



How Professionals in the Social System and Child Protection Perceive Their Profession

Eszter PAPP

University of Debrecen, Hungary
e-mail: pappeszter93@gmail.com

Andrea RÁCZ

University of Debrecen, Hungary
e-mail: raczrubeus@gmail.com

Abstract. Our research is based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews made with 20 professionals in social care and child protection. The research aims at finding the answers to how the legacy of the past affects the field workers' professional mentality and how it surfaces in the treatments of clients, to the current issues of the social and child protection profession, and what ways to improvement exist. The analysis of the interviews points to the fact that the pervasive role of professionals in social work and child welfare is damaged in the course of their work, and dilemmas concerning interests and values often arise in everyday work. Cooperation with clients and the representatives of power is burdened with conflicts. While we expect reflexivity on the part of experts, as they are parts of a hierarchical system, they are not given the opportunity to expose their point of view, to dissolve their doubts; they respond with suppression to the suppressive system, and give help in function of merits. Our research shows that fear, uncertainty, and distrust are present on all levels of this profession, namely on all levels of helper–helped, helper–associated field, helper–power, and helped–representative of power.

Keywords: Hungarian child protection and social work, professional mentality, professional integrity

Introduction

It is important to note at the beginning of this article that we do not intend to appreciate or judge the work of social workers and child protection professionals. By our research based on a qualitative methodology, we wish to add new points of view to the renewal process of this profession and to the discussions of recent

years concerning the crisis of the field. Our research¹ is based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews made with 20 professionals in social care and child protection. We have deliberately chosen helpers from various fields (family support service, child welfare, support service, Regional Child Protection Agency, provisional home for families, social politician of an NGO, school social worker, social assistant in homeless care, mediator, trainer). Most of them are employees, but there are a few managers or professional coordinators as well. The respondents work in Hajdú-Bihar County, Hungary, providing services in settlements of various sizes. Concerning their work experience, two-thirds of the interviewees have worked in the field for 10 years, others as young professionals have a few years of work experience. The research aimed at getting feedbacks about the motivations of social workers and the subjective appreciation of this profession.

We examined their view on this profession, their opinion about the clients, the difficulties within cooperation, the moral dilemmas helpers face in their work and the possibilities to solve these. We would like to use our research results to draw the attention of professionals and decision-makers to the fact that during the past 20–30 years, before it could have taken shape, the pervasive role of social workers and child protection professionals has been in danger, and in many cases the basis of cooperation has become fear; moreover, professional values have suffered damage as well, and thus in many cases confidential relationship is founded on respect for authority. As a consequence, professionals frequently see themselves – like their clients – as victims, and the outcome of this process is that social problems confer value to the client through the terms of suffering and victimhood; this value itself is therefore becoming the cause and justification of action (offering and accepting help). Researches confirm that in cases of different mental disorders, addiction, post-traumatic stress, crises, clients typically see themselves as victims (Szabó 2011). The role of a victim offers a comfortable identification possibility, in which moral primacy falls outside one's life and the social worker's authority. If we set victims and perpetrators as two sharply opposed poles of a dichotomy, then it makes facing ourselves or practising self-criticism impossible.

Different theories describe particularities of late modernism in various manners. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, for example, individuals are in an increasingly worsening economic situation, bureaucratic organizational forms are disappearing, global network-based capitalism is emerging, which entails the exploitation of employees, the suppression of individual identity, and the increase of uncertainty. Dubet points to the increase of autonomy along with

1 Within the research project entitled *The Political and Sociological Use of Narratives of Victimhood in Europe and Hungary* (RH/885/2013) supported by the University of Debrecen, we examined four thematic fields: social care, child protection, healthcare, and justice. (Some of the interviews made within the framework of the research were used by Eszter Papp in her thesis.)

the decline of institutions. In Memmi's view, regulation becomes incidental, the aim of institutional functioning being the shaping of individuals (qtd by Rényi et al. 2014: 20–21). The individualization of public policies imposes individual solutions, and thus helpers get the burden of interpreting problems specifically, without the support of standards and well-defined procedures and norms; individual suffering legitimates help, while the helper becomes the subject or victim of the responsibility their own decision or action encompasses. Professional success and failure are both interpreted individually as well (Rácz 2012).² The basis of professional help is reflexivity, based on individual histories and conclusions drawn from them (Hegyési–Kozma 2002, Banks 2012). “Thus, institutional programme is based on the paradox resolution to socialize the individual and at the same time to create them as a subject; this endeavour results in a tension between socialization and autonomization, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, we could see that at present socialization is guided also by the principle of freedom” (Rényi et al. 2014: 38). Concerning social assistance, Fassin (qtd by Takács 2014) outlines that subjectification, as being an individual subject in the face of the state, and subordination, as being dependent on the goodwill of the state, are present simultaneously. Those who receive social assistance request that assistance not with reference to their rights but to their merits and suffering, where this latter gives them legitimization (Takács 2014). According to Boltanski, in order to feel pity – which differs from empathy, the basic value of social work –, the representation of suffering people is needed, which emphasizes that the subject's suffering is individual, but it could be anybody (qtd by Rényi 2008).

In the present study, following an overview of the professional objectives and the new definition of the ISFW – which also determines the framework of the interpretation of the view on this profession –, the research findings will be presented. Our qualitative research aims at finding the answers (1) to how the legacy of the past affects field workers' professional mentality and how it surfaces in the treatments of clients, (2) to the current issues of the social and child protection profession, and (3) to the ways of improvement that might exist.

Social work in the society

Social work has a long history, yet helpers had to struggle a lot while it became a widely acknowledged profession and calling. “In the course of history, social work appears where people constrained or forced to otherness can't break out from their otherness and from its consequences without professional help” (Katz

² Based on the ideas of Trocmé, Rácz (2012) presents those interpretations in which the displacement of a child could mean a success for the professional, in many cases such interpretations also ensuring an exemption for them.

