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Author: Academic Painter Andrea Spišáková

## *Values, Resilience, and New Perspectives in the Helping Professions*

### Original Articles

- ✓ PERSONAL VALUE ORIENTATIONS AS PREDICTORS OF MOTIVATION TO VOLUNTEERING
- ✓ THE LIFE ALTERNATIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT SHELTER IN THE CONTEXT OF MENTAL HEALTH
- ✓ EDUCATIONAL PROCESS EFFICIENCY PREREQUISITES IN THE CONTEXT OF DISTANCE LEARNING OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS
- ✓ DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE MOTIVATION AND VALUE ATTITUDE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARDS MASTERING INFORMATION AND DIGITAL SKILLS
- ✓ THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON YOUTH EDUCATION
- ✓ THE STATUS OF CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL FIELD
- ✓ INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES AS THE TOOL OF SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION
- ✓ THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUTPATIENT PALLIATIVE CARE IN UKRAINE: THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL AND CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS
- ✓ SOCIAL WORKERS IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS TREATING PALLIATIVE PATIENTS: THE SITUATION OF SUFFERING
- ✓ HEALTHCARE CLUSTERING AS A STRATEGY FOR BUSINESS PROCESS OPTIMIZATION IN UKRAINE
- ✓ PROMOTING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN ATTENDING PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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# Editorial

Dear Readers, Esteemed Colleagues, Dear Friends,

You are holding a new issue of our journal, arriving during a period that sociologists and psychologists are increasingly referring to as the „era of permacrisis.“ Scarcely had we, as a society, caught our breath after a global pandemic that fundamentally tested the limits of our health and social systems, when we found ourselves in the shadow of an armed conflict just beyond our borders. These tectonic shifts in society are not only reshaping geopolitical maps but, above all, the internal map of the individual’s experience. The role of science—and particularly the human and social sciences—in such times is not merely to impartially observe and record data. It is our moral obligation to seek meaning within the chaos, to define points of stability, and to offer solutions for practice. It is precisely this ambition that is woven through the current issue we present to the professional community. Values as an Anchor in the Storm The dominant theme resonating across the contributions is resilience and its sources. We open with a highly relevant study by a collective of authors (Dykyi et al.), who focused on the axiological anchoring of volunteers in Ukraine. Their findings serve as a fascinating probe into the „psychology of action.“ It becomes evident that in borderline situations, such as war, helping others ceases to be merely an altruistic gesture and becomes a fundamental existential strategy. Personal values here function as the strongest predictor of motivation, which is a key insight for us as therapists and social workers: if we wish to build a resilient society, we must begin with the cultivation of values. The Invisible Among Us Social work has attention to those whose voices are often drowned out in public discourse encoded in its very DNA. In this issue, we therefore dedicate significant space to themes of social exclusion. Whether

it is an analysis of life alternatives for homeless youth (Pavelkova et al.) or a critical look at the socio-legal status of persons with disabilities (Šurín et al.), the authors agree on one thing: the systemic gaps remain too wide. These texts are not merely dry statements of fact, but an appeal for the necessity of bridging legislative frameworks with the real needs of clients in the field.

**Education at a Crossroads** The second strong pillar of this issue is a reflection on changes in education. The digital transformation, accelerated by the pandemic, has placed new challenges before educators. However, the authors (Rudenskyi et al., Shyshak et al.) rightly warn that the discussion cannot be narrowed down solely to the technical provision of distance learning. The real challenge lies deeper—in the ability to maintain human contact and motivation even through computer screens. Here, the indispensability of social support reveals itself. Research on the impact of family and teachers on youth education (Mahrik et al.) reminds us that a child is not an isolated unit processing information, but a bio-psycho-social being whose performance is directly proportional to the quality of the relationships in which they live.

**Competencies for the Future** We close the circle with a look at the future of higher education. Paradoxically, in the age of artificial intelligence, it is not „hard skills“ that are coming to the forefront, but soft skills—the capacity for communication, empathy, and critical thinking (Savitska et al.). For us, who are educating future generations of helping professionals, this is a clear signal: we must teach students not only to know, but above all to understand and to feel. Dear colleagues, I believe that the presented collection of scientific articles will be for you not only a source of new citations for your work but, primarily, an inspiration for your daily practice—whether behind the lectern, in the therapist’s chair, or in the field.

**Michal Oláh**

# Personal Value Orientations as Predictors of Motivation to Volunteering

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Original Article

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## Abstract:

The study highlights the psychological dimension of volunteering as an act through the prism of the situation of actualisation of this free and socially useful act in Ukraine, taking into account the value and meaning sphere of

volunteers. Guided by V.A. Romenets's theory of action, as well as the work of volunteer motivation researchers E. Clary and M. Snyder and one of the leading theories of values proposed by S. Schwartz, we highlight the influence of values on the motivational structure of the volunteer's personality. At the same time, four types of leading motivations for joining this socially useful free-of-charge activity are classified. The study of the value and conceptual sphere of volunteers makes it possible to consider certain worldview universals of different categories of people involved in volunteering, in particular, their perception of the situation, the manifestation of intentions to transform it and the influence of psychological details manifested in the professing of prosocial terminal and moral instrumental values on the formation of motivation for sustainable volunteering.

## Introduction

Modern Ukrainian society is undergoing complex socio-political transformations that have a significant impact on various aspects of citizens' lives, including their readiness to volunteer. Volunteering has become an important component of social support and assistance, especially in times of military conflict, economic hardship and social challenges. However, despite the significant role of volunteering, there is little research on how specific contextual factors influence the decision-making process of volunteering. Researchers emphasise that compassion is an important virtue that encourages people to do good deeds without expectation of reward. It is the essence of love, mercy and honesty that encourages good actions (1).

The relevance of the study lies in the need for a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms that motivate individuals to volunteer in the context of modern Ukrainian society. In particular, special attention should be paid to the situational component of volunteer activity, which includes specific conditions and circumstances that encourage individuals to perform activities for the benefit of others. The lack of proper understanding of these mechanisms makes it difficult to develop effective strategies for attracting new volunteers and supporting those who are already actively involved in volunteer initiatives.

In the context of canonical psychology, the research field covers individual, social and

historical human activity, within which the essence of a person is most fully manifested. These three dimensions of human existence are united into a single phenomenological canon, which allows us to logically, consistently and in detail formulate the basic principles of human mental existence, taking into account the integrated axiological aspect. The culture of each of us lies not only in the ability to create a new culture, but also in the ability to perceive, assimilate and reproduce it, creating the necessary conditions for the innovation of values (2).

The issue of volunteers' values is central to the study of their motivation and social behaviour. Volunteering, as a form of prosocial activity, is actively studied in scientific works that analyse the role of terminal and instrumental values in shaping volunteer activity. Modern society defines rules that govern the behaviour of its members. Violation of these rules leads to sanctions (3). For the most part, terminal values are focused on the volunteer's perception of the optimal image of the future. According to Kralik (1), «if a person loses interest in the future, he or she loses motivation for broader social interaction. As a consequence, they lose the soft skills needed to communicate and manage any project focused on the telos, where the telos represents a temporal projection of participants' expectations and planning.»

Particular attention should be paid to the study of the influence of spiritual values in

the structure of the terminal values of the volunteer's personality, which contribute to the implementation of social and moral and psychological support of the population (1). This will allow us to better understand the motivational aspects of volunteering and develop effective approaches to its promotion and support. In the field of care provision, especially social work, it has been found that the effectiveness of support depends on the level of self-care of employees, as well as on the work-life balance (4).

It is also important to assess the impact of the socio-political context on the formation of volunteer initiatives and to identify key situational factors that facilitate or hinder participation in volunteering. This points to a societal ethos in which the pursuit of material wealth and individual consumption often prevails over values such as solidarity, social justice and compassion (5).

It is worth noting that stressful situations such as socio-economic crises or physical threats to life are among the leading external incentives for volunteering. In this context, it is reasonable to inform representatives of this community about emotionally oriented coping mechanisms. They can be effective when a person is aware of the causes of his or her stress, such as suppressed emotions or frustration. In this case, it is useful to use practices that help to release emotional tension, as well as adapt to an environment with fewer stressors. Developing strategies for managing anger triggers, such as through exercise or logical problem solving, can significantly improve a person's well-being and help alleviate stress (6). A significant role in interpersonal communication is played by the exchange of aspects of personal life that serve as psychological details for socio-economic professionals, namely psychologists and social workers. Such an exchange with a client is a tool for healthy communication and self-expression and is of great importance for a specialist to form an idea of the etiology of life difficulties of a particular person by clarifying specific micro-events of psychological content. However, excessive sharing, especially through the media or social media, can lead to negative consequences, such as internet addiction,

attention seeking, or increased anxiety or worry (7; 8).

Modern society forms rules that regulate the behaviour of its members to comply with social norms, and in case of violation, it imposes sanctions. That is why the key principle of society's response to deviations is punishment, which aims to restore the balance between the damage caused and the harm done to the offender by restricting his or her rights. The idea of global citizenship, proposed in the XVIII century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, was based on the belief that we have a common human nature and that every person has equal value. Accordingly, each person has a duty to protect this value and care for others, which is applicable to the modern volunteer movement (9).

The analysis of these values and conceptual spheres of volunteers will help not only to understand their motivation in depth and in detail, but also to develop practical recommendations for supporting and developing the volunteer movement in Ukraine.

## Method

The need for interdisciplinary research arises when the problem to be solved is too large and complex to be addressed by a single discipline. Drawing on several disciplines and combining them in an integrated way in the research process allows not only to combine the knowledge gained, but also the methodologies of different disciplines to create a scientific synthesis that ultimately leads to the integration of knowledge (10).

The methodological basis of the study is as follows:

- a) V.A. Romenets' four-component theory of action, which includes situational, motivational, action and post-action components, with the situational component being considered fundamental, since it is at this stage that the conflict between external conditions and the inner world of a person occurs (11).
- b) The concept of psychological disaggregation, which involves breaking down complex social or psychosocial phenomena into smaller, more understandable components

- for more detailed analysis (12). the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), developed by E. Clary and M. Snyder to study volunteer motivations (13).
- c) PVQ methodology ‚Portrait of Values‘, which was developed and cross-culturally validated by Schwartz and colleagues (14).
  - d) Analysis of the average values of respondents' answers, which is used to identify general trends and assess various motivational factors of volunteers, taking into account the standard deviation (SD).

The researchers note that compassion is an important moral virtue that encourages people to do good deeds regardless of external rewards. Compassion is the basis of honesty, mercy and moral purity, which motivates a person to act charitably (15).

Sociologists have identified several key characteristics of Generation Z. One of the leading trends among the representatives of this generation is a high level of individualism, accompanied by an emphasis on social justice and equality (16). At the same time, a modern person is often so tied to reflective ideas about themselves, their own lives and the social environment that they lose the ability to effectively interact with the social structures of which they are a part. The desire to be recognized, respected and loved often turns into dissatisfaction due to unfulfilled aspirations. This can lead to the creation of illusory expectations that do not coincide with reality and cause a gap between personal goals and objective capabilities (17). When addressing contemporary social problems and challenges, it is important to take into account psychological coping mechanisms, which may include both cognitive and behavioural strategies. For example, hedonic orientation can be effective in low stress conditions, when the desire for pleasure and relaxation contributes to a positive mood. However, in conditions of high stress, this orientation may not be sufficient to maintain mental health. Therefore, in order to achieve optimal psychological functioning, it is recommended to pay attention to physical activity, communication with family and friends, spirituality and meditation, which can contribute to the organization of psychosocial mechanisms (18).

The most common method of psychosocial research of volunteering today is the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) developed by American scientists E. Clary, M. Snyder and others in 1998. It is aimed at identifying six leading functions of volunteering, which, according to the proposed functional approach, are considered to be the main motives for participation in volunteering. These functions include: the desire to acquire or improve skills, knowledge or experience; career motives that focus on professional development or academic growth; value motives that express humanistic and altruistic orientations; defensive motives, which are related to the ability to avoid problems or protect one's self; social motives, which are manifested in the ability to adapt and integrate into society; and self-improvement motives, which reflect the desire for self-knowledge, self-development and improvement. This methodology has remained relevant over the past two decades and is still widely used in volunteering research, as it allows for a comprehensive consideration of the various motivational aspects that influence individuals' decisions to volunteer (13).

Researchers in the field of socio-humanities emphasize the importance of compassion as a fundamental virtue that contributes to the development of moral qualities of a person, including mercy, honesty, and the ability to do good deeds without expectation of reward (15). In addition, modern research in this area is often combined with a deep sense of social justice (16). At the same time, they want to expand opportunities for self-expression, which is often reflected in social media activity and the desire for social change.

It is also important to note that an individual's excessive attachment to his or her own persona serves as an obstacle to his or her successful integration into the social structure. This phenomenon illustrates the need to form pro-social terminal and moral instrumental values, which will be the first step towards overcoming social frustration and will have a positive impact on self-esteem and motivation (17).

Another important tool for studying the value orientations of volunteers is the version of M. Rokic's „Value Orientations“ methodology

adapted and modified by Schwartz, known as the PVQ „Portrait of Values“ methodology. This methodology is based on M. Rokic’s concept of dividing values into terminal and instrumental values, as well as on Schwarz’s theoretical model, which considers the motivational goals of value orientations and the universality of basic human values (14).

Using this technique, researchers can analyze both positive and negative value orientations of respondents. This allows not only to determine which values are prioritized by a particular person, but also to identify the motivational blocks that dominate at the moment. A distinctive feature of Schwartz’s methodology is the use of rating assessment instead of direct ranking, as is the case with M. Rokic’s methodology. This approach allows not only to build a hierarchy of values, but also to identify the priorities of motivational blocks that are relevant for respondents in a particular period of time.

S. Schwartz’s methodology covers both cognitive and motivational variables, which makes it particularly useful in studies aimed at understanding the mechanisms of volunteer motivation. It provides an opportunity to assess the extent to which certain values influence the behavior of volunteers, as well as how their value priorities change in the modern social environment.

Identification of general trends in responses by analyzing the mean values obtained by respondents on individual subscales of the VFI and PVQ methods, which correspond to the indicators, namely prosocial terminal and instrumental moral values, taking into account the standard deviation (SD). The study of value orientations is an important tool for understanding the motivational factors that encourage individuals to participate in volunteer activities.

It is important to take into account that social models, psychological state and spiritual orientation of representatives of modern volunteering can significantly affect their motivation to volunteer. (19). In addition, differences in motivational and value orientations can also be found among older age groups. In particular, older people, due to their extensive life experience, usually have a more limited and pragmatic approach

to spiritual needs. Their desires are often focused on basic needs and stability, unlike young people who seek wider opportunities for self-expression and social fulfillment.(20).

Thus, the use of VFI and PVQ techniques allows us to gain a more complete understanding of how different age groups form their motivational attitudes. This is especially important in the case of Generation Z, which is characterized by the complexity of its motivational processes, requiring interdisciplinary analysis.

## **Empirical data**

In conducting this study, we took into account the dichotomous attitude towards volunteers, since in modern conditions there are different approaches to studying this phenomenon. Proponents of the social exchange theory believe that the basis of prosocial behavior is selfish interest. According to this concept, people help others only when the expected benefits exceed the costs. According to the postulate of success by J. Homans, any activity consists of three stages: action, reward, and repetition of the initial or similar action. This approach denies the perception of volunteering as exclusively altruistic prosocial behavior, since, according to the proponents of this theory, altruism is a form of hidden egoism. A similar opinion was expressed by the philosopher Nietzsche, who noted that goodness and altruism are identified primarily by those who do them, not by those who use them (21).

At the same time, we are convinced that the heart of modern volunteerism in Ukraine is the act, with its inherent internal structure. It is not only a specific action, but also a moral choice that reflects the beliefs and values of the individual. In the context of Ukrainian volunteering, an act is of particular importance, as it is often associated with a high level of personal responsibility, courage, and self-sacrifice. According to researchers, work-life balance is an important aspect of volunteering. It is seen as an individual’s perception of the compatibility of work and non-work activities, which promotes growth in accordance with the person’s current life priorities. Factors that influence this balance include social support,

organizational challenges, stress, use of information technology, work demands, family responsibilities, and individual issues. (22).

In addition, pro-social values such as universalism and benevolence can play an important role in motivating volunteerism. At the same time, conformism and tradition are aimed at adapting to existing social norms. A high level of prosocial values may indicate an ethical stance, not just a desire to meet social expectations (23).

It is also important to note that compassion is considered one of the key virtues that encourages good deeds without expectation of reward. It is the basis of love, mercy and honesty, and contributes to the improvement of the individual and his or her moral qualities (15).

Pro-social values, such as universalism and benevolence, are global and focused on responsibility to society. At the same time, conformism and tradition may reflect a desire to conform to existing social norms. A high level of prosocial values may indicate a conscious ethical position, not just a desire to meet the expectations of society (24).

In today's world, especially in the context of conflicts and crisis situations that are relevant to Ukraine, the concept of prosocial activity is taking on new forms. For example, war can provoke various emotional experiences and change the psycho-emotional state of both individuals and society as a whole (25).

Such phenomena should be viewed through the prism of V.A. Romenets' theory of action, who emphasized the importance of understanding the specific conditions and circumstances in which the need for volunteering arises. It is important to take into account situational factors such as social environment, support from society and availability of resources.

Highlighting the parameters for selecting the correct psychodiagnostic tools based on the situational component of the act, we note that they include the following:

a) awareness of a certain spatial and temporal configuration of forces caused by the active covert participation of subjects, which can acquire an independent meaning for each of them. Objective reality remains the same, but

its perception is a psychological feature of each participant in social life, which leads to different reflections in decision-making and activities;

b) individual psychological inclinations and abilities;

c) mental and professional experience of the volunteer;

d) social and/or personal orientation, which can determine the intentional features of the motivation for a particular person to join volunteering. The indicators of these parameters will be the terminal and instrumental values of the individual.

A significant aspect is the formation of a socially inclusive environment that supports the model of social justice and mutual support. According to research, compassion is seen as a fundamental virtue that encourages good deeds without expectation of reward, revealing the essence of love, mercy, and honesty (15). This attitude reflects pro-social values, including universalism and benevolence, which are focused on responsibility to society (24).

In the context of studying prosocial values, it should also be noted that even in situations of conflict or war, moral and emotional reactions can vary depending on the psycho-emotional state of the individual and society. This thesis is supported by the data that the insufficient level of moral and psychological readiness of young people for socially significant activities may indicate a lack of orientation towards social responsibility and patriotism (25). At the same time, the need for continuous self-improvement is becoming more and more important in volunteering today, as a volunteer, like a manager in other social spheres, must constantly improve his or her management skills (26). The act of volunteering involves making a large number of responsible and balanced decisions, which often involve moral choices. That is why it is important for volunteers to observe their own behavior and reflect on their thoughts and actions, which are the center of metacognition (27). The psycho-spiritual world of volunteers is revealed through the internalization and externalization of spiritual values, which serve as extremely important psychological traits-

qualities of the volunteer's personality, and their dissemination through social networks can help expand the volunteer community (28). An important prerequisite for the development of a value-based motivation for volunteering is a healthy lifestyle that provides for the harmony of physical and mental health (29). The key to such a balance should be the high resilience of the volunteer's personality and the ability to withstand life's difficulties, thus avoiding exhausting internal and external conflicts (30). At the same time, the task of the volunteer community is to preserve the psycho-emotional and physical conditions of the participants, which requires their education and appropriate training. Today, there are a number of artificial intelligence-based tools that have proven to be effective in teaching and will be useful for volunteer development (31). It has also been scientifically proven and substantiated that volunteering can serve as a means of dealing with the traumatic experience of the war in Ukraine, which correlates with classical approaches to the study of the psychological phenomenon of volunteering, which include its protective function. When it is activated, the psyche is able to project an optimal and desirable image of the future, which increases the motivation for self-development and forms a life-affirming position of the individual (32). The realization of volunteering as an act in conditions of social instability should provide for a certain managerial flexibility among representatives of this community. Such flexibility is based on the value and meaningful orientations of the individual, which, due to the activation of the motivational component, make it possible to make moral and prosocial decisions (33). In general, the problem of motivation in the humanities has been the subject of many scientific studies, and motivation for successful interaction for social development is a cornerstone for volunteers. (34).

Therefore, the study of the value sphere of a volunteer's personality as a predictor of motivation is an urgent and important interdisciplinary task that will allow a detailed understanding of the psychological needs of representatives of this community and will help

to identify both external stimuli and internal motivations for this act.

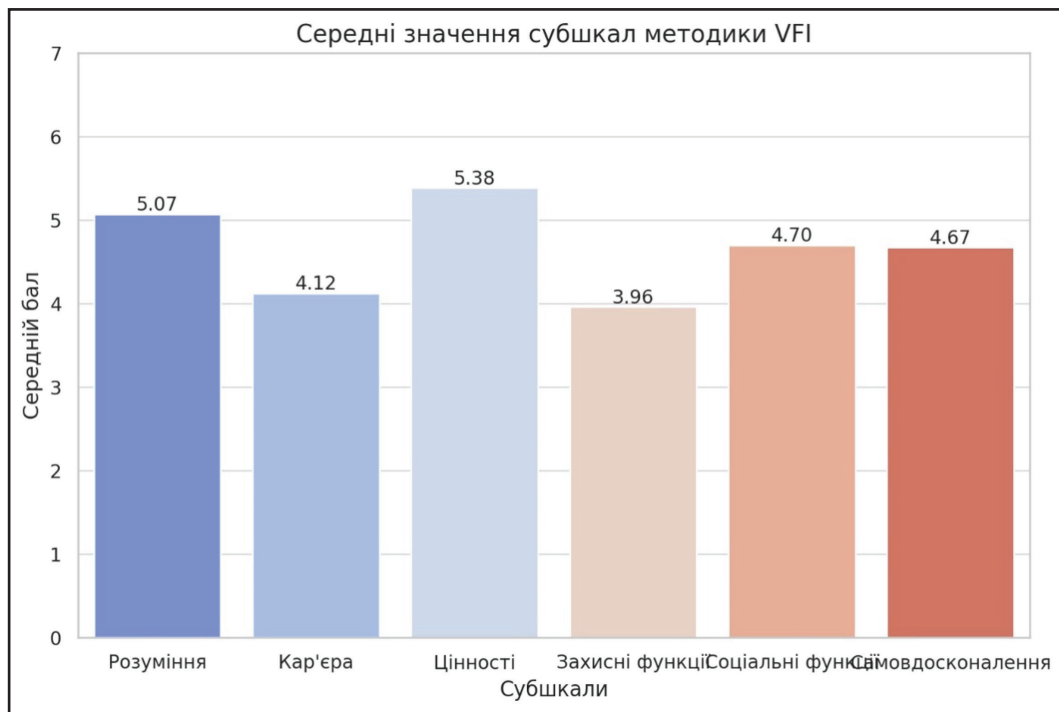
The methodological basis for studying these aspects is the „Portrait of Values“ by S. Schwartz and the „values“ subscale of the VFI methodology, which allow us to determine the values of a person - values-goals or values-means. These indicators are essential for the proposed study, as they form the conceptual core of the canonical act. At the same time, other subscales of the VFI methodology can reveal motivational indicators of the act of volunteering.

Work-life balance is also important, which is an individual's perception of the compatibility of professional and personal activities that facilitates the achievement of current life priorities (22). Failure to maintain this balance can make it difficult to participate in volunteer activities, especially in times of high stress or social conflict.

In the course of the study, 74 volunteers from various NGOs, charitable foundations and volunteer associations working in the areas of educational activities, military assistance, humanitarian missions, assistance to internally displaced persons, children, as well as medical and psychological volunteering were interviewed. The sample was structured taking into account different areas of volunteering to ensure maximum representativeness. It is important to emphasize that representatives of Generation Z make up the largest share of the sample. Taking into account situational factors that influence volunteer motivation is an important aspect of this study. For example, pro-social values and the desire to support the public good can play a key role in shaping the motivation to volunteer (24).

From the data obtained, we found that 64.9% of the respondents were women and 35.1% were men, most of whom were aged 18 to 44, namely 23% were 25-34 years old, 23% were 35-44 years old, and 21.6% were 18-24 years old. The next largest age group (18.9%) is the category of people aged 45-54. The smallest groups of volunteers are those aged 55-60 years (8.1%) and 60 and older (5.4%).

Today, the concept of volunteering is not unambiguous, and its interpretation depends on the

**Figure 1** Average values of subscales according to the VFI methodology

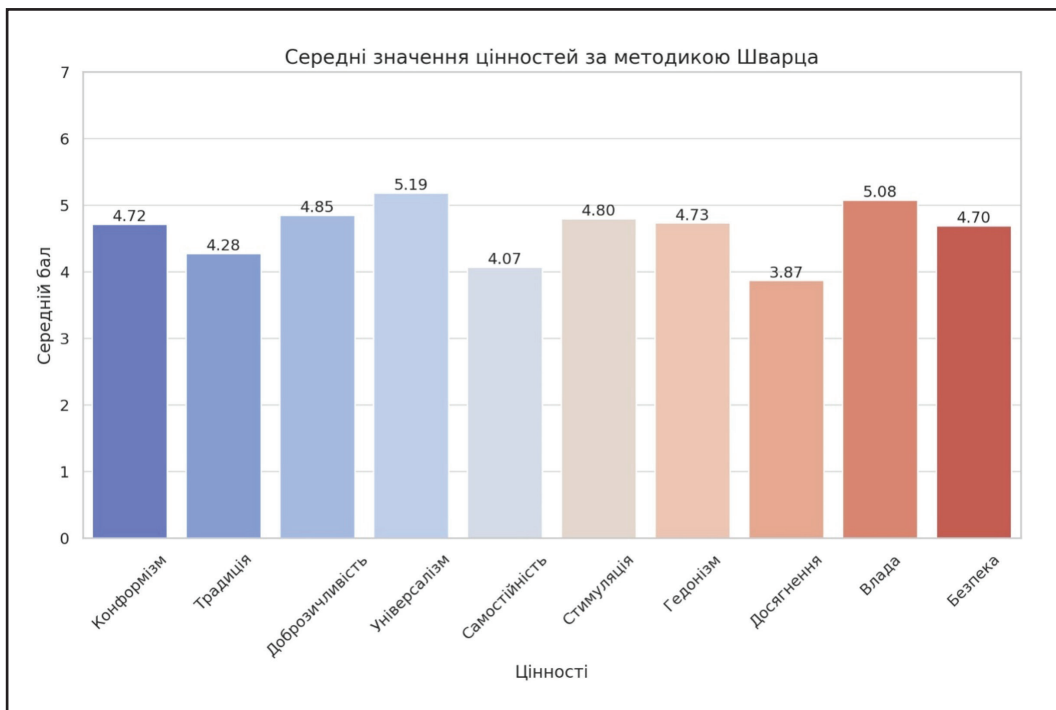
socio-cultural context. For example, in countries with developed civil society systems, volunteering is seen as a form of social participation supported by government programs and corporate social responsibility. At the same time, in countries with low levels of social welfare, volunteering often becomes a forced activity, when citizens compensate for the shortcomings of state institutions by helping vulnerable groups. In addition, there is a pragmatic approach to volunteering, in which it is perceived as a means of self-realization and career growth. For many young people, participation in volunteer programs is an important stage in the formation of their professional experience, especially if the activity is related to a future career in social work, medicine or education. That is why diagnosing the value structure of the personality of representatives of the volunteer community is so important. The study of the axiological aspect will allow us to draw conclusions about its influence on the motivation to join volunteer organizations and will make it possible to separate the group of people who perform volunteering as a canonical act.

To achieve this goal, we analyzed the respondents' answers using the VFI (Fig. 1) and PVQ (Fig. 2) methods using the average values of the answers with regard to the standard deviation (SD), and identified psychological details (indicators) that serve as signs of the act.

Based on the results of the analysis of the mean values for each subscale of the VFI methodology (on a scale from 1 to 7), we obtained the following data by subscale: „values“ 5.38 points (SD ± 1.12); „understanding“ 5.07 (SD ± 1.33); „social functions“ 4.70 points (SD ± 1.24); „self-improvement“ 4.67 points (SD ± 1.41); „career“ 4.12 points (SD ± 1.45); „protective functions“ 3.96 points (SD ± 1.44).

Guided by these indicators, we conclude that the value aspect plays a leading role in motivating the involvement of volunteers in this free and socially useful activity, which, due to the actualization of other components, has the potential to become a canonical act.

The respondents demonstrated high scores in the subscale „Understanding“, which is a sign that they are deeply aware of the public demand for their activities and are ready for new

**Figure 2** Average values of volunteer responses to the PVQ methodology

challenges. At the same time, there is a low score on the protective functions and career subscales, which indicates that the surveyed volunteers are less likely to join such movements for career development, personal protection, or overcoming internal and external psychosocial difficulties.

Summarizing the above, we note that the results show the dominance of value orientations in the formation of the motivational structure of a person who is actively involved in volunteering.

The results of the survey according to the PVQ („Portrait of Values“) by S. Schwartz (Fig. 2) reflect the average scores among the respondents by subscales, namely: „Universalism“ 5.19 points (SD  $\pm$  1.12); „Benevolence“ 4.85 points (SD  $\pm$  1.37); „Stimulation“ 4.80 points (SD  $\pm$  1.34); „Conformism“ 4.72 points (SD  $\pm$  1.20); „Hedonism“ 4.73 points (SD  $\pm$  1.58); „Security“ 4.70 points (SD  $\pm$  1.29); „Power“ 5.08 points (SD  $\pm$  1.32); „Tradition“ 4.28 points (SD  $\pm$  1.40); „Autonomy“ 4.07 points (SD  $\pm$  1.35); „Achievement“ 3.87 points (SD  $\pm$  1.46).

Analyzing the graph of average values according to this methodology, we note that

the subscales „Universalism“, „Power“, and „Benevolence“ have the highest scores, while the subscale „Achievement“ received the lowest score. In substantiating this methodology, S. Schwartz relied on the work of M. Rokic in the field of research on the value-sense sphere of personality, guided by their theoretical developments, we have distributed the subscales according to the search parameters and indicators.

The terminal prosocial values include the statements of the subscales „Universalism“ and „Benevolence“, which imply the personality's orientation towards helping others.

The instrumental moral values include the subscales „Conformism“ and „Tradition“, which perform the regulatory function of socially acceptable behavior. It is important for the psychological detailing of the situational component of the act of volunteering to determine the percentage of respondents who scored the highest average scores on the above subscales and serve as indicators of the act.

Thus, 54.05% of respondents demonstrated the dominance of terminal prosocial values,

and the percentage of respondents whose value structure is dominated by instrumental moral values is 44.59%. The difference between the percentage of respondents who demonstrate the prevalence of terminal prosocial (54.05%) and instrumental moral (44.59%) values is evidence of several important trends in the value orientations of the sample representatives, namely

- a) Priority of moral ideas over social norms, A higher percentage of respondents with a predominance of universalism and benevolence indicates that universal and altruistic ideas are more important to them than following social norms and traditions. This makes it possible to conclude that people are guided by internal moral convictions rather than external rules of behavior;
- b) changes in social norms and individualization of values, so a lower level of orientation towards instrumental moral values means that respondents rely less on generally accepted social norms and traditional behavioral patterns. This is typical for periods of social change, when people are more likely to choose meaningful values rather than follow established norms;
- c) the growth of social responsibility. Pro-social values, such as universalism and benevolence, are more global and focused on responsibility to society. At the same time, conformism and tradition indicate adaptation to existing social norms. A high percentage of pro-social values may indicate a conscious ethical position rather than a desire to simply meet the expectations of society.

