were made aware that the outputs would be published in the journal *Social Work*. The survey covered 9 Prague-based and 2 Brno-based organisations.

Table 1: List of organisations

Non-governmental organisations	Municipalities
Archdiocesan Charity Prague, church legal person (Arcidiecézní charita Praha, církevní právnická osoba) (ACH Praha)	Municipal district authority Prague 14 (ÚMČ Praha 14)
Integration Advisory Centre Prague (Poradna pro integraci, z.ú., Praha) (PPI)	Municipal district authority Prague 13 (ÚMČ Praha 13)
Integration Centre Prague (Integrační centrum Praha) (ICP)	Municipal district authority Prague 12 (ÚMČ Praha 12)
InBáze, z. s., Prague (InBáze)	Municipal district authority Prague 7 (ÚMČ Praha 7)
Migration and Integration Association, Prague (Sdružení pro migraci a integraci o.p.s.) (SIMI)	Brno City Council (MMB)
Diocesan Charity Brno, church legal person, Brno, (Diecézní charita Brno, církevní právnická osoba) (DCH)	

The data obtained from closed questions were analysed quantitatively (using the Google Form functions – charts, summary sheet), from open questions qualitatively. The answers were assigned to the following categories: employment of intercultural workers, education of intercultural workers, profile of intercultural workers and challenges for the future.

## FINDINGS

The non-governmental organisations started to employ the intercultural workers over the years 2010–2014. The first intercultural workers were hired by Inbáze, the position was then entitled “socio-cultural mediator”. Local self-government authorities started to employ the intercultural workers from 2017. ÚMČ Praha 7 was the very first pioneer in this context. ÚMČ Praha 13, 14 and MMB are now implementing their first project, within which they employ their own intercultural workers. The name of the profession “intercultural worker” has been used by the organisations since 2014 thanks to the outputs of the Inbáze project and involvement in the Regional counselling platform in Prague. Nevertheless the municipal district authorities in Prague prefer the title “community worker”. ACH Praha uses the title “outreach worker”. The number of intercultural workers employed varies from 1 to 12. ICP employs the most intercultural workers (12). The employment is predominantly based on the contracts for work (61.5%). The intercultural work is offered in Russian, English (5 organizations), Vietnamese (6 organizations), Arabic (3 organizations), Ukrainian (3 organisations), Spanish (3 organisations), Romanian, Bulgarian,



Mongolian, Chinese (1 organisation). All 11 organisations finance the intercultural work service from grants and subsidies. In the self-government authorities (5 organisations), subsidies by the Ministry of Interior for the support of the integration of foreigners prevail. In non-governmental organisations (6 organisations) it is a combination of subsidies for social services and for integration of foreigners (MICR), ESF and AMIF.

The work activities of intercultural workers are similar in all 11 organisations. These mainly aim at searching for clients from individual language groups within a migrant group;<sup>11</sup> assistance and interpreting, basic counselling (legal, social, socio-cultural), providing the contact data to other organisations and the implementation of integration policies. The municipal district authorities in the list of activities also mention the involvement of migrants in the events that take place in the district and collaboration with schools. The efforts to involve the intercultural workers in the setting of the municipal integration policy are mentioned by ÚMČ Praha 13 and MMB. Only ICP points out that its intercultural workers do not provide social and legal counselling and do not work as mediators. Inbáze, on the other hand, endeavours to bring the profession closer links to social work. A generalised profile of intercultural workers in all 11 organisations is of 85% formed by migrants with university education in humanities (but not necessarily in social work) who have a history of work in non-governmental organisations and informal help to their compatriots. Only 11 out of 61 intercultural workers comply with the qualification as per Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on social services, i.e. approx. 18% of total amount of employed intercultural workers. Formal education in interpreting and command of foreign languages is documented in 5 of 61 workers, i.e. approx 8%. According to ICP an *“intercultural worker is – ideally – an integrated migrant who has command of the Czech language and knows the Czech environment, as well as the language and environment (culture, customs) of other groups/communities”*. Although the 95% of intercultural workers are migrants, the experience of migration is considered an important part of qualification by 6 of 11 employers concerned.

The mapping of the importance of interconnection between intercultural work and social services implied that 7 out of 11 organisations consider it important. The interconnection is preferred by the non-governmental organisations rather than the self-government. The arguments for the inclusion of intercultural work into the social services treated intercultural work as part of social work; and as an opportunity to standardise the activities and requirements for qualification of intercultural workers and ensuring the sustainability of the profession within the system of social services. The respondents also see the subsidies for social services as possible resources for financing the intercultural work. Arguments against interconnection with social services mention the potential reduction of intercultural work both in terms of employing *“the right people without proper education”* and actual performance of the intercultural work. *“Intercultural work should be an independent original profession specialising in various areas, including social services, civil participation, development of communities, etc”*. Two respondents have no clear opinion on this issue.

As regards the inclusion of the profession to the National Qualification System and National Profession System, all 11 organisations agreed that its meaning at a practical level is zero. At a theoretical level, it forms a reference framework for setting the competences of the profession, and it serves as support for defending the importance of the profession (e.g. in project applications and strategic documents).

All 11 respondents agreed that they completely lack the education courses for intercultural workers. As one respondent put it: *“The absence of quality education leads to a state where the intercultural work is mostly performed by people with informal experience of helping their compatriots. While helping their friends or working with the clients, they draw upon their own experience which may differ considerably from the current practice. They often encounter the absence of education in the field of social work (professionalism, limits, work with clients, burnout prevention)”*. The discrepancy between the ideal

<sup>11</sup> The respondents used various names to denote the target group of migrants, most predominant was the term “community” with attributes like “foreign” or “language/ethnic”.



and the practice has been expressed quite succinctly by a respondent from ICP: *“It is far more practical for us to employ well motivated migrants who know the language and culture and subsequently teach and train them in social work than it is to employ social workers having a vision that they will learn the language and culture afterwards.”*

8 of 11 respondents state that they must rely on their own system of intercultural worker training. One respondent has also mentioned the need for the language education of intercultural workers. *“Particularly within the Vietnamese community we feel the need to receive education in the Vietnamese language (2nd generation) or the Czech language (1st generation).”*

All 11 respondents see the major challenge in the field of education in ensuring the systematic education in intercultural work that would be partially independent of the projects. The respondents agreed that it should cover various types and levels of education. They speak of specialised qualification courses within the framework of social services, lifelong education; specialised courses in selected topics (e.g. support for inclusion of children and pupils with different mother tongue at schools, work with foreign families, and support for civil engagement/community work). 5 respondents see as necessary the need to open the relevant field of study in colleges and universities. This is linked with the challenge to ensure a sufficient number of experts in intercultural work education.

In the sphere of employment, according to 7 respondents the paramount challenge is the necessity to ensure a sufficient number of qualified intercultural workers who would be adequately paid. This also calls for continuous systematic financing. The municipal district authorities mention the need to verify the functionality of engaging intercultural workers in the operation of the organisation. Challenges in the field of systematic establishing and recognition of the profession concern the extension of the practical usability of intercultural workers in the public administration and self-government sphere (5 respondents), involvement of intercultural workers in the coordination of migrants integration at the municipal level (8 respondents), promotion of the profession among the professional and wider public (5 respondents), establishment of professional platforms (3 respondents). One of the respondents said *“it is necessary to overcome the methodological shortcomings and related ethno-centric definitions of their position as interpreters or outreach workers without their proper inclusion within the structure of the organisations”*.

## DISCUSSION

What is the position of intercultural workers in the Czech Republic? Is it a new helping profession, a specialisation of social work or just a project – based work position? The concept of the profession has been variously defined in the sociological literature but has most commonly referred to an occupation that can be joined only after demonstrating the mastery of a well-defined set of knowledge and skills acquired through a rigorous and structured course of study (Gilkey, Garcia, Rush, 2011:179).

The case study shows that only one full-fledged course for intercultural workers has been undertaken and most intercultural workers are migrants. We can say that their expertise is based mostly on experience, not on credentials. Discussion about the status of an expert by experience has been conducted both in the field of social work and in related professions (e.g. in the field of mental health, health care etc.; Gilkey, Garcia, Rush, 2011; Toikko, 2016)<sup>12</sup>. However, in the

<sup>12</sup> The development of recognition of the profession of community health worker in the USA can be considered as a parallel. Gilkey, Garcia, Rush (2011:180) state that the desire to professionalize the community health worker role is apparent in various efforts to standardize their training and credentialing. Furthermore, despite the aforementioned state-level certification programs, many community health workers continue to be viewed as ad hoc or casual hires who receive site-specific training and whose positions are often supported by short-term special project grants.



context of establishing an intercultural worker profession in the Czech Republic, this concept of expert by experience has not been applied. The aspiration is to shape a special profession of intercultural worker defined by formal education performed not only by migrants.

The case study results imply that intercultural workers remain primarily a project-based work position. The main activities intercultural workers perform are assistance and interpreting, basic social counselling, community and outreach work. Intercultural workers closely cooperate with social workers, legal advisers, psychologists, pedagogical workers, immigration officers, health workers etc.

The main systematic support is represented by the conceptual documents of the integration policy. They ensure the financing of intercultural worker activities. Nevertheless, they cannot ensure the systematic education or guarantee the quality of the intercultural work performed. Searching for new paths to the systematic establishment and anchorage of the intercultural work and ensuring the proper education has been a concerted effort of non-governmental organisations nowadays represented by the Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations.

The trend of involving the well-motivated migrants, who often lack adequate formal education, in the helping professions, corresponds to the situation in the traditional EU countries. Priorities of the integration policy – particularly at a local level – include continuous support and professionalization of services performed primarily by people with migration history and command of multiple languages and cultures. Those services include in particular interpretation and assistance in public institutions, negotiation and prevention of conflicts within communities and neighbourhoods. The most frequent areas of action are in schools, hospitals, state administration and self-government institutions, housing cooperatives, hostels, reception centres, social housing, refugee camps, etc. Definitions of competences vary between community interpreting, social counselling, intercultural mediation and community work. The designation of these professions is heterogeneous, “community interpreter” and “intercultural mediator” prevail. In many cases migrants start their professional careers as volunteers who work with professional social workers. They interpret and facilitate contact between migrants and public institutions. Gradually, they are completing specific trainings and gaining paid work.

In the pioneering project of the organization Inbaze, practice in several EU countries was mapped. Portugal, with the state organization ACIDI (Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural, I.P), is a model where the state plays a major role. ACIDI is the main employer of socio-cultural mediators who recruit from NGOs. In other countries, we see very good cooperation between local government and NGOs or educational institutions (Servicio de mediación social intercultural – an intervention program backed by an agreement between the Social Welfare Department of Madrid and the Autonomous University of Madrid, BürgerLotsen from the NGO VIA – der Verband für interkulturelle Arbeit working with the municipal authorities in Berlin). The grass root level focusing primarily on supporting their own migrant community on voluntary base presents Fédération des associations de femmes-relais (Seine-Saint-Denis, Paris; Dohnalová, 2014).

Concurrently, public administration in traditional EU countries specifically develops diversity management or the concept of intercultural openness of public institutions. The objective of these approaches is to enhance the intercultural competences in public administration and the understanding of cultural diversity as a benefit. One of the tools is the specific support of employing the people with migration history in public administration, where the command of language and culture is perceived as an additional competence (Riehle, 2001). The Brno City Council and several municipal districts of Prague can be seen as pioneers in this approach.

The performance of intercultural work, as well as the intercultural competence in social work, must be developed at the ideological and political level, not only instrumental. The integration is critically influenced by the objectives set out by the integration policy. Bauböck (1994:10) points out that the elementary question is whether the policy predetermines a monolithic or pluralistic



view of society. I believe the objectives of the Czech integration policy correspond with the model of individualised civic integration (Baršová, Barša, 2005). The major stress is placed on the integration of foreigners into society, their self-subsistence, peaceful coexistence with the majority, prevention of negative social phenomena and securing the protection of rights and safety of all the citizens of the Czech Republic (Vláda, 2016). Amendment to Act No. 326/1999 Coll. on the residence of foreign nationals in the territory of the Czech Republic will enlarge the mandatory integration elements and introduce mandatory socio-adaptive courses from the year 2021. The fact that a foreigner according to the law is not seen as a citizen of a municipality has a preclusive counter-integration effect.<sup>13</sup>

Baršová, Barša (2005) suggest it is not a restoration of “monoculturalism”, rather a determination of minimum obligatory framework of the civil cohesion which takes the acceptance of liberal civil political culture as a prerequisite for a complete integration. My opinion is that the ideological discourse of intercultural work reflecting the model of interculturalism corresponds only partially to the setting of the Czech integration policy. A paradigm of interculturalism that considers the cultural diversity or pluralism as a positive social phenomenon is not declared in the official integration policy. It would be useful to open and lead a serious discussion with the policy makers, scholars and practitioners in the integration of foreign nationals about the sense of the given discourse in the Czech context.

## CONCLUSION

Social work in the ethno-cultural diversified society is a new challenge of our times. Schröer (2007:80) suggests that social work nowadays must be intercultural, otherwise it is not professional. In the Czech Republic, the approach to social work includes cooperation with interpreters, education in intercultural competences, legislation concerning foreign nationals, migration studies as well as the involvement of migrants as intercultural workers. The conclusions of the case study lead into the following statements regarding the current state of the profession of intercultural worker:

1. The profession of intercultural worker represents a dynamic, variable/heterogeneous professional concept which stands the closest to social work and community interpreting. The competences of an intercultural worker are defined and delineated in the National Qualification System and the National Profession System of 2018. The acknowledgement of intercultural worker as a distinct occupation in the National Qualifications System speaks to the growth of their practice and the need for a unique job title for these workers. This competence model is however optional only. The qualification requirements, as issued by employers, primarily accentuate the intercultural competence, interpreting skills and migration history. The profession is predominantly practised by migrants working in non-governmental organisations; nowadays it starts to develop in local self-government bodies, too. The activities of intercultural workers are financed from grants and subsidies. A systematic continuous financing is absent.
2. The title “intercultural worker” for work position performed mostly by migrants is only used by some organisations. Other names used are as follows: outreach worker, intercultural assistant, community worker. The name of the job is often derived from the setting of the project. There is no mandatory tool that would require the use of the term “intercultural worker”.

<sup>13</sup> According to Section 16 of Act No. 128/2000 Coll., on municipalities, and Section 12 of Act No. 129/2000 Coll., on regions, foreign nationals are not considered citizens of a municipality. Citizen of a municipality is a natural person who a) is a citizen of the Czech Republic, b) has permanent residence in a municipality.



3. Trainings for intercultural workers are not ensured in any systematic level and are felt as lacking considerably. There is an increased demand for various forms of education and finances from public resources. The qualification course for social service workers is unsatisfactory in its contents.

4. Systematic legitimacy of intercultural workers is provided by the strategic documents of the integration policy. At the national level, the Updated concept for integration of foreigners – Respect for each other (Vláda ČR, 2019), works as a strategic document, whereas its local counterpart is the Updated Concept of the Capital City of Prague for Foreigners Integration (Magistrát hl. Města Praha, 2018). In the field of social work, the profession may only be codified within the Act No. 106/2008, on social services. Intercultural worker may also be defined as an autonomous helping profession practised primarily by people with migration background. It is possible to use the concept of expert by experience (Collins, Evans, 2002) to further discussion on the professionalization of intercultural workers. Its adequate recognition definitely requires further tools for proper anchorage in the system.

The research question concerning the development of the profession of intercultural worker has many layers that are suggested here as impulses for further research studies. I find it sensible to explore the views of intercultural workers themselves: how they perceive their profession and what they see as critical for its development. I also see it as adequate to analyse the ideological discourse of intercultural work in its practical application, and specifically focus on the evaluation of intercultural work carried out by the municipal authorities. The intentions of social and integration policy makers need to be explored at the local as well as national level; primarily in the field of systematic anchorage of intercultural workers. Last but not least, the educators should be asked about the possibility of systematic education for intercultural workers, specifically in the field of tertiary and further professional education. Intercultural worker has emerged as a project-based work position and it aspires to be recognised systematically as a profession. Whether the aspiration becomes a reality remains an open question.

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# Exploratory Research on Community Empowerment for Women Victims of Forced Migration: Implications for Social Work in Sustainable Community Reintegration

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## Abstract

The research was guided by the following OBJECTIVES: To explore the narratives/experiences of the women victims of trafficking in Harare, Zimbabwe; to assess the socio- economic and psychological coping strategies employed by women Victims of human trafficking and, to establish the social protection measures taken to reintegrate women Victims of human trafficking in Zimbabwe. The THEORETICAL BASE employed in this study was the hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical background aimed at understanding the hidden meanings and the essences of the trafficking rescue and integration experience. METHODS: The research adopted a qualitative research design and a purposive sample of twelve Victims of trafficking and eighteen key informants. Semi-structured interviews and focus were used to gather data. The data was analysed using the concept-modelling approach. The OUTCOMES of the research noted that trafficked women reported experiencing job losses, failure to get jobs, and delays in salary payment. The reasons for being trafficked included the loss of parents/breadwinners, and vulnerabilities emanating from divorces. Upon reintegration in the community victims reported facing stigma, blame and stereotyping. The SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS are discussed along four areas: social work training, policy advocacy, social norms change and families and social work research.

