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Editorial

Our Journal works on the premise that social work is a theoretical as well as practical discipline, with the goal of social work being to professionally handle the problems of people who find themselves in challenging circumstances. In their efforts to help, social workers deal with the entire situation of the client. The articles in this issue, we believe, demonstrate well how these aims are being met. In their article on the *Impacts of Working with Victims of Domestic Violence on Social Workers*, Iva Frydrychová and Ester Poláčková of Charles University in Prague in the Czech Republic, address two very important issues for social workers: firstly, the effects of what we know is one of the main and most destructive forms of violence around the world, interpersonal violence; and secondly, the need for social workers to be supported sufficiently when they are undertaking work in such distressing and difficult areas of conflict within their work. The authors set out the situation concerning domestic violence in the Czech Republic and the types of trauma which victims of domestic violence may be experiencing, and then look at the secondary effects on those attempting to help victims in these types of circumstances. Linking this with our knowledge of such areas as compassion fatigue for those working in such types of conflict and high demand, the authors examine support needs and self-care approaches for workers. This includes not only emotional and professional distress for the workers, but also when intervening in such abusive situations to help the victim, actual attacks on the social worker themselves. In the article, the needs of the clients and the workers are necessarily looked at in tandem.

The article *With Empty Hands: How the Lack of Public Resources Distorts Social Work Performance* by Jana Havlíková and Olga Hubíková of the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs in the Czech Republic discusses, from an examination of the theoretical literature, and two original pieces of research, issues around social workers' experiences and views on accessing resources which are necessary for clients when they are not able to do this directly themselves. Drawing on social workers' lived experiences, this is a valuable examination of how social workers attempt to cope with, and can do their best to manage these matters, in order to best advocate for their clients' needs. In their article *The Digital Age - Digital Radicalisation?* Magdaléna Hovanová, Tomáš Šedo, of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice in Slovakia examine a contemporary and important matter in European societies and beyond, on how radicalisation in online environments is influenced by face-to-face factors. In studying online content accessed by adolescents and how this may have an important role in developing online radical behaviour, the article sets out to identify key determinants of radicalisation and online radicalisation. Crucially, it moves on from this to discuss the digital environment's potential in the prevention of such radicalisation, using analyses from correlation calculations, factor analysis, simple linear regression, developing from this a multiple linear regression model. They found that Personal Values have a greater influence on online radical behaviour than General Values and break these down into variables such as Socialization and Communication, exposure to Emotional Content and Quotes, and how they are associated with levels of online radical behaviour. From this they make suggestions on

how social workers can better deal with such radicalisation by actively focusing upon such content, and shaping personal values and beliefs, supporting socialization and communication that can help prevent radicalisation.

In the contribution from Kateřina Mikulcová, Michal Burda, Martina Daňková and Veronika Sikorová of the Faculty of Social Studies at the University of Ostrava on *Siblings Relationships as a Source of Resilience in Homeless Children in the Czech Republic*, the authors set out to understand the relationship between sibling relationships and resilience in homeless children, setting out how the features of warmth and intimacy are important for children in developing their resilience; but also how these relationships can include negative qualities such as intense, potentially destructive conflict. Using responses to a questionnaire on resilience, sibling relationships and parent-child relationships, the authors discuss and analyse how the quality and nature of these relationships between siblings can affect the resilience of the children. Homeless children face particular risk in many ways in relation to their health and development, and thus a focus on helping meet their needs is important. The article is of particular importance because there is no research in the Czech Republic or internationally that focuses on understanding the key valuable elements in sibling relationships in development of resilience in homeless children.

Katarzyna Miśkiewicz, of the University of Łódź, Poland, presents a research note on *Family Probation Officer in the Field: Interactive Rituals Enacted in a Professional Role* utilised a qualitative research strategy, based upon a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, to look at the activities of Polish family probation officers in a large city, where they are in the role of “forced guest”, and subsequent interaction rituals revealed by family probation officers in relationships with their clients. The roles as social actors in such encounters are discussed within the concept of “dirty work. Some of the important results of the research were strategies of supervising through protection, consisting of two tactics — caring

as well as monitoring protection. One other result was about talking strategies, which had their source in the conflictual relations between the probation officers and their supervisees.

Daniel Houben of University of Applied Sciences Landshut offers a research note on the *Challenges of the Digital Transformation for Social Work* in an age when there are increasing pressures for social work organizations to implement the rapidly accelerating digital transformation of services in their work approaches. From five case studies in Lower Bavaria, it examines how digital transformation of social work will likely reshape the structures of these institutions and also change the life and participation opportunities of their clients. The case studies included a mobile eldercare service, two homelessness assistance centres, a child and youth welfare service, and a migrant support service. The 16 interviews conducted involved executives, professionals, and beneficiaries, and found the main issues for clients were financial barriers, lack of social resources, habits and routines that for many clients’ digital technologies have played a subordinate role, and low self-efficacy. Barriers in organizations include lack of financial and technical resources, inadequate technical equipment, shortage of skilled personnel, lack of interoperability & synchronization issues, challenges in data management, lack of strategic planning, and legal frameworks which complicate or prevent the use of certain digital solutions. For professionals, lack of systematic/professional knowledge about technology and digital media, personal distance from technology, lack of control and co-design, and data protection are important barrier features. The authors then go on to suggest ways in which such transformation may benefit all parties in social work, and how this might be achieved.

We hope you find these articles that we believe aid the mission of the Journal—and social work—valuable.

Karen Mills and Brian Littlechild,
University of Hertfordshire, UK



Impacts of Working with Victims of Domestic Violence on Social Workers

Accepted for publication on January 10th, 2025.

Iva Frydrychová, Ester Poláčková

Iva Frydrychová¹ is a PhD student at the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Arts, Charles University and has long been engaged in social work with families with children. She currently leads an organization that, among other things, provides social services to families at risk of social exclusion. In her dissertation, she deals with the possibilities and limits of the concept of social functioning in housing families with children based on the principle of Housing First. She teaches subjects focused on social work with the family and theories and approaches in social work at a higher vocational school.

Ester Poláčková² is a PhD student in the field of Social Work at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, where she focuses on the topic of Domestic Violence. In the past, she worked in the organization proFem - Center for victims of domestic and sexual violence, o.p.s. as a social worker. She is now addressing the topic in her upcoming dissertation and as a participant in psychotherapy training.

Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The aim of the article is to summarize the situation in the field of domestic violence in social services in the Czech Republic and to describe the effect of working with traumatized clients on social workers. **THEORETICAL BASE:** As a theoretical starting point for working with victims of domestic violence, the authors use the publication “Domestic violence” (“Domáci násilí”) by the authors Ševčík and Špatenková, regarding the care of social workers from the publication Havrdová in the book Matoušek “Encyclopaedia of Social Work” (Encyklopedie sociální práce). In the case of the effects of working with a traumatized client, they draw on the work of American psychology professor Figley, C.R., “Compassion fatigue: Toward a new understanding of the costs of caring,” in the book B.H. Stamm (Ed.), “Secondary traumatic stress: Self-care issues for clinicians, researchers, and educators.” (pp. 3–28). **METHODS:** Literature review and theoretical analysis of key works in the field. **OUTCOMES:** The result is a description of the situation and the identification of weak points in the care of social workers in the field of domestic violence. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Implications for social work take the form of orienting the reader in the situation and appealing for a solution to an overlooked situation.

Keywords

domestic violence, persons at risk of domestic violence, social services, social worker, burnout syndrome, trauma, work with trauma, vicarious traumatization, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, prevention

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence represents one of the biggest challenges among social work target-groups, especially because of the severe trauma it leaves on the victims. Globally, estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that 30% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a male partner or husband at least once in their lifetime, affecting approximately 641 million women (WHO, 2022). According to the statistics of the intervention centres, in 2023, 1.268 cases of report of a violent person were recorded, during these reports, 2.612 victims were identified. As part of low-threshold services, i.e., in the field of counselling, 7.474 people turned to intervention centres in 2023 (Asociace pracovníků intervenčních center, 2023)³. Domestic violence is growing in alarming numbers, while it is sometimes difficult to find workers for the services intended for them. Referenced here are social workers who work with victims whose lives are marked by violence, pain and injustice, and the authors in the article are interested in what effect this environment can have on workers. The article is written from the point of view that if we meet victims of domestic violence in our profession, we meet clients of services that are traumatized.

Of course, we can meet traumatized clients across various services and target groups, but there are places where the concentration is undoubtedly higher (a body for the social and legal protection of children, probation and mediation services), but also services intended directly for clients experiencing trauma (intervention centres, services for victims of domestic and sexual violence, crisis centres, children's crisis centre, services for refugees from wars). In our text, we will mainly focus on the workers of counselling centres, intervention centres, crisis services, and shelters.

This issue is now all the more relevant, given the recent attack on a worker of the social and legal protection of children, whom the perpetrator had already threatened in the past (Honus, 2024). Although we do not know whether domestic violence was present in the perpetrator's family, it is clear that the social worker was threatened and that government officials showed lack of concern for the safety of the workers.

It is therefore not surprising that the field of social work has long lacked new workers, caused by low financial remuneration and high work demands. In organizations working with victims of domestic violence, a condition, other than education according to the Social Services Act, is knowledge of the theories and dynamics of domestic violence and the legislative framework. As well, training in crisis intervention, training in some therapeutic direction is often required, knowledge of the specifics of working with trauma is a must, and special emphasis is also placed on personal prerequisites, such as working with one's own emotions, resistance, stability, maturity and working with boundaries (Hodková, 2020).

Workers who themselves have experienced trauma are a particular group. There is debate as to whether such workers should be employed, as working with clients may reopen their own traumas (Ben-Porat, Itzhaky, 2015). Israeli experts Ben-Porat a Itzhaky (2015) suggest that workers with trauma experiences should be offered help in processing their stories rather than being excluded from working with this target group.

Workers who decide to pursue a career in the field of helping victims of domestic violence will encounter not only demanding work, as already mentioned above, but also be in daily contact with clients and their life stories, which are full of violence, humiliation, and helplessness.

At the same time, however, these workers also face low social and financial rewards, which can reduce their motivation to work in the given field and increase the risk of burnout. The aim of this article is therefore to summarize the situation in the field of domestic violence in the Czech Republic and the possible influence of exposure to traumatizing and unfair human outcomes on

³ It differs from the statistics presented below, as not all intervention centres belong to Asociace pracovníků intervenčních center (APIC - Association of Intervention Centre Providers).



social workers. In the end, the authors discuss how working conditions and overall team support could be improved.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic approach to reviewing academic literature, adhering to established standards in the social sciences (Webster, Watson, 2002). The primary goal was to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and rigor through a structured framework based on the PRISMA methodology (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; Moher et al., 2009). This process included defining the search strategy, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematically analysing the collected data.

Search Strategy

The research was conducted using reputable databases such as EBSCOHOST, JSTOR, SAGE Journals, and the Czech UKAZ portal, during the period from June 2022 to January 2023. Keywords were carefully selected to align with relevant academic terminology and included terms such as “trauma,” “domestic violence,” “burnout syndrome,” “victims of crime,” “psychologists,” “psychotherapists,” and “social work.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to optimize search results.

The search was restricted to publications, research papers, and articles published between 2000 and 2023 in English or Czech, except for sources foundational to the topic. Special attention was given to studies focusing on the impacts of working with traumatized clients—particularly victims of domestic violence—on professionals such as social workers, psychologists, and psychotherapists. A key similarity between social work, psychology, and psychotherapy was observed in their shared emphasis on direct client work, requiring high emotional intelligence, stress management skills, and the ability to cope with the burden of hearing clients’ traumatic stories. Professionals in these fields often encounter narratives that can have a profound emotional impact. Additionally, all three professions share commonalities in their reliance on strong communication skills, providing support, and creating a sense of safety, as well as participating in joint education such as crisis intervention training, trauma-focused training, and psychotherapy certifications.

The definition of client trauma was narrowed to include victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and childhood abuse and neglect. This restriction ensured that the study remained focused on practitioners who work directly and over the long-term with clients who have experienced crimes against their freedom and dignity.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the analysis if they met the following criteria:

- **Thematic Relevance:** They explored the impact of working with traumatized clients on professionals (social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists).
- **Methodological Quality:** They were published in peer-reviewed journals, academic books, or scientific monographs.
- **Language and Time Frame:** They were published in English or Czech between 2000 and 2023.

The following were excluded:

- Publications focusing on other professions (e.g., police officers, healthcare personnel).
- Studies without empirical data or with insufficient methodological quality.
- Older texts, unless they were foundational to the topic.

Data Analysis

The collected sources were analysed in two phases:

1. **Primary Screening:** Removal of irrelevant or duplicate sources and publications that did not meet the time frame or thematic criteria.



- 2. Secondary Analysis:** Detailed evaluation of the quality of selected studies based on the framework by Gough, Oliver, and Thomas (2012).

The analysis identified the following key themes:

- The impact of working with traumatized clients on the psychological and professional well-being of practitioners.
- Preventive mechanisms aimed at mitigating the negative effects of such work on social workers.

Limitations and Bias

Despite efforts to ensure rigor, the study faced the following limitations:

- A shortage of both Czech and international studies directly examining the impacts of working with victims of domestic violence.
- Potential gaps in the literature review due to varying terminology used in international contexts.
- Subjective selection of keywords and inclusion criteria.

Key Sources

The chapters on the situation in the Czech Republic regarding domestic violence, methods of working with victims, and possible interventions draw primarily from the works of Čírtková and Špatenková, recognized as leading experts in the field in the Czech Republic. The section addressing care for social workers is based on Havrdová's publications, while burnout syndrome is described using the model by Eldewish, Brodsky, and Stock.

The section focusing on the impacts of working with traumatized clients and prevention of these negative effects is based on the works of Figley, an American university professor whose research was identified as among the earliest on this topic. Additional significant contributions come from Pearlman, Saakvitne, and Rohwetter, whose works were essential to achieving the study's objectives. Prevention strategies were informed by the research and recommendations of Harrison and Westwood.

This arrangement provides a comprehensive perspective on the care of domestic violence victims and the factors influencing the professional lives of social workers and psychologists. By integrating these elements, the study achieved its objective of summarizing the state of domestic violence in social services in the Czech Republic and describing the impact of working with victims—traumatized clients—on social workers.

THE SITUATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

"The home is often idealized as an oasis of security and happiness, but at the same time it has become the most dangerous place in modern society" (Giddens, in Špatenková, 2011:21).

We have only encountered the term *domestic violence* since the end of the 1970s, when cases of serious violence by men against their partners began to be used on the North American continent. (Čírtková, in Matoušek et al., 2013). *"Contemporary opinions on the essence, causes and phenomena of this phenomenon also corresponded to this. However, the study and research of the phenomenon of domestic violence has progressed considerably in the meantime."* (Čírtková, 2008:9).

The issue of domestic violence came to the attention of Czech society only after 1989, with the development of civil society and the start of the activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations drawing attention to topics that, until then, had been overlooked in our territory as they had been associated with being a consequence of the capitalist society, or had been a taboo.



Domestic violence is a serious societal problem that can be defined “... as repeated, long-term and usually escalating violence of a physical, psychological, sexual, social and economic nature, which creates a clearly asymmetrical relationship and leads to a stable division of roles between the violent and the vulnerable person.” (Čírtková, 2008:9).

Here it is necessary to emphasize that domestic violence does not only take place between partners, but is also an intergenerational problem, when there are various forms of violence perpetrated by parents on children, or the aggressors may be children who commit violence against their parents, often those who are in senior age.

“Family violence can be defined as the unlawful domination of a family member over another member or members” (Špatenková, 2011:6).

From a criminal law point of view, however, we currently do not find a direct definition of domestic violence in the Criminal Code.

“The Criminal Code, however, defines several elements of criminal offenses under which actual domestic violence can be classified, when actions between partners that are domestic violence of a criminal law intensity (severity) can most often be classified under the element of abuse of a person living in a common dwelling according to Section 199(1)) of the Act 40/2009 Coll.” (Právní prostor, 2020).

In this regard, the currently discussed amendment to Act No. 89/2012 Coll., Civil Code, which should uniformly and unambiguously define domestic violence, should improve the situation in this respect, and thus ensure a comprehensive procedure for all interested entities (police, intervention centres, justice) when solving the issue of domestic violence in the field of criminal law. In addition to a uniform procedure, the main goal is increased protection for victims of domestic violence (Ministerstvo spravedlnosti ČR, 2024).

Perspectives on the Issue of Domestic Violence

The issue of domestic violence can be looked at from different perspectives, and each perspective differs in terms of defining the target group. *Feminist* and *criminological* perspectives are among the basic approaches that are most often mentioned in Czech professional publications.

A Feminist Perspective

Domestic violence from a *feminist perspective* is seen as narrowly profiled violence, the common feature of which is its perpetration against women. McPhail et al. (2007) states that for feminist movements, taking up the topic of domestic violence was a way to point out the structural and systemic inequalities that lead to the disadvantage of women in society. She further points out that violence originates in a historically given imbalance of power, where women are subordinated to male power through instruments of control, which include physical, economic, and psychological violence together with intimidation and isolation. It indirectly follows that earlier it was possible to find organizations that work exclusively with victims - women. Today, the situation has changed in this respect, although it is still a big problem to find a service with a secret address (e.g., an asylum) where a man can turn.

The feminist perspective is very often misrepresented as denying that women can also commit violence, but this is not the case. It only points out, like the theory of gender-based domestic violence, that it is more socially acceptable and easier to commit violence against women.

A Criminological Perspective

Since its inception, the criminological perspective has addressed a broader target group of individuals affected by domestic violence, considering anyone subjected to violence by a close



person, regardless of gender, age, or other factors. We may also encounter the fact that this view primarily aims to protect the general public and therefore combats domestic violence as a pathological phenomenon. For a better idea and in a simplified way, we can say that they try to lead the victims to actively solve their situation, ideally through criminal law.

Apart from these two historically oldest views, in the context of the Czech Republic we can often encounter a *systemic view* of domestic violence, which deals with patterns of behaviour of household members and their disruption, a *client-oriented approach*, which deals with domestic violence in the family as a unique situation with unique reasons, a causal model that sees the origin of violence in many facts, not only in individual problems, but also in the social setting, as well as a *trauma-informed approach* that focuses primarily on the victim and the prevention of any type of victimization with an emphasis on explaining the manifestations of trauma and the importance of trust and safety (Urban et al., 2023:182).

Systemic and Institutional Support Network for Individuals Affected by Domestic Violence in the Czech Republic

Domestic violence is a multifaceted issue requiring interdisciplinary approaches and systemic solutions. Two significant legislative measures have shaped responses to domestic violence in the Czech Republic: criminalizing “mistreatment of a person living in a shared dwelling” (under Section 199, Act No. 40/2009 Coll., Criminal Code) and establishing intervention centres through the Act on Social Services, which support victims.

