Psychosocial risk Management of Employees from the perspective of Managers of social service Facilities, case 5P

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Abstract:

Objective: The aim of the research was find out the importance of supporting the management of psychosocial risks of mental health in helping professionals from the view of managers of social service facilities.
Design: Qualitative analysis, pilot pre-research probe.
Participants: Head manager of the Social Services Home for Adults in Zavar, in the Trnava district, creator of an authentic support project, and head manager of the Social Services Home for Children and Adults in Pastuchov, in the Hlohovec district, a participant in the activities of the project.
Methods: At the beginning stage of the preparation of the pre-survey project, the authors designed semi-structured interviews to be carried out with social workers in management

positions with many years of managerial experience in social service facilities.

Results: The intention was to find out what the baseline situation is when it comes to the perception of the importance of mental healthcare. The results of the pilot study aimed at recognizing the authenticity of the 5P support project and reflecting the positive effects of employee participation in preserving one's own mental balance. The source of the greatest benefit is individual self-development.

Conclusion: The case of 5P has become an exemplary model of effective subvention of psychosocial mental health risk management in helping professionals.

Introduction

Exposing important psychosocial factors fundamentally affects the work and power of social and healthcare staff. The accumulation of tasks, the nature of them, and the scale of the workplaces' high demands on professional and human availability can be stressful and affect the mental balance of social and healthcare workers. The priority of the work of the helping professions in the field of social services is the universal benefit for the client. The social worker, as a manager of a social service facility, provides mental healthcare for their staff. This is a current, timeless value and a human resource development benefit; one significant quality benefit is improved access to clients. It is the unique responsibility of the management of social service facilities to create an optimal model of functioning of care for the clients of social services and to eliminate stressogenic factors in this environment that would negatively affect the professional intervention of the helping professions. This process cannot be completed without the application of programs to strengthen the mental health of employees. Social work plays an integral role in setting up support for mental health projects, and this is not only true for social workers.

The aim of this paper is to qualitatively analyze the professional exposure of mental healthcare of social and healthcare staff in social service facilities from the perspective of human resource management and the importance of the elimination of risk factors (so-called psychosocial factors) that determine the mental health of employees of social service facilities. This is a pilot pre-survey and a search for partial answers, which will form the primary research framework for further scientific research. The authors intended to highlight the significant interaction between mental healthcare and subjectively perceived job performance. A suitable self-relationship of an employee of a social service facility positively profiles the interaction with a social work client. In this context, Bočáková et al. (2023) state that in view of the development of social services, the priority tasks, among others, are a quality guarantee, humanization and deinstitutionalization. In the Slovak area, the pioneering support project 5P of mental health in social services represents a significant advancement in the fulfilment of these tasks in the form of prevention for those who work professionally in social services homes.

Methods

The basic method of the qualitative research, interviews, was used. As this is a relatively unstructured way of gathering data, the following information was presented through content analysis. Interviews have the advantage of exploring a phenomenon in its natural setting while responding to local situations and conditions (Hendl, 2016). The interviews were done with managers of social service facilities who are involved in the implementation of applied mental healthcare into practice among employees in the helping professions of social services.

Pavlicek and Dobrikova (2007) indicate that qualitative research is a process of seeking understanding based on different methods of investigation for a given social or human problem. The researcher builds a comprehensive picture, analyzes information and the views of research participants, and conducts the investigation in natural conditions. The researcher may change

or add questions during the course of the research; the research design may also be changed. We consider these factors to be essential in the decision to use the suggested basic research.

Science considers postulated statements to be true if they are also adopted by others unconditionally and if they are perfectly non-contradictory. We use the consensus theory of truth, which considers a statement to be true when it is accepted by all reasonable participants in a conversation or dialogue (Ondrejkovič, Majerčíková, 2012).

The basic research concept focuses on the area of maintaining mental balance in the practice of helping professions. At the beginning stage preparation of the pre-survey project, the authors designed semi-structured interviews to be carried out with social workers in management positions with many years of managerial experience in social service facilities in the Trnava self-governing region. The intention was to find out what the baseline situation is in the perception of the attributed importance of mental healthcare. What was of interest was their managerial experience, particularly in the field of human resource management.

Based on the knowledge of theory, observation and social interaction, the premise that there are fundamental differences in the approach of the management of social service facilities to the elimination of psychosocial risks of the work of social and healthcare staff was developed. A key role is represented by the individual availability and erudition of the manager to adapt psycho-hygienic intentions into the management process. Another important aspect is the support of the founder of the social service facilities in the creation of innovative social work methods in the field of mental health maintenance.

The design of the pilot pre-research probe is part of an intended research investigation in which we plan to use a mixed design to gather relevant data on the issue. To understand the essential connections between mental health and psychosocial risks, we contacted erudite social service managers with more than 20 years of experience in management positions. In addition to the length of managerial experience in social services management, additional criteria were determined as education in social work, the location of performance (social services facilities in the Trnava self-governing region) and participation in the 5P support project.