2009: 108). Social work is a practice-oriented, multi-faceted activity; its main objective is to make people in need capable of having as much control as possible over their lives (Lüssi 1997, Johnsson-Svensson 2005). Professionals work with individuals living in a social environment, who mutually influence each other – that is what Welch’s human ecosystem theory is about; due to the nature of a two-directional interaction, it is possible for an individual to effectuate successful transactions applying a problem-solving attitude (Woods 1994). “The individual enters on different levels of social environment, and acts there, respectively the environment confronts the individual. This two-directional action constitutes the field of social work” (Woods 1994: 33–34). Social work and child protection are activities implying intervention, determined by a permanent “pendulous” movement between individual help and care, and communal tasks, thus being a process in the course of which problems of private sphere are transferred to the public sphere (Katz 2009, Johnsson-Svensson 2005). “The basis, task, meaning of social work is the responsibility assumed for the other – this gives its *raison d’être*, the framework of the professional activity” (Katz 2009: 108).

Its central term is empowerment, which means to authorize, to make capable, to render strong, that is, giving power to those deprived from power. Its main purpose is to increase the will and capability of the individual to gain autonomy concerning everyday issues regarding them, to have a role as significant as possible in controlling their life. Its philosophy is based on trust in people. Social work is the professional solving of social problems (Woods 1994, Lüssi 1997, Compton-Galaway 1994, Hegyesi–Kozma 2002, Kozma 1994). Pincus and Minaham outline four interlinked objectives: 1. to enhance the problem-treating and -solving capacities of the individual; 2. to link the individual with the systems that provide them with services; 4. to promote the humane operation of different resources; 4. to have a positive attitude towards permanently changing social policy (qtd by Woods 1994: 35).

The global definition of social work was approved in July 2014 by the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) General Meeting and the IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) General Assembly. Thus, “social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” (IFSW 2014).

The relations of 1989 continue to exist: social work and child protection in Hungary

The history of social work in Hungary progressed similarly to the international one until socialism began. However, the era of state socialism eroded social work and child protection. In the process of centralized redistribution of property, values and interests, social work merged into healthcare, while child protection typically merged into education. Ferge (1985) points out that Hungary was unique in Europe until 1945, that it had untouched feudal relationships in tenures, which greatly inhibited the formation of democratic institutions. In addition to scarce resources, power groups were interested in maintaining inequalities limiting the reduction of poverty.

After the Second World War, a number of reforms, such as the radical land reform in 1945, then the nationalization of the mines, banks, and large factories created a good basis for economic development, and thus for the reduction of social inequalities and poverty. Later, all the living standard indicators deteriorated between 1949 and 1952, and political tensions increased. The tensions culminated in the 1956 political crisis, followed by a period of economic and political revival. The period between 1957 and 1977 was characterized by development, although the reproduction of low incomes persisted (Ferge 1985: 15–16). The rate of poverty in the 1980s was estimated at 10–30% as descriptive data to validate social work (Ferge 1985: 17).

Zsuzsa Ferge remarks three major sections in the developments of social policy: 1) the period lasting from 1945 to 1948, as stage for establishing social policy; 2) the period between 1949 and 1956, when social policy was subject to political and economic interests, and 3) between 1956 and 1978, when social policy was developing but without autonomy (qtd by Domszky 1999: 53).

From the perspective of the social work profession, a positive development of the 1960s brought about educational counselling, and the first social organization training was established in 1972, followed by psycho-educational training. In the 1970s, social work was revived in Hungary by starting social organization training, and socio-political changes in the eighties established the possibility to develop a uniform, comprehensive training programme. In 1985, Zsuzsa Ferge led the formation of the first social policy training, and then further educational venues launched trainings in social matters. The Support Fund for the Poor was set up in 1979, and the TBZ (Social Integration Disorders) researches were launched in 1981, which drew attention to serious social problems. As one result, several family support services were established in the mid-eighties. Simultaneously with starting the training, specialists tried to create the training syllabus, develop new methods and flesh out the services with content, supported by foreign experts, by

studying international scientific literature and international study visits. “It was very dominant in shaping the education and social work praxis that we primarily established relationships with Anglo-Saxon social work, and our training was largely founded on its effects” (Szabó 1999).

After the change of regime, many civil society organizations were established and began operations in the social field. The Social Act of 1993 initiated the build-up of social services, while the Child Protection Act of 1997 urged the establishment of child protection structure (Domszky 1999; Pik 2001). This process was reinforced by creating a number of professional advocacy organizations, as highlighted: in 1987, the Hilscher Rezső Social Policy Association, in 1988, the Social Workers’ Association in Hungary, in 1989, the Association for Hungarian Family Helpers, and in 1990 the School Association responsible for the development of social education on international quality. These four organizations established the Social Work Association with Phare support in 1994, which created the Social Work Code of Ethics in 1995 (www.3sz.hu). The changes beginning in the 1980s can be described through the work of professional organizations along four main characteristics such as *innovation* (to develop new services and methods, and channelling them into regional work), *regulation* (to establish a legal framework for social services and training and to create a code of ethics), *professionalization* (to develop trainings, to implement a further training system, and to adjust to international education standards), and *articulation* (formation of professional identity, advocacy). Therefore, improving services and the build-up of the welfare system started along the principles laid down in the social and child protection acts, which the representatives of the newly (re)born profession regarded with high expectations, as commitments to the profession’s core values, standings were clear. Domszky (1999: 52) notes that in relation to child protection:

the law fundamentally owes its birth to the socio-historical event of the change of regime. Its significance appears in legal history so that this was the first complete and independent legal regulation of the Hungarian child protection. While its significance lies in the history of child protection as it brings forth new institutions, transforms and compiles our child protection. The new law associated our former responsibility with professional challenges, an event that ‘only comes once in a life’.

The UNICEF (2007) evaluation study on Central and Eastern European countries notes that the social, political, and economic transformations that occurred since 1989 led countries to make new laws in social services, education, child protection, and in this transformation the process of deinstitutionalization played a key role, as well as the support for familiar forms of accommodation, building up a support system for a number of target groups, for example, people with disabilities. In

addition to the service attitude, prevention efforts also appeared. Although an earlier UNICEF research on Eastern and Central European countries in 1997 claims that despite a dramatic fall in the birth rate since the 1980s there was an increase in the number of children who were placed under child protection, which may also prove the initial uncertainty of the newly established systems. Overall, Hungary has therefore a belated and slow professional progress after the change of regime until the present day; in the first 10 years, the social and child protection professions could not keep up with the rapid development of the service system, and later it could not stabilize its professional framework. Consequently, the helper work is typically based on performing official and semi-official and administrative tasks, while partnership with clients remains in the background (Patyán 2013).