One critical tool for victim protection is the “expulsion institute,” allowing police to remove an aggressor from a shared residence. Governed by Act No. 273/2008 Coll., the measure has been in effect since 2007. Upon evaluating a case, the police expel the aggressor and notify an intervention centre within 48 hours to initiate victim support. Usage statistics reveal a steady increase in expulsions, with 972 cases in 2021, 1,098 in 2022, and 1,292 in 2023.

Legislation also safeguards children through Act No. 359/1999 Coll. (ZSPOD), which includes children witnessing domestic violence as at-risk. This aligns with WHO recommendations and mandates the use of individual child protection plans. These plans help authorities assess risks, family dynamics, and protective measures.

Another key law, Act No. 45/2013 Coll., defines “particularly vulnerable victims,” including minors and victims of sexual crimes, abuse, or violence. This law ensures tailored protection and support services for these groups.

Systemic measures are bolstered by guidelines from ministries and the police, aiming to enhance protective mechanisms. One such tool is the SARA DN system, implemented with the support of the Bílý kruh bezpečí organization. Based on Canadian-Swedish models, this system helps police assess risk and determine appropriate interventions.

In summary, the Czech Republic has developed robust legislative and systemic measures to address domestic violence, protect victims, and offer specialized support through coordinated institutional efforts.

Social Services System for Individuals Affected by Domestic Violence

In the Czech Republic, a network of social services has been created for persons who are exposed to domestic violence. Social services are defined in more detail by Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services and Decree No. 505/2006 Coll., which implements some provisions of the Act on Social Services. The law, which came into effect on 1 January 2007, regulates the types of social services aimed at helping individuals affected by domestic violence. These include social counselling and social prevention services, e.g., telephone crisis assistance, crisis assistance, asylum houses (shelters), intervention centres, and specific services for children at risk of domestic violence. The network of services for children affected by domestic violence is expanded to include facilities for children requiring immediate assistance, whose activities are regulated by Act No. 359/1999 Coll.,



on the social and legal protection of children. These facilities are intended for children who have found themselves without a safe background or proper care and if their development is seriously threatened, including situations where children are exposed to physical or psychological abuse or abuse (Act No. 359/1999 Coll.).

Support for Workers in Czech Social Services Assisting Individuals Affected by Domestic Violence

In social services for individuals affected by domestic violence, we meet representatives of various professions. In addition to social workers and workers in social services, there are psychologists, therapists, lawyers, but also volunteers who, in their free time, help those who are victims of domestic violence free of charge exposure. All those who are interested in solving the issue of domestic violence in the sphere of social services are exposed to challenging situations on a daily basis, for which they are continuously prepared by study and other specialized courses and training. Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, in addition to the areas defined above, defines the area of compulsory education for social workers, workers in social services and professionals performing direct work with service clients. Ensuring the mandatory scope of education and its financing is one of the employer's obligations. Supervision is an often-inflected term. However, we do not encounter this term directly in the Act on Social Services, and the only possible reference from which it is possible to conclude that it is supervision is Decree No. 505/2006 Coll., which implements some provisions of the Act on Social Services, namely enumerated quality standards of social services, standard No. 10 – professional development of employees, criterion e):

"The provider ensures the support of an independent qualified expert for employees who perform direct work with persons who are provided with social services." (Decree No. 505/2006 Coll.)

Supervision is a tool that can help prevent burnout. However, it very much depends on how supervision is organized at the social service provider, what forms of supervision it offers, how often it is carried out, and whether it is a mere formality in order to fulfil the criteria of the quality standard. Havrdová (in Matoušek et al., 2013) states that the essence of supervision is to support the quality of social services for the benefit of clients. This happens especially through what is termed case supervision, which is directly focused on the process of working with clients. However, the social service provider can also provide supervision for its workers "... *focused on workers, their values, attitudes, behaviour towards clients, emotional management of work and relationships with colleagues...*" (Havrdová, in Matoušek et al., 2013:515).

For the performance of activities in social services, the same conditions apply to employers as to any other employer. In the field of **mandatory care for employees**, the applicable legal regulations must be followed, in particular Labor Code Act No. 262/2006 Coll., which regulates the field of labour relations, establishes the rights and obligations of employers and employees, and general working conditions.

In the Czech Republic, employers in social services try to care for their workers. However, most services for individuals affected by domestic violence are provided by non-governmental non-profit organizations, often free of charge by law. Financing for these services is multi-sourced, with public funds (subsidies, grants) primarily covering operational costs and wages. For employers in non-profits, securing additional funds from other sources can vary annually. This uncertainty makes it hard to implement a consistent internal employment policy. Progressive employers want to support their workers, but limited resources hinder their efforts. Alternatives to low financial compensation and inadequate benefits include offering a friendly team, open communication, extra leave, personal days, a business phone and laptop for personal use, home office options, flexible hours, and adjustments based on employee needs.



“Working conditions are another area in which there are no guarantees, while in a demanding helping profession, suitable working conditions supporting work well-being and overall well-being are a key prerequisite for preventing burnout syndrome...” (Hubíková et al., 2021:50).

It is precisely in the field of voluntary employee care that we see a great deal of room for development and one of the very important factors in the prevention of burnout syndrome.

BURNOUT SYNDROME IN GENERAL

The first person to deal with the burnout syndrome was the American psychoanalyst Herbert Freudenberg. In 1974, he described the syndrome as a combination of exhaustion, insomnia, withdrawal, headaches, and emotional instability. Several decades later, in 2019, burnout was recognized as a disease by the WHO. At that time, we can read about the burnout syndrome in many publications and academic works, while the authors describe it as the result of excessive enthusiasm for work and encountering a different reality than the individual expected. This “awakening” puts him under constant pressure and stress. Kebza, Šolcová (2003:5–6) identify this chronic stress as one of the most important components of the burnout process, adding that burnout can be understood as absolute psychological and emotional exhaustion from an excess of demands. Matoušek (2008) describes the burnout syndrome as a result of unrealistic expectations of an employee with unmanageable *“working conditions created by the organization”*. Expectations are also based on the motivations that led the worker to the profession, from a wide range of different motives from religion to helping others to healing one’s own traumas, which affect the level of threat, the manner and extent of burnout (ibid.:55).

Stages and Symptoms of the Syndrome

The first symptom is usually mental and physical exhaustion, e.g., fatigue, weakness, sleep disorders, digestive problems, as well as general disgust, apathy, despondency, and hopelessness, despite various similarities with depression. It is a wide range of different feelings that have in common the gradual emergence of increasing work stress. The second is alienation, which we understand as an indifferent attitude towards clients, passivity and lethargy, which is connected to a decrease in performance. (Stock, 2010:28–37). Other symptoms tend to be adherence to standardized work, disengagement, seeking administrative work, and in some cases even abuse of clients (Matoušek, 2008:56).

The most frequently used development of the burnout syndrome is the model of Eldewish and Brodsky, which leads through initial enthusiasm and unrealistic expectations, through stagnation, frustration and apathy (Stock, 2010:22–24).

ICD-11 views burnout purely as a “work phenomenon: *“Burnout syndrome is understood as the result of chronic stress at the workplace that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three aspects: 1) a feeling of exhaustion or loss of energy; 2) increased mental distance from the work or a sense of negativism or cynicism related to the work; 3) feeling of ineffectiveness and failure. Burnout refers to phenomena specifically related to work and should not be used to describe experiences in other areas of life.”* (ICD-11, 2024).

This is how we know the burnout syndrome in general, not only for the helping professions. However, when working with trauma, experts found a slightly different range of development, feelings and effects on personal life.

Burnout Syndrome in Czech Social Services

Social services have significantly evolved since the adoption of the 2006 Act on Social Services. This law established key principles, defined target groups, outlined service activities, and set qualification



requirements for social service workers. Only qualified personnel can perform direct “face-to-face” work, with prerequisites varying by role. These range from direct care workers to professionals in counselling and socio-therapeutic activities. Qualification ensures workers understand the specific needs of target groups, whether gained through higher education or mandatory training courses. The emphasis on qualifications highlights the importance of professional preparation for effective service delivery across different levels of social work.

During their studies or work, (future) workers in social services often encounter risks such as burnout syndrome. While initially linked to helping professions, burnout now affects a wider range of jobs, as noted by Stock (2010). Helping professionals may still face higher risks due to emotional involvement. Maroon (2012) highlights psychoanalyst Herbert Freudenberger’s findings. Based on his work with drug addicts in a rehabilitation centre, Freudenberger initially believed burnout affected only those directly interacting with clients facing social issues like addiction. However, his observations led him to expand the scope to include healthcare, education, and other professions. We believe that despite theoretical preparation and ongoing education, workers in social services can still face unexpected situations that impact them personally. These moments often stay with us, leading to reflection at home about whether we handled them correctly or did enough. How we respond depends on various factors. In this context, Kebza and Šolcová (2003) reference Becker’s concept of mental health, where burnout risk arises from the balance of protective and risk factors. **Protective factors** include competence, such as satisfying needs, social and cognitive skills, managing stress, and self-control (ibid.:3). **Risk factors**, as noted by Kebza and Šolcová, include vulnerability and stressors.

Burnout syndrome develops as a result of a combination of various risk factors that can be categorized into these areas of personal, occupational and general risk factors (Stock, 2010). It is the work area that brings many burdensome situations and the associated high level of stress, which nowadays can be linked to high demands or meaningless demands of the employer, to a low-quality and unsupportive workplace climate, to unclear rules, and to low financial remuneration. The authors of the research report *Deficits in the anchoring of Czech social work* perceive that the consequence of missing or insufficient support and guarantees of social work can be precisely burnout syndrome (Hubíková et al., 2021).

In the paragraph dedicated to the care of employees, we have listed some basic options for supporting workers beyond the scope of mandatory care, which is anchored by legal regulations. According to the collective of authors Hubíková, et al., (2021:50) “...these are things that can be gradually cultivated through other support of social work, such as standards or especially a professional organization that would formulate and defend the interests and needs of the professional group of social workers. It is mainly about creating a safe climate for social workers and a good atmosphere in the workplace, which is also one of the ways to prevent the burnout of social workers, who generally have a high risk of burnout due to the demanding nature of their work”.

Effects of Working with Traumatized Clients on the Worker

Working with traumatized clients, who are undoubtedly victims of domestic violence, represents a significant psychological burden for social workers, as was already mentioned several times in the article. Two terms are most often mentioned in this context: *Vicarious Trauma* and *Compassion Fatigue*. Some authors rank vicarious traumatization among the specifics of emotional burnout (Dekel, Peled, 2000), while compassion fatigue describes a state where the worker loses empathy and concern for the client (Figley, 1995a). Other authors (Rauvola, et al., 2019) summarize these terms as “empathy-based stress”, which points to the impact of the specific stress that arises from the exposure of the worker to the traumatizing stories of the clients, combined with the empathy that he exudes.

As already written above regarding burnout syndrome, it is proven that workers with their own traumatic experience are more prone to these specifics (Kassam-Adams, 1995; Pearlman; Mac Ian,



1995; Dekel, Peled, 2000; Nelson-Gardell, Harris, 2003; Linley, Joseph, 2007; Adams et al., 2008) even with these two terms. The most vulnerable group are workers who have their own reality with trauma. Others include those who lack social support, both at home and at their employer, do not have psychohygienic habits, do not know how to deal with their own stress, and do not find satisfaction in work, and as well those who have deep professional knowledge and experience with the target group (Harr, Brice, Riley, Moore, 2014).

For better clarity, we will divide these terms:

Vicarious traumatization: a condition where workers begin to change their basic beliefs about the world, and their attitudes change due to constant exposure to traumatic material (Pearlman, Saakvitne, 1995). Manifestations can include intrusive thoughts, hopelessness, feelings of discouragement, splitting relationships into healthy and toxic, and taking on PTSD symptoms, among others.

Compassion fatigue: a condition in which a worker loses empathy, compassion, focus and concern for the client (Rohwetter, 2022:21–27). This condition can develop from long-term job dissatisfaction.

The path to vicarious traumatization or compassion fatigue is directly through job dissatisfaction and lack of fulfilment associated with heavy workloads. The worker may feel disrespected in the workplace and does not receive recognition and appreciation (Harr, Brice, Riley, Moore, 2014). Workers working in this area *“need a preventive and supportive program, both individually and as a whole team”* (Rohwetter, 2022:32).

Symptoms reported in vicarious traumatization and compassion fatigue

inability to concentrate, memory loss, reduced self-esteem, apathy, preoccupation with trauma, perfectionism, rigidity, change in world view/change in view of relationships, feelings of anxiety, guilt, anger, fear, sadness, helplessness, moodiness, irritability, impatience and withdrawal, disorders lack of sleep, lack of appetite, negatively disturbed relationships, lack of trust in people, disturbing and negative thoughts, avoidance of certain situations and clients (Figley, 1995; Hesse, 2002; Bride, 2007, Harr, Brice, Riley, Moore, 2014)

The problem with these terms is the inconsistency in the opinions of experts. Some argue that vicarious traumatization and compassion fatigue are the same thing. Others that it is the same as secondary traumatic stress (see the authors mentioned above). In contrast, others say that so-called secondary traumatic stress is an acute reaction that develops suddenly, and the symptoms are almost identical to those of PTSD in clients (Pearlman, 1999; Sodeke-Gregson, Holttum, Billings, 2013) while compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization develop gradually.

In her book *Compassion Fatigue* (2022:32), Angelika Rohwetter emphasizes the differences between compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization, as follows: Compassion fatigue can affect all workers in the helping professions, no matter what target group they work with, on the other hand, vicarious traumatization affects only workers with traumatized clients.

What we can agree on is the lack of research in the area, unfortunately also non-existent data in the Czech Republic.

Burnout vs Vicarious Traumatization and Compassion Fatigue

The main difference between vicarious traumatization or compassion fatigue and burnout is that burnout is more of a reaction to the demands of the job and environment (Sodeke-Gregson, et al., 2013), it is also related to a certain repetitiveness and stereotyping in the workplace rather than a specific type of client problem, such as trauma (Schauben, Frazier, 1995). Furthermore, we can



understand burnout as an evolving response to chronic overload, while vicarious traumatization is understood as stress related to specific cases and can appear quite suddenly (Figley, 1995b). Lastly, burnout usually does not lead to a change in our core beliefs and values, as vicarious traumatization and compassion fatigue do. What they have in common, however, is that they can result in physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms (Kulkarni et al., 2013).

Methods of Prevention

We will examine the general methods of prevention, which we will divide into three categories according to the level of involvement of the workers themselves and team members.

The **individual** domain may include various practices to ensure mental and psychological well-being, but it should first and foremost begin with prevention. As repeatedly mentioned by Prof. Radek Ptáček (2023), we should start at the complete basal level, which involves sufficient exercise, a healthy diet, and quality sleep.

We can also include individual therapy, meditation, breathing and physical exercises, and others. The aforementioned Rohwetter recommends techniques for coping with compassion fatigue as follows: analyse your situation, ask yourself questions such as “how am I actually doing?”, “what do I feel in the presence of the client?”, and “when do I start to experience compassion fatigue?” and many other helpful self-reflection questions (Rohwetter, 2022:81–109).

As other preventive tools, we can use various courses, seminars, and trainings to improve our skills and work with ourselves.

Group supervision and coaching already mentioned above, and group therapy. If we imagine that more workers may exhibit the syndromes mentioned above, wouldn't therapy rather than supervision be appropriate?

An interesting format can also be a support group composed only of social workers who work in the given area. A group where the primary goal will be talking, sharing difficulties, experiences, and support. Furthermore, various group opportunities for education and development.

The **business** area cannot do without the active involvement of the organization's management. It is important that managers have full information about the risks to which employees are exposed. Therefore, I would include education in the field of employee care for higher positions in this sphere. Based on this, their options for supporting the mental health of their employees and which benefits they can offer them, according to their (as we already know limited) financial possibilities. Certainly, there should be support for the boundaries between personal and professional life, the possibility of home offices, various benefits in the field of mental health care (the aforementioned individual supervision/therapy, but also massages, yoga, etc.). Also team building and otherwise relaxing events that can improve the work environment.

From the qualitative study by authors Harrison and Westwood (2009), who dealt with the prevention of vicarious traumatization among psychotherapists, we learn that maintaining mental fitness can depend on many elements and built-up defence strategies. The authors divide them into nine categories:

- **Struggle with isolation**, by ensuring continuity between work, professional and personal life, making the most use of supervision, whether professional or peer, i.e. from workers in the same field. The **variety of work** will also help, the worker is not only in his field but also performs other activities within the organization. A **supportive environment** of family and friends is an integral part of this.
- **Spiritual foundation**, the belief that they are part of something bigger than themselves, that what we do has meaning and is good. Moreover, it is not only up to them to heal a traumatized individual.
- **Mindfulness practice** i.e., focus on the present, the surrounding world, perceive changes, try to practice from the beginning of your day. They expand their view to include beauty and pain, when life cannot have one without the other.



- **Active optimism**, which includes self-belief, the therapeutic process, and the world as such. We can also include the so-called enjoyment of life: trips, adventures, and travel.
- **Holistic self-care**, both in the personal and professional areas, such as enough sleep, physical condition, healthy lifestyle, but also education, personal therapy, etc.
- **Determining one's own boundaries and respecting one's limits.**
- **Empathy**, according to research, it appears that attunement and rapprochement with the client can help as prevention, a kind of professional satisfaction and a good feeling at work.
- **Professional satisfaction**, not only with the content of the work, but also with the management and functioning of the organization.
- **Making sense of and perceiving** that what I do is important, and it serves a purpose.

We believe that prevention and the work environment play key roles in the development of these syndromes. It is necessary to approach this issue comprehensively, because one cannot be solved effectively without the other. An employer cannot reduce the risks of a worker who does not believe in the importance of his work and does not take care of himself. In the same way, the worker needs a solid point, support, and understanding in his work environment. Unfortunately, in the Czech Republic there is no research on this topic and there are no recommendations for the care of workers with traumatized clients. The lack of research, recommendations and methodologies gives room for further research, i.e., the development of specific methods of employee care. We also find limited research abroad, but this could already be the first springboard for experts from the ranks of Czech social work.

LIMITS

The limit of this work is a superficial description of the situation regarding the care of employees in the field of domestic violence. This limitation is caused by a rough description of the situation and possible risks for workers, a brief introduction to the syndromes, and the citation of only selected works and authors. The sources were selected by the authors based on their knowledge and experience, while one of the criteria was also the availability of literature and studies. However, the aim of this work was to describe the situation and at the same time motivate experts in this field to be more interested in workers and draw attention to possible challenges in research areas.