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## Keywords

forced migration, human trafficking, women victims, community empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking has become more conspicuous during the turn of the 21st century in both developed and developing countries, with developing countries being the source of most victims (Horwood, 2009; Mtinkulu, 2010). Explanations surrounding this phenomenon among women, children, and men are likely to differ (UNODC, 2006). Following the enactment of the Trafficking in Persons Act 09:25 in June 2014 and the sustained public awareness campaigns led by the Ministry of Home Affairs, reported incidences of human trafficking seem to be on the increase in Zimbabwe. Various factors can be attributed to this increase, and these include Enactment of enabling legislation that expressly recognizes human trafficking as a crime in Zimbabwe; the increased global inter-connectivity; improved global transport systems making accessibility much easier; and recent improvements in Information Communication Technologies and the availability of information, including reduced cost of communication (Oram et al., 2011). These factors have not only predisposed hitherto unreachable vulnerable populations to the scourge of human trafficking, but other related international criminal activities including drug trafficking, proliferation of small arms, and human smuggling. Vulnerable members of society, including women, have unfortunately fallen victim to international crime syndicates. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study sought to explore the experiences of women victims of human trafficking in Harare, Zimbabwe.

This study adopted the definition of human trafficking by the Horwood (2009:14) which defines human trafficking as: *“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, and deception for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”*

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2006) states that millions of people are trafficked each year around the world (UNODC, 2008) whereas the International Labour Organization's (ILO) focusing on Africa states the thousands of those trafficked every year are from sub-Saharan Africa who are forced into modern day slavery (ILO, in Horwood, 2009). Human trafficking is thought to be one of the fastest-growing trans-national organised crime in the world (Deer, 2010; Shelley, 2010). Kreston (2007) notes that countries involved in trafficking are divided into three categories: countries of origin, countries of transit, and countries of destination; with victim status determining this designation. A country may be included in more than one category and may be included in all three simultaneously (Kreston, 2007).

Oram et al. (2011) pointed out that academic research on the extent, causes and experiences of human trafficking in Africa has been limited. Statistics on trafficking in Africa have been based on estimates and behind the statistics estimating the extent of trafficking in Africa are individual stories of hardship, exploitation and even death. What is known about the enigma in Africa has been fragmentary and based on journalists' reports rather than on the legal testimony or documented research. Studies from organisations such as Molo Songololo, reports that children in Africa, specifically South Africa are trafficked for sexual exploitation (Molo Songololo, 2000). The IOM notes that the destination for trafficked women and children for sexual exploitation in Africa is mainly South Africa (IOM, 2000).

Studies on the experiences of victims of trafficking in Africa document the physical and psychological trauma experiences of trafficking notably sex trafficking. Studies in East Africa for instance point out the fact that women and girls trafficked for prostitution reported widespread



rape, physical abuse, sexually transmitted infections or diseases (STI/STD), and HIV/AIDS (Pearson, 2003; Mtimkulu, 2010). Less obvious, but potentially deadly, conditions such as cervical cancer may also occur as a result of being trafficked for sexual exploitation (Mtimkulu, 2010; Mollema, 2013).

Jones (2006), it must also be noted that pregnancy-related death is the leading cause of mortality for 15–19-year-old girls worldwide, and those under 15 are five times as likely to die as women in their 20's. It should be noted that though the most egregious physical, sexual, and psychological trauma and abuses are often borne by children, obviously, children also suffer additional harms, including the loss of education opportunity stigmatisation and stereotypes have been pervasive among children who would have been trafficked and returned back to the communities (Oucho, 2006). More so, children victimised by this crime are also robbed of the psychological, spiritual, cultural and social development that would have been enjoyed, but for the exploitation (UNICEF, 2001; Brown, 2011). Kreston (2007) notes that recovery from these types of abuse and their aftermath may take decades to achieve.

While literature on the harmful and long-term effects of trafficking on the victims especially women is generally available and in detail, there is limited literature on viable, sustainable long-term community empowerment models for victims. Within the migration discourse human trafficking is generally classified under emergency/humanitarian interventions whose main aim is to save lives. The focus of such interventions is not normally to empower the victim but to save life. Emergency funding and interventions are generally short term in nature and not meant to support long term needs. While empowerment initiatives are designed for long term interventions that are sustainable for both the community and the victims to improve their welfare and well-being. The concept of empowerment revolves around overcoming powerlessness through strengthening the individual's adaptive capacities to use resources and opportunities within their social, economic, technical and political environment and the development of the abilities and capabilities to participate competently within that environment (Kieffer, 1984). Gutierrez (1991) defines empowerment as a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals (in this case Victims of human trafficking) can take action to improve their lives after successful reintegration into society. Empowerment is the purpose of social work regardless of which end of the transaction intervention is directed. Victims powerlessness can be noted as the target of social work intervention and empowerment as a process and an outcome.

This paper contributes to academic literature in the area of sustainable reintegration and empowerment of victims of involuntary migration. Literature on the social and psychological issues faced by victims on return including feelings of rejection, stigma and social isolation is available, but how to use social work theories to address these at community level has been limited. While community social work perspectives theories (like Paulo Freire) are available these do not specifically target victims of involuntary migration.

The empowerment theories by Paulo Freire in his 1970 book are very critical for victims of forced migration within communities. One of the key tenets advocated for by Freire (1970) is the need to view human beings as subjects and not objects. When human beings are seen as subjects, they are perceived as being able to think and reflect for themselves and they can dissociate from the world. The essential difference between humans and animals is that humans can operate in the world through action and reflection. The same principle can be applied to victims of human trafficking who within the community after reintegration can reflect and decide to follow the empowerment perspectives. Involuntary migration per se is a recent and contemporary phenomenon within the social work profession. The paper zeroes in on the opportunities provided by the systems theory to work with victims within their community context.

The aim of this study was to examine the community reintegration and empowerment of victims of trafficking following the rescue process. The process includes recruitment, transportation, exploitation, rescuing and community re-integration. The research study had three main guiding



questions: a) What are the narratives/experiences of women victims of trafficking in Harare, Zimbabwe? b) What are the coping strategies employed by women Victims of human trafficking? And c) what are the social protection measures put in place to reintegrate women Victims of human trafficking in Zimbabwe including the role of social caseworkers in the process?

This paper elaborates on the findings of this research specifically focusing in guiding question number b) What are the coping strategies employed by women Victims of human trafficking? The next section of the paper dwells on the theoretical framework followed by methodology that was adopted and used for the study, then analysis of the key results of the study; recommendations made by the study; key implications of the study to social work practice and a conclusion including suggestions for further research.

## STUDY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework can be looked at as a theoretical mirror upon which research work is viewed and is also a way of describing, analysing, interpreting and predicting a phenomenon. The theoretical framework employed to analyse this study was phenomenology and specifically the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition. Lavery (2003) defined phenomenology as a term encapsulating both a philosophical movement and an array of research approaches. Applied to research, phenomenology is the study of phenomena: their nature and meanings (Finlay, 2009). Phenomenology can be defined as a discipline that “aims to focus on people’s perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; a focus on people’s lived experience” (Langdridge, 2007:4). Phenomenology has several sub branches namely; a) Transcendental phenomenology b) Existential phenomenology c) Interpretive Phenomenological Approach and d) The Hermeneutic phenomenological tradition.

This study theoretical framework revolved around hermeneutic phenomenology as expounded by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenological standpoint which emphasises the fact that people cannot be studied in isolation to their culture, family traditions, community values or the historical period in which they live underpinned this study. Central to the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition is the fact that reality is socially constructed hence society is a fragile human construction and social products are humanly meaningful acts that appear as supra-human entities (Groenewald, 2004). To Heidegger, phenomenology is politically neutral and non-judgemental. It is of paramount importance to note that hermeneutic phenomenology emphasises the need to study the interpretive structures of experience, how people understand and make sense of their surroundings notably themselves and others (Groenewald, 2004). Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2003), critical to the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition is the situated-ness of research participants in their milieu viz the broader socio-cultural and economic-politico context. Thus, the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition is of the idea that people cannot be studied in isolation to their culture, family traditions, community values or the historical epoch in which they live (Groenewald, 2004). This study therefore sought to understand the lived realities and experiences of victims of human trafficking at the community level. The experiences were to be explored from the recruitment process, actual trafficking and exploitation, rescue and reintegration. This paper specifically focuses on experiences during the community reintegration and empowerment of the victims.

One of the key terms that will be dealt with in this paper is community work/development which relates to a core social work approach or methodology aimed at working with community or members of the community who are disenfranchised, or marginalised. Community work in rural settings especially relates to identification of safety nets which can facilitate collective rehabilitation and empowerment for victims of trafficking. Understanding the community dynamics is very important for the sustainable and long-term empowerment of the identified victims.



## STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research method. According to (Kumar, 2014) a qualitative research approach allows for an open, flexible and unstructured mode of enquiry. Additionally, qualitative study was specifically chosen in order to capture as many details for interpretation as is possible most of which details were subjective in nature and helpful to the exploratory nature of the topic. O'Leary (2010) noted that qualitative research attempts to understand behaviour and institutions by getting to know persons involved and their belief, values and emotions. A qualitative methodology was hence utilised in order to spotlight the narratives of forgotten women victims of trafficking as well as their experiences and coping strategies. In order to maintain confidentiality of the informants' codes made up their initials were used to reflect the direct quotations and experiences from the in-depth discussions.

The research was conducted in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The population of the study was women victims of international human trafficking domiciled in Harare, Zimbabwe. A sample population of twelve victims of trafficking was sampled using the purposive sampling technique. In addition to the 12 victims of human trafficking 18 key informants were purposively selected broken down as follows 12 family members and friends of the victims of trafficking (one per survivor), two government officials who were members of the interministerial committee on human trafficking, one each from the International organization of Migration, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and from at least two implementing Non-Government Organizations working directly with victims of human trafficking. Total number of respondents in the study was 30. Issues studied were personal and sensitive, hence, making purposive sampling an ideal sampling technique. Cases were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the research. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), purposive sampling is adopted when the sample being investigated is quite small; it relies on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting the unit of study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants while two focus group discussions were held with victims of human trafficking. The key informants interviewed included social workers in both government (Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare) and non-governmental/intergovernmental organizations like IOM, and UNICEF. Additionally, social workers operating at policy level through the Anti trafficking taskforce were also interviewed as key informants. The social workers from IOM were specifically targeted as they had elaborate reintegration grant schemes. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had incorporated the victims under the public assistance programme in addition to providing temporary shelter and individual counselling for the victims as per their mandate in the Trafficking in persons act of 2014 chapter 09:25.

The data was analysed using the concept-modelling approach, which involves two stages: analysis and synthesis. During the data synthesis stage of the study, testing the validity of the concepts was done through seeking confirming and disconfirming evidence. Once all relevant concepts were identified and validated, synthesis was achieved through an examination of the relationships between the concepts developed. A comparative approach was used for the purpose of understanding how they relate to one another. The identification of the relationships between concepts results in the concept model. The concept model visually represented the relationships between the concepts and the social situation of the study.

Apart from observing ethical issues, the researchers obtained an ethical clearance certificate to conduct the broader study from where this paper draws its findings. Furthermore, data collected through in-depth interviews were analysed according to the themes that emerged.

Cases were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the research. Those who were between eighteen years and forty-five years were chosen. Current trends in trafficking show that women who are still able-bodied and in this age range have constituted the largest



number of the victims of human trafficking in Zimbabwe. Picking the key informant (friends) for this study was contingent on the period of time the key informants have known the person in question. Thus, those who have befriended and known a certain participant for a substantial period of time (at most a year) in most cases have much information to share and therefore were selected to participate in the study. At least one key informant (friends) per survivor was selected. In addition to family members and friends, technical persons and first line officers working on both policy and implementation levels were purposively sampled as well. To this end, the following were interviewed: two members of the Government of Zimbabwe Inter-ministerial Committee on TiP, TiP focal persons in the IOM and UNODC responsible for Zimbabwe, two first line officers working with victims of trafficking from the Department of Social Services and a local Non-Governmental Organization providing shelter for victims. A sample of six professional key informants was selected using the purposive sampling technique. These six professional key informants were selected (sampled) based on the posts they hold in their respective institutions. The total sample for the study were 12 Victims, 12 key informants (family) and 6 key informants (technical officials) to give a total of 30 participants.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY – SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COPING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY WOMEN VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In this section, the findings of the study are presented according to the themes that emerged, and a discussion is given thereof. The second research question generated findings, which highlighted the socioeconomic and psychological coping strategies employed by women Victims of human trafficking. The coping strategies employed were given through semi-structured and focus group discussions with the victims of trafficking. Table 1 shows a graphic representation of the themes and sub-themes which emerged during interviews. There were two main themes, which emerged from the data gathered. These themes are psychosocial coping and economic coping. The results for the second objective which form the basis of the article focused more on the experiences of the Victims at community level. The key informants' results are not prominent in this article as they contributed mainly to policy and other sub themes. The results detailed below focus on community empowerment of the Victims.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes concerning the psychosocial and economic coping strategies employed by women Victims of human trafficking Themes Sub-Themes Issues raised

Themes	Sub-themes	Issues raised
Psycho-social coping	Building peer allies with those who were in such situations	One major form of psychosocial support for the Victims was keeping contact details of fellow victims who they travelled together with and together plan escape strategies. Peer allies were found to be very important and remained bonded together even after rescue.
	Attending workshops on post-traumatic coping	These were organised by civil society organizations on return and after rescue. In addition to mere attendance some received individualised counselling after the workshops.
	Seeking psychological help from psychologists	Coping also include getting counselling from psychologists. These psychological sessions were sponsored by civil society organizations following discovery that the victims needed more psychosocial support and psychotherapy.



Economic coping	Finding new employment opportunities locally	To cope economically, women victims of trafficking reported engaging in informal job activities such as vending. To be successful these small scale and informal initiatives depended heavily on broader family and community support.
	Seeking financial support from civil society organizations and philanthropists and relatives for reintegration	Coping economically also involved seeking for help from civil society organizations in the form of reintegration grants and relatives. The family was very central in linking up the returned migrants with such opportunities within the community.

**Psycho-social coping**

One of the themes which emerged from the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were that concerning the psycho-social coping strategies employed by participants after the traumatic experiences of trafficking. The sub-themes, which emerged from this theme, were building peer allies with those who were in such situations, attending workshops on post-traumatic coping and seeking psychological help from psychologists. These sub-themes are presented and analysed in the sub-sections below.

***Building peers allies with those who were in such situations***

Most participants stated that they usually build what they termed peer allies'. These according to the data gathered are women victims who had also fallen prey to trafficking. Through building these peer allies' participants stated that they will be able to cope better through sharing experiences.

*“Peer allies have been very helpful to me... meeting up fortnightly helps us share our experiences which makes me cope psychologically”* (P.M.).

The same was said by P.P. who said:

*“You find strength through, sharing your experiences with those who would have undergone the same ordeal as yours... that has been helpful to me a lot.”*

In the case of women who were trafficked to the Middle East their repatriation was done in stages and groups of between 5 and 10 Victims at a time, and most of the relations formed during the trafficking process in the Middle East, or during the stay at the Zimbabwean awaiting repatriation after being rescued or during the plane back home. These peer relations despite being formed under especially difficult circumstances endured over time and mutated into therapeutics relationships.

In some instances, some women worked together as Zimbabweans on the same premises and within those circumstances, strong camaraderie and friendships grew. This was the case for P.P. who said:

*“At the three-storey house I was working, there was a Zimbabwean working there already and together we would discuss our escape and rescue strategies using my secret phone to text home”* (P.P.).

In addition to the above some women were recruited from the same neighbourhood, community, or church. Because of this common background the victims had already formed strong bonds and alliances and during the discussions for possible support they preferred to maintain the peers' alliances. From a community empowerment perspective, it was therefore key that these peer alliances are noted and considered in the reintegration process. With peer support and coming from a group that endured same experience chances of successful long-term reintegration were higher than separating the girls as individuals.

***Attending workshops on post-traumatic coping***

Some participants reported attending post-traumatic coping workshops held in the city. These to them have been helpful for them to cope psychologically. Through these workshops, participants



reported meeting up with other people who would have undergone trafficking where they share and through the help of psychologists, they will then cope better. One participant noted: *“Post-traumatic workshops have been very helpful... through tips from psychologists and the sharing of experiences is also helpful”* (P.J.).

In line with that, P.E. also noted:

*“These workshops [post-traumatic] workshops have been of great help, and then helped me to cope psychosocially...”*

Employees of civil society organizations with supervision from government officials mainly facilitated these workshops. Government officials were drawn from the Ministries of women’s affairs, home affairs, and social services. Most workshop participants were encouraged to join social media platform groups for victims only to continue the relations after the workshop as well as received updates on possible reintegration assistance and further psychosocial assistance that could be extended.