Katalin Katz (2009: 113) believes that the natural development of the profession is lacking in Hungary, in a former socialist country:

After the disappearance of the former regime, social work burst into action, mainly so that it massively imported foreign (mostly Western) knowledge and professional experience while trying to apply those. However, it turned out that there were a number of problems to tackle that need to acquire experience and establish practice locally because the situation and culture are always and everywhere individual.

Szoboszlai and Bugarszki (2014) draw attention to that the care and services in the social work field still carry the legacy of socialism, as the paternalistic patterns are still clearly palpable: “The symbol of the paternalistic approach to helping service – ‘caring’ work – hardly implements the quasi-equal status in social work which would facilitate our effort to enter individual or family life, and establish forms of partnership in helping relations” (Szoboszlai 2014: 91). Therefore, the local history of social work after the transition appears to have a uniquely Hungarian operation in addition to the democratic ideals of the Western world, where the law and not social workers determine social work, where social work narrows down to administration and administering that work during practical working (Szoboszlai 2014). Citing Bugarszki’s critical words: “(...) the profession exists along the relations of 1989, and the personal entanglements or conflicts of those relations even to the present day” (2014: 72).

Prestige is an individual value position, a status, irrelevant of the person holding it. The prestige of different professions is a special field, which primarily shows the rank in the hierarchy of values. Social workers need a high level of devotion in order to fulfil the above mentioned professional objectives, even if the prestige of social care and child protection profession is low (Domszky 1999). Neither clients nor decision-makers take into consideration how straining it can be to be a helper and to make decisions about human lives (Urbán 2008). Regarding the image social work

students³ have on their career, Fónai et al. (1996) found that evaluating the prestige of 27 professions, social work was put on the 23rd place due to low enforcement of interests and power related to profession. Due to the profession's low prestige, professionals receive a low income too,⁴ while the field of child protection is further divided by the extension of the teacher career to certain spheres of this kind of work, by the absence of wage decompression and delays in the introduction of the planned social career. Those who work in the social field and child protection too feel that the profession entered a crisis. The primary solution is seen in the spiritual development of professionals and in the renewal of the profession. Due to the uncertainty of values of late modernity in general and the rapidly changing legal environment which gives the framework of the professional work, helpers often feel they are in lack of tools. Due to low social appreciation, they themselves are often oppressed and helpless, in many cases they are badly off like their clients (RÁCZ 2012, Krémer 2014, Szoboszlai 2014, Bugarszki 2014, Takács 2015, Bogács 2015). A further consequence of the low prestige is that they are driven more and more by prejudices (RÁCZ 2014a). In Hungary, the political situation does not enhance either the "popularity" of social workers. The state does not assume the principles of social work, which are the following: "a legal system based on human rights and on the principle of social justice, endeavour to abolish inequalities in the name of social cohesion, respect for otherness, the values of change, progress and mobility, the right to community organisations and independent action" (Bugarszki 2014: 66).

Evaluating the situation of the social work performed, in 2005, Bass-Márton could only estimate the size of the sector, which was very variable as estimates pointed between 5 and 80 thousand employees. The sector's weight and the precise community embeddedness seem hard to be defined as helping activities can be performed through a wide variety of trainings; furthermore, the data since installing the system are not fully available and empirical research concerns only part of the area.

People with social qualification often apply for work in family support and child welfare services. According to the CSO time-series data, between 1998 and 2014, the number of family support employees increased from 2,100 to 2,500 and the number of service clients from 246 thousand to 399 thousand. At the same time, the number of child welfare service workers decreased from 3,500 to 2,900, while the number of beneficiaries decreased from 158 thousand to 140 thousand. The number of departments for the two types of services is 1,200, the number of covered settlements is almost 100% (STADAT 2.5.14).⁵ People in long-term residential care and transitional care numbered 90 thousand, of which nearly 60% were the elderly, but here the employees were not included

3 102 students participated in the survey: 15 men and 87 women.

4 See, for example: http://index.hu/belfold/2013/11/26/ime_a_legertelmetlenebb_diplomak/.

5 https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_fsg003.html.

(STADAT 05/02/15).⁶ In 2011, 5,300 people were employed in child care homes, of which, however, only 10% were qualified social staff, and there were 5,500 foster parents, while the number of children and young adults without a family was 21 thousand (Social Statistical Yearbook 2011).⁷

Based on the 2013 aggregate data for statistical numbers, occupied jobs in the social sector and child protection involve 70,220 professional people, there were 67 thousand staff members with professional qualifications, and 55% with secondary education. This is Bass-Márton's (2005) estimate on the approximate upper limit of accurate, aggregate data, although diminishing the weight of some helping activities such as elderly care, disability care, child protection, etc. This total data represents 91 types of jobs, for example, special education teacher, physician, guardian care, home care, or child protection assistant. There are, however, only 660 social worker jobs available.⁸ The weight of the sector can be assessed by the number of people with social qualifications: 31 thousand employees have qualifications in social work, social pedagogy, and social policy. From 2001 to 2014, 151 thousand students have participated in social training, which data also include specialist further training and higher vocational trainings as well as basic and specialized master's degrees (Balogh et al. 2015: 41, 76–77).