SUMMARY

When working in organizations for victims of domestic violence, one encounters not only violence, abuse, listening to scary stories, and fear for the safety of both the client and one's own (this can be summed up as exposure to direct and indirect trauma). But one encounters all this precisely in a culture that downplays or even denies domestic violence and provides minimal resources for combating it (Kulkarni et al., 2013).

These specific problems are minimally mapped and in our environment almost hidden from the professional public, although they were described by the 1990's, they are not on the agenda, and protection against them does not seem to be an important point of working with clients. Burnout syndrome is taught in schools, but we rarely learn about related or similar syndromes. The question must be asked whether wider education would not help with the high turnover of employees and higher financial support from the state.

DISCUSSION

The topic of the impacts of working with victims of domestic violence on social service workers is a serious and often overlooked issue that requires more attention and real solutions. Care for employees in this sector in the Czech Republic is desperately lacking and available literature,



studies, and research do not address this topic, or do so only marginally. This creates the impression that the issue is not considered important. The result of this situation is the feeling or lingering aftertaste that social workers are considered easily replaceable and, given their turnover, unimportant to retain.

The lack of funding in this field only increases the demands on workers, who must look for motivation beyond material rewards. But what keeps them in this work? The reasons may lie in education, faith, and a deep conviction about the importance of their work, which is difficult to sustain without adequate support. To understand why social workers risk their own mental health, it is necessary to collect data and conduct qualitative research that would shed light on the impacts of trauma on their professional and personal lives.

Recommended steps should include the following:

- **Clarification of terminology and education:** First of all, it is important to inform the professional community about the terms and to start a discussion about the way we will think about the terms compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, and secondary traumatic stress. Do we include it in the burnout syndrome or not? For research purposes, it would be possible to use various methods, such as semi-structured interviews with experts, focus groups, and questionnaire surveys. The aim of these activities would be to map the meaning and comprehensibility of the individual terms, the way in which experts perceive and grasp them, and to find out what differences between these terms they identify and what they mean for them in practice. Specifically, we can then ask: What is the meaning and comprehensibility of the terms compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, and secondary traumatic stress in the eyes of experts? How do experts grasp these terms, and what differences do they perceive between them? What is the practical significance of these terms for experts in their everyday practice? What factors contribute to the distinction between the individual terms by experts? What connects the individual terms and what shared aspects do experts perceive between them?
- **Data collection, analysis, research:** The next step is to obtain basic data on social workers in the field of services for victims of domestic violence. Focus on mapping the impacts of compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization and secondary traumatic stress. Qualitative studies could shed light on motivations and reasons for remaining in the services, or possibly employee turnover. Furthermore, how workers cope with challenging situations and deal with stress. Here we would ask questions such as:
 - How does *vicarious traumatization/compassion fatigue/secondary traumatic stress* affect the daily work and personal lives of social workers who work with traumatized clients? What measures, support strategies and preventive methods do social workers consider to be most effective in managing and preventing *vicarious traumatization/compassion fatigue/secondary traumatic stress*?
 - What role do appreciation and work motivation play in preventing *vicarious traumatization/compassion fatigue/secondary traumatic stress*?
 - and others...
- **Promoting well-being:** An area discussed across social work target groups is how to obtain funding and persuade employers to improve access to individual supervision, education, and other options for employee mental health. It is worth considering providing psychological or psychotherapeutic support for your employees as well.
- **Better financing:** Lobby for better funding of services and better salaries for employees.
- **Methodological tools and training:** Developing methodological tools and training focused on stress management and working with traumatized clients could contribute to the prevention of burnout. Organizations should offer targeted training for managing specific situations and develop effective interventions aimed at improving the work environment.



- **Expert discussion and further follow-up research:** The topic must be regularly discussed in professional circles, not only at universities, but also in various government working groups and the services themselves.

The article should serve as a springboard to a deeper understanding of the problem and highlights the need for further research and data that can contribute to improving working conditions for social workers and preventing their turnover. However, the burning question remains whether the described measures and support mechanisms would actually be enough, or whether it is not necessary for social service workers who encounter traumatizing stories from clients over a long period of time to undergo targeted intensive psychotherapeutic care. This reasoning is based on the experience that these professionals face daily with difficult life stories that often lack positive endings. Such exposure inevitably disrupts their own perception of reality and safety, a phenomenon that manifests itself, for example, in an attempt to rationalize and trivialize situations that are otherwise completely incomprehensible: “That can’t be true, that didn’t happen, that’s definitely exaggerated...”, with which we are also familiar in the general public. This process of rationalizing extreme suffering is often a way to protect one’s psyche from the weight of harsh reality.

Another recommendation is to take into account fundamental questions directly related to the body of social workers in research: Is it even possible to fully cope with such a burden? If a social worker provides long-term support to victims of domestic violence, what helps him or her to maintain faith that the world is not just a place full of danger and evil? What sources of hope and resilience do they draw on to maintain their mental health and optimism in their work? And to what extent is hope a key element in their work with clients? These questions lead to a deeper reflection on the role of hope as a tool, source of stability, and motivational force, without which care for victims of violence would likely lose one of its core resources. They also open the way to finding new approaches and methods that could bring better protection and support to those who are exposed to extreme emotional burdens on a daily basis in order to improve the situation of victims of domestic violence.

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With Empty Hands: How the Lack of Public Resources Distorts Social Work Performance¹

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: This paper explores the impact of critical public resource scarcity on the performance of municipal social work in the Czech Republic. **THEORETICAL BASE:** Employing Osborne's Model of Human Service Production, we examined how limited access to resources hampers social workers' abilities to provide comprehensive support, leading to the reliance on provisional strategies and personal networks. **METHODS:** We used insights from three qualitative and one quantitative research projects. The qualitative methodological approach included semi-structured interviews with social workers and their managers across various municipalities, as well as content analysis of the records kept by social workers. **OUTCOMES:** The findings highlight a shift towards provisional goals and improvised procedures in everyday practice as a consequence of the severe lack of external resources essential for achieving desired social work outcomes. Without addressing the underlying lack of resources, the responsibility for achieving the desired outcomes of social work with clients is placed solely on the social worker and perceived to be purely a product of their skills, knowledge, and experience. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Our research highlights the systemic nature of the aforementioned problems. In this study, our research begs the broader recognition of the influence of public resource availability on social work practice; and suggests that policy and research in the field of social work need to more adequately address these constraints.

Keywords

municipal social work, social work goals, lack of public resources, Osborne's Model

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INTRODUCTION

We examined the pitfalls of viewing social work by assessing its narrowly defined effectiveness and identified the “influences of the social environment” as one of the crucial factors that significantly affect social work outcomes today (Malley, Fernández, 2009); yet this area has been given insufficient analytical attention. It is also severely underestimated in the context of social policy creation in the Czech Republic. Through synthesising selected research findings concerning municipal social workers in the Czech Republic, we aimed to highlight the critical impact of public resources allocated within the national social protection system (social benefits, social services, and other public services) on the service delivery process of social work, including the formulation of outputs. From the beginning, we thought it is important to stress that we do not consider critical resource scarcity to be a situation that has been well-defined in social work since Lipsky (1980), who sees functioning in an environment of resource scarcity as essentially intrinsic to the social work profession. By this, we mean a situation that social workers may experience, according to repeated findings from our research and their own media reports of the conditions of social work practice, making meaningful social work almost impossible. For example, Pavel Veleman, a social worker at a municipal authority, awarded the Gratias award as the best social worker of 2023; he metaphorically likened this problem to the situation of firefighters standing in front of a fire with equipment but completely without water (Veleman, 2024).

Several decades behind Western countries, the Czech Republic has also faced pressure to measure social workers' performance. This trend is mostly linked to neoliberal social policies and the application of New Public Management (NPM) (Lijegren, 2012; Lazar, 2021; Timor-Shlevin, Benjamin, 2021). Specifically, it relates to NPM's attempt to achieve economic efficiency in public services by implementing performance standards, evaluations, and accountability mechanisms (Munro, 2004; Shore, Wright, 2015; Lorenz et al., 2020; Ek Österberg, de Fine Licht, 2021; Power, 2021). Although Osborne, Randor, and Nasi (2013) argued more than a decade ago that NPM proved to be a flawed approach in the public services sector, and others have highlighted its negative consequences on the quality of these services (e.g., Munro, 2004; Clarkson, 2010; Timor-Shlevin, Benjamin, 2021); and this ideology remains appealing to policymakers. This might be because all professionals, including social workers, are affected by a crisis of public trust manifested as suspicion towards the work of professionals (Shore, Wright, 2015), although according to O'Neill (2002), the evidence that people's or institutions' performance is deteriorating is elusive.

In the Czech Republic, distrust towards the necessity and effectiveness of social work is further deepened by its weak institutionalisation (Hubíková et al., 2021). And it still persists, even 30 years after efforts began to establish social work as a full-fledged profession following the political regime change in the Country. Musil (2010) recognised the uncrystallised nature of social work as a social institution. In public discourse, social work in the Czech Republic is not perceived to be an expert method of solving specific social problems related to various adverse social situations. This is further reflected by offices at the municipal and national levels who are often reluctant to allocate the necessary financial resources from the budgets. According to a survey conducted in 2022 by the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic, almost 80% of municipalities do not consider the financing of social work for their municipality to be optimally set (Varhol, 2023). The effectiveness of the social work profession should reveal itself through the impact it has on clients' quality of life overall. In 2023, for example, and in order to prepare the still missing professional law, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) requested answers from researchers to questions such as: *Is there a quantification of the societal costs (both for individuals and society as a whole) of insufficiently available quality social work? Is there a measurement of the impact of social work on the specific aspects of clients' social situation and physical, and psychological state?* In 2024, MoLSA assigned a project aimed at formulating financial models for the performance of social work. These models are intended to calculate the ratio of costs and savings in public



resources associated with the activities of social workers and, in fact, to justify the financing of social work activities (project number N006/23/V00031496). We also repeatedly encounter MoLSA's requirements, as the managing authority for municipal social work, to propose easily measurable efficiency criteria, including redesigning the records of social work performance at municipalities for such reporting. Moreover, in connection with the financing of municipal social work, during the professional workshop "Record Keeping for Social Workers at Municipal Offices" (October 2023) held at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, we witnessed pressure from the Ministry of Finance officials to justify the usefulness of state expenditures to finance social work at municipal offices, expressed by the attitude, *We want to know what we are buying with that money*, while refusing to accept as relevant the answer: *A year of the professional work of 1500 social workers*.

This way of thinking disregards the specificity of the production of outcomes in social work services; primarily, it is a different nature of outcomes in services than in manufacturing. In social work, as in services generally, phenomena such as co-production and co-creation are discussed (Blom, Morén, 2012; Osborne et al., 2013; Osborne, 2018). We have already addressed the issue of outcomes in social work and their relationship to its quality in general (Havlíková, Hubíková, 2022). In the field of social work services, we consider Osborne's Model of the Production of Human Services (Osborne, 1992) to be crucial, as it conceptually separates service quality from a client's quality of life, while highlighting the influence of the social environment. This presents a significant difficulty in establishing a causal relationship between a social worker's intervention (i.e., service quality) and its effect on the client's situation (i.e., quality of life), sometimes perceived by social workers themselves as an element of "unpredictability" (Shaw, Shaw, 1997). Within the framework of Osborne's Model of the Production of Human Services, we would like to accentuate the "influence of social environment" dimension for the process of providing social work services in municipal authorities.

Municipal Social Work in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, municipal social work, as a delegated competence of state administration, is provided by 388 larger municipalities (i.e., 6 per cent of all municipalities), where approximately 1,500 social workers cover the entire country. Social workers at the municipality represent the first and/or last point of contact for all citizens in administrative districts of the municipality who are in adverse social situations or at risk of such situations. Therefore, municipal social work is understood as universal (i.e., not aimed at specific target groups, unlike e.g., social services); it is low-threshold (i.e., provided for free, both in outpatient and field form); and lastly, it aims not only to provide help and support to those who turn to social workers on their own, but also to actively seek out potential clients. According to available statistics, the most common clients of these social workers are people in need of long-term care for themselves, people with material problems and debts, individuals at risk of social exclusion, homeless people, or those living in insecure housing (Hubíková et al., 2023).

Despite the clientele consisting of people with accumulated problems, including various forms of severe material deprivations, municipal social workers cannot directly use any material resources to help and support clients (i.e., they do not decide on the provision of social benefits or allocations of social housing, etc.). They neither decide on the provision of non-material resources (i.e., social services), nor influence their availability in the locality. From this point of view, these public resources should be seen as external to the performance of social work in the Czech Republic. Therefore, in the following, we also refer to these public resources (social benefits, social and public services) as "external" or "resources" for short.

The use of the professional potential of social workers to effectively intervene is thus significantly limited. It is not surprising, therefore, that the method of intermediation, narrowed to the role of a distributor (broker) (Hepworth et al., 2009; Craig, Muskat, 2013), has occupied too much space

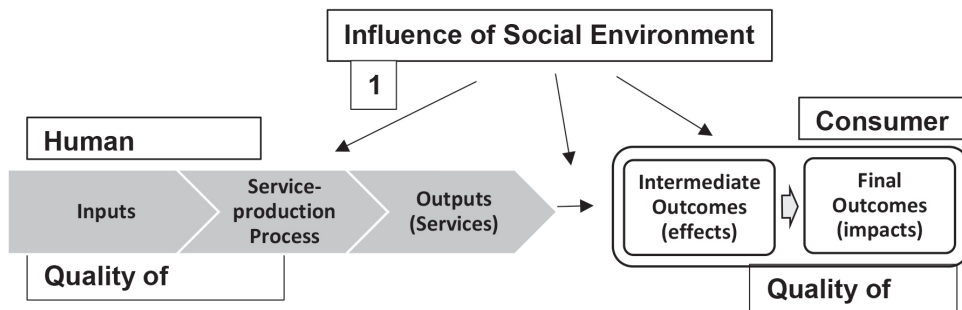


in the individual social work of municipalities. Social workers focus mainly on assisting clients in seeking solutions for their pressing material, housing, or care situations, and supporting them in accessing or utilising resources (e.g., by helping with filling out forms for benefit applications). Typically, these involve systemic social protection resources, such as social benefits, social services, and social housing. External or systemic resources play a crucial role for municipal social workers to effectively assist their clients. Their importance becomes even more pronounced when these resources are less accessible, or the path to them is fraught with administrative and other barriers. This is precisely the situation with which Czech municipal social workers find themselves vis-à-vis the state of the profession (Havlíková et al., 2022).

ELABORATION OF OSBORNE’S MODEL OF PRODUCTION OF HUMAN SERVICES

The now classic *Osborne’s Model of Production of Human Services and their Links to Quality of Service and of Life* (Osborne, 1992) (Figure 1) argues that while there is a relationship between the outputs of an organisation or social worker on one side, with the effects and impacts on the other, this relationship is not straightforward because other factors. Osborne calls these factors the “influences of social environment”, which intervene. These are largely beyond the direct reach or control of social workers, and yet these factors significantly influence the effectiveness of interventions (cf. Malley, Fernández, 2009). Osborne (1992) and later Blom and Morén (2012) relate influences of the social environment primarily to a client’s particular circumstances in life and the local community without further specification. However, Malley and Fernández (2009) note that these influences should also include the broader context in which social work is carried out, such as political structures, the availability of social services, and legal practices.

Figure 1: The Production of Human Services and their Links to Quality of Service and Quality of Life



Source: Osborne, 1992:447

Based on our research, we find Osborne’s concept of the influence of the social environments focused on the client and local community more suitable for the social work carried out in social services. There, social workers use the resources of a given social service to directly support clients in specific, narrowly-defined life circumstances; for example, within domiciliary care, helping and negotiating with clients which activities of a particular service will be provided to them. Nevertheless, for social work at the municipal level, the above definition of influences of the social environment is insufficient. Municipal social work, which is provided to the entire spectrum of clients, has been deprived of the possibility to directly involve systemic material and non-material resources in the provided assistance by gradual changes in the organisation of the Czech national welfare system. Therefore, it is desirable to elaborate on the resources of help available and



allocated within the national social protection systems (especially social benefits, social, and other public services) as another type of influence of the social environment that should be considered in analyses when assessing the effectiveness of production within social work services.

The relationship between “influences of social environment” from the sphere of national systemic resources and the process of providing “human services” (Arrow No. 1 in Figure 1) which are, for our case, the services of municipal social workers in Osborne’s model—is illustrated using insights gained through qualitative data. We elaborate on the influence of the availability/or lack of these resources at the levels of (1) Service Production Process, and (2) Outputs (see Figure 2). The Service Production Process includes all activities that occur when providing social work services to clients, encompassing both the aspect of the interaction between social workers and clients within the professional sphere (i.e., applied social work methods). Furthermore, “outputs” generally refer to the immediate results of the *service production process*. In social work at the municipal level, we understand outputs as the goals that social workers set with their clients as part of their cooperation in addressing adverse social situations.

Figure 2: Elaboration of part of the Osborne’s Model (authors’ compilation)

Municipal Social Work Influence of the Social Environment = Resources of the National Welfare System



MATERIALS AND METHODS

The findings presented in the Results section are based on four research projects that we recently conducted in social work at municipal offices. These projects are:

The application of case management and the assessment of the possibilities and limits of this method in the performance of social work in municipal authorities aimed at supporting the provision of long-term care in a natural environment, including consideration of organisational conditions and the readiness of social workers to implement this method, DC539/2018 (2017–2018), hereinafter also referred to as “The Case Management Project”.

Outreach performance and the subsequent setting of social assistance objectives by municipal social workers, TL01000229 (2018–2020), hereinafter also referred to as “The Project on the Outreach Performance”.

The quality of the provision of social work in the Czech Republic – the creation of a methodology for the assessment and implementation of an initial evaluation, IP70707 (2020–2022), hereinafter also referred to as “The Quality of Social Work Project”.

Research aimed at evaluating the activities of municipal social workers in relation to the structure and needs of their clients, IP70714 (2022–2024), hereinafter also referred to as “The Project on the Municipal Social Work”.