At the same time, in accordance with the criteria we have established for the indicators of acting volunteering, we note the following: according to the results of the survey based on Schwartz's methodology, we found that despite the tendency of transformation and development of the system of terminal values, only 44.59% of respondents demonstrated compliance with the indicators characterizing the signs of acting in their activities.

## Conclusions

Due to the constant development of volunteering as a significant psychosocial phe-

nomenon of our time, there is a need to apply more comprehensive approaches to its study, which will take into account a wider range of reasons, prerequisites, motives and motivations for its fulfillment as an act of service. Such an approach makes it possible to distinguish between volunteering as an act and as a type of activity. The appropriate distinction and typologization of volunteers' responses suggest a series of further studies in this area based on new search parameters and indicators. The cyclic-act approach to the study of this socially significant situation (35) makes it possible to realize psychological detailing on each of the components of the act of volunteering from manifestation to canon. The current study highlights an approach to the study of the situational component, which is characterized by the struggle of the inner psycho-spiritual world of the individual, formed on the value structure of the personality, with external factors. The result of our study was the discovery that values are the leading motivational factor for joining volunteer communities, which is confirmed by the highest average score of the subscale of the same name from the VFI methodology. The use of Schwartz's „Portrait of Values“ (PVQ) methodology made it possible to identify among the sample those volunteers who are guided by pro-social terminal and moral instrumental values in their practice. It is worth noting that this work takes into account only the situational component of the act of volunteering with a description of the struggle of internal motives and motives that help a person to overcome external circumstances and requires further research on the motivational, action and post-action components that will allow for the authoritative identification of the category of volunteers who do. At the same time, the identification of such a group in the volunteering system will provide an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of their motivation in a longitudinal study to find out the patterns and factors that affect the duration of motivation and develop strategies to prevent their burnout.

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# The Life Alternatives of Young People Without Shelter in the Context of Mental Health

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## Abstract:

The paper deals with issues related to the life of homeless young people in the context of their mental health. The aim of the article is to present an alternative to the life of homeless young people on the street and their specifics from the point of view of age, causes of their social decline in this phenomenon, loss of background, etc. Attention is also drawn to coping with the stigma of one's own past, but also to other consequences of a non-standard life, such as drug addiction, registration in the criminal record and accumulated debts. Life on the street is mentioned, where one loses privacy, the ability to satisfy basic needs and often-even self-respect, which must endure in order to survive here. In society, homeless people are stigmatized, moreover, if they suffer from a mental disorder, in-

cluding dual ones. Even if social work is providing professionally, their full integration back into society is complicated. The use of existing mental health centres in this issue appears to be beneficial, which is a new element of care for people with mental illness using the CARE system. That is, to provide help in the treatment of mental illness, but also support in all necessary areas of the client's/patient's life (general health and psychological state, housing, employment, social and social status, etc.), which can help in solving the mental health of homeless young people in the affordable involvement of a psychologist or psychiatrist in their social reintegration back into majority society.

## Introduction

Currently, homelessness is a global problem with an increasing proportion of young people who have ended up on the streets for various reasons. Based on this fact, many experts in the Czech Republic, as well as abroad, started to take a targeted interest in the addressed issue. Tracking young homeless people and their specifics in terms of age has considered a serious problem for a long time.

In order to approach this serious issue, we first introduce some authors, experts, who focus on this social group and are, used to compare the entity to the addressed problem, for example Janebova, 1999; Boydell et al., 2000; Burt, 2007; Prudkova, Novotny, 2008; Reeve, 2011; Piotrowski, 2011; Marek, Strnad, Hotovcova, 2012; Vagnerova, 2014; Marschall, 2016; Kidd et al. 2018; Cerna, 2019; Tompset, Fowler, Torro, 2019; Nesporova, Holpuch, 2020; Vokurkova, 2022; Skodova, 2021; Pavelkova 2022, etc.

Each country has a specific approach to the entity in terms of historical and social context. Based on this point of view, we present in more detail professional works that deal with the social environment of the solved issues in the Czech Republic. M. Vagnerova and the team already dealt with homelessness as an alternative of the life of homeless young people in detail ten years ago (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek, 2014). They draw attention to the causes of formation of this phenomenon, the loss of their background, which they never even had. They describe life on the street, where one loses privacy, the ability to satisfy basic needs and often-even self-respect; they show what must endure in or-

der to survive here. They also describe the opposite process, of returning from the street back to society, and the difficulties that must overcome to make this possible. In their opinion, it is not only a matter of managing the stigma of one's own past, but also other consequences of a non-standard life, such as drug addiction, registration in the criminal register or accumulated debts. The text is an authentic image of the mentioned social group. However, the positive thing is the stated fact that, especially for young people, life on the street can only be a temporary life phase.

J. Marek (2018) devoted himself to the research project "Psychosocial determinants in the reintegration of young homeless people", which concerns an age-specific young population between the ages of 18 and 26. He confirms the results with the genesis of homelessness, which begins long before the very fall on the street; looks for and presents situational factors as well as personality characteristics leading to the emergence of homelessness that existed even before that. He finds many sustaining factors that affect the individual during life on the street. He describes the reintegration process itself in overcoming barriers to reintegration back into mainstream society (how to deal with the past, detach from the current situation and find the meaning of life directed towards the future).

In her publications from 2010 and 2014, J. Pavelkova presents extreme forms of poverty, respectively misery, as a manifestation of social exclusion using the example of homeless people and beggars. She provides basic information about this social target category of people who

are clearly poor, living on the fringes of mainstream society and characterized by their specific way of life, with a focus on the younger generation. In 2022 she presented three consecutive professional articles dedicated to the alternative life of homeless young people in the professional journal *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention* (The Issue of Homeless Young People; Homeless Young People – Relationships and Risks of living on the Street; The Issue of Homeless Young People as an Alternative of Life - Subjective Evaluation of Life on the Street).

The results of interesting qualitative research were brought by the work of M. Skodova (2021), focused on young homeless people and their life on the street from the point of view of causes, subjective assessment of the situation, the dangers of living on the street, social relations and the street and the use of social care provided.

Homelessness itself can understand as a complex generalized social failure of an individual. This is a social category of people who are clearly poor, living on the fringes of society and characterized by their specific way of life, which singles them out on the fringes of society based on their inability to participate in the quality of life and disregard for the requirements of the majority society (Vagnerova, 2014).

The aim of the article is to present issues related to the phenomenon of homeless young people and to understand the reasons and causes of their social decline, which led to their unfavourable social situation and the alternative of living on the street. We are talking about a complex phenomenon, where it is not only a lack of shelter, but also other basic factors that condition it.

Among them is the fact whether the individual has a place to live that is suitable for living, whether he has any legal certainty about this place with space for his private life. It is precisely with the loss of home and his social exclusion that he ends up on the fringes of society, his value and normative system and lifestyle change, which manifests itself in changes in all areas of life:

- They will lose their professional position and the related legal access to funds, and the resulting economic self-sufficiency;

- Exclusion from the family community, disruption of relationships with close people and the breakdown of the social network;
- A reduced lifestyle and an increase in dependence on the support of charitable societies, begging and searching through garbage or criminal activity (Prudkova, Novotny, 2008).

Based on life on the street, the individual undergoes a process of de-socialisation. Marginalization associated with homelessness also brings social stigmatization, because the majority society clearly considers life on the street to be a negative deviation from the norm and for most people it is evidence of social pathology and they take a rejecting and condemning attitude towards it.

The causes of homelessness can divide according to the factors that lead to the emergence of this phenomenon, into objective and subjective. The first are influenced for example by the social policy of the state and social legislation and reflected in the observance of human rights; in respect for the law and equal opportunities for all citizens; in the education of citizens; the possibility of employment; in social protection; security in old age and diseases; employment of young people; xenophobia; ethnic problems; emigration, etc. Subjective factors are influenced by the individuals themselves; their families; various social groups or communities; their dispositions and abilities; temperament; age; achievements, etc. (Vagnerova, 2014).

They can be viewed from a material point of view (housing, employment, tragic events in the family, property conditions, unexpected events in society, floods, etc.), or from the point of view of breakdowns and breakdown of relationships in the family (dysfunctional family), community with its subsequent failure or with regard to problems in the personality itself (mental retardation, mental or physical illness, lack of independence, loneliness, disability, addiction to alcohol or drugs, social immaturity, ethnic differences), etc. Situations that arise after released from hospitals, institutions, prisons or after reaching adulthood from etopedic facilities often contribute to subjective factors (Pavelkova, 2014).

According to Janebova (1999), there are still stages of loss in an individual's life, namely the loss of support from family and friends (resources and advice in solving problems, material and spiritual support).

Loss of community support (public institutions and social service organizations), when the resources provided by the community are not always adequate to prevent homelessness, or inappropriate help for people with an unstable address (the path to a chronic homeless lifestyle).

The number of homeless people in the Czech Republic has roughly doubled in the last decade. While the 2011 census recorded 11,496 homeless people, eight years later, i.e. in 2019, according to a survey by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, there were already roughly 23,830 of them, of which 2,600 were children.

The results are supported by the authors Nešporová and Holpuch (2020), who created a monograph to support the long-term conceptual development of the research organization for the period 2018–2022, which is part of the project “Research of the homeless population in the Czech Republic taking into account economic activity depending on the stages of the life cycle” (VUPSV, Prague). It provides representative data on people sleeping “outdoors” in the Czech Republic, in Low-threshold hostels, in asylums, in halfway houses and in non-commercial municipal hostels for homeless people. The text provides information on the basic socio-demographic characteristics of homeless people, their family and social background, and the length and continuity of homeless life. It also monitors the economic activity of homeless people, their sources of income, indebtedness and the saturation of basic life needs. Attention is devoted to often-poor physical and mental health and addictions to alcohol and drugs. The level of use and demand for individual types of social services for homeless people is monitored. The forms of help that homeless people themselves consider key are also specified. Compared to those who use at least occasionally some type of accommodation service, homeless persons who sleep outside are the poorest, the most socially excluded, with the least basic life needs met

and most often physically or verbally attacked. At the same time, addictions to alcohol and other addictive substances are the most widespread among them.

## Homeless Young People

A significant part of the addressed subculture, almost half, consists of young people under the age of 26 (Vagnerova et al., 2014).

### The specifics of the life of young people living on the street

Homeless young people represent a separate group that requires a different approach (Vagnerová, Csemy, Marek, 2014). Some young people without shelter, for example, refuse to use social services for this social target group, on the condition that there are also elderly homeless people in this facility. (Marek, Strnad, Hotovcova, 2012; Cerna, 2019). The thinking and behavior of younger people without a background is different and meeting the older generation can often cause tension. It is necessary to realize that in early adulthood young people have to deal with a number of challenges, such as gaining independence, studying at university or getting a job, establishing important partner relationships, etc. This age group appears to experience greater levels of stressors than the homeless population. In terms of mental health, young adults show higher levels of hostility and paranoid ideas than other age groups (Skodova, 2021). The difference is also in the feeling of the loss of background. Compared to older homeless people, they do not lose the built environment, but only the environment in which they brought up and they did not choose the environment. The same applies to the loss of previous roles and built-up social status, which older homeless people bear harder (Marek, Strnad, Hotovcova, 2012).

According to the German Youth Institute, homelessness is increasingly affecting young people (Marschall, 2016). A study from 2015 talks about 20,000 thousand young people under the age of 27 living outside the system. They do not go to school, they do not have a job and they do not even receive support from the state. Many of them end up homeless or drug addicts. “*But you do not see these young people on the street*

very often,” says social worker Ines Fornaçon from the Berlin street worker Station Off Road Kids. They usually do not sleep directly on the street, but spend the night with different friends, often for years. They are called “Sofa-Hopper” here. “They have moved their social contacts to the Internet: *“They meet more on Internet applications such as WhatsApp than in public spaces.”* This is how hidden homelessness actually arose. However, this trend can observe for approximately ten years.

From the point of view of substance abuse, there are no major differences compared to older homeless people. Tompset, Fowler and Torro (2019) reported that alcohol abuse was involved in 50.6% of younger and 56.5% of older homeless individuals. Drug abuse involved 47.4% of younger adults and 56.3% of older adults.

### **Causes of the social decline of homeless young people**

The causes for young people are often the breakdown or dysfunction of the family. Furthermore, the causes can divide into so-called throwaways, i.e. people whom thrown out by their own families, and so-called runaways, i.e. people who left their families on their own (Marek, Strnad, Hotovcova, 2012). Compared to older homeless persons, younger adults report nearly twice as many experiences of family abuse and neglect (Burt, 2007). Young homeless people also often run away from home repeatedly, even before finally leaving for the street, almost a quarter of them (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek, 2014).

A risk group is also persons brought up outside the family, leaving a children’s home or other institutional facility. Young adults leave home unprepared and without other supportive social background, they have no one to turn to, which increases the risk of failure (Marek, Strnad, Hotovcova, 2012).

Depending on the reasons for leaving the street, a different approach is required in the process of reintegration, but also prevention from the point of view of, for example, excessive use of drugs or alcohol, inability or unwillingness to work systematically, a combination of behavioural disorders and mental illness.

Excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol is clearly a possible trigger and accelerator of falling into the street.. The result is an inability to manage work, the high cost of obtaining drugs leads to the inability to pay bills or the accumulation of debt. They easily lose their jobs, are kicking out of their rent or hostel, or even their home. It is also possible to mention obstacle in the availability of housing, poverty, the impossibility of paying for housing (40.0% of one’s income for housing). (Vokurkova, 2022).

The inability or unwillingness to work systematically has usually manifested already in childhood in relation to education. We can describe individual as reckless, irresponsible and lazy. They tend to take advantage of the family and if family run out of patience, they end up on the streets. Individuals with a combination of behavioural disorders and reluctance to work are often burdened with debt problems and delinquent and criminal activity, manifesting as theft and cheating; they procure their finances illegally (Vagnerova et al., 2014).

According to Skodova, mental illness can also be the cause of an individual’s fall on the street.

Depressive and anxiety disorders, suicidal behavior, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders appear in homeless youth (Skodova, 2021).

Among other causes, we can add belonging to a sexual minority and a different sexual orientation (sexual minority ranges from 6.0 to 35.0%; often stigmatized) and is often not acceptable by the family (Burt, 2007).

### **An alternative of street life**

As M. Skodova states, homeless young people like to claim that they chose life on the street voluntarily and that they enjoy such a life. For them, the street represents a place of freedom, where they do not have to follow the rules, e.g. of their own parents, teachers, educators, superiors, etc. The impulse can be failure to finish school, conflicts with the parents’ new partner, or different ideas about their future. Young adults sometimes themselves sense that the contradictions are great and leave the family background. Life on the street can also be a manifestation of be-

longing to various subcultures, e.g. punk or hip hop, a certain rebellion against the system (they do not identify themselves as homeless people, but consider it their own choice as “street children, squatters”). It is also often a reaction to losing one’s home.

### **Social Services**

Social services, according to Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, as in Slovakia (similarly Act 448/2008 Coll., on social services), include social counselling, social care services and social prevention services. Homeless people use social prevention services the most. These help to prevent the social exclusion of persons who are at risk of a crisis social situation, life habits and way of life leading to conflict with society, a socially disadvantageous environment and a threat to the rights and legitimate interests of another natural person. The goal of social prevention services is to help people overcome their unfavourable social situation and to protect society from the emergence and spread of undesirable social phenomena. Social prevention services that concern homeless people include asylum houses, low-threshold day centres, shelters, outreach programs, halfway houses, contact centres and social rehabilitation services, etc.

The main goal of social work with homeless people is their return to society and change their philosophy of thinking. We must take into account the specifics of this subculture and maintain an individual approach (reintegration into the client’s natural environment, his mentality, changes in the subjective causes of homeless life, but also public attitudes, effects on family and society, etc.).

According to Skodova (2021), social services represent an important component in the lives of young homeless people. They provide an opportunity to carry out hygiene; they offer a space where clients have accepted without prejudice. Also, represent a fixed point or a certain pattern of ordinary life. The approach of an experienced social worker plays a big role. However, the lack of one’s own space or privacy has considered a disadvantage. She also mentions a similar problem with social services, identified as a lack

of privacy and peace (2019). According to mentioned author, another of the barriers to the use of social services is the accumulation of people with a similar problem in one place, which can lead to conflict, especially in the winter months.

### **Numbers of homeless people**

According to the UN (2020, in Vavro, 2021), there are over 150 million homeless people in the world, which is an approximate number, because statistics are unfortunately only kept by developed countries and big cities. This is almost 2.0% of the world population. The largest number of homeless people occur in big cities.

Getting an accurate picture of the number of homeless people in the world is quite difficult, for several reasons. The first such reason is the definition of homelessness. Second, states lack the resources and commitment to measure this globally widespread phenomenon. State governments tend to underestimate homelessness. Currently (2024), as a result of the military conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza in conjunction with global ecological disasters, it is possible to state a further increase in the number of homeless people, among whom there is certainly a large percentage of the young generation.

The biggest problem is getting numbers on the number of homeless people in developing countries. Manila, the capital of the Philippines, said to have the largest number of homeless people of any city in the world, but estimates range from a thousand to a million. Trends in recent years show that homelessness rates have increased in England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy and New Zealand, while falling in Finland and the United States. The majority of homeless people in the USA are male and younger. Most states do not intend to fight poverty or homelessness politically, which will probably keep this problem part of modern life (Chamie, 2020 in Vavro, 2021).

Because of 2020 engulfed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of homeless people has undoubtedly increased. This virus originated in China, from where it began to spread to the rest of the world. Because of this expansion, the WHO declared a global pandemic that affected every country. Many people lost their jobs

and the associated housing of people who until recently led a completely normal life without problems. The pandemic had a huge impact on the increasing number of homeless people in the world (Tab. 1).

As stated by Vavro (2021) "Spatial Differentiation of Homelessness in Europe - An Analysis" is carried out at the level of 36 European countries. It should note that smaller states and states for which no data find are not included in the work. The average rate of homelessness in European countries is 181.2 per 100,000 inhabitants. The highest values achieve Albania (1124.2) and the lowest Croatia (11.4).

In the environment of the Czech Republic, not so much attention is devoted to the is-

sue of homeless young people. Based on the mentioned entities, a pilot qualitative research (5 participants of young homeless people who used low-threshold social facilities), carried out in 2021, led by Skodova, using the technique of collecting information through a semi-structured interview, which resulted in interesting conclusions that confirmed the mentioned facts.

The first area investigated was the cause of homelessness. Marek, Strnad and Hotovcova (2012) describe that the cause of homelessness among young people is often the breakdown or dysfunction of the family. The impulse to leave the family can also be different ideas about their future. Other identified causes were substance abuse, an irresponsible relationship with finances, job loss and an adverse psychological state. Vagnerova, Csemy and Marek (2014) divided the causes of leaving to the street into several categories, namely excessive use of addictive substances or alcohol, inability and unwillingness to work systematically, a combination of behavioural disorders and mental illness. In the mentioned research (2021), the abuse of alcohol or other addictive substances also figured as a cause, which subsequently led to the loss of a job and other problems associated with the use of substances. Hodgson, Shelton, and Los (2013 in Kidd et al., 2018) describe a complex relationship between mental health, substance use, and homelessness. They state that 48.0-98.0% of homeless youth would meet criteria for at least one mental health diagnosis, which is acceptable within the results obtained.

Homelessness as such, homeless young people perceive in various ways. The resulting situation includes feelings of guilt, it can serve as an escape from the past, but it also represents a life experience and a form of lifestyle. From the data analysis of the presented research, we came to very similar results as Marek, Strnad and Hotovcova (2012), where for their participants, life on the street symbolized a place of freedom, where young adults do not have to follow rules or fulfil any obligations.

Based on the mentioned comparisons, it follows from the research that it is important to consider care for the mental health of young people and the involvement of a psychologist

**Table 1** Countries with the highest and lowest rates of homelessness in Europe

State	Homelessness per 100,000 inhabitants
Albania	1 124.4
Slovakia	430.2
Germany	405.9
Latvia	358.2
Luxembourg	335.4
Sweden	325.0
Serbia	286.5
Austria	243.4
The Czech Republic	223.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	218.0
State	Homelessness per 100,000 inhabitants
Croatia	11.4
Belgium	22.7
Lithuania	30.7
Belarus	42.2
Portugal	42.9
Russia	44.3
Montenegro	48,2
Spain	48.9
Bulgaria	49.8
Switzerland	64.0

Source: Vavro, 2021

or psychiatrist in the process of reintegration of a homeless young person. Quality screening activities within the provision of field social services and active resolution of the situation are also essential.

Currently, mental health centres, established at psychiatric hospitals following the reform of psychiatric care in the Czech Republic, can be using to solve the issue of the availability of psychologists and psychiatrists within the framework of providing social work. The general aim of the reform is to improve the quality of life of people with mental health, the fulfilment and exercise of the rights of people even with addressed disadvantage. It is the providing of systematic, coordinated, interconnected care focused on recovery (*Recovery*) of the client/patient in a multidisciplinary team. As mentioned, almost 40.0% of homeless youth suffer from various mental disabilities. Here the possibility of the availability of rapid primary psychiatric care with the providing of timely diagnosis and treatment of basic mental irregularities and disorders has demonstrated. A de facto balanced care model for the client's mental health offered (*Balanced Care Model*).

In society, homeless people are stigmatizing; moreover, if they suffer from a mental disorder, including dual ones, even if social work is providing professionally, their full integration (reintegration) back into society is complicated. The team includes peer workers, care users who also participate in the provision of the service (people with their own experience of mental illness, who use this experience to support other clients and to strengthen their hope for recovery. Family members are also used.

The CARE system is not only able to provide help in the treatment of mental illness, but must also provide help and support in all necessary areas of the client's/patient's life (general state of health, housing, work, social and social status, etc.). The team is composed, and coordinated by workers from various professions and institutions. These are community teams, ambulatory care, acute inpatient care, follow-up and specialized inpatient care. The most important and accessible are mental health centres, which is therefore a new element of care for people

with mental illness (a group of clients/patients most at risk of institutionalization, but also exclusion/exclusion from ordinary society (*Early Intervention*)).

The team consists of a doctor, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, an addictologist, a health and social worker, mainly in outpatient and field services. Interdepartmental cooperation with ministries is also an essential part of success. It is supported by European funds (Integrated Regional Operational Program and Operational Program for Employment).

The so-called CARE (Comprehensive Approach to Rehabilitation) methodology is using, which has existed for 25 years and used in the Netherlands and other countries, authors D. Hollander and J.P. Wilken. It is a method of a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation and includes theoretical starting points, a basic vision, a practical work method and the necessary tools, including reintegration into the work process, life in the majority society. CARE is based on recovery (personal and social), focus on presence and empowerment. It teaches to deal with past events, teaches to deal with one's own vulnerability and to look again for solid reference points in the present and the future (Hollander, Wilken, 2016). Researches in the introduced entity brought justification of the used methodology also for homeless young people (Shepherd, 1984; Anthony et al, 2002; Liberman, 2008; De Girolamo, 2008; Wilker, Hollander, 2012 in Hollander, Wilken, 2016).

### **Recommendations for practice**

1. Homeless young people have often experienced various negative and even traumatic experiences in their past. It would be appropriate for them to have easy access and the possibility to solve their problems, or the consequences left by these events on mental health with a psychologist, psychotherapist, psychiatrist or other mental health experts during the providing of social services.
2. According to current statistics, the number of homeless young people is increasing. It is therefore important to think about enough low-threshold day centres for young people without shelter and their sufficient capacity.

3. In the case of the social phenomenon addressed, the rule applies that the longer an individual lives on the street the harder it is successfully reintegrate into mainstream society.

Based on this fact, it is important to motivate homeless young people to change their situation, as soon as possible; actively search for this social group within field social services and offer it help (Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on Social Services).

## Conclusion

Having a home, facilities and a stable roof over your head is one of the basic things that a person needs. Its absence represents a problem that affects all aspects of an individual's life, affecting personal, work, and economic and health areas. In the environment of the Czech and Slovak Republics, there are similar tendencies in the providing of social work to homeless people. Unfortunately, the problem is mostly solved by non-profit organisation. With the help of the mentioned information, it is necessary to expand the knowledge about the addressed phenomenon, which has an increasing tendency and present a serious social problem. It is necessary to deal with new methods, approaches and recommendations for clinical practice for social workers when providing social work with the addressed disadvantaged social group of homeless young people. We consider it important to take care of the mental health of homeless young people and the consistent involvement of a psychologist or psychiatrist in the process of their reintegration. It is also essential to perform high-quality screening activities within the framework of field social services and actively resolve the situation that has arisen in order to influence changes in the philosophy of life of homeless young people, including with the use of spiritual help.

Only appropriately applied social work supported by motivation for change and a vision to the future of the addressed social subculture can stop or reduce the number of people living on the streets and help with their successful reintegration back into mainstream society.

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# Educational process efficiency prerequisites in the context of distance learning of primary school students

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## Abstract:

The study examines the main prerequisites for effective distance learning for primary school students. Three key factors are identified: computer-oriented educational environment, learning skills and media literacy of students and teachers. An open educational environment includes accessible digital devices and resources that are age-appropriate and support play-

ful learning. The importance of selecting high-quality digital tools, using video communication and electronic textbooks is emphasized. The formation of the ability to learn involves the development of educational, organizational and control and evaluation skills. Of particular importance is the independent work of students and support from the teacher. Media literacy ensures the critical and safe use of information in the educational process. It is formed through integration into various academic subjects. The study emphasizes the importance of these components for creating an effective distance learning environment.

## Introduction

In the context of the emergency introduction of adaptive quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faced new challenges that affected not only human health but also all spheres of life in general (1-5). At the beginning of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, these processes became even more urgent, as the threat to the lives of the population became even greater, and the forced relocation of families to other parts of the country or abroad led to the search for solutions that would allow them to continue providing education to students at considerable distances. Thus, there was a transition to distance learning via the Internet. Primary schools have not been spared from this implementation. And although the introduction of distance learning was spontaneous, we consider it appropriate to note and justify the prerequisites for the effectiveness of such learning for primary education - that is, those aspects that, before the start of distance learning, were a necessary factor in its organization at that time.

Long before 2019, distance learning centres were established in Ukraine, part-time education using distance learning technologies, advanced training courses at higher education institutions, institutes of postgraduate teacher education, etc. were popularized, so distance learning was mostly introduced into higher education. It is also evident that students of higher and postgraduate education have a sufficient level of skills to work in an open computer-oriented learning environment, unlike students of primary education.

Secondary and high school students have a formed ability to learn, which means they can navigate the information flows of the Internet,

independently select online resources for homework, organize a workplace at home, and determine which application or computer tool is most convenient for them to use for distance learning activities. Even so, in the context of martial law and the pandemic, they had difficulty carrying out these activities due to the development of anxiety and depression, not to mention primary school students as a vulnerable population (6; 7).

Primary school age is characterized, firstly, by the transition from visual and figurative thinking to abstract thinking, mastering a new leading activity - learning, based on playful activities, which are leading in preschool age, mastering complex skills such as writing, performing arithmetic operations of the first and second degree, developing the ability to reflect, self-control, self-esteem, etc (8). In addition, students aged 6-10 are eager to use ICT, but often for entertainment purposes. As a result, they may develop a dependence on gadgets, which is associated with the vividness of the information presented on the World Wide Web and the wide capabilities of devices that allow them to process it (9; 10). All this determines the specifics of the approach to the organization of primary school students' education in the context of Internet learning.

**The purpose** is to determine the prerequisites of the educational process effectiveness in the context of primary school students distance learning.

### **The Prerequisites for the Effectiveness of the Educational Process of Primary School Students in Distance Learning**

Taking into account the age psychological characteristics of primary schoolchildren, the content of primary education and the state policy in the implementation of the concept of open education, from a didactic point of view, we identify the following prerequisites for the effectiveness of the educational process of primary schoolchildren in distance learning:

1. availability of an open computer-oriented educational environment (COEE) of primary school;
2. formation of the skill of learning as a key competence of primary school students;
3. media literacy of primary school students and their teachers.

We define the above components as the fundamental basis for the implementation of an effective educational process in the context of distance learning. The successful formation and availability of the above components is not complete, as the educational process is also influenced by other important factors, such as the role and activities of parents, the presence of children with special educational needs in the classroom, and others (11). However, we define these four components as a necessary and sufficient condition for organizing the educational process of primary school in remote conditions, which will ensure both the quality of educational services and the continuity of education. Let us describe each of the four components of effectiveness in more detail.

#### **Availability of an open computer-oriented educational environment in primary school**

In the context of studying the features of the structures of closed and open computer-oriented learning environments, it is determined that the factor that significantly affects the change of a traditionally closed learning environment into an open information space is the process of its gradual decomposition as ICT tools are involved in the educational process (12).

This process is nothing more than the process of modifying the traditional classroom system of education into its other form - distance

learning. This process is a systemic factor. In our opinion, it is this factor that determines the emergence and development of the distance learning system, which has its own common and distinctive features for each level of education. It should be noted that in primary education, it is impossible to achieve the maximum possible distance of the educational process and learning activities exclusively within the framework of open COEE from the point of view of didactics, age psychology, ergonomics, etc. The essence of a computer-oriented educational environment is the use of computer-based learning tools, which constitute a separate group, and programs (applications) that are directly used in the educational process in the context of DL (13).

Modern technology allows access to the Internet not only through a computer, but increasingly also through mobile devices, thereby expanding the availability of online content in virtually any environment» (14, p. 61). Therefore, the group of computer facilities includes personal computers, laptops, netbooks, tablets, smartphones, etc. (15). The specificity of their use lies in the possibility of using the Internet, access to online resources, distance educational content, etc. The reason for combining funds into this group is the material and technical support of each individual family of junior schoolchildren. The school staff cannot directly influence this, nor should they force the parents of the student to purchase a particular computer. This is important because each family may be in a different financial situation, which can be supported by different circumstances: emigration of parents, refugee status, inability to work due to parental illness, the need to care for the sick or even imprisonment, etc (16–22). Instead, the pedagogical staff, the teacher in particular, influence the material and technical support of the family indirectly: through the selection of applications that can be used on all computer devices. This way, the opportunity for younger students to receive education is not interrupted. The creation of distance educational content also has an indirect impact on the material and technical capacity of a primary school student's family. The educational materials taught by the teacher should be easy to use on various computer devices.

We will study online resources (applications) of the educational process for distance learning. A wide range of opportunities opens for teachers in the context of the diversity of such programs at the current stage of education development. In the didactics of primary education, there are no classifications in this regard, which leads to the unreasonable use of individual applications and platforms, their oversaturation of the educational process of primary school, the inability of younger students to use them, and the disorientation of students and teachers in the variety of such programs. This necessitates streamlining, identifying common features of each group of applications, and, on this basis, developing criteria for selecting online resources that will be optimal in the context of distance learning.

