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Work satisfaction and mental pressure of social workers and workers in social services

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ABSTRACT

Working in the social sphere is a profession that involves intensive social interaction with clients. The aim of this paper is to describe work satisfaction in the research group of social workers and workers in social services from the South Bohemian region ($N = 227$). This is established by the means of a standardized Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS, Spector) and an evaluation of pressure of work by means of a Meister questionnaire. The research aim is also to test the relationships of dependent variables within the job positions and the scope of employment in this group of employees. The results show the research group is ambivalent from the aspect of work satisfaction, which means they are medium satisfied (56.1% of the research group). Total dissatisfaction has been identified in less than 5% of employees and satisfaction has been identified distinctly less than in the whole of the Czech population. The employees especially showed their satisfaction in the area of relationships at the workplace, communication and the scope of employment. Dissatisfaction was shown in possibilities for career development, evaluation of their work, and administrative stress. Less than 5% of the respondents mentioned high work stress, but despite this the group evaluated their working conditions rather negatively. The total pressure of work of most respondents conforms to the category 2, whereas temporary affection of subjective state and productivity can regularly occur. 17.4% of the research group reach the levels that increase the limit of mental pressure of work. A statistically significantly higher rate of pressure of work in the social workers compared to the workers in social services has also been proved. Generally satisfaction has been influenced by the trend of understanding social work as an obligation and support from the working collective, while negatives are connected with pay grades and work benefits.

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Introduction

An analysis of work satisfaction should be done because it is a significant determinant of the work productivity of an individual in a company, and it also relates to the mental condition, health and the quality of life of an employee [1–4]. Social workers and workers in social services often face stress and emotionally demanding situations in their job; their work often does not contain benefits such as sufficient financial and social evaluation, which, according to the motivational models increase the satisfaction of employees.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the work satisfaction of social workers and workers in social services from the South Bohemian region. The research purpose was to describe the particular components of work satisfaction and mental pressure of work in this research group, and then to test mutual relations between these concepts. There were set research questions focused on the relationship between work satisfaction and the selected variables (such as work position and the scope of employment).

Theoretical data

Work is a basic human need, value and even obligation. Therefore it is an important part of human life that reflects the quality of human life [4,5]. Work satisfaction can be defined as work attitude; a positive or negative emotional state that follows from work life and work evaluation [6,7]. The factors of work satisfaction can be classified as internal and external [8]. The internal factors include individual perception of work – they are connected with the internal motivation of workers and their personal characteristics [9,10]. External factors primarily reflect the current situation in the working environment that is influenced by many sources, such as the method of evaluation, management style, relations in the workplace, the way of assigning work tasks and demarcation of work roles and competencies [11,12]. Work satisfaction is a significant factor of working efficiency, and the Czech Republic has a relatively long tradition in the evaluation of work satisfaction [12,13]. The evaluation of work satisfaction is applied in specific workplaces and the research focuses on comparisons within particular professions or other European countries [14]. In the Czech Republic 63% of the examined workers were satisfied with their work.

The basic factor correlating with work satisfaction is business engagement, which is, according to Allen and Meyer [15], a construct that is connected with a bond between an individual and a company, both at the level of the internalization of the goals of their work roles, emotional bond to their work, and acceptance of their work responsibility. Although the character of the work of our research group – helping clients in a difficult situation – may increase business engagement, the other determinants of work may influence its decrease [16]. The contradictory nature of social work as a helping and also repressive profession motivates the research of work satisfaction and the particular work factors. One of the most significant determinants of satisfaction that is not standardly assessed is the subjective perception of work pressure, which closely relates to the development of

work stress [17]. Work pressure means biological, physical or mental pressure that is connected with working conditions and requirements [18]. Židková [19] stresses a significant partial factor of work pressure to be the demands of communicating with clients. Especially the interaction with involuntary or aggressive clients, emotionally demanding work with people in an unfavourable situation, mentally demanding work with clients connected with bad working conditions, time pressure and over workflow financial evaluation and low social evaluation of this profession belong to the negative effects of work pressure. Pressure of work is a significant aspect of an occupation legislatively determined by the government regulation No. 361/2007 Coll. [20] that sets out the conditions of health and safety at work, and the regulation of the Ministry of Health No. 89/2001 Coll. [21] that categorizes jobs according to mental stress. The occupation of social workers and workers in social services are among the professions that are characterized by working with people [22]. It means that they are endangered primarily with mental stress [23]. In social services there is high demand for mental strength and frustration tolerance, because a worker often faces the negative emotion of clients and they must often deal with their interpersonal conflicts.

Work in the social services or the work of social workers can actually be classified into category one; it means there is no danger of stress that should affect mental or physical health. The problems of stress factors in social work were issued in the government regulation No. 523/2002 Coll. [24] and then cancelled by a review in the government regulation No. 361/2007 Coll. [20]. The level of pressure of work in the available researches negatively correlates with higher education [5]. Work experience, including the number of years at work, [25] is also important. Therefore we will focus on these socio-demographic variables too.