In the subsection *Service-production process...*, we work with the results obtained from two of these projects, namely The Case Management Project (Hubíková, 2018) and The Project on the Outreach Performance (Hubíková, Havlíková, 2020). It is not a secondary analysis of data



obtained in these research projects, but rather a new reflection on some of the findings that have already been achieved and realised; further reflections are critical in light of the ever-changing context of social work performance at municipalities, especially the increasing political pressure to measure outcomes and the scarce resources available to accomplish social work goals with clients. Both research projects had similar mixed research designs where the first, exploratory qualitative research phase was followed by a survey. In this paper, however, we only applied the findings from the qualitative phases of these projects. The qualitative research in both cases consisted of individual semi-structured interviews facilitated among municipal social workers and their direct superiors. Municipalities were included in the research through purposive selection (Marton, 2013) to ensure the representation of municipality parameters where they operate; they were as diverse as possible in terms of their size and population density, whether they have a more rural or urban character; as well as whether they are located in richer or poorer regions of the Czech Republic. In the Case Management Project, we conducted interviews with 23 participants and in the Project on the Outreach Performance with 30 participants. These research participants were involved in full compliance with RILSA's binding Code of Ethics and on the basis of their informed consent. The interviews were always conducted with the support of an interview scenario focused mainly on topics that we the researchers expected based on our desk research. Questions regarding the influence of resource availability on social work performance (i.e., the topic of this article) were not included in the interview scenarios.

In both studies, however, the strong nature of semi-structured interviews, which allows for both discussants to expand on their own topics, became manifest. Thematic analyses were conducted in both research projects, which is particularly useful when it becomes necessary to focus on not only specific topics researchers expect based on theoretical preparation, but also on identifying new topics in participants' dynamic statements. (Braun, Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Unfortunately, even with the qualitative research phase knowledge regarding the impact of resource deficits on social work performance, we did not grasp the severity of this situation to the extent that we would include the topic of external resource deficits necessary in the subsequent standardised phases of the respective research projects, i.e., surveys. Therefore, we lack sufficient quantitative data that would better document the scope of the problems described in the Results section of this article regarding municipal social work vis-à-vis social work methods discussed.

Eventually, in the 2022 questionnaire carried out within the project The Quality of Social Work Project, we included a set of questions regarding resource deficits in relation to the performance of social work and the fulfilment of its goals. The respondents were social workers (N=1 774) practising their profession in various spheres and departments where social work is performed in the Czech Republic. This research returned data for a subset of social workers at municipal offices (N=333) which is referenced at the beginning of the Results section. In the Outputs subsection, we further relied on insights from a fourth research project, i.e., the Project on the Municipal Social Work focused on analysing a log called the "Standardized Record of a Social Worker," which municipal social workers are legally required to keep. The record has a mandatory structure, which also includes a field for open entry of social work goals for a given client. We conducted qualitative and quantitative content analyses of printouts of a sample of 65 of these records (Havlíková et al., 2023).

RESULTS

Based on data from several studies (see *Materials and Methods*), we highlighted how the lack of resources in the national Czech welfare system affects social work in municipalities. This shortage can appear as indirect, where social workers do not have access to necessary resources to assist clients; or direct, where resources are almost completely lacking in the locality. Within the framework of a questionnaire survey carried out in 2022 under The Quality of Social Work Project,



we asked questions regarding the capacity of various types of public services, including social services needed by clients who social workers assist, as well as questions on whether the parameters of Czech benefit systems (i.e., the amount of social benefits, conditions for their acquisition, deadlines, etc.) help or hinder social workers in achieving the goals of social work they have set with their clients. Summarising the responses to these questions, about 58% of respondents among municipal social workers consider the capacity of social and other public services to be insufficient for most of their clients; only about 3% deemed their capacity entirely sufficient. Regarding the Czech benefit systems, approximately 47% found them only partially helpful in achieving social work goals. What must be considered particularly alarming, however, is that 36% of municipal social workers stated that achieving social work goals with their clients is somewhat or entirely hindered (Havlíková et al., 2022). Since the survey was conducted (in mid-2022), the availability of resources has declined. For example, by 2024, access to unemployment support became more difficult, and housing benefits were reduced. Moreover, data on unmet requests for social services are increasing, with the numbers for almost all services rising from December 2021 to December 2022 (e.g., by nearly 16% for nursing homes, 25% for social counselling, 29% for shelters, 35% for social rehabilitation, and 41% for night shelters) (according to MoLSA, 2022; MoLSA, 2023). These critical public resource deficits affect both the processes and outputs of social work, with our data better illustrating the impacts on processes.

Service-production Process: Lack of Resources Blocks or Distorts the Use of More Complex Social Work Methods

In two different studies (Hubíková, 2018; Hubíková, Havlíková, 2020), we looked in detail at the use of case management (CM) (see the Case Management Project) and outreach methods in municipal social work (see the Project on the Outreach Performance). In both instances, deficits of various types of resources or their systemic inaccessibility figured as one of the external limits to applying these methods. Social workers explicitly related the lack of resources primarily to the outcomes of applying these methods. Descriptions of social workers' strategies and improvised solutions in environments with resource deficits and of the dilemmas they face suggest, however, that resource deficits and the (anticipated) struggle for them link directly to social workers' perceptions about these methods and how to apply them.

Distorted Use of Case Management

Often, the only reason a social worker attempts to apply the CM method in addressing a client's life circumstances is precisely the deficit of services and resources for resolving this situation. If CM is applied in municipal social work, the social worker assumes the role of a case manager. In this role, they seek ways to compensate for the fact that they themselves do not have access to the resources needed to resolve the client's adverse situation, nor do they have the authority to co-decide on them. One social worker responded as follows:

“If we have classic problems, meaning the coordinated approach directly targeted at the person who has, let's say, housing, financial, or similar problems, we can involve more people. So, yes, I think that the possibilities of how to help them that we could actually coordinate are very few...” (social worker)

The effort of a social worker to involve relevant representatives of the authorities that, at least in theory, have these resources often fail from the very beginning when trying to establish relations with these representatives. Cooperation falters because these relationships are often contaminated with elements of competition for scarce resources, or cooperation does not even begin because the social workers of organisations that would need to be involved in the case pursue incompatible goals in allocating resources to clients. Municipal social workers most often described this in



relation to Labour Offices, which in the Czech Republic decide on the provision of most social benefits. These include benefits not related to employment policy, such as care allowance, benefits for people in material need, housing support benefits, and family allowances.

“[At] the Labour Office, even though it is set up to do social work, they don’t really deal with social work; they don’t care about the client’s case. They are only interested in the benefits: to pay or not to pay, but they’d rather not pay. If they do pay, they pay as little as possible. The client’s social situation doesn’t interest them at all. It’s not their priority.” (social worker)

“Every worker [at the Labour Office] handles it differently. Of course, we aim to saturate clients. They sit on the money. Sometimes it’s an unsolvable problem.” (social worker)

In coordinating assistance for clients, it is also particularly important to engage social services for cooperation, such as residential social care services, as well as shelters and field services. Tension arises in this area as well; there is a general shortage of social services in the Czech Republic, and municipal office social workers do not influence their allocations. Moreover, in the opinion of the municipality social workers, social services primarily operate according to rules that facilitate their operation but thereby disadvantage some clients of municipal social workers. Social services routinely turn away complicated clients, with whom communication is difficult and who have many needs. These are often the very clients that municipal office social workers focus on when applying CM.

Social workers at municipal offices often described their attempts to secure a suitable social service for a client as essentially a concatenation of helplessness. On the one hand, social workers from one agency (e.g., a health care facility) have unrealistic expectations towards municipal social workers; on the other hand, social workers at municipal offices then encounter reluctance and sometimes even refusal on the part of social services providers to accommodate them.

“Those health care facilities try to get rid of the client, even though we don’t have any facility secured or no one who would take them as there’s no place. We have nowhere to put the client, even if a life is at risk. So, they discharge them, and we don’t have any higher authority to counter this. I can’t get that client into any facility.” (social worker)

Coordination of care and access to material and non-material assistance then borders on pleading with the relevant entities to do something for the client. Even if the social worker eventually manages to engage the necessary actors in CM, they may encounter an absolute limit where the cooperating entities—while willing to participate in CM—have in practice exhausted their own resource capacities. Thus, optimal assistance cannot be given in either case. In such situations, municipal social workers are forced to seek provisional solutions (e.g., social hospitalisation in a healthcare facility instead of securing the client’s needs through appropriate social services and other resources). Furthermore, within the context of systemic deficiencies or poor availability of resources, the responsibility for the success of an intervention shifts significantly towards the individual accountability of the social worker, perhaps more so towards personal than professional responsibility. The importance of the social worker’s personality is emphasised, especially their willingness and ability to establish and maintain semi-formal relationships with a wide range of representatives from various agencies in the locality. It is essentially that achieving cooperation is not done purely through professional channels, but in a more personal way by linking a specific “name” to a “face.”



“You need to know these people by face. It’s also necessary to go out, visit that facility, and meet those people; they need to know you. That means that when they then call, they already know what D. looks like, and what S. looks like; she knows what Mrs. K. looks like, and it’s a completely different contact.” (social worker)

“The social worker who wants to do this must have their network of cooperating organisations set up in such a way that they pick up the phone and the other side knows that if this person called me, it’s serious; it’s important and needs to get done.” (manager)

“In practice, ... you establish contacts in that place, with doctors, hospitals, providers of social services, the labour office, [...] and [they] must be character-wise set in such a way that they look for ways to help the client, and how they do it and always look for those ways.” (manager)

These excerpts from interviews come from social workers’ supervisors, so supervisors consider such an approach desirable. The outcome of social work, including CM, then stands or falls on the personal connections of the social worker with representatives of other agencies. If the social worker or their counterpart in the relevant agency is replaced, it is necessary to start from scratch. This poses a threat to clients, is an undue burden on social workers, and deforms methods such as CM.

Hesitant Application of the Outreach Method

Regarding the outreach method, it was found that its application has been accompanied by the same difficulties in terms of resources and analogous problems in cooperation with other entities managing these resources, as described above about CM. The core of outreach, however, lies in attempting to find and contact people in difficult life circumstances within a given locality, in public spaces or private premises, and within households whose members would not seek help from a social worker themselves; this because they are either unaware of this possibility or have not yet decided to solve their situation. If social workers considered the most immediate goal of outreach, “to find and contact,” as the ultimate goal, then they could focus on techniques and strategies to do this and not question the achievement of the goal. If they viewed “to find and contact” more as an instrumental goal (i.e., as a starting point for achieving substantive goals aimed at changing the life situation of the person found), however, then the problem of the availability of material or non-material resources and assistance would be thematised as the main obstacle.

“We know about such groups, and it is often not about their unwillingness, but rather about the system’s inability to deal with it. These are, for example, people in residential hostels, who, let’s say, fall ill or have an amputation, a person from the street who is then unable to maintain the hygienic and operational conditions of the hostel, is unable to take care of themselves, and is a person dependent on material need; so there’s a problem of where to place such a person in a service.” (social worker)

From the statements of social workers, it’s evident that the problem is not conducting the outreach and finding the person, but rather, the subsequent collision with the barriers of resource deficits. They describe a moment of despair when they succeed in finding and establishing contact with a person for whom they know it will be difficult to find services and other necessary resources, such as housing or accommodation, appropriate social services, social benefits, etc.



“There’s the problem that even if you then work with it, that you have it found, a lot of things just don’t work (...) the absolute catastrophic lack of residential places and services. So, in nursing homes, and institutions for the mentally ill, when everyone has some target group; as soon as that person has two problems, they’re incompatible and so on. So, it’s such a disaster, when we have to use our personal inventions and so on. It’s terrible, and nobody’s dealing with it.” (social worker)

“We have people, we can find them, but it’s very frustrating for us, and you encounter this with seniors and the physically disadvantaged, that we don’t have the appropriate service for them, and often it’s really fighting windmills. Wherever we send requests, they come back saying that it’s not their target group.” (social worker)

Social workers then face the dilemma of whether to even attempt to contact the person and motivate them to resolve their situation, which puts them further at the risk of raising expectations to then be disappointed. They pointed out that such a person often has past experience of the unavailability of assistance, and failing a second time to find adequate resources is often permanently demotivating for them. Among social workers who verbalised this dilemma, however, the sense of personal responsibility to “do or try something” ultimately prevailed, similar to what has been described above in relation to CM. Thus, they seek solutions despite the unavailability of resources and services, even though it takes away their capacity to attend to other clients; even though it still does not usually lead to any satisfactory; or even improvised and temporary solution.

“Our city doesn’t have a shelter; doesn’t have a night shelter. So mostly it’s a few clients, but some just shuttle between the psychiatric hospital and here. So, these are the ones who really need to be cared for and helped when they’re hungry. We provide them with food, or we facilitate a shower for them.” (social worker)

Outputs: Influence on the Goals of Cooperation Set with the Client

In the previous part on the impact of the lack and inaccessibility of resources on the application of some social work methods, we revealed that this condition can also be imprinted on the objectives pursued by social workers. The data showed that there was often a shift from comprehensive goals set in agreements with clients aimed at making more permanent changes to their life circumstances to setting amenable “makeshift” goals, or even to a diversion to more procedural or very partial goals. The risk of goal displacement was intensified if, in the context of resource deficits, there was also pressure on social workers to justify their actions through reporting results, e.g., numbers of clients helped, goals achieved, etc. Goals may then be mistaken for administratively verifiable actions, and preference may be given to clients where there is a higher likelihood of quickly achieving intervention goals (Hubíková et al., 2021).

This problem became fully apparent in the content analysis of the forms of social worker’s records (see the Project on the Municipal Social Work). Among other tasks, municipal social workers are required to enter the goals of individual social work with a given client in these records. Through their content analysis, we compared the parts describing the client’s life situation and its development with the fields of the form where the social workers set the goals of cooperation with the client. While descriptions of work with clients usually showed an ambition to achieve a change in the client’s life situation, the way goals were formulated in another part of the record corresponded more to the priority of achieving simplistic goals, which was supplemented in the forms with the note “achieved.” Often, these involved listing specific activities that the social worker planned to focus on in helping the client, or areas that the social worker’s activity would target, such as “providing social counselling,” “occasional supervision of the client, trying to establish



a caregiving service or a volunteer for meal delivery,” and “support in finding adequate housing.” Commonly, the set goals also took the form of enumerating very specific actions the social worker intended to perform, for example, “filing an application for care allowance,” “assisting in filling out applications for nursing homes,” or even “conducting a social investigation.” When goals were set in this way, it often happened that most or even all of them were marked as achieved, while other records about social work with the client showed that the client’s situation did not improve or even worsened. The second tendency was to formulate very general and almost contentless goals without specifying criteria for their achievement, such as “ensuring the client’s needs,” or “improving the quality of life.”

In the records of the intervention process into the client’s situation, we could observe social worker’s efforts to secure resources and mediate help that would lead to a real qualitative change in the client’s situation and satisfy their basic life needs, especially in solving material deprivation, lack of housing, or absent psychiatric care. At the same time, these records also documented how the efforts of the social worker repeatedly failed due to the absence of resources or the unwillingness of other actors to provide resources in a given locality. We believe these are the main reasons why social workers hesitate to formulate comprehensive social work goals that, while “fitting” the client’s situation, are unlikely to be achieved due to the lack of critical, necessary external resources.

DISCUSSION

Under current political pressure on the efficiency of municipal social work, applying Osborne’s model without the proposed elaboration would effectively overlook the crucial influence of the degree of resource availability in the Czech national social protection system, which is beyond the direct reach of municipal social workers. As we demonstrated in the Results section, this type of social environment influence significantly affects the very process of performing social work in municipalities. It is evident that if we were to examine the examples mentioned in the Results section solely through the lens of professional performance in social work, and without considering the influences of systemic resources in the social environment, then we might likely conclude that the given social workers at municipal offices are not working professionally, and further education would be desirable. This is a common recommendation that we have come to in a number of our studies. In making these recommendations, we did not reflect on the fact that additional education, which again instructs social workers on the correct use of social work methods, would only add to their frustration at the inability to effectively assist clients in the face of low availability of systemic resources for assistance. Rash conclusions could thus lead to counter-productive recommendations regarding ways to increase their work efficiency.

The influences of the social environment on the process of providing social work services differ from those on achieving outcomes in the area of clients’ quality of life. As explained in the Introduction, when achieving outcomes, the influence of the social environment, whether positive or negative, is rather seen as an element of “unpredictability.” Conversely, influencing the process of providing social work services at municipalities through social environment elements as national systemic resources is quite predictable under current conditions: as shown in the Results section, it is to be expected that deficits in the availability of these resources would lead social workers to “bend” some social work methods or to resign from using them altogether. Instead of proven methodological procedures, improvisations would likely thus be established.

At the level of the formulation of the objectives of cooperation with clients (outputs), those that are realistic to fulfil are often given preferential selection; but in fact, these goals have little potential to contribute to practical changes to a client’s life circumstances. This leads to the institutionalisation of “provisionality.” Expecting positive impacts of municipal social work on clients’ life situations (outcomes) without providing necessary resources sets unrealistic demands on social workers’ engagement. Greater roles than established social work methods may, in many cases, be played



by the personal connections and individual experiential knowledge of the social workers (i.e., that they know their way within the specifics of their locality and have personal relationships with those in other bodies). Achieving outcomes, therefore, often depends to a large extent on the social capital of the social worker.

Furthermore, if these environmental factors are overlooked, there is a tendency to attribute the failures in working with clients to social workers, perceived as their individual professional shortcomings. Various metrics, reporting, and benchmarks could subsequently lend an air of objectivity to this allegation. Thus, consistently ignoring systemic obstacles and resource deficits could lead to interpreting the results through the lens of individual failures (of clients and social workers) and to the blindness of the need to primarily change the system itself. Over time, this could lead to the perception of the entire profession of social work as failing and disqualifying social work as an effective solution to social problems. This, in turn, could lead to proposals for further funding cuts to social work, stricter conditions for its funding based on demonstrable long-term impacts on clients' quality of life, and/or a redefinition of its mission (e.g., towards the greater disciplining of clients); perhaps even to the extent of the de-professionalisation of social work with the justification that untrained workers could be equally as "effective." These conditions could lead to a crisis of public trust, which O'Neill (2002) once considered unfounded, but which is gaining real justification in the decreasing ability of social work to effectively solve social problems. Paradoxically, this is not due to the laxity of social workers, but, conversely, to their efforts to function at least in some way despite the unsatisfactory conditions.

Although we drew examples exclusively from the practice of municipal social work, we postulate that most of the findings and arguments likely apply to other areas of social work performance in the Czech Republic, particularly those areas where social workers need to involve external resources beyond their direct control in their interventions. We believe that the specific situation in municipal social work in the Czech Republic allows for a clearer recognition of the risks associated with applying simple "metrics" (especially those that do not reflect the characteristics of value production within services and the concurrent influences of the social environment) for evaluating the quality or efficiency of social work performance, or in worse cases, of individual social workers.