There are valuable qualitative research data on the location. Hajdú-Bihar County belongs to the country's disadvantaged regions, the amount (39.4%) of per capita gross domestic income is below the EU average. The population on January 1, 2012 was 538,037 people, 5.4% of the country's total population. It ranks fourth among the 19 counties regarding population. Activity rate was 53.1%, ranked 13th among the counties and Budapest, which typically lags behind the national average value (55.8%). The unemployment rate was 12.1%, ranked 17th among the counties and Budapest. The social welfare is essential for Hajdú-Bihar's society for improving the quality of life. According to the 2010 data, 37 day nurseries operated in the county, 15 of which were in the county seat. Family support institutions are available in all settlements. The number of long-term residential and temporary placement institutions was 53 units, and more than 4,500 beds were available to those in need. Elderly daily care institutions had 2,700 beds, while 2,300 residential nursing home beds were available (based on an exploratory-assessment study in 2013 to establish the regional development concept of Hajdú-Bihar County). According to the 2013 aggregate data, the statistical numbers of employees and the posts occupied in the social sector and child protection in Hajdú-Bihar County are the followings: nearly 6,000 people are employed as professionals; however, the number of people with required specific job qualifications is only 5,300 in the county, while workers with secondary education are over-represented with 58%.⁹

6 https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_fsi001.html.

7 https://www.teir.hu/szoc_agazat/ksh_evkonyvek/a2011/html/tablak.html.

8 Source: KSH 2014, 2023 OSAP data collection, not published.

9 Source: KSH 2014, 2023 OSAP data collection, not published.

Findings of the qualitative research

How helpers view the profession

We tried to find out why the interviewees wanted to become helpers. The vast majority of them indicated that the reason for their choice of profession was that they wanted to deal with people, helping people is in their attitude, and they were motivated by the will to do something and to offer support for those in need. With respect to students in social work as well, Fónai et al. (1996: 117–118) found that their motivation for choosing this profession was that they wanted to deal with people, to offer them help, which is also what they find good about this profession; meanwhile, they consider it a hard profession since it is full of failures, and they also suppose that all what they would experience during work would try them. The fact that wages are low is on the third place according to them. Respondents stressed upon the importance of humanity in their work as the most important value, equality, acceptance, patience, respect, tolerance, openness, care also being very important, respondents being unable to conceive their work without these values. Regarding the humanitarian principle, Fassin notes that it implies the intrusion of moral feelings into politics,

the substitution of politics of law and justice with politics of mercy and sympathy. Despite this – or perhaps due to this ethics –, humanitarianism unavoidably leads to the institutionalization of inequalities, and forcedly presumes that certain lives are more valuable than others. (...) They become sufferers instead of persons claiming their rights, thus actual life avoids the normalisation of everyday life as well (qtd by Takács 2014: n.y.).

The importance of empathy was mentioned by all respondents; in their view, it is necessary to have empathy for the situation of the client, which should precede the act when plans and common objectives are outlined together as well as when the action plan is elaborated and executed. Respondents also stressed the importance of tolerance and recourse, the maximal acceptance of the client's personality, of a supporting attitude in offering help, which means that the client's problem is not approached by blaming them but by searching for a solution. In relation to this, the importance of objectivity was also stressed, which can ease, but also encumber, cooperation with the client system (Kozma 1994, 2002). Professionals agree that these values are permanently present in their work, but also in their private lives, indicating that social work is a pervasive profession: "I try to live my life according to these values. I can't separate my work from my everyday life because that's how I am what I am, with these values" (manager of a support service). We tried to identify the respondents' fears and distresses connected to their work, and whether

or not these values got damaged in the course of the actual work. Fears arise daily, in which context professional errors were mentioned mostly, many respondents also sharing that they carry a huge responsibility, and they are very much afraid that they would take wrong decisions, and this could cause even tragedies. A further revealing aspect was that they frequently experience unrealistic expectations on the part of the clients. They highlighted that many clients struggle with problems of subsistence, and they expect salvation and immediate help accordingly, so it is very hard to make them understand that social work can respond to these financial problems only to a limited extent, for example it cannot ensure financial solution for housing and other credits or usury. Related to the crisis of this profession, an increasing number of professionals highlighted that social work cannot offer an adequate answer to poverty (Krémer 2014, Takács 2015).

Experts interviewed during the research pointed out that clients expect from them a response to individual problems and the understanding and appreciation of individual suffering. Provoking compassion is one of the possible ways to compel help. Fassin emphasizes that children are often involved in supplication, which thus prompts even more to take action (qtd by Takács 2014). With respect to values, the interviewed child welfare and child protection professionals distinctly mentioned children and that sorting out their life, the protection of their interest above all is the ground of their work. According to Fassin, besides compassion, need is also a proper rhetoric basis for the individual. Exigence points out the series of unsatisfied needs. Those who wish to stress upon their merits, when requesting help, they refer to the fact that commitment to social re-adaptation and the presented positive qualities entail the desired help. In such cases, a typical attitude is distancing oneself from others, the unmerited (qtd by Takács 2014). We should mention at this point that at the initial phase of social work the dilemma of the merited and unmerited was already present, and it is even more present in today's social politics (Hegyesi–Kozma 2002, Csoba 2010). In Fassin's view, the fourth type makes reference to justice; in this case, a legal or another type of injury can be observed, which needs solution (Takács 2014).

Reflexions on professional work

In the opinion of the interviewees, the personality of the client is of utmost importance, getting to know the client's personality, mapping their life circumstance and in function of these circumstances being aware of expectations we can have towards them also bearing special significance. In the view of the majority, a young professional tends to have too high, idealistic, and unreal expectations towards their clients.

Cooperation with clients is based on partnership, on the treatment of the client as an equal partner. According to Leadbeater (2004), services should be

tailored to the person's need, which should be the ground of cooperation and the link between the individual and the community. In practice, however, this can hardly be fulfilled; many think that this work is embedded into a hierarchy of relationships, as winning one's trust requires prestige, but this prestige means, on the one hand, professional prestige, which is a high-quality practice of the profession, an outstanding expertise, the adequate, quick, professional solving of problems, while, on the other hand, it also means the embodiment of power, the role of a manager, and in many cases of a decision-maker. Initiating cooperation itself fills experts with fear in many cases. Some professionals shared that at the first meeting pressure is too high since this is when it turns out whether or not they would be able to cooperate in the future. Social workers in the child welfare field have to take serious decisions concerning the life of endangered children. They experience a huge fear for taking the right decision, whether displacement is the right solution or it would worsen the child's situation – there are not any objective criteria to help their work, as being endangered is a plastic term.