### ***Seeking psychological help from psychologists***

Similarly, some participants stated that they visit psychologists (provided free by Civil society organizations) in order to get help psychologically. Through sessions with psychologists, participants reported managing to cope psychologically.

*“I visited a psychologist soon after landing from the Middle East, sessions with him proved extremely helpful”* (P.F.).

For the few victims who were provided with temporary accommodation upon arrival, the reintegration assistance package included psychotherapy sessions with trained and experienced psychologists. The psychologist in the case of P.F. provided follow up support and provided three visits within a space of three months after release from the temporary shelter. However, the follow up visits were noted to focus on the victim only at the exclusion of other family members as well as the community within which the returned migrant resided in.

### **Economic coping**

One of the themes which emerged from the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were that concerning the economic coping strategies employed by participants after the traumatic experiences of trafficking. The sub-themes, which emerged from this theme, were finding new employment opportunities locally, seeking financial support from civil society organizations, local philanthropists in the community such as businessmen and farmers and relatives. The sub-themes are presented and analysed in the sub-sections below.

### ***Finding new employment opportunities locally***

After having returned home, most participants reported finding jobs locally in order to cope economically. Most of them reported being employed in the informal sector in order to eke out a living thereby coping economically.

*“I am now selling vegetables, I have no option, life has to go on, and the only way I can cope is to set up a small vegetable market...”* (P.G.).

In line with what P.G., P.H. said:

*“I am now employed in a salon; I had to find a job locally in order to cope economically.”*

A detailed analysis of the employment opportunities exploited locally noted that they are exclusively in the informal sector. Vending was the immediate fall-back position, hairdressing, and working again in the domestic sector. For the women in the domestic sector they indicated that the idea was to raise capital to supplement O levels or start an informal trading. One woman was volunteering with a local NGO.

For local opportunities in the informal sector as an empowerment option the victims relied more on the family and community networks. Some had already started simple hair pleating at home



starting with the immediate family members, extended family and the community in general. The success of such alternative options leaned heavily on the acceptability of the victims back into their communities by their community members without stigma. The success of the informal ventures hitched mostly with the community attitude towards the returned migrants.

### ***Seeking financial support from Civil Society Organizations, philanthropists and relatives***

Through looking for help from philanthropists, some participants are able to cope economically. Some participants reported getting financial help from well-wishers. This helps they stated was so helpful to them starting small business adventures, which cushion them from financial vulnerabilities.

*"A well-wisher gave me some money to start a business, I now own a small vegetable market, which has helped me to cope financially"* (P.E.).

P.M also reported getting help from a philanthropist, which has helped her to start a small informal business.

*"A philanthropist gave me some money used to start a small, second-hand clothes reselling business. It has helped me a lot".*

The well-wishers and philanthropists were noted to be in three categories, a) family members (including extended family) and community level acquaintances and b) Local philanthropists including business people and farmers and c) Formal civil society organizations operating in the areas of the Victims' origin. At family and community level resources were mobilised to assist in setting up small businesses. In some instances, the family paid return air tickets to return home as the government was overwhelmed. The community was also noted not only to provide financial resources but also opportunities for business and networking as well as linkages with locally available resources to start off. One returnee opted to purchase cattle and the village head provided space for cattle fattening plot to the women regardless of the common social norms that land is not provided to women traditionally. The success of the project therefore hitched on community support. As such any long term and enduring empowerment schemes have better chance of success when they are fully embraced by the community.

Formally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was mentioned several times as having provided reintegration assistance. The reintegration assistance was provided in the form of a USD 1 500 grant that was claimed upon submission of a mini business plan. However, the grant was supposed to be utilised in full within a period of six months after which it expired. While the seed money was very important as start-up capital for the victim other variables at community level are key to the successfully use of the grant for sustainable empowerment of the intended beneficiaries. The community plays an important role both in providing a market as well as other types of support to ensure the initiatives are sustainable.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FROM SOCIAL WORK THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

From the interviews and research conducted one of the major issues that came out was that human trafficking in its existence is a complex phenomenon with so many player and stakeholders. Each of the player and stakeholders have different roles to play as well as different interests on the issue. Nothing that happens or occurs in isolation and nothing can be understood in isolation, since phenomena and events are linked to a vast number of other phenomena and event. To this end once victims are rescued (which seems to be the major objective of most stakeholders both public and private) there is need to look at their circumstances in total especially family and community if their integration is to be successful and sustainable over time.

An in-depth analysis of the responses from the interviewees on their coping strategies noted that the issue of reintegration is complex beyond mere receipt of reintegration grant. While the grant is important to ensure the victims have a starting point there are several intertwined social processes



and issues that need to accompany the grant. Among the issues are stigma at community level, families accepting the victims back into the family set up, issues related to security upon return and the role of the community in guaranteeing this security. Before the economic aspects are addressed or along with the economic issues there is need to address the broader social and psychological issues to ensure the reintegration is sustainable over time and the community is safe from similar occurrence.

Against this background this is where the social work profession comes into play. From analysis of the several theoretical approaches and practice approaches analysed by the authors it was noted that probably the broader systems theory is very key in address such complex issues as human trafficking. Such a complex social construct such as human trafficking cannot be approached by using a linear or simplified lens and require a holistic perspective if a lasting solution is to be found for victims.

The complexity of human trafficking results from the interaction of a range of factors which include the nature of the crime as it is a process that takes time involving in certain instances several countries and severe brainwashing of the victims in the process; The range of perpetrators of the crime from single actors to large well-coordinated and complex criminal organizations operating at regional and international levels; The several and seemingly endless ways in which humans are exploited including but not exclusive to sex, forced marriage, domestic and farm labour, harvesting of vital organs among other forms; and the variety of contextual factors (social, economic, cultural ). As noted by Laczko (2005:42) who asserts that human trafficking 'crosses so many disciplinary... boundaries' that it requires the incorporation of a range of perspectives originating from more than one discipline. The complexity of human trafficking provides social workers an opportunity to utilise complex social work theories to come up with innovative long-term solutions to this 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge.

According to Anderson et al. (1999), A system may be defined as an organised whole made up of components that interact in a way distinct from their interaction with other entities and which endures over a period of time. In analysing and coming up with long terms situations of victims of trafficking there is need to fully understand the system around which each victim relies and how they interact with the system. During the process of assessment, intervention evaluation and conclusion of each and every case there is need to ensure the whole system is systematically analysed. Teater (2010), asserts that the goal of the social work intervention is to promote human growth, development and social justice.

From the interviews captured in this study it can be noted that the challenges the victims faced could not be reduced to one linear challenge rather they emanate from several issues and all these have to be addressed. In addressing the community within which the victims reside need to be involved from prevention and management perspective. The social worker's role becomes to assess risks in the community before reintegration is done, make recommendations for the in the best interest of the client after a careful and structured assessment process. The outcome of this process will be to diminish the influence of the identified problem in this case human trafficking.

The systems theory proposed above must be applied within the broad context of Community Social Work (CSW). According to Stepney (2018), community social work as a concept is relatively recent phenomenon aimed at mainly challenging oppression, reducing inequalities and committed to social justice (in this case for victims of trafficking). Being a new concept while is shows a lot of potential to help communities deal with preventive activities and enhancing informal networks the concept still needs more clarity in terms of definitions of what exactly is a community for example and how the concept is evolving over time, and the underpinning theoretical background of the phenomenon.

The community social work that could be applied here to working with reintegrated victims of trafficking works perfectly well with the systems theory. Gitterman and Germain, 2008 as cited by Stepney 2018, argue that the systems approach suggests that many problems can be tackled



by improving the fit between a person's environment and their needs, capacities and aspirations through the course of life. A good example would be social workers working with victims to identify support systems in their societies and how to positively utilise these to make positive and lasting changes in the lives of the victims as they reacclimatise with normal life after undergoing traumatic experiences in the trafficking process. Social workers have several options implementing community social work activities working with victims of trafficking including a) forming victims' groups at community level for mutual support and joint therapeutic sessions or b) coming up with community groups where victims participate share their experiences narratives and fears for community support in the reintegration process. The second option results not only in empowered victims but also empowered communities.

The community has several roles in empowering victims of human trafficking if the reintegration is to be successful including participating to ensure the security of the victims is assured to avoid revictimization; addressing stigma associated with being trafficked; serving as a market for any small projects that can be undertaken by the victims, and most importantly provide psychosocial support to the victims and their families. Involvement of the communities and the subsystems within it helps empower not only the victims but also the whole community. An empowered community is better off in withstanding the effects of trafficking than merely empowered individuals or empowered individual family units. The community is a strong social capital that needs to be harnessed beyond the provision of grants which in this instance only have to be used within six months. The community is always present, and its support comes in different ways. The immediate community including the family is central to the success of any reintegration efforts for victims of human trafficking.

The coping strategies demonstrated and shared by the Victims are key in remodelling social work interventions to ensure complete empowerment. The identified coping strategies shared in the findings are key to be pursued and promoted especially community and family level initiatives as well as addressing social norms related to stigma. Addressing sister issues such as social norms goes a long way promoting the success of community level empowerment initiatives. While case work is important during the humanitarian and rescue process reintegration works well using community work social work approaches. One on one case work was noted to be important from and post traumatic psychosocial perspective however as the survivor is reintegrated into the community more of community work is expected and has better results as broader family is engaged and other community supporting systems.

In addition to the findings above Busch-Armendariz et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of coordinating various actors in the delivery of services to Victims of human trafficking. Without proper coordination it is difficult to determine which are the players at community level, who is providing what let alone measure the successes of the different interventions and their impact on the targeted Victims.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the detailed analysis of the narratives and voices of young women victims of trafficking, their experiences at coping with the trafficking situation, the following recommendations were made:

**Primary prevention as a key empowerment strategy:** Entails empowering people (especially young women) and preventing them from being trafficked in the first instance. Primary prevention should be modelled around three main key activities namely: a) Research to establish baseline and context for the whole country especially communities where the victims have predominantly emanated from to come up with credible baseline including the dynamics and trends in human trafficking; communities are unique and empowering different communities requires different strategies hence the need for the baseline information to be specific to communities b) Once



the baseline is established and trends are known the next important step would be appropriate awareness raising and information dissemination using multiple channels and media. The awareness should be deliberately biased at ensuring the affected communities are targeted. The information disseminated should be empowering to communities, families and individuals to ensure in the face of increasing cases of trafficking the communities have enough information on how to respond and support would be victims. The awareness messaging should also target broader communities to support returning Victims and coming up with specific empowerment strategies suitable for young women in the respective areas. c) Last but not least is work around social norms to understand family and community decision making and negative social norms that may promote the trafficking of young girls. Social norms include working on enduring community negative norms such as stigma for returning Victims, Stigma is one major factor that may impede the success of any empowerment initiatives hence the need to work strongly on social norms. In undertaking all these activities there is need for multisectoral coordination for all stakeholders including Government, Private sector, CSOs and communities. Each targeted community needs to be mapped out in terms of the organization of the community the gate keepers and where the community gets information on migration, how decisions are made and how they receive returning migrants and the necessary support.

**Secondary prevention:** Entails identification of those at risk and supporting them to get out of the situation and facilitate their reintegration into society as well as minimise chances of revictimization. Trafficking thrives mainly because there is demand and in secondary prevention there is need to engage with the consumers of commercial sex as well as cheap domestic labour. Provision of shelters and further counselling and psychosocial support for identified victims. Empowerment of Victims of trafficking takes several stages including initial accommodation in shelters where they are not ready to return to their families. Rushed reintegration to communities where the traffickers and their recruiters may be staying has the effect of negatively affecting the empowerment process. It is therefore key that important that as part of empowerment and secondary prevention, each trafficking case is assigned a case worker who draws up a case plan starting with immediate needs followed by long term empowerment needs including available resources at community level and any type of support that can help entrench the empowerment process. Adherence to the care plan from case intake through to assessment follow up and closure helps structure the reintegration process and ultimate empowerment.

In some instances, it was noted that brokers for trafficking emanate from the same communities where the victims reside, and the community becomes key in flushing out such individuals at the same time ensuring Victims are safe. In the presence of their former traffickers or runners it is practically impossible for the Victims to be empowered.

**Tertiary Interventions:** Entails offering services to those who are Victims of trafficking as well as longer term support and policy interventions targeting young women. As part of tertiary intervention current legislation needs to be reviewed to strengthen the reintegration aspects as well as make victim compensation claims easier. In addition to this there is need to promote cross border cooperation as trafficking cannot be dealt by one country but regionally at a minimum. How can the trafficking issues be taken to SADC level for example to come up with binding regional protocols including minimum standards of care and support for identified Victims.

Some of the participants reported that they only knew about human trafficking from what they read and saw on television, they did not have other knowledge on dealing with the Victims. There should be education courses to equip various stakeholders on the nature of human trafficking and how to deal with the Victims. Training programs should be given to those that deal with the Victims. Workers in a shelter for victims specifically need specialised training to handle victims. Empowered communities are better in contributing to bottom up policy development. It is therefore key that communities have relevant information to contribute to policy as well as share their experiences with policy makers.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The findings and recommendations from this study brings to the fore several key implications for social work practice and some of these will be itemised below:

- **Social Workers training:** The nexus between social work practice and the general migration discourse cannot be overemphasised. There is need to extent the scope of current casework approaches to expand beyond the traditional settings to include the broader migration discourse especially working with victims of trafficking and international law. In line with this (Edwards et al., 2017) emphasises the responsibility of helping professionals, including social workers to make an effort to educate themselves on topics they are not familiar with by finding outside seminars or trainings to gain more knowledge. In addition to this he further reiterates the need for agencies to provide educators who can go out into the community and provide knowledge to those working with victims and Victims of human trafficking.
- The role of social work in policy advocacy as part of social work upstream work is very key. Social workers need to engage with governments and regional policy makers to make cases for victims and advocate for responsive policies and inter country cooperation.
- Work in social norms and family (or community level) decision making and the social sanctions applied for lack of compliance is one area social work has to play a central role. Some of the victims were actually encouraged to travel by families regardless of glaring risks.
- Last but not least continued social research is paramount especially following the victims to understand their resilience over time and what lessons can be learnt for future intervention. Resilience of victims needs to be understood within the context of their community. Without an empowered community resilience and empowerment of victims will be very difficult and most not sustainable over time. Social research in applying social work theories in practice becomes very key especially in the upcoming disciplines like migration. Research in the nexus between humanitarian intervention and longer-term development approaches is a fertile area to further explore among other research areas.

The sub theme of migration including sub sectors such as human trafficking, internal displacement and refugees remains of the most interesting contemporary issues for 21st century. The recent international adoption of the Global Compacts on migration and refugees attest to this argument. In light of this migration and social work remain an interesting area for deep dive research of the several sub sectors in the migration framework.

## CONCLUSION

This paper shared findings of research whose aim was to explore the experiences of woman victims of trafficking in Zimbabwe through their own voices. The paper elaborated on the methodology used and a detailed presentation of the findings focusing on the copying mechanisms employed by Victims of human trafficking to pick up the pieces after the reintegration process. The data was analysed using the concept-modelling approach. The reasons leading to trafficking situation included the loss of parents/primary guardians who were breadwinners and therefore being forced to look for jobs, vulnerabilities emanating from divorces were also been noted. Upon being rescued, freed and coming back into the community to pick up the pieces, Victims reported facing stigma, blame and stereotyping. In analysing and discussing the findings the paper noted that it is key that a systems approach to empower the victims, their families and the community is considered given the complexity of human trafficking as a subject. Without empowering communities, it is difficult to focus on the individual only while ignoring their support system at community level. Human



Trafficking remains a relatively contemporary migration and social work sub theme straddling the realms of individual casework, community work and in-depth insights into criminology. Against this background it is key that social work practice evolves to link these sub themes together. Any prevention and intervention approaches need to understand this background if they are to be successful at all levels. Implications of the study to social work practice were divided into three primary, secondary and tertiary.

## NOTES

MSW: The paper emanates from the Master's in social work dissertation submitted to the University of Fort Hare in 2017 titled: Human trafficking in Zimbabwe: The narratives of women Victims of human trafficking in Harare.

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# Empowerment of Sexually Abused Children in South African Communities

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## Abstract

**OBJECTIVE:** As child sexual abuse haunts South African communities, this paper aims to present the nature of empowerment services rendered by the non-profit sector for child sexual abuse in the Western Cape, South Africa. **METHODS:** A qualitative research approach was applied to interview 20 participants at six non-profit organisations (NPOs) who render empowerment services in communities haunted by child sexual abuse. **OUTCOMES:** Findings of the study indicate that participants execute an empowerment approach by means of a process which entails building relationships, determining goals, identifying strengths, developing action plans, executing plans, attaining goals and ending relationships. The findings also indicate that sexually abused children in South African communities are empowered with micro level intervention to deal with the consequences of their abuse. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Service providers should be equipped to empower sexually abused children with meso and macro level intervention in addition to micro level intervention.