Results

The first 5P support project started to take form in the context of post-covid rehabilitation of the helping professions in the facilities of the Trnava County in the Centre of Social Services in Galanta. Primarily, it was addressed only to approximately 250 employees after overcoming a viral illness in 21 social service facilities, all of which were founded by the Trnava Self-Governing Region. The purpose was and remains the prevention and support of the recovery of mental balance and the elimination of physical and mental consequences of post-covid syndrome in people who take care of clients of social service institutions on a daily basis. As part of the original 5P project aimed at preventing burnout through psycho-hygiene and a holistic view (body, soul, mind) of the person, there were also additional mental health support modules for the helping professions. Trnava County as a self-governing body offers these services as a non-material benefit for its employees in social services. As of 2019, more than 1,500 employees of social service facilities in the Trnava region had participated in psycho-hygienic rehabilitation (Navzájom lepší, 2023).

The role of the 5P support project is to introduce a new perspective into the social service provision system and provide tools and techniques for the psycho-hygienic care of providers. The project, which was created by the management of the social services facility in Zavar, is mainly focused on social service providers themselves, their education and psycho-hygiene. The aim is to provide prevention from the emotional and psychological stress helping professionals have to deal with. This objective leads to improvements in well-being, efficiency, the quality of work and working conditions.

Management practice has shown that for the qualitative development of social service facilities, it is essential to promote a balance between the work and personal life of employees. This is especially true in helping professions. This concept has become a basic part of the management intervention in our selected facilities. It is a broad view of an approach to life that points to the need for self-reflection. Self-reflection is

important for understanding opportunities in the workplace and in personal life. Holistic optics emphasize that the individual components in life form a whole. If we don't have balance in one part, it will naturally manifest itself in other areas. For example, the lack of balance from the area of providing material needs goes to the level of personal development and self-fulfillment.

The project employs an authentic model that is based directly on the needs of social service providers. Every single course is „tailor-made" for the participants and aims to start a change in each individual. The uniqueness of the project lies in its focus on human individuality and the development of teamwork and synergy as an important requirement for growth in personal and professional life (Pavlovičová et al., 2021).

The partial goals of the project include the detection of one's own experience, reactions and behaviour, the discovery of inner motivation, and the path to internal change. In other words, to find the dimension of inner leadership - the ability to lead others, which helps to guide people effectively and to perform better with minimal energy output.

Psychosocial risk management by social services managers

Part of the delimitation of stressogenic factors in the work of social and healthcare staff is the management of psychosocial risks by the managers of social services facilities. According to Žuľová and Skolodová (2021), expert studies identify the following as risk factors with an impact on employees' mental health (the so-called psychosocial factors):

- job description,
- workload, work pace,
- working time and its distribution,
- scope for decision-making, control,
- working environment and equipment,
- the culture and function of the organisation,
- interpersonal relations at work,
- position in the organisation,
- career development,
- violence, bullying, harassment,
- the interface between work and home.

Employers are expected to effectively manage individual psychosocial risks and promote the mental health of employees in the workplace. The final product of these managerial activities is work conditions and an atmosphere in the workplace that is stimulating, satisfying, pleasant and safe. In this context, it is essential for the employee to have the opportunity to contact an available professional in the event of an acutely perceived threat to mental health. Current European approaches to counselling suggest that the role of professionals is to guide, motivate and provide relevant information to assist individuals on their journey through life and to facilitate their decision-making. The new approach includes counselling as a continuously available service to all. These factors are also part of the profiling of the support center in the case of our research survey. Being with the client in a way that facilitates his or her personal growth and potential is part of biodimensional counselling (Woolfe, 1999).

In managing psychosocial risks to mental health, the social services manager can build on aspects of biodimensional counselling, which consist of counselling about relationships, trust and a specific form of communication aimed at optimising and stimulating personal development.

Emphasis is placed on the clients taking an active approach to their own life and taking responsibility for themselves in decision-making and problem solving. The content and form is personalized and socialized learning. It includes education, upbringing and training (Hargašová, 2009).

Authentic outcomes qualitative analysis

Managers of selected social service facilities in the Trnava district (Social Services Home for Adults in Zavar and the Social Services Home for Children and Adults in Pastuchov) perceived the risk factors of mental health threats almost identically based on their long-standing practice. In the focus of their own managerial function, they perceived serious psychosocial risks, in particular: workload, working time and its distribution, work pace and interpersonal relationships. Managers at both social services homes identified threats to mental balance in subordinate social and medical staff as follows: work-

load, work pace, work environment and equipment, and interpersonal relationships at work. In the context of managerial risk management, expert studies identify workload as a source of risk in the sense that employee mental discomfort can be caused by a lack of job variation, short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, the underutilization of an employee's skills and high levels of uncertainty.

