

# Social (Pastoral) Services and its Impact on the Citizens of the Czech Republic

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Original Article

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## Abstract:

The article examines social services and their impact on the citizens of the Czech Republic. This is not only important from the point of view of the present time, but also for the acute needs of the localized places of the studied area. The main objective of the study was based on this aspect in line with the main research question: *How important is the concept of social services in the networking of religious institutions in the Czech Republic?* The quantitative representative sample

(online) consisted of 858 respondents from the Czech Republic, of which 59% (N = 506) were women and 41% (N = 352) were men. Age group representation was balanced across the five main categories, with the 41-59 age group dominating at 41% (N = 351). Two-thirds of respondents 67% (N = 575) reported having a college or high school education. The research sample identified 54% (N = 465) of participants who identified themselves as atheists in terms of religious beliefs. Almost half of the 48% (N = 413) surveyed identified having the Ústí nad Labem region as their place of residence, which can be considered a positive given the current social issues in the North Bohemian territory. In turn, we see a balanced view of our respondents in the five marked groups in relation to the size of the place of residence. From the research results, we can conclude that the social sphere plays an important role in the Czech Republic, where we see a significant role in the connection of religious institutions. It is from these religious places that our respondents expect the greatest amount of „social attention“.

## Introduction to the topic

A society can be defined as a stable network of relationships between men and women based on their mutual behaviors that are manifested among specific people based on established positions. One of these positions holds the dimension of “social friendship”, where we discover the recognition of the values of each human person in the dimensions of human greatness. The present theme aims to point to the need for social (pastoral) service in favor of the most needy, so that the humane level of universal fraternity is shown precisely to them. For this group we have in mind children and teenagers in detention centers, people on the margins of society (homeless people), individuals at social and deviant risk, the seriously ill, the elderly and the dying. It is in these groups that we recognize, above all, those who are often above the level of human misery and who are so close to God’s plan, even though they have never known his teaching (cf. *Mt 9:13*). We are aware that this is the very open space of the “outstretched palms”, which in their misery point to the open wounds of the crucified Savior.

There is a whole range of dynamic processes that can be employed to help those in need in the social assistance continuum. It happens, for example, through appropriate pedagogical and clerical outreach (1,2), but, above all, it comes about through the witness of a life based on neighborly love. Today’s covid period in par-

ticular offers a wide range of possibilities for maintaining the right direction in relation to other people (3,4,5). The duty that we have towards ourselves, that is, the restoration of the social good (6,7,8), can also be developed through the spiritual values (9,10,11) we discover in various religious institutions (12). It is in them that we can point to the various examples of the holy friends of God (13,14,15,16) who drew their inspiration from the previously mentioned divine purpose (17,18).

It is good to note that, despite being in a civilized Central European environment like the Czech Republic, we also find here a whole range of “social attention”, as well as a desire not to forget those who are not receiving it. We must not forget that we can also imagine this charitable activity nowadays through various managerial-economic factors (19,20) and social-media means (21,22), which, especially in the 21st century, set the trend for new possibilities related to the culture and ethics of education (23,24).

## Objective of the study

The main objective of the study was to answer the question:

- How important is the concept of social services in the network of religious institutions in the Czech Republic?

***Sub-goals (hypotheses) examined using the Pearson chi-square test:***

- Do the answers of women and men differ significantly?
- Do the answers differ significantly according to the age of the respondents?
- Do the answers to questions depend on whether the respondents come from a village, a small town or a big city?

## Methods

### Research design

The research design of the study was chosen to target the available measurement methods. We chose a non-experimental research plan – a comparative study – and analyzed the results obtained from the measurements using basic descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The research set was obtained by deliberate selection. We selected residents of the Czech Republic as the target research groups to compare. The research took place for three months from May to July 2021, online and by distributing access data to the research questionnaire.

