

Reflection of Social Workers to Adopt the Act on Social Work and the Establishment of a Professional Chamber

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Abstract:

The development of Social Work in Slovakia has its specificities influenced by the historical development of the country through the socio-political changes that date back to 1989. Subsequently, with changes in the economic and social sphere, Social Work develops dynamically first as a practical activity and later in the years 1992-1996, also as a separate study field at the level of University Education. Applying graduates and the legislative environment, which required particularly in state administration educated staff at the Master's level

of education, have influenced the strong dynamics of the development of the study branch of Social Work. The number of graduates has since 2005 been recorded by up to 15,000 graduates per year. The problem, which has been politically motivated was the application of Graduates in Social Practice, where up until 2014 it was declared, that the position of Social Workers and the pursuit of Social Work can be secured by Graduates with University Education. This fact significantly affected the possibilities of employing Graduates of Social Work, especially in the area of Social Services and in the area of state administration within the Sector of Labor, Social Affairs and Family. Significant turnover was through the adoption of the Law on Social Work and the establishment of a Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work as a Professional Association. The mediated information in this contribution can help deeper insight into the genesis of the Law.

Adoption of the Act on Social Work

In this respect it should be noted that the Law itself, as a document we do not understand as the final result of the process of Professionalization of Social Work in Slovakia but as one of its instruments. Entry into force of Act no. 219/2014 Z. z. on Social Work and on the conditions for the performance of certain professional activities in the field of Social Affairs of the Family (hereinafter referred to as the Social Work Act), there were no official rules of professional, ethical and legal performance for the duties of Social Work. There were (and still exist) in the legislation regulating individual areas of performance of the partial adjustment of the qualification conditions for the duties of Social Work for the different areas of duties in the area of social protection of children and social guardianship, in the field of Social Services and Social Assessment activity. However, these did not manage to modify the conditions of the profession in its entirety.

Although the Law on Social Work was submitted to the Slovak Government as an initiative of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family in the Slovak Republic, it was a Law that was formed in close

cooperation with the representatives of the universities in which the Department of Social Work is studying. Voices were often heard from practitioners about the low professional status of the Profession, despite the fact that society constantly emphasizes its importance. Mentioned also indicated an indirect proportion between the growing number of University Graduates in the branch of Social Work and their status in society (Schavel, 2012). Also, the expert discussion of the bill highlighted the low professional credit of Social Workers in society. The fact that the Profession of Social Work deserves greater societal attention in Slovakia - irrespective of socio-political changes - also demonstrates the fact that the new government included in its program statement for 2012-2016, the formulation:

“The Government will create the conditions for the Professional providing of Social Work” (Program Declaration, 2012). By this has been demonstrated the political will to make fundamental changes in the Social Workers’ employability; to ensure the status of the Social Worker; to create the conditions for Lifelong Learning (Pavelkova, 2008) and Professional Graduation, as well as the creation of a Professional

Organization on the Principle of the Professional Chamber.

The main aim of the Law was, according to the submitters of the Law, as well as members of the expert group, to support professionalization of the performance of Social Work, in particular by provision the necessary qualifying premise and establishing the Slovak Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work. The Law has created a presumption of a positive qualitative influence on all client groups of Social Work and the access of providers of Social Work to services that will be ensured for them by the Chamber. The new Law confirms that Social Work in Slovakia is adapting to the world trend identified by Tomes (2010). According to his study, Social Work is institutionalizes; professionalizes; specializes and internally structures, privatizes, changes content, expands its scope, and penetrates into other sectors.

Professionalization is made more concrete by the fact that Social Workers are publicly recognized (Licensed and Registered); have a monopoly on a certain type of work which gives them professional excellence and professional autonomy.

In accordance with the adopted Law, it is clearly stated that Social Work as a Professional activity can be performed exclusively by a Social Worker or an Assistant of Social Work. In addition to Social Work, however, the Law distinguishes between two types of activities:

- *Specialized Professional Activities* – these are de facto narrower “specializations”, these are performed by Social Workers who have the necessary knowledge and skills acquired by completing an accredited specializing training program.
- *Supplementary Professional Activities* – a variety of professional activities that do not belong primarily or exclusively to the field of Social Work but belong to other professions. According to the Law, a Psychologist, a Special Pedagogue, a Medical Pedagogue, a Social Pedagogue, or another person fulfilling the qualification requirements, including the completion of an Accredited Training Program, can also practice these in the area of Social Affairs and Family.