A positive relationship with people is one of the requirements for psychological balance and success at work and in the personal lives of those who help. Social or physical exclusion, isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflicts and a lack of social support are perceived as psychosocial dangers. The priority of social services management is to eliminate them and employ the support of teamwork through educational impulses. Members of a functional work team are aware of belonging to a group; achieving goals is a shared affair. They can identify with their work and the goals to be achieved because they themselves participated in their creation. Each member contributes with knowledge to the correct formulation of the task. An atmosphere of trust encourages the open expression of opinions, disagreements and feelings. Communication should be open with an effort to understand each other. In a functional team, members are encouraged to make the most of their knowledge and skills (Hambálek, 2010).

The head manager of the Social Services Home for Children and Adults in Pastuchov detected specific psychosocial risks in the social or health profession in a broader evaluation concept: „It is a demanding mental and physical job, which is reflected in the lack of staff and interest in the positions. Insufficient salaries also play a role. Another individual risk is the continuous increase in the demands of specific work with clients. In view of managerial risk management, unsatisfactory diagnosis of clients and the lack of specialised facilities providing this type of social service are often a problem."

In addition to the selected risks, the manager of the Social Services Home in Zavar, who created the design of the project in the individual focus group, registers an enormous burden and unsolved question marks: „For the helping professions in particular, deciding whether to be a person first - a woman, a mother,... or a 'role'

– doing an expected behaviour. It exposes the enormous pressure on just the professional role from society - criteria, standards, inspection... From a manager's point of view, I realise there are many absent common sense and realistic horizons. The helping professions in social services are often looked down upon in society, and there is a lack of decency, respect and increased arrogance, even though social and health workers are the people who look after the most difficult group of clients, who often no one is interested in."

Stress creates one of the so-called challenging life situations, which are usually unpleasant events causing all sorts of difficulties and activating considerable efforts to cope with them (Nakonečný, 2015). Therefore, the managers of the selected facilities agreed that the workplace is an appropriate place for mental health interventions for employees. The manager of a facility in Zavar explains the innovative attitude of the management of social service facilities about the mental healthcare of employees: „In the horizon of changes and many concepts of social services after the adoption of Act No. 448/08 Coll. on Social Services and its revisions, it is the view of mental health that has changed significantly in a positive way. Since 2019, the Trnava self-governing region has been very actively caring for all its employees in the helping professions with the 5P project, which is comprehensively based on a holistic view and supports all provider resources. An interactive book has been published with coaching tools under the title 'Better Together'. Approximately two thousand employees of social service institutions in the Trnava self-governing region have been trained. We are preparing a Mental Health Institute. The 5P project is innovative and directly 'tailored' to the needs of the helping professions, taking into account the topicality of the times, post-covid rehabilitation and three-day therapeutic stays offered to maintain and develop mental health. „It should be remembered that the project involves all employees in social service institutions, regardless of their profession.

Discussion and conclusion

The reason why the management of social service facilities should attend to the mental health issues of their own employees comes

Table 1 SWOT analysis of potential psychosocial risks

S - Potential internal forces	W - Potential internal weaknesses
• strong and receptive management • regular supervision • positive interaction between manager versus social and healthcare worker • self-management of the manager	• staff fluctuation • lack of qualifications in some positions • interpersonal relations in the workplace • communication barriers
O - Potential external opportunities	**T - Potential external threats**
• founder's support • own project and educational program in the field of mental health • the use of therapeutic stays aimed at removing stressogenic factors	• uncertain financing perspectives • low wages and employee benefits compared to similar positions in other sectors • lack of funds for investment

(Source: author's own processing)

from the primary managerial task, which is to guarantee the effective functioning of the organisation. To do this, management emphasizes that personal goals are achieved through individual efforts and organisational goals require collective action. Managers achieve goals by influencing other people (Dravecký, 2015).

In the pilot pre-research probe, it resonated with both managers: „In our case, effective psychosocial risk management can only happen if management and staff support each other, listen to each other and bring new things to the table that will be put into practice."

Positive group behaviour, which occurs as a result of a positive team of working people in work groups, plays a role here. Group ideology and cohesion, communication channels and identification with the group can significantly affect the mental balance of an individual in both positive and negative ways. The dysfunctionality of a group is caused by an unnatural and formalised atmosphere, frequent discussions that lead nowhere and healthy discussions being obstructed by dominant members of the work team. Employees do not listen to each other, and decisions are not made together or are not justified. They do not feel free to express their opinions. Employees do not know the goals and standards of the facility, and individuals on the work team avoid work or let others do the work for them (Armstrong, 2009).