The following factors have a significant impact on the development of distance learning applications for primary school: the possibility of using them in synchronous and asynchronous learning modes; providing game-based learning activities; intuitive interface of the application for primary school children; providing feedback, matching the age and psychological capabilities of primary school children, etc. The analysis of sources shows that scholars and practitioners address this issue unevenly. For example, much attention has been paid to cloud-based learning technologies, while video communication programs have been the focus of attention since the introduction of quarantine in Ukraine. The issue of computer-based didactic games for younger students, e-textbooks, etc. also remains open (23).

For primary school students, especially those in the first cycle of education (grades 1-2), it is extremely important to gradually move from playing as a leading activity to learning. That is why role-playing games, folk games, didactic games, game tasks and exercises, game techniques for working with various didactic materials are widely used in the theory and practice of primary education. It is logical to ask about such games in the context of remote learning. One of the solutions to this issue is a computer game. The group of computer games includes didactic, reactive entertainment games, and competition games. In psychological and pedagogical

science, such games are included in the group of closed games, i.e. those in which the ability to modify the course of the game is as limited or absent as possible. Activities in such games are organized by adults in advance (24). It is important to remember that the environment and educational process in primary school contributes to the formation of a new leading activity - learning, but the game does not disappear without a trace.

Let's pay attention to computer-based didactic games for younger students. Such games provide an opportunity for a student to work one-on-one with a computer and the educational material hidden behind the game plot. The younger pupil abstracts himself from everything around him, focuses his attention on the computer screen, is fully imbued with all the events unfolding during the computer game, thinks algorithmically: what action should be performed first, what action should be performed next - in accordance with the conditions and rules of the game. Computer games are an emotionally stimulating medium, i.e. they do not limit the expression of emotions that arise during the game itself. Instead, didactic games, as games that are teacher-driven and controlled, are less interesting than computer games. The synthesis of a didactic game and a computer game results in a type of these games in which the teacher's leading role is hidden, the student is offered to play a game by the computer itself, and learning will take place unnoticed by the student, because the teaching teacher is physically absent, and the game approach to the presentation of educational content is presented by a computer tool. The peculiarities of using computer games for children are that they can be an element of the lesson, as well as facilitate the mastery of educational material that is difficult to perceive and understand in a regular educational environment (24). Such a characteristic of computer didactic games reveals the relevance of their use in the educational process of primary school in the context of distance learning. A prerequisite for the use of computer didactic games should be summing up the results after the game reflection. The difficulty lies in the fact that the child's imagination is not yet sufficiently arbitrary, and the images of characters or objects

that were present in the computer game are vivid, events unfold dynamically, the plot changes quickly, etc. It is important that students can reflect, including with the help of the teacher, on what knowledge they have acquired during the game, what was difficult for them, and what, on the contrary, was known and easy to solve. Only if there is a joint discussion after the completion of the computer game and reflection will computer didactic games have a positive didactic effect, contribute to the formation of the necessary competences (25).

Computer didactic games are part of the group of electronic educational game resources (EEGR) - computer game lessons. Of course, such game lessons are not a lesson, because a lesson is both a pedagogical phenomenon and an educational process in general, so we will focus on the game form of implementation. Let's take, for example, the computer package of game lessons for 1st grade students 'Smart kids', developed to implement a pedagogical experiment (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 1234 of 30.08.2017) (26). The specificity of such lessons is a program that is installed on the teacher's or students' computer device. Each student has access to the game-lesson with a unique password and login. The Smarties game-lessons are a set of exercises for generalizing knowledge. Each task is preceded by a sample voiced by an adult. The educational purpose of these games is that a set of game exercises have been developed for each lesson topic of a particular subject in accordance with the curriculum and offered to students. For example, the topic "Consolidation of knowledge about the numbers 2 tens. Counting by tens up to 100" (1st grade), 20 game exercises have been developed to consolidate knowledge. For each correctly completed task, the child is awarded points, and the image of the completed task is displayed on the chronological line of the tasks. Interestingly, in case of a mistake, a hint signal is sounded to let the student know that he or she is wrong. The impossibility of moving on to the next task without a previously completed game exercise helps the student to think about what his or her mistake was and, if necessary, return to the explanation of the task. The competitive effect also

enhances the motivational content of the game lesson (26). In the electronic journal, the teacher can see which student has completed how many tasks. If necessary, they can display a table of results and demonstrate them to the class. The point is that students will not see which task a particular student made a mistake on, but will only see the number of points scored, and thus the motivational component of the lesson is enhanced. The possibility of using such computer game packages is also realized in the context of remote learning, and the results will be displayed only to the teacher, which does not require the presence of both the teacher and the students in the educational institution. Such EEGR can be for one school subject and integrated for integrated courses. The authors have developed methodological recommendations for the use of EEGR for primary school: they propose a methodology, criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the educational process using EEGR, and technological maps for preparing mathematics lessons, etc. (27).

The practice of using online test environments is common in the context of distance learning for younger students (27). The teacher prepares such tasks in advance and indicates the correct answer. Students are given access to complete the tests, most often by vocation. Although the use of this form of testing students' knowledge is widespread, it should be noted that such forms of work are not productive, require reproduction of the answer, and do not promote active thinking, solving educational tasks and problems. The didactic principle of distance learning - activity-based assessment criteria - is not actually implemented.

A noticeable improvement in the organization of the educational process in remote conditions is the availability of video communication, especially for collective forms of learning activities (23). The technical capabilities of computer devices provide video interaction based on the Internet and mobile communication. The implementation of distance learning using video communication is especially important for younger students, because students in grades 1-4 do not yet have the ability to self-organize their learning activities, which determines the leading -

managerial - role of the teacher in the educational process in general. Video communication in a remote environment makes it possible to identify the personality of a student or a teacher, i.e. has a direct functional impact on the educational process. The indirect impact is manifested in the fact that students must maintain order in the workplace, prepare the necessary materials for the online class in advance, put away unnecessary things, put their appearance in proper order, ensure that there are no distractions, etc. The same requirements are imposed on the teacher, who is a role model for younger students.

Video communication software (VCS) for online classes is also justified by the possibility of demonstrating the teacher's computer screen (23). For example, when explaining new educational material, a teacher can illustrate an oral explanation by demonstrating a presentation on the topic of the lesson prepared in advance, can visualize concepts or data that are difficult to understand, and can highlight the conceptual emphasis of the lesson and terms.

A functionally convenient addition to an online lesson is a message chat. The teacher can ask for feedback in the chat, for example, at the beginning of the lesson to determine the level of Internet connection, how well they can be heard and seen. Students can let you know if they have understood the new material, write answers to questions, comment on their classmates' answers, add to them, or offer a different point of view. Message chat provides quick feedback and requires students to type correctly, avoid grammatical and spelling errors, etc.

The use of video communication software in a remote environment leads to a new form of teaching - online lessons. Preparing a lesson via video communication has its own specific features and differs significantly from both the process of preparing a traditional lesson and the process of the lesson itself. Firstly, this specificity is manifested in the selection of forms of activity for students and teachers, the choice of online resources, sanitary and hygienic requirements for working with computer devices, age-related psychological characteristics of primary school students, etc.

Teachers, as leaders of the student body, also need to pay attention to ways of organizing

learning activities with electronic textbooks (ETs), which have become popular with the introduction of digitalization of education.

Electronic textbooks in the educational process can be used to more fully implement the didactic principle of visualization of learning, self-study; rationalization and intensification of the processes of repetition, generalization and systematization of knowledge, formation of skills and their application in practical activities; development of students' cognitive abilities to independently perceive, understand the educational material provided and explained with the help of autonomous multimedia audiovisual means (28). They are a multisensory learning tool characterised by multimedia, hypermedia, thus creating favourable conditions for learning, based on the priority of the way of representing, explaining and perceiving the educational material and considering the age, psychological, intellectual, cognitive and physiological characteristics of students (28).

When comparing a traditional printed textbook with an electronic one, the following common features are identified: the educational material relates to a particular field of knowledge and is covered at the current level of scientific and cultural achievements; the material in textbooks is presented systematically a, i.e. it is a complete product consisting of many interconnected elements, which ensures the integrity of the textbook (29). There are also specific features inherent only to an e-textbook: unlike a printed textbook, an e-textbook on a particular subject may contain material of several levels of difficulty. In this case, it will be placed on a web link as one of the files, contain multivariate tasks for testing knowledge in an interactive mode for each level; the visibility in an electronic textbook is much better than in a printed one, as it is provided by the use of multimedia technologies: animation, sound and hyperlinks, videos, etc. (29).

Primary school teachers should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of using e-textbooks in the educational process, identified by scientists, in order to organize the work of younger students in the context of remote learning, considering interactivity as one of the

main features and advantages compared to a traditional textbook for primary school.

### **Formation of the skill of learning as a key competence of primary school students**

The development of the ability to learn (life-long learning) in younger students is of great importance when introducing distance learning. In didactic science, a lot of work is devoted to this phenomenon. O. Savchenko identifies the structural components of the ability to learn: motivational (attitude and desire to learn), content (known and new knowledge, values, skills), activity (ways of organizing learning activities at different levels of complexity), control and evaluation (self-testing, self-monitoring of achievements, self-assessment, mutual control, mutual verification), reflective and corrective (self-knowledge and self-awareness of one's cognitive capabilities, desire to improve them) (30).

The process of educational activity in accordance with the structural components of the ability to learn involves the formation of the following groups of skills and abilities in junior pupils: educational and organizational, educational and informational, general cognitive, control and evaluation, reflective and creative skills (31). The content of the formation of these structural components is specified in terms of the traditional educational process with attendance at an educational institution. Let us briefly describe the process of forming the structural components of the ability to learn in distance learning among junior students.

The remoteness of the subjects of primary school interaction determines the priority of junior pupils' independent learning activities, while the subject-subject relations of teachers and pupils are not interrupted, only the conditions for their implementation change. In view of this, in each group of skills and abilities that specify the structure of the ability to learn, it is necessary to identify and characterize those without which the independent learning activities of primary school children in the conditions of the DL are impossible. These skills represent the activity component of the ability to learn. To learn independently, younger students need to master

the basic skills: reading, writing, counting, reasoning, observing, using subject concepts and applying action skills (31). Since primary school students, especially those in grades 1-2, have not yet mastered basic skills at a sufficient level, it follows that it is impossible to completely distance younger students from a didactic point of view. Basic skills are of an interdisciplinary nature, represent an activity (process) component and are specified in general learning skills. O. Savchenko in 'Didactics of Primary Education' identifies the following groups of general learning skills: educational and organizational, educational and informational, general cognitive, control and evaluation, and reflective and corrective (31). Let us describe the role of each group of general educational skills and abilities of junior schoolchildren in the context of distance learning.

The leading learning and organizational skills of primary school students in the context of distance learning are: organization of a workplace at home, ability to work at one's own pace in a remote environment, ability to focus on one thing and distribute attention between several objects of learning, understanding the value of time and the ability to allocate it, etc., which are dominant in the formation of primary school students' independent learning skills, which is a prerequisite for DL. In general, in primary school, it is advisable to form values that will become the foundation for any activity of a person in life educational, either in the process of studying in educational institutions or during non-formal and informal education and self-education (32-35).

A primary school student who, under the traditional model of education, systematically attended an educational institution and studied in specially created conditions - a classroom - in the conditions of DL must organize a workplace at home, prepare the materials necessary for studying, monitor the order at the workplace, and eliminate stimuli that distract his/her attention. While in an educational institution this was indirectly facilitated by the educational environment and directly by the teacher's instructions, in a remote environ-

ment, the student often must do it on his or her own. Proper organisation of the workplace by younger students at home requires preliminary development of this skill in the context of traditional learning in an educational institution.

Orientation in time, the ability to use it rationally in learning activities in the context of DL poses considerable difficulties for primary school students. For example, younger pupils are used to the fact that the timeframe for completing tasks, certain activities, the duration of the lesson and the school day is primarily controlled by the teacher through announcements, instructions, comments, the school bell, and in physical education lessons - by the teacher's command, whistle, etc. Time, as a moment of action and as a long process, is perceived by younger students in a difficult and subjective way. Forming an understanding of time in learning activities is a long process, not without difficulties, which requires the teacher to select specific teaching aids, visual aids, etc. For example, in their practice, teachers often use a clock with a second and minute hand. Before a student begins an exercise, the teacher will give them a brief introduction: "You have six minutes to complete the exercise. Concentrate, children!" and puts an hourglass on a table or display stand for six minutes. The students can visualise the "passage of time". Towards the end of the time limit, the teacher again gives the instruction "Finish the activity. Let's check". In physical education classes, a stopwatch is used, in music lessons, a chronometer, etc. The conditions of distance learning complicate this process, requiring students to self-manage the duration of tasks, and more often the help of parents or an adult.

The conditions of distance learning are favourable for learning activities at one's own pace. In the context of individualisation and differentiation of learning, this skill requires special attention, because the child's personality is characterised by a different level of intellectual development, type of attitude to learning, educational needs and interests, character, social and living conditions, etc. All this has a complex effect on determining the pace of learning activity of primary school students (36). For example, if there is a need to perform a certain task

that causes difficulties in perception or understanding at home, a younger student can devote more attention and time to it and ask for help from parents or an adult. In traditional education, this approach is difficult to implement, because there are students in the class who complete tasks quickly, learn new things, and there are those who need more time to complete their learning tasks. Children with special educational needs have a different learning pace: children with disabilities, gifted children, etc. One of the determining criteria that affect the inability to work independently at their own pace in traditional education is the number of students in the classroom. That is why the educational process in the context of DL is a favourable environment for junior pupils to work independently at their own speed.

The ability to focus on one thing and distribute attention between several objects of learning activity requires the arbitrariness of mental processes, such as attention, memory, thinking, etc. In primary school, the arbitrariness of these processes as a dominant feature and qualitative skill is still being formed, not characterised by completeness, perfection of the mental development of a child of primary school age. Under traditional learning conditions, such arbitrariness of mental processes is facilitated by a specially created educational environment, the teacher's leadership role, the conditions for completing tasks and exercises given in the textbook, etc. Instead, the conditions of distance learning are home-based, it is not a specially created educational environment. The whole household and its elements can act as side stimuli to a child's attention at home. It is especially difficult for a child of 6-7 years old to maintain attention, focus on tasks, studying certain educational material, because everything distracts: pets, toys, adult conversations, the absence of a teacher, the school's educational and material component of the educational environment, etc. The development of this skill is preceded by the systematic, planned and purposeful completion of learning tasks at home, in a specific workplace, within a specific time frame, etc. Research shows that attentive students who know how to manage their attention gain more knowl-

edge (37). To help a 6–10-year-old learner do this, it is helpful to provide them with tasks that are interesting to them, often with a humorous overtone or relating to heroes of their peers with whom they identify (38; 10).

We consider the ability of junior schoolchildren to work with a textbook (or an electronic textbook) to be the leading one in the group of educational and informational skills. Studies by Ya. Kodliuk, O. Savchenko and O. Yanchenko reveal the content of this skill as an acquired quality of a junior pupil and the process of its formation (31; 39). Scholars note that working with a textbook as a teaching method is represented in different types of work with a textbook. The main type of work with a textbook in primary school is work with each of the structural components of a textbook (39). However, there are other types of work with a textbook, including teacher-led and independent work. In the context of distance learning in primary school, the role of students' independent work with a textbook, including an electronic textbook, is increasing. If the stages of independent work with a textbook are observed (preparatory (orientation), executive, checking (controlling) stages), the formation of general learning skills and abilities takes place, and the development of student independence is ensured (39). Independent work with a textbook is impossible without the developed ability to work with text and extra-textual components, the ability to use the orientation apparatus - structural components of the ability to work with a textbook (39). In our opinion, the ability to use the orientation apparatus (preface, table of contents, rubrication, language designations, indexes, etc.) is the basis for organising junior students' independent work with a textbook in the context of distance learning.

Advantages of e-books: the following are among the advantages of e-books: light weight and small size compared to a set of paper textbooks; no paper or paint is used in the process of their production; the content of an e-book is cheaper than printing a traditional paper-based book; e-books create prerequisites for overcoming physical, sensory and cognitive barriers to education for students with special educational needs; significantly low cost of distribution of

e-books; electronic editions can be downloaded from the comfort of your own home (29).

General cognitive skills of primary school children. This group of skills primarily deals with the development of mental processes, such as visual and semantic memory, imagination, fantasy, child's thinking, observation, reasoning and others. Among this group, we single out those that require close attention in the context of DL: the ability to use meaningful memorisation techniques and the ability to carry out project activities. We have already noted that the educational process in DL is implemented in a specially created open computer-oriented learning environment. This necessitates special attention to the preparation of visual aids and distance educational content, as the visual perception and visual memory of younger students are formed using computer devices.

The ability to use meaningful memorisation techniques is preceded by the formation of the arbitrariness of the memorisation process, using visual support for thinking and a memorisation attitude. Since the source of perception is changing from printed paper to digital media, the approach to the organisation of arbitrary perception and memorisation of primary school students is determined. One of the reasons for this approach is the rapid visual and physical fatigue of younger students when working with computer devices. To this end, the teacher should have a wide range of methodological techniques, tools and techniques and choose the most appropriate ones for use in the conditions of DL. One of these means of organising arbitrary memorisation is educational mnemonics. Researcher H. Chepurnyi defines it as a separate author's pedagogical technology - "Educational Mnemotechnics" (40). Considering the digital aspect of distance learning, we suggest that teachers use the following methods of educational mnemonics by H. Chepurnyi: 'Transformation', "Pictograms" (alphabetic and digital), 'Digital image' and others. The teacher's ability to organise arbitrary memorisation of junior pupils with the help of computer devices will prevent low motivation to learn, mechanical memorisation, low concentration, etc.

The complex ability to carry out project activities of younger students is formed over a long

period of time and in many ways. This skill is rooted in the student's independent learning activity, which is also formed throughout primary school. By preparing educational projects in various subjects, students gain experience in search activities, learn to plan a long-term task without teacher guidance, and develop the ability to work with different types of information. The conditions of distance learning are favourable for organising individual project activities - short- and medium-duration learning projects. When organising project activities for junior students in distance learning, teachers should keep in mind the didactic requirements for using project technology: interest in the problem, search activities of junior students; practical results of activities; clear planning of actions for project implementation (purpose, content, means, stages, time, results, etc.); an integrated approach to project activities - different types of information sources, a range of forms of cooperation (31, p. 300). It is logical to assert that without the prior repeated preparation of projects in traditional learning, the formation of this skill in remote conditions is impossible, as there is no pedagogical content.

The child's speech in distance learning requires special attention because the child is remote. The speech of younger pupils is a plane of continuous work of the teacher aimed at involving active and passive vocabulary, developing phonemic awareness, dialogic and monologic content. For junior pupils, the teacher's speech is a role model, an example of culture, purity and correctness of literary language.

Control and assessment skills. The ability to exercise self-control and self-testing, among other skills in this group, is of great importance for successful learning in remote conditions. Younger pupils' voluntary attention and the development of independent learning activities are the basis for self-control and self-testing in the learning process. The process of forming these skills is complicated by children's belief that it is the responsibility of an adult, a teacher, to check tasks. Self-control in the process of completing a task or exercise requires thorough preliminary work from the teacher: in no case should the content of the task be simplified

specifically to facilitate its completion; ensure that students understand the importance of the sequence of the self-checking process; prevent mistakes in advance by discussing them before completing the task; clearly indicate the guidelines for independent work; avoid hyper-parenting in the process of independent learning activities, etc. The conditions of DL require increased teacher's attention in forming these skills objectively; it is impossible to allow younger students to neglect self-checking and self-control, as this will lead to inefficiency, low learning productivity, and ultimately to a child's disbelief in their own learning capabilities, reduced motivation to learn, lack of cognitive needs and interests.

Reflective and corrective skills. The ability of primary school students to reflect is relevant in the context of remote learning. Important in the process of reflective activity of primary school students is self-awareness of performance actions based on self-control and self-testing of the student as a subject of learning. Self-awareness (understanding) is preceded by self-knowledge - these are complex psychological and pedagogical processes, and, accordingly, determine the complexity of developing these skills in primary school students. As a rule, in practice, the teacher helps to carry out reflection by asking questions that ensure the student's understanding of successes and overcome (or not overcome) difficulties. Thus, it is appropriate for the teacher to ask the following questions: 'What did you manage to do easily?', 'What difficulties did you have in the process of performing the exercise?', 'What helped you overcome these difficulties?', 'What advice would you give to your classmates if they have a similar task?'. The content of such questions will help students to understand what actions, means or conditions ensured successful or unsuccessful completion of the task, what new skills they acquired while learning activities, how they prevented mistakes, etc. Practice shows that, having completed a task, students of grades 1-2 in traditional education report it to the teacher in an emotional, enthusiastic manner, wanting to receive approval, a grade or a positive assessment. When primary school children make mistakes, it is usually difficult to trace at

what stage of the task they have made, they ask for help from the teacher, and rarely analyse them on their own. Only a thorough systematic work of the teacher to develop the ability to reflect in traditional learning environments can contribute to the reflective activity of primary school students in distance learning (41).

### **Media literacy of primary school students and their teachers**

The update of the content of primary education in accordance with the concept of the New Ukrainian School is represented in the State Standard of Primary Education (2018) (42; 43). Along with the update, concepts such as ‘competences’ and “competencies”, ‘cross-cutting skills’, etc. have also appeared. Scientists interpret the concept of ‘competence’ as a given norm, a requirement that is alienated from the individual, socially conditioned; and ‘competence’ is a personal acquired integrated quality that includes: knowledge, skills, experience, emotional and value attitudes, personal qualities that are necessary and sufficient for successful activity (31, p. 142).

Scientists argue that key competences are most significantly formed using educational technologies (44). They are formed based on interdisciplinary (cross-cutting) and subject-specific competences. I. Kuzma and O. Yankovych note that technologies for the formation of ICT competence and lifelong learning competence are included in the group of complex technologies. These researchers also note that this group includes other technologies, such as the technology of collective creative education, technologies for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, etc. (44). Let us focus on educational technologies for the formation of information and communication competence of primary school students. There are different approaches to defining the concepts of ‘information technology’, ‘information and communication’, ‘computer technology’, ‘digital’.

Considering educational technologies for their use in primary school, scientists have determined that information technology is a generalised name for technologies responsible for information activities (search, storage, processing,

transmission, protection, etc.), including the use of computer devices. As for ICTs, they expand the capabilities of information technologies, as the priority is to ensure and support information and communication processes (44). Thus, depending on which aspect of working with information (educational material) we consider, the group of technologies will be decisive in the educational process.

Intermediaries in information technology can be media technologies responsible for the transmission of educational content. The concept of ‘information technology’ is broader than ‘media technology’, so they should not be synonymous. Among information technologies, media education technologies require attention. Media education in primary school is primarily the practice of preparing a primary school child for effective interaction with the media, which reduces the risks of negative media influence on the socialisation process and increases the resource opportunities for their positive developmental influence (44, p. 128). The result of the media education process as a component of the educational process is the acquired quality of a primary school student - media literacy as a component of media culture (3). The concept of ‘media competence’ is broader than media literacy, as it includes the ability to transmit media cultural values. Firstly, media literacy involves knowledge about media, their types, use, understanding the authorship of a media product, education through media and for media, including the moral and ethical aspect of being in the media space, etc. Media education technologies are implemented through a set of forms, methods, tools and ways of organising media learning activities. A notable phenomenon is the development of variable curricula for primary schools aimed at developing infomediate competence: ‘Steps to Media Literacy’ (V. Litostanskyi, V. Danylenko, V. Melezhyk, T. Ivanova, O. Volosheniuk, V. Ivanov), ‘Digital and Media Literacy’ (N. Sarzhynska, S. Yakuba), ‘I am in the Media Space’ (I. Ivanova, A. Kozhanova), etc. (47; 48; 49).

The analysis of these programmes allows us to highlight the possibility of integrating media education topics into the study of primary school subjects as an invariant component. Ta-

**Table 1** Options for integrating the topics of the 'Me in the Media Space' programme into primary school curricula (indicative)

No.	The topic of the Programme 'I am in the media space'	Study subject into which the content of the topic is integrated
Topic 1.	The world of media - the world of information	Ukrainian language, Literary Reading, Computer science
Topic 2.	Visual media	Ukrainian language, Literary Reading,
Topic 3.	Information sharing via text	Literary Reading, Computer science
Topic 4.	Information sharing through photography	Ukrainian language, Technology/Design/Labour Training/Art
Topic 5.	Transferring information with a picture	Ukrainian language, Literary reading, Art
Topic 6.	Audience media	Literary reading, Art
Topic 7.	Audiovisual media	Art, Literary reading
Topic 8.	Television is a source of audio-visual information	I explore the world, Art
Topic 9.	The art of cinema	Literary reading, I explore the world
Topic 10.	The Internet is a modern information space	Computer Science, I explore the world
Topic 11.	Advertising in the life of modern man	I explore the world
Topic 12.	Protecting human rights in the modern media space	I explore the world, Literary reading
Topic 13.	Critical thinking is a condition for media competence	Literary reading, I explore the world,

Source: own research

ble 1 shows approaches to integrating media literacy topics with other primary school subjects under the programme 'I am in the media space' (I. Ivanova, A. Kozhanova) (49).

Based on the data presented in the table, we conclude that the content of media education is organically integrated with all primary school subjects and follows a cross-cutting content line. This organic integration is implemented primarily through various types of work with media. An analysis of professional periodicals such as 'Pri-

mary School Teacher', 'Teacher's Palette', 'Primary School', etc. shows that teachers are very interested in using animated films, children's periodicals, comics in the educational process of primary school (49).

Thus, methodologically sound, systematic work on media education in primary school will contribute to forming the ability to communicate and express one's opinion through media, establishing relationships with classmates and adults; conscious perception of information, its critical

processing and interpretation; ability to work with sources, select them; awareness of the importance of citing authors to argue one's opinion; understanding the space constructed by media sources: distinguishing between virtual and real media environments, etc. (50).

## Conclusions

To ensure the quality of distance learning for primary school students, it is necessary to consider the prerequisites for the effectiveness of the educational process in the context of distance learning for primary school students. These include the following: the availability of an open computer-oriented primary school educational environment; the formation of the ability to learn as a key competence of primary school students; media literacy of primary school students and teachers.

The presence of an open computer-oriented educational environment in primary school provides a transition from a traditional closed space to a flexible information environment. Such an environment includes various computer devices and applications that are accessible to most students and easy to use, regardless of the family's technical support. It is important to select digital resources that meet the age and psychological characteristics of students, have a simple interface, work in synchronous and asynchronous modes, and support game-based learning. A special role is played by computer-based didactic games and electronic educational game resources that combine learning with play, build competencies and motivate students. The use of video communication for interaction, feedback and visualisation of material also contributes to efficiency, while electronic textbooks complement learning through interactivity, visibility and adaptability to the needs of students. The combination of these components creates a modern, flexible and effective learning environment for primary school students.

The formation of the ability to learn as a key competence includes motivational, content, activity, control and evaluation, and reflective and corrective components that ensure the independence and awareness of the child's learning activities. In the context of distance learning, study

and organisational skills are particularly important: the ability to organise a workplace, manage time, work at one's own pace and concentrate. The role of independent work with a textbook, including an electronic one, and mastering general cognitive skills such as observation, reasoning, and memorisation is increasing. Control and evaluation skills (self-control, self-testing) and the ability to reflect provide for the comprehension of one's own learning. The formation of these skills requires systematic work of the teacher in the face-to-face learning environment, which allows them to be effectively implemented in a distance format.

Media literacy of students and teachers ensures conscious, critical and safe perception and use of information. In the New Ukrainian School, it is seen as a component of information and communication competence and is formed through the integration of media education topics into various subjects, such as Ukrainian language, literary reading, art, computer science, and I Explore the World. Media literacy involves the ability to work with information, understand the authorship of media products, critically evaluate content, and express one's own opinion with reference to sources. For a teacher, this means a methodologically balanced selection of common media tools and the development of critical thinking in students, because the content of information that younger students process or will process during their studies in educational institutions and in everyday life is very diverse and impossible to predict accurately (51; 52). In the context of distance learning, media literacy becomes the key to successful learning and information security of the individual, including younger students (53).

This list does not limit the number of prerequisites for the effectiveness of the educational process in the context of distance learning for junior schoolchildren, but it allows us to focus on some of the most important ones.

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# Development of Positive Motivation and Value Attitude of Primary School Students Towards Mastering Information and Digital Skills

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## Abstract:

The aim of the study is to define the essence of developing positive motivation and value-based attitudes among primary school students (6–10 years) toward acquiring information

and digital skills (the ability to search for information online and critically assess it; the ability to choose digital tools necessary for completing a learning task, the ability to select and use digital tools for online communication, and the ability to create and edit a digital product; netiquette skills and safe behavior online; skills in identifying device malfunctions and solving simple technical issues independently), as well as to explore and analyze the experiences of primary school teachers on this issue.

The study employed the following methods: the method of studying scientific and pedagogical literature, analysis, synthesis, generalization, surveys, the expert assessment method, and the quantitative analysis method.

Positive motivation among primary school students for acquiring information and digital skills is rooted in fostering both internal and external (positive) motives. These motives encourage students to develop key competencies such as searching for and evaluating information, selecting and using digital tools, interacting online, and independently identifying and solving basic technical problems.

Primary school students' value-based attitudes toward acquiring information and digital skills involve recognizing the importance of mastering digital information processing and online communication, as well as embracing the core values of a digital society. According to teachers' experiences, most consider it essential to cultivate positive motivation and value orientations in students regarding information and digital skills. They actively support this development through various methods, including storytelling, discussions, leading by example, case studies, challenges, and collaborative digital activities.

In their teaching, they primarily aim to foster internal motivation – or a combination of internal and positive external motivation – alongside key values such as knowledge, critical thinking, self-identity, ethics, responsibility, kindness, mutual respect, time management, well-being, and independence.

Our research demonstrates that the development of positive motivation and value-based attitudes among younger schoolchildren toward mastering information and digital skills is a relevant issue, as reflected in modern scientific and pedagogical studies. Additionally, primary school teachers actively cultivate these qualities in students during lessons and extracurricular activities by implementing both traditional and innovative teaching methods within the context of primary education digitization.

## Introduction

All spheres of public life globally, including in Ukraine, are currently undergoing a phase of digitalization. At first, this was due to the emer-

gence of personal computers, mobile phones and the Internet, now – to the application of artificial intelligence technologies based on the aforementioned technical means (1).

In education, this urgency stems largely from the Covid-19 pandemic, which created an immediate need to integrate digital technologies comprehensively into the learning process and to enhance the digital competence of both educators and students. Achieving this requires the development of a modern educational environment – whether in-person or through platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams – and equipping learners with the skills to navigate it effectively (2). There is a two-way connection here: digitally organised environments help to stimulate students' independence, self-regulation and interest in learning, and it is possible to orientate a person in such an environment only if they have the following newly formed skills at least at an elementary level (3).