It is important to examine how helpers experience success and failure. Interviewees unanimously shared the view that the slightest positive change should be considered a success. Typically, success is when they can give some help to the client, when they understand their problem and can give an answer to their suffering. There were interviewees with a slight criticism towards themselves and the system who thought that the fact that the system is functional at all can be considered a success, yet this is also a reason for experiencing failure, namely that the system is dysfunctional. Failure is much more spectacular, and it gets more attention in the media. There are countless stories of social and especially child protection cases, which showed the dysfunctions between different service providers: "Media also suggests that we are good for nothing. I never hear experts speaking, relating what they do in difficult cases. There are distortions all the time. People should be made aware of what social work consists of" (Mediator).

Moreover, media shows slices of social work sporadically, typically through Christmas charitable activities, when the main topics are starvation, the support given for survival, the reduction of child suffering, along the typology described by Fassin. According to the interviewees, most people get a clear understanding of what social work is only when they get in contact with a helper, or if there is a person in their family or close environment with this profession. Therefore, it is very important for professionals that people who contact them get a positive impression of them since that is how "civilians" can determine this profession.

Low prestige is manifested mostly with respect to wages. According to the interviewees, social appreciation of this profession would be highly enhanced if the government recognized it also financially, since in many cases the helper and the client are in similarly difficult situation (RÁCZ 2014). In the opinion of professionals, if social workers enjoyed a higher esteem, clients would accept

them more easily, since in most cases clients do not believe that helpers can change their situation in a positive direction. Moreover, due to low appreciation, professionals are not motivated, and reach burn-out much more rapidly. Burn-out has several symptoms such as negativism, cynicism, inflexible attitude, and the rejection of renewal. In extreme cases, paranoia might emerge as well, when the social worker feels that the colleagues and bosses are there only to make their life more difficult (Zastrow 1995).

Burn-out was ranked as a frequent phenomenon in the field of social work and child protection, which is caused mainly by the accomplishment of too many tasks full of responsibility and a high number of clients. It occurs frequently that helpers face difficult cases but are alone to take decisions, are unable to surpass dilemmas, and bring the problems home. The most frequent causes of burn-out are the following: too many working hours, lack of a career plan, lack of appreciation both on the part of clients and managers, low income, lack of power, and erroneous working policies (Zastrow 1995). According to the examinations of Maslach, burn-out is less significant with those persons who regularly analyse their personal experiences and feelings with their colleagues, and thus they have the chance to get a feedback about problematic situations or their work in general. This secure background means a lot when a crisis situation needs to be solved (qtd by: Zastrow 1995: 79–80). Thus, reflexivity, just as the supportive background of this profession, the team, and consultation or supervision are all protective factors. The interviewees were consistent that it is of utmost importance that professionals identify their own limits, and make an abstraction in case of a negative impulse. Unsuccessful intervention is not necessarily and exclusively the helper's failure, as clients often project their own faults onto the expert. It is also important to examine whether the service provider ensures a proper background for development, relief, and everyday work in general. Generally, professionals recognize burn-out on themselves and their colleagues. As a solution, analysts suggested case discussions, individual and group supervision, which is in many cases not automatically ensured for experts. A further step is to establish good relationships with the colleagues since in problematic situations they expect positive reinforcement from one another. An outstanding proposal was to have more holidays since in a loving family is much easier to go through annoying cases at home.

As we have already mentioned, cooperation with clients is in many cases placed in a hierarchical system of relations. For interviewees, it is clear that clients expect them to help in sorting out a difficult life situation, but they consider a serious problem that in most cases clients let professionals take all the decisions, and expect them to put an end to their suffering as an expert, to rectify the problem, to cure the teenage child, and to represent them in administrative issues. Taking the experiences of the helpers, we can say that these are excessive, unreasonable

expectations since the majority of the clients live in extreme poverty, and it is impossible to find immediate solution to their problems. Many helpers have the impression that clients want to force out radical changes from their helpers, they assign helpers some sort of a “saviour” role. However, the opposite attitude can also be observed towards the family helpers of child welfare services when clients wish to be “left alone”. These clients keep a rigorous distance from the helper; they do not want to let them into their private sphere. They are in a constant fear since their first encounter because they dread that the process is irreversible, and at the end their child would be taken away (Szilvási 2006, Rácz 2012).

Concerning the typology of clients, the interviewees distinguished two main categories in what concerns cooperation: helpful clients and impeding clients. Helpful clients are generally aware of the limits of their competence, are cooperative, and are worthy of help. They accept that helpers cannot solve everything, are motivated in fixing their problems; moreover, they realize what they need to do in order to have a good relationship with the expert. It is much easier to cooperate with these people, the relationship is also more sincere since they accept to be advised and they speak much more openly about their problems. Impeding clients have a narrow-minded attitude, they do not accept the helper’s opinion, moreover, react quite aggressively to the slightest critic. A complete lack of motivation or will to act characterizes them, and they expect an activity on the part of the expert. Cooperation is also difficult with reticent clients, who fear to speak about or are ashamed of their problems. In the case of family helpers of child welfare service, the refusal of cooperation is coupled with antipathy. Clients often presume the helper has bad intentions, and the only thing they can think about is that the helper wants to take away their child. They are especially keen on provoking fear in the helper, and they do not accept any advice; they are completely reluctant (Hüse 2014). According to the experience of professionals, clients are informed, they know that experts who meet children have the obligation to report. Therefore, clients are not entirely sincere, they do not dare to speak about their problems since they think that opening up could have serious consequences. Some fear social stigmatization, which is why they do not want their problems to become known. In such cases, clients try to show an unreal image of their situation towards the helper. If the helper still manages to establish a trustful relationship, it will break once an authority measure is implemented, since clients feel that they were betrayed. This is a two-way process as the authority of the expert enhances, but the client’s trust decreases. However, the principle of authority is contrary to the set of values of this profession.

The persons interviewed within the framework of the research see themselves as exposed. Especially young social workers feel so, due to the lack of experiences and limited self-protection mechanisms. They also expressed that the sponsor, operator, professional coordinator, as well as clients have much too high

expectations towards professionals. In the case of child protection professionals, the chance of committing a mistake is much higher, and thus responsibility is higher too. All this is coupled with the interest of media for well-saleable, valuable stories of suffering. Interviewees considered clients too as entirely defenceless due to their difficult situation and insecurity.