The management of the social services home that created the project and another one that is

part of the implementation of different modules of mental health support see the essential positive aspects brought about by the participation of their staff in them. The exposed evaluations of the managers of the social service homes were united in the intersection of the necessary evaluation of the social area of human resource management, which mainly follows:
• creating the conditions for job satisfaction, job content and the work environment,
• the internal working climate, building employee loyalty to the organisation, the use of appropriate motivational tools
• appropriate development of incentive programs to encourage skill development, creativity and initiative to solve the organisation's problems (Vaverčáková, Hromková, 2018).

On the basis of the internal knowledge of the selected social service institutions and their managerial management, we profiled the evaluation construct of psychosocial risk delimitation in the performance of managerial, social and healthcare professions with regard to both opportunities and weaknesses by means of a SWOT analysis in Table 1.

The consensus of the results of a pilot study aimed at recognizing the authenticity of the 5P support project reflects the positive effects of employee participation in preserving their own mental balance. The source of the greatest benefit is individual self-development. The real source of long-term and lasting change is invest-

ment in education and therefore the development of the human potential of employees. The added benefit of social service management's concern for staff mental health development consists of a change in perception and a holistic view of the social service provider. Teamwork, creativity, self-expression, willpower, self-confidence and self-satisfaction are found in the social and health professions.

It is necessary to establish a formal mechanism to provide tools for management to consult with employees about issues of mutual concern. The exchange of views and the sharing of knowledge and experience in a partnership system emphasises the mutual benefit and importance of cooperation between the manager of a social service facility and those in the helping profession.

The manager has the opportunity to design a counselling program focused on psychosocial skills oriented to interpersonal relationships, mental balance and self-development. The helping professions must be saturated with opportunities for personal development in effective communication, openness and willingness to accept feedback, in basic group counselling techniques and procedures, in learning a new concept of life and healthy action, i.e., assertiveness.

The results of the research study in the regional conditions of the Trnava self-governing region clarify that successful management of psychosocial risks among employees of social service institutions includes individual consultations, coaching in the area of self-confidence, self-satisfaction, the elimination of discomfort, the fear of responsibility and authority, effective communication, improvement at work (employee) and partner relationships.

It has been shown that the concrete implementation of mental health support programs is largely dependent on the supporting material, in this case the Integration Centre in Galanta. Psycho-hygiene support includes conferences, inspirational stays, holistic health festivals, community, walking, tea at five, and others. Improving individual resilience in European workplaces will be crucial in the future to minimize the risk of burnout and increase the well-being of employees (Butz, Mrazova, Deaconu, Czirfusz, 2024).

In addition, we reflect on the fulfilment of the vision of making the social services facility a holistic centre of mental, spiritual and physical balance. It is encouraged not only by the managerial expertise, but also by the social worker's conceptual equipment to create active living programs. Social workers themselves must humanely walk the way of responsibility and prevention towards mental health as a result of inner balance. However, it is highly strategic for them to implement and develop comprehensive and innovative programs. This not only increases the working efficiency of human resources, but above all exposes the qualitative development of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. This is especially true for the necessary activism in the work of the social and health professions.

Helping professions in social services are in continuous contact with clients. They are often exposed to their negatively accented attitudes or feelings, which disturbs the psychosocial balance and in the long term leads to burnout syndrome. Other factors posing psychosocial hazards to mental health include an excessive or insufficient workload, a machine-like pace of work, high levels of time pressure and constant exposure to deadlines.

Prevention is important. Zaskodna et al. (2023) say for example, that personal engagement, particularly the emotional engagement of individuals who take care of a dependent member of the family, can result in a caregiver burden, specifically manifested by stress. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize positive approaches and theories in the context of a selected psycho-hygiene practice that is applied to eliminate psychosocial risk factors in social work practice, specifically in social service staff. The role of managers of social service facilities is to provide support for the staff and the clients themselves and to promote the profile of the integrated personality.

Part of coping with psychosocial risks is taking a constructive approach to the value of mental health in the management of a particular facility. It should respect the principles of salutogenesis, i.e., perceiving individual sources of health and a whole, holistic understanding of the human being as a bio-psycho-social and spiritual entity with unique needs.

Kováčik and Imrovič (2019) explain there is a growing problem with the lack of skilled labor

in some sectors of the economy. This also applies to social services.

The case of the 5P project clearly showed that it is not only in the helping professions that we need to change our attitude to life and look for a sense of integrity. This especially goes for the coherence of meaningfulness, the perception of the manageability of tasks and the ability to understand what happens around us as a comprehensibility measure. In a fundamental way, this builds the resilience of the helping profession along the lines of self-awareness, self-regulation, critical thinking, realistic optimism, perseverance, relationships and energy management. The case of the 5P project has naturally become an exemplary model of effective subvention of psychosocial mental health risk management in helping professionals.

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