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The Digital Age - Digital Radicalisation? A Model of the Relationship Between Online Content and Online Radicalisation

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The aim of the paper is to explore how face-to-face radicalisation factors influence radical behaviour in an online environment. It also focuses on the content that adolescents seek online and its role in their online radical behaviour. **THEORETICAL BASE:** Theoretically, it focuses on identifying the determinants of radicalisation and online radicalisation. It also aims to describe the role of social work in the digital environment and its potential in the prevention of radicalisation. **METHODS:** In the context of quantitative research, analyses were conducted using correlation calculations, factor analysis, simple linear regression, and to create a multiple linear regression model. **OUTCOMES:** The research results demonstrated that the factor of radicalisation Personal Values has a greater influence on online radical behaviour than General Values. Variables entering into Model 2, such as Socialization and Communication, as well as exposure to Emotional Content and Quotes, are associated with a lower level of online radical behaviour. Conversely, more frequent Shopping, use of Educational Materials, and exposure to Controversial Content and Radical Opinions are associated with a higher level of radical behaviour. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Social work should focus on shaping personal values and beliefs, supporting socialization and communication, using emotional content to prevent radicalisation, emphasizing proven educational materials, and actively engaging in the online environment to reduce radical behaviour.

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**Keywords**

radicalisation, online radicalisation, adolescence

INTRODUCTION

Social work must continually adapt to the evolving society and the phenomena it introduces. As the online environment has become an integral part of daily life in recent years, it is imperative for social work to conduct new research and develop innovative methods to ensure its effectiveness. Content that deliberately or inadvertently includes radical views is encountered almost daily. Exposure to radical content online can be a determinant in the resulting radicalisation of an individual. This paper aims to define radicalisation and online radicalisation, investigate how face-to-face radicalisation factors influence radical behaviour in the online environment, and analyse the content that adolescents search for online to better understand its role in their online radical behaviour.

RADICALISATION

In recent years, society has become increasingly concerned with the growing polarization among its members (Alstein, 2022). The widening ideological divide is creating heightened social tension. A specific example is political polarization, which has reached critically high levels. This phenomenon poses a direct threat to democracy (Abdi, Qasaye, 2024). One contributing factor to these phenomena is radicalisation. However, in the social sciences, there is no unified and universal definition of radicalisation (Heath-Kelly, 2013; Neumann, 2013; European Parliament, 2015). This lack of consensus arises partly because radicalisation occurs in diverse socio-cultural contexts (Ahmed, Obaidi, 2020; PISOIU, Zick, Srowig et al., 2020). Our view on radicalisation is that it is a dynamic and gradual process that legitimizes oppressive and discriminatory ideas, hate speech, and corresponding (non)violent behaviour (Alonso, Bjørgo, Della Porta et al., 2008; Scarcella, Page, Furtado, 2016). This legitimization is accompanied by internal justification of political, sexist, racist, or religious ideologies that promote hatred towards specific groups within society, impacting its diversity and democracy (Bath & North East Somerset Council, 2019). Radicalisation can also be understood as a gradual socialization process leading to the acceptance of extremist beliefs, which prepare an individual for violent behaviour (Hafez, Mullins, 2015). Such behaviour is often not inevitable but is rather influenced by conviction. Violence, in this context, has militant potential and serves as a means for a specific purpose (Taylor, 1991). Despite the apparent linearity in maintaining continuity and gradation, this process is not absolute. Current efforts focus on describing radicalisation through its individual and multidimensional characteristics (factors, levels, stages, mechanisms, etc.) (McCauley, Moskalkenko, 2008; Borum, 2011; Doosje, Moghaddam, Kruglanski et al., 2016). Radicalisation is a cognitive-behavioural process (Lub, 2013; Neumann, 2013), meaning it initially involves hateful thoughts that individuals gradually adopt. As these thoughts and beliefs become embedded in their value system, they begin to behave undesirably (Martínez, Sánchez, Galindo, 2022), integrating radicalisation into daily life (McCauley, Moskalkenko, 2008). Cognitive indoctrination of ideology leads to the restructuring and redefinition of an individual's values (Koehler, 2017). It is important to note that violence is not necessarily inherent in radical manifestations (Bak, Tarp, Liang, 2019). However, moral justification of violence is often present in the radicalisation process, subsequently determining the pathway of the process (European Commission, 2008).

The roots of contemporary societal radicalisation can be traced to the dynamics of democracy and the ways in which social systems can change (Schmid, 1992; Li, 2005). Conventional efforts



for change are sometimes ineffective, necessitating alternative, often less peaceful, instruments. However, these instruments do not necessarily entail anti-systemic or anti-democratic measures in the preparation and implementation of change (Lichner, 2020; Martínez, Sánchez, Galindo, 2022). The consequence of radicalisation can be radical behaviour by individuals and active support for radicalism in society. Radicalism represents a form of hostility and criticism towards the social status quo (Bötticher, 2017). It differs from extremism in that extremists' efforts exceed the constitutionally conforming spectrum and their attempts at change conflict with the normative-legislative order of the country. This is particularly evident in matters concerning government structure, fundamental values, freedom, respect, and tolerance (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2011). In summary, radicalisation is a process aimed at the adoption of extremist ideologies and its potential active support, i.e., socialization towards extremism (European Parliament, 2015; Maskaliūnaitė, 2015; Chisholm, Coulter, Public, 2017; Hardy, 2018).

RADICALISATION IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

The dynamics of contemporary society are closely linked to technologies that enable the reception and dissemination of information globally from the comfort of one's home, in what is known as the virtual environment. Groups aiming to radicalise society in this manner are no exception (United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 2021). The online environment provides a relatively safe space for the spread of violent and ideologically motivated propaganda. This phenomenon is expected to intensify (Briggs, 2014; Whittaker, 2022b; Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023). Online radicalisation can thus be defined as a process in which radicalisation is supported and disseminated through digital platforms and internet media (Neo, 2019; National Institute of Justice US, 2023). The evolution of online radicalisation can be delineated into three generations. **1) First Generation (1984–2000)** – during this period, “hate went online.” It is characterized by initial efforts at online recruitment mechanisms and propaganda primarily through websites, mass emails, discussion forums, and “primitive” social networks. **2) Second Generation (2000–2010)** – this period marks the beginnings of the global spread of social networks. Platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* (now “X”), *YouTube*, *Reddit*, and *Instagram* became leading online communication channels, making the spread of radical and extremist propaganda easier and more accessible. **3) Third Generation (2010–present)** – extremist organizations and ideologies become less significant as the trend of “self-promotion” grows, such as through personal manifestos. These manifestos are often shared and promoted via social media, which have become the dominant communication channels. Currently, up to 78% of children and youth in Slovakia use social media almost daily (Holdoš, Izrael, Almašiová et al., 2022). A significant milestone in mass online radicalisation during this period was the COVID-19 pandemic (Whittaker, 2022a). The online environment acts as a facilitator of radicalisation, and despite efforts to thoroughly study the mechanisms of online radicalisation, its impact on the final outcome remains unclear (Koehler, 2014). One of the fundamental mechanisms of online radicalisation is malevolent creativity. This form of creative activity aims to achieve the goals of a particular group while causing harm to the victim (Argentino, Maher, Winter, 2021). Malevolent creativity can be observed at both non-violent levels (e.g., recruitment processes, financing, and content dissemination) (Tóthová, 2018) and violent levels (e.g., planning meetings for harm, attacks, etc.) (Hunter, Walters, Nguyen et al., 2021). In practice, these activities are innovations that are organizational, tactical, or strategic in the context of radicalisation. For recipients of information in the online environment, these mechanisms can act as echo chambers, where they find understanding and support for their own ideas, potentially leading to further radicalisation (Behr, Reding, Edwards et al., 2013). It is essential to note that internet content considered extremist can act as a radicaliser to some extent. However, it is not clear whether it can replace face-to-face radicalisation (Conway, 2017). Behr, Reding, Edwards et al. (2013) highlight the insufficiency of research on the interaction



between online and face-to-face radicalisation. Marwick, Clancy, and Furl (2022) also criticize the mechanism of online radicalisation due to the vast number of interactions that can catalyse the idea of online radicalisation. The conventional understanding of the relationship between online radicalisation and face-to-face radicalisation is simplistic. This understanding supports the assumption that exposure to extremist ideology leads to its adoption. Consequently, there is a need to perceive online radicalisation holistically, as an interplay of two meta-levels – online and face-to-face radicalisation (Whittaker, 2023b; Wolbers, Dowling, Cubitt et al., 2023). Online radicalisation can also be significantly influenced by algorithmic radicalisation. This concept involves algorithms tailoring the content seen by individuals based on their previous searches or interactions. As a result, the content tends to become increasingly radical, including texts, videos, images, etc. (Davey, Ebner, 2019; Munn, 2019; Burton, 2023). Kenyon, Binder, and Baker-Beall (2022) summarize findings from several studies conducted on 437 perpetrators of extremist acts. A significant finding is the transformation of online platforms through which individuals encountered extremist content. Offenders convicted between 2018–2021 attributed significant influence to the online environment during their radicalisation, primarily due to the availability of online material (articles, websites, online games, etc.). Offenders convicted between 2019–2021 attributed an exceptionally significant influence to the online environment for their radicalisation.

SOCIAL WORK IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION

The aforementioned societal transformation in favour of digitalization presents several challenges, especially for social science disciplines. The online environment serves as a space for interaction among individuals, groups, and communities, making the creation of new types of relationships and their networking crucial. Social services and social workers inevitably become part of this interaction (Rafferty, Steyaert, 2009; Nordejsjö, Scaramuzzino, 2023). The National Association of Social Workers and the Association of Social Work Boards (2011) jointly developed several standards to integrate information technologies with social work practice. The goals of these standards are: **1) maintaining the quality and innovating mechanisms of technology-oriented social services;** **2) facilitating social workers in implementing information technologies in their practice;** **3) assisting and evaluating the use of information technologies amidst its continuous development;** and **4) informing clients, authorities, insurance companies, and other stakeholders about professional standards and the digitalization of social work.** The practical benefits of utilizing digital technologies in social work include the sharing and dissemination of information, monitoring and evaluation of interventions, transparency of social service enterprises, communication between institutions and clients, and the automation of routine and time-consuming tasks (Jacob, Souissi, 2023). Online meetings with clients can be advantageous for those from remote areas, anxious clients, clients who prefer written communication, or those whose health conditions prevent face-to-face meetings (Marković, 2024). The level of online prevention of radicalisation is a key instrument for current programs (International Peace Institute, 2010; European Commission, 2022). The intersection of social work and online interactions can be found in online counselling, therapy, and similar services (López, Pašić, 2018; Vrtová, Vaska, 2022). For social workers, professional preparation and education in the safe and professional use of the online environment are essential. This includes increasing competencies, maintaining confidentiality, addressing ethical issues, and securely handling sensitive data (Vaska, Čavojská, 2012; Fričová, 2020; Li, Reamer, Manning, et al., 2023).

The prevention of radical behaviour is generally described primarily in theoretical terms. This means that practical prevention and intervention methods for social work are currently lacking or have not been verified in terms of their effectiveness for contemporary societal needs (Patyi, 2023). Since the mechanisms of the online environment as determinants of risky behaviour are not sufficiently explored, it is challenging to create effective prevention methods for radicalisation



mechanisms from a social work perspective. The EU Internet Forum, in collaboration with IT companies, works on regulating online extremist content. However, content that remains within legal boundaries yet is considered radical becomes critical (European Commission, 2022). There is an opportunity for social workers to collaborate with international organizations to regulate this content by highlighting its inappropriateness. For instance, the Counter-Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) removed up to 10,000 pieces of radical and extremist content monthly in 2016 (Counter Terrorism Policing, 2018). Briggs (2014) describes several practical methods for combating the spread of radical and extremist content online. These include: **1) removing online content, domain names, etc.;** **2) filtering IP addresses, online content, proxy filtering, hybrid IP, and proxy filtering, etc.;** and **3) hiding search engine filtering, etc.** A similar prevention system, which can involve social workers, is proposed by Wolbers, Dowling, Cubbit et al. (2023): **1) removing online content to reduce exposure to inappropriate material;** **2) removing accounts spreading hate speech to limit exposure to unwanted content;** **3) reducing anonymity, as using real names often deters individuals due to fear of identity recognition;** **4) providing alternatives by criticizing extremist content and offering alternative perspectives;** and **5) educating and critically using the internet to build resilience and question radical views.** Thus, the prevention of radicalisation requires a holistic approach. This includes intercultural education aimed at civic society, peer-based and non-hierarchical work, and more (López, Pašić, 2018; Sklad, Park, Venrooij et al., 2022). The most common forms of prevention activities focus on information and communication, awareness-raising and educational activities, and preventive-resocialization activities (Jusko, 2022), from the perspective of primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Hassan, Brouillette-Alarie, Ousman, 2023).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using a quantitative design aimed at addressing two primary questions: *How do factors associated with face-to-face radicalisation influence online radical behaviour?*, and, *What content sought by adolescents in the online environment explains their online radical behaviour?* To answer these questions, the research utilized a questionnaire battery composed of a standardized methodology for measuring the extent of radicalisation and a proprietary questionnaire focused on online radical behaviour among adolescents. The level of radicalisation was assessed using the methodology “*Radical and Extremist Attitudes and Tendencies in Adolescent Behaviour*” (REPTSA) developed by Lichner (2020). This methodology included 33 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It encompassed two factors: *Personal Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs* (referred to as *Personal Values*) and *General Values and Opinions Supporting Radicalisation and Extremism* (referred to as *General Values*). Higher scores on these factors indicated a greater extent of radicalisation. This questionnaire was also used to assess the concurrent validity of the proprietary section. For evaluating the extent of radicalisation in the online environment, a proprietary questionnaire was employed. Initially comprising 6 items with a Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), the questionnaire underwent analysis including histogram examination, normality testing, skewness tests (indicating non-parametrical data distribution), and variance analysis. Based on these analyses, a revised 4-item factor was adopted (e.g., “*I share opinions on social networks against individuals of different skin colours, countries of origin, sexual orientations, or religions*”), which was subsequently used in the study. Higher scores on this factor signified a greater degree of online radical behaviour. The proprietary questionnaire also included 23 statements focused on the purposes for which adolescents use the online environment and the content they view. These areas were derived from a preliminary study in which students were asked to list several intentions behind their online activities.



Table 1: Provides descriptive statistics for the individual questionnaires and factors in the proprietary research

REPTSA			
Factor	Online radical behaviour	Personal values	General values
Alpha	0.856	0.960	0.905
M	1.564	1.718	2.398
items	4	19	14
min.	1	1	1
max.	5	5	5
SD	0.837	0.779	0.828

The research was conducted in compliance with the principles and rules of ethical behaviour as outlined in the Code of Ethics of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. This code is closely linked to the Principles of Research Practice in Scientific Publishing (Rector's Decision 5/2021, Rector's Decision 2/2022).

The research sample consisted of students from Slovak universities with both technical and humanities specializations (N=163). The questionnaire was administered online due to the nature of the research content. Students were intentionally recruited through various groups on social media. The average age of respondents was 22.91 years (SD = 1.756; Min – Max = 18 – 27). The gender distribution was predominantly female, comprising 79.1% of the sample (males 20.9%).

RESULTS

To verify the outlined assumptions, several analyses were conducted in the present study, including correlation calculations, factor analysis, simple linear regression, and multiple linear regression for model creation. All computations were performed using the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Table 2 represents the relationships between radical behaviour in the online environment and various factors of radicalisation. A positive moderate correlation was measured for both factors: *Personal Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs*, as well as *General Values and Opinions Supporting Radicalisation and Extremism*.

Table 2: Spearman's correlation coefficient between factors of radicalisation and online radical behaviour

	REPTSA		
		<i>Personal values</i>	<i>General values</i>
<i>Online radical behaviour</i>	r	0.434**	0.226**
	p(α)	< .001	0.001

REPTSA - Personal Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs; General Values and Opinions Supporting Radicalisation and Extremism

**p < 0,01

To deepen the understanding of online radical behaviour through face-to-face radicalisation, the data were subjected to simple linear regressions. Online radical behaviour was chosen as the dependent variable, while the independent variables were represented individually by factors of radicalisation. The conditions for performing linear regressions were met, despite the non-parametrical distribution of data in the research sample (Rabušic, Soukup, Mareš, 2019).



Table 3: Summary Results of Individual Simple Linear Regressions for REPTSA Factors: Regression Coefficients and t-values of Social Support Sources

		R	R ²	F	B	t	Sig.
REPTSA	<i>Personal values</i>	0.687	0.472	144.167	0.738	12.007	< .001
	<i>General values</i>	0.438	0.192	38.254	0.443	6.185	< .001

The research results were statistically significant and demonstrated that the factor “*Personal values, attitudes, and beliefs*” explains up to 47.2% of the variability in online radical behaviour exhibited by adolescents in virtual environments. Interestingly, the factor “*General values and opinions supporting radicalisation and extremism*” explains only 19.2% of the variability in online radicalisation. Subsequently, we examined what online content adolescents seek out that explains their online radical behaviour. We employed multiple linear regression using the enter method. The assumptions for performing regression analysis were met, and multi-collinearity was not confirmed (tolerance: Model 1 – from 0.395 to 0.749; Model 2 – from 0.745 to 0.948; VIF: Model 1 – from 1.335 to 2.529; Model 2 – from 1.055 to 1.343) (Rabušić, Soukup, Mareš, 2019; Bavořár, Ferjenčík, Kačmár, 2021). The dependent variable was online radical behaviour, and the independent variables were all variables reflecting the intent and content of online environment usage. The results showed (Table 4 presents the coefficient values for both models) that these variables explain 29.2% of the variations in online radicalisation within Model 1.

Table 4: Adequacy of the multiple linear regression model - enter method

	Model Summary			ANOVA	
	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
Model 1	0.540	0.292	0.174	2.488	0.001
Model 2	0.454	0.206	0.181	8.157	< .001

Although Model 1 demonstrated statistical significance, some variables within it were not significant (Table 5 provides the regression coefficients and additional statistics for the multiple linear regression of Model 1).