Ethical dilemmas in the practice

Basically, five types of dilemmas can be distinguished when examining the everyday functioning of social work: 1) the dilemma concerning intervention and non-intervention; 2) objectivity and subjectivity; 3) the role of a professional and that of a non-professional helper; 4) the dilemma of who deserves the service; and 5) the dilemma of values and interests (Andok–Tímár 2002). The task of a social worker is to represent the interests of the client. The role of a social worker encompasses two main functions: control and help. The control function is quite controversial since the autonomy of the client must always be considered. Concerning help, it is to mention that it is often switched towards a pitiful guardianship (Varsányi 2006).

In a significant number of cases, experts suppress their moral dilemmas even though they frequently face situations when they cannot feel empathy, which do not fit into their set of values: “those moral dilemmas, which arise in the everyday practice of social work, obstinately resist any attempt to reduce them to psychological issues” (Jordan 1994: 66). Helpers can find points of reference in the Code of Ethics of Social Work (2011). “Social work is a professional activity based on the ethical principals determining the responsibility of social workers. The social worker has the responsibility to ensure professional services within their competences, according to their sphere of activity”.¹⁰ Many professionals in the field of family care mentioned that the conflict between spouses and partners often causes problems. In such cases, clients try to conceal the conflict, to misrepresent themselves and family members in order to gain the helper’s empathy and compassion and to have the helper’s on their side. In such cases, the dilemma is caused by the fact that clients expect help from the family helper, who in turn cannot be a partner in denigrating the other party, cannot act to anybody’s detriment; as experts, they have to put the child’s interest on the first place. Experience shows that clients feel that the helper abandons them or even takes the other party’s side. In such cases, they expect from the helper to enforce the principle of justice: “They expect us to do justice among them, but mediation isn’t about that! I can’t take on this role of a justiciary” (Mediator).

10 Code of Ethics of Social work. Introduction, Article 4: http://3sz.hu/sites/default/files/uploaded/etikai_kodex_2011.pdf.

A moral dilemma occurs in almost each child welfare case since these experts have to take decisions affecting children's lives. Such is the case, first of all, when one has to decide whether displacement is a grounded and proper decision, whether it would be better for the child to live in the child protection system, whether a real solution was achieved to the family's situation, while they agree that every child needs their real family and displacement should be only an ultimate solution. A further cause of the dilemma is whether all possible assistance was given to the family in order to keep the family's unity (Szilvási 2006, RÁCZ 2012). Professionals gave account of dilemmas concerning adoption as well; for example, in one case, the dilemma was caused by the fact that the adopting family had lost their own child two months earlier, and it was obvious for the helper that they had not overcome this yet.¹¹ It is also a cause for dilemma when the sponsor of an institution sets certain conditions to the offered support and donation; for example, in one case of Christmas donations, the assisted could not be a Roma and in case of families at least one of the parents should have been employed. In many cases, conflicts overshadow the relationship between the sponsor and the manager or the leader and the employee within a specific service, which also causes moral dilemmas to the workers. In the professionals' opinion, in such cases, professional debates are rejected, decisions are taken by use of power, which influences their treatment of clients as well. Several researches highlight that experts have few possibilities to elaborate and introduce new methods or to shape their work and working conditions. They have less influence in personal issues, for example, in the employment of new work force and in the elaboration of documentations, regulations, professional programmes. In lack of these, quality work also meets many difficulties (RÁCZ 2006, Rubeus Egyesület 2015).

The international literature reflects the challenges of the profession as well as its low social prestige (Biggerstaff 2000, Varzinskiene 2009, Eustern 2014). Literature highlights, among other things, how difficult it is to define the concept of social services at a European level as the term is used in respect to a variety of services, and a number of concepts are used interchangeably as social work in different countries in different ways, like social care, social services, and social work activities. (Notably, the Hungarian practice of child protection and social work are separate, child protection is typically a pedagogical task.) Asquith et al. (2005) believe that there are various manifestations of the professional crisis such as: a professional identity crisis; erosion of the boundaries between professions; no increase in the number and qualifications of workers; high staff turnover; deteriorating working conditions; lack of resources; hindering effective social work, etc. Asquith et al. (2005) claim that although professional identity in social work is inseparable from the current characteristics of the specific organizational

11 This case means the substitution of professional rules with a merciful attitude, since in such cases a child cannot be placed with a family until mourning was completed.

structures, it would be more useful if the identity of the profession were based on the fundamental values and principles of the profession so that social workers' activities should be more distinguished from the other human service work, thus protecting and limiting the scope of the profession. The 2008–2009 global economic crisis accelerated, deepened this process burdened with uncertainty and challenges. As seen in the European Social Network's (2015) *Public Social Services in Crisis: Challenges and Responses*, this assessment study highlights that between 2008 and 2014 the studied countries, such as Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, and Spain, were forced to make austerity measures due to the economic crisis reducing the social and care spending. Naturally, the crisis has greatly affected the living standard of the population, increasing poverty and social exclusion, and this compels social and child care to search for new ways and open the question as to how it is possible to provide high-quality services with shrinking resources and worsening working conditions. As an outcome of searching new ways, the measure and method of the state's role should be reconsidered, community resources channelled, and communal social work strengthened.

Conclusions

The findings of our research based on a qualitative method show that professionals have difficulties in finding answers to the challenges of their work and to social changes. In many cases, they feel abandoned and without proper tools, and due to the low prestige of their work they, too, see themselves as excluded. They feel exposed like their clients.

The analysis of the interviews points to the fact that the pervasive role of professionals in social work and child welfare is damaged in the course of their work and dilemmas concerning interests and values often arise in everyday work. Cooperation with clients and the representatives of power (managers, sponsors, decision-makers) is burdened with conflicts. In the course of the analysis of stories of suffering, the search for individual answers to the client's specific situation acts against professional practice, while values of the profession get damaged, for example, cooperation, based otherwise on trust, becomes grounded by authority or, instead of empathy, mercy becomes the moral basis of help.