Materials and methods

The research aim was to describe the factors of work satisfaction and the pressure of work in the social workers and the workers in social services, then to compare both groups of employees and perform an analysis of relation of the measured variables with work characteristics, the rate of interaction with clients and the length of service. In order to answer this, we used the data acquired by a questionnaire survey of the workers in the field of social work. A standardized questionnaire Job Satisfaction Survey [26] that deals with nine factors measured through 36 items on the 6-point Likert scale was chosen for the examination of working satisfaction. The statements included the participants' attitude towards labour wage factors, career development, management, employee benefits, recognition, working conditions, co-workers, scope of employment and communication in the workplace. Mental stress was measured through a 10-item Meister questionnaire for the evaluation of mental stress [27]. The total stress is assessed as a combination of three factors: work overload, monotony and a nonspecific factor. Work overload is characterized by a feeling of time pressure, the pressure of high responsibility and problems in the workplace. Monotony

is characterized by work dissatisfaction, dull work and retained attention. A nonspecific factor is connected with nervousness and stress of work, tendency to do something else, tiredness and weakness from work and demand reducing performance. The measurement takes place on a 5-point Likert scale to the statements considering work and its influence. The mentioned two standardized questionnaires were further completed with several questions of working and socio-demographic character: age, sex, length of practice in the social sphere and a question ascertaining the frequency of an interaction with a client.

The research group ($N = 227$) was made up of social workers ($N = 57.33\%$) and workers in social services ($N = 57.67\%$) who were acquired through a selection pursuant to availability, namely through available and willing providers of social services in the South Bohemian region. These were purely providers of social services in the non-state non-profit sector. From the aspect of gender, there were 89% women and 11% men. The most represented age group were in the age of 26–30 years (35.6%), and from 36 to 45 years (32.4%). From the aspect of education, a secondary school graduation prevailed in 53.2% of the research group. From the aspect of prevailing target groups it is possible to divide the research group into those who work with seniors (52.2%), workers with the handicapped (17.4%), workers with marginalized persons (9.6%) and workers with children and youth (15.1%). The most often represented practice is 1–5 years of practice in the social sphere (in 46% of the workers). However, almost 5% of the workers have worked in the area of social work for more than 20 years. For 73% of the respondents, their main scope of work was directly working with a client.

Within the analysis of work satisfaction and stress of social workers and workers in social services we used descriptive statistics. Within hypothesis testing, parametric different statistics (T-test, F-test) considering normal allocation was used.

Results and discussion

Results of the assessment of working satisfaction

The descriptive assessment of the JSS questionnaire brought the following results: 4.62% of the respondents were dissatisfied with their jobs, 56.1% had an ambivalent approach, and 39.3% showed job satisfaction.

The satisfactory factors mentioned by the respondents were management, co-workers and communication in the workplace. The unsatisfactory factor was career development. The ambivalent factors were wage, employee benefits, appreciation and working conditions. So the service itself satisfies the target research group, however this research group is not satisfied with their job assessment. Concerning the individual items, satisfaction was mentioned by the research group in the factors: competent manager, good relations with co-workers, fairness of the manager, fun working tasks, interest of the manager, interest in feelings of the subordinates, good feeling in the company of co-workers, pride in one's own work and the sufficient explanation of working tasks. On the contrary, the highest dissatisfaction was

found in the items: opportunity of promotion, increase of salary, benefits compared to other companies, opportunity of career development compared to other companies and examination of the fact if people in a company are too little assessed.

Factors effecting work satisfaction

Considering the factors that affect work satisfaction, interference statistics were executed resulting from the research questions relating to the difference in satisfaction rates towards characteristics of working positions (a social worker or a worker in social services) and the scope of work (primarily work with a client or administration).

We focus on the extent of interaction with a client as the first significant factor. The respondents who work with clients for only part of their working hours are dissatisfied with their work in 4.44% of cases. 64.44% of cases have an ambivalent attitude, and 31.11% of cases are satisfied. The respondents whose main scope of work is interacting with clients are dissatisfied in 4.8% of the cases, in 53.6% of cases they have an ambivalent attitude, and they are satisfied in 41.6% of the cases. It was proved – compared to the hypothesis – that there is no significant difference between the groups considering frequency of interaction with a client ($t = 0.94$, $p = 0.35$) within the average values of the gross satisfaction rate.

Another examined factor in relation to work satisfaction was the work position, and the legislative classification of workers on a social worker and a worker in social service. The reasons for different satisfaction could arise from the different wage evaluation as well as the character of the work. Although the workers in social services stated higher satisfaction (an average gross score $M = 142.2$), compared to social workers ($M = 137.8$), no statistically significant difference was seen ($t = 1.17$, $p = 0.24$). The particular factors of work satisfaction and its values for individual groups can be seen in [Table 1](#).