Table 5: Model 1 Regression Coefficients and Additional Statistics for Multiple Linear Regression - Enter Method

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error				Zero-order	Partial	Part
Constant	1.461	0.442		3.307	0.001			
Socialization, communication	-0.197	0.070	-0.233	-2.825	0.005	-0.191	-0.233	-0.202
Entertainment, relaxation	0.080	0.097	0.079	0.829	0.408	0.064	0.070	0.059
Study, learning	-0.101	0.082	-0.124	-1.233	0.220	0.095	-0.104	-0.088
Activism and sharing opinions	0.025	0.078	0.033	0.317	0.752	0.169	0.027	0.023
Sharing creative content	0.018	0.066	0.026	0.281	0.779	0.096	0.024	0.020
Shopping	0.185	0.078	0.234	2.369	0.019	0.210	0.197	0.169
Reviewing product reviews	-0.009	0.065	-0.013	-0.146	0.884	0.028	-0.012	-0.010
Watching news	-0.064	0.073	-0.088	-0.883	0.379	0.050	-0.075	-0.063
Politics, current events	0.106	0.067	0.178	1.569	0.119	0.165	0.132	0.112
Entertainment, humorous content	-0.057	0.066	-0.087	0.860	0.391	0.001	-0.073	-0.061
Sharing personal photos and videos	0.043	0.056	0.068	0.775	0.440	0.047	0.066	0.055
Educational materials	0.186	0.075	0.269	2.464	0.015	0.160	0.205	0.176
Creative content	-0.018	0.067	-0.027	-0.273	0.785	-0.045	-0.023	-0.020
Charitable content	-0.033	0.069	-0.043	-0.469	0.640	0.050	-0.040	-0.033
Sports content	0.105	0.055	0.167	1.896	0.060	0.143	0.159	0.135
Recipes and food	-0.043	0.064	-0.073	-0.675	0.501	-0.041	-0.057	-0.048
Fashion and style	-0.029	0.064	-0.049	-0.449	0.654	-0.003	-0.038	-0.032
Music, movies, videos	-0.103	0.070	-0.164	-1.473	0.143	-0.044	-0.124	-0.105
Podcasts	0.023	0.063	0.037	0.374	0.709	0.090	0.032	0.027
Meditative and calming content	0.015	0.059	0.022	0.247	0.806	0.064	0.021	0.018
War content	0.034	0.073	0.046	0.469	0.640	0.180	0.040	0.034
Emotional content, deep quotes	-0.180	0.072	-0.241	-2.510	0.013	-0.023	-0.208	-0.179
Controversial content, radical opinions	0.282	0.088	0.291	3.203	0.002	2.254	0.262	0.229

The most significant variables identified were *Controversial Content*, *Radical Opinions*, *Socialization and Communication*, *Educational Materials*, *Shopping*, and *Emotional Content with Deep Quotes*. These variables also exhibited statistical significance. Consequently, we proceeded to develop a new Model 2, which also proved to be statistically significant. Although the coefficient of determination (Table 4) decreased from the original value of 29.2% to 20.6%, all variables, their regression coefficients, and additional statistics for the multiple linear regression indicated that the model could be accepted.



Table 6: Model 2 Regression Coefficients and Additional Statistics for Multiple Linear Regression - Enter Method

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error				Zero-order	Partial	Part
Constant	1.363	0.316		4.319	< .001			
Socialization, communication	-0.201	0.062	-0.238	-3.254	0.001	-0.191	-0.251	-0.231
Shopping	0.178	0.058	0.225	3.074	0.002	0.210	0.238	0.219
Educational materials	0.128	0.051	0.185	2.512	0.013	0.160	0.197	0.179
Emotional content, deep quotes	-0.158	0.062	-0.210	-2.554	0.012	-0.023	-0.200	-0.182
Controversial content, radical opinions	0.301	0.078	0.310	3.872	< .001	0.254	0.295	0.275

In comparing the models, in Model 2, the unstandardized coefficient B for the variables *Socialization and Communication* and *Controversial Content with Radical Opinions* increased, whereas *Shopping*, *Educational Materials*, and *Emotional Content with Deep Quotes* decreased. This coefficient represents how the influence of independent variables on online radical behaviour would increase or decrease when controlling for the effects of other variables. In Model 2, this indicates that an increase in socialization—i.e., fulfilling the needs for communication and interaction—would lead to a decrease in online radical behaviour (-0.201), as would an increase in *Emotional Content with Deep Quotes*. Conversely, each one-unit increase in the variables *Shopping* (0.178), *Educational Materials* (0.128), and *Controversial Content with Radical Opinions* (0.300) would result in an increase in online radical behaviour.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the presented paper, it was determined through simple linear regressions that the factor of adolescent radicalisation, *Personal Values and Beliefs*, explains up to 47.2% of the variability in Online Radical Behaviour, while *General Values* explain only 19.2% of the variability. The research findings thus demonstrate that *Personal Values and Beliefs* have a greater impact on online radical behaviour compared to *General Values*. This may be due to *Personal Values and Beliefs* being deeply ingrained, forming a part of individual identity, and influencing how adolescents perceive and react to various stimuli (Elliot, Dweck, Yeager, 2018; Šlosár, 2023), including radical online content. *Personal Values* may also provide a stronger motivation for more active engagement (Maskaliūnaitė, 2015; McGregor, Hayes, Prentice, 2015) in online radical behaviour, while those with higher levels of radicalisation in *General Values* may not exhibit such active behaviour. These differences are significant for social work in the context of designing preventive and intervention measures, where social workers should focus more on addressing adolescents' *Personal Values and Beliefs* rather than just on general societal attitudes toward radicalisation and extremism in the context of adolescent online radicalisation.

Additionally, the research introduced a standard descriptive model of multiple linear regression examining the relationship between Online Radical Behaviour and specific content sought by adolescents in online environments. Although Model 1 demonstrated statistical significance, some variables within it were not significant, leading to the creation of Model 2, which achieved a coefficient of determination of 20.6%. Variables included in Model 2, such as *Socialization and Communication*, as well as exposure to *Emotional Content and Deep Quotes*, are associated with



lower levels of online radical behaviour. Conversely, more frequent Shopping, use of *Educational Materials*, and *Exposure to Controversial Content and Radical Opinions* are associated with higher levels of radical behaviour.

In Model 2, the variable describing socialization, or the need for communication in online environments, was associated with a reduced level of radicalisation. However, the literature often describes a potentially opposite trend, where the attempt to satisfy unmet needs in face-to-face interactions such as seeking excitement, adventure, friendships, and status confirmation may lead individuals toward radical groups (Bjørge, Carlsson, 2005; Kopčanová, Kopányiová, Smíková, 2016). Adolescents who spend time in online environments may encounter groups that support radicalisation, and feelings of belonging to these groups may steer them toward radical behaviour (Campelo, Oppetit, Neau et al., 2018). Since the research sample consisted of university students, the findings may reflect their experiences, which could be influenced by engagement in primarily positive and supportive online communities. However, this may not apply to all university students or other demographic groups, due to the methodological selection. Based on a comparison with available sources, it can be assumed that these results may nevertheless be valid. These communities may provide adequate social interactions and sufficient social support, which, conversely, reduces the likelihood of engaging in online radicalisation (Schiff, Pat-Horenczyk, Peled, 2010; Rousseau, Hassan, Miconi et al., 2019; Miconi, Santavicca, Frounfelker et al., 2023). University students are also likely to have a broader social network, diverse opinions (Aburezeq, Dweikat, Al-Shaar et al., 2022), lower levels of prejudice (Brown, Saeed, 2015; Shafieoun, Haq, 2023), and higher levels of critical thinking, social, and civic competencies (Sklad, Park, Venrooij et al., 2022). Nonetheless, it is important to note that the relationship between education and radicalisation is ambivalent, and there is no conclusive evidence that access to education necessarily reduces the risk of radicalisation (Macaluso, 2016). Nevertheless, all these factors may contribute to university students being better integrated into online environments and having access to diverse and supportive social networks. Another variable that tends to reduce online radicalisation is *Emotional Content and Deep Quotes*. This may be because emotional content can elicit emotional reactions and foster empathy. When individuals experience positive emotions or align with the values and sentiments expressed in these quotes, they may be less susceptible to radical and extremist ideas, which often exploit fear. Specifically, fear, when fuelled by anger, tends to increase radicalisation (Halperin, Canetti-Nissim, Hirsch-Hoefler, 2009). The role of emotional content can be interpreted through the lens of Emotionally Based Strategic Communications. This approach influences emotional, cognitive, and behavioural processes through indirect strategic communication (Ćosić, Srblić, Popović et al., 2012). Briggs and Feve (2013) describe this approach as focusing on “what we are for” rather than “what we are against.” A positive outlook is a significant component in building resilience against radicalisation and in the process of deradicalisation. In the context of radicalisation, this means engaging in critical reflection on controversial, disinformation, radical, and extremist content (RAN, 2017; Ruah, 2021).

Paradoxically, the variable *Search for Educational Materials* tends to increase online radicalisation, despite education typically serving to build connections between young people and society (Ghosh, Chan, Manuel et al., 2017). This paradox can be explained by the nature of the materials sought. The internet is rife with diverse information, and without critical thinking and proper filtering mechanisms, students may be exposed to risky ideas presented as educational or informational resources. Additionally, the search for answers to complex questions may lead students to radical groups that often provide simple, black-and-white answers to intricate issues, which can be appealing to those seeking quick solutions. Furthermore, the current educational system may not reflect contemporary needs or effective teaching methods, leading students to feel frustrated and more receptively open to alternative and radical narratives promising change or addressing complex questions. Therefore, it can be said that education plays a significant role in the radicalisation process. Its role is to influence opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as the spread



of disinformation, either directly or indirectly, to benefit the groups creating and disseminating propaganda. From this perspective, these groups currently possess almost unlimited power (Lieberman, 2017). The digital age has facilitated the rapid and easy dissemination of undesirable educational content to the public (Scheuble, Oezmen, 2022). Promoters or “influencers” (Sprejer, Margetts, Oliveira et al., 2021) are tasked with encouraging active or passive participation in society. However, the content they use to indoctrinate individuals is often violent, antisocial, anti-pluralistic, manipulative, and misleading (Rothut, Schulze, Hohner et al., 2023). Educators create so-called alternative media, aiming to educate the public through personal blogs, disinformation, or conspiracy theories, often adopting a style similar to traditional news media (Lewis, 2018; Davey, Ebner, 2019). In addition to ideological propaganda from radical and extremist groups, personal manifestos may also serve an educational function (Ware, 2020).

Conversely, it is anticipated that the variable *Exposure to Controversial Content and Radical Opinions* will increase online radicalisation, as repeated contact with such content can lead to gradual normalization, dichotomous thinking, and reinforcement of extremist views among students. The online environment is also unique in that students can easily gain social approval for conspiratorial or unverified opinions through likes, shares, and comments, which further motivates their dissemination. Typically, these are individuals seeking their content to go viral. According to Eid (2013), there is a broad spectrum of theories addressing the role of information technologies in the development of radicalisation. One of the tools of radicalisation is the competitive struggle and subsequent profit within the media environment. It is often observed that the more controversial the content, the greater its power to attract viewers. In practice, this can mean the widespread sharing of extremist narratives. Angus (2016) adds that exposure to controversial propaganda on the internet has the power to reaffirm one’s radical views and thoughts, a phenomenon known as echoing. This involves identifying with extremist narratives and the possible onset of self-propagation—radicalisation (Whittaker, 2022b). This phenomenon is further explained by Mølmen and Ravndal (2021), who argue that the online environment offers greater opportunities for seeking controversial content compared to offline environments. The internet, in this case, acts as a facilitator and, according to Gill, Corner, Conway et al. (2017), enables but does not drive radicalisation. Generally, one might also discuss a “tipping point” in the form of cognitive opening, which disrupts the existing value system and creates an alternative—radical—one (Schuurman, Bakker, Gill et al., 2017).

Another variable associated with these explanations is *Online Shopping*. Individuals who frequently shop online may be exposed to a broader spectrum of content, including political and ideological material that promotes radical views and beliefs. The aforementioned algorithms may subsequently recommend similar content, thereby increasing exposure to radical ideas and misinformation. Frequent online shopping may also indicate frustration, dissatisfaction, or a lack of life fulfilment, which can make students more vulnerable to radical ideologies disseminated in online environments. The threat of radicalisation through online shopping is linked to the process of mainstreaming radical positions (Comerford, Halvick, 2021; Rothut, Schulze, Rieger, Naded, 2023) and the commercialisation of the far-right. Although this phenomenon is not new, the current trend is more widespread. For instance, music and clothing items with extremist or radical content are now penetrating mainstream markets. These products are often designed to appeal to individuals who may not yet fully identify with extremist ideologies. By purchasing such items, individuals may unwittingly support the activities of radical and extremist groups (Aldao, Arboleda, 2019).

We acknowledge that the research results are subject to significant limitations, primarily related to the research sample. The limitations are not only about sample size but also the gender composition, with 79.1% of the participants being female. This disparity may be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted in an online environment, where women are more likely to engage in such surveys compared to men. Another limitation is the understanding of online radical



behaviour among adolescents, as it cannot be solely interpreted through the content and intent of respondents in the online environment. As discussed in the theoretical framework of the paper, online radicalisation mechanisms have been criticized by several authors for their limitation to a range of face-to-face radicalisation factors. The impact of the online environment on individuals has not yet been sufficiently explored. Thus, explaining the complexity of radicalisation through online mechanisms is challenging. The underlying factors are much more complex, and it is essential for further research to explore these contexts more extensively. This paper offers only a preliminary insight into the issue and opens up new directions for social work as a field of study. Preventive mechanisms in social work must keep pace with the constantly changing societal needs. The fluidity of social work should also be ensured by social workers themselves, who need to tailor their work to the specific needs of clients (Dominelli, 2004). As previously demonstrated, the contemporary era is characterized by information technologies that provide a space for socialization without real contact. In relation to this phenomenon, Morgensen and Buch (2022) note that, despite similarities, online radicalisation fundamentally differs from face-to-face radicalisation. The key difference lies in the fact that online radicalisation is characterized by “self-radicalisation”. This process starts with the individual and moves towards a radical society, while traditional face-to-face radicalisation mechanisms involve the reverse process. Therefore, social work must adapt to a combination of online and face-to-face socialization dynamics. The role of social workers is dual: they act as both “social controllers” of communities and those who focus on individual well-being. This aspect is crucial in the prevention of radicalisation (Ward, Gannon, Fortune, 2014). A fundamental task for social workers in preventing online radicalisation is the identification of warning signs of radicalisation. An initial sign of radicalisation is usually disconnection from the mainstream. This disconnection is not necessarily negative; it represents an alternative environment that replaces the mainstream. Initial warning signs that an individual is in an environment showing signs of radicalisation or extremism include: questioning authorities, re-evaluating societal opinions, call for resistance, justification of violence perpetrated by extremists, wearing clothing associated with extremists, and more (Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency, Netherlands Institute of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, 2018; Mølmen, Ravndal, 2018; Langdon-Shreeve, Nickson, Bright, 2021). It is crucial for social workers dealing with radicalisation to devote adequate attention to their professional and specialist training. This highlights the multidisciplinary nature of social work. Rosner (2017) incorporates strategic elements of social pedagogy into social work interventions as follows: **1) empowerment and mobilization strategies** (identifying personality and social characteristics of the client through interviews and encouraging social participation); **2) emphasizing the client's needs** (considering cultural or ethnical background through identification and conceptualization of values and beliefs); **3) tailored reflective communication** (creating and deepening relationships through meaningful conversations), and **4) creating appropriate collaborative plans** (sharing the client's perspective through networking individuals and institutions). Preventive and intervention elements should include levels such as: *cognitive* – developing critical thinking and understanding global society, reducing stereotyping and prejudice; *socio-emotional* – sharing values such as human rights, belonging, empathy, solidarity, etc.; and *behavioural* – responsible behaviour and action, motivation for social participation (UNESCO, 2016). It is therefore essential for social workers to actively engage in online environments where they can effectively intervene and reduce radical behaviour. Social work must continually adapt to evolving phenomena. Innovative methods are crucial to ensuring its effectiveness in the digital age. Analysing the content that adolescents seek online and understanding its role in radicalisation is critical for the development of effective preventive strategies.



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Sibling Relationships as a Source of Resilience in Homeless Children: The Case of Czech Republic¹

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The goal of this article is to understand the relationship between sibling relationships and resilience in homeless children. **THEORETICAL BASE:** Homelessness is a highly stressful situation for entire families. Sibling relationships are a unique and powerful context for children's development. **METHODS:** We obtained a total of 137 sets of questionnaires on resilience, sibling relationships and parent-child relationships. **OUTCOMES:** From the analysis of the hypotheses, it now follows that the relationships between parents influence the quality of relationships between siblings, and it is this quality of relationships between siblings that influences the resilience of the child. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Social work with homeless children should focus much more on sibling relationships.

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Keywords

sibling relationship, resilience, homeless children, parent-child relationship

INTRODUCTION

Sibling relationships are unique and powerful context for children's development, characterized by strong positive features, such as warmth and intimacy, as well negative qualities like intense, potentially destructive conflict (Öz Soysal, Eylül, 2016). For these reasons, sibling interactions may be both a risk and a protective factor for resiliency with lifelong implications (Smith, Hart, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2012). Sibling relationships involve process and provisions not present in other relationship. Sibling relationships are (often) the first experience of child interaction, and siblings have the capacity to act as both parental figures and peers (Dirks et al., 2015). Siblings share time spent together, living space, common history and opportunities for developing social-cognitive and behavioral skills that promote relationship quality (Kramer et al., 2019). Despite the important role of sibling relationships across lifespan, they have received far less attention than other relationships in children's lives (e.g., parent-child relationship) (Davies et al., 2019). It is not only that less attention is paid to sibling relationships as such in basic research, but also phenomena such as autism, intelligence, executive function, or the development of specific skills, e.g., reading, are preferred in the study of sibling relationships (see Öz Soysal, Eylül, 2016).

Homelessness is a highly stressful situation for whole families, including children. Although each child is unique and deals with external conditions differently, it can generally be stated that homelessness can have a negative impact on children on several levels: a) developmental delays; b) social adjustment; c) the incidence of internalized and externalized problems; and d) stress and its management (see e.g. Hinton, Cassel, 2013; Chow et al., 2015). In a situation of homelessness, risk factors accumulate in children in relation to resilience such as: low socio-economic status and (chronic) poverty, aversive residential environment, chronic familial disharmony and parental stress, (very frequent) parental divorce, unemployment of parents, frequent relocation and change of school, social isolation of the family, loss of sibling or a close friend (due to housing conditions), (frequent) mobbing (at school) (see e.g., Skala, Bruckner, 2014). Positive sibling relationships were associated with numerous benefits related to social, emotional, and health related development throughout childhood and adolescence (Kim et al., 2007; Whiteman et al., 2007; Padilla-Walker et al., 2010).

Despite the fact that it is siblings with whom homeless children spend the most time and who often represent the role of parenting figure (see Glumbíková et al., 2022), there is no research in the Czech Republic or abroad that focuses on understanding the functioning of sibling relationships and their relationship to resilience in homeless children (Ungar, Liebenberg, 2011; Davies et al., 2019).