## Keywords

child sexual abuse, South Africa, empowerment services

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## INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, the number of children who fall prey to sexual abuse is horrifying and is indicative of communities facing a crisis in terms of the extent of sexual offences committed against children. The South African Police Service Annual Report of 2017–2018 indicates a total of 23,488 reported cases of sexual abuse against children demonstrating a 3.2% decrease in reported cases year on year (SAPS, 2018:98). The report ascribes this decrease in reported cases to community awareness campaigns and intensified targeted crime driven operations, conducted in communities classified as hotspots for child sexual abuse (CSA). However, the OPTIMUS Study (2016) disputes this reported decrease and states that the actual prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa remains unknown. It is estimated that there is an under-reporting rate, which ranges from one in nine to one in thirteen cases not being reported to the police (OPTIMUS Study, 2016). Due to this extent of child sexual abuse, not only is South Africa, but the world over UNICEF established an International Rescue Committee, which is a compilation of the Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse Guidelines for health and psychosocial service providers in humanitarian settings<sup>3</sup>. This document aims to empower service providers, including social workers, to provide high quality care and empowerment to sexually abused children and to their families (UNICEF, 2013). As a signatory to UNICEF South Africa adheres to these guidelines as legislation and policy, such as the Constitution (RSA, 2006), the Children's Act No 38 of 2005, the Integrated Service Delivery Model (RSA, 2006) and the Framework for Social Welfare Service (RSA, 2013) all address child sexual abuse. Therefore, it is clear that on a macro level South Africa appears to be successful in establishing policies and legislation to guide empowerment services for child sexual abuse. However, closer attention needs to be given to the implementation of these policies and legislation to address societal problems such as child sexual abuse in communities.

### Child sexual abuse and empowerment

Child sexual abuse has been defined in various ways over a period of twenty years in a number of national and international policy and legislative frameworks. These include, but are not exclusive to the Encyclopaedia for Social Work (Conte, 1995), guidelines from the World Health Report (WHO, 2003), the Children's Act, No 38 of 2005, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2006) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2015). Considering the varying definitions, child sexual abuse for the purpose of this study is seen as an act which is forced upon children and is for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator. It includes force and exposure to unlawful sexual activity, which can be of non-contact or contact nature. The non-contact abuse could develop into contact abuse; thus, inferring that exposure to pornography and exploitation for commercial gain may lead to prostitution which may result in rape and molestation.

In the light of the definition of child sexual abuse an empowerment approach to service delivery is needed to address the consequences thereof. Thus empowerment for child sexual abuse for the purpose of this study is considered to be a process which involves activities aimed to reduce powerlessness, allowing the child to perceive themselves as having the ability to exert influence in achieving their own goals and improving their quality of life (Neville, 2004; DuBois, Miley, 2010). This process therefore aims to discover, develop and use the untapped power within the child (Egan, 2018:45), allowing social workers to support sexually abused children to develop power to address the challenges which they face in the communities in which they live (Ruffolo, Perron, Voshel et al., 2016:24). This should in turn allow them the opportunity to take control over their lives and achieve self-direction (Adams, 2008).

Empowerment services to sexually abused children in South Africa are however lacking (Richter, Dawes, Higson-Smith, 2004; Waterhouse, 2008). For this reason, the Integrated Service Delivery

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.unicef.org>



Model (ISDM) (RSA, 2006), places emphasis on child sexual abuse as a social pathology faced by South African communities and recognises the inability of service providers to provide adequate empowerment services. The South African government further strengthens the need for services to children within its National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment (RSA, 2009), as it identifies sexually abused children as a prioritised target group, within the community. From this, it is evident that empowerment services must be made available in communities where sexual abuse is rife. Consequently, the need exists to investigate the nature of empowerment services, which are available for child sexual abuse in South African communities.

Various authors (Mullen, Martin, Anderson et al., 1996; Bannister, 1998; Saywitz, Mannarino, Beliner et al., 2000; Bolen, 2001; Corcoran, Pillai, 2008; Waterhouse, 2008; Mathews, Loots, Sikweyiya et al., 2012) draw attention to the need for sexually abused children to receive empowerment services in the form of casework (micro level intervention) or group work (meso level intervention), social support and debriefing by service providers within communities.

Based on the problem formulation, the research question for the study is: How do service providers at non-profit organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa, empower children who were sexually abused? The aim of this paper is thus to report on the nature of empowerment services rendered by service providers at non-profit organisations in South African communities.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to attain an in-depth understanding of the nature of empowerment services rendered to sexually abused children in South African communities, a qualitative approach was chosen to guide this study (Fouché, Schurink, 2011).

For the purpose of the study, phenomenology was applied as it is a form of research which is concerned with that which gives meaning to experiences of people. A combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs were seen to be suitable for the study. The exploratory design was considered appropriate because it allowed for the gaining of new knowledge and insight into the nature of available empowerment services as rendered by non-profit organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa (Fouché, De Vos, 2011). In addition, a descriptive design was chosen to be used together with the exploratory design to offer an in-depth explanation of empowerment services rendered to sexually abused children in South African communities (Fouché, De Vos, 2011; Mouton, 2011).

Purposive sampling (Strydom, 2011) which is a form of non-probability sampling was applied to select a sample of 20 service providers at six NPOs, in the Western Cape, South Africa. As social workers and auxiliary workers' scope of practice both include providing counselling services to sexually abused children (SACSSP, 2019) they made up the population for the study from which the sample was drawn. The criteria for inclusion were that participants should be a registered social worker or registered auxiliary social worker, be employed at a registered non-profit organisation in the Western Cape (South Africa), render empowerment services to sexually abused children, and be conversant in English.

Telephonic and written contact was made with the directors and/or deputy directors of NPOs in the Western Cape in order to gain permission to conduct the study. Directors or their deputy directors were asked to identify prospective participants rendering empowerment services to sexually abused children. Those who were willing to participate were contacted telephonically and individual meetings were arranged, during which each participant was asked for consent to participate and for the interview to be recorded, before engaging in the data collection.

The twenty chosen participants were employed by non-profit organisations in the Western Cape, that are registered as such in terms of Chapter 3 of the Non-profit Organisations Act 71/1997, rendering services in the field of CSA. Three of the organisations' core business is CSA while others render general social work services in terms of the Western Cape Directory of Services for



Victims of Crime and Violence (Western Cape Government, 2018), which include services in the field of CSA.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the profile of the participants within the context of the NPOs in which they are employed.

Table 1: Profile of the service providers (n=20)

Participant	Position within the organisation	Registration of organisation	Years of experience in CSA	CSA Caseload
1	Social worker	NPO	08	60%
2	Auxiliary social worker	NPO	08	100%
3	Social worker	NPO	01	99%
4	Auxiliary social worker	NPO	10	100%
5	Social worker	NPO	05	100%
6	Auxiliary social worker	NPO	03	90%
7	Social worker	NPO	04	100%
8	Social worker	NPO	03	100%
9	Auxiliary social worker	NPO	09	100%
10	Social worker	NPO	03	100%
11	Social worker	NPO	14	50%
12	Social worker	NPO	03	30–40%
13	Social worker	NPO	02	Uncertain
14	Social worker	NPO	02	100%
15	Social worker	NPO	03	100%
16	Social worker	NPO	¼	100%
17	Social worker	NPO	05	98%
18	Social worker	NPO	20	5%
19	Social worker	NPO	10	90%
20	Social worker	NPO	26	85–90%

Table 1 indicates that 12 (60%) of the participants (n=20) were social workers and eight (40%) auxiliary social workers, registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions ([www.sacssp.co.za](http://www.sacssp.co.za)). Ten (50%) of the participants had less than five years of experience in the field CSA, five (25%) had more than five years of experience, three (15%) had ten or more years of experience and two (10%) had 20 and more years of experience in rendering services in the field CSA. Therefore, these met the requirements for inclusion in this study.

A literature review on the nature of child sexual abuse and empowerment services was done to gain a general theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of the study and because this is a form of deductive reasoning, the literature review served as basis for the tool for data collection (De Vos et al., 2011). The literature review clarified vague concepts and provided the researcher with the opportunity to draw logical connections amongst concepts which were included in the tool for data collection.

A semi-structured interview schedule, which was the tool for data collection, thus served as research instrument to guide face to face interviews with participants to explore the nature of empowerment services (Greeff, 2011). This was in order to gain an understanding of and interpret



how services providers at non-profit organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa, empower children who have been sexually abused. Tesch's eight steps for qualitative data analysis as described in Creswell (2014), were utilised to group information according to themes, patterns and trends and to investigate relationships between concepts and variables by paying careful attention to recurring ideas, use of language and patterns of thought. Member checking, also known as participant-validation, was a technique used for exploring the credibility of results (Birt, Scott, Cavers et al., 2016). Member checking was used to actively involve the participants to check and confirm results of the study. For the purpose of this study five of the transcriptions of interviews were returned to the participants in order to verify if it is a true reflection of the interviews. All participants verified the information.

Ethical clearance was attained from the Department Ethical Screening Committee (DESC) of the University of Stellenbosch, prior to the initiation of this study (Strydom, 2011) which was a study with low risk.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the findings of the study it became evident that service providers at NPOs use an empowerment approach to address child sexual abuse according to a process which is executed as phases.

Participants reported on how an empowerment approach provides them with the opportunity to discover, develop and use the untapped power within the child (Egan, 2018). Therefore, it allows the service provider to assess how those affected by CSA can develop power to address the challenges they face (Ruffolo, Perron, Voshel, 2016), by allowing them the opportunity to take control over their lives and achieve self-direction (Adams, 2008), as is demonstrated by the excerpts below:

"Making them gain their boundaries back, I think that is important they need to know and acknowledge that they've got the boundary, they can rebuild the boundary back, because when somebody gets into your space it's hard ... cause then you let everybody in." (Participant 12)

"Sometimes the kids feel that they are not listened to. Most of the kids blame themselves. So also if you as a social worker help them to deal with that, that faulty thinking, when you make them aware of their faulty thinking and also creating a safe space." (Participant 7)

Of importance for this study is that an empowerment approach to service provision for child sexual abuse which is executed by means of a process. This process has various phases which are similar to the intervention phases as described by Gitterman (2009) in the Life Model, which includes the preparation phase, initial phase, working phase and termination. Participants reported on how they executed the phases of an empowerment process with sexually abused children. Most of them could explain how they execute the phases of an empowerment process at micro level practice, but with regard to the execution of some phases, some were unable to report how the activities they use are specifically relevant to the needs of the sexually abused child, as will be evident from the findings. The findings of the study are presented to offer an in-depth description of the views of the participants as is appropriate when a descriptive research design is used. The following themes emerged:

### Theme 1: Preparation phase

Forming partnerships and sharing the helping process (Egan, 2018) with children who have been sexually abused is essential to an empowerment process. It also forms part of the preparation phase (Gitterman, 2009) for intervention, as it sets the tone for developing trust which is a key element to developing collaborative partnerships (Poulin, 2005). Various techniques and activities can be used to initiate a partnership with the child, as is described by some participants:

"By creating a safe environment, just let her be herself, to let her know that we are here to guide and to help her. So we have to do certain activities with them which encourage them to speak." (Participant 1)



“We do different types of activities like getting to know each other. You talk about yourself, you explain yourself then you allow the child to talk about herself as well, her strengths and weaknesses likes and dislikes. The child to feel free to talk... all information is shared within a non-threatening environment.” (Participant 10)

These findings, as illustrated in the narratives above, support the view of DuBois and Miley (2010) who indicated that service providers need to acknowledge children and respect their uniqueness in the intervention process. This is indicated by participants when they explain that activities are used within a safe, non-threatening, child friendly environment where children are encouraged to feel free to share information about their lives. However, they did not indicate how it was specifically relevant to child sexual abuse. Additionally, paving the way to building professional relationships between the service provider and the child is elaborated on in the sub-theme which follows.

### ***Sub-theme: Building relationships***

Developing trust, which is a key element to building relationships, according to Poulin (2005), is emphasised by the following statements of how participants build relationships with sexually abused children:

“To build a relationship with the child I think it depends on each child, each child is different, you can then formulate which activities can benefit this child.” (Participant 14)

“When you build a relationship with the child, it starts with your first session. Every relationship takes time... It’s important that you also start where the child is, what’s on the mind of this child when it comes to the session.” (Participant 8)

As is evident from the narratives above, relationship building takes time and is dependent on various factors. Most importantly, it is dependent on the child and where they are at. It is thus evident from the narratives that service providers are mindful of the importance of the best interest of the child principle, as stipulated in the Children’s Act No 38 of 2005. Furthermore, it is also evident that they are mindful that children who have been sexually abused, have experienced an invasion of their boundaries, as described by Lev-Wiesel (2008) who stated that children experience that their bodies are no longer being regarded as a “safe place”. These findings, furthermore, corroborate Ungar’s (2002) view related to the principle of intrinsic value of the New Ecology, which is to respect each individual.

It is against this background of articulating the situation unique to each child that service providers embark on a process to build a professional relationship and develop an understanding of the circumstances and the environment in which sexually abused children function; thus, also allowing for the appropriate selection of activities to empower the child to deal with the consequences of child sexual abuse (DuBois, Miley, 2010).

### ***Sub-theme: Using information gathering to determine goals and tasks***

Doing risk assessment in the preparation phase provides the opportunity to gain an understanding of sexually abused children’s experiences from their own perspective and the environment in which they function (DuBois, Miley, 2010). It further allows for the opportunity for the sexually abused child to take control of the processes in term of determining goals and tasks which provide direction to an empowerment process. Almost all participants indicated that the children are at the core of the empowerment process they are using and that the children are the main source of information with which they work, as can be seen in the narratives below:

“... they [children] are the main source of information. So they are the ones that have to give me the information about their home circumstances. (Participant 16)

If the child doesn’t tell me what going on, it’s difficult for me to know what’s going on, so I try to make that known to them. It’s a conversation that we have to have.” (Participant 15)

“... the child determines her own goals, I allow the child that self-determination and that freedom



of choice. It's actually a whole activity the goal setting by the child. Sometimes the sessions flow so into each other, that the child just step into goal setting, but the session wasn't about goal setting." (Participant 10)

These findings are indicative that service providers gather relevant information from the sexually abused child in order to determine goals and tasks. The unique nature of every child, particularly of sexually abused children is evidently considered (Department of Social Development and UNICEF, 2008; Johnson, Yanca, 2010). Furthermore, the findings also corroborate the argument of DuBois and Miley (2010) that it is important to recognise the positive contributions made by the children, thus allowing them the opportunity to determine their goals for their empowerment through structured alliances (Ungar, 2002).

The findings also verify the importance of defining the direction for an empowerment process (DuBois, Miley, 2010). Although children are central to their own empowerment; it is difficult for service providers to rely solely on the information provided by the child, as is evident from the experts above. Service providers therefore may have difficulty in establishing adequate goals and tasks with only the information gathered from the child, knowing that it may be insufficient. This may further hinder the service providers ability to believe in the potential of every sexually abused child (DuBois, Miley, 2010). This belief in the potential of the sexually abused child is demonstrated in the hope that the social worker has in the potential of change for the child (Glassman, Kates, 1986; DuBois, Miley, 2010) by making them central to the process and allowing them ownership thereof. However, if the child is the main source of information the potential for change may be limited.

## **Theme 2: Initial phase**

Participants shared their views on how they engage with sexually abused children in the initial phase of the empowerment process; hence, the emergence of the initial phase as a theme.

The initial phase of intervention involves assessment using assessment tools such as the one specified by the Learner Manual for Safety and Risk Assessment of children in the field of child protection services (Department of Social Development and UNICEF, 2008). This phase includes identifying the strengths of the child who has been sexually abused and the construction of an action plan for the empowerment process. These aspects are discussed as sub-themes.

### ***Sub-theme: Identifying strengths***

During the initial phase of an empowerment process the strengths of the sexually abused child should be identified in order to assist the child to cope with the trauma of the sexual abuse, and overcoming the adversity related to it (Gitterman, 2009; DuBois, Miley, 2010). Most participants indicated that they directly involve the children in the process of determining their own strengths; thus, making them central to the empowerment process, which is paramount to its success (Neville, 2004). This is because it aims to alleviate their feelings of powerlessness. Participants shared examples of how this is achieved, as is evident in the narratives below:

"I think with that you'd also need to include the child and say what are you good at, what makes you different to other people? So to get the child also involved yes ... in the process ... and if the child really struggles, because some don't really value themselves at that point and are not able to identify for themselves, as a therapist to say: 'I saw you doing this or that ... then I will start to identify ... I really thought when you did that ... that was great'. And maybe also to find out from the teacher, is there anything special that you can contribute or that I can say to the child that you've noticed." (Participant 14)

The excerpt above is indicative of the challenge faced by some service providers to get the child to be positive about themselves. So extra effort is needed to make the child aware of their own potential and strengths as is required by the empowerment approach to service provision (DuBois, Miley, 2010).