While we expect reflexivity on the part of experts, as they are parts of a hierarchical system, they are not given the opportunity to expose their point of view, to dissolve their doubts; they respond with suppression to the suppressive system and give help in function of merits. The lack of self-reflexivity in many cases means that experts in social work and child protection do not even have the need to expound their opinion.

The functions of education (on behalf of a proper socialization) and empowerment (in order to enhance autonomy), incorporated by the helper, mobilize and extinguish the roles of the *victim*, *chaser*, and *rescuer*. The helper respects the person in need, and represents their rights and interests. In accordance with the profession's values, they believe in the existence of the client's resources and positive features that can be mobilized, and they offer the client opportunities starting from the idea of freedom. According to Krémer (2014), in practice, it is precisely the offering of opportunities that is omitted. According to the triangle of the drama, in the context of assistance, it is easy to identify the victims who do not trust themselves and are not capable of assuming (individual and professional) responsibility for their own deeds. The client can also be a victim, who shifts responsibility and problem solving to the expert. The chaser undervalues the victim if they take the control over the victim's life, undervalues their abilities, does not trust that they would be able to solve problems together, with proper professional help and the mobilization of social support. This could be a reason for prejudice, contempt, detestation, aggression which could also be verbal towards the other. Finally, the rescuer's main feature is that they do not trust in the ability of the victim to interpret a problem and to act, and therefore they take over control from the client, who assumes the role of a victim (Berne 1984). The question is which the hidden losses of these "games" are that the profession can give account of. According to Berne, one way to avoid games is consciousness and open communication. Our research shows that fear, uncertainty, and distrust are present on all levels of this profession, namely on all levels of the helper–helped, helper–associated fields, helper–power, helped–representative of power. In addition to this, due to low self-confidence and self-esteem, the helper fears that they would commit an error, that their family life would be harmed because of burdens they carry home, and also fear the judgment of the society, which receives news about their work through the false voice of the media, typically through extreme cases.

Debates initiated repeatedly on the crisis of this profession show directions of change (for example, No 3/2014 of the periodical *Esély* and No 2/2015 of the periodical *Párbeszéd*). However, for the sake of a change, it is indispensable that the state fulfils at least its minimal obligations, namely that it ensures the framework of social work, the set of conditions for professional activity, a wide range of possibilities for proactive and reactive interventions, the opportunity for evaluation and follow-up, and the framework of quality (RÁCZ 2014b). The rest is to be solved by the social care and child protection profession.

References

- Andok, Ferenc, Tímár, Szilvia. 2002. Dilemmák a szociális munkában. *Esély* 4: 85–98.
- Asquith, Stewart, Clark, Chris, Waterhouse, Lorraine. 2005. *The Role of the Social Worker in the 21st Century. A Literature Review*. Scottish Executive.
- Banks, Sara. 2012. *Ethics and Values in Social Work. Practical Work Series*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Balogh, Edit, Budai, István, Goldmann, Róbert, Puli, Edit, Szöllösi, Gábor. 2015. Higher Welfare Training in Hungary. *Párbeszéd: Szociális Munka-folyóirat* 2015/1. (http://parbeszed.lib.unideb.hu/file/2/5628d4c086821/szerzo/Felso_foku_szocialis_kepzese_k_tanulmany_teljes_anyag_Parbeszedbe.pdf, last accessed: March 31, 2016).
- Bass, László, Márton, Izabella. 2005. *Szociális munkások helyzete ma*. Conference Presentation. November 4–5. Seregélyes.
- Biggerstaff, A. Marilyn. 2000. Development and Validation of the Social Work Career Influence Questionnaire. *Research on Social Work Practice* 10: 34–54.
- Berne, Eric. 1984. *Emberi játzmák*. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.
- Bogács, Ernő. 2015. Veszélyben a gyermekvédő. *Párbeszéd: Szociális Munka-folyóirat* 2015/2. (<http://parbeszed.lib.unideb.hu/file/2/5591161c0383e/szerkeszto/BogacsKORR.pdf>, last accessed on: March 7, 2015).
- Bugarszki, Zsolt. 2014. A magyarországi szociális munka válsága. *Esély* 3: 64–73.
- Compton, Beulah Roberts, Galaway, Burt. 1994. Problémamegoldás: a szociális munka folyamata. In: G, Hegyesi, K. Talyigás (eds), *A Szociális munka elmélete és gyakorlata 1. kötet*. 138–160. Budapest: NcsSzl.
- Csoba, Judit. 2010. *A tisztas munka. A teljes foglalkoztatás: a 21. század esélye vagy utópiája?* Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó.
- Domszky, András. 1999. *Gyermek- és ifjúságvédelem*. Budapest: Államigazgatási Főiskola.
- European Social Network. 2015. *Public Social Services in Crisis: Challenges and Responses. From 2008–2014: a response from ESN members*. June.
- Euster, Gerald L. 2014. The Occupational Prestige of Social Work. *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 7: 273–284.
- Exploratory-Assessment Study in 2013 to Establish the Regional Development Concept of Hajdú-Bihar County. 2013. (http://www.hbmo.hu/webdocs/Files/PortalDocMix/06B_I.%20HBM_Konceptci%C3%B3_Helyzetfelt%C3%A1r%C3%A1s.pdf, last accessed on March 31, 2016).
- Ferge, Zsuzsa. 1985. A tudomány szerepe a szegénység társadalmi kezelésében Magyarországon. *Szociálpolitikai Értesítő* 4–5: 13–49.
- Fónai, Mihály, Kiss, J., Fábíán Gergely. 1996. Szociális munkás szakos hallgatók pályaképeinek néhány eleme. *Esély* 1: 114–134.