Chamber of Social Workers and Social Work Assistants Slovakia

Due to the real deficit of the professional organization of Social Workers in Slovakia, the representatives of the Social Work Schools in the Institutional Coverage in the Association of Social Workers in Slovakia and the Staff of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and the Family of the Slovak Republic responded by formal proposal to establish the Chamber. This goal was fulfilled by a new Law on Social Work, which establishes a “*Chamber as a professional organization associating Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work*”.

- Chamber members can be physical persons professionally qualified to perform Social Work; have to practice Social Work; formally apply for membership.
- Graduates of Social Work who do not practice Social Work, as well as current Social Workers who do not fulfill the qualification requirements are thus excluded from membership.

In the case of Experts, for example in Education, these may be, under certain procedural assumptions, visiting or honorary members of the Chamber, but without the right to vote.

They may be members of one of the bodies of the Chamber, its Professional Council,

which has competence in particular in the field of Professional Ethics, Education and its Evaluation.

The establishment of the Chamber is one of the most important benefits of the new Law, but at the same time raises some questions.

- Why are from its proper activities excluded those Social Workers who have not yet fulfilled the conditions of Education in the field of Social Work, if their relevance to practice is assumed, only because they do not meet the currently set qualification requirements?
- Will the Chamber not lose by this way important Research and Education Specialists, when they cannot be members of the Chamber?
- How will the concept of voluntary membership in the Chamber affect the wider professional community?
- Will there not be divisions to members and non-members?

These questions arise from the fact that the Law anticipates the establishment of a Chamber without prior experience with such an authority within the Section of labor, Social Affairs and the Family. The responses will come from the Chamber's own activities; on the other hand it will be necessary to put such questions in place so that the Chamber can help the professionalization of Social Work in Slovakia as much as possible.

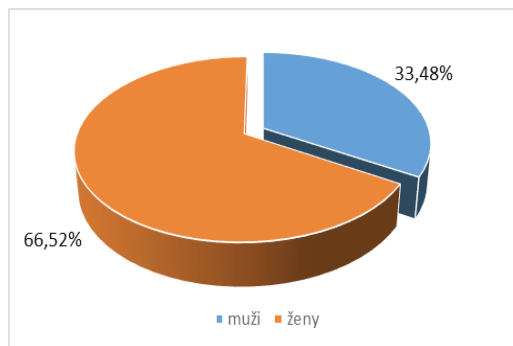
In connection with the membership of the Chamber and its real functioning, we were interested in how Social Workers respond to the establishment of Chamber and membership in this. Therefore, we have decided to carry out research to answer some questions about the importance of the Chamber for Social Practice; for performance of the Practice itself; the strengthening of Social Worker status in society; as

well as the improvement of conditions for the performance of Social Work activities.

Respondents' reflection on the adoption of the Act on Social Work and the Establishment of the Chamber

The aim of the research was to get a comprehensive view of the respondents on the new legal regulation on Social Work and its application in Practice. We also anticipated the identification of some shortcomings, threats, and unfulfilled expectations that could serve as a basis for future Amendments to the Law of Social Practice.

The basic set was a research sample, which consisted of 483 respondents - members of the Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work. The research file consisted of 224 respondents (46.3%), ie. those, who were willing to fill in an electronically processed questionnaire.



Graph 1: Respondents according to gender.

In our research, we also looked at some differences in respondents' views by gender, which we also evaluated statistically. We identified, for example, conflicts in the interest of membership in the Chamber based on the Practice of respondents; the differences in the expectation of solving the social status of Social Workers; interest of Performance in Practice.

The formulations of our assumptions were as follows:

- There is a statistically significant difference between men and women, graduates of the Study of Social Work with more than 10 years of experience in interest about membership in the Chamber of the Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work.
- There will be significant difference between the sexes in anticipation of addressing societal status of Social Workers from the point of view of the Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work.
- There will be a difference between the sexes in question of performance of Independent Practice of Social Workers, as allowed by the Law on Social Work.

To calculate the probability of the correlation we used Microsoft Office, by which we calculated the measured values by statistical functions. We used the following formula to calculate the Chi-quadrante, which represents the sum of the differences between the observed values denoted as O and expected values identified as E, these are then divided by the expected frequency E.

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

When calculating Chi-quadrante, we used a frequency table to test the zero statistical hypotheses according to which the frequencies in each categories equal to the expected frequencies. When calculating, we denote p with a significance level of 5% that is equal to 0.05.

- If the value p is lower than the significance level, then the hypothesis is rejected.
- If the value p is higher than the significance level, we will not reject the hypothesis.