Therefore, it is crucial to prepare children from an early age to thrive in an era of continuous scientific and technological advancement. This involves enabling them to use digital tools in daily life and process information effectively in digital formats – in other words, to develop strong information and digital skills.

The first step in the developing skills is motivation. A primary school teacher helps to form motivation in younger schoolchildren to master new competencies, taking into account their age and individual characteristics. Thus, the teacher's activities largely determine whether a 6–10 year old schoolchild will be motivated to perform certain types of activities or not. For example, whether a teacher is working with a child with typical development or a gifted primary school student, the use of digital tools will help present more engaging information in digital form (4, p. 6477). This stimulates positive motivation for further learning and the development of students' abilities to process digital information, communicate online, and use specialized tools. And the presence of positive motives and value-based attitudes toward acquiring information and digital skills is the driving force behind effective steps for establishing these skills in primary school students. After all, «the importance of achieving a certain result, multiplied by the expectation of that result, determines the strength of the incentive to act» (5, p. 110).

Modern technologies – such as smartphones, computers, and other digital devices – are integrated into daily life from an early age and have a significant psychological impact. They motivate actions, shape an individual's worldview – particularly through the lens of values – which can be observed in real-life situations as well as in scientific and fictional narratives (6, p. 57). These technologies also enhance cognitive and emotional processes.

For instance, players of computer games can experience extraordinary abilities such as flying, teleporting, passing through matter, or constructing entire communities, cities, and civilizations. These experiences stimulate thinking, memory, imagination, emotions, and feelings (7, p. 46). As a result, the structure, purpose, and functionality of digital tools carry significant cognitive and emotional weight.

At first glance, children aged 6–10 appear to have a high level of motivation to develop information and digital skills. However, when breaking down the individual components of these skills, it becomes evident that younger students tend to focus on selective abilities rather than developing a comprehensive skill set. This indicates that their desire to master digital competencies is limited to specific interests rather than an understanding of their broader importance.

Therefore, fostering positive motivation and a value-based attitude toward mastering information and digital skills among younger students is a pressing issue that requires further in-depth research.

### **The essence of the development of positive motivation and value attitude of primary school students (6–10 years) towards mastering information and digital skills**

In researching the development of positive motivation and value-based attitudes in primary school students toward acquiring information and digital skills, it is essential to first clarify the components of the comprehensive concept of “information and digital skills.” These skills encompass a system of abilities grouped according to the logical connections between them:

– *Skills in searching for and evaluating digital information* (the ability to search for infor-

mation online and critically assess it) are essential because, when searching for information online through algorithms in search engines, primary school students typically evaluate its relevance to the search query and select data that are relevant to them;

– *Skills in selecting and using digital tools* (the ability to choose digital tools necessary for completing a learning task, the ability to select and use digital tools for online communication, and the ability to create and edit a digital product) are grouped together as they share a common foundation – selecting and using digital tools for different purposes: completing a learning task, online communication, and creating and editing a digital product;

– *Skills for online interaction* (netiquette skills and safe behavior online) – the reason for grouping these skills is that, in general, user behavior on the internet is based on their interaction with other people in the global network or with digital devices and resources. As a result, it can be ethical/ unethical and safe/unsafe;

– *Ability to independently detect and solve basic technical problems* (skills in identifying device malfunctions and solving simple technical issues independently) – this is conditioned by the fact that a younger student, when working with a digital device, must be able not only to notice a malfunction but also to determine whether they can fix it themselves. If the answer is affirmative, they should do so; if negative, they should seek help from adults (8, p. 22–23).

Motivation is the source of activity and, at the same time, the system of incentives for any activity. is considered one of the specific motives, a unified system of motives, or even a special domain encompassing needs, motives, goals, and interests, which are intricately intertwined and in constant interaction (9, p. 153). If a child aged 6-10 has motivation, he or she feels an interest and desire to learn. Thus, motivation stimulates the student to act, and the result of the implementation of actions is the formation of new abilities.

Learning motivation of primary education students is formed in two ways: through the content of the material being studied and through the methods of organizing educational activities

(10). Motivation through the content of the studied material aims to engage younger students in learning about what is presented in educational texts, exercises, or tasks. In addition, motivation through the methods of organizing educational activities involves stimulating students to explore new knowledge by applying interesting teaching methods, tools, and forms of organizing the educational process (11, p. 124).

For the most part, the motives associated with the student's work with digital information and digital devices are as follows:

- *desire to learn something new.* Working with digital information provides significant opportunities for learning about the object in the spectrum of its functions and intersubjective connections. Younger schoolchildren prefer searching for information not in books, but on the internet,;
- *the desire to learn new ways of doing things.* The search for digital information, its processing, and the creation of new digital material require the mastery of specific methods of work using online applications or computer programs. Students of primary education are interested in developing new skills: for example, working with augmented reality, developing pictures or videos;
- *desire to work with information and digital means.* Younger schoolchildren like to work at the computer due to the presence of bright images, access to educational and entertaining videos, games and programs, thus often not fully understanding the task, they rush to complete it (12, p. 40).

In scientific publications in the field of education and pedagogy, the terms “positive motivation” and “negative motivation” are used, yet their clear definitions are not provided. Three types of motivation are identified: intrinsic, external positive, and external negative. The term “intrinsic motivation” refers to motivation that arises from an individual's needs and is directly related to the process and outcome of their activity. External positive motivation is characterized by motives that are only indirectly related to the process and result of the activity, while external negative motivation involves motives that are not directly related to the

process and outcome of the activity and carry a negative emotional connotation (such as the desire to avoid punishment, condemnation, criticism, etc.) (13).

By reviewing the literature, we believe there is a benefit to dividing motivation for mastering information and digital skills into positive and negative categories. Positive motivation includes intrinsic and external positive motivation, while negative motivation consists of external negative motivation. Intrinsic motivation in younger students is positive and involves personal needs, desires, interests, etc., related to the process and outcome of mastering information and digital skills. External positive motivation for primary education students includes motives indirectly related to the process and result of acquiring information and digital skills (approval from teachers, parents, or peers, prestige). External negative motivation in younger students involves motives indirectly related to the process and result of mastering information and digital skills, characterized by a desire to avoid punishment, criticism, or condemnation from others. Consequently, the development of positive motivation in younger students for mastering information and digital skills involves the formation of both intrinsic and external positive motivation while reducing the influence of external negative motivation.

Positive motivation in younger students for mastering information and digital skills involves the development of both intrinsic and external (positive) motives for acquiring the ability to search for and evaluate information, select and use digital tools, interact online, independently detect and solve basic technical problems. In other words, each group of skills corresponds to specific motives. In particular:

- the development of skills to search for and evaluate digital information can be motivated by the need to learn how to search for information online and the desire to critically evaluate data as intrinsic motives, and praise for finding and critically assessing digital information as an external (positive) motive;
- mastery of the skills to select and use digital tools is supported by the desire to choose the necessary digital tools for completing

educational tasks, interest in selecting and using digital tools for online communication, curiosity about creating and editing digital products, and the belief in the importance of selecting and using digital tools as intrinsic motives, as well as recognition for one's ability to select and use digital tools as an external (positive) motive;

- the development of online interaction skills occurs based on the emergence of a younger student's need for online interaction, the desire to communicate ethically online, and the aspiration to follow safe behavior norms in the global network, which serve as intrinsic motives, while societal approval of netiquette skills and safe online behavior represents the external motive;
- the formation of the skill to independently detect and solve basic technical problems begins with a cognitive interest in identifying and solving basic technical issues, the belief in the importance of such skills for oneself as intrinsic motives, and the high status of a student who can identify and solve technical problems in the class as an external motive.

The development of intrinsic motivation for mastering information and digital skills in younger students is more stable than external (positive) motivation. When the importance of praise and recognition, diminishes, only intrinsic motivation remains to stimulate the individual toward completing the activity. However, it is also important not to devalue external (positive) motivation, as these motives are engaged in the process of forming any new skill to later stimulate internal desires, aspirations, needs, and cognitive interest, among others.

Important stimuli for the development of information and digital skills in primary school students also include value-based attitudes. "Value-based attitude" (or "value orientations") refers to the significance a person attaches to certain phenomena in the environment. A value-based attitude towards learning is the result of transforming the societal need for knowledge into an individual one. The value orientations of younger students reflect their life position, state of consciousness, emotional and sensory sphere, skills, abilities, and behavioral habits, which are ob-

served in their attitudes towards knowledge, the surrounding reality, society, themselves, and their own educational duties (14). Based on the above, we define the value-based attitudes of younger students toward mastering information and digital skills as their awareness of the importance of digital information processing and online communication, along with the overall assimilation of the values inherent in a digital society.

In the digitalization of primary instruction, it is essential to instill values in young students that will guide their use of digital tools in both educational and everyday contexts. These values can be consciously or subconsciously assimilated as students develop their information and digital skills. Let's describe this.

As part of the formation of a value-based attitude towards mastering the skills to search for and evaluate information (the ability to search for information online and critically assess it), it is important to understand the significance of possessing information and the ability to apply different methods of searching for it. The global digital space encourages younger students to be independent and to internalize this skill as a value. Acquiring information is no longer dependent on others, such as teachers or librarians. The learner independently enters a query in a search engine and reads a web article or watches a video segment. In this context, it is crucial to develop the value of a critical approach to acquiring knowledge. The data obtained by primary students from web sources may not be scientific. The ability to critically evaluate data is particularly important, as disinformation – including fraudulent material, misleading representations, or false propaganda claims – is often spread on the internet (15). Younger students may also come across materials on the internet that promote undesirable activities for children and young people in their free time (self-destructive and harmful behaviors such as smoking, drug use, alcoholism, etc., as well as delinquency, crime, and participation in extremist groups) (16). So it is important to always verify information by comparing it with materials from scientific platforms, knowledge from competent adults, or using criteria for critically evaluating data.

When stimulating the formation of a val-

ue-based attitude toward mastering the skills required to select and use digital tools – such as choosing the appropriate digital tools for educational tasks, using them for online communication, and creating and editing digital products – it is important to consider the hobbies of modern younger students, which are often centered around interacting with digital data. These hobbies include online games, photo, audio, and video editing, and watching cartoons and movies. The use of digital tools to fulfil these tasks not only provides information and entertainment, but also allows individuals to express their identity (17, p. 103). So engaging in such activities, which may also involve music, movement, or other forms of expression alongside digital tools, supports the development of emotional competence (18). Through these activities, children aged 6–10 begin to analyze their own actions, take pride in the products of their work, and celebrate their personal achievements in the digital environment. This fosters the development of self-value by increasing their awareness of their uniqueness, abilities, and talents. Additionally, it promotes the value of achievement, symbolizing personal success, and hedonism, which refers to the sensory satisfaction derived from both the process and the result of their work.

While developing information and digital skills in younger students – whether through communication or collaborative activities – encouraging these values is crucial. The awareness of their own personality and strengths during childhood will contribute to the development of a successful individual, both in their future profession and personal life.

A value-based attitude toward mastering online interaction skills – such as netiquette and safe internet behavior – requires fostering in young students an awareness of their own safety and the importance of ethical conduct in online social interactions. «Human beings exist within a vast network of concrete relationships and are intrinsically connected to others» (19, p. 29). Social networks facilitate their social development: individuals meet each other, establish interpersonal relationships, improve communication skills, form moral and ethical

guidelines, etc. (20, p. 18). In view of this, primary school students may sometimes behave recklessly online, openly sharing personal information, quickly connecting with strangers on social networks, or engaging in risky browsing habits. While completing educational tasks, they might carelessly jump from site to site or download programs that contain viruses.

A widespread issue in educational institutions today is bullying, which can also take virtual forms – such as sending insulting messages, creating mockery-based images or videos, and more. This phenomenon gradually erodes social norms that uphold mutual respect, safety, and trust. Even when it begins in a small environment, such as a classroom or school, the normalization of bullying can lead students to lose faith in justice and support systems. This, in turn, fosters alienation in victims, weakens social bonds, and fuels aggression and violence – ultimately laying the groundwork for social anomie. Insufficient social control at this level leads to inadequate social regulation, contributing to broader social decay (21). The victim of bullying feels anxious and may become depressed, which will have negative consequences for them both now and in the future (22). Therefore, it is crucial to prevent aggressive behavior from the outset by fostering an understanding that kindness and universalism should be core guiding values. Students must recognize that virtual spaces are not detached from real life – insulting someone online is equivalent to insulting them in person.

It is also important to encourage younger students to understand the value of time. The learner should value their time for both study and rest. This is particularly important when working with digital information, due to the impact of digital tools on a child's health (mental processes, vision, posture). Understanding of the primary school student the value of time, especially a teacher's time, is crucial. For example, during distance learning, a common issue is students submitting answers or requesting clarification on assignments during odd hours of the day. Working outside of working hours can lead to professional burnout (23). This highlights the interdependence between the value of time and respect for personal boundaries.

The development of a value-based attitude toward mastering the skills of independently identifying and solving basic technical problems – such as detecting malfunctions in digital devices and resolving simple technical issues – requires not only fostering independence but also assimilating the values of causality (understanding that every process or phenomenon generates others, and addressing causes can sometimes eliminate consequences) and assistance (knowing when and whom to turn to for help, especially when a technical issue cannot be resolved independently). An important aspect of forming value-based attitudes in younger students towards mastering information and digital skills is emphasizing the benefits of digital tools and the ability to use them for individuals and society as a whole. These tools are essential for performing various everyday tasks: calling or messaging parents, preparing educational projects, finding interesting videos or images, etc. However, there are also other, more global advantages to using digital tools. For example, maintaining social contacts over geographically significant distances. Close family members (often mothers) who migrate to another country can communicate in real-time with family members and friends who remain at home, search for necessary information, learn a language, and constantly feel emotional support from family members online (24; 25). The benefits of using digital tools can also be demonstrated by the example of people's lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, anti-epidemic measures were implemented, and children were often forced to temporarily suspend their usual social interactions (26). It was through the use of digital tools that communication could continue online. Emphasizing the advantages of using digital tools and engaging in online communication, supported by real-life examples that resonate with children's emotions or are shaped by their experiences, we help form an understanding of the values of these tools. This, in turn, fosters a respectful and mindful attitude toward them and their developers.

### **The experience of primary school teachers regarding the development of positive motivation and value attitude of younger schoolchildren towards mastering information and digital skills**

We conducted a survey among primary school teachers to determine whether they contribute to the development of positive motivation and value-based attitudes in younger students towards mastering information and digital skills, and how they did so. The anonymous survey involved 34 primary school teachers from the city of Ternopil and Ternopil region, who responded to 7 thematic questions.

Regarding the question “Do you consider it necessary to develop positive motivation and value orientations in primary school students towards mastering information and digital skills?” we received the following results: 29 (85.3%) – yes; 5 (14.7%) – mostly. This indicates the importance of the issue for educators, as no one responded negatively.

As for teachers’ contributions to the development of younger students’ motivation to master information and digital skills, 6 (17.6%) do this consistently, 17 (50%) – occasionally, and 11 (32.4%) do not pay attention to it. This allows us to conclude that work on developing primary school students’ motivation to process digital information and use digital devices needs further improvement.

When asked to provide examples of the specific motives that teachers form or consider it appropriate to develop, we received the following responses: the need to learn how to search for information on the internet, the desire to assess the reliability of the data found, the wish to communicate ethically online, the belief in the necessity of safely using the internet, and the desire to receive praise for using digital tools. This generally confirms the theoretical data on the types of motives for younger students to master information and digital skills.

Regarding the type of motivation that teachers believe should be developed or contribute to, 15 (44.1%) educators responded that it should be internal motivation; 14 (41.2%) – both internal and positive external motivation; and 5 (14.7%) – all types, including external negative motiva-

tion. This allows us to state that primary school teachers understand the importance and sustainability of internal motives, but often believe that they are the result of the initial emergence of external motives influenced by societal pressures.

28 teachers (82.4%) consistently contribute to the development of younger students’ value orientations towards mastering information and digital skills, and 6 (17.6%) do so mostly. The absence of negative responses indicates the importance for educators of shaping domain-specific values in primary education students. Among the values they form or consider it appropriate to shape, they listed the following: knowledge, critical thinking, personal “self,” ethics, caution, friendliness, mutual respect, time, health, and independence. This supports our theoretical research on this aspect.

To develop positive motivation and value-based attitudes towards mastering information and digital skills, primary school teachers use various methods and techniques. Among the most commonly used, as reported by the respondents, are traditional methods such as storytelling, conversation, the teacher’s personal example, and case study methods, as well as non-traditional ones like challenges and flash mobs. Depending on the educational situation, methods can transform into techniques. Therefore, we assume that educators meant that simpler methods (storytelling, conversation) can function as both standalone methods and techniques within more complex methods (such as case studies, challenges, flash mobs, or the teacher’s personal example).

In collaboration with primary school teachers, we have developed examples of some methods that are useful for fostering positive motivation and value-based attitudes towards mastering information and digital skills.

The case study method involves students working on a problematic situation based on discussion questions, tasks to complete, or, when necessary, additional information in the form of documents, data, graphs, etc. (27, p. 415). This method can be used to foster younger students’ interest in searching for information online, critically evaluating it, and developing value-based attitudes towards this process.

*Situation 1:* Two fourth graders want to learn more about conflict resolution strategies. Andriy wants to use Google to find information, while Stepan suggests using other search engines (such as Yahoo, Bing, etc.) to ensure the information is comprehensive.

What positions did the students hold? How did their opinions differ, and in what ways were they similar? What do the students consider important (what values do they adhere to?) Have they heard of other search engines besides Google? Why was it important to use other search engines?

*Situation 2:* Olya and Natalia are fourth-grade students. After studying the topic “The Solar System” in their “World Exploration” class, the girls became interested in it and decided to learn more. They used ChatGPT for help and received the following text: “Jupiter is the smallest planet in the Solar System, it has only one moon and no rings. Neptune is the hottest planet, with a surface temperature exceeding 500°C.” The fourth-graders started to argue: Olya says that the text can be trusted, while Natalia believes it should definitely be verified for accuracy.

Why did the heroines argue about the situation? What arguments can be made in defense of each side? What values did each student hold? How can one verify which position is correct? What tools should be learned to do this? Why is it important to learn to critically assess digital information?

*Situation 3:* Lesya and Larysa were assigned to create a map of their local area. Lesya used the AI app Leonardo.ai and received the result. Larysa refuses to use this image.

What caused the students’ argument? Provide arguments to support each side. What was important for each of the characters in this situation? What are the possible solutions to this problem? Why is it important to be able to critically evaluate images generated by AI?

Challenge («Challenge») is a «genre of internet videos in which a blogger performs a task on camera, posts it online, and then challenges a friend or an unlimited number of users to repeat the task» (28, p. 292). This method can be used to stimulate motivation and the acquisition of values related to the

selection and use of digital tools. Tasks can be completed in a specially created internal chat in a convenient messenger, passing the baton to the next participant there.

*Challenge 1* «You need to choose»: Complete the sentence briefly: «It is important to be able to select the necessary digital tools for completing a learning task because...». Pass the baton to a classmate. Ensure that digital tools are not repeated.

*Challenge 2* «Why should we...?»: Explain in 15 seconds why it is important to select and use digital tools for online communication. Pass the baton to a classmate, encouraging them to add a few words. Try to have different perspectives.

*Challenge 3* «I would like to learn...»: Complete the sentence briefly: «I would like to learn to use this app... because...». Challenge a classmate. Try to make sure that the apps do not repeat.

*Challenge 4* «My values»: Name one thing you value when performing tasks with a computer (time, convenience, speed, etc.). Pass the baton to a classmate. Express different opinions.

Flash mob is a phenomenon where a group of people gathers in a public place, performs a random action, and then quickly disperses (29). In elementary schools, flash mobs are organized to study poems with movements. The activity also includes answering the question: “What does this poem teach us? Why is this important?” Students receive information about the flash mob in social networks and messengers, including the time, place, and main instructions. The events take place within the school grounds and during breaks.

Here are some poems for flash mobs, aimed at developing positive motivation and the assimilation of values related to ethical and safe online behavior.

*Flash mob 1* „Anti-spam“

There was a Bunny in the world, He lived in a small hut.

He sent a lot of messages to his friends in the chat.

He sent them spam: text, pictures, emoticons.

The bunny did not listen when he was asked to stop...

*Flash mob 2 „Do Not Offend Online“*

On the social network Fluffy Squirrel registered.

Many of her photos there every day she posted.

But suddenly many haters write things bad.

Because of this the poor squirrel is very sad.

*Flash mob 3 „A Secret“*

The hedgehog told the Fox his secret: at home

He has given a smartphone by his parents.

The fox told about the secret everyone.

She wrote about it on Instagram.

The hedgehog is sad: friendship has an end.

The fox must apologize to his friend.

The Method of Personal Example by the Teacher involves a set of actions that serve as a model for students to follow, and are assimilated by them through the authority of the one performing these actions (30, p. 315). It is appropriate to use this method to stimulate young learners' need to independently identify and solve elementary technical problems and to form thematic values, combining it with role-playing situations and elements of problem-based learning. The teacher creates a problematic situation, finds a solution, and thereby motivates primary school students to acquire the skills they used to solve it. Below, we will describe possible contents for such situations.

*Situation 1.* The laptop signals an alert. A message appears on the screen: "Please connect the charger." The teacher says, "It seems there's an issue with the laptop. It's good to know what to do." The next steps involve connecting the digital device to the network, which resolves the issue.

*Situation 2.* The teacher enters a query into the Google search bar but receives a message on the screen: "No internet connection." The teacher says, "It seems there's an issue with the internet. It's great to know how to fix it." The teacher then reconnects the internet cable or restarts the Wi-Fi router, solving the problem.

*Situation 3.* The teacher tries to visit a website. A message appears on the monitor: "Connection not secure." The teacher says, "It seems there's a problem with access. I can't solve this on my own. It's better to consult a specialist,"

emphasizing that there are issues whose causes and solutions cannot be identified or resolved independently by younger students.

For the successful development of positive motivation and value-based attitudes towards mastering information and digital skills in primary school students, these methods and similar tasks based on them should be used in an integrated manner.

## Conclusion

The development of positive motivation and value-based attitudes in primary school students toward mastering information and digital skills is a crucial first step in enabling them to effectively use digital tools in everyday life and process information digitally. Positive motivation for younger students involves fostering both internal and external (positive) motivations to acquire the skills needed to search for and evaluate information, select and use digital tools, interact online, and solve basic technical problems – each skill set corresponding to specific motivations.

Value-based attitudes toward these skills reflect students' awareness of the importance of mastering digital information processing and online communication, as well as embracing the values of the digital society as a whole.

A survey of primary school teachers revealed that the development of positive motivation and value-based attitudes towards mastering information and digital skills is highly relevant to them. Teachers are actively working to encourage these qualities in younger students by using a variety of methods and techniques. These include traditional methods, such as storytelling, conversation, the teacher's personal example, and case studies, alongside non-traditional approaches like challenges and flash mobs.

Future research should focus on experimentally testing the effectiveness of these methods and techniques in fostering positive motivation and value-based attitudes in primary school students toward mastering information and digital skills.

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# The Impact of Social Support on Youth Education

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Original Article

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## Abstract:

Social support is crucial in shaping youth education, affecting academic performance, emotional well-being, and resilience. This article examines the role of family, peers, teachers, and the community in providing support. It explores different forms of social support—emotional, informational, and material—and presents findings from qualitative research with secondary school students. The study shows that strong social support is linked to better academic outcomes, higher motivation, and reduced stress. It also highlights the lack of support in schools and the need for stronger collaboration between

families and schools. The article concludes with recommendations for educators, parents, and policymakers to strengthen social connections for improved educational experiences.

## Research Method and Study Rationale

The questionnaire survey was carried out using google tools and excel processing of the obtained results. The survey involved 110 respondents who sent answers to all the questions. They were mostly students from the selected school and their sports teammates and friends. Almost 50% of the total population involved were females. The questions in the questionnaire were formulated based on the four-dimensional House model of social support. The four dimensions of social support according to House (1981) are:

- Informational support: the provision of advice, information, or guidance to help solve problems.
- Values support sharing and reinforcing values, beliefs, and attitudes that promote self-esteem and self-worth.
- Emotional support: includes expressions of empathy, love, trust and care.
- Instrumental support: providing practical help or resources, such as financial or task assistance. This model is often used in psychology and sociology to understand different aspects of social support and its impact on people's mental and physical health; we consider it relevant to the subject of our research in an institutional setting.

In our research, we were interested in the role that parents, coaches, friends/peers, and educators play in these domains. We scaled responses into 4 levels: not at all, rarely, often, constantly. The wording of each question was designed to elicit an overall view of the quality of provision of the basic parameters of social support according to the model in question. We will consider the weakest indicators in the different dimensions of social support as an area to be strategically entered in future pedagogical practice. This is where we see the possibility of innovative application of educators who, in addition to their professional portfolio, can contribute to improving the quality of social support and thus to improving the sport performance of pupils.

The role of parents, friends and coaches is more peripheral to the aims of this thesis. We see their place within the social support framework mainly in terms of improving synergy, with the educator becoming the catalyst for the necessary changes.

We are also aware of the weaknesses of our research in the following respects, for example:

- research areas were not specified separately for sport and academic outcomes;
- we did not apply higher order statistical methods of analysis to the results obtained;
- the statistical sample size of 100 represents more indicative potential than statistical significance;
- the questions in the questionnaire could have had more extensive structuring and greater fineness of scaling;
- we did not test any hypotheses specific to the school setting.

Nevertheless, we consider the statistical set of 100 to be a sufficient reference source to make an initial exploration of the issue and a first approximation of practical applications as a result of the data collected. We have not been able to access a similar survey within the Slovak provenance, thus the comparison of our results was limited only to general findings presented in relevant literature from abroad.

## Introduction

The concept of social support has gained significant attention across various scientific disciplines in recent decades. Initially introduced by Sidney Cobb in 1976 in his seminal work, *"Social Support as a Moderator of Life Stress,"* Cobb laid the theoretical foundations for understanding how social ties and interactions impact mental and physical health, highlighting social support as a protective factor against stress. (1) This concept is now widely recognized in fields such as sports, medicine, sociology, psychology, and education.

In recent years, the role of social support in the development of young athletes has emerged

as a key topic in sport psychology and pedagogy. This shift is partly driven by the increasing psychological and emotional pressures faced by today's youth, stemming from factors like the fast-paced nature of modern life, information overload, media saturation, post-COVID shifts in social dynamics, and the rise of online education. Consequently, psychological challenges among primary and secondary school students, as well as higher education students, are becoming more prevalent, as confirmed by both national and international studies (2). These changes emphasize the need for educational systems to integrate comprehensive support for students, addressing not only their cognitive and behavioral development but also their social, moral, and spiritual growth.

Within pedagogy and psychology, social support plays a vital role in shaping the psychological and academic progress of students. While much research has been dedicated to the general influence of social support, the specific mechanisms through which educators impact students remain relatively underexplored (3). Educators, due to their significant role in students' lives, often influence their social and emotional development, sometimes unconsciously, making their support crucial during the formative years. This role has become even more prominent in the wake of the psychological and sociological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (4).

### Definition of Social Support

Since this subject of scientific research originally appeared in Anglo-Saxon provenance, Slovak literature is dependent on translations of foreign terms, which can be quite confusing (5). It is necessary to distinguish between the interrelated terms *social support* and *social integration*. Although both terms are related to the extent to which individuals are integrated into society and the collective, and to their ability to take on responsibilities in the context of belonging and building relationships in the community of which they are part, there is a fundamental difference between them. This lies in the point of view and in the causal factors. *Social integration* relates more to the structure and extent of social relationships and the frequency of the variety of their

interactions; *social support* relates to the type of function of these relationships, their quality, and this in primary regard to the inner world of the person who is socially integrated. While it is true that both - social integration and social support - are interrelated, because it is only through existing social ties and interactions that the attainability of social support is realistic, it is social support that becomes the engine of progress and development of social interactions within social integration (6). It is evident that the quality of a person determines the quality of the relationships he or she creates or becomes part of. Given that humans are intricate entities, and their internal experiences cannot be easily delineated or fully captured, it is understandable that multiple definitions of social support exist. For the purposes of this thesis, we present three such definitions.

Cohen and Wills' definition is based on their stress buffering model, in which they defined social support as "resources obtained through social relationships that help individuals cope with stress and increase their ability to adapt to life changes" (7). Both authors believe that high quality and relevant social support can reduce the negative effects of stress by providing emotional and practical support. This definition is very clear and clearly highlights the role of social support in the context of coping with stress and adaptation to change. Particularly in the post-pandemic C-19 period, the importance of social support in different social contexts has increased in importance (8).

Another definition of social support, according to Thoits, is based on the direct effects model, with particular emphasis on "the process by which social relationships provide the emotional, informational, material, and other problem-solving tools needed to cope with stress" (9). This definition focuses on the process aspect of social support and emphasises its dynamic nature. It identifies similar types of support (emotional, informational, material) and their role in coping with stress, making it a comprehensive tool for understanding different forms of support. According to this model, social support has a direct positive impact on an individual's well-being, independent of the presence of stressful situations. Understood in this way, regular social sup-

port leads to higher levels of self-esteem, motivation and overall satisfaction.

House’s (1981) definition of social support is “a resource provided through interactions that helps individuals deal with stressful situations” (10). By social support he meant all appropriate and corresponding means and resources provided through interactions with others that help individuals deal with their stressful situations. According to him, social support includes emotional, informational and instrumental support. This definition is practical and concrete because it classifies social support into four understandable categories (emotional, material, informational, and appreciative support). It is suitable for applications in a variety of fields, including work stress, because it clearly distinguishes types of support that can be easily identified and measured. Its clarity makes it useful for both research and applied practice, for example in health or social work. On the other hand, although the definition focuses on specific types of social support, it may be overly simplistic, which runs some risk of reductionism. With this in mind, we have based our research on this paradigm of social support.