“By paying attention to it [strengths], by looking for it, by making a point of it. Uhm ... and I think once you start thinking like that, it becomes automatic, but it’s not automatic just to start off with.” (Participant 20)

These examples provide evidence of how service providers place the child at the centre of the empowerment by involving the child in activities and emphasising positive characteristics of the child. It does, however, not show how the activities they use are specifically relevant to the needs of the sexually abused child. Placing the child at the centre of an empowerment process is evident of the application of the principle of intrinsic value of the New Ecology which stipulates the respect for each individual described by the New Ecology (Ungar, 2002). This is done by identifying the strengths of the child; thereby reducing their sense of powerlessness and recognising the individuality of the child (Johnson, Yanca, 2010). This is further indicative of the consideration of the best interest of the child, as stipulated by national and international policy and legislative frameworks as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) and the Children’s Act No 38 of 2005.

These considerations will add value to the initial phase of an empowerment process as it will guide the sexually abused child to identify their own strengths, and it paves the way for the construction of the functional plan of action in which they should be actively involved (Potgieter, 1998; Lee, 2001; Miley, O’Melia, DuBois, 2004; Neville, 2004).

***Sub-theme: Constructing a plan of action for the empowerment process of recovery and healing***

The construction of the action plan for recovery and healing is an example of collaborative work between the service provider and the child who has been sexually abused, by assessing the available resources in the community and framing appropriate solutions for an empowerment process (Lee, 2001; DuBois, Miley, 2010), as is described in the narratives below:

“... we are able to do activities like: ‘What does my life look like right now and where I would want to see my life?’” (Participant 5)

It’s about setting goals. Then they have to write what their goals are and then they first write it down and when they done, they explain to you and we talk about it. (Participant 8)

“One of our goals is the goalsetting, what the child would want to achieve in the therapy, not just socially the goal settings, but what the child want to achieve. I break it down into three: therapeutically what they want to achieve, what the child wants to achieve socially and what the child wants to achieve academically.” (Participant 7)

The above narratives are indicative of the application of the New Ecology principles of diversity and diverse solutions and structured alliances (Ungar, 2002), as it demonstrates how participants embrace and accept the differences of each child, their unique circumstances and view of their own needs (Johnson, Yanca, 2010). This is important as there is a diverse range of consequences experienced by those affected by child sexual abuse, which means that different children will respond in different ways to child sexual abuse; hence, each child requires interventions unique to their needs.

From this study, it is noteworthy that not all service providers have a structured plan for the empowerment process of the recovery and healing of the child who has been sexually abused, as is evident from the narratives below:

“I don’t think I have a formal plan to be honest, I mean recovery and healing is the aim for all the kids at the end, but because you get to deal with so many different personalities and people.” (Participant 10)

“Everything I do must be child informed and child lead. But I’m not the kind of therapist that would sit on a verbal level and make the plan overt.” (Participant 20)

From the above narratives it is evident that not all service providers render services in a uniformed way which is indicative of not only the unique nature of the client system, in this case the sexually abused child, but also the diverse way in which service providers approach the execution of an



empowerment approach (Johnson, Yanca, 2010). It is particularly clear from the narratives that the child is at the centre of the empowerment process with the aim of restoring the goodness of fit between them and their environment (Gitterman, 2009), and that the relationship between the child and the service provider is important to the process (Poulin, 2005; Egan, 2018). Once alliances are successfully attained, the service provider and the child are ready to move to the working phase to achieve the planned goals; and focus once again shifts towards the next phase of an empowerment approach (Johnson, Yanca, 2010).

### **Theme 3: Working phase**

The working phase (Gitterman, 2009) involves activating resources, creating alliances and expanding on opportunities (DuBois, Miley, 2010) in order to address power imbalances and restore the goodness of fit with the environment which was lost as a result of CSA (Germain, Gitterman, 2008; Gitterman, 2009).

#### ***Sub-theme: Execution of an empowerment plan***

The execution of an empowerment plan is achieved through executing tasks (Gitterman, 2009) which are in the best interest of the sexually abused child (RSA, 2006), as is evident from the following passages:

“If I have my plan of action, I now set out, what me and the child are gonna do. If there’s anything she would like to address with me first; and if there’s nothing from her side then I’d say: ‘Ok fine this is what I’ve got planned for the day, is it ok? Are you up to doing it for today, if not, you don’t have to do it we can decide on something else’.” (Participant 10)

The example depicted in the narrative above is evident of the Life Model’s principle of stakeholder management, as this principle is about the interdependence in the relationship between social workers and the sexually abused child (Ungar, 2002). These relationships should, according to Poulin (2005), be collaborative and based on trust; if not, empowerment cannot take place. Absent in the narrative, however, is how the activities are specifically relevant to the sexually abused child.

#### ***Sub-theme: Resources required to execute the plan of action for an empowerment approach to address child sexual abuse***

Participants reported on resources they require to execute their plan of action for an empowerment process in cases of child sexual abuse. This yielded significant responses from participants, as can be seen in the narratives below:

“Play therapy equipment is important, having a space is also very important. Something that is now not directly linked to it, but which is also important often is, transport money for them to actually get there for them and their parent to be able to get there. Sometimes they even need something to eat, because, you see a child after school and he hasn’t eaten, you know, they not going to feel like that session.” (Participant 19)

“You need a skilled therapist who has a lot of self-awareness and is willing to be vulnerable and is willing to be person first social worker second. However, if I had to choose two things, it would be a blanket and bear. Because it immediately speaks to attachment and safety and you know you can do many things with blanket.” (Participant 20)

The narratives above are indicative of the practical resources which are required for service providers to render effective services. These resources include transport money to get to offices of the service providers. Once children arrive, they are also in need of food and a safe child friendly environment. In South Africa, this is particularly relevant given the high unemployment rate of 29% (STATSSA, 2019). Furthermore, according to the South African Social Security Agency’s Annual Report of 2017–2018, 44.8% of South African households are dependent on at least one state grant (SASSA, 2018). These statistics are indicative of a lack of money in households; thus, making children vulnerable, even in the context of receiving empowerment services after being



sexually abused. Therefore, by providing the sexually abused child with food, service providers display a sense of authenticity by recognising and fulfilling one of the most basic needs of the child as described in Section 28(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 2006) – the right to basic nutrition. Rendering empowerment services in a child friendly environment also requires resources such as toys in order to truly place the child at the centre of service delivery. Furthermore, for some sexually abused children it also means providing transport money to reach service providers. Service providers thus prioritise the best interest of the sexually abused child (Children's Act, No 38 of 2005). However, the needs of the child cannot always be met, due to a lack of resources as can be seen in the excerpt below:

“Resources are inefficient...” (Participant 11). “In the past there was also food [for the children], but that has stopped, because there is no funding it.” (Participant 1)

Findings of this study indicate that there is a lack of adequate resources to ensure effective service delivery to sexually abused children. These narratives are also indicative of the reality of a lack of resources available to render adequate empowerment services to sexually abused children, in South Africa. These views echo the sentiments of Richter and Dawes (2008) and Mathews et al. (2012) who highlight that inadequate funding negatively effects service provision to sexually abused children, in South Africa.

#### **Theme 4: Termination phase**

Analysis of findings indicate that an empowerment approach is not an everlasting process; it has a beginning, middle and an end, as is characteristic of the social work intervention process (Gitterman, 2009; Johnson, Yanca, 2010; Hepworth et al., 2013; Ruffolo, Perron, Voshel, 2016). Therefore, termination marks the end stage of an empowerment process which according to DuBois and Miley (2010), have elements of monitoring and evaluation, as it recognises successes and integrates gains. Evaluating the goals and ending of the relationship with the sexually abused child will thus be discussed as sub-themes in the next section.

##### ***Sub-theme: Evaluation of goal attainment***

As an empowerment approach with the sexually abused child draws to an end, services providers and the child look back at the journey in order to determine if goals set at the beginning of the process were achieved. Participants practically describe this process as can be seen in the following excerpts: “... we set goals in the beginning of the session, go back and reflect, did we achieve those goals we didn't we achieve those goals. Then we also have evaluation activities that we complete with the child. It would involve basically, it would be from the client's side depending on the child's age uhm ... as well as from the caregiver's side.” (Participant 10)

“Termination would be a conversation with the caregiver as well as with the teacher, besides, just what you get from the child [in order to determine if goals were attained].” (Participant 19)

“I wouldn't necessarily say, let's look at where we started and where you are now, because that's a cognitive process which may not be helpful for the child. I also think though that preparing children and their caregivers for the possibilities of wobbly wheels in the future is also very important part of empowering.” (Participant 20)

The narratives above are indicative of evaluation being a process which is completed not only with the child who is at the core of service delivery, but also with parents and teachers. These findings are indicative of a holistic approach to service delivery, as is expected from service providers by various South African policy documents such as the ISDM (RSA, 2006) and the Framework for Social Welfare Services (RSA, 2013). For most participants the process of evaluation includes looking back and reflecting on whether or not goals were achieved. However, for one participant, the focus is not necessarily on looking back, but rather focussing on what may transpire in the future. This focus on the future may serve to sustain the empowerment of the child, however it may also be indicative of the empowerment approach being a process which stretches beyond



termination and recognises the vulnerability of the sexually abused child to experience setbacks, despite having achieved set goals.

The findings of this study further verify the opinion of Kirst-Ashman and Hull Jr (2006) that evaluation is a process and is necessary throughout the utilisation of an empowerment approach. Policy documents such as the ISDM (RSA, 2006), the National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment (VEP) (RSA, 2009), the National Plan of Action for Children in South Africa (RSA, 2012) and the Framework for Social Welfare Services (RSA, 2013) emphasise that evaluation is a vital part of empowerment service delivery to children who have been subjected to sexual abuse.

Once evaluation is complete and goals have seemingly been attained, an empowerment process is ready to shift focus (Johnson, Yanca, 2010) to the final phase of the process, which is the ending of the relationship. This will be discussed next, as sub-themes.

### *Sub-theme: Ending the relationship*

Termination marks the end of the process of empowerment. It demonstrates that intervention is not everlasting (Johnson, Yanca, 2010) and reiterates the belief that social workers see potential and competencies of sexually abused children in the strengths (DuBois, Miley, 2010). This is demonstrated by the narrative below: "By celebrating the success we do have an ending off party which the child chooses in which format that's going to be ... ." (Participant 20).

From the above narrative it is evident that the process of empowerment draws to a close once goals are reached and the child is ready to function on their own. These findings reiterate that the service provider steps into the lives of sexually abused children in order to implement the intervention process to restore equilibrium so that the goodness of fit between the child and their environment (Gitterman, 2009) can be restored. The fact that empowerment services have an ending encourages self-reliance and places emphasis on the fact that social work services are not everlasting, according to the Framework for Social Welfare Services (RSA, 2013). However, during termination the service provider ensures that the child is prepared for life after intervention. Children who have been sexually abused may, over the course of their lives, have to cope with other interrelated issues, such as traumatic life events, difficult life transitions (court proceedings) and environmental pressures, alongside dysfunctional interpersonal processes such as poverty and re-victimisation (Ruffolo, Perron, Voshel, 2016). Furthermore, risk factors which were present before the sexual abuse may still be risk factors after an empowerment process has concluded.

Termination, however, is indicative of the readiness of the sexually abused child to function independently, which means a restoration of power (Neville, 2004), and that the restoration of the equilibrium between the child and their environment has taken place to some degree (Gitterman, 2009). However, this may not mean that the child can never return to seek services. For this reason, termination retains an open-door policy (Johnson, Yanca, 2010) as is illustrated in the narrative below: "We would let the family know that there's is an open-door policy, any time when they need to ... when they looking for advice they are welcome to come to the office. We don't end the relationship." (Participant 11)

The findings of this study corroborate with the views of Potgieter (1998), who states that change cannot be achieved without assistance from social workers that have a key role in empowerment. This is a process which sees services providers rendering services at micro, meso and macro levels in the community (DuBois, Miley, 2010; Seabury, Seabury, Garvin, 2011; Hepworth et al., 2013; Zastrow et al., 2019).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study has shed light on the nature of empowerment of sexually abused children rendered by NPOs in South Africa. Although an empowerment approach to service provision is mainly used



at micro level of direct service delivery, it is significant to note that if these services are absent for sexually abused children, the quality of their lives in the community will be directly affected due to the consequences of child sexual abuse they experienced.

Furthermore, this study has found that the execution of an empowerment approach, which is executed by a process, is the same as the general social work process for micro level practice which has a beginning, middle and an end phase. Of importance is that this process, which participants use for empowerment, is made up of the preparation phase which sets the tone for professional relationship building with the sexually abused child not only to gain trust, but for the service provider to understand the sexually abused child and the environment in which they live and to identify their strengths. Within the South African context it is important to note that the most basic need, such as food, becomes central to the empowerment process. Additionally, parents do not have the money to transport children to the offices of the services providers, therefore, NPOs often have to provide this resource, in order for empowerment services to be rendered to sexually abused children. Without resources such as food and transport money, empowerment services to sexually abused children cannot take place. Only when these resources are sufficiently available then the service provider can begin to build a professional relationship in order to engage with the empowerment process. Thus, understanding of the environment from which the sexually abused child emanates, becomes crucial for the establishment of goals and tasks for the empowerment process with the child during the initial phase. The advent of the empowerment process with the sexually abused child is thus dependent on the successful establishment of a reciprocal professional trusting relationship, which could be dependent on the availability of resources of the service provider.

It is evident that the process of empowerment at micro level is guided by activities, which service providers employ during the intervention phase, all of which place the child at the centre of service provision. The aim of these activities is to alleviate the sense of powerlessness and to place the child back in control of their own lives. What is, however, lacking in the findings of this study is how these activities are actually used to meet the specific needs of children who have been sexually abused.

As services are not everlasting, service providers bring the individual relationship to an end once goals that were set during the initial phase of the empowerment process are reached. Children are prepared well in advance by service providers for when termination is set to take place. They are also prepared to face a world outside, after intervention as they often continue to live in the community where the abuse took place. The findings emphasise that ending the relationship must be a special event; one in which the child is once more placed at the centre of the process. All their successes are recognised in terms of reiterating strengths and at the same time recognising that there may be difficulties in their life journey beyond the services of the service providers. Assurance is provided by service providers that should they need help, the organisations' services will still be available, thereby retaining an open-door policy. It shows that the unique nature of each child is respected in the empowerment process, and that termination is not necessarily the ending of the professional relationship as the open-door policy is retained.

In conclusion the findings of the study reveal that empowerment services for sexually abused children in South African communities is mainly achieved with micro level intervention services offered by NPOs.

Further research would benefit from examining the long-term effects of the use of micro level intervention with sexually abused children for their empowerment and for them to deal with the consequences of child sexual abuse. Additionally, further research ought to examine how service providers at NPOs could be made aware that the same empowerment approach and process that they are familiar with could be adjusted and applied for meso and macro level intervention to address child sexual abuse. Lastly, an investigation into how a holistic and integrated approach, combining micro, meso and macro level intervention could be achieved to empower sexually abused children in communities in South Africa, is recommended.



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# Emancipatory, Relationship-Based and Deliberative Collective Action: The Power of the Small Group in Shifting from Adversity to Hope, Activism and Development

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## Abstract

The main OBJECTIVE of this article is to conjoin theory and practice through the voices of a “service user/giver” and a university professor, to reflect on the voluntary work that we engaged in 22 years ago. The METHOD constitutes a theoretically informed, reflective article underscored by emancipatory social work. The OUTCOME reflects an ethical imperative to shift from neoliberal, new managerial and positivist paradigms to participatory and democratic ways of working with people. This article, which demonstrates the power of the small group in supporting the transition from adversity to hope, activism and development in the area of HIV/AIDS, has enormous SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS. On account of the dominant, influences of neoliberalism, new managerialism and positivism, which prioritize profit above people and the environment, demand that social workers do more with the least resources in the shortest period of time, and privilege detachment and neutrality, social work has become increasingly de-professionalized. At the heart of emancipatory social work, which humanizes science, is relationship and trust building; process; reflexivity; cultural sensitivity and responsiveness; the ability to tune into the life worlds of people; consciousness-raising in relation to intersectionality, power and privilege, building upon people’s altered consciousness to engage in deliberative, collective action, and politicization of the personal.

## Keywords

emancipatory social work, group work, HIV/AIDS, intersectionality, micro-macro intersection, deliberative collective action

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## INTRODUCTION

Born within the period of modernity, formal social work in the West began to take on the omniscient voice of science of the logical-positivist tradition. While this provided the profession with status and a legitimating framework, it began to prevail over the more humanitarian and community roots of social work (Franklin, 1986; Bisman, 2004; Sewpaul, Hölischer, 2004; Sewpaul, Henrickson, 2019). Logical-positivist rationality, which has come to be universalized, has significant impact on social work's ontologies, epistemologies and practices. Thus, the taken-for-granted education, research and practice frameworks, rooted in the natural sciences and transposed into the social sciences, that support researcher/practitioner non-involvement, detachment in working relationships, neutrality, generalization, replication, separation of the professional from the personal, technical-bureaucratic approaches, and the demand to prove one's truth according to positivist empiricism's all too often linear reductionist reasoning (Sewpaul, 2010). Such emphases have derided alternative and different ways of knowing and doing, supported by emancipatory social work, which has critical and radical roots. Logical positivist science and new managerial and neoliberal pressures in social work have superseded the emancipatory goals of social work, and the place of relationships based on care and compassion, and the ability to *be for the Other* (Levinas, 1985; Bauman, 1993; Sewpaul, 2010; IASSW, 2018), which social work must reclaim.