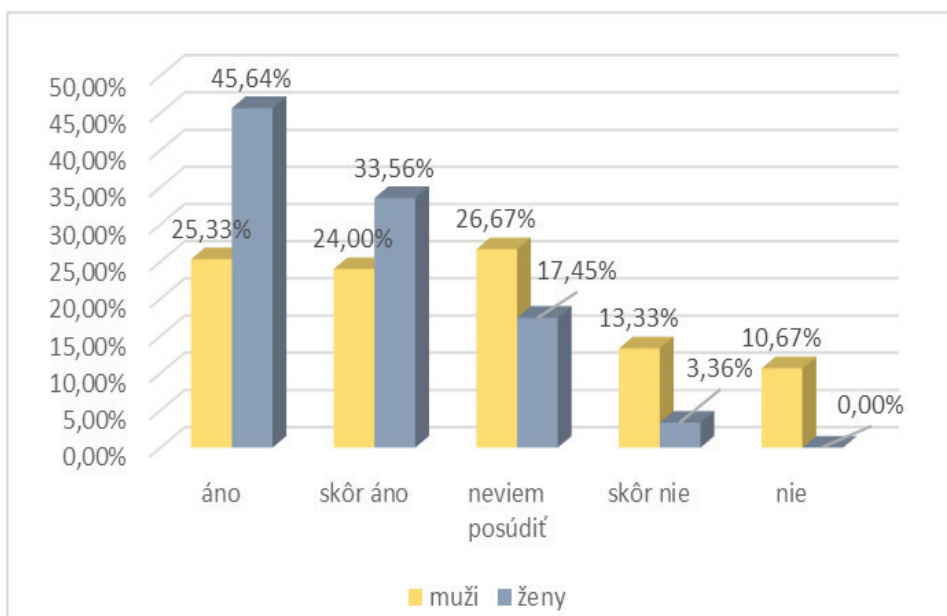
Such a result means that the difference between the observed and the expected frequencies can be a coincidence of the chance and therefore we can consider it to be statistically insignificant. (Kalina et al. 2010).

Based on our calculation of probability, we have concluded that

- men graduating from Social Work with more than 10 years of Practice have shown a stronger interest in becoming members of the Slovak Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work as women Graduates of in Social Work. (Chi-quadrante 0,832196, p = 0,732696816).
- It can also be concluded that there are statistically significant differences indicating that men, unlike women, are of the opinion that the adoption of the Social Work Act has strengthened the status of a Social Worker in society. (Chi-quadrante 1,362863, p = 0,524863225).

Concerning the interest in the performance of Independent Practice, our assumption has not been confirmed, there are no statistically significant differences, which would point to differences in perceived in performance independent practice according to sex. (Chi-quadrante 2,83254, p = 0,034411386).

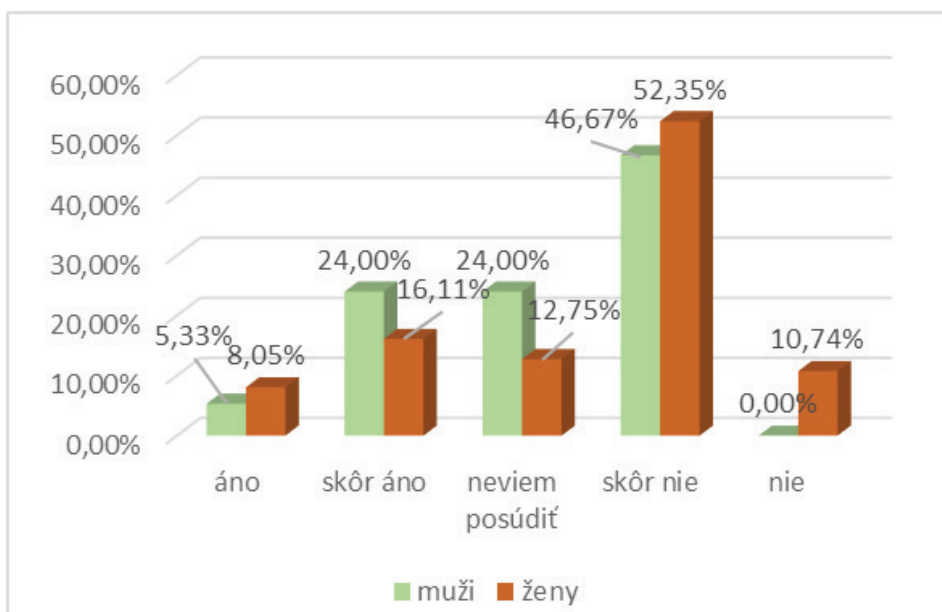
As part of our findings, we would like to point out some results that point to the views of respondents regarding the establishment of the Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work. In Graph 2 we present results that clearly confirm the importance of setting up such a professional organization.