### Methods of statistical processing

The results were examined through descriptive statistics, contingency tables and a contingency table variability test. The variable independence test assumes that the random variables X and Y are independent, so the values of one variable do not affect the values of the other variable. The dependence between variables can be either one-sided (asymmetric) or mutual (symmetric), where both variables interact with each other. Pearson’s chi-square test was used to test the independence of two categorical variables in the PivotTable, regardless of the direction of their dependence. The null hypothesis of this test assumes that both variables are independent of each other. We tested the null hypothesis at the determined level of significance  $\alpha$ , that the variables are independent, as opposed to the alternative that there is a dependence between the variables. We write the hypotheses as follows:

$$H_0: n_{ij} = \frac{n_{i.} * n_{.j}}{n}$$

$$H_1: n_{ij} \neq \frac{n_{i.} * n_{.j}}{n}$$

when  $n_{ij}$  indicates the frequencies in the PivotTable where  $i = 1, 2, \dots, r$  denotes the categories of the variable X and  $j = 1, 2, \dots, s$  denotes the categories of the variable Y.

The test criterion  $\chi^2$  is defined as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^s \frac{(n_{ij} - n'_{ij})^2}{n'_{ij}}$$

where  $\chi^2 \approx \chi^2 [(r-1) (s-1)]$ . The larger the differences between the categories of the examined variables, the larger the test criterion  $\chi^2$ .

The prerequisite for using this test is that theoretical frequencies where there are less than 5 observations make up less than 20% of the PivotTable fields. Individual categories of variables can be combined to meet this assumption. The data were processed using the statistical program SPSS (version 23) and MS Office Excel.

### Research file

Data was collected between April and July 2021. A total of 858 respondents were surveyed, of which 41% were male (N = 352) and 59% were female (N = 506).

Age	(N)	(%)
up to 18 years	99	12%
18-25	121	14%
26-40	168	20%
41-59	351	41%
60 and over	119	13%

Religious confession	(N)	(%)
No religion	465	54%
Christian	352	42%
Eastern religions and similar	20	2%
Jewish	1	0%
Other	20	2%

Permanent residence - region	(N)	(%)
Usti	413	47%
Karlovy Vary	83	10%
Prague	65	8%
South Bohemia	62	7%
Middle Bohemia	61	7%
Olomouc	35	4%
South Moravia	31	4%
Pardubice	25	3%
Moravian-Silesian	24	3%
Plzeň	18	2%
Hradec Kralove	14	2%
Liberec	14	2%
Zlin	9	1%
Vysočina	4	0%

Size of place of residence	(N)	(%)
village	202	24%
a city of up to 10,000 inhabitants	174	20%
a city of 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants	287	33%
a city of 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants	95	11%
a city of over 100,000 inhabitants	100	12%

Highest completed education	(N)	(%)
Primary education	102	12%
Secondary educ. without matriculation	80	9%
High school with high school diploma	246	29%
Higher vocational school	58	7%
Higher education	328	38%
Higher education postgraduate	44	5%

### Measuring instruments

We did not use standardized questionnaires in our research. We created a sociometric questionnaire that also included requirements for basic demographic data. Participants answered eleven questions, one of which was open-ended.

### Result

In the following section, we present the data in frequency tables:

#### A) How would you express, in percentage terms, the need for social services in the society in which you live?

	(N)	(%)
0% - 10%	36	4%
11% - 25%	166	19%
26% - 50%	261	30%
51% - 75%	241	28%
76% and more	154	19%

#### B) Which group of people, in your opinion, deserves the most „social attention“?

	(N)	(%)
children and teenagers in detention centers	368	43%
the seriously ill	125	15%
the elderly	114	13%
homeless people	81	9%
individuals at social and deviant risk	76	9%
all those groups	35	4%
other	59	7%

#### C) What do you see as the main cause of socially deviant behavior of some people?

	(N)	(%)
the family environment (poor upbringing)	440	51%
media age	114	13%
genetic factors (innate predispositions)	97	11%
the absence of religious influence	60	7%
a delinquent group of „friends“	55	7%
the absence of God	3	0%
other	89	11%