In this theoretically informed, reflective article we conjoin theory and practice, and the voices of a "service user/giver" and a university professor, to demonstrate the power of non-hierarchical, egalitarian relationships; subjectivities; relational ethics; and care, compassion and responsiveness to support transition from adversity to hope, activism and development in the area of HIV/AIDS. We call for a social work based on a humanized science and a humanized professionalism, with emancipatory social work at its core. The voice of Princess is reflected under the heading of the same title; the rest of the first person reference refers to Vishanthie. The use of "we" refers to the assertions claimed by Princess and Vishanthie. As a theoretically informed article, underscored by emancipatory social work, we eschew positivist impositions of what are deemed to be inviolate standards of scientific writing, and adopt a more creative approach to report on our working experiences and their outcomes.

## EMANCIPATORY SOCIAL WORK

Emancipatory social work theory and practice has various roots in what has been called Conflict theory; Critical theory; Feminist Social Work Theory and Practice; Anti-Oppressive Theory and Practice; Anti-racist Social Work; Structural Social Work Theory; Radical Social Work and Liberation Theology. It must be noted that even within these groupings there might be a broad range of leanings and dissenting views. For example, feminist theory has sub-divided into African feminism; Black feminism; liberal feminism; socialist feminism; developmental feminism; radical feminism; lesbian feminism; psychoanalytic feminism; and cultural feminism. As social scientist we fragment at our own peril! Liberation theology might take overt religious standpoints, such as Islamic, Buddhist, Christian or Hindu Social Work, or be underscored by more unifying spiritual dimensions that address core values and principles, that are aligned with those of emancipatory social work. Religions have the potential to oppress or to liberate; it is the liberation potential that emancipatory approaches embrace. What the various roots of radical and emancipatory social work have in common is understanding the structural dimensions of life and power dynamics based on intersecting social criteria, and understanding and undoing oppression and/or privilege (Warner, 2008; Collins, 2015; Kang, Bodenhausen, 2015; IASSW, 2018) and it "enables us to examine the social divisions and power relations that affect people's lives" (Sewpaul, 2013:118).

Emancipatory social work embraces these diverse origins, but moves beyond them to focus on liberation from the constraints of one's own thinking, recognizing the inter-connectedness between



individual consciousness and societal consciousness, and the importance of transforming both, directed towards deliberative, collective emancipatory action (Freire, 1970; 1973; Humphries, 2008; 2017). Central to emancipatory social work is the politicization and awakening of the self, and the development of action strategies that such awakening provides the potential for (Sewpaul, 2015). Conventional social work, even with its more critical roots tends to focus on issues, problems and concerns of the people who social workers engage with. While not eschewing the importance of understanding, and heightening the consciousness of people who we engage with, and adopting participatory methodologies to engage people as active agents, emancipatory social work turns the spotlight on us, as professionals. The focus is on how the constraints of our own thinking, and the worldviews that we hold might influence our conceptualization of people, their life challenges, the methods and strategies that we choose to use, and the goals that we aspire towards. This is highlighted in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (GSWSEP; IASSW, 2018) with principles 4.7 and 4.8 reading as: Social workers recognize that dominant socio-political and cultural discourses and practices contribute to many taken-for-granted assumptions and entrapments of thinking, which manifest in the normalization and naturalization of a range of prejudices, oppressions, marginalizations, exploitation, violence and exclusions.

Social workers recognize that developing strategies to heighten critical consciousness that challenge and change taken-for-granted assumptions for ourselves and the people whom we engage with, forms the basis of everyday ethical, anti-oppressive practice.

At the heart of emancipatory social work is understanding multiple sources of oppression and/or privilege and working towards more just societies (Freire, 1970; 1973; Gramsci, 1977; Giroux, 1997; Dominelli, 2002; Sewpaul, 2013; 2015), with authentic participation being key to this pursuit. This is highlighted in the voice of Princess, an HIV+ woman who was courageous enough to walk into her fears, and negotiate multiple disadvantages in her journey from hopelessness and despair to hope, and constructive community engagement directed at making a difference.

### **The voice of Princess**

This short write-up is a reflection of my living with HIV for 22 years. I have come a long way from the time that I was first diagnosed to now working as a HIV/AIDS counsellor at the KwaMashu Community Health Centre, employed by the Department of Health.

My son, Phumlani was born on 4 May 1996. A short while after he got very sick. He had persistent diarrhea and was passing blood in his stools. We first took him to an *isangoma* (traditional healer) as his father said he dreamt that the baby had a disturbance. The *isangoma* told us that the baby was affected by a bad spirit and that we had to do a prayer and make an offering to the ancestors, called *amagobongo*. The *isangoma* gave us traditional medicine, and she made marks on our body, using the same razor blade on all of us, and gave Phumlani enema. After that I took him to Addington Hospital where he was put on a drip, and I was asked to give consent for an HIV test. He was in hospital for two weeks. On the last day, the doctor came and broke the news to me. Phumlani was diagnosed with AIDS, not even HIV. That is how I got to know that I was HIV+. On first hearing the news, I first burst out laughing and I thought “it cannot be”, and then I cried. I went home in a daze and I could not believe what I had been told. I experienced all kinds of emotions, including denial, anger, guilt and fear. I was terrified of disclosure and afraid of death. When family and friends asked what was wrong with my son, I lied. I told them he had liver problems. I really felt bad about carrying the secret, but I was afraid of discrimination. I was afraid to tell my partner who was very abusive.

When Phumlani got sick again I did not take him back to Addington Hospital but to King Edward VIII Hospital. I was hoping that they would tell me he did not have AIDS. When they asked me if the baby had an HIV test, I said no, but they found the records on the computer. Phumlani was



admitted again. I was told to stop breastfeeding him and to put him on formula feed<sup>3</sup>. One of my striking memories was hearing a nurse in the ward shouting: "All these babies with AIDS must be discharged. They must go home. We have no beds for them." The discrimination against HIV+ persons was deep and it hurt me.

On one follow up out-patient visit, I met Dr. Nigel Rollins, from the pediatric ward (Ward N1 B) at King Edward Hospital. He informed me about the support group for HIV+ mothers, with babies with AIDS. I refused to go. I knew that HIV was not curable and I thought I was going to die. I thought there was no point. But Dr. Rollins was warm-hearted, kind and caring. He took time to talk to me and kept encouraging me to go. Finally, I joined the Bamabanani<sup>4</sup> support group that was coordinated by a non-judgmental, compassionate woman, who was an empathetic listener – Dr. Vishanthie Sewpaul. This was the beginning of my road to recovery, and becoming an AIDS counsellor, educator and activist.

When I went to the out-patient, support group, which was held once a week, I met other women who were in the same boat as me. I realized that I was not alone. We shared our trauma and pains, the awful guilt about transmitting the virus to our babies, our fears of disclosure, our fears of death, and our feelings of being abandoned by God. In all of this we were listened to. When we talked about our fears about being abandoned by God, and how, on account of our guilt and feelings of badness, we could not pray, Vishanthie discussed the option of calling in a pastor to offer spiritual support. Talking to a supportive, compassionate minister of religion made a difference. More than our fear of dying was our fear of how we were going to die, as we knew what the end stages of AIDS involved. This prompted us to begin lobbying for the legalization of euthanasia. The topic of euthanasia came up when a medical doctor came to the group to hear our views as she was involved in planning a conference on HIV/AIDS. One of the women asked this doctor, "When the time comes for us to die, why do you send us home?" Her response was, "Because we want you to die in the comfort of your own home." I responded saying, "That might be so for you, but it is not for us." We did not have the kinds of support or the homes to manage dying from AIDS. Vishanthie and her students<sup>5</sup> helped some of the women to disclose to their families or partners. The fear of disclosure was real. After I disclosed to my partner he used to beat me up badly, and I would sometimes go to the group with whip marks on my back. Through the support of the group I gained the courage to leave my partner. He was a soldier in the South African National Defense Force and remained in denial until his death. Vishanthie and her students tried to reach out to him but he refused to be involved in any way. He used to drink alcohol excessively. Once, while he was very drunk, he took Phumlani onto the road, holding him up and swaying him in front of a bus, screaming "I am not HIV+, my baby does not have AIDS."

As the group progressed, we had intensive and extensive skills training on counselling, facilitation skills, gender, and how to run HIV/AIDS education workshops. In doing so, Vishanthie and her students often co-facilitated workshops with us, especially in the beginning. We started with a peer support network programme for the newly diagnosed women at King Edward Hospital. This was then complemented with outreach in schools, children's homes, industries, and the university. I remember the one time when Vishanthie asked me to come and talk to her students. I was afraid as I thought that University students are very smart. Vishanthie assured me that

<sup>3</sup> Exclusive breast feeding in the first six months of a child's life has been found to significantly reduce mother to child transmission. See Seidel, Sewpaul and Dano (2000) for a discussion on the socio-cultural aspects of exclusive breast feeding.

<sup>4</sup> Bamabanani, an isiZulu word meaning to grip or to hold one another, was chosen by the women.

<sup>5</sup> Once established, Bamabanani served as a field placement that Vishanthie supervised. Apart from the direct engagement of educators with communities, student field placements provide an excellent medium of knowledge exchange between universities, service organizations and broader communities, as they allow for a two-way flow of knowledge, ideas and people.



I was an expert on my own experience. I went. It turned out to be a wonderful experience and the students had many questions for me.

But it was not all work. We all sat on the floor in a circle as we worked. We laughed at – or rather with – Vishanthie, as she struggled with isiZulu words that she could not pronounce. We often served as her interpreter. Vishanthie, and her daughter, joined us on picnics with our children, and we had some fun times on the beach. She was HIV negative, and of a different language, culture, race and status. But she understood where we were coming from. She stayed the course with us for six years. We trusted her, and as we engaged in the challenges together we recognized our common humanity in many ways. We also shared common hopes and dreams – a world that recognizes the power of *Ubuntu*<sup>6</sup> that humanizes all people, including those of us who are HIV+. In 1997, I lost Phumlani, my one and only child. This was one of my worst fears and a very difficult time of my life. I had no parents to support me. Nigel and Vishanthie could not save my baby. But they cared enough and they understood my pain. They came to the funeral and brought me flowers. The support of the women in the group, some of whom had lost their babies, also made a big difference to me.

The Bamabanani support group was regarded as one of the better practice models at that time. In 1998 it was filmed and shown on national television on World AIDS day. Despite my fears, pain and loss, I got more fully involved in AIDs work. I took the risk to have the main role in the movie. The aim of the movie was to break the silence around HIV/AIDS, to destigmatize AIDS, and to demonstrate that, with support, one could live positively with HIV. The producers did the filming in the support group at the hospital, and in my home in KwaMashu.<sup>7</sup> By this time, I had been separated from my partner. Interestingly, while he refused any support or counselling, and remained in denial to the end, he agreed to be part of the movie although he was on his death bed at that time. I, together with some of the other women in the group, were some of the lucky ones. As part of a drug trial, we were put on anti-retroviral treatment (ART) and that is how we managed to keep alive.

The women in the Bamabanani Support Group were also interviewed by the BBC to know their views about access to ART. The women served as strong advocates about making ART available in South Africa. We also joined the rallies of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), an organization that challenged the multi-national drug corporations to make treatment accessible. The TAC took the South African Government to the Constitutional Court. The Court ruled in favour of the people and ordered the South African Government to make ART available to HIV+ pregnant women to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

While the Bamabanani Support group lasted for six years, my work in the area of HIV/AIDS continues 22 years later. It was the support, counselling and all the skills training that helped me to get the job with the Department of Health. One woman from the group started a support group in a clinic in an informal settlement, and I know of one other woman, Lindiwe, who is

<sup>6</sup> *Ubuntu* roughly translates into humanity or African humanism, that has come to be seen as a Pan-African value (Mupedziswa, Rankopo, Mwansa, 2019). *Ubuntu*, the aphorism of “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, meaning “a person is a person through other persons” embraces the virtues of forgiveness, compassion, the inter-connectedness of human beings with each other and with the universe, and restorative justice.

<sup>7</sup> KwaMashu is located within the broader urban area of Inanda-Ntuzuma-KwaMashu (INK), a product of apartheid, designated for African Blacks. According to DPLG (2014) INK shares the following socio-economic characteristics: over 69% of the population being younger than 29 years; 40% unemployment; high rates of poverty; alcohol and drug abuse and crime; 26% of households have no electricity; 30% no piped water; an HIV prevalence rate of 39%. It is against this kind of contextual realities that the women’s concerns about being sent home to die, and their lobbying for euthanasia, must be understood. The management of the end stages of AIDS can be extremely challenging in the face of poverty, lack of electricity, proper sanitation and water.



still employed as a counsellor in a non-governmental organization called MATCH, Maternal Adolescent and Child Health Institute. Over the years I have continued with my HIV/AIDS outreach and prevention work, and I have counselled thousands of people who are HIV+. I am now involved in South Africa's implementation of the United Nations 90:90:90 programme. The aim is for 90 per cent of all people living with HIV to know their HIV status; provide antiretroviral treatment for 90% of those diagnosed; and achieve viral suppression for 90% of those treated by 2020. The targets are ambitious and the pressures are high. But I am happy to be part of a global community of AIDS workers who engage daily to stem the tide of HIV/AIDS, and to give a human face to HIV/AIDS. Over the years, Vishanthie and I continued to maintain an intermittent professional relationship, and I would sometimes participate in some of HIV/AIDS outreach work that she was engaged in. For example, in 2015 when she and her students worked in a school where there were some HIV+ learners, who had lost hope and were non-compliant with their ART, I spoke to the learners about my lengthy experience of living positively with HIV, and the importance of compliance with treatment. On 26 August 2019, I co-facilitated a workshop with Vishanthie with social work, psychology and nursing staff at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. On 27 August 2019, I joined Vishanthie in delivering a keynote address at a social work conference in Cape Town, with national and international delegates. We talked about how we can come together and work with people in participatory and empowering ways to take collective action.

### **The voice of Vishanthie**

It was the mid-1990s when HIV/AIDS was at its peak in South Africa, with KwaZulu Natal being the epicentre of the virus. Dr. Nigel Rollins, a paediatrician in Ward N1B from King Edward VIII Hospital – a large public hospital in Durban, KwaZulu Natal – called to say that he used to feel very guilty to tell women, “Your baby has AIDS you are HIV+. Sorry there is nothing we can do about it. Bye, bye.” He indicated that he had heard about the group work that I had done with HIV+ women<sup>8</sup>, and asked if I would help. Nigel cared enough to reach out and he wanted more for the women and their children, even as they faced death. ART was unavailable in South Africa in those dark days of AIDS denialism during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki; a denialism that only served “to reinforce the pervasive community denial around HIV/AIDS”, which is “certainly the antithesis of HIV/AIDS prevention” and impacted the offering of *hope*, a “rare and precious commodity” that South Africans were in great need of (Sewpaul, 2002:405). At that time, at any given time between 35-50% (i.e. 8 to 12) of babies in Ward N1B had had symptomatic HIV or AIDS; at one time over 80 percent of babies were HIV+, and mortality rates in Ward N1B indicated that 60% of deaths were HIV related. At King Edward VIII Hospital the 1997 anonymous antenatal survey reflected an HIV rate of 26.9% (Sewpaul, Rollins, 1999).

Given the high prevalence of HIV, the stance of the South African Government was unconscionable. In a scathing attack on Government's denialism and unwillingness to provide ART, I wrote, “We have for some inexplicable reason ended up in a very inimical situation in South Africa – an assured Constitution guaranteeing peoples' right to health, equality and to life. Only the South African Government, as embodied in the person of the President, is pro-death while citizens mainly through the advocacy and lobbying of the Treatment Action Campaign, are fighting Government for life” (Sewpaul, 2002:404). I went on to argue that, “There is clearly an inextricable link between care, counselling and treatment of HIV+ persons and prevention, for prevention, to a large extent lies in the hands of HIV+ persons” (Sewpaul, 2002:405). Apart from

<sup>8</sup> This was in 1987 in a hospital providing specialist treatment for tuberculosis (TB). Given that TB is one of the opportunistic infections linked with HIV, some of the early cases of HIV were diagnosed in the hospital, at a time when “HIV/AIDS posed a threat that had not yet been fully realized” (South African History Online, 2019).



the moral impulse to respond to the suffering of the women, it was knowing that *prevention lies in the hands HIV+ persons*, that prompted the group and community interventions.

On first meeting the women, I wanted to take a couple of steps back, as I felt that their material needs were beyond my scope. Their initial expressed concerns rested not on HIV and the impending deaths of their babies. Their immediate concern was more basic: “We cannot feed our children”, the guilt about this was accentuated in the face of their children’s terminal illness. They wanted milk and food. Remembering the community work principle of responding to the expressed needs of communities as a way of gaining entry, I engaged religious institutions of two different faiths that, in the generosity of spirit, mobilized their congregations and provided us with groceries on a monthly basis. As the psychosocial support and the multiple dimensions of the group deepened, the material support became less important. The women and I celebrated our strengths, our reaching out and our numerous engagements. We also lived through lows as we lost some of the women and all the babies to AIDS, and confronted our own mortality.