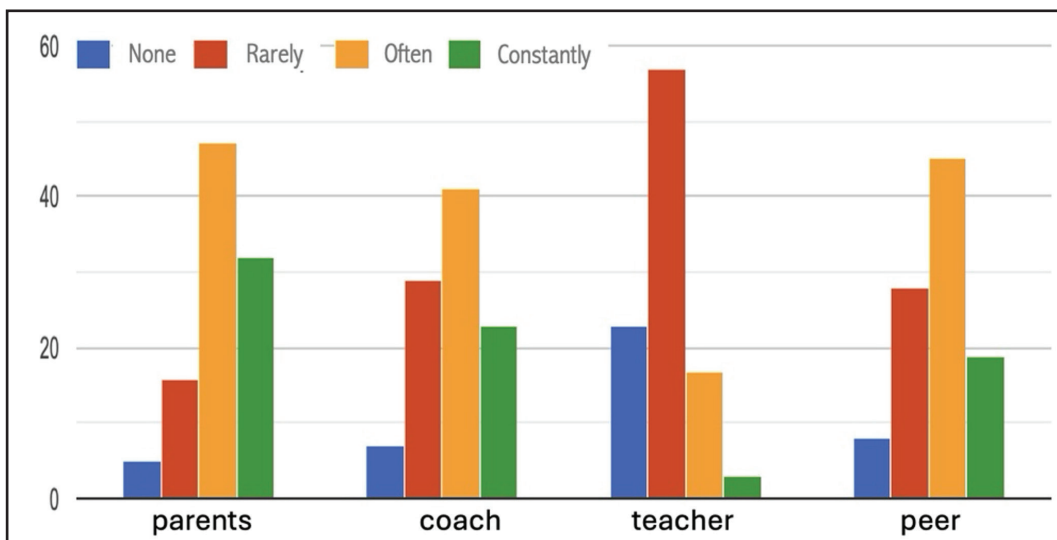
A recent comprehensive comparative study (11) highlights that social support comprises a multifaceted array of factors affecting an individual’s capacity to handle life’s difficul-

ties. These factors are influenced by a network of diverse inputs within social interactions, and as such, there is currently no universally agreed-upon definition of social support. This research explored the impact of a hierarchical model of social support (family, friends, and teachers) concerning various types of social support (emotional, material, informational) and examined the correlation between perceived social support and actual social support. The researchers discovered that robust social support networks greatly enhance adolescents’ resilience to stress and life’s challenges, resulting in improved psychological well-being and higher academic performance. In the context of contemporary society, characterised by a pervasive sense of self-preoccupation (12), the issue of social support assumes paramount importance. This is not only due to the escalating prevalence of psychological distress among students but also considering concerns regarding the deleterious effects of digital technologies and the dissemination of “fake news” online, and “the potential influence on recipients’ behaviour within the digital environment” (13).

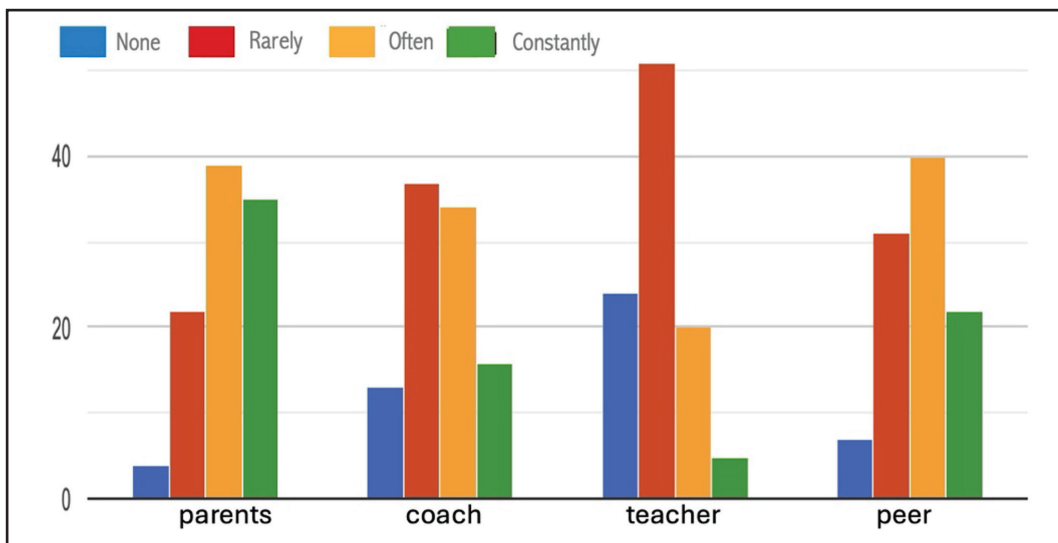
### Study Results and Analysis

From the extensive results obtained in our survey, we present the most relevant ones to the topic.

**Figure 1** Information support sources rate



**Figure 2** Sources of social support pertaining to the quality of self-esteem



**Figure 3** Emotional support – an assessment of the quality of various sources

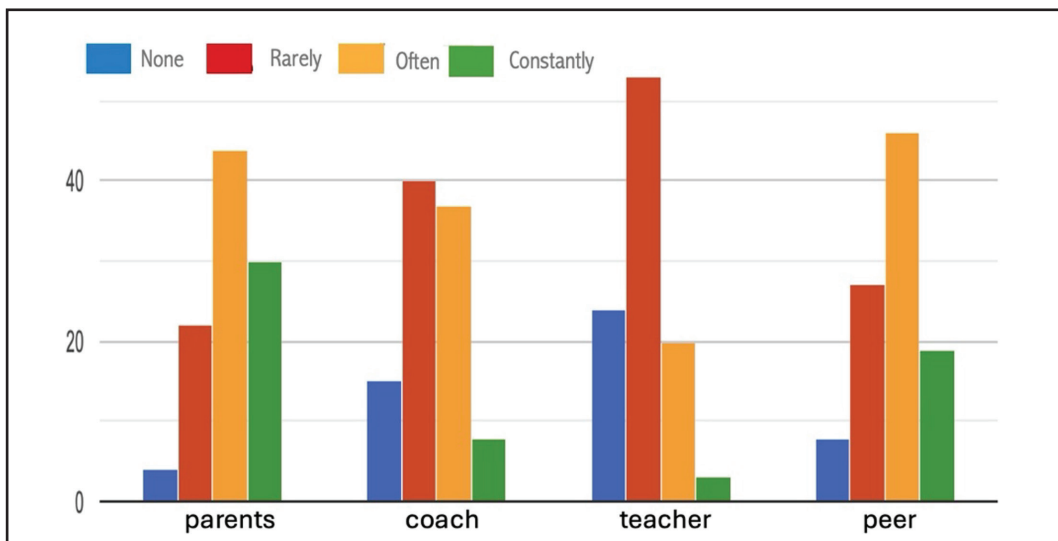
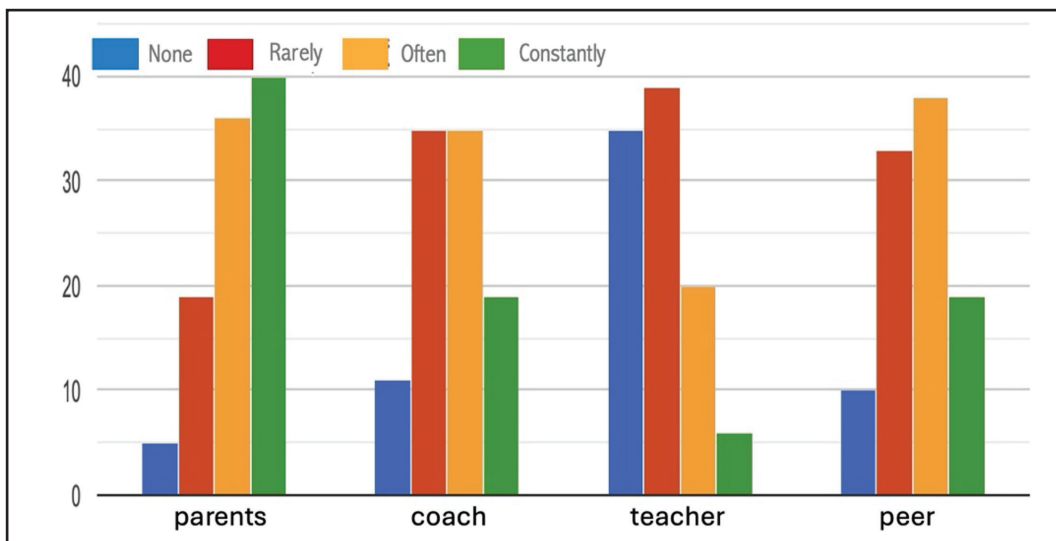


Figure one of the survey results reveals that the family is the leading source of information support, with the coach, teammates, and teachers following in that order, with teachers having the least influence. This could be attributed to the ambiguity surrounding the term “information support,” whether it refers to information specific to the sporting interest or general tools needed for achieving goals, such as academic goals and outcomes in the educator’s context. The research emphasizes the need to bolster

the educator’s role and capabilities in the life of a young student who might experience varying degrees of information support absence.

As shown in Figure two, the findings reveal that the family of the student/athlete is the most significant factor in developing healthy self-esteem. In contrast, educators have the least positive influence on social support. It is noteworthy that respondents considered their coaches to be less important to their self-worth than their teammates. This finding requires further explo-

**Figure 4** Instrumental support – resource efficiency

ration to determine the causes. One possible explanation is the poor communication skills of coaches in building self-esteem. Nonetheless, the importance of classmates and peers in social support is recognized.

Figure 3's analysis demonstrates that teachers are perceived as providing the least emotional support, with coaches, teammates, and family ranking next in line. The negative aspects tied to educators are acknowledged. These results emphasize the necessity and urgency of addressing social support. Educators should not allow the quest for academic success to obstruct their capacity to provide emotional support like that of a coach. The expectations for educators are especially high when student-athletes are less driven to excel academically. Students who prioritize sports often exhibit less interest in academics, as seen in schools. This could lead to a diminished need for emotional support. However, students seeking academic enhancement may need emotional support and encouragement from their teachers.

Figure 4 reveals that the family is the most crucial source of instrumental support among those studied. This aligns with the respondents' age group, indicating their financial and practical reliance on their families. Surprisingly, teammates received higher ratings for instrumental support than coaching practices in this area.

Teachers had the lowest ratings. This calls for further research to uncover the context and causes of this situation and to suggest possible areas for pedagogical changes to improve the results. While educators have minimal ability to directly influence the coach-parent relationship, they can initiate meetings and activities within their primary role that strengthen the parent-coach-educator triad and modify their teaching methods to enhance social support.

## Effective strategies for educators

Drawing from the analysis of theoretical insights and empirical data in our study, we can propose several actionable suggestions for educators that may enhance the psychological and performance growth of students or young athletes.

### 1. Providing steady emotional support

Emotional support can include simple acts of empathy and caring, such as personal conversations where teachers actively listen and show that they care about the students' feelings and experiences. For example, after difficult tests or competitions, a teacher can provide individual feedback that includes not only technical aspects but also emotional support. This approach can include praise for effort and effort, even if the results were not ideal, and encouragement to

improve in the future. Regular encouragement and positive reinforcement are other important aspects of emotional support. Educators can use motivational phrases, recognition of achievements and encouragement before and after competitions to help athletes maintain high levels of motivation. An example would be the use of motivational bulletin boards in training facilities where individual or team achievements are posted, which promotes a positive atmosphere and team spirit.

Educators can also work to create an overall supportive environment where students feel safe and valued (14). This may include organizing team-building activities, social events outside of practices, and regular team meetings where progress, goals, and challenges are discussed. Such activities promote team cohesion and allow students to build strong relationships with each other which will create a supportive environment for their individual development and growth (15). The dynamics of emotional support depend not only on the individual teacher's approach to the student but also on how he or she can establish a collective *modus operandi* where there is a synergy of positive emotional support stimuli among the individual members of the classroom collective. Empathy, encouragement, positive reinforcement, and fostering a supportive and relationally creative environment are crucial elements that coaches and educators should consciously incorporate into their methods (16). This approach enables them to effectively assist students in achieving their full potential while cultivating a positive and inspiring atmosphere.

## 2. Fostering a positive team environment

One of the primary educational challenges in fostering a positive team environment is ensuring that every team member feels significant and appreciated (17). Teachers must strive to create an inclusive setting where every voice is acknowledged, and every contribution is respected. This can be difficult, particularly in classrooms with diverse backgrounds and personalities.

Another challenge is managing conflicts and misunderstandings among students in the class-

room. Teachers need to be equipped to resolve issues swiftly and effectively to prevent conflicts from escalating and disrupting team dynamics. This involves the ability to engage in open and honest conversations, offer constructive criticism, and reach compromises acceptable to all involved. However, a fundamental requirement for success is that the teacher is well-acquainted with their students and maintains a personal connection with them, which goes beyond merely meeting the educational goals of the school curriculum (18).

Practical tips for fostering a team environment:

- Team-building exercises: planning team-building exercises, like group outings, sports events, or theatre visits, can enhance connections among team members and encourage collaboration.
- Unified objectives and principles: Establishing shared objectives and principles that all team members endorse can contribute to a sense of solidarity and emotional safety.
- Transparent communication: Promoting transparent communication within the team, where each member can openly share their ideas and emotions, aids in avoiding misunderstandings and builds trust, which is essential for emotional backing.
- Consistent team gatherings: organizing consistent team gatherings to review progress, setbacks, obstacles, and strategies can ensure all members are aligned and reinforce team unity

## 3. Efficient conflict resolution

As today's youth struggles with relational conflicts, educators must adeptly manage disputes and issues that may occur between themselves and students, as well as among students. This entails transparent communication, empathetic listening, and collaborative problem-solving (19). Conflicts may emerge due to various factors, such as differing expectations, misunderstandings, and personal differences.

Resolving conflicts effectively is crucial for sustaining a positive and productive teacher-student relationship. According to Hellison (20), effective conflict resolution "involves open communication, empathetic listening, and finding

common solutions.” Educators who can address conflicts constructively can enhance their rapport with students and foster an environment where everyone feels valued and supported. This lays the groundwork for delivering effective social support.

Educators must ensure that learners comprehend they can freely express their thoughts and feelings without fear of their grades being impacted. This includes organizing frequent meetings where students can express their worries, recommendations, or any other input related to school and classroom activities. Numerous studies (21) have demonstrated that open communication reduces conflict and strengthens team cohesion.

Offering students opportunities to cultivate leadership skills serves as an effective tool for conflict prevention. This may involve assigning tasks, responsibilities, and guiding team projects or subtasks (22). Cultivating leadership skills enhances student confidence and participation, fostering a supportive peer environment. Likewise, Kouzes and Posner’s research endorses the notion that nurturing leadership skills boosts team dynamics and overall performance (23). Such an environment is suitable for delivering social support that operates not only vertically (teacher-student) but also horizontally (student-student).

## Conclusion

Society is shifting and culture is perpetually evolving. Digital technologies are significantly transforming the young generation’s awareness and emotional sphere, including their ability to interact socially (24). In the last five years, there has been a substantial increase in mental health issues among young people. Statistics reveal that the number of children and young people diagnosed with mental disorders has risen by more than 70%. This increase has been driven by several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which has greatly exacerbated the mental health of this age group (25). Children and young people experienced increased stress, isolation, educational interruptions, bullying, and family issues, which contributed to the decline in their mental health. The present-day digital

age, characterised by an abundance of entertainment and media, is observed to be contributing to a decline in critical thinking skills, particularly among younger demographics (26). This phenomenon underscores the imperative for a resurgence of “metaphysical components within educational curricula”(27) and the moral development of young individuals.

Based on the findings of our theoretical and empirical research:

**1. Social support alleviates stress.** Social support, particularly emotional and informational support, can greatly alleviate stress and anxiety levels among students. Our research indicated a deficiency in emotional and informational support from educators.

**2. Direct impact of social support.** According to Thoits’ direct effects model, social support has a direct positive impact on students’ self-esteem and motivation. Appreciative support, which includes acknowledgment and praise, can enhance students’ intrinsic motivation and inspire them to strive for performance improvement. Our research uncovered a lack of interest in students’ inner world within the school environment and inadequate inspirational guidance from educators regarding students’ career prospects.

**3. The ecological aspect of social support.** The present study is rooted in the theoretical framework of House’s model, which has been instrumental in highlighting the pivotal role of diverse environmental layers in shaping individual development. The findings underscore the significance of not only direct interactions between educators and students, but also the broader contexts of family, peer, and school environments play a crucial role in the holistic development of students. The primary role of family and peers in providing social support to respondents was confirmed in the present study. Concurrently, the results aligned with the understanding that social support is a multi-layered phenomenon, the mechanism of which remains unexplained for us and thus continues to be a subject for further research.

**4. Practical applications of the theoretical models:** the proposed integration of theoretical findings into practice suggests that edu-

cators should more actively offer emotional and informational support, adopt an individualized approach, cultivate positive relationships and a team atmosphere, resolve conflicts effectively, and support the long-term development and career planning of their students. This is a complex challenge that extends beyond the scope and capabilities of this paper and highlights fundamental issues related to the quality of our educational system and the competence of coaches and educators themselves.

We believe that our theoretical and empirical research has contributed to a better understanding of the theoretical models and frameworks in sport psychology and pedagogy and has provided inspirational insights into the professional discourse on the importance of social support for the school environment. The identification of key factors and mechanisms of social support may provide a foundation for further empirical studies and research, which may extend the existing literature and lead to new discoveries and insights in this area. The goal, however, is the development of the person and his or her ability to socialize in a way that seeks not only his or her own benefit (28).

The performance of Slovak students in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) over recent years shows stagnation or a slight decline in educational quality. Students score below average in literacy, mathematics, and science compared to other OECD countries. This trend highlights the necessity for fundamental changes in the education system, such as modernizing curricula, supporting teachers, and enhancing student motivation. Enhancing the quality of teaching and the efficiency of the educational process is crucial for improved competitiveness (29,30). The findings of this work strongly support our conviction that healthy transformational change in our education system must encompass the implementation of social support in all its aspects (31,32,33).

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# The status of citizens with disabilities in the social and legal field

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Original Article

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## Abstract:

**The main objective** of the theoretical-empirical study is the analysis and identification of the position of citizens with disabilities in the social and legal sphere. The authors point to factors that influence the perception of a person with a health disability as a healthy intact person. They legislatively define the position in the social sphere and point to the social position and status in the conditions of the Slovak Republic.

**Methods.** In qualitative research, the authors identified and investigated the current social position and legal position of

citizens with disabilities and pointed to the knowledge of these citizens in terms of legal status, taking into account obtaining a job or dependent activity and the resulting independence. The authors evaluated the impact of social and mass media awareness of the possibilities of benefits resulting from the status of a person with a disability. Using the method of group interviews and a summary protocol, the authors documented the statements of participants deliberately selected from the group of persons with disabilities. Through analytical induction, they established final hypotheses, the result of which is a theory.

**Conclusions and discussion.** The main contribution of the final part is the awareness of the sensitivity of the topic, which the authors supported by identifying and analyzing the goals. Based on the generation of final hypotheses, we can confirm that the participants had less information about their rights arising from the status of a citizen with a disability, these persons can define the concepts quite clearly and at the same time they do not identify with the claim about advantage over the majority group of citizens. In the last hypothesis, the authors point to the insufficiently broad possibility of obtaining information from mass media serving to expand knowledge in the socio-legal field.

**Conclusion.** All urgent problems in the socio-legal status and in the field of employment of disabled citizens, their occupational rehabilitation need to continue to be addressed as a priority, because statistical indicators point to an annual increase in the number of job applicants with disabilities. This growth points to a significant disadvantage of these citizens on the labor market. The health damage of these persons is accompanied by their low qualifications, which causes employers to show no interest in them and rather prefer healthy citizens.

## Introduction

The legal and social status of citizens with disabilities is a social issue that has resonated in Slovakia in recent years. Since this is a disadvantaged group of citizens that deserves special attention and, above all, the number of people with various disabilities is increasing, it is appropriate to start paying closer attention to the issues of life, living conditions and legal conditions of these people.

### Unfavorable health status of a citizen with disabilities

The Social Insurance Act works with the term „unfavorable health status“. According to Section 71, paragraph 2, a „long-term unfavorable health status“ is a health status that causes a decrease

in the ability to perform gainful activity and is expected to last longer than one year. The decrease in the ability to perform gainful activity is assessed by comparing the physical, mental and sensory abilities of an insured person with a long-term unfavorable health status and the physical, mental and sensory abilities of a healthy natural person (Act No. 461/2003 Coll.). The Employment Services Act uses the term „disability“. According to Section 9(1), a citizen with a disability is a citizen recognized as disabled according to a special regulation. In accordance with Section 9(2), a citizen with a disability proves disability and the percentage of decrease in his or her ability to perform gainful activity due to a physical disorder, mental disorder or behavioral disorder by a decision or notification of the

Social Insurance Company or by an assessment of a social security department according to a special regulation (Act No. 280/2013 Coll. on Employment Services and on Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended). Disability according to Levická and Mrázová (2004) is a disorder of the physical, mental or intellectual function of an individual with permanent consequences associated with limited educational ability, limited working ability, increased demands on health and social care with a significantly reduced quality of life. Hartl, Hartlová (2000) characterize disability as any mental, physical, temporary, long-term or permanent disorder or handicap that prevents an individual from effectively adapting to the ordinary demands of life. The Labour Code uses the term „disability“. According to Section 40, Section 8 of the Labour Code, an employee with a disability for the purposes of this Act is an employee recognised as disabled under a special regulation who submits a decision on a disability pension to his or her employer (Act No. 311/2001 Coll. Labour Code). The Act on cash benefits for compensation for severe disability uses the term „severe disability“. According to Section 2, Section 3, severe disability is a disability with a degree of functional impairment of at least 50%. For the purposes of this Act, a functional impairment is a lack of physical abilities, sensory abilities or mental abilities of a natural person which, in view of the expected development of the disability, will last longer than 12 months (Act No. 447/2008 Coll. on cash benefits for compensation for severe disability). According to Section 2, Letter a) of the Education Act, a child with a disability or a pupil with a disability is a child or pupil with a mental disability, hearing disability, visual disability, physical disability, impaired communication skills, autism or other pervasive developmental disorders or multiple disabilities (Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education).

Strieženec (1996) and Fila (2024) understand it as harm caused by a physical or mental disorder or a combination thereof.

### **Social status**

Social status or also social position. It is an imprecisely defined term used in the

environment in the sense of the place, position of an individual in the structure of a certain social group or organization, where the substitute term social position or sometimes social role is also used (Leskova, Haburajova-Ilavska, 2023). Social status (lat. status = attitude, figure, establishment, conditions, well-being), in the most general understanding, this term is used as a summary expression of the social position of a person in a certain society, or in a group associated with a certain degree of appreciation from others. (Zenelaga, et al. 2024). Each social status is associated with a certain set of rights and obligations (Árpová, Árpová, 2024, Janacková, 2024). Social status and social role reflect a certain social position and structure. Social status is assigned a certain social prestige, while social role is associated with certain cultural patterns of behavior that are expected of a given individual (Kondrla et al., 2023; Petrovič et al, 2023, 2024).

Social status is a more permanent position and function of individuals within a social system. It expresses a position in the hierarchy of social prestige based on the innate, acquired and attributed characteristics of the individual, while this more permanent position is of course also connected and expressed by role behavior. (Mahrik, Kralik, 2024).

We distinguish three types of status:

- innate (gender, age),
- acquired (acquired social prestige),
- attributed (conditioned by age, socio-economic position, authority).

Status is usually associated with symbols - a doctor is distinguished from a nurse by his clothes, soldiers have rank insignia. Status symbols are its external signs and allow group members to accurately perceive the status of others and behave appropriately towards them. All of the factors described above, i.e. internal dimensions of personality, valid social norms, adopted social roles and the status associated with them, influence the nature of social behavior.

The form of social behavior is individually different and social situations also require the application of different behavior (Budayová, 2024b).

However, since many social situations have

the character of standard situations, categories of social behavior have been defined, called styles of social behavior (Árpová, 2023, Bursová, 2024, Oravcová, 2004, Stan, Pavlikova, 2024). Certain rights and obligations are attributed to each social status.

In every culture, the dualism of male and female genders is manifested, to which different characteristics, rights and obligations are attributed, especially in the provision and upbringing of children. For the disabled, their status or role is expressed in advance, although it may not always be an obvious sanction. The creation of appropriate measures to achieve an adequate standard of living and social protection for persons with disabilities is directly obliged by Article 28 of the Convention. This applies in particular to the area of social insurance, state social support and social assistance, as well as aspects of housing for persons with disabilities and their families. In the Slovak Republic, the special rights of persons with disabilities in the area of social insurance are implemented mainly in the form of providing a disability pension due to a decrease in the ability to perform gainful activity (National Program for the Development of Living Conditions for Persons with Disabilities).

The Anti-Discrimination Act divides the concept of discrimination into direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and unjustified sanction; discrimination is also an instruction to discriminate and an incitement to discriminate. The relevant Act also provides for discrimination on the grounds of disability, which also includes discrimination on the grounds of a previous disability or discrimination against a person who, based on external signs, could be presumed to be a person with a disability. Furthermore, discrimination on the grounds of disability is not objectively justified differential treatment, which consists in establishing a condition of health fitness for access to employment or a condition for performing certain activities in employment, if the nature of this employment or activity requires it. (Svoboda, et al. 2024). Discrimination is not differential treatment on the grounds of age or disability in the provision of

insurance services, if such differential treatment results from a different level of risk verifiable by statistical or similar data and the conditions of insurance services are appropriate to this risk (National Programme for the Development of Living Conditions for Persons with Disabilities).

### **Empirical findings**

Using the group interview method, we clarified and documented the statements of individuals selected for this research. It was a specific and targeted selection of participants who had to meet the criteria and be classified in the group - a citizen with a disability according to the legislation. We will establish final hypotheses based on preliminary hypotheses. The starting point of analytical induction will be theory.

The main goal of the research part of the rigorous thesis is to describe the current social status and legal status of citizens with disabilities and to point out the knowledge of their legal status, taking into account obtaining a job or dependent activity and the resulting independence.

In order to fulfill the main goal of the research, we set partial goals of qualitative research using the group interview method (focus group).

1. Identify and classify the subjective assessments of participants in legal and social assessment.
2. Map the opinions of participants whether they can distinguish between the concepts of social status and legal status and awareness.
3. To evaluate the impact of social and mass media awareness about the possibilities of „benefits“ resulting from the status of a person with a disability.

We selected four participants, represented by 3 women and one man from the geographical area of the Spišská Nová Ves district. Participants with different types of education and approximately the same age category from 30 to 43 years were included in the research.

### **Information about the participants**

We obtained data about the participants directly from them and they provided us with their name and age. In order to maintain

**Table 1** Research questions for qualitative research participants

Basic questions	Supplementary questions
Do you think that the social status of citizens with disabilities is more protected by law and legislation than other citizens?	What do you understand by the term social status? What do you understand by the term legal status of a citizen?
Is the current situation with the possibility of applying yourself in working life as a citizen with a disability good?	Do you think that legal status includes extensive knowledge of the law, and those who do not have it cannot fully use their opportunities? Do you think that you receive enough information from the mass media (i.e. television, radio, Internet) to learn everything about your options? Do you know about any options that give you an advantage in legislation? For example, N
Do you think that by getting a job, your status and life have changed and given you greater opportunities compared to if you were only receiving a disability pension?	Have you ever used or are you currently using any service to which you are entitled because you are a citizen with a disability? When looking for a job, did you feel your handicap was an advantage or disadvantage during job interviews?

Source: own processing

anonymity, which was also a condition of the participants, we marked them with the letters A,B,C,D. We assured the participants that their personal data would not be used for any purposes other than the purposes of the specific research.

- A: man, 43 years old, employed through the Labor Office in a car repair shop as a sales clerk,  
 B: woman, 30 years old, unemployed, fully retired on disability,  
 C: woman, 62 years old, employed in the state administration, not specified,  
 D: woman, 59 years old, retired.

During the research, we came across some facts that did not affect the main research, but in a way they led us to change the auxiliary questions for the overall evaluation of the initial hypotheses. Qualitative research allowed us to evaluate the participants' answers in the form of an interview in which we find out the answers to the questions asked and thus we can adjust or direct the interview to specific topics with auxiliary questions. However, it is important, as J. Hendl (2008) states, that the main group of data collection methods in empirical research consists of listening to the story, asking people questions and obtaining their answers.

Questioning generally includes various types of interviews, questionnaires, scales and tests. These methods can be used separately as in questionnaire surveys, or in combination with other methods. Participants will answer with free answers from which we will evaluate their answers and use analytical induction to determine the final hypothesis. Since we assume that the legal regulation of the status of citizens with disabilities provides sufficient opportunities and is sufficient, the questions for the participants are created so that in the first part of the interview they provide a picture of whether and how the participants master the subjective basic concepts. In the second part of the interview, the questions were created so that they provide a picture of more detailed knowledge of legal awareness and of the information provided by general mass media. In the third part of the interview, we prepared questions about the specific experience of citizens with disabilities, which are focused on practical experiences with using the opportunities provided by the legal framework of the Slovak Republic.

We performed the transcription of the group interview using the summary protocol technique, the level of which is defined by the generality

of the information provided. The answers were given in Slovak, but also in the Spiš dialect, therefore we provide them to me exactly in Slovak.

### **Analytical induction and hypothesis generation in qualitative research**

Preliminary hypothesis 1: We assume that participants control their rights and their extended framework and have sufficient ability to use them so that they can fulfill their work ambitions associated with a sufficiently generated income, so that they can improve their social status. During the interview, we found that the interviewed participants know their rights to a certain extent, which does not exceed the knowledge of an ordinary citizen. (Slobodová et al, 2024). Participants do not see or feel elements of positive discrimination resulting from various legal norms in their own lives. According to the statements, in our opinion, this is rather a low implementation of measures by society, employers and organizations. The enforceability or implementation of conditions favoring disabled citizens, in our opinion, is not sufficiently motivating and therefore organizations often move in the direction of mandatory fulfillment instead of creating appropriate conditions. A good basis and motivation for organizations can be the UN Convention. With its elaboration and vision of fulfillment by all countries that participated in the ratification, it creates a framework for better conditions and an easier life for these citizens.

Final hypothesis 1: We assume that the participants who participated in the group interview had less information about their rights arising from the status of a citizen with a disability.

Preliminary hypothesis 2: We assume that the participants can distinguish between the concepts of social status and legal status and feel the protection and elements of positive discrimination of the laws. According to our preliminary hypothesis, the interviewed participants will be able to define the basic concepts that we are monitoring in the research, namely the concept of social status and the concept of legal status, in order to be able

to answer the basic question No. 1, whether they think that „the social status of citizens with disabilities is more protected by law and legislation compared to other citizens?“ All participants answered the same, namely negatively. The interview resulted in the opinion that the current situation is not satisfactory for them and showed us a kind of mirror of social responsibility, which reflects the real state of society and gives an answer to the question of whether we are truly a developed society in the European area (Budayová, 2024a). In defining the concept of social status, the participants had a very clear idea of what they consider social status and almost all of them were conceptually unified. In contrast to the question of legal status, where they generalized this concept to subjective needs and adapted this concept from their own perspective. The truth is that the question of legal status and its meaning was conceived broadly, but it undeniably followed the main goal, which was to improve their position in society.

Final hypothesis 2: We assume that more than 90% of citizens with disabilities can define the concepts quite clearly from their point of view and at the same time the same percentage is not identified with the claim of advantage over the majority group of citizens.

Preliminary hypothesis 3: We assume that participants are interested in expanding their knowledge and the ability to actively search for information directly related to them, if this information is available. Based on the information obtained through interviews with participants, we came to the conclusion that, in our opinion, mass media do not devote sufficient space to information in the socio-legal field. In our opinion, these topics seem to be outdated and not very interesting for television, radio or the press to publish them to such an extent that they reach the widest possible group of people with disabilities, and this is despite the fact that the informational influence of mass media, its potential, and its reach among the public are significant (Tkáčová et al., 2023; Tkáčová, Kondrla, Svoboda, 2024). Therefore, 60% of our participants responded negatively to this topic .... not like I mentioned before, if I don't go and ask everywhere what is happening and what

I can use, I don't even know half of it. .... no, not at all. I don't feel that there is a large amount of information on television or radio... Maybe on the Internet, but I have a hard time finding something like that there. .... There are not very few of them. and the remaining 20% could not express themselves or were not interested in this information .... no. And I can't say.