The length of practice also seems to effect [28] work satisfaction and the occurrence of burn-out syndrome. However, a difference test of the groups of workers by the length of practice in their job did not identify any statistically significant difference in the total work satisfaction ($F = 1.06$, $p = 0.37$). Considering the analysis of the particular factors of work satisfaction, the length of practice is only in relation with higher satisfaction with employee benefits. The length of the job at the present employer is significantly connected with work satisfaction ($F = 3.14$, $p = 0.03$), and satisfaction decreases with the length of job.

Results of the assessment of pressure of work

In the research an average gross score of pressure of work in the total research group 21.65 ($SD = 6.65$) was established, which conforms to the second category of stress, whereas a temporary influence of subjective state and performance may regularly occur. Only 5.5% of the respondents fall into category 3, with a possible occurrence of a physical injury. Category 2, with moderate stress, includes 18.4% of the people, and 76.1% of the people are in category 1, which are groups not endangered by mental stress. It was established that in terms of pressure of work there is no significant difference between women and men, or their age. However, considering professionalism a statistically

Table 1 – Factors of work satisfaction between the research group of social workers and workers in social services.

	Social worker M (SD)	Worker in social service M (SD)	t	p
Total satisfaction	142.2 (23.8)	137.8 (22.0)	1.17	0.24
Wage	12.3 (4.6)	12.6 (4.6)	-0.38	0.71
Career development	11.8 (4.2)	11.7 (3.9)	0.16	0.87
Management	19.6 (3.7)	18.9 (4.1)	1.30	0.19
Employee benefits	14.0 (4.4)	13.7 (4.5)	0.51	0.61
Appreciation	14.2 (3.7)	14.6 (3.6)	-0.66	0.51
Working conditions	14.4 (3.3)	12.5 (3.1)	3.90	0.00
Co-workers	18.0 (3.4)	17.7 (3.6)	0.59	0.55
Work	19.4 (3.1)	18.7 (2.9)	1.54	0.12
Communication	18.0 (3.7)	17.1 (3.8)	1.63	0.10

significantly higher score of mental stress of social workers (gross score $M = 22.9$, $SD = 5.8$) was proved than in the workers in social services ($M = 21$, $SD = 6.8$).

The topic of work satisfaction in the Czech environment is processed especially by the programmes of development of the quality of provided care and the identification of risk workplaces. Unfortunately, only marginal attention is paid to the satisfaction of social workers and workers in the social services, so relatively little information about this target group exists. This survey may serve not only for further research in the area, but also as an exemplificative survey of the present situation of this group of employees. Meister and Spector questionnaires are tools that are primarily used in personal counselling. Their application in social workers can be valuable especially in the analysis of specific working groups. The results show dissatisfaction or ambivalent satisfaction primarily in the cases of working evaluation and other benefits. A reason for this can be that according to the job catalogue a social worker is ranked on an 8–13 pay scale and a worker in social services on a pay scale of 3–9 [29]. The average salary of workers in the area of social care is therefore lower than an average salary in the rest of the country [30]. Just dissatisfaction with financial assessment means – according to Wágnerová [31] – the most frequent reason of job dissatisfaction that was, however, replaced in our research group by dissatisfaction with possible career development. This is connected with the fact that there is no possibility of career development in many positions within social work (especially in the NGO sector). Within partial questions of the questionnaire there was also marked dissatisfaction regarding the amount of paperwork – the analogical results are shown in the research of British social workers [32]. On the contrary, work satisfaction was mentioned by the respondents in the case of relationships in the workplace, which can be connected with the team nature of social work [33], and supervisor and internal activities that have been already implemented in the most workplaces. They were also satisfied with the scope and purpose of their work, which is connected with the character of social work as a helping profession and personal bond [34]. The total results of the Spector questionnaire of work satisfaction shows social workers as an ambivalent group, which is a different outcome than, for example, social workers in the United States [35] who have a low rate of work satisfaction. They show less work satisfaction compared to the Czech group, where 39.3% of the workers in social services

were satisfied [34] compared to the 63% satisfaction rate within the Czech population.

Conclusion

The results provided information on the rate of work satisfaction of social workers and workers in social services. In the examined research group, work satisfaction was more ambivalent (56.1% of the research group) with a relatively low number of unsatisfied workers (4.6%). The view of individual factors shows that the highest satisfaction was mentioned by the workers in the branch of social work in the items evaluating management, cooperation and communication in the workplace. Dissatisfaction has especially been found in the career development factor. The total difference, in terms of professionalism of workers was not significant, but the average score of work satisfaction is higher in the workers in social services than in social workers, and the workers in social services have showed significantly lower values of pressure of work. However, the total score of pressure of work has been evaluated as the second degree, so possible temporary influence of subjective condition and efficiency. 5.5% of the research group had a high degree of stress. The outputs may serve as inputs for the identification of critical areas of employee motivation, to assess overload of the persons in this area and to compare working factors between workplaces.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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