We all experienced existential crises at different points of the group’s life, affirming the embodied vulnerability of all of humanity (IASSW, 2018). Far from the positivist demand for non-involvement, neutrality, the separation of the personal from the professional, with boundaries reflective of “restrictive, artificial barriers that are not in keeping with the professional values and of the realities of practice” (O’Leary, Tsui, Ruch, 2012:135), I was involved and pained by the suffering of the women. Regarding the call for the separation of the personal from the professional, Bauman (1993:19) reflected: “... it does not always feel like that at all, not all stains incurred on the job – ‘in the course of the role performance’ – stay on the work clothes alone. Sometimes we have the unsavoury feeling of some of the mud spilling on our body, or the fatigues sticking to our skin too tight for comfort; they cannot be easily peeled off and left behind the locker [...] away from mere ‘role-playing’, we are indeed ‘ourselves’.”

What is important is not non-involvement but reflexivity, or as feminists would call it, *conscious partiality* (Mies, 1983:123) which, “enables the correction of distortions of perception on both sides and widens the consciousness of both.” As with the treatise of Kleinman (1998:376) on social suffering, I was acutely aware that, “Here is where fear and aspiration, desire and obligation, mesh in the close encounters of ordinary men and women with the pain and disaster and with the infrapolitics of power that apportion those threats unequally and distribute responses to them unfairly across social fault lines in actual worlds.” It was precisely my awareness of the *infrapolitics of power* being unfairly distributed *across social fault lines*, in apartheid South Africa, that enabled empathic entry into the life worlds of the women. An understanding of the structural determinants of people’s lives, and how intersectional social criteria such as race, class, gender and geographic location influence access to power, status and resources, would allow social workers to engage with all people with respect and dignity, and in non-pathologizing ways.

In apartheid South Africa, race and gender constituted the quintessential criteria in determining life opportunities, and it was the African Black woman who was relegated to the bottom of the socio-economic stratification system (Sewpaul, 1994). While there is a growing middle class elite among African Blacks, and the positions of African Black women are by no means homogenous (Sewpaul, 2013), race, class and gender still intersect in powerful ways to render African Black women in South Africa more susceptible to HIV infection. The total number of persons living with HIV in South Africa increased from an estimated 4,25 million in 2002 to 7,52 million by 2018, the majority of whom are in KwaZulu Natal. The increase, in part, reflects the fact that more HIV+ people are living longer given their access to treatment. For 2018, an estimated 13,1% of the total population was HIV positive. Approximately one-fifth of South African women in their reproductive ages (15–49 years) are HIV positive (Statistics South Africa, 2018). The prevalence rate for African Black women is 20.6% compared with 12.5% for African Black men; among White women it is 0.9%, Coloured women, 5.8%, Indian/Asia women, 1.3% (TBFACTS.org, 2018).



### Challenging the micro-macro divide

Princess's voice is a powerful one, highlighting several inter-locking themes, one of the most important being that the dichotomy between the micro and macro is, indeed, false. As in the case of Princess, the other group participants also reported reactions of disbelief, shock and fear on receipt of their HIV+ diagnoses. These contributed to "a sense of suspension, many reporting having no sense of either past or future – a period characterized by aimlessness and despair" (Sewpaul, Mahlalela, 1998:36). Some of them also reported thoughts of killing themselves and their babies, with one of their main concerns being who would take care of their babies if they died before them. All reported having experienced distorted body image, and they talked about the relief that they felt on entering the support group and realizing that they could not see that the others were HIV+. The small group context is powerful as it has the potential to look inward to the needs of group participants, and to contribute to societal change, thus providing for the interface of micro and macro levels of empowerment. Reflecting on how oppression individualizes and fragments people's experiences, Dominelli (2002:109) describes the power of the group: Coming together in groups is a major way of reversing such fragmentation. Realising their power within a group setting, engaging in collective action can be a response that empowers an individual and enables him or her to work with others to redefine their state of being and develop a greater range of options within which to live.

The guilt about transmission of the virus to their babies was so acute, that they believed that people could look right through them. One woman (Sewpaul, Mahlalela, 1998:37) reported: At first I could not even walk on the street. I felt that everybody was just looking at me and blaming me for making my baby sick. For them it was me who was killing my baby. If it was not for the support group I don't know what I should be doing, it has made me to lift my head and to walk again.

The women needed to free themselves from the entrapments of their own pain, fears, self-hate and guilt, and to understand how stigma and discrimination, embedded in society, had become internalized, as elucidated on in the seminal writing of Freire (1970). Drawing on Emerson, Nayeri (2019:328) asks the following arresting questions: "How can one be self-reliant ... if one is taught to hate the very self that is supposed to do all the work? ... What if every sign points to its inferiority?" The women talked about how the support group served as a catalyst to disclose, and how "living with the pain of secrecy was far worse than living with some of the prejudices associated with disclosure" (Sewpaul, Mahlalela, 1998:38). Haney (1988:252), a person who had been living with HIV, pointed out, "We understand very little scientifically about the power of hope and caring. However, it is clear how vital they are to our survival."

In emancipatory social work what matters most is the intersection between the micro and the macro. Theoretically informed praxis validates people, and it makes them appreciate that they are much more than that defined by their social circumstances; it enhances their sense of self, increases self-confidence, belief in themselves and instils hope that change is possible (Sewpaul, Larsen, 2014). The women's increased sense of self and hope, achieved through active listening, responsiveness to their trauma, empathy, unconditional acceptance, mutuality and authentic dialogical encounters, were tapped into and complemented with skills development and other pragmatic capacity building and social action initiatives, so that they became actively involved in the South African HIV/AIDS crisis that was of global concern. Lifting micro levels of analyses and interventions to broader public issues brings social work into the realm of the political. The relationship between social work, politics and human rights is indivisible. Social workers witness on a daily basis the suffering engendered by political decisions and policies on the lives of people. They are thus in strategic positions to contribute to the development of humane and just policies, challenge those that are harmful and bridge the divide between the macro and micro level analysis and intervention.

Social work, Sewpaul (2015) argues, by upholding the value of *ubuntu*, and by making *being for the Other* the normative, is or can be politics with soul. By tuning to and responding to



the life words of people, social work, more than any other profession, holds the potential to function in that “intermediary site where ‘life politics’ meets Politics with a capital P: where private problems are translated as public issues and public solutions are sought, negotiated and agreed for private troubles” (Bauman, 2007:24). Each individual that a social worker works with, irrespective of the nature of the issues presented, is a representation of groups of people experiencing the same concern/s within the constraints of in a neoliberal, new managerialist and positivist world. Bringing people together into small groups, and drawing on their shared experiences and collective voices does contribute to empowerment, and active citizen and community engagement. And if we have to work at the individual level, casework must be politicized. The politicization of casework is one way of transcending the micro-macro divide, as we recognize and respond to people as agentic individuals with power to influence their life circumstances and environments. Through their participation in the group, and their numerous outreach and networking activities, the women began to appreciate that HIV/AIDS was not an individual problem, but an epidemic of global significance. For instance, while they experienced the effects of stigma and discrimination on a deeply personal level, and were angry about the unavailability of ART, they began to see these as structural problems that worked against HIV+ persons as a group – that the personal is political and vice versa.

When they brought up the topic of euthanasia following the visit of the doctor that Princess referred to above, I reflected that euthanasia was illegal in South Africa. They countered with, “so what? That does not mean that we cannot do anything about it”, and discussed lobbying for its legalization. They networked with other AIDS interest groups, such as the National Association of People Living with AIDS, the AIDS Training and Information Centre, and the AIDS Foundation in this initiative (Sewpaul, Mahlalela, 1998). A lawyer from Lawyers for Human Rights discussed the legal and ethical concerns around euthanasia with the women so as to assist them in their networking and advocacy (Sewpaul, Rollins, 1999). While they were not successful in achieving this goal, the very process of active engagement, made them appreciate that they were not mere victims of the virus and of society’s control elements. Their full and democratic participation contributed to their willingness to take risks to challenge AIDS denialism, and the deeply entrenched stigma and prejudices against HIV+ persons.

### **Risk taking in the interests of the greater good**

While Rose, one of the group participants, was willing to engage in HIV/AIDS outreach work, she was unwilling to disclose her status publicly. After one of her outreach sessions, she described her frustration. Despite her best efforts to drive home the reality of HIV/AIDS, people did not want to believe her, and in desperation she disclosed. She had her two-year-old son, who had AIDS, present in the workshop. She pointed to him, drawing their attention to some of his symptoms, and told them about her and his status. Rose realized that she made a more credible educator as an HIV+ person, and disclosed in subsequent outreach programmes. Literature attests to the fact that peer educators, are effective in HIV/AIDS prevention efforts, as they are seen to be trustworthy and credible (Latkin, Hua, Davey, 2004; Norr, Norr, McElmurry et al., 2004; Richter, Phillips, McInnis et al., 2011), can communicate context specific and relevant knowledge to targeted audiences, and that they provide for a low-cost and sustainable option (Hughes-d’Aeth, 2002; Naidoo, Morar, Ramjee, 2013). In an evaluation of peer education programs across four non-governmental organizations in Zambia, Hughes-d’Aeth (2002:405) described their successes in prevention, and how peer educators “enabled people living with AIDS, their dependents, and the community at large to retain a measure of dignity in the face of the most appalling uncertainties and fear.”

In some of the group sessions, the women discussed how they thought disclosure was an ethical imperative, despite their fears. One woman reported overhearing men talk about how they would shoot anyone who they knew was HIV+, and one of the women described how she had a gun pulled on her when she disclosed her status while waiting at a bus station. We discussed the



importance of judicious disclosure in safer spaces. The women attributed their HIV infection to ignorance and denial, and indicated that they would have felt guilty if their younger brothers or sisters became infected. They had the power to be of help to their families and communities and saw disclosure as a way of doing this. Dominelli (2002) contended that the desire to be of service to others and to be committed to a common good, despite one's own disadvantaged and vulnerable position, is a reflection of interdependence, reciprocity, solidarity and altruism.

Princess demonstrated great courage in facing humiliation and stigma in the interests of the greater good. We once had an outreach programme planned over two days with staff at the South African Airports Company in Durban, which left an indelible imprint on us. We planned for Princess to arrive on day two of the programme. In day one, a colleague and I facilitated discussion on various aspects of HIV/AIDS. When I asked about willingness to test, all of the over 50 participants claimed that they could not possibly be HIV+ and saw no need for testing. On the morning of day two, Princess was introduced as a special guest who would be talking in the afternoon. During the course of the day's interactive sessions, Princess joined the small groups. I casually went to the groups, joined the discussions, and inserted the question: "How would you feel about sitting next to someone who is HIV+?" The prejudices were manifest, with overwhelmingly negative responses of "no" or "never".

Although a painful experience for Princess, she was prepared for it. She had experienced more than enough direct discrimination; a shared experience by all the women in the group. She understood that there was a higher goal to reach - to help people confront their own misconceptions and prejudices about HIV/AIDS. Late afternoon Princess gave her talk, describing her journey as an HIV+ person. The participants were dumbstruck, and many of them were in tears. Princess challenged very myth that they held about HIV. She was smartly dressed, eloquent, and beautiful. They had constructed HIV+ persons as dirty, unworthy, sinful, uneducated, "sickly-looking" and emaciated. At the end of her talk, one of the men said: "If she can be HIV+, I can be too. I will get tested", echoing the sentiments of some others in the group. This poignant encounter was yet another of several reminders, that prevention does, indeed, lie in the hands of HIV+ persons.

### **Negotiating differences**

One of the overarching principles of social work is respect for multiple forms of diversities (IASSW, 2018). Princess makes the point that I was different: HIV- and of a different race, class, culture, language and status compared with the group participants. Nigel Rollins, while not directly involved in the group facilitation, was key to linking the women to the group, and supporting the group in tangible and non-tangible ways. Nigel was Irish, white, male and also of a different class, status, culture and language. Thus, initiating and maintaining such a project, especially in the beginning, was not easy. The challenges in the formation and maintenance of the group were addressed with a preeminence placed on "process in our pursuit of social change" (Sewpaul, Rollins, 1999:255). Nigel and I knew that no matter how well intentioned, our spheres of influence would be limited. There was a need to work with the women in collective, empowering ways so that they could become catalysts for change and HIV prevention. The success of the group depended on a combination of professional knowledge, skills, values, and principles. The IASSW (2018) lists, as its first principle, respect for the inherent dignity of humanity, with the principle 1.2 reading as: Social workers demonstrate respect for the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings, in attitude, word and deed. This calls for differentiation between unconditional positive regard for persons and people's attitudes, behaviours and/or socio-political and cultural contexts that may be deemed to be in need of change. While we respect persons, we challenge beliefs and actions of those persons where they may devalue or stigmatise themselves or other persons. and/or socio-political and cultural contexts that may be deemed to be in need of change.

The ethos of the group was characterized by the above. One of the main paradigm shifts that I had to make, given my training as a clinical social worker, was to move away from a preoccupation



with linguistic detail and ambiguities and to focus on the broader objectives, which included consolidating a cohesive therapeutic/support *cum* socio-education group; facilitating linkages between the group and community-based organizations; skills training of the group members; and engaging in HIV/AIDS education, outreach, and advocacy.

My language limitation often placed me at the mercy of the group. But the limitation also proved to be a facilitating factor in some ways. It minimized the notion of the facilitator as “expert” and served to enhance more egalitarian relationships. While social workers must work towards valuing diversities, and building trusting and equal relationships, the roles of social workers as public or organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1977), in working to transform common-sense assumptions into empirically tested good-sense, must not be underestimated. The use of reflexive dialogue in cultural circles (Freire, 1970; 1972; 1973), which Bambanani served as an ideal context for, is central to such transformation. While, as social workers, we minimize our role as experts, it is important that we possess professional expertise, aligned with that of emancipatory social work. This does not presume the absence of knowledge on the part of the people who we engage with. Embedded in the narratives and lived experiences of people, are rich tapestries of information and knowledge that must be tapped into, supported and maximized for transformative change.

To expect that I would enter the lives of women, for whom an HIV+ diagnosis was an additional burden to their already over-burdened lives, and that they would’ve welcomed me with openness and honesty, would have been unrealistic. Reilly (2012) in a book titled, *Shame: Confessions of an Aid worker in Africa*, wrote of the sham of externally mediated HIV/AIDS programmes in Zimbabwe, where she was part of overseas funded projects worth millions of US dollars, where the preoccupation was with results submitted in neatly packaged reports, rather than connecting with contextual socio-economic and cultural realities. The local facilitators who they worked with did not receive the benefit of support and, while doing HIV education and outreach, remained in denial themselves. Reilly (2012) describes how the emphasis was on the ABC ‘abstinence, be faithful and condomise’ approach, with little consideration of the socio-cultural and structural drivers of HIV, including poverty and lack of opportunities. Against a milieu of deep poverty, AIDS denialism, the lack of access to ART in South Africa, the tendency of academics to abuse communities for research purposes, and the markers of difference between us, the women at least initially, had little reason to trust me.

When the topic of safer sex was raised in the initial phase of the group, all the women provided a blanket response, “no sex”. I was skeptical and concerned that they might have been having unprotected sex. I was acutely aware of the importance of “responsible living” (Osei-Hwedie, 1994:32), but I was also aware that if I confronted them at that stage, I might have lost them. The women had no obligation to work with me. Had I dealt with my ethical dilemma by getting on a moral high ground and giving them a lecture about responsible living, we might have lost the opportunity of the participants shifting from their fears and trauma to becoming educators, outreach workers and activists. When the group became more cohesive, I challenged this by saying, “We are all women, we know our sexual needs so let’s cut out the nonsense and get real. Let’s talk about how we are really meeting those sexual needs.” Then came the outpouring of stories about unprotected sex, their feelings of guilt about this, how this impacted their sexual lives, and their fears of disclosing their status to their partners.

The consolidation of bonding, with women coming together around an intimate shared concern, marked the first of several very productive group sessions, and served as a catalyst for disclosure, which is critical in HIV/AIDS prevention. The sameness, as women, was valued only after I had gained their trust. Positioning myself as one with a common identity – as woman – yet different, permitted me to be both on the inside and outside, allowing for an involved yet reflexive stance that contributed to the enrichment of the group. The bonding achieved in the group enabled us to challenge notions of women as victims, and as objects of male sexual gratification, so that the women could regain control over their own bodies and sexuality, and over their lives.



Discussions on religion and cultural beliefs and practices in non-judgmental ways, and attending funerals when mothers lost their babies, where possible, enhanced cultural sensitivity and understanding. As Princess alludes to in her introduction, with “using the same razor blade on all of us”, there are downsides to cultural practices, with some contributing to the spread of HIV. These were candidly discussed in the groups, which the women took into their community based outreach programmes. Sewpaul and Rollins (1999:254) concluded that, “true adherence to the humanistic call for empathy, warmth, unconditional acceptance, active listening, genuineness in relationships, and being authentic and real does help to transcend both language and cultural barriers.”