Final hypothesis 3: We assume that more than 60% of citizens with disabilities do not have a sufficiently wide opportunity to obtain information from mass media serving to expand knowledge in the socio-legal field.

## Conclusion

Citizens with disabilities are motivated to get a job and the resulting social status, but they constantly encounter the barrier of a society that is not ready to create conditions for their personal growth and career.

Employers and organizations are partially motivated, but not enough to create, for example, conditions for barrier-free access. This applies to older buildings and objects, where creating such access would be expensive and their potential is limited (Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2023, 2024). Furthermore, there are employers' prejudices against citizens with disabilities and fears that they will be frequent „marauders“ and a problem item, although experience shows that these are honest, hard-working and often exemplary employees (Petrovic et al, 2024). The perception of work by citizens with disabilities is not only about the issue of financial reward, but above all about the need to be a useful member of society (Hamarová, et al. 2024) with appropriate responsibility, which also increases their self-confidence, professional knowledge and of course their social status and independence from the state benefits system. Through research, we have come to the conclusion that the social status of citizens with disabilities is closely linked to their legal status, and that their social status is directly proportional to the legal regulations that benefit them and at the same time motivate economic entities to create conditions suitable for their personal and career growth and thus a better social and legal status.

## We briefly stated our goals as follows:

1. To identify and classify the subjective assessments of participants in the legal and social assessment. For this goal, we focused on determining the real state of the interviewed sample of respondents, who gave us a subjective opinion on the basic conceptual criteria of this work. Our research or focus interview showed that the initial hypothesis changed during the interview with the respondents and formed into the final hypothesis.
2. To map the participants' opinions on whether they can distinguish between the concepts of social status and legal status and awareness. In this part of our interview, we focused on how the respondents understand the basic concepts of our work, but at the same time they also provided information on what they expect from these concepts. This is interesting information for further research.
3. To evaluate the impact of social and mass media awareness about the possibilities of „advantages“ resulting from the status of a person with a disability. Participants could express themselves on this topic by subjectively evaluating their own experiences from their lives and experiences. Participants expressed negative opinions on the questions of awareness in almost all cases.

## Recommendations for the theory

- the urgency of further solutions and deepening of solutions in the area of disabled citizens
- development, implementation and updating of necessary measures to increase the quality of life and ensure easier access to information leading to the use of these services
- creation of motivational conditions for organizations, employers and associations that could provide more space and opportunities for the physically disabled
- education leading to greater empathy and an independent approach of entities providing employment to voluntarily participate in the participation of these citizens in the work process.

### Recommendations for practice

- Implement the solutions developed by the UN Convention to the maximum extent possible, so that we can rank among modern states that know how to use the human potential hidden in these people and create conditions for the sustainability of the economy and the economy.
- Monitor and effectively adapt legislation to the needs of this group of citizens and, in particular, try to create a method of precise information and at the same time the possibility of using the information obtained in real life.
- For a successful start and the satisfaction of all stakeholders, it would be appropriate, in our opinion, to create much better conditions for the employment of citizens with disabilities in order to obtain two-way information about the abilities of these citizens, which they can provide and at the same time eliminate the concerns of economic entities from this group (Králík, 2023; Králík, et al. 2023; Vaľko et al., 2024),
- Within the framework of education, awareness and marketing tools, instill information about the benefits, reliability, loyalty and all other positive qualities of these citizens, which they can provide to employers, but also society.
- Strengthen the role of mass media in disseminating socio-legal information to citizens with disabilities, as media can shape public awareness (Tkáčová et al., 2024) and provide accessible, comprehensible, and up-to-date information on their rights, benefits, and opportunities. Increasing media engagement in this area could help bridge the information gap and enhance the social participation of individuals with disabilities (Kondrla, 2023; Tkáčová, Pavlikova, 2024; Tkáčová, Kondrla, Svoboda, 2024).

### Recommendations for research

- Continue research and topics of the legal and social status of citizens with disabilities.
- Based on the analysis, adapt, revise and update information on the needs of citizens with disabilities.
- Verify and examine hypotheses about the functionality of the motivation of economic

entities and their later functionality even without significant support.

- Examine whether the conditions created by the state correspond to the current time and need (Kondrla et al., 2024a,b).

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# Innovative Educational Technologies as the Tool of Soft Skills Development in the Context of Higher Education Transformation

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## Abstract:

The research aims to assess the ways of professional and personal development of university students based on soft skills development using innovative educational technologies that comprehensively affect the educational process. The study

aims to achieve this by solving the following tasks: conducting expert surveys (respondents are university teachers and students) to determine the most effective educational technologies for soft skills development and creating methodological materials.

The research uses the following methods: questionnaires, expert surveys, observations, and a pedagogical experiment (ascertaining, formative, summative).

The article considers the problem of improving teaching methods and techniques, modernization of organizational forms, and educational and methodological support for the soft skills development of university students, using the example of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the West Ukrainian National University. The material of the study is the empirical experience of applying the educational process of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the West Ukrainian National University, developing soft skills of students using innovative educational technologies within the framework of the Soft Skills School optional course. The experimental use of innovative educational technologies within the course mentioned, proved the students' interest in the problem of soft skills development, contributed to the development of their critical thinking, and increased the ability to apply knowledge in new situations, and developed creativity and intellectual capabilities of the students. The use of innovative technologies has several limitations, related mainly to procedural issues of their application in the educational process.

The article develops a discussion on soft skills as well as active and interactive teaching methods aimed at forming students' ability for self-development and self-learning for the effective implementation of possible scenarios of the trajectory of their professional development.

## Introduction

The determining factor of the globalization process in the contemporary world is higher education, which is in the process of constant reformation, modernization, and adaptation to the market economy conditions (1). The use of human resources requires innovative models and development technologies in the higher education system (2; 3; 4; 5; 6). In January 2022, the European Commission outlined the focus of European education policy on the search for innovative university education strategies (7). This document identifies the need to adapt university education to the rapid evolution of graduate skills requirements (8). The modern labor market requires multifunctional

specialists who can automate routine tasks (9; 10) and develop or create innovative products (11). Today, even the most capable specialists work inefficiently, especially in a team (12; 13; 14). We assume that this is not only because of a lack of meta-skills. Being absorbed in daily work, specialists do not notice evident changes in the subject area and society (15), do not know how to manage the impact of modern technologies on life (16), and are captured by behavioral patterns and stereotypes successfully used in the past, and do not understand that they are not effective in new, rapidly changing conditions. People are trying to do today's work with yesterday's tools. Therefore, the demand for specialists with multi-potential

will remain relevant for many years. Employers will choose creative, cross-functional graduates who can adapt to changes and constantly strive to update their tools.

The demand for cross-disciplinarity has become not only a European but also a global trend that has not lost its relevance for several years (17). One topic combines issues of natural sciences and humanities (18): IT and psychology, medicine and events, natural sciences and PR, project management, and organizational psychology (19). For several years, there has been a demand for T-shaped specialists who are experts in at least one field but are professional and actively developing in related fields (20). Due to the development of digital transformation, communication skills such as change management, leadership, collaboration, and meta-skills such as mindfulness, emotional intelligence, flexibility, adaptability, and stress management have become in demand (21; 22; 64). According to Harvard University research, the development and availability of soft skills already determine the professional success of graduates by 85%, while hard skills only by 15%.

Despite the high demand from employers, working professionals improve their soft skills only to a small extent (23; 24). Therefore, they cannot meet the requirement of the century - possession of a set of non-specialized (25; 26), but essential for career and life success, soft skills that are responsible for high productivity and are cross-cutting, not related to a specific subject area (27; 28). Training graduates of higher education institutions based on the development of soft skills will become one of the tools for modernizing the higher education system. Nowadays, the university development strategy should consider the transition from soft academic disciplines to a curriculum focused on developing students as holistic individuals with universal views.

Since the creation of the European Higher Education Area, approaches to learning at European universities have changed: students have achieved more academic freedom, and teachers have transitioned into facilitators of the educational process.

Modern students are representatives of Gen-

eration Z. They prefer teamwork (31), interactive learning, and active participation in the educational process, and are ready to learn in various educational environments with unlimited access to information (32). Generation Z chooses personalized, project-based, and practical learning approaches that are current with modern educational paradigms (33). Studies have shown the need to develop soft skills, including critical thinking, among Generation Z representatives (34), as they “do not always have their critical thinking well developed” (35; 36), have individual (in)resistance to digital media manipulation (37; 38), are often manipulated (39) and subsequently subjected to excessive workload and stress in the workplace (40; 41). According to K. Robinson, soft skills are essential for active and lifelong learning (42) and individual moral development (43).

## Research Questions of the Study

The research aims to determine the best practices for using innovative educational tools to develop the soft skills of students of higher education institutions and the use of these practices in the educational process of the West Ukrainian National University. This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- to establish how cross-cutting (universal) competencies are being developed in the higher education system today;
- to determine which soft skills are of particular relevance for university students in the context of society’s transformation;
- to propose innovative educational tools that allow for taking into account the diversity of formal and informal educational practices in the development of soft skills of university students;
- to assess the level of development of soft skills among students who participated in the experimental study.

## Literature review

### The concept of soft skills

The concept of supra-professional skills is not new. It is discussed mainly in the context of ideas about internationalization of education and the European Education Area. In academic cir-

cles this idea is often described using terms “key competencies,” “soft skills,” “transversal skills,” or “transferable skills.” In rapidly changing contemporary environment, there is a high demand for both technological and digital skills, as well as soft skills. Both groups of skills are used in the professional sphere and personal life. With the increasing pace of digital transformation, they are becoming inseparable. Technological skills include digital competencies, digital literacy, working with digital services and platforms, and cyber security (44; 45). Soft skills are cognitive, social, and emotional skills, including creativity, critical thinking, interpretation of information, decision-making, and communication skills (46). In 2024, digital and soft skills have become even more correlated. The combination of skills increases the adaptability of graduates to rapid changes in the market, helps them to remain in demand and strive for continuous development.

M. Matteson and co-authors in their work “Soft skills: A phrase in search of meaning” defined soft skills as ‘intra- and interpersonal (socio-emotional) skills’ necessary for personal development, social participation, and success (46, p. 72). According to K. Stek and N. Schiele (2021), soft skills play a key role in knowledge application and cognitive skills in everyday life. They are even more important than professional skills, as they are a prerequisite for hard skills implementation (47). The theoretical analysis of the literature shows that soft skills are generally understood as a set of social and communication skills that allow for effective communication and teamwork. T. Wikle and T. Fagin define soft skills as “character traits, goals, motivations, and preferences”. The authors note that in the business context, soft skills are a set of personal characteristics that increase the effectiveness of interaction and productivity in the workspace (48, p. 643). The essential characteristic in the definition of soft skills is that it is a set of competencies, personal qualities, behavioral models, and values (49) that allow you to choose and use the most appropriate knowledge and skills to solve professional and communication problems, interact constructively with other members of society, develop and achieve goals (50). These skills are required for various fields of activity.

## Classification of soft skills

The list of soft skills used in business and pedagogical literature is rather extensive. Researchers classify them in different ways. Thus, J. Botke and co-authors propose six basic groups that underlie soft competencies: basic (fundamental, academic) skills; communication skills; conceptual (thinking skills); personal skills; skills related to the business world; and social and civic skills (51). Developing the theme of successful professional activity and the importance of soft skills, A. Llorens and co-authors identify 5 most important soft skills expected of potential and successful job candidates: social skills; communication skills; higher-order thinking skills (including problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making); self-control; positive self-concept (29), and even spirituality (38; 52). An extended list of soft skills includes the following elements: communication skills (building interaction with different people; mastery of business communication formats); social skills (performing various roles in professional activities; working independently and in a team; positioning oneself in society); managerial skills (ability to make independent, balanced decisions; analysis and forecasting; ability to search for resources); organizational (ability to manage own time, resources, development in general; goal setting; self-study, self-motivation); intelligence (27), as well as focus on health and healthy lifestyle (53).

Given the increasing complexity of professional tasks for various fields of activity, the question of measures and competencies necessary for the successful functioning of specialists today and tomorrow is relevant. It seems suitable to analyze the “competencies of the future” based on foreign and domestic research: “Partnership for 21st Century Learning”, USA, (P21); international organization “Assessment and Training of 21st Century Skills” (ATC21S); “International Society for Technology in Education” USA, (ISTE); international organization “European Union”(European Education Area (EUA)); International Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, (OECD); Ministry of Education of Singapore (MOES). The ideas of these organizations are largely similar. Some of them are shown in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1** Comparative analysis of the 21st-century key competencies defined by foreign organizations

<b>P21</b>	<b>ATC21S</b>	<b>ISTE</b>
<i>Learning skills:</i> 1. Critical thinking. 2. Creativity. 3. Communication.	<i>Thinking skills:</i> 1. Creativity. 2. Critical thinking. 3. Focus on learning.	<i>Creativity and innovations:</i> 1. Creative thinking 2. Knowledge creation. 3. Creating products and processes based on technology.
	<i>Work skills:</i> 1. Communication. 2. Cooperation.	<i>Work skills:</i> 1. Critical thinking. 2. Problem solving. 3. Making decisions.
		<i>Communication and collaboration</i> Use of digital tools for communication and collaboration.
<i>Information media and technological skills:</i> 1. Information literacy. 2. Media literacy. 3. Technological literacy.	<i>Tools for work:</i> 1. Information literacy. 2. Competence in information and computer technologies.	<i>Technological operations and concepts:</i> 1. Understanding of technological concepts. 2. Understand systems and operations.
<i>Life and career skills:</i> 1. Flexibility and adaptability. 2. Initiative and self-regulation. 3. Social and intercultural skills. 4. Responsibility. 5. Leadership.	<i>Living in the world:</i> 1. Local and global citizenship. 2. Life and career. 3. Personal and social responsibility.	<i>Computerized data processing</i> The use of digital tools to collect, process, and work with information.
		<i>Digital citizenship</i> Understanding humanitarian, cultural, and technological issues.

The latest research on the key competencies of a modern specialist belongs to Coursera. Their results are highlighted in “*The Job Skills of 2024, Harvard Business School Future Hub*”. The authors of the study identified the soft skills that modern employers pay special attention to: analytical thinking; creative thinking; resilience, flexibility, and agility; motivation and self-awareness; curiosity and lifelong learning; technological literacy; talent management; service orientation and customer service; and systemic thinking (54). Based on the analysis of the results of the studies, researchers presented their taxonomy of soft skills in Table 1.

The analysis of approaches to the soft skills classification allows us to highlight two essential points.

1. The process of soft skills formation is rather long. Presumably, having begun during stud-

ies in general secondary education institutions, these skills are actively improving in higher education during the mastery of general and professional cycle disciplines.

2. Soft skills development is facilitated by various teaching methods and technologies that aim to enhance both subject-specific knowledge and interdisciplinary skills.

### Methods

The research methods included a theoretical analysis of the literature on the research topic, observation of the ways of organizing students’ learning activities in higher education institutions, questionnaires, and experimental work using innovative educational technologies to develop students’ soft skills. A long-term nature study conducted using general theoretical, empirical, and statistical research methods. Its re-

**Table 1** Relevant soft skills that employers need.

Skills	Characteristics and Meaning
Communication skills	The ability of future professionals to adequately interact with other people, social groups, and society as a whole allows them to make the most productive decisions and overcome any difficulties in the communication process.
Curiosity	Curious people are actively interested in new products, monitor current trends related to their professional activities, ask questions, and try to find answers by immersing themselves in the subject area. This skill allows them to expand their networking and learn new subjects and phenomena.
Adaptability	The ability to quickly adapt to changing circumstances allows you to adopt and implement innovations faster.
Creativity	The potential of using imagination to generate new ideas, solve problems unconventionally, and find interesting approaches allows one to solve the most complex issues.
Stress resistance	A skill that allows you to work productively and make decisions despite uncertainty, risks, and lack of information.
Teamwork	Ability to interact effectively with other team members, build effective professional relationships, and achieve mutual results with a team.
Client focus	This skill allows you to understand the client's needs and solve their problems, as well as the ability to offer the product that is most in demand in the market.
Critical thinking	The ability to evaluate information and different situations objectively prevents mistakes, allows you to ask the right questions, and generates interesting ideas.
Emotional intelligence	Developed emotional intelligence helps understand the feelings and actions of other people, allows them to negotiate productively, respond adequately to unpleasant situations, and experience setbacks more easily.
Vital intelligence	Vital intelligence influences the energy level of a person. Lack of energy can negatively affect overall well-being and productivity, and lead to emotional burnout.
Work-life blend	An innovative behaviour model that offers integration of professional responsibilities and personal life into a single harmonious lifestyle.

Source: own research

sults are analyzed according to the objectives of each stage.

The effectiveness of innovative educational activities for soft skills development was revealed during the experimental work at West Ukrainian National University (WUNU) in the autumn semester of the 2024/25 academic year.

We used the following methods: questionnaire, expert survey, and observation. The authors of the article conducted a series of expert surveys (2024-2025) in which two groups of respondents took part: lecturers of WUNU (40

persons) and fourth-year students of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (98 persons).

The sample of respondents included students from various fields of study: Psychology, Journalism, Design, Information, Library and Archival Studies, Physical Training and Sports, and Social Work. The survey was conducted using Google Forms. The questionnaire survey included the following tasks:

- empirical confirmation of soft skills;
- identification of effective methods and orga-

nizational forms for the development of students' soft skills;

- creation of the *Soft Skills School* and its methodology.

The study complied with the following norms and principles of research ethics: respect for the human dignity of respondents; voluntary informed consent to the survey; confidentiality (anonymization of data) and protection of personal information; minimization of harm (no potential risks for research participants); prohibition of manipulation of data and research results; adherence to the principles of fairness, honesty, and impartiality of the study; refusal to selectively report results and distort them.

## Results

Analysis of world experience showed two approaches to developing soft skills today. The first one is to teach directly, integrating individual courses (data analysis, project management, team building, stress management) within the variable component of the curriculum, like at Harvard University or Stanford Research Institute. The second approach is to use the potential of the disciplines studied, combined with non-formal education and extracurricular activities. This method is more commonly used at universities in Ukraine. However, it raises questions not only about "what to teach" (what is the most popular "set" of soft skills) but also about "how to teach" and "how to measure what a person has learned"?

The need for qualitative changes in the higher education system initiates the active introduction of practice-oriented teaching methods into the educational process (55; 56), aimed at increasing students' supersubject competencies. The formation of students' soft skills should be based on modern educational technologies and trends of digital transformation (57; 58), as well as by using social media in education (59; 60).

This study was conducted in several stages. The task of the theoretical stage was to analyze the psychological and pedagogical aspects of using the methods and organizational forms that ensure the effective development of students' soft skills. The task of the ascertaining stage of the study was to conduct a questionnaire survey

of students to assess the importance of soft skills necessary for successful professional activity. The purpose of the formative stage was to implement the "Soft Skills School" which was "embedded" in students' independent work and provided for the updating of universal knowledge, additional formation of indicative bases of action, analysis, and solution of typical quasi-professional tasks requiring soft skills with fundamental consideration of their variability. The final stage included a final diagnostic section, expert evaluation of the results, and generalization of the results of the experimental work to assess the significance of the selected innovative educational technologies for the development of students' soft skills.

At the theoretical stage, a survey was conducted among students and teachers on the importance of methodological support, organizational forms, and teaching methods in forming the professional competence of technical university students. The results of the analysis of the two groups' responses are presented in Table 2.

The analysis of the results of the survey of the respondents (lecturers) shows that the following methods were highly rated: problem lecture and problem seminar, project method, "lecture for two" (two lecturers: an academic teacher and an employer), method of building a goal tree, solving case studies and foresight design. In the complex of different types of methodological support, e-learning modules, e-textbooks, and manuals were highly rated. The respondents identified the project-based organization of practical training, individual educational trajectories of mastering the discipline, and a virtual excursion in the complex organizational forms.

Based on the obtained results, an optional course, *Soft Skills School*, was prepared to develop the soft skills of the students participating in the pilot study. The course program included eight classes, each lasting three hours. To ensure the effectiveness of the optional course, we paid considerable attention to creating an informal atmosphere of interaction. To develop the students' soft skills, we used a set of innovative educational technologies in the optional course (Table 3).

**Table 2** The importance of teaching methods, methodological support, and organizational forms (teachers and students) for soft skills development

Methods, methodological support, and organizational forms	Students		Lecturers	
	Average	Over 3 points (%)	Average	Over 3 points (%)
<b>Teaching methods</b>				
Problem lecture and problem seminar	5,0	91,3	4,8	85,6
Training and interactive learning technologies - simulators, trainers	4,7	83,8	4,8	87,6
Seminar-discussion	4,2	85,3	4,2	81,2
Master class within the framework of future professional activity	4,8	95,3	4,7	91,3
Brainstorming session	4,8	87,5	4,3	81,6
Traditional seminar	3,5	88,4	3,3	74,6
Gamification	4,6	89,2	4,7	92,8
Project method	4,9	94,6	4,9	82,5
Traditional lecture	3,0	96,3	4,5	90,6
“Lecture for two” (two lecturers: a teacher and an employer)	4,6	93,7	4,9	96,5
Building associative rules	4,6	90,8	4,6	89,5
Method of building a “goal tree”	4,9	95,2	4,9	94,3
Solving case studies	4,9	85,8	4,9	93,7
Role-playing (business, simulation) game	4,7	93,5	4,4	92,3
Foresight design	4,9	90,3	4,8	93,6
<b>Methodological support</b>				
Electronic textbooks and training manuals	4,8	88,3	4,8	89,5
Multimedia programs	4,7	95,8	4,6	89,3
Electronic training modules	4,8	88,9	4,8	88,5
Training computer programs	4,7	88,5	4,6	89,5
Electronic dictionaries	3,5	87,4	4,6	85,6
<b>Organization forms</b>				
Web conferences, web seminars	4,5	91,2	4,5	92,6
Video lectures	4,6	88,9	4,5	90,5
Electronic lectures	4,4	90,6	4,4	89,3
Online seminars	4,6	85,5	4,6	78,7
Online laboratories	4,7	90,3	4,5	89,6
Virtual excursions	4,8	89,6	4,9	96,5
Project organization of practical training	4,9	84,5	4,9	96,5
Individual educational trajectories of learning disciplines	4,9	97,5	4,8	94,5

Source: own research

**Table 3** Innovative educational tools and developed soft skills

Developing soft skills	Examples of the use of innovative educational technologies or their elements
<b>Technology of project activity</b> - development of individual creative abilities of students	
Communication skills, creativity, planning, analytical thinking, judgment and decision-making, adaptability, flexibility, self-control, interpersonal skills, research skills, and teamwork.	<p>Project “<i>Creation of a video</i>”. The task is to create a video on a relevant topic, for example, “<i>My education is my future</i>”, “<i>The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities is the best</i>”, and “<i>A foreign language and my profession</i>”. The video can be presented in any genre: a short film, a video clip, or animation, and the virtual platform for posting the video is the YouTube video hosting service. The presentation of the video in the classroom is evaluated according to the requirements for technical, linguistic, and artistic design.</p> <p>Project “<i>The Social Media</i>”. The project is practice-oriented. The objective of the project is to develop a concept of a social network for professional purposes based on the experience of effective online communities: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. The project involves creating a name and logo for the social network, defining marketing goals in social media, defining the target audience, setting your indicators (post coverage, clicks, hashtag effectiveness, etc.), analyzing competitors, and creating content.</p>
<b>Information and communication technologies</b> provide changes and unlimited enrichment of educational content, integrated courses, Internet access, interactive teaching methods, and e-learning.	
self-management, time management, communication, multitasking, ability to plan and think strategically, ability to interact with others both in a team and via networking	<p><i>Various distance learning courses implemented on the Moodle LMS platform</i> involve posting materials and assignments for groups of students to be completed within a fixed time.</p> <p><i>Google spreadsheets for joint work.</i></p> <p>Completing tasks in pairs and mutually checking each other’s work using the cross-assessment feature in Moodle LMS.</p> <p><i>WhatsApp Messenger groups</i> are created for correspondence, conferences, and consultations using platforms like Zoom, MS Teams, and Google Meet.</p> <p><i>The case-study method</i> is realized using an independent search for data from Internet resources.</p>
<b>Collaborative learning technology</b> (teamwork, group work)	
ability to communicate, considering the position of the interlocutor, and organize cooperation	<p>The <i>foresight methodology</i> is implemented during teamwork to identify the most important concepts of the future and develop tools for their further realization.</p> <p><i>SWOT analysis and negotiation.</i></p>
<b>E-learning</b>	
social and communication skills, self-control	<p><i>Engaging in webinars and online courses</i> to enhance communication skills via <i>Coursera</i>, <i>Google Classroom</i>, <i>Moodle</i>, and other platforms.</p> <p>Use of multimedia materials and Internet services to complete online tasks.</p>

Source: own research

**Table 4** Summarized results of the input diagnostics of students' soft skills development, %

Skills	Control group	Test Group
<b>Soft skills of personal development</b>		
Self-education skills	beginner – 40,2	beginner – 40,8
	intermediate – 59,8	intermediate – 59,2
	advanced – 0,0	advanced – 0,0
Self-management	beginner – 51,6	beginner – 53,2
	intermediate – 48,4	intermediate – 46,7
	advanced – 0,0	advanced – 0,0
<b>Socio-communication soft skills</b>		
Competencies of effective communication and interaction	beginner – 25,85	beginner – 25,75
	intermediate – 61,65	intermediate – 60,25
	advanced – 12,5	advanced – 14,0
Teamwork skills	beginner – 54,0	beginner – 53,0
	intermediate – 46,0	intermediate – 47,0
	advanced – 0,0	advanced – 0,0
<b>Cognitive soft skills</b>		
Creativity	beginner – 37,0	beginner – 39,0
	intermediate – 63,0	intermediate – 61,0
	advanced – 0,0	advanced – 0,0
Critical thinking	beginner – 27,25	beginner – 28,0
	intermediate – 50,25	intermediate – 49,0
	advanced – 22,5	advanced – 23,0
Overall level of soft skills development	beginner – 39,3	beginner – 39,2
	intermediate – 54,9	intermediate – 54,6
	advanced – 5,8	advanced – 6,2

Source: own research

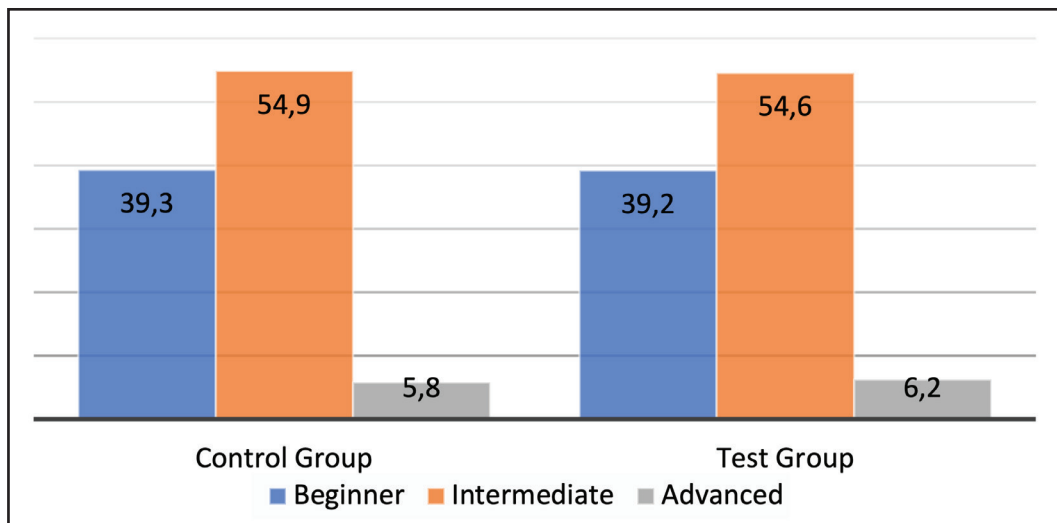
The general principles of organizing a pedagogical experiment to test their impact on the effectiveness of students' soft skills development were as follows: the pedagogical experiment was designed traditionally with the involvement of a control group (CG) and a test group (TG). In the test group, a certain impact was purposefully carried out, whereas in the control group, it was not.

The organization of the research work required the development of a criterion-evaluation system. The relevant soft skills theoretically substantiated in the article are divided into three groups: soft skills of personal development (self-education skills, self-management), socio-communication soft skills (competen-

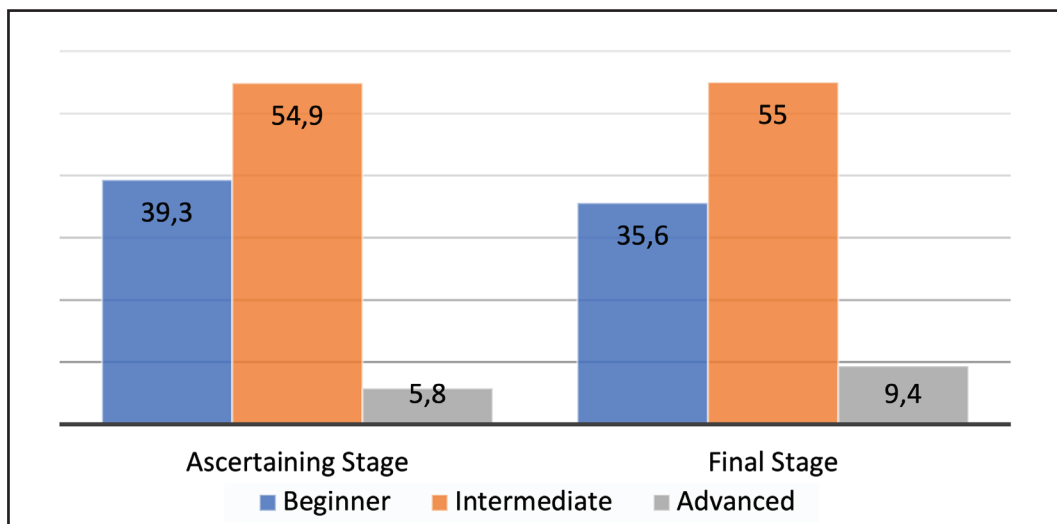
cies of effective communication and interaction, teamwork skills), and cognitive soft skills (creativity, critical thinking). The study used a structured questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire contained three blocks to identify three groups of soft skills.

The diagnostic results showed no significant differences in the data of the control and test groups, which indicates the objectivity and reliability of the empirical results. Bringing all the obtained empirical data to a single three-level scale made it possible to calculate the overall level of development of students' soft skills in three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced (Table 4).

**Figure 2** Results of the input diagnostics of students' soft skills development summarized



**Figure 3** Comparison of the results of the control group at the ascertaining and final stages of experimental work, %



The data summarized in the table are in Figure 2 for clarity.

Processing the empirical data obtained during the final stage and summarizing it into a three-level scale according to the levels selected in the study (beginner, intermediate, advanced) made it possible to compare the final values with the results of the ascertaining stage (Table 5).