Understanding how and why sibling relationships contribute to the onset and maintenance of children's resilience in homeless children population will provide critical information for helping professions (e.g., social work, social pedagogy or psychology), such as knowing when and how to intervene in sibling relationships. **The primary goal of this article is to understand the relationship between sibling relationships and resilience in homeless children.**

RESILIENCE

Despite extensive research, there is still no uniform view of the definition and content components of resilience. Various definitions of resilience are linked by reference to an individual's ability to maintain, restore, or improve mental health after having been exposed to negative circumstances.



In general, it can be stated that resilience is of: **a) multifactorial nature** (it is the sum of internal and external factors having an impact on resilience); **b) dynamic and procedural nature** (related to the child's natural development but also to the nature of specific risks and threats affecting the child) (Skala, Bruckner, 2014); **c) relationship-interaction character** (the psychological growth of an individual occurs within relationships and toward relationships) (L'Abate et al., 2010); **d) contextual conditionality** (consisting of interactions between an individual and the environment); **e) anchoring in positive psychology** and the resulting connection to efficacy and protective factors (Terzi, 2013); and **f) socio-cultural conditionality** (the influence of the social and cultural context crucial) (Davies et al., 2019).

In the framework of the research, we will perceive resilience as a **process** (with an emphasis on the development of resilience), which is the result of a reaction to risk factors or injuries that are present in the environment. As part of this process, we will emphasize the **understanding of resilience as relationally conditioned**, which is based on the belief that the psychological growth of an individual occurs within and towards relationships (see e.g., L'Abate et al., 2010). Positive relationships and the existence of social support in childhood are an important factor of resilience, as they increase the occurrence of positive ways of interaction (including positive emotions associated with them) and thus also the gain of additional social support, which supports the capacity to cope with life's challenges, restoring self-efficacy (Luthans et al., 2007).

Today, there are more than eighty concepts of resilience measurement (e.g., Prince-Embury, 2006; Ungar, Liebenberg, 2011) that accentuate to a different extent the personality's characteristics and environmental factors. There is agreement among the authors on some factors related to resilience, such as an ability to socially function, a positive self-image, and factors related to relationships with close family and friends, including relationships with siblings. Acceptance of social support associated with resilience can be divided into several types, for example: listening support, emotional support, emotional challenges (support in evaluating one's own attitudes, opinions, values and feelings); support in confirming reality; understanding and support in the performance of tasks. All these types of support are present in sibling relationships (Novotný, 2015).

HEURISTIC CONTEXT: HOMELESSNESS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

According to Ministry of Regional Development (2023) there are 61,000 children in housing need (homeless) in the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic we do not have law on social housing, but the Ministry of Regional Development is working on housing support that will implement tools for support of household in housing need. Current programs of municipalities and NGO's are financed from European social fund plus.

The above-mentioned, on the lack of legal regulation of the obligation to provide social housing, reveal that helping homeless people in the Czech Republic is currently the agenda of social services in the first place i.e., social services are the ones that are primarily responsible for helping these families (see Glumbíková et al., 2019). Homeless people are only supported on the streets with a variety of programs. Shelters (which are separate for men, women, and mothers with children and families) are residential social services for homeless people. According to the Act on Social Services No.108/2006, a shelter is a social service that provides temporary accommodation (most often for the period of one year) to persons in a difficult social situation connected with the loss of housing and involving social work. The Act on Social Services defines the following principal activities: a) providing food or assistance in ensuring one's meals, b) providing accommodation, c) providing assistance in asserting one's rights, legitimate interests, and in explaining personal affairs.

Hostels are the second most common accommodation option for homeless families with children (after shelters, the most common). Hostels are single buildings or groups of buildings that serve for accommodation and are run (most often) as private businesses. Although these facilities are subject to state regulations in terms of building and accommodation rules, it is true that they



have highly overpriced rents, instable and short-term leases, and poor housing quality (untidy and dysfunctional premises, poor hygiene standards, etc.). These hostels often accumulate disadvantaged groups of citizens who cannot afford to buy standard rental housing due to their lack of financial means to pay the rent deposit or due to their debts (Glumbíková, Mikulec, 2021). We can summarize the above by saying that homelessness is, not only in the Czech Republic, a highly stressful situation for entire families, including children. Although each child is unique and deals with external conditions differently, it can generally be stated that homelessness can have a negative impact on children on several levels: a) developmental delays; b) social adjustment; c) the incidence of internalized and externalized problems; and d) stress and its management (see e.g., Hinton, Cassel, 2013; Chow et al., 2015). In a situation of homelessness, risk factors accumulate in children in relation to resilience such as: low socio-economic status and (chronic) poverty, aversive residential environment, chronic familial disharmony and parental stress, (very frequent) parental divorce, unemployment of parents, low(er) educational level of parents, frequent relocation and change of school, social isolation of the family, loss of sibling or a close friend (due to housing conditions), (frequent) mobbing (at school) (Skala, Bruckner, 2014).

THE CONNECTION OF SIBLING RELATIONSHIP AND RESILIENCE

Sibling relationships could provide a natural environment for children to learn to develop relationships with peers, pay attention to other's perspectives and feelings, and develop significant skills such as anger management, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

Positive sibling relationships were associated with numerous benefits related to social, emotional and health related development throughout childhood and adolescence. These benefits included, but were not limited to, higher peer competence (Kim et al., 2007), prosocial behavior (Whiteman et al., 2007), healthy emotion regulation, high level of self-regulation (Padilla-Walker et al., 2010), prosocial behavior (Whiteman et al., 2007), empathy and solidarity (Öz Soysal, Eylül, 2016).

In addition to direct effects, sibling support could also buffer the impacts of distressful life events on internalization problems, as children with supportive siblings were reported to experience fewer depressive symptoms after distressing life events than children in unsupportive sibling relationships (Gass et al., 2007). Some research even states that strong sibling relationship may neutralize or offset adolescent vulnerability to insecurity in the aftermath of exposure to interparental conflict (Jacob, Sillars, 2012; McHale et al., 2012).

Positive sibling relationships may thus enhance resilience, for example, due to the fact that they: a) serve as a role model, mentor, guide to an effective negotiating approach oriented in interpersonal and exploratory domains (Jacobs, Sillars, 2012); b) are a source of security (Öz Soysal, Eylül, 2016); c) provide a repertoire of coping strategies, corrective feedback and framework for understanding situations (Whiteman et al., 2007); c) provide instrumental support and distraction from stress (Jacobs, Sillars, 2012); d) reinforce the ability to gain perspectives, understand emotions, negotiate, persuade and solve problems as well as the ability to initiate and maintain positive social interactions (Sang, Nelson, 2017). Positive sibling relationships can also mitigate depression, juvenile misdeeds, and internalization of problems and other adversity (Kim et al., 2007).

Negative sibling relationships were associated with risky behavior, adjustment problems, school problems, bullying (Bank et al., 2004), antisocial behaviors (as gatekeepers to delinquent peers and risky activities) and substance use (Scholte et al., 2008). Sibling conflicts were also associated with both internalizing (fear, inhibition, and overcontrol) and externalizing behaviors (aggression, antisocial behavior, and undercontrol) (Buist et al., 2013). Children growing up with a discordant sibling relationship could experience despair as they felt guilty for struggling. A number of studies also indicated that a more discordant sibling relationship was more likely to lead to increases in depressive symptoms; self-harm, low self-esteem, emotional distress and hopelessness (Buist et al., 2013).

Sibling relationships may have a different correspondence to resilience. In general, it is assumed



that (severe) conflict between siblings reduces resilience (hostility), and conversely, sibling warmth and positivity have the potential to strengthen resilience (Gass et al., 2007). The relationship between resilience and the quality of sibling relationships (positivity and warmth vs negativity and conflict) is modified by individual sibling constellations, especially by sibling gender, order, and age. In general, siblings of the same age and sex are more supportive than the ones who are more age-distant and of the opposite sex (Branje et al., 2004), but this also bears the risk of similarity in deviations (e.g., theft, drug use). In general terms, it can also be stated that later-born siblings are more likely to identify with their earlier-born siblings behavior (McHale et al., 2012), and that older siblings report a lower rate of conflict with the younger ones (Oliva, Arranz, 2005). However, younger siblings of a different sex are more likely to deidentify with an older sibling (Branje et al., 2004). The sibling dyads consisting of girls have a closer relationship, greater intimacy, and spend more time together; girls are generally considered to be warmer in their relationship with other siblings than boys (Dirks et al., 2015). Male dyad relationships show a higher rate of conflict, less intimacy (Kim et al., 2007) and greater hostility (Oliva, Arranz, 2005). There are always inter-individual differences, modified by the uniqueness of children and the environment in which they live (Mikulcová et al., 2023).

Some research on resilience is criticized for the focus on resilience in a population without contextually anchoring the life situation of the individual in which resilience is shaped. The majority of research on resilience in children also work with the majority population (see e.g., Davies et al., 2019), while the inclusion of a minority population group in research is a relatively rare phenomenon (Ungar, Liebenberg, 2011). However, without understanding the context of the child's life situation, it is not possible to correctly interpret findings related to resilience or determine what practices can help create an appropriate environment for children. For this reason, we focus on the specifics of the life situation of homeless children.

METHODOLOGY

Sibling interactions may constitute both a risk and a protective factor for resiliency, with lifelong implications (Smith, Hart, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2012). Only a few research studies have focused on resilience in sibling relationships, however, they do not pay attention to understanding the functioning of sibling relationships and their relationship to resilience in homeless children (Ungar, Liebenberg, 2011; Davies et al., 2019).

The research was carried out using quantitative data collection from homeless children in order to map and describe the connection between sibling relationships and resilience in children in the homeless population.

To carry out the research, we set the following hypotheses based on the study of the literature (see the theoretical anchoring of the research above):

H1: Warmth and Closeness in sibling relationships are associated with higher resilience in the sense (sense of relatedness, emotional reactivity and sense of mastery).

H2: Conflict in sibling relationships is associated with lower resilience in the sense (sense of relatedness, emotional reactivity and sense of mastery).

H3: Relationships between parents and children are related to sibling relationships and to children's resilience itself.

We used criterial purposive sampling for data collection. The criteria for a particular child's inclusion in the research were: a) the homeless situation according to the ETHOS typology (in particular stay in a homeless shelter or hostel); b) the 9-18 age group; we will select the eldest child living in a family of the given age group; c) existence of at least one sibling (always the age-closest sibling of the selected child will be used for measurement); d) stay in one of the ten cities in the Czech Republic where more than half of the population of families at risk of housing poverty live; e) voluntary participation in research. Respondents were selected deliberately through specific



institutions: shelters, hostels, and field social services operating in hostels. We were assisted by respondents' social workers from social services (shelters and field social-activation services) in addressing individual respondents.

The research was carried out from January to December 2023. To obtain data, we used standardized questionnaires focused on specific phenomena such as sibling relationships, parent-child relationships, and resilience. Furthermore, we created (on the basis of previous desk research and qualitative research with the given target group, $n=3$ sets of interviews with homeless children and at least one of their parents) our own questionnaire focused on the demographic characteristics of the given family and on the characteristics of its living situation. We especially focused on: the place of stay (shelter/hostel); the number of persons in the household, including the total number of siblings in the family; sex, age and birth order of siblings; and number of previous moves and length of stay in the place of residence.

For data collection we used the following questionnaires, all of which we obtained with the consent of their authors or current owners.

A) Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (SRQ) is a self-assessment questionnaire consisting of 21 items. The questionnaire consists of two basic assessment areas: Warmth/Closeness (15 items) and Conflict (6 items) (Furman, Buhrmester, 1985). The Warmth/Closeness factor consists of the average of the scale scores for intimacy, prosocial behavior, companionship, similarity, admiration by sibling, admiration of sibling, and affection. Conflict scores consist of the average of the quarreling, antagonism, and competition. The use of this questionnaire was preferred over other phenomenon-related questionnaires (e.g., Sibling relationship quality; Stocker, McHale, 1992) due to: a) its focus on the dimensions of the relationship that a number of authors (Feinberg et al., 2012; Dirks et al., 2015; Öz Soysal, Eylül, 2016) have agreed to be crucial, and b) the shorter extent of the questionnaire.

B) Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RSCA) is a self-assessment questionnaire containing 64 items. The questionnaire consists of three basic resilience scales: sense of relatedness, emotional reactivity, and sense of mastery (Prince-Embury, 2006). Sense of mastery includes self-perceived competence or self-efficacy, optimism, and adaptability. Sense of relatedness includes trust in others, access to support, social comfort, and tolerance of difference. Emotional reactivity represents the child's self-perceived relative sensitivity and intensity of reaction, length of time it takes to recover after an emotional eliciting situation, and to what extent this interferes with daily functioning. Sense of mastery and sense of relatedness have previously been identified as a protective personal characteristic, while the third construct emotional reactivity, is associated with risk when confronted with adversity (Prince-Embury, 2014).

The questionnaire was chosen on the basis of: a) focus on the research age group (as opposed to, for example, Resilience Scale, Wagnild, Young, 1993), b) a comprehensive focus on perceived strengths and weaknesses of the individual in relation to resilience, c) confirmation of a strong internal test consistency in the Czech population (higher than e.g., in Child and Youth Resilience Measure) (see Novotný, 2015), d) not restricting oneself to just a negative effect of resilience based on cognitive evaluation theory (see, for example, Resilience Scale; Jew et al., 1999).

C) Child-Parent Relationship Test (Chip) is a self-assessment questionnaire assessing the quality of parent child relationship designed for children (Titze et al., 2014). The questionnaire consists of 36 items representing three resource scales (cohesion, identification, autonomy), five risk scales (conflict, punishment, rejection and indifference, emotional burden, overprotection), and one additional scale (help for the parents). The questionnaire was chosen based on: a) its focus on assessing the relationship between parents and children from the child's perspective (as opposed to, for example, Mother-Child Relationship Quality, Montgomery et al., 1992), b) its focus on the current life situation, not on retrospective assessment of parent-child relationship (see, for example, Life Span Siblings Relationship Scale; Riggio, 2000), c) its focus on risks but also on resources; d) a reasonable extent for the target population (as opposed to, for example, Child Report on Parental Behavior Inventory; Schwarz et al., 1985).



Questionnaires Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (SRQ) and Child-Parent Relationship Test (Chip) with no existing Czech translation were translated using a double-blind translation (from English to Czech and vice versa and were always validated by a native speaker). The questionnaires were also piloted with help of 10 respondents from the target group. None of the questionnaires has a standardization in the Czech Republic, therefore we worked with simple scores.

The collected data set was cleaned, outliers were detected and double checked. The association between computed scales was assessed using the Pearson's correlation test. The significance of the results was evaluated at level alpha 0.05. All analyses were performed in the R statistical environment version 4.3.1. From the ethical perspective, research followed Ethical Principles in Human Research (APA, 2016). Participation in the research was voluntary; the informed consent of their legal guardian as well as the informed consent of children to participate in the research were required in the children's population. Special emphasis was placed on the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants. The University of Ostrava Ethics Committee approved the research on April 2020. We worked with the children in their natural environment and with sensitivity regarding their age. Each child had the opportunity to have their parent in the interview if they wanted. The children knew that they could stop the questioning whenever they felt uncomfortable. The researchers who collected the data have long-term experience working with children. The head of the research team has education and experience in the field of child psychology and social work.

The research limits were reflected, such as the use of: self-report measures, nonrepresentative sample of the population, possible social desirability, and non-longitudinal study. Despite this, we believe that the research brings interesting findings about the hitherto unexplored area of relationships between sibling relationships and resilience in homeless children.

RESULTS

As part of the research, a total of 137 sets of RSCA (Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents), Chip (Child-Parent Relationship Test) and SRQ (Sibling Relationships Questionnaire) questionnaires were obtained; a total of 411 questionnaires were completed.

A total of 137 children, 68 boys and 69 girls, took part in the research. The average age of the children was 11 years. In 50% of cases, these were households of single mothers. The average number of household members was 5. More than half of the households had more than three children. The maximum number of children in a household was seven. 55% of families had experience of living in a shelter and 45% of families had experience of living in a hostel.

Table 1: Average values of questionnaire scales and standard deviation

name	all
N	137
SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	3.60 ± 0.68
SRQ_scale_Conflict	3.05 ± 0.72
RSCA.scale_mas	52.71 ± 11.17
RSCA.scale_rel	68.93 ± 13.18
RSCA.scale_rea	56.55 ± 10.99
RSCA.scale_total	178.19 ± 32.34
Chip.QRI _{mother}	1.27 ± 3.21
Chip.QRI _{father}	1.34 ± 3.97
Chip.QRI _{total}	56.55 ± 10.99



It is clear from the data analysis that the scale of the Warmth and Closeness questionnaire is positively correlated with the scales of sense of relatedness, emotional reactivity and with the total score of the questionnaire focused on resilience (RSCA). No positive correlation was found for the sense of mastery scale. **Therefore, we can only partially confirm H₁**, that Warmth and Closeness in sibling relationships are associated with higher resilience in the sense (sense of relatedness, emotional reactivity and sense of mastery).

Table 2: Calculations of Person's coefficient for H₁

x	y	estimate	p	p adj.
SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	RSCA.scale_mas	0.15	NS	NS
SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	RSCA.scale_rel	0.21	0.0174	NS
SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	RSCA.scale_rea	0.20	0.0230	NS
SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	RSCA.scale_total	0.21	0.0207	NS

We can reject H₂. It turns out that sibling Conflict is not correlated with either the Resilience Focused Questionnaire (RSCA) scales or the total score of the questionnaire.

Table 3: Calculations of the Person coefficient for H₂

x	y	estimate	p	p adj.
SRQ_scale_Conflict	RSCA.scale_mas	0.05	NS	NS
SRQ_scale_Conflict	RSCA.scale_rel	0.09	NS	NS
SRQ_scale_Conflict	RSCA.scale_rea	0.09	NS	NS
SRQ_scale_Conflict	RSCA.scale_total	0.08	NS	NS

As part of the **H₃** analysis, we found **that the quality of children's relationships with their parents does not correlate with any scale of the questionnaire focused on resilience**. This is the most surprising result of the entire data analysis.

Table 4: Pearson coefficient calculations for H₃: Chip and RSCA

x	y	estimate	p	p adj.
Chip.QRI _{mother}	RSCA.scale_mas	0.11	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{mother}	RSCA.scale_rel	0.12	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{mother}	RSCA.scale_rea	0.12	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{mother}	RSCA.scale_total	0.13	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{father}	RSCA.scale_mas	0.12	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{father}	RSCA.scale_rel	0.07	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{father}	RSCA.scale_rea	0.08	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{father}	RSCA.scale_total	0.10	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{total}	RSCA.scale_mas	0.16	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{total}	RSCA.scale_rel	0.13	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{total}	RSCA.scale_rea	0.14	NS	NS
Chip.QRI _{total}	RSCA.scale_total	0.16	NS	NS



However, we can state that the relationships of children with their parents correlate in almost all cases with the relationships between siblings. Whereas the correlation for the Conflicts scale is negative, i.e., we can say that the worse the relationship between parents, the higher the probability of conflict between siblings.