## CONCLUSION

There is an undoubted ethical imperative to shift from neoliberal, new managerial and positivist paradigms to more engaged, participatory, process-oriented, empowering, and democratic ways of working with people. HIV/AIDS education over a period of one or two weeks, with pre and post-test measures that claim success, must be viewed with suspicion. While these might impact cognitive knowledge acquisition, they are no markers of behavioural change, which is key to HIV prevention. Over the years of working with the women, we recognized the sheer messiness of lived reality. During the course of the group, two women fell pregnant – both unplanned. Discussing the challenges of condom negotiation, Sewpaul and Rollins (1999:260) asserted that: When issues of love, intimacy, passion, companionship (and perhaps economic survival) are at stake, the introduction of a condom (and by association elements of, ‘badness’, and possible rejection) might take secondary place and supersede women’s (and men’s) moral and ethical considerations. Perhaps nowhere than in the areas of love, intimacy and sexuality does one find such disjuncture between cognitive appraisals and affective responses.

Far from the demands on replication, value-free neutrality, standardization, generalization, the push to prove one’s truth in accordance with positivism’s linear, reductionist reasoning, and on efficiency – the achievement of narrow, measurable outcomes in the least amount of time – and detachment, we emphasize the importance of involvement, mutual respect, reciprocity, the particular and the contingent, and underscore that participatory approaches to development *takes time*. These have huge implications for social work, which on account of the dominant influences of neoliberalism, new managerialism and positivism, has become increasingly de-professionalized. At the heart of emancipatory, professional social work is relationship and trust building; process; reflexivity; cultural sensitivity and responsiveness; empathy; the ability to tune into the life worlds of people; consciousness-raising in relation to intersectionality, power, privilege and disadvantage and building upon people’s altered consciousness to engage in deliberative, collective action; capacity-building; and politicization of the personal. As discussed in this article, such an approach calls for cooperation and authentic engagement and participation of people. Ledwith and Springett (2010:30) aver that, “A participatory worldview is founded on cooperation [...] it is a belief that we can coexist in a world in harmony and diversity in ways that enable everyone and everything to flourish.” Although labour intensive and time-consuming – unlike managerialism’s push towards efficiency – there are distinctive benefits to participatory approaches. They are not only consistent with the core values of social work; they also contribute to better outcomes (Weyers, van den Berg, 2006; Tesoriero, 2010; Hugman, Bartolomei, 2014). Countering the dominant view of science, and challenging neoliberalism and new managerialism is not easy, but doing so does produce rich and thick silver linings among the dark clouds that rain on us.

South Africa has come a long way from the days of AIDS denialism and failure to provide ART, but the crisis still exists. While the country has the highest rate of HIV in the world, with over seven million infections (UNAIDS, 2018), it also has the largest ART programme in the world, and it is making an attempt to reach the UN 90:90:90 targets, with 87% of the population



being aware of their status (Avert.org, 2018). The spirit and ethos of Bambanani live on 22 years later through women like Princess and Lindiwe. They braved societal discrimination, prejudice, violence and rejection; politicized HIV; and they continue to be active agents in the global effort to prevent HIV.

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## Neil Thompson: **Mental Health and Well-Being: Alternatives to the Medical Model.** New York: Routledge, 2019

This is an important book which sets out to help those of us working within the ‘caring professions’ to reassess what is meant by Mental Health and Well-Being. In a well-structured and lucid fashion Neil Thompson sets about his task with sensitivity and skill. The book is divided into four sections; how ideas about madness evolved; how they have come to be deconstructed; the consequences of the latter for ‘developed selfhood’ and more integrated and holistic approaches to Mental Health, which then focus on considerations of Well-being rather than pathology in the final section. Neil Thompson bravely does not duck the contentiousness of the subject matter and he is not intimidated by its inherent thorniness. He approaches the material with great clarity and confidence. He also importantly helps us to remember the personal dimension throughout. There are numerous illustrations of individual experience, practitioners as well as clients in the many Practice focus and Voice of experience extracts in each chapter. He reminds us that our experiences are the same as those depicted as having Mental Ill Health. What they feel is ‘just like someone without Mental Illness, only more so’.

The reader is repeatedly reminded of the need to consider feelings as central to Well-being. Perhaps underplaying the value of Freud, Neil Thompson correctly stresses how Freud emphasises cognitions rather than feelings. He then considers how they have too seldom been centre stage within the provision of contemporary Mental Health services. He challenges a ‘false science’ inherent in the medical model which does not take adequate

account of the importance of empathetic listening to clients. Further, there is a danger that we might be attempting to fit a client’s clusters of symptoms into the array of DSM-5 labelling formulations influenced by the pharmaceutical industry (DSM-5 is the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

One of the pivotal messages in the book is that there is no single embracing truth that explains the issues that arise in this difficult area of practice. Rather, there is a dynamic of opposing forces (subjectivity and objectivity) an awareness of which helps us to understand ourselves and our world, and consequently our clients more fully. It is a process of understanding shared narratives. The author’s existential perspective may initially appear to avoid hard hitting truths, but its effect is to strengthen our own sense of self and our capacity to relate meaningfully to others. It is therefore more egalitarian and empowering. We do not look down on people objectively, as we realise that we need to work in partnership with clients and listen to them rather than take over and control their lives.

The book encompasses a welcome concern with ‘spirituality’, which is not to be confused with the supernatural. It is more about an existential awareness which heightens our sense of connectedness. This can only come from shared narratives bound up with ‘meaning, purpose and direction’. We are reminded that as humans we are ‘meaning makers’. But if that meaning is too interwoven with materialistic perceptions and goals we find ourselves less able to relate to one another, and importantly, to understand ourselves. It also renders us



more vulnerable to existential crises because materialistic approaches do not help us to cope with the many inevitable losses within our lives. Neil Thompson delivers a powerful critique of the medical model and dominant approaches to mental distress, but expresses himself courteously and sensitively throughout. He rightly claims that most Mental Health practitioners act conscientiously in good faith (although he is less charitable towards the big pharmaceutical companies). However, there is clearly a need for urgent action to ensure that increased awareness translates into more holistic professional practice. While the book is primarily targeted at practitioners it would be highly appropriate for their managers as well as politicians to read.

Enlightened recognition may not be enough when powerful forces are at stake. Neoliberalism and free market economics are identified as external forces that are invidious to developing humane approaches to mental health care. But in my experience the ability of members of the caring professions to act as authentically and conscientiously as they might wish, is often governed by the degree of support they receive from their employing agency. A further consideration is the degree to which professionalization itself can become a counterproductive force if it promotes professional self interest in an area where there are many competing demands. This problem of defensive practice has grown in recent times

as departmental training budgets have been severely curtailed.

Alienation and stigma not only arises from free market economics, but also from a decline in community and caring relationships. So we need to consider how more caring communities can be created, a prerequisite for addressing the issues so well identified in the book. Public meeting places, collective associations and clubs, community events (including churchgoing) and social connectedness have all declined over the past fifty years. Correspondingly, notions of individual success, wealth creation and social inequality (responsible for spawning significant increases in 'Mental Ill Health') are more prominent forces.

These latter comments are not in any way meant to detract from the clarity of Neil Thompson's thought provoking critique or the highly engaging insights that he has to offer. He is rightly encouraging us towards more eclectic, cooperative and collaborative approaches to understanding mental health and promoting well-being. Everyone who is concerned about mental health should read this important book and reflect on its contents. As a manager and practitioner, I feel that I have benefited enormously from reading this excellent book.

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## Sarah Banks, Angie Hart, Kate Pahl, and Paul Ward (Eds.): **Co-Producing Research: A Community Development Approach.** Bristol: Policy Press, 2019

At a time when co-creation is a buzzword in the academy and the business world alike, **Co-producing research: A community development approach** sinks its teeth deep into the everyday challenges, as well as the beauty, of actual co-efforts to produce knowledge collaboratively and with diverse people. The book stems from and discusses the experiences and insights gained during a five-year research project called *Imagine – Connecting communities through research* funded by The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the United Kingdom. Its editors, Sarah Banks, Angie Hart, Kate Pahl, and Paul Ward, have all a long history of working with and researching communities, and were themselves involved in the Imagine project.

The book consists of altogether ten articles and is, beyond the introductory chapter, structured into three parts, I Forming communities of inquiry and developing shared practice, II Co-creating through and with the arts, and III Co-designing outputs, with three articles in each section. Apart from two articles, all the others have minimum three and one as many as eight authors (altogether 35), which fits with the collaborative emphasis of the book. Although approaches vary, each text discusses both the how-to and the how-to-not of co-production, the latter culminating in the chapter seven on the methodological possibilities and limitations of co-producing research in a prison. Overall, the articles treat the topic, co-production of research, in a detailed, simultaneously cautionary and optimistic, critical and reflective manner.

Noting that the Imagine research project was in principle diverse and took the multiplicity

of perspectives and voices as a starting point, the introductory chapter *Co-producing research: A community development approach* by the editors is a key to the book, setting the scene. Defining community development approach to the co-production of research as “research undertaken collaboratively by several parties” (p. 1), it underlines that community development and co-producing research with communities are not the same (p. 9). When the former is about “enabling people to work collectively to bring about positive social change” (p. 7), the latter focuses primarily on the production of knowledge for that purpose.

Both co-producing research with a community development approach and community development itself are openly political and ideological projects. Decidedly and deliberately, they build on ethical principles such as mutual respect, equality and inclusion, and democratic participation of people from diverse backgrounds and varied expertise. Further, while respecting the personal integrity of everyone, the emphasis is on active learning, collective action, and making a difference. As these things are easy to say but difficult to practice, the process matters for, and even before, the outcome. At any rate, there needs to be “a link between knowing and doing” (p. 1). From these premises, the introduction, and the book overall, asks whether and how co-produced research can contribute to community development and vice versa, how to make research in a truly collaborative manner, and what does that presumably mean for research.

The take of the book on communities, as also in the Imagine research project, is that they are



multifaceted collectives of people that do not reduce into unison narratives. People of a given community have something, but not everything in common, and as in the broader society, some have power and privilege over others. Moreover, communities are not necessarily about togetherness, they can also be oppressive and exclusive (p. 7). While community development is not about avoiding conflicts of opinion, it accents inclusivity, including tolerance to non-members, and generally seeing the community and the issues at stake in connection to broader societal processes. Individually and collectively, the interplay and weight of various contexts, be they social, cultural, economic, or historical, influence the scopes of civic engagement and imagination available.

In practise, co-production of research means that people from different settings and backgrounds, such as 'professional researchers' from universities/research institutions and other people with either direct experience of, or interest in, the issue being researched, work together to produce knowledge. Notwithstanding their different abilities, confidence, and positions of power, wealth and status, the spirit and philosophy of co-production emphasises equality and democracy. While some differences cannot be undone, the aim is to utilise the varied expertise of the participants in ways that "are as empowering and respectful as possible" (p. 6). In other words, the core idea is that people can take part actively, that research projects are "accessible to as wide range of people as possible" and the focus is on "achieving positive social change" (p. 7).

After the introduction, the articles of Co-producing research elaborate the experience and lessons learned in the different sub-projects part of the Imagine research project from various angles. The focus is on specific locations and research projects in the United Kingdom. Some of these are introduced rather sparingly, possibly to stay in the word limits for an article. As a reader not very familiar with UK contexts, I found it occasionally somewhat demanding to get a hold of the numerous contexts introduced, and the entire book somewhat fragmentary (as edited books often are). While overall the articles could have been written keeping

the possibility of non-British readers more consciously in mind, some chapters, such as chapter eight, Co-production as a new way of seeing, are easy and enjoyable reading also for foreigners. However, notwithstanding that the articles that operate on a relatively general level were the most accessible ones for me, together and separately the articles provide interesting prospects to co-producing research. In what follows, I highlight some of these on a general level.

The book makes clear that in community development driven collaborative research projects time, money and other resources really matter. In short, there is no way out from the fact that genuine collaboration takes time and suffers if hurried by external scheduling and the need to produce certain types of achievements. To start with, the rhythms and motivations of community partners and the people involved in them differ from those of academics. Whether or not involved already in the initial planning and funding application phase for the collaboration, people need time to figure out what the collaboration is about, what their needs, aspirations and conditions regarding it are, and what they would like to do and why. On the other hand, numerous institutional pressures and material structures strain the work of academics. It is often difficult to make adequate time for research from loads of other tasks, including demands of new projects and often short contracts (and the subsequent need to apply and accept new jobs when available). As collaboration is usually project-based, time limits and pressure for outcomes easily gets on the way (p. 110).

As with time, so with money, which is tight everywhere. For example, most of the artists involved in community projects are freelance. Even when the expectations for the community contribution are high, it can be financially severely under-resourced, as if things that cost elsewhere are somehow freely available in communities. At the same time, from the participants the project-based nature of collaborative knowledge production commonly requires flexibility as well as capacity to deal with the general unpredictability of the process. In reality, however, communities cannot

always invest into processes whose gains are uncertain. There also barriers for joint use of resources. Universities, for example, commonly facilitate specific tools, such as particular kind of software, for their employees but not for the community-based co-researchers in research projects.

As the above suggests, university and community partnerships are challenging, as well as infested with both subtle and apparent, intended and unintended forms of power. While in an ideal world every party would “be treated equally, paid fairly, and given enough time and resources to do things” (p. 13), these things are not always paid adequate attention. Moreover, there is a danger that the collaborations get co-opted to the advantage of the (potentially more target-driven) participating academics or artists, without tangible gains for the participating communities (p. 99). It is thus vitally important to discuss power openly, and remain alert to various hierarchies and their potential to reproduction. Besides these, it is important to counter power systematically in the actual practices of collaboration.

There are various practical ways to promote equality and participation, starting from creating safe, inclusive learning spaces, where everyone can feel welcome and valued. Altogether, the articles describe or hint at various practices tested and working, such as pushing people slightly but safely out of their comfort zones, or using diverse recording and documentation practices and media from community artists and photographers to professional artists, while balancing the delicate sense of ownership this may require. One research project had consciously limited the verbal dominance of academic participants. Another one had used brokers, people with cross boundary identities and thus access to different perspectives and languages, as facilitators in the process. Overall, the experiences highlight the need to provide people chances to be involved in their own terms, in ways meaningful to them, and design “activities that enable different collaborators share their knowledge” (p. 89). Moreover, instead of mere participation, it is

also important to provide people opportunities to enhance their capacity for leadership and command of methodologies (p. 89–90).

To summarise the message of the book even partially, it is important to strive for and achieve what is possible in an imperfect world (p. 109). In so doing, however, it is crucial to foster critical thinking individually and collectively, and generally remain true to the process and the ideological principles of community development. Questions that follow are quotidian, such as how to cherish and maintain commitment, and how to prove the worth of everyone’s effort (p. 178). At the same time, they are fundamental: Why did the ‘turn’ to co-production emerge when it did and what does it eventually serve (p. 117)? What are the things that do not change in the hierarchies between academia and community despite co-production? Among others, these questions may evoke interest in history, as addressed particularly in the chapter nine on Black history and community development, which points to the selectiveness and omissions of history writing.

The experiences conveyed in the articles is that while time consuming and intensive, co-production of knowledge leads to better research designs and is more rewarding than research done alone. Although its benefits to communities and community development may take long to materialise and be indirect in nature, one should not stop trying. Overall, Co-producing research, as also its individual articles, are clearly structured and include informative lists and tables. What’s more, while strongly committed to and pursuing co-producing research, the picture painted is not too rosy. Instead, the reader is treated with critical, practise-rooted accounts on the trade of co-production, which communicate also beyond their immediate contexts with similarly minded work in other sectors, such as in development cooperation.

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# Public commitment to the Journal

The journal for theory, practice, and education in social work

The mission of the journal “Czech and Slovak Social Work“ is to:

- support the ability of Czech and Slovak societies to cope with life problems of people through social work,
- promote the quality of social work and professionalism of social work practice,
- contribute to the development of social work as a scientific discipline and to the improvement of the quality of education in social work,
- promote the interests of social service providers and users.

In the interest of achieving these objectives, the Journal will, across the community of social workers and with co-operating and helping workers from other disciplines, promote:

- attitudes which regard professionalism and humanity as equal criteria of social work quality;
- attitudes which place emphasis on linking theoretical justification of social work practice with its practical orientation on clients' problems and realistic possibilities;
- coherence among all who are committed to addressing clients' problems through social work;
- open, diversity-understanding, informed and relevant discussion within the community of social workers;
- social workers' willingness and interest in looking at themselves through the eyes of others.

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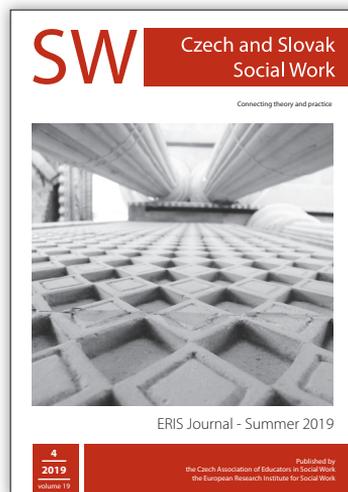
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