The results obtained within two stages of the research are presented in the diagrams in Figures

3 and 4, which show the dynamics of the phenomenon under study: the development of soft skills of the Western Ukrainian National University students.

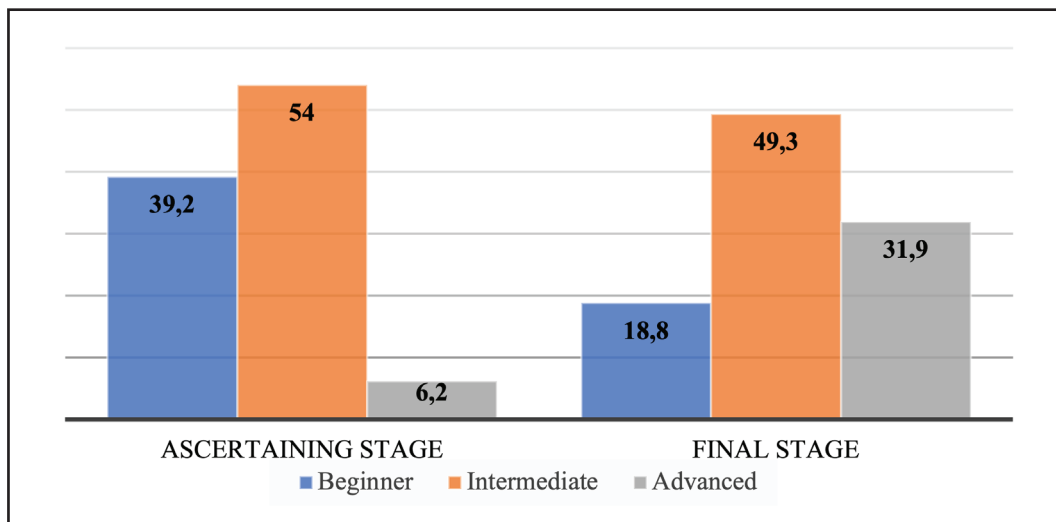
The analysis of Fig. 3 shows that the dynamics in the control group are practically not expressed: the beginner level of soft skills development at the ascertaining stage demonstrated 39.3%, whereas at the final stage, 35.6% of students. The percentage of students with an average level at the ascertaining stage was 54.9%,

**Table 5** Summarized results of students' soft skills development

Skill level	Control group		Test Group	
	Ascertaining stage	Final stage	Ascertaining stage	Final stage
<b>Soft skills in personality development</b>				
<i>Self-education skills</i>				
beginner	40,20	35,90	40,80	15,60
intermediate	59,80	40,70	59,20	48,45
advanced	-	23,40	-	35,95
<i>Self-management</i>				
beginner	51,60	46,90	53,30	25,00
intermediate	48,40	51,60	46,70	44,00
advanced	-	1,50	-	31,00
<b>Socio-communications of skills</b>				
<i>Competence in effective communication and interaction</i>				
beginner	25,85	25,00	25,75	19,00
intermediate	61,65	67,00	60,25	50,00
advanced	12,50	8,00	14,00	31,00
<i>Teamwork skills</i>				
beginner	54,00	47,00	53,00	25,00
intermediate	46,00	53,00	47,00	44,00
advanced	-	-	-	31,00
<b>Cognitive soft skills</b>				
<i>Creativity</i>				
beginner	37,00	34,00	39,00	17,00
intermediate	63,00	66,00	61,00	69,00
advanced	-	-	-	14,00
<i>Critical thinking</i>				
beginner	27,25	25,00	28,00	11,00
intermediate	50,25	51,50	49,00	40,60
advanced	22,50	23,50	23,00	48,40
<b>The general level of soft skills development</b>				
beginner	39,30	35,60	39,20	18,80
intermediate	54,90	55,00	54,60	49,30
advanced	5,80	9,60	6,20	31,90

Source: own research

**Figure 4** Comparison of the results of the test group at the ascertaining and final stages of experimental work, %



whereas at the final stage, 55%. An advanced level showed 5.8% of students at the assessment stage and 9.4% at the control stage. So, the traditionally organized educational process in higher education institutions does not give students a full opportunity to develop the soft skills needed in a dynamically changing world.

Fig. 4 shows that in the test group, the proportion of students with a beginner level decreased by half from 39.2% to 18.8%. The proportion of students who showed an intermediate level at the ascertaining and final stages differs slightly: 54.6% and 49.3%, respectively. At the same time, the proportion of students in the experimental group who showed a high level of soft skills development increased more than fivefold from 6.2% to 31.9%. Thus, the results confirm the validity of the research design and the hypothesis made during the study. As the results show, the educational process of higher education institutions has sufficient potential and resources for its purposeful organization to develop soft skills necessary in the contemporary world.

## Discussion

In a highly competitive environment, soft skills are crucial levers for increasing the productivity of professionals and companies.

A team consisting of professionals with developed soft skills will be more successful. The priority is the formation and improvement of the identified key soft skills in university education. It is possible when we take at least the following steps:

- systematic monitoring of the actual soft skills required by employers (conducting surveys of students after they have passed job interviews in their specialty, analyzing vacancies published by recruiters, inviting representatives of employers to universities, and more);
- develop and introduce special courses in the educational process to form and develop the necessary soft skills or make changes to the existing ones in the curriculum;
- Motivate students to permanent self-development.

Our experience, which develops the idea of using innovative educational technologies in the development of students' soft skills, has several distinctive features: optimization of the combination of traditional and innovation approaches to learning; integrative approach, which involves the preparation of courses that form panoramic thinking and develop meta-subject skills; comprehensive scientific, methodological, technological, information support and support for students' activities; teamwork: university teach-

ers and students. In the technologies and forms of soft skills development, it is possible to move according to the model of reengineering the educational process, for example, by creating communication laboratories, project offices, teacher research groups, introducing non-linear schedules, holding various schools, and more.

## Conclusions

Modern research proves that employers appreciate not only professional (hard skills) but also universal soft skills, which include a wide range of skills and abilities that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of a specialist's professional activities.

The study showed that:

1. Most students often do not have end-to-end soft skills, and there is a lack of understanding of the importance of soft skills.
2. The personnel training system is not ready for soft skills development. Blurred and insufficient development of vertical and horizontal links between individual components of the professional training process (goals, content, technologies, means, and forms), poor diversification of professional disciplines, excessive theorization, and detachment from modern requirements for expanding professional activities are the reasons for this.
3. Limited opportunities for application of various soft skills because of weak links between theoretical and practical training.
4. The in soft and mobile process of soft skills development in higher education institutions slows down the response to employers' requests.
5. Many modern interactive trends are realized only in business education and commercial courses.

It is evident that the development of soft skills largely depends on the chosen teaching methods and the orientation of the higher education system to implement modern teaching trends aimed at developing soft skills. At the same time, teaching practice shows that motivation, dedication, and active student participation are necessary to be competitive and in demand in the future. As evidenced by the results of experimental training and students' self-reflection,

innovation and project activities based on modeling social interaction in a study group are a relevant and effective teaching method, ensuring the productivity of various tasks in the field of educational, educational, and cognitive, social and professionally oriented activities, promotes the formation of soft skills of future specialists, and also best meets the expectations of students themselves. However, the authors suggest that closer interaction with internship sites is needed to further learning activities and innovations in the educational process, closer to the specifics of professionalization. It makes it possible to bring the soft skills development of a particular student to an individual educational trajectory and the higher education institution to plan a learning trajectory.

In the prospect of developing students' soft skills, the following innovative educational technologies can be used: games (game-based learning - role-playing, business, situational, or others (61; 62); projects (within one discipline or interdisciplinary); introductory courses before the main study; educational blogging (63); business modeling; simulation models; remote laboratory; design competitions.

The article explores the essential issues that will influence the careers of future professionals. It addresses questions such as: What should new educational practices look like? What skills need to be developed for the future? How can we teach effectively today to achieve the desired outcomes? The authors aim to pinpoint areas where educational technologies can enhance soft skills anticipated to be in demand over the coming decades.

## Limitations and implications for the research

The research's results can be disputed, as the experiment was a single-institution experience, and the number of respondents was small. The study results were achieved from only one group of sample respondents and experts. The quasi-experimental design of the study and the number of variables studied were also limitations of this research.

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# The development of outpatient palliative care in Ukraine: The role of non-governmental and charitable organizations

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## Abstract:

This study presents a retrospective evaluation of outpatient palliative care delivered by the “SVOI” Charitable Foundation in Ukraine from 2019 to 2025. Against the backdrop of health system reforms and wartime disruptions, the study highlights the critical role of non-governmental actors in providing decentralized, multidisciplinary support to patients with life-limiting conditions. The research focuses on service volume, patient demographics, diagnoses, and types of support provided.

**Methods:** a total of 4661 anonymized patient records were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data covered gender, age, diagnosis, and forms of care - medical consultations, psychological support, household assistance, oxygen therapy, and supplies. Services were provided both through home visits (Kyiv and Kyiv region) and remote consultations across Ukraine.

**Results:** patients were predominantly older adults (mean age 69,7), with 74,6 % over age 66. Although cancer was the most frequent diagnosis (31,8%), nearly half of patients had non-oncological conditions, including COPD, dementia, and neurodegenerative diseases. Pain was underreported, especially in dementia cases. Household support was mostly provided to those aged 76+, while psychological services were concentrated among oncology patients. Regional coverage was skewed toward Kyiv, but remote demand grew annually.

**Conclusion:** outpatient palliative care in Ukraine remains unevenly distributed, with psychosocial and geriatric needs often unmet. NGO-led models have proven effective and adaptable but require formal recognition, sustainable funding, and integration with state services. Expanding mobile teams, improving pain assessment (especially in non-verbal patients), and scaling telemedicine could help ensure equitable access and continuity of palliative care in both peacetime and crisis settings.

## Introduction

Palliative care is increasingly conceptualized as a paradigmatic innovation within global health and social policy frameworks. The contemporary model incorporates four interrelated domains: 1) clinical management of symptoms, 2) psycho-emotional and spiritual support, 3) caregiver and family assistance, and 4) bereavement care. International health governance standards now explicitly recognize access to palliative and hospice care as a core human right. Ensuring universal, equitable access irrespective of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or geographic context is a normative imperative. Furthermore, timely availability must be assured across all points of care, without imposing prohibitive financial burdens—especially upon socioeconomically vulnerable populations (Tománek, Radková, Buzalová, 2024; Barkasi, Kenderešová, 2021, 2023).

In Ukraine, the institutional maturation of palliative care has accelerated over the past decade, underpinned by a series of legal enactments

and regulatory frameworks. Key instruments include the Law of Ukraine “Fundamentals of Health Legislation” (1992, No. 2801-XII) and its amendments (2011, 2020, 2022) [1]; the Law of Ukraine “On State Financial Guarantees of Medical Services to the Population” (2017, No. 2168-VIII) [2]; and the Law of Ukraine “On Social Services” (2019, No. 2671-VIII, revised in 2024) [3]. Implementation is further structured by executive directives from the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and ministerial orders from both the Ministry of Health of Ukraine (MOHU) and the Ministry of Social Policy. Buzalová et al. (2024, 2025) confirmed

In 2020, the National Health Service of Ukraine formally incorporated palliative care into the Medical Guarantees Program, enabling reimbursement for essential services and medications through public funds. This policy shift was operationalized through a revised national protocol for palliative care provision (MOHU Order No. 1302, July 4, 2022) [4], subsequently modified by MOHU Order No. 2216 (December 27,

2023) [5] and expanded in scope by MOHU Order No. 1853 (November 4, 2024), which broadened patient eligibility criteria in line with ICD-10 guidelines [6].

Despite these reforms, significant systemic disparities persist. These include regional inequities in service access, insufficient interdisciplinary workforce capacity, and fragmented cooperation between healthcare and social sectors. Similar structural gaps have been observed in post-pandemic Slovakia and Czechia, where poverty, demographic aging, and weakened social support systems have intensified the need for holistic models of long-term and palliative care (comprehensive studies by Radkova et al. 2022, 2024; Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2022; Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2024; Buzalová et al., 2025, Makan et al. 2023).

At the international level, palliative care is firmly situated within the framework of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and is upheld as a fundamental human right (WHO, 2018) [7]. Within the international framework of Universal Health Coverage (WHO, 2018), the **European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC)** underscores the importance of integrating palliative services at all system levels through evidence-based, interdisciplinary collaboration [8]. This is reflected in the Vincentian tradition of person-centered care (Hamarová et al., 2024a,b), emphasizing dignity and spiritual accompaniment in hospital and community settings (Noga, 2024).

Within the context of armed conflict, the exigency for decentralized and mobile palliative care services in Ukraine has become markedly pronounced. Wartime destruction of healthcare infrastructure, mass displacement, and cumulative psychological trauma have significantly heightened demand for localized, home-based interventions. In this environment, non-governmental and charitable organizations have emerged as indispensable providers of not only clinical care, but also psychosocial and logistical support. One illustrative example is the “SVOI” Charitable Foundation, which since 2019 has delivered outpatient services in Kyiv and surrounding regions, while maintaining nationwide remote outreach capacity. Their multidisciplinary model

reflects integrated medical, psychological, and social support—paralleling broader trends in frontline psychosocial services (Murgová et al., 2022; Judák et al., 2022; Noga, Kenderešová, Jurašek, 2025).

This investigation aims to systematically analyze operational data from the “SVOI” Foundation spanning 2019–2025, with attention to service volumes, typological patterns, and longitudinal dynamics. The study offers an empirical basis for evaluating current trends in outpatient palliative care and contextualizes the evolving role of third-sector actors within Ukraine’s palliative care landscape (Tomanek et al., 2024). By situating this analysis within broader Central and Eastern European experiences—such as therapeutic support for persons with disabilities (Radková, Buzalová, Kenderešová, 2024), the impact of caregiver burnout (Buzalova, Vansač, Tománek, 2024), and minority care challenges (Buzalová et al., 2025)—this work contributes to a richer understanding of the evolving role of civil society and social workers in palliative ecosystems.

Moreover, the integration of spiritual and psychosocial accompaniment has emerged as a vital component of effective palliative strategies, particularly post-COVID-19 (Králik et al., 2023; Hamarova et al. (2024a, 2024b)). The involvement of trained volunteers, often operating in emotionally and logistically complex situations such as refugee care or border crises (Radková et al., 2022; Kenderešová 2017, Kenderešová 2021), demonstrates the depth of civil resilience and the value of culturally and spiritually competent care (Barkasi, Noga, 2024; Kobylarek et al., 2022).

## Methodology

This research is based on a retrospective analysis of empirical data collected by the “SVOI” Charitable Foundation between January 2019 and March 2025. The foundation maintains an internal registry of patients who received outpatient palliative care from mobile teams operating in Kyiv and the Kyiv region. In other regions of Ukraine, patients were supported remotely via teleconsultations and distance-based care delivery.

The dataset comprises demographic variables (gender, year of birth), primary diagnoses, disability status, and categories of services provided, including medical consultations, psychological support, oxygen therapy, provision of consumables, pain management, and household assistance. In total, the sample includes 4,661 patients who received at least one outpatient intervention during the study period.

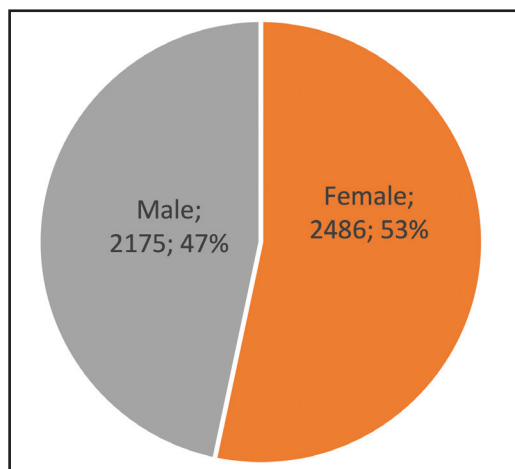
Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel. Age was calculated based on year of birth, and diagnoses were aggregated into broader categories (e.g., oncological diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD], dementia) to facilitate analytical generalization. All data were anonymized prior to analysis.

Given that the study utilized de-identified internal records without any direct patient contact or identifiable information, formal approval from an ethics review board was not required.

## Results

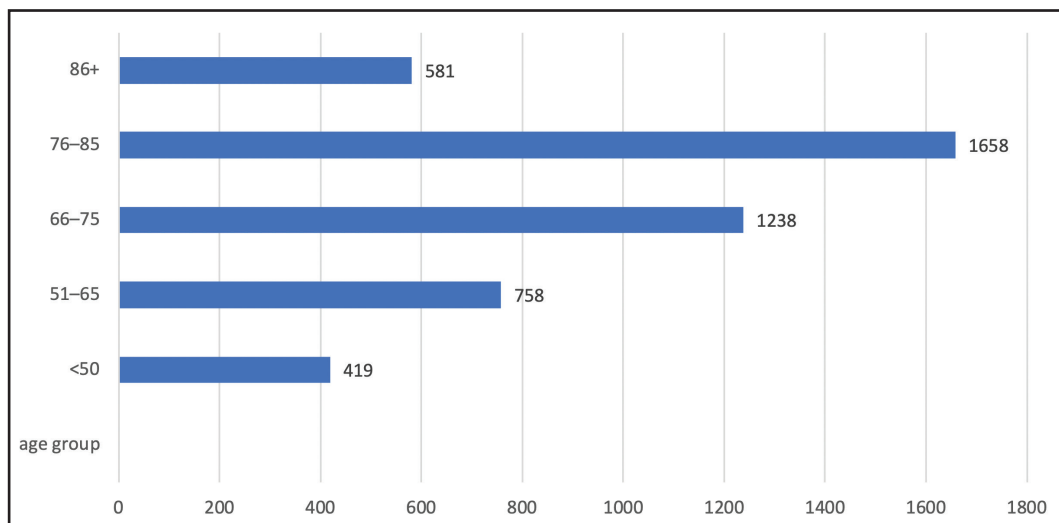
Between 2019 and 2025, the “SVOI” Charitable Foundation provided outpatient palliative care services to a total of 4661 patients, of whom 53,3% were female (n = 2486) and 46,7% were male (n = 2175) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** Gender Distribution of Patients (N = 4661)

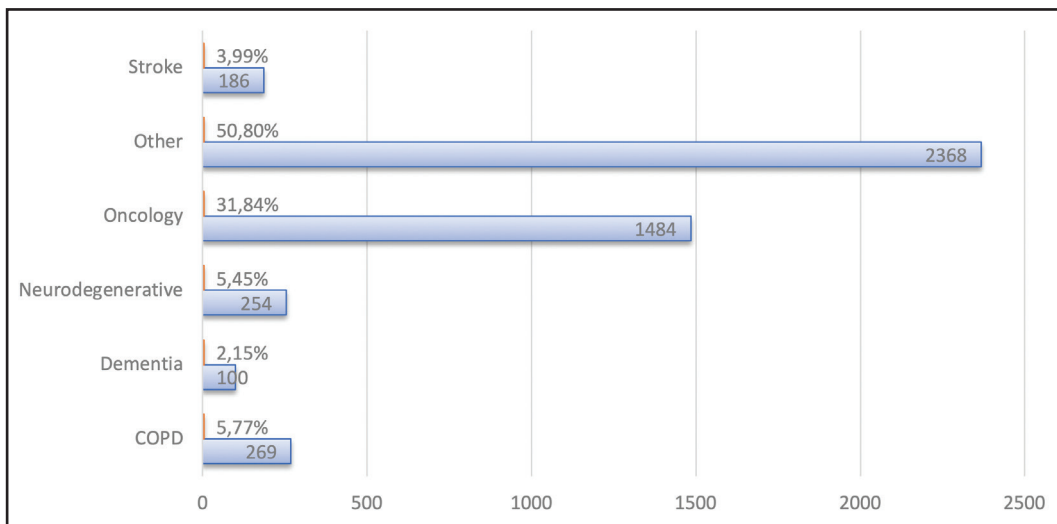


The mean age across the cohort was 69,7 years. The largest demographic segment fell within the 66-86+ age range, constituting 74,6% of the total sample (Figure 2), consistent with prevailing epidemiological profiles of patients requiring long-term palliative support.

**Figure 2** Age Distribution of Patients



**Figure 3** Distribution of Primary Diagnoses



**Diagnoses and Pain Syndromes**

Among patients with recorded diagnostic data, malignant neoplasms represented the most prevalent pathology (n = 1484), followed by chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD; n = 269), dementia (n = 176), cerebrovascular accident (stroke; n = 119), and congestive heart failure (n = 115) (Figure 3). A substantial proportion of cases (48,9%) were classified under the “other” category, reflecting the clinical heterogeneity characteristic of advanced-stage chronic conditions within palliative populations.

Chronic pain syndromes were documented in 5,2% of oncology patients, in approximately 3% of individuals diagnosed with diabetes mellitus, and in less than 1% of patients with COPD, stroke, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Notably, no cases of chronic pain were recorded

among patients with dementia, which may suggest underreporting or diagnostic challenges associated with cognitive and communicative impairments in this subgroup (Table 1).

**Types of Support and Associations with Age and Diagnosis**

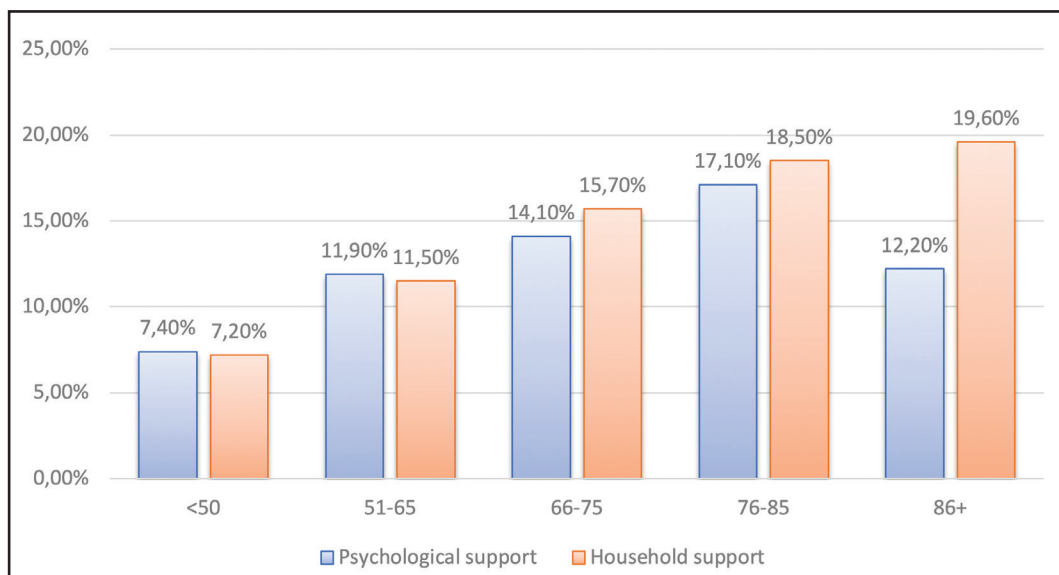
The most frequently provided forms of assistance included:

- provision of consumable medical supplies (n = 3059),
- medical consultations (n = 2436),
- psychological support (n = 1341),
- household assistance (n = 1099),
- oxygen therapy (n = 668).

Disaggregated analysis revealed significant correlations. Psychological support was most frequently provided to oncology patients (over

**Table 1** Pain by Diagnosis Group

Diagnosis group	Pain Present	Pain Absent	Total Pacients	Pain %
Other	69	2299	2368	2,91%
Oncology	77	1407	1484	5,19%
COPD	1	268	269	0,37%
Neurodegenerative	2	252	254	0,79%
Stroke	1	185	186	0,54%
Dementia	0	100	100	0,00%

**Figure 4** Psychological and household support by age group

35%), whereas the proportion was minimal among patients with dementia. Household assistance was most commonly delivered to individuals aged 76-85 years (35,7%) and those aged 86 and older (31,4%), indicating a strong relationship between functional decline and the need for non-medical support services (Figure 4).

Age was also a determinant in the type of assistance received: patients receiving oxygen support had a lower mean age (64,3 years), whereas those requiring consumable supplies were older (mean age 71,3 years), suggesting different trajectories of disease burden across age cohorts (Table 2).

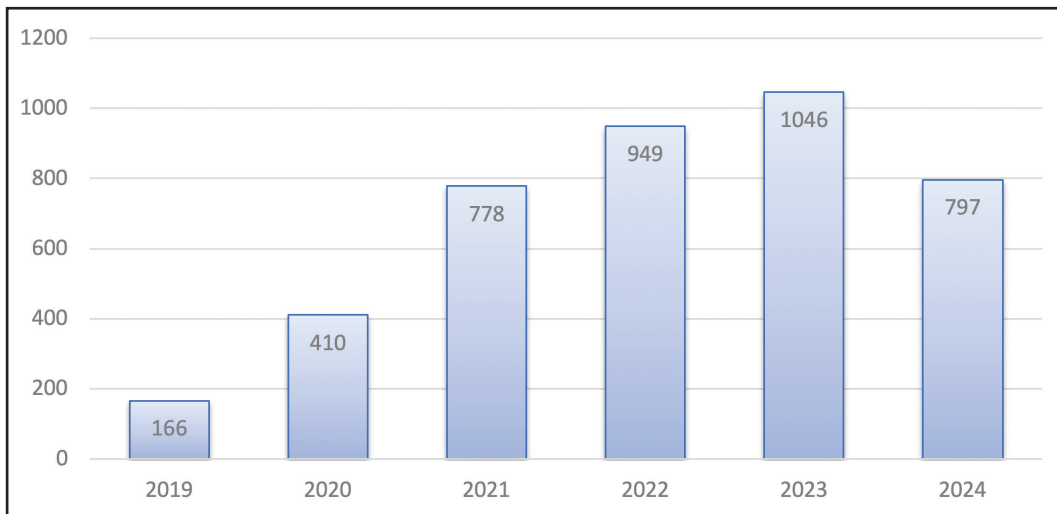
### Regional and Temporal Trends

The highest concentration of patients was recorded in Kyiv (n = 2841) and the Kyiv region (n = 610), while other regions were served primarily through remote consultation and support services. The annual patient count demonstrated steady growth - from 166 in 2019 to a peak of 1046 in 2023 - followed by a moderate stabilization in 2024 (n = 797) (Figure 5). Notably, in the first quarter of 2025 alone, the number of patients had already reached 515, which constitutes over 64% of the total for the entire year of 2024.

**Table 2** Summary by Diagnosis Group

Diagnosis group	Total Patients	Pain %	Oxygen %	Psych Support %	Household Support %
<b>COPD</b>	269	0,4	58,7	5,2	7,1
<b>Dementia</b>	100	0	4	13	20
<b>Neurodegenerative</b>	254	0,8	19,7	32,3	38,6
<b>Oncology</b>	1484	5,2	16,5	16,3	17,1
<b>Other</b>	2368	2,9	26,3	11,3	12,9
<b>Stroke</b>	186	0,5	9,7	17,2	20,4

**Figure 5** Annual number of patient served



**Discussion**

This retrospective analysis of 4661 patients who received outpatient palliative care from the “SVOI” Charitable Foundation between 2019 and 2025 highlights several significant trends with implications for community-level health-care and social protection. First, the data confirm the predominance of older adults in the structure of home-based palliative care, with a mean age of 69,7 years and nearly 74,6 % of patients over the age of 65 (Figure 2). This pattern aligns with global trends, wherein population aging constitutes a major driver of increased palliative care needs. The gender distribution (53,3% female, 46,7% male) corresponds to the broader demographic trend of greater longevity among women (Figure 1).

Importantly, the cohort demonstrated marked diagnostic diversity: while cancer remained the leading cause for referral (n = 1484), nearly half of the patients had alternative diagnoses. This supports the contemporary paradigm shift in palliative eligibility, expanding beyond oncology to include conditions such as COPD, dementia, and heart failure.

In the subgroup of patients with dementia, no documented cases of chronic pain were reported (Table 1). A notable observation was the association between pain and oxygen therapy: patients with documented pain were twice as likely to receive oxygen (6,3%) compared to those without pain (2,4%) (Table 2), suggesting an integrated approach to symptom management.

The provision of psychological support ap-

**Table 3** Support by diagnosis

Diagnosis group	Total Patients	Pain Cases	Oxygen Cases	Psychology Support	Household Support
COPD	269	1	158	14	19
Dementia	100	0	4	13	20
Neurodegenerative	254	2	50	82	98
Oncology	1484	77	245	242	254
Other	2368	69	623	268	306
Stroke	186	1	18	32	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>4661</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>1098</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>735</b>

**Table 4** Support by age

Age group	Total Patients	Psychological Support	Psychological Support %	Household Support	Household Support %
<50	419	31	7,4	30	7,2
51–65	758	90	11,9	87	11,5
66–75	1238	174	14,1	194	15,7
76–85	1658	284	17,1	307	18,5
86+	581	71	12,2	114	19,6

peared highly dependent on diagnosis. It was most frequently administered to patients with cancer, whereas those with dementia were rarely recipients (Table 3). Given the heightened emotional and psychological burden on both patients and caregivers in neurodegenerative conditions, this discrepancy warrants critical attention.

Household assistance was predominantly provided to the oldest age cohorts (Table 4), emphasizing the urgent need for structured home care support, particularly for individuals aged 75 and older. These findings underline the necessity of reinforcing the social component of palliative services and fostering interagency collaboration between healthcare institutions and social protection entities.

Another noteworthy aspect concerns the age profile of home-based palliative care recipients: patients who received oxygen support were typically younger (mean age 64,3 years), while those receiving consumable supplies and psychological support were generally older (mean age over 71 years). This suggests distinct clinical trajectories - namely, respiratory insufficiency among younger cohorts and conditions such as cancer or dementia in the elderly (Kralik et al., 2022).

The regional analysis confirmed that although Kyiv accounted for the majority of patients (n = 2841), demand from other regions has been steadily increasing. The annual growth in patient numbers, peaking in 2023 (n = 1046) (Figure 5), reflects both trust in mobile care services and the relevance of scaling such interventions. The temporary decline in coverage observed in 2024 was likely due to the need to optimize service delivery, avoid overextension of mobile team capacity, and concentrate efforts within Kyiv and the Kyiv region.

Taken together, these findings highlight the need for palliative care to be age- and symptom-sensitive, as well as socially integrated. The involvement of NGOs such as the “SVOI” Charitable Foundation emerges both as a strength and a challenge: while such care models offer flexibility, they require sustainable funding, professional training, and formal state recognition (Mlynarčík 2017, 2022, 2024).

The delivery of high-quality palliative care in Ukraine is gradually evolving. Faced with suffering, pain, the fear of death, and existential despair, the role of the multidisciplinary team becomes crucial - where the compassion, professionalism, and presence of physicians, nurses, and social workers are paramount. One can affirm that mercy remains the cornerstone of care for terminally ill and dying patients. Compassion, respect, and love are among the most powerful forms of care, and when coupled with clinical expertise, they offer the most meaningful hope for upholding dignity at the end of life. “While we may not be able to add more days to the patient’s life, we can add more life to their remaining days.” Though we cannot cure our patients, we can help them live their final days with dignity, free from pain and suffering, and accompany them on their final journey through life. The urgent need for structured home care support, particularly for individuals aged 75 and older. These findings underline the necessity of reinforcing the social component of palliative services and fostering interagency collaboration between healthcare institutions and social protection entities.