Table 5: Pearson coefficient calculations for H3: Chip and SRQ

x	y	estimate	p	p adj.
Chip.QRImatka	SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	0.25	0.0075	0.0374
Chip.QRImatka	SRQ_scale_Conflict	-0.22	0.0200	NS
Chip.QRIotec	SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	0.24	0.0354	NS
Chip.QRIotec	SRQ_scale_Conflict	-0.25	0.0264	NS
Chip.QRIcelk	SRQ_scale_Warmth_Closeness	0.32	0.0043	0.0256
Chip.QRIcelk	SRQ_scale_Conflict	-0.27	0.0191	NS

From the statistical data analysis given above, the following logic of relationships between relationships in the child's family and resilience can be assumed: relationships between parents and children influence relationships between siblings, and relationships between siblings (in the sense of warmth and closeness) influence resilience.

CONCLUSIONS/DISCUSSION

For the first time in the Czech Republic and abroad, the project brought extensive systematic knowledge on the connection between sibling relationships and resilience in homeless children. Research into the homelessness situation of families with minors is today a major social issue that deserves due attention (viz Feantsa, 2023).

From the analysis of the hypotheses, it now **follows that relations between parents are related to the quality of relationships between siblings, and it is this quality of relationships between siblings (in the sense of Warmth and Closeness) that is related to the resilience of the given child.** The above seems to be logical in relation to who children actually spend the most time with in shelters or hostels, whom they perceive as a source of security and safety and as a certain model for solving life situations (Glumbíková, Mikulec, 2021; Glumbíková et al., 2022; Mikulcová, 2023). Glumbíková et al. (2022) specifically found that sibling relationships among homeless children satisfy a number of children's needs, such as the need for stimulation, the need for a meaningful world, the need for love and emotional security, the need for identity and finding one's place in society, and the need for life perspective and open future. Bad relationships between siblings (in the sense of conflict), on the other hand, can deepen deprivation in the area of some needs; for example, poor relationships with siblings can lead to a deepening need for love and emotional security.

Another challenge for research is to find out how the individual characteristics of homeless children are related to resilience, parent-child relationships, and sibling relationships. Furthermore, it is necessary to focus on how the specific characteristics of the living situation of homeless children influence resilience itself. This could be achieved by comparing test results in the population of homeless children and in the non-homeless population.

The connection between sibling relationships and resilience in the homeless children has been largely overlooked in family-based prevention and intervention programs (Feinberg et al., 2012). It is the strengthening of the quality of sibling relationships that can significantly strengthen family cohesion in the homeless population and thus potentially serve as a source of resilience to cope with the current difficult life situation of homelessness and in the future as a kind of



homelessness prevention (in the sense of the existence of a certain safety net and social support). It is also necessary to note that in times of the Covid-19 pandemic and related epidemiological measures, siblings are often the only “peers” with whom children (homeless) interact, thus further enhancing their influence on resilience.

Our research in homeless children can have a broad impact in three areas: (a) interventions that target siblings of at-risk youth, (b) family-based programs whose effects are connected with the benefits of target youth siblings, and (c) programs designed to improve the quality of sibling relationships. The effectiveness of sibling programs has been proven in research; see, e.g., Solmeyer and Feinberg (2011).

The above opens up another possibility for social work interventions supporting the fulfilment of the need for love and emotional safety to strengthen the relationship between siblings, which is impaired by the insufficient spatial capacity of accommodation, and the poor way of the spending of leisure time by children, by organizing common activities (excursions or trips), or by establishing low-threshold facilities, such as day-centers for children in the immediate vicinity of their accommodation, where the children could spend their time productively in a safe environment, and the parents could “relax” and reduce their emotional strain (see Swick, Williams, 2010).

It is not without interest that if we search for professional texts dealing with social work with siblings, we only find texts focused on foster care and specifically on decision making in cases involving siblings. We, social workers, are still lacking research-based texts focused on the development of relationships between siblings in children at risk in specific life situations difficult situations. The need to introduce innovative approaches to work with a target group of homeless children based on basic research of the situation of this target group is also evidenced in the European Pillars of Social Rights, principle 19: Housing and Assistance to the Homeless. The primary goal of this article was fulfilled, to understand the relationship between sibling relationships and resilience in homeless children.

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Challenges of the Digital Transformation for Social Work

This research note provides information about a project that examined the challenges posed by digital transformation for social work institutions through five case studies.

Welfare and social work organizations are increasingly under pressure to implement the rapidly accelerating digital transformation of society within their respective domains. The manner in which these organizations address these challenges will determine which understanding of social professions and welfare care will prevail in the future. The digital transformation of social work will not only reshape the structures of these institutions but will also inevitably and sustainably change the life and participation opportunities of their clients and professional practitioners. Prevention of the hopes associated with digitalization from turning into their opposite requires reflective implementation and sovereign design within social institutions. In this context, a central task of academic social work and its related disciplines is to generate orientational knowledge for practitioners.

In the summer of 2023, empirical case studies were conducted in five institutions. Each case study focused on a social institution in Lower Bavaria that employs digital technologies in its work with vulnerable groups. The institutions studied included a mobile eldercare service, two homelessness assistance centres, a child and youth welfare service, and a migrant support service. A total of 16 interviews were conducted, involving executives, professionals, and beneficiaries.

The key findings are summarized below. The presentation of the challenges derived from the interviews is structured according to (1) clients, (2) institutions, and (3) professionals, followed by (4) an outline of the derived approaches.

(1) Clients

Financial Barriers: A significant obstacle to digital participation is the lack of financial resources. This affects both the acquisition of devices and access to internet services. Clients in precarious situations often cannot afford the necessary hardware or internet access.

Social Support: The lack of social resources, such as a supportive environment that helps with or encourages the use of digital technologies, exacerbates the digital divide and hinders digital participation. Without a network providing assistance and guidance, it can be difficult for clients to recognize the benefits of digital technologies and use them effectively. Limitations in supportive individuals and institutions extend to the use of digital technologies. If these institutions lack sufficient resources or competencies to educate and support clients in using digital media, potential users are often left excluded.

Habits and Routines: In many households, digital technologies have played a subordinate role thus far. Traditional routines and habits without digital technologies can lead to clients being less motivated to integrate digital devices into their daily lives, even if it could bring potential benefits. This is particularly true for older generations who grew up with a lesser presence of digital technologies.

Low Self-Efficacy: A lack of self-efficacy experiences, i.e., the belief in one's own ability to successfully use digital devices, is a significant barrier. This is especially true for clients who rarely interact with technology. An exception is often found in children and adolescents who, through early and regular use of digital media, develop higher self-efficacy in this area.

Lack of Technical and Media Competence: A lack of technical or media competence is a major barrier to digital participation. Without the necessary knowledge and skills to operate digital

devices and critically evaluate digital content, many clients remain excluded from the benefits of the digital world. This applies to both the basic operation of devices and more complex skills such as online security and data protection.

(2) Organizations

Lack of Financial and Technical Resources: Institutions face the challenge of insufficient funds for acquiring and maintaining modern technological equipment. This includes both hardware and software, which can result in the use of outdated or inefficient systems.

Inadequate Technical Equipment: Limited budgets lead to inadequate technical equipment in institutions, severely restricting the possibilities for digital participation and efficiency improvements through technology use.

Shortage of Skilled Personnel: A major obstacle to the effective use of digital technologies is the shortage of qualified personnel. Institutions report difficulties in finding professionals who possess both domain-specific skills and adequate technological competencies.

Lack of Interoperability & Synchronization Issues: A common problem in social institutions is the lack of interoperability among various systems and programs, especially, but not only, when governmental IT systems are involved. This leads to synchronization issues and hampers efficient data flow and information exchange.

Challenges in Data Management: Technical limitations (as mentioned above) complicate data management, preventing staff from accessing important information in a timely manner.

Lack of Strategic Planning: There is often a lack of clear concepts and strategies for the implementation and use of digital technologies. This results in ad-hoc implementations that do not meet the actual needs of the institution and create isolated solutions that further complicate interoperability.

Lack of Coordination: There is often little coordination regarding digital strategies between the social institutions studied and their sponsors or welfare associations. This lack of coordination can lead to inconsistent approaches and inefficient resource use.

(Data Protection) Legal Uncertainties: Data protection legal uncertainties pose a significant hurdle. Institutions are uncertain about how to use digital technologies without violating data protection laws.

Legal Frameworks: In some cases, legal frameworks complicate or prevent the use of certain digital solutions, limiting the possibilities for digital transformation.

(3) Professionals

Lack of Systematic/Professional Knowledge about Technology and Digital Media: Many professionals lack sufficient systematic or professional knowledge in the field of technology and digital media. This deficit can negatively impact the integration and effective use of digital technologies in their work. Insufficient expertise often leads to inefficient or suboptimal use of digital tools, which can affect the quality of service delivery.

Personal Distance from Technology: Some professionals exhibit a low affinity for digital technologies, which is reflected in a hesitant or reluctant use of digital tools. This reluctance can be attributed to various factors such as unfamiliarity with the technology, lack of training, or a general scepticism towards digital innovations.

Lack of Control and Co-Design: Professionals often experience feelings of powerlessness due to having little influence over the selection, design, and implementation of the technologies they are required to use. This lack of control can lead to frustration, especially when the available technical solutions are not well-suited to the specific needs of their work.

Data Protection Issues: There is often a discrepancy between theoretical data protection regulations and actual practice. Data protection regulations can be difficult to integrate into everyday work, leading to conflicts between compliance and practical feasibility. This is particularly relevant in

areas where the exchange of sensitive information plays a role.

Expectation Discrepancies: The discrepancy between the expectations and goals of management and professionals regarding the use of digital technologies often leads to tensions. While management views the introduction of new technologies as an opportunity to increase efficiency, professionals may perceive these changes as an additional burden or as unsuitable for their working methods.

(4) Preliminary conclusion and approaches

Improving Technical Infrastructure in Social Institutions: The technological infrastructure in social institutions should be modernized and expanded to meet the increasing demands for digital services. This includes providing powerful hardware, efficient and coordinated software solutions, and a stable, high-speed internet connection.

Targeted Training Programs: Training and educational programs should be tailored to the needs and abilities of the various groups within the institutions. This will enhance both the competence and confidence of employees in dealing with digital technologies.

Creating Opportunities for Empowering Use — Empowerment through Technology: Programs should be developed to help clients and professionals in social institutions develop a sense of self-efficacy in using digital technologies. This can be achieved through practical workshops, support services, and easy-to-understand guides.

Participatory Development: The development of digital concepts should ideally occur in a participatory process that includes employees, clients, and other stakeholders of the institutions. This ensures that the solutions developed meet actual needs.

Tailoring Strategies to Individual Needs: The overarching digital strategies of the sponsors should be closely aligned with the individual requirements and conditions of each institution. This allows for more efficient and targeted implementation of digital projects.

Knowledge Sharing and Networking: The exchange of best practices within and between different institutions and sponsors should be promoted at the local level. By transferring proven approaches and solutions, institutions can learn from each other and improve their digital competencies. Often, existing support offerings from sponsors are not well-known to local institutions.

Promoting Collaborations: Collaborations with other social institutions, as well as with technology partners, can support digital transformation. Joint projects and exchange programs can create synergies and make more efficient use of resources.

Centralizing Technical Support: Centralized (regional) IT departments at the sponsor level, which provide clear data protection guidelines and technical support, would be an advancement to ensure the security and efficiency of the technological infrastructure. These central units should also serve as contact points for technical questions and problems, thereby preventing parallel isolated solutions and concentrating competencies in personnel.

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Family Probation Officer in the Field. Interactive Rituals Enacted in a Professional Role – Doctoral Dissertation

The research project presented in the doctoral dissertation entitled “Family probation officer in the field. Interactive rituals enacted in a professional role” was oriented around the activities of Polish family probation officers, which worked in two central districts of a large city. The aim of the study was reconstruction of the interaction rituals disclosed by family probation officers in relationships with wards at their homes. I intended to show how a family probation officer copes in a field where he is a “forced guest”. In Poland, family probation officers work on behalf of the district court and their relationship with supervised families is somewhat imposed by the court’s ruling. Due to the dominating quantitative research in the literature on Polish probation, in my research, I decided to adopt a qualitative research strategy.

Theoretical and methodological assumptions of the research

The theoretical framework was defined by the assumptions of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986), which states that social actors act towards the objects around them based on the meanings they assign to them. The leading theoretical inspirations for my research were the Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical approach and the theory of interactional rituals (Goffman, 1959; 1967). Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach uses the metaphor of theatre in relation to the everyday life of people — social actors. The theory of interactional rituals assumes that participants in social interactions comply with the requirements that define the ritual order. Participants in the interaction play the roles they have adopted to protect their own face and that of other social actors (Goffman, 1967). Moreover, the conception of “dirty work” initiated by Everett Hughes (1958; 1962) has proven to be significant. Its basic assumption is that some jobs experience physical, social, moral, and emotional issues (Ashforth, Kreiner, 1999; Rivera, Tacy, 2014; Lesiak, 2019).

The subject of my research was the family probation officer’s activities with their wards in their natural living environment to accomplish professional goals. The main method of my research was ethnography (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2000; Angrosino, 2010). I decided to follow in the footsteps of the Chicago School researchers and go out into the field. I also used elements of analytical autoethnography (Anderson, 2006). In the analysis and interpretation of the empirical material, I used the procedures of grounded theory methodology, with a particular focus on the axial coding (Strauss, Corbin, 1990), which supported the process of emerging research categories. The data collection techniques included open participant observation (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2000; Flick, 2010), ethnographic interviews (Angrosino, 2010), informal (conversational) interviews (Konecki, 2000) and unstructured interviews (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2000).

I conducted my research in the specific area of the centre of Łódź, a city with over 500,000 inhabitants (a large city). Its specificity resulted from the “stigma” of being dangerous and unfriendly (Wolaniuk 1997; Marcińczak, Siejkowska, 2003; Tobiasz-Lis, 2013). At the same time, it was an area where revitalization and gentrification processes were taking place. As a result, the center of Łódź became full of paradoxes, firstly due to its architectural superficiality resulting from fragmentary revitalization, and secondly due to social inequalities – people in a difficult economic situation became neighbours of wealthy residents (see Wolaniuk, 1997; Świerczewska-Pietras, 2009; Michel, 2016; Gulczyńska, Granosik, 2022).

Selected results of our own research

The research allowed me to identify categories related to the probation officer's area of work, conducting supervision and talking to members of supervised families.

Thus, the topography of the probation officer's work area consisted of the following places: *streets, pavements, buildings, tenement house gates, courtyards, staircases and the apartments of the supervised families*. It was also possible to identify the issues of the area that the family probation officer must deal with. These included physical, social, material and emotional burdens. The research showed that probation officers adopted methods of coping with them, which include: *the strategy of coping with immaterial burdens and the strategy of coping with material burdens*. What is more, the research showed that the probation officers frequently experience specific risks in his work, because they can only anticipate the course of meetings with members of supervised families in their places of residence but cannot be definitively convinced about this (Miśkiewicz, 2024).

Another important result of the research emerging was *the strategies for probatory supervision management*. The first was *the strategy of supervising through protection*, which consisted of two tactics: *the caring protection and the monitoring protection*. The second strategy was *supervising through control*. The probation officers implemented strategies goals using three tactics: *imposing a definition of the situation, ensuring the effectiveness of supervision, and forecasting* (Miśkiewicz, 2024).

The final important result of the research was *the talking strategies*, which had the source in the troubles in relations between the probation officers and the supervised people. The probation officers used the strategies of *taking up difficult topics, extinguishing conflicts with the wards and obtaining hidden information*. Each of them contained a few tactics, implementing the goals of the mentioned strategies (Miśkiewicz, 2024).

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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 society to solve people's life problems through social work,
- support the quality of social work and the professionalization of social work practice,
- contribute to the development of social work as a scientific discipline and to the improvement of education in social work,
- promote the inclusion and interests of people who use and / or co-produce social work or are involved in social work in different contexts and ways.

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.

Notice to Contributors

The journal *Sociální práce/Sociálna práca/Czech and Slovak Social Work* is published four times in the Czech language and twice in the English language each year. The journal publishes the widest range of articles relevant to social work. The articles can discuss any aspect of practice, research, theory or education. Our journal has the following structure:

- Editorial
- Academic articles
- Book reviews
- News / Research notes

1. Instructions to authors of academic articles

Editors accept contributions that correspond to the profile of the journal (see "Our mission"). The contribution has to be designated only for publishing in the journal *Czech and Slovak Social Work*. It can also be a contribution which has already been published in another journal, but for use the text has to be revised and supplemented. The number of contributions from one author is limited to two per year.

The offer of manuscript receipt and review procedure

The academic text intended for publishing in the journal should be a research or overview essay (theoretical, historical, etc.). For the article to be accepted to the review procedure, the author of the text must work systematically with the relevant sources, explain the research methodology and present a conclusion with regard to the research goal. Because the journal has a specific professional nature, texts are preferred which also contain application aspects where the author explains the relevance of their conclusions in the context of social work.

The review process is reciprocally anonymous and is carried out by two independent reviewers. Student works are subject to a single review process. Academic and student works are judged in terms of content and form. If necessary, a work may be returned to the authors for supplementation or rewriting. Based on the assessments of the review process, a decision will be made to either accept and publish the article in our journal or to reject it. The Chairman of the Editorial Board will decide in questionable cases. Please send two versions of the article to the editor via e-mail. The first one may contain information which could reveal the identity of the author. The second version should be the complete and final text.

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There is also space for all reviewers who want to introduce an interesting book in the field of social work and its related fields in the journal. We require making arrangement about the book review with the editors in advance. When sending the text, please attach a scan of the front page of the reviewed book. (in 300 DPI resolution).

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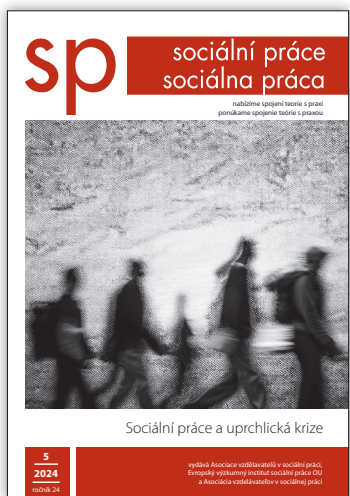
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