- Hegyesi, Gábor, Kozma, Judit. 2002. A szociális munka – áttekintés. In: J. Kozma (ed.), *Kézikönyv szociális munkásoknak*. 13–37. Budapest: Szociális Szakmai Szövetség.
- Hüse, Lajos. 2014. Traumatizált szülők a segítő kapcsolatban. Az őstörés jelentősége a gyermekvédelemben. *Párbeszéd: Szociális Munka-folyóirat* 2014/1–2. (http://parbeszed.lib.unideb.hu/file/2/5534c8657527f/szerzo/huse_az_ostores_jelentosege_-_lektoralt,_javított_verzio.pdf, last accessed on June 28, 2015).
- IFSW. 2014. A szociális munka globális definíciója. *Esély* 6: 96–100.
- Johnsson, Eva, Svensson, Kerstin. 2005. Theory in Social Work. Some Reflections on Understanding and Explaining Interventions. *European Journal of Social Work* 4: 419–434.
- Jordan, Bill. 1994. Szociális munka a gyakorlatban. *Esély* 2: 66–94.
- Katz, Katalin. 2009. A szociális munka kultúrái. *Esély* 6: 108–116.
- Kozma, Judit. 1994. Milyen a jó szociális munkás, avagy ki tud démont űzni? *Esély* 4: 63–70.
2002. Kompetencia a szociális munkában. In: J. Kozma (ed.), *Kézikönyv szociális munkásoknak*. 38–67. Budapest: Szociális Szakmai Szövetség.
- Krémer, Balázs. 2014. Az alapvetések érthetőségéről – és tarthatatlanságáról. *Esély* 3: 79–86.
- Leadbeater, Charles. 2004. *Personalisation through Participation. A New Script for Public Services*. London: DEMOS (<http://www.demos.co.uk/files/PersonalisationThroughParticipation.pdf>, last accessed on June 20, 2015).
- Lüssi, Peter. 1997. *A rendszerszemléletű szociális munka gyakorlati tankönyve*. Budapest, Interdiszciplináris Szakkönyvtár 1. Magyar Testnevelési Egyetem – Híd Alapítvány – Párbeszéd (Dialógus) Alapítvány.
- Patyán, László. 2013. Szociális munkások szerepe a szociális gazdaság szervezeteiben. *Acta Medicinae et Sociologica* 4: 53–64.
- Pik, Katalin. 2001. *A szociális munka története Magyarországon (1817–1990)*. Budapest: Hilscher Rezső Szociálpolitikai Egyesület.
- RÁCZ, Andrea. 2006. Személyes gondoskodást nyújtók munkával kapcsolatos attitűdjeinek vizsgálata. *Kapocs* 3: 6–15.
- RÁCZ, Andrea. 2012. *Barkácsoló életutak, szekvenciális (rendszer) igények*. Budapest: L'Harmattan.
- RÁCZ, Andrea. 2014a. Az előítéletes gondolkodás megjelenése a gyermekvédelemben. *Esély* 3: 24–47.
- RÁCZ, Andrea. 2014b. Jó szülő-e az állam? – fejlesztési igények a gyermekvédelmi szakellátás professzionalizációjáért. In: A. RÁCZ (ed.), *Jó szülő-e az állam? A corporate parenting terminus gyakorlatban való megjelenése*. 215–245. Budapest: Rubeus Egyesület.

- Rényi, Ágnes. 2008. Érzelmes kutatás. *Replika* 62: 127–154.
- Rényi, Ágnes, Sik, Domonkos, Takács, Erzsébet. 2014. Elemzési szempontok a késő modern társadalmak kordiagnózisához. *Szociológiai Szemle* 3: 18–60.
- Rubeus Egyesület. 2015. *A gyermekjóléti szolgálatok feladatellátásának értékelő elemzése országos szinten. Műhelytanulmány*. Budapest: Rubeus Egyesület.
- Szabó, József. 2011. *A narratív pszichológiai megközelítések addiktológiai alkalmazási lehetőségei*. Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Egészségtudományi Kar.
- Szabó, Lajos. 1999. *A szociális esetmunka kialakulása és elméleti hátterei*. Kapolcs: Veszprémi Nyomda Rt.
- Szilvási, Léna. 2006. Családok a gyermekvédelem határán. In: A. Rác Andrea (ed.), *A magyar gyermekvédelmi rendszer helyzete, jövőbeli kihívásai*. Digitális tanulmánykötet. Budapest: NCSZL.
- Szoboszlai, Katalin. 2014. A szociális munka a változások tükrében: kik vagyunk, hol tartunk, és mit kellene tennünk? *Esély* 3: 87–94.
- Szociális Munka Etikai Kódexe. 2011. Budapest: Szociális Szakmai Szövetség (http://3sz.hu/sites/default/files/uploaded/etikai_kodex_2011.pdf, last accessed on June 20, 2015).
- Takács, Erzsébet. 2014. Szenvedő testek – humanitárius cselekedetek. 2000, 9. (<http://ketezer.hu/2014/12/szenvedo-testek-humanitarius-cselekedetek/>, last accessed on May 13, 2015).
- Takács, Imre. 2015. *Veszélyben a gyermekvédelem – MACSGYOE közleménye* (http://www.macsgyoe.hu/hirek/aktualitasok/2015-03-20/veszelyben_a_gyerekvedelem_-_macsgyoe_kozlemenye.html, last accessed on July 05, 2015).
- UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. 1997. *Children at Risk in Central and Eastern Europe: Perils and Promises. Regional Monitoring Report No 7*. Florence: The United Nations Children's Fund.
- UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. 2007. *Law Reform and Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The United Nations Children's Fund, Italy, Florence.
- Urbán, László. 2008. Elhelyezkedési esélyek a szociális szférában. In: *Jászsági Évkönyv*. Jászberény: Jászsági Évkönyv Alapítvány.
- Varsányi Erika. 2006. Szociális munka és kultúra. *Beszélő* 7–8: 43–51.
- Varzinskiene, Laura. 2009. Prestige of Social Work Profession. *Social Research* 15: 98–104.
- Woods, Ronald. 1994. A szociális munka tevékenységének egy lehetséges rendszerezése. In: G. Hegyesi, K. Talyigás (eds), *A Szociális munka elmélete és gyakorlata 1. kötet*. 32–45. Budapest: NCSZL.
- Zastrow, Charles. 1995. Mít tegyünk, hogy a szociális munka élvezetes hivatás legyen? *Esély* 1: 62–81.