**D) Which form of assistance, in your opinion, is the most effective support for these socially vulnerable people?**

	(N)	(%)
family background	348	41%
professionalism	261	30%
a change of environment	113	13%
spiritual help	73	9%
other	63	7%

**E) In your opinion, does the social-pastoral service of religious organizations play any social role?**

	(N)	(%)
to some extent	353	41%
yes	313	36%
no	66	8%
I do not know	126	15%

**F) Have you observed people in your environment who belong to a church institution and who have actively participated in the social assistance of others?**

	(N)	(%)
noted/observed	300	35%
partly noted	296	34%
partly have not noted	245	29%
have not noted	17	2%

**G) Can you briefly describe a personal experience or the experience of people close to you in the area of social services? If yes, please describe it... (open question)**

Only 5% of the respondents did not answer the question at all, and 20% stated they had no such experience.

- Other common answers:
- Helping seniors, children, the ill 8%
- Caring for the elderly and ill 6%
- Donating things, money 4%
- Hospice care 5%
- Charity 5%

**H) How would you evaluate the quality of social services in the society in which you live?**

	(N)	(%)
very good	85	10%
rather good	586	68%
rather bad	173	20%
very bad	14	2%

**I) How could the performance of social services be improved?**

	(N)	(%)
personal approach to others	560	65%
emphasis on professionalism	113	13%
offer spiritual help	53	6%
I do not know	51	6%
nothing can be improved	42	5%
in another way	39	5%

**J) Should the state, religious institutions or other associations participate more in the form of increased funding for this area?**

	(N)	(%)
definitely yes	336	40%
rather yes	405	47%
rather no	97	11%
definitely no	20	2%

**K) Do you yourself participate in any way in the development and benefit of social services?**

	(N)	(%)
definitely yes	103	12%
rather yes	263	31%
rather no	402	47%
definitely no	90	10%

## Dependency results

### Comparison by gender

For the question *Have you observed people in your community affiliated with a religious institution who have actively participated in social assistance to others?:* There was a gender de-

pendency at the 1% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.002). Men were most likely to respond: I have observed quite specific acts by believing Christians. The second most frequent response was noted but only marginally. Women most frequently reported having observed, but only marginally, and as the second most frequent response they reported not having observed.

For the questions *How would you express, in percentage terms, the need for social services in the society in which you live?*; *Which group of people, in your opinion, deserves the most "social attention?"*; *What do you see as the main cause of the socially deviant behavior of some people?*; *Which form of help, in your opinion, is the most effective support for these socially vulnerable people?*; *In your opinion, does the social-pastoral service of religious organizations play any social role?*; *How would you evaluate the quality of social services in the society in which you live?*; *How could the performance of social services be improved?*; *Should the state, religious institutions or other associations participate more in the form of increased funding for this area?*; and *Do you yourself participate in any way in the development and benefit of social services?*, no statistically significant gender dependence was found at the 5% level of significance.

### Comparison by age

For the question *Which group of people, in your opinion, deserves the most "social attention"?*: There was a statistically significant dependence on age at the 5% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.014). All age groups reported the youngest and most vulnerable (children and teenagers in detention centers) most often. Age groups under 25 years reported seriously ill as the second most common option. Age groups over 26 years reported seniors as the second most common option.

For the question *Which form of assistance, in your opinion, is the most effective support for these socially vulnerable people?*: There was a statistically significant dependence on age at the 5% significance level (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.026). Age groups over 26 years old reported family background as the most common. Age groups under 25 years reported the same number of responses for the

family background and professional expertise options.

For the question *In your opinion, does the social-pastoral service of religious organisations play a social role?*: There was a statistically significant dependence on age at the 1% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.001). The age groups under 25 years old most often mentioned the option of a partial role because, like any other institution, they are also responsible for other matters (education, care of cultural monuments, pilgrimages, etc.). The age groups over 26 were most likely to say yes, because this area is one of their priorities.