Graph 2: The need for the establishment of a professional organization.

It is interesting to note that the expectations of Social Workers to strengthen the status of Social Workers are not yet sufficiently fulfilled. This may be related to the fact that the Chamber did not sufficiently reflect the expectations of a more pronounced

political overhaul, especially in relation to the salary solution and improving the position of Social Workers in society even compared to other helping professions. The results of this finding are shown in Graph 3.

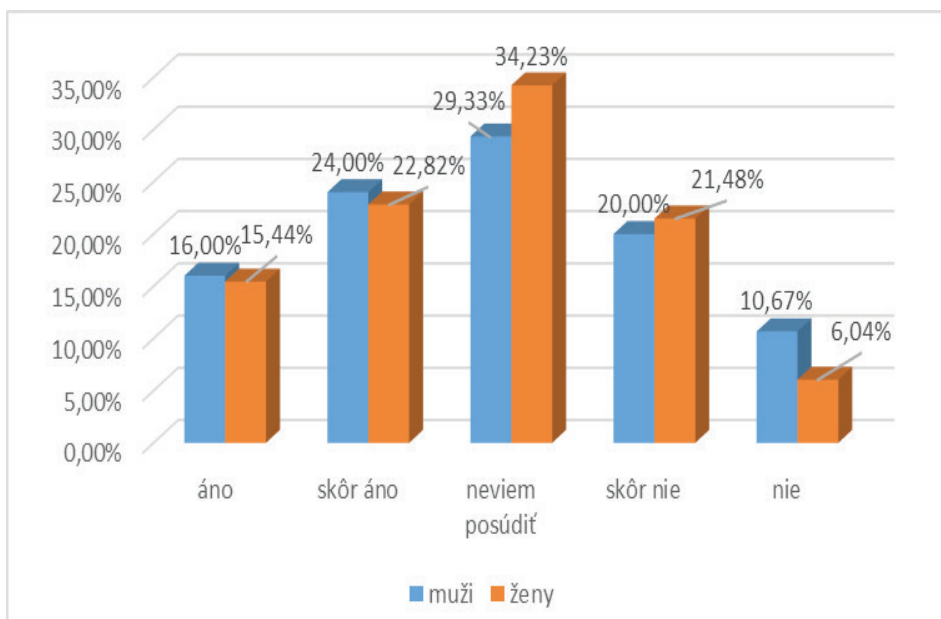


Graph 3: Improving the status of Social Worker in society.

A new and significant element in the Law is the possibility to perform an Independent Practice by Social Worker her/himself. It is independence in the performance of Social Work without necessity of employment. The performance of Independent Practice is not linked to a trade license, it is a free occupation. Respondents in our research are undecided in the perception of this possibility, which is also reflected in their answers in the sense of “I do not know to judge and “rather not” and not what they make up for women in almost 62% and 61% in males.

Conclusion

The adoption of the Social Work Act is an important milestone for Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work. It is important that, under mentioned the Act of Social Work, Social Work can only be carried out by a Graduate with a University Degree in Social Work. The establishment of a Chamber of Social Workers was an important part in the actual process of professionalization. The establishment of the Chamber, also according to the respondents’ answers of our research, was an important step but on the



Graph 4: Interested in conducting independent practice.

From 2015 to the present, Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work issued only two permits. It also appears to be related to lack of information, obviously also with the need for certainty and anchoring in proper employment. The reason is probably the workload of Social Workers within their Profession and on the other hand also in connection with the Civil Service Act, a limited option for Social Workers in the state employment relationship to Practice Independently.

other hand, according to the statement, the Chamber does not yet implement the expectations in the context of strengthening the status of Social Workers and some assumptions are not fulfilled. These include, for example, adjusting the status of Social Workers in other sectors or the possibility of participating in Specialized Education. We were surprised by the relatively low level of interest in the performance of independent

practice; statistical differences did not reveal significant gender differences. On the other hand, men with more than 10 years of experience in the Social sphere showed the greatest interest in membership in the Chamber of Social Workers'; and similarly men are of the opinion that the adoption of the Law strengthened the status of a Social Worker to a greater extent than women.

The fact remains that all members of the Chamber of Social Workers and Assistants of Social Work did not participate in research. It is possible that even the short duration of the Chamber and its activity that is profiled had an impact on the results of our research. As similar research in Slovakia has not yet been realized, it would be interesting to continue to explore identity, status and interest in further education of Social Workers through specialization study.

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