For the question *Did you notice people in your neighborhood who belong to a religious institution and who were actively involved in the social assistance of others?*: There was a statistically significant dependence on age at the 1% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.000). The age group under 25 years old most often reported the option of not having noticed. Age groups from 26 to 59 years were most likely to report the option noted but only marginally. The 60 and over age group most frequently reported having observed very specific actions by believing Christians.

For the question *Should the state, church institutions or other associations be more involved, including through increased funding for this area?*: There was a statistically significant dependence on age at the 5% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.011). The age group up to 59 years old most frequently reported the option rather yes. The age group 60 years and over most frequently reported definitely yes.

### Comparison by town or village size

For the question *What do you see as the main cause of the socially deviant behaviour of some people?*: Gender was found to be significant at the 1% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.009). All groups cited the family environment (family upbringing) most often. Respondents from a city of over 100,000 inhabitants cited genetic factors (innate predispositions) as the second most common answer. Conversely, respondents from smaller areas cited the media production environment as the second most common option.

For the question *Which form of assistance, in your opinion, is the most effective support for these socially vulnerable people?*: It was found to be dependent on gender at the 5% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.038). Again, the other groups were outperformed by respondents from cities of over 100,000 inhabitants, who most frequently reported professional expertise. Other groups most frequently reported family background.

For the question *Do you yourself participate in any way in the development and benefit of social services?*: There was a gender dependence at the 5% level of significance (P-value of the Pearson chi-square test: 0.016). Respondents from cities with a population of over 100,000 were most likely to report yes, while respondents from areas with smaller local authorities were most likely to report no. Respondents residing in rural areas were most likely to say rather no and definitely no.

For the questions: *How would you express in percentage the need for social services in the society in which you live?*; *Which group of people, in your opinion, deserves the most "social attention"?*; *In your opinion, does the social-pastoral service of religious organizations play any social role?*; *Have you observed people in your neighborhood who belong to a religious institution and who actively participate in the social assistance to others?*; *How would you evaluate the quality of social service performance in the society in which you live?*; *How could the performance of social services be improved?*; and *Should the state, religious institutions, or other associations become more involved, including through increased funding for this area?*, no statistically significant relationship was found for the size of the place of residence at the 5% level of significance.

## Discussion

Based on the research, we perceive an important element that shows an interesting fact among the respondents in terms of religion. Although the greater half did not identify with any religious denomination 54% (N = 465), through their responses we see their humanistic dimension. This demonstrates the fact that the men and women of the Czech Republic are not indifferent to the sphere of human good, even in the connection of church institutions. Two thirds of the re-

spondents 77% (N = 666) believe that social and pastoral service occupies an important element of social life. We find some surprises at this point in the Western economic-managerial world (25). Even the church environment, which is more or less exposed to a public-critical view, is evaluated by the Czechs in a more or less positive way. In response to the question *Have you observed people in your environment who belong to a church institution and who have actively participated in the social assistance for others?*, again, a significant 69% (N = 596) responded positively. Czech society expects a greater call for a personal approach from church institutions in the connection of humanitarian activities, as around 65% (N = 560) answered in this direction to the question *How could the performance of social services be improved?* It is precisely in this direction that we can perceive the dimension of further new evangelisation efforts (26,27,28).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we found that through the main research question in the linking thesis objective, we have established through quantitative research that social service connected to religious institutions holds an important place in the Czech Republic. There is room for deeper research here by focusing on the categories that our respondents noted most in their answers (children and teenagers in detention centers, the seriously ill and the elderly) (29,30). In this context, we should not neglect the factor of the family environment (poor upbringing) and media age, which the respondents identified as the main causes of socially deviant behavior of some people. After all, since ancient times the family has held the most basic position in the operation of the individual in connection with society as a whole (31,32). It is in this media-technological (post-industrial) progressive society, to which we are all connected today through various systems (33,34), that we see not only the dangers already identified, but also the wide-ranging positive possibilities affecting our chosen topic (35,36,37,38).

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