## Conclusion

The global trend of rapid population aging, including in Ukraine, has led to a rising prev-

alence of severe, often incurable age-related chronic illnesses, thereby increasing the need for palliative and hospice care. Findings from our retrospective study, which included 4661 patients receiving outpatient palliative care from the “SVOI” Charitable Foundation between 2019 and 2025, confirm that elderly individuals are the primary recipients of such care, with a mean patient age of 69,7 years and more than 74,6 % aged over 65+.

1. This underscores the need to develop integrated, geriatric-oriented palliative care models that address the physical, cognitive, and social vulnerabilities of the aging population.

2. The core objectives of palliative care - relief from pain and distressing symptoms, and provision of psychosocial and spiritual support - can only be achieved through multidisciplinary teams. Our findings show that only 31,8% of patients had a cancer diagnosis, while 48,9% suffered from COPD, dementia, heart failure, and neurodegenerative conditions (comp. Dávidová, Hardy, 2024). This distribution supports the updated eligibility criteria for palliative care established by the Ministry of Health of Ukraine chronic pain syndrome was documented in only 5.2% of oncology patients and in none of the patients with dementia. Despite the availability of tools for pain assessment in non-verbal patients, such as PAINAD and the Abbey Pain Scale, their use remains limited in outpatient settings. We recommend the mandatory implementation of these tools in home-based palliative care for patients with dementia, along with proper staff training (Kralik et al., 2023a; Kralik et al., 2023b; Petrovic et al., 2024; Jackulíková et al., 2021).

3. The type of support provided was significantly influenced by patient age and diagnosis. Oxygen therapy was more common among younger patients (mean age 64.3 years), likely due to COPD and respiratory failure; household assistance was most frequent among those aged 75 and older, indicating dependency and care needs; psychological support reached 35% of cancer patients but was almost absent among those with dementia. These disparities suggest the need for a more equitable allocation of psychosocial and supportive care resources,

regardless of diagnosis (Horáčková et al., 2022; Šupolová et al., 2024; Laca et al., 2024; Poloňová et al., 2022).

4. Non-governmental and charitable organizations have substantially supported healthcare and social service institutions in Kyiv by supplying transdermal fentanyl patches, respiratory devices, and electric generators—critical resources amidst wartime budget constraints. The year-over-year growth in patients served by the SVOI Charitable Foundation, from 166 in 2019 to 1046 in 2023, demonstrates strong demand and the effectiveness of the mobile palliative care model. However, 84% of all patients resided in Kyiv and the surrounding region, indicating geographic disparities in access. (Trnková, 2025; Pavlíková et al., 2023). This highlights the urgent need to expand regional mobile palliative teams, including the use of telemedicine technologies. Compared studies by Budayová et al. (2024) and Budayová et al. (2023) indicate external factors such as digital accessibility and psycho-social support improve the quality of life for older people, while also pointing to the risk of burnout among social workers involved in palliative care (Budayová et al., 2023; Budayová et al., 2024; Ludvigh Cintulová & Buzalová, 2024).

5. The role of NGOs and charitable foundations has become increasingly vital under martial law, as public funding remains severely constrained. These actors have proven the efficacy of integrated, multidisciplinary, and cross-sectoral approaches. However, the sustainability of such models depends on investments from both the state and local communities to train and equip mobile multidisciplinary palliative teams, ensuring that outpatient palliative care in Ukraine evolves into an accessible and comprehensive system (Ludvigh Cintulová & Kafková, 2020; Shyshak et al., 2024; Kobylarek et al., 2023). These findings underline the necessity of reinforcing the social component of palliative services and fostering interagency collaboration between healthcare institutions and social protection entities (Budayová & Ludvigh Cintulová, 2025; Murgová et al., 2022; Barkasi & Bárta, 2024).

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# Social Workers in Multidisciplinary Teams Treating Palliative Patients: The Situation of Suffering

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Original Article

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## Abstract:

**Introduction:** Solving theoretical and practical problem of contemporary palliative care in sphere of relief of the patient's suffering applies to the entire process of palliative care, not only in the terminal stages, and includes the patient's social environment in this process, focusing attention on the problem of the physical and social factors complex. In this case the philosophy of palliative care is directed to offering an opportunity to explore cultural, social, and personal aspects of suffering; it emphasizes effective support and collaboration with community-based services. Because of this, in our research, we address the problem of the suffering in the palliative care

practice in the context of perspectives of social work in the multidisciplinary team treating palliative patients.

**Methods:** A philosophical methodology is used, based on the review of existing literature on the topic and the argumentation in favor of what are found for suffering.

**Results:** By analysing the results, we have found that to the basic tenets of social work with palliative patient must be added describe nature and the goals of suffering, connected with solving such worldview issues as: the suffering as a social gift; the suffering as meaning acquisition; the suffering as an alienation. An understanding of the suffering can be of help to the caregiver in caring for the patient by serving as a basis for looking a way of alleviating the patient's suffering.

**Conclusion:** For increasing the effectiveness of social worker in the multidisciplinary team treating palliative patients is need to develop a educational course for social worker, understanding suffering, to help better understand the suffering experience, for better prepared to intervene in difficult clinical situations involving suffering and for working in the multidisciplinary team.

## Introduction

The answer to the question of the conceptualization of suffering need, at first of all, determined by the existing limitations of medicine in the treatment of suffering and pain. Medical experience deals with physical pain, and in most cases the pain is main object of medical care. Medicine has learned to cope with physical pain. The situation is worse with non-physical pain, but some medical advances are evident here too. But as soon as pain acquires a new quality, as soon as it begins to be identified with suffering, or considering as a source of suffering, medicine often finds itself at a loss. And it is not only a matter of the «psychological subtleties» of pain perception, but most often – of the conceptual basis of understanding both the nature and essence of suffering. The conceptualization of suffering always moves within the conditional framework of the paradigmatical problems of concrete practice and worldview abstractions (more often, unfortunately, worldview illusions). But the conceptualization, that asks whether suffering itself is an illusion, how much of this phenomenon is illusory, and how much is objective (since it really does deform reality, at least subjective), is rare.

The conceptualization of suffering is shaped by the limitations of modern medicine

in treating pain and suffering (Vansač & Noga, 2024). While physical pain is often successfully addressed, non-physical or existential suffering presents a challenge. Some advances exist even in this area, yet when pain transforms into suffering, the medical system often falters due to a lack of a comprehensive philosophical and psychological framework (Svoboda et al., 2024).

Social workers play a key role in addressing this gap, especially in institutional settings where elderly individuals face not only physical deterioration but also social isolation (Barkasi & Kenderešová, 2021; Barkasi & Kenderešová, 2023, Vansač, Kenderešová 2023b). The emotional well-being of the elderly can significantly benefit from a holistic, interdisciplinary approach (Bundzelová et al., 2023; Budayová et al., 2024a).

Mental health challenges among workers in health and social services are increasingly recognized as a systemic issue (Budayová et al., 2023; Buzalová et al., 2024). These challenges are exacerbated by burnout, emotional exhaustion, and a lack of institutional support. Proper education and training, including lifelong learning, are essential to equip professionals for these roles (Taraj et al., 2023).

Another important topic is the quality of life in marginalized communities, such as the Roma

population, rights and cyberspace (Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2023; Budayová, Ludvigh Cintulová, 2025). Issues like social labelling negatively impact individual dignity and integration (Buzalová et al., 2025), requiring tailored, culturally competent approaches in care provision.

Spiritual support in both long-term and palliative care is gaining recognition as a fundamental component of holistic care (Vansač & Noga, 2021; Noga, 2024). The role of spirituality is particularly vital in terminal stages, where meaning-making and dignity take precedence over curative interventions (Vansač & Noga, 2024).

Studies also show that ongoing educational activities improve life satisfaction among seniors (Bursová et al., 2024), and active engagement through University of the Third Age programs helps maintain mental vitality (Kobylarek et al., 2022). Demographic projections further emphasize the necessity for a well-structured long-term care system (Noga & Vansač, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed systemic vulnerabilities in senior care, highlighting the need for rapid adaptation in service delivery and staffing strategies (Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2024b; Tománek et al., 2024). Additionally, social service recipients with disabilities require specialized therapeutic support tailored to their needs (Radková et al., 2024).

War-related crises also draw attention to the need for emotional resilience and mental well-being in volunteer workers (Radková et al., 2022). The broader social context, including compassion and solidarity, must guide both professional practices and public policy (Kralik et al., 2022).

In academia, there is growing interest in exploring the philosophical and ethical dimensions of suffering, calling for interdisciplinary research and deeper conceptual frameworks (Kenderešová, 2021). Furthermore, anxiety and depression significantly affect students' quality of life, requiring targeted psychosocial interventions (Petrovic et al., 2024).

In the palliative care is actively developing the approach, "proposing, that the study of pain recognizes both objective and personal meaning

types", in the same time keeping "the methodological dilemma, whether a direct approach is the most appropriate for understanding the state of the patient or is it rather an indirect gathering of information that may best depict individual pain and suffering". Solving theoretical and practical problem of contemporary palliative care in sphere of relief of the patient's suffering, and the preparing the patient for death applies to the entire process of palliative care, not only in the terminal stages, and includes the patient's social environment in this process, focusing attention on the problem of the physical and social factors complex. In this case the philosophy of palliative care is directed to offering an opportunity to explore cultural, social, and personal aspects of loss, death, dying, grief and suffering; it emphasizes effective support and collaboration with community-based services, includes bereavement theories, social justice and diversity, ethical issues etc.

## Research objectives

This paper aims to provide a critical engagement with conceptual level of the suffering understanding in the palliative care practice in the context of perspectives of social work in the multidisciplinary team treating palliative patients.

## Common approach to suffering in palliative care

The idea of a philosophy of palliative care (PC) emerged with Cicely Saunders' vision for "a good death", and was developed further with the World Health Organization definition of palliative care. It is now being applied not only to cancer patients, but to all patients in end-of-life situations and patients and their families who are facing problems associated with life-threatening illness (WHO, 2018). In international palliative care literature, hospice philosophy is challenged for being overly normative in its ideal of the good death. The framework of the PC approach is describing by quality of life, autonomy, dignity, patient-centeredness, and the priority assigned to relatives in the remit of care (Calling for a Palliative Care Culture, 2012; Klitzman, 2007). The palliative care names as one of its central

aims to prevent and relieve suffering, but it not only focuses on the physical dimension of pain but also addresses the patient's psychological, social, and spiritual suffering. Formerly understood as specialized care for patients suffering cancer and with a poor prognosis, palliative care is now regarded as appropriate for those with chronic illness requiring long term care. As a result, contemporary conception of PC is orienting to suffering as a counterpoint of the patient's state in ill, including his environment as a totality of physical and social factors. The traditional approach to palliative care, that development in the framework of appropriate philosophy, is oriented to the suffering and pain as a main goal of the palliative care (Kleinman A., Das V., Lock M, 1997; Rodgers, Cowles 1997; Sacks, Nelson). In accordance with such tradition, "palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering. This is done through early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual" (Cherny, 2015). As we can see, at-first, traditional paradigm of thinking postulates the priority of the prevention and relief of suffering, and, at-second, as an object of palliative care is pain, but "other problems" fade into the background in most cases. In the same time, physical, psychosocial and spiritual problems in the lot of cases, are more important for the patient and his immediate environment. From the point of view of the alternative philosophy of PC, that oriented to concept, in which the PC names as one of its central aims to prevent and relieve suffering (the concept of "total pain" by C. Saunders) are important the issues of axiological orientations of multidisciplinary team treating palliative patients.

The contemporary approach to multidisciplinary team treating palliative patients forming, expanded by including social workers in it, certainly implies including the existential dimension in the definition of suffering highlights the relevance of suffering in life and its effect on one's own attachment to the world (including personal management, or the cultural and social influences which shape it) (Bueno-Gómez,

2017). In the same time, the multidisciplinary team must take into account "our experience of pain and suffering structure" (Smith, 2024.), because this experience over time the experience of suffering allows one to overcome time, at least a social time. Since "it is important to avoid essentializing, naturalizing, or sentimentalizing suffering. There is no single way to suffer; there is no timeless or spaceless universal shape to suffering" (Kleinman, Das, Lock, 1997), we take the suffering as a fact of being (social and individual, but not objective), without delving into the essence of the concept itself to the detriment of understanding the essence of the phenomenon itself.

Contemporary researches emphasize that "acknowledged suffering through the identification of various meanings of a situation within their constructed reality and belief system. During individuals' suffering, time was altered and the experience occurred within an expanded present. The individual created an emotional space apart from the meaning of loss within suffering. Trust included the categories of dynamic experience, losing trust, and dealing to regain trust" (Sacks Nelson, 2007). That is why for social worker, as a member of multidisciplinary team treating palliative patients, the task of paying attention to states of suffering is associated with the study of disease states in general, which is realized in the well-known "direct approach". However, "the methodological dilemma remains, whether a direct approach is the most appropriate for understanding the state of the patient or is it rather an indirect gathering of information that may best depict individual pain and suffering" (bueno-gómez, 2017).

We accept conceptualization the suffering as a complex human response to which there are physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects. As a consequence of that conceptualization is understanding that perception of suffering threatens self-integrity, and induces negative behaviors, such as personal changes in relation to value system, sense of reality, withdrawal, feelings of helplessness, and despair. However, the next situation take place too – "suffering" is a central concept within bioethics and often a crucial consideration in medical decision

making. As used in practice, however, the concept risks being uninformative, ambiguous, or even misleading (NELSON et al., 2024). Moreover, the progression of suffering is an existential ‘sign’ of the development of understanding of life as an ontological or spiritual entity, which demands a meaning-creating encounter between the patient and caregiver, and the concept ‘existential caring encounter’ was used to describe how the encounter between patient and caregiver can create meaning in communion and thereby alleviate suffering by making it bearable. The last is determinant for practice of palliative care in the whole and social work in particular.

## Discussion

R. Anderson’s conception introduces the taxonomy that distinguishes mental, physical, and social suffering, and then offers subcategories: depression, anxiety, grief, and existential suffering are all types of mental suffering; suffering is defined as distress resulting from threat or damage to one’s body or self-identity. “Next, to capture the principal, dominant cultural meanings of suffering, eight frames (essentially, major points of view) for suffering are summarized. These frames are suffering as punishment, suffering as reward, suffering as craving, suffering as sacrifice, suffering as natural destiny, suffering as manageable, relief of suffering as human purpose, and lastly, relief of suffering as progress in quality of life. Suffering and negative quality of life have a lot in common. Understanding perceptions of peoples’ desired relief of suffering requires that we distinguish their own suffering from suffering of others important to them. Thus, in measuring subjective quality of life, it may be necessary to distinguish a person’s perception of their own quality of life from that of others who are important to them” (Anderson, 2014). In other side, when the pain brings a satisfaction, the suffering alive, because in most cases the suffering lives by the pain (physical, spiritual, social, emotional etc.). But if the suffering is commonly viewed as a self-reflective and future-oriented process, which fails to validate many forms of suffering and marginalizes certain populations (Stilwell et al. 2022.), how physical pain, for example, becomes the emo-

tional state, and even emotional dependence that in the essence is suffering? The emotional (essentially, psychological in a whole) barrier, formed in the system of morality, in the system of public morality, transforms physical pain into suffering, which has the property of causing «spiritual» pain. Overcoming alienation, like overcoming death, leads to the fetishization of suffering. Pain here is that intoxicating source of suffering through which an escape from reality is realized, and suffering itself develops into an existential basis of being, determining a specific *modus vivendi*. Suffering, in fact, turns into a lifestyle regardless of a person’s perception of being and life – optimism or pessimism.

Suffering, as a specific property that alienates the individual in social being, becomes a fetish as soon as it acquires the status of a certain value, that accepted and shared by the social environment of a person. The objectification of suffering, as subjective, ultimately leads to the sacralization of the conditional state of an alienated individual who perceives all of the reality around him in a distorted form, forming and rooting in his consciousness and thinking erroneous ideas that are transferred to reality itself. The nature and essence of suffering is interpreted in no other way than in the light of the supernatural, insurmountable ontological condition of human existence. Religious apologetics of suffering gradually comes to the forefront, legitimizing it as an attribute of any sacred text that determines the possibility and form of human being in the world.

Studies such as Dávidová et al. (2017) underscore how relational attachment and the experience of meaning are essential in mitigating the internalization of suffering among helping professionals. Similarly, Hardy and Roman et al. (2022) observed how social pathologies, amplified by pandemics and conflict, solidify suffering into collective psychosocial disorders. In the post-COVID and conflict-ridden context, the work of Poloňová et al. (2022) reveals how suffering has manifested in increased substance abuse, depression, and pathology in vulnerable populations like refugees and the homeless.

Objectively non-existent properties, that determined by the conventions of any moral-

ethical system, give to the suffering the character of inalienable values of the being. The fetish of suffering, as a counterpoint of many moral systems, is difficult to overcome. Even nihilistic denial sometimes is unable to overcome this fetishism, recognizing the existential significance of suffering and postulating the need for its unconditional and submissive acceptance.

The experience of Holocaust survivors (Horácková et al., 2022), and the mental health dimensions of war refugees from Ukraine, Yemen, and Syria (Murgová et al., 2022), illustrate how collective trauma translates into personal suffering, often interpreted as moral burden or destiny. In social work, suffering is frequently seen not just as a clinical concern but as a spiritual and existential reality (Kondrla et al., 2024).

But let us admit that Marx was right and agree with him that man changes everything around him in a way that is beneficial and useful to him. Then suffering, which is absent in reality, being an inversion of the subjective in the outside, acquires the character of an equivalent value in relation to the conditions of being and being itself. It is quite natural that the value content of suffering changes the attitude of the person himself to suffering.

Suffering becomes as to a value Moloch, and with the help of mystification of the compassion brought to life as a result of the objectification of the subjective-individual in social existence, suffering turns into a bargaining chip for one's own vanity, feeding and justifying everything base and unsuccessful in life. This is visible in the commodification of suffering, as echoed by Buzalová et al. (2025) in their study of labeling and stigma among the Roma population—how socially constructed suffering can serve institutional and political agendas. Comparing to study Budayová and Ludvigh Cintulova (2025) there is significance between lifestyle and changes in life, social media and behaviour in online space that impacts personality.

Suffering becomes a real commodity, which often sells very well – there is always a demand for it, and a considerable one! Suffering, and especially compassion, causes a person's slavish

dependence on the product of his own fetishism as a result of emotional immaturity or lack of integrity of personality, apologetics of the non-existent, imposed on a person by society that using the construct of suffering for its own purposes. Any type of social relations parasitizes on suffering, subjugating a person who is completely disoriented.

In the context of professional environments, Slašťan et al. (2024) emphasize how burnout in social services facilities arises precisely from this overwhelming exposure to systemic suffering, which feeds back into the helper's own existential malaise. Hubková et al. (2024) have further confirmed that suffering, when objectified in mental health care, becomes embedded in institutional practice, reinforcing a distorted understanding of patient identity.

And in vain does Baudrillard (2017) try to remove the problem by introducing the concept of the “symbolic” into the system of classifying society – the symbol of modern society is the unconditionality of suffering. Although simply there are no objective conditions for suffering.

As Trnková (2019) and Nemčoková & Trnková (2025) remind us in their clinical studies, even physiological conditions like obesity or pregnancy-related health risks are frequently imbued with social-symbolic suffering, often disproportionate to the objective threat. Meanwhile, fieldwork done at crisis points—by Jackulíková et al. (2021), Laca & Laca (2022), and Murgová et al. (2022) – confirms how trauma transforms suffering into an operational framework for policy, medicine, and humanitarian aid, institutionalizing it further.

Ultimately, as Majda et al. (2024) highlight in their research on foster care, the psychological and social dimensions of child suffering are socially codified and instrumentalized under the guise of care and protection. As Vansač et al. (2024) and Laca et al. (2024) argue, the intersection of suffering with social inequity, energy poverty, and the sexuality of persons with disabilities further reveals suffering's role as a deeply politicized and moralized construct.

But if the social alienation is loneliness (as a result which forming the concreteness of social being), pure subjectivity of the thinking really

isn't a solidarity. But can't be none solidarity in the suffering – this is always mine. May be this is not humanistic, but even an “infant smiles” is result of someone's suffering. That is social sense of suffering as itself. And if Sartre is right, the suffering contents “all that is ignominious in the human situation, for depicting what is mean, sordid or base to the neglect of certain things that possess charm and beauty and belong to the brighter side of human nature” (Sartre, 1989). In this case we have a conclusion – the suffering is possibility of human life itself in its social dimension. However, for not to be existentialists, in traditional sense of the word, we don't must proceed from subject, in the sense in which it is used by subjectivism. In the fact we have situation the suffering as an alienation (including the pain). (Bustan, 2016).

The projection of the wish to suffer is really “a conscious decision taken”. But this can be and opposite “conscious decision taken” – not to suffer. As in the first, so in the second case, the decision taken determines the form of human existence, in which a man exists already independent of external conditions of being alienates by the subjective. Abandonment, in the Heidegger's interpretation, suggests that a man is without excuse for suffering. And this is right, because suffering has no value, especially objective value (if it exists or can exist at all). But the suffering, as form of pain (as experience of the pain), is pure ideal form – it is the path to fetishization of reality, and way or method of its fetishization. In that reality the suffering is a symbol imperfection and weakness (compared to study by Leskova et al, 2023; Lenhart et al., 2023).

Realness of pain plunges into the fog of uncritical (religious and similar) consciousness and thinking: when real turns to only symbol of real, the real leaves of all ideal – it turns to a formal material sign, «objective» sign of this reality. But ideal appears as a phenomenon of alienation, and in this sense, it opposes the consciousness and will of the individual, forming a different reality. What can we do in the case that ideal, like material, exists out- and independent of subjective, because for subjective the realness of ideal, its objectivity is exactly the same reality as realness and objectivity of material?

Perhaps we should admit that the culture of suffering is an alienated ideal? But in that case, we must agree with Marx and admit that suffering has nothing to do with the nature of physical pain; or we can return to Hegel and admit that suffering is the «fetishism of a symbol», specifically the symbol of pain. At least we must clearly understand (and theoretically manoeuvre) that ideal being is absurd, and the being of ideal is real. However, an embodied idea is only a way of existence of an idea, the realization of its other being in the present being... In this case we have a conclusion – the suffering is a scream of loneliness, and we have also situation the suffering as meaning acquisition.

We have some words for a person in suffering, but we have no words for a person in happiness. And we can certainly share someone's suffering, but we often no longer have the strength to share someone else's happiness and joy.

## Conclusion

To the basic tenets of social work with palliative patient must be added describe nature and the goals of suffering, connected with solving such worldview issues as: the suffering as a social gift; the suffering as meaning acquisition; the suffering as an alienation. An understanding of the patterns of unbearable and bearable suffering can be of help to the caregiver in caring for the patient by serving as a basis for meaning-creation in communion. This may thereby be a way of alleviating the patient's suffering by making it bearable during the progression of suffering. For increasing the effectiveness of social worker in the multidisciplinary team treating palliative patients is need to develop a educational course for social worker, understanding suffering, to help better understand the suffering experience, for better prepared to intervene in difficult clinical situations involving suffering and for working in the interdisciplinary team.

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# Healthcare clustering as a strategy for business process optimization in Ukraine

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## Abstract:

This article presents a conceptual framework for establishing a virtual, non-state medical cluster in Ukraine's metropolitan regions, financed through a dedicated private insurance fund. The proposed model responds to the urgent need for more sustainable financing mechanisms, improved coordination among providers, and structural modernization of urban healthcare delivery. It integrates public and private medical institutions into a unified digital and contractual network supported by performance-based funding. Drawing on international ex-

perience - such as France's GHT, Germany's sickness funds, and the U.S.- based Kaiser Permanente - the model aims to optimize resource use, enhance service quality, and incentivize preventive care. Core elements include shared clinical protocols, integrated patient pathways, and transparent insurance operations. A qualitative analysis examines the model's institutional design, implementation scenarios, and potential policy implications. The study argues that virtual healthcare clusters offer a scalable, innovative strategy to strengthen system resilience and equity, and could serve as a practical foundation for future health insurance reform in Ukraine.

## Objective

This study aims to substantiate the concept of establishing a virtual, non-state medical cluster within a major urban agglomeration, supported by a dedicated private financing mechanism. The relevance of this inquiry is underpinned by the persistent underfunding of Ukraine's healthcare system and the disproportionate reliance on informal out-of-pocket payments by patients. Currently, public healthcare expenditure accounts for only approximately 50% of the total national health spending, leaving a significant financial burden on individuals. Despite the creation of the National Health Service of Ukraine (NHSU) in 2018, and its administration of state-funded health services via the Medical Guarantees Program, funding levels remain grossly inadequate. Official requests for financing from the Ministry of Health and the NHSU have consistently exceeded budget allocations by a factor of three, resulting in limited service coverage and the transference of costs to patients [1] [2]. Healthcare challenges in post-COVID settings have further amplified system stress. As study by Kralik et al. (2023, 2022), Radkova et al. (2022, 2024) and Ludvig Cintulova et al. (2022, 2023) highlight, the long-term effects of COVID-19, including Post-COVID Syndrome, place new demands on service provision and necessitate integrated psychosocial and therapeutic support structures, particularly for vulnerable populations affected by social, economic barriers and mental health problems.

In light of these constraints, the necessity arises for alternative mechanisms to mobilize private capital and optimize the allocation and utilization of existing healthcare resources. A strategic

solution lies in the formation of non-state medical clusters in large cities, where healthcare demand and institutional concentration are highest. However, the current hospital clustering efforts led by the Ministry of Health largely address rural and regional contexts, insufficiently addressing the complex dynamics of metropolitan healthcare. Experts critique the lack of well-defined patient flow pathways within urban clusters, where overlapping institutional functions often create inefficiencies. For example, both a specialized cardiology center and a general hospital with a robust cardiology department may coexist within a metropolis, leading to ambiguity in emergency routing decisions. Additionally, urban facilities frequently attract patients from surrounding areas due to superior care standards, an aspect inadequately reflected in official service planning [3].

The core proposition of this article is the conceptualization of a «virtual» metropolitan medical cluster that integrates institutions of diverse ownership structures under a unified service and financing framework, mediated through a private insurance fund. This cluster model is intended to achieve dual objectives: first, to enhance care coordination and operational efficiency across healthcare providers; second, to aggregate and mobilize supplementary financial resources through private health insurance schemes, employer-sponsored coverage, and regulated patient contributions. A delicate equilibrium between public oversight and private sector dynamism is critical: while the state defines regulatory parameters and guarantees a baseline of care, private actors complement the system through innovation, managerial flexibility, and co-financing.

## Design/Concept

Unlike traditional brick-and-mortar healthcare complexes, the proposed cluster does not involve the construction of new facilities. Instead, it integrates existing metropolitan healthcare providers into a coordinated network through contractual agreements and digital interoperability. Participants may include large multiprofile hospitals (both municipal and ministerial), specialized care centers (e.g., cardiology, oncology), private clinics, diagnostic laboratories, rehabilitation units, and primary care practices. A defining feature is the cluster's multi-ownership model, fostering collaboration between public and private entities.

As Petrovic et al. (2024) and Kobylarek et al. (2022) emphasize, the mental health of university students in Slovakia suffered markedly during the pandemic, reinforcing the need for well-coordinated urban care systems. Thus, the proposed cluster model integrates multiple healthcare providers under a virtual, multi-owner structure. It aims to facilitate effective patient navigation and reduce institutional redundancies. Such clustering echoes integrated models in Western Europe and aligns with domestic calls for healthcare decentralization and diversification.

Central to the governance structure is an independent private insurance fund, functionally akin to the NHSU but capitalized through private contributions. This fund establishes service-level agreements with cluster members, reimbursing them for patient care at negotiated tariff rates. Revenue streams for the fund include premiums from voluntary health insurance plans, corporate insurance contributions (sponsored by employers), and payments for out-of-pocket services not covered by public guarantees. In effect, the fund consolidates currently fragmented private health expenditures. For instance, approximately 95% of French citizens possess supplementary insurance (*mutuelle*) to cover copayments and non-basic services [4]; although uptake in Ukraine remains low, it is on an upward trajectory. The proposed fund would serve as a catalyst for expanding this sector by introducing standardized and transparent financial instruments.

The organizational architecture of the cluster features a coordination unit - either a ma-

nagement company or a representative cluster council - which may be embedded within the insurance fund or formed as a separate governance entity. This unit is tasked with strategic care planning, fiscal distribution, contract administration, quality assurance, and the implementation of clinical and procedural standards. Internationally, analogous functions are performed by Germany's sickness funds, which operate as non-state insurers under a framework of social solidarity, covering around 86% of the population [5]. In this system, the state primarily acts as regulator and co-financer, while service provision is carried out by a diverse set of public, nonprofit, and commercial institutions. The Ukrainian model proposed here mirrors this arrangement: public authorities define the operational framework, but the cluster is managed according to principles of stakeholder competition and collaborative governance.

A foundational tenet of the cluster is integrated care delivery. This entails the seamless navigation of patients through all stages of treatment - initial consultation, specialized intervention, and rehabilitation - within a single coordinated network. Such an approach aligns with global paradigms of integrated healthcare. In the United Kingdom, for example, Integrated Care Systems (ICS) consolidate the NHS, local authorities, and affiliated organizations to jointly administer healthcare services at the regional level. Forty-two ICS entities span all of England, each serving between 0,5 to 3,5 million people, with the objective of enhancing health outcomes and cost-efficiency through collaborative local governance [6]. The proposed Ukrainian cluster mirrors this strategy but is rooted in a non-state infrastructure confirmed by studies [14,15].

Implementation requires a unified digital health platform: shared electronic health records, centralized service and pricing registries, streamlined referral systems, and telemedicine capabilities. In Germany's *Gesundes Kinzigtal* initiative - one of the most successful integrated care models - the IT platform enabled data interoperability and collaboration among disparate providers. The coordinating organization established clinical protocols and aligned financial incentives between payers and providers, facilita-

ting coherent service delivery [7]. The Ukrainian cluster aims to replicate this logic, optimizing business processes via systemic reengineering and Lean management principles. Lean methodology mandates the evaluation of each procedural step in terms of its value addition and the elimination of waste. The inculcation of a continuous improvement culture, patient-centered practices, and participatory decision-making are key hallmarks of this approach [8]. As such, cluster governance will collaborate with institutional leadership to streamline care pathways, eliminate procedural redundancies, and enhance patient logistics (e.g., inter-facility transportation).

The financial model is structured to incentivize quality and operational efficiency. Remuneration schemes may range from fee-for-service arrangements to more sophisticated mechanisms such as episode-based payments or capitation (fixed per capita rates). Contractual agreements will embed performance metrics and quality benchmarks. These may include targets for reducing avoidable hospitalizations or minimizing elective surgery wait times. Achievement of such benchmarks will trigger incentive-based compensation. This alignment of economic incentives between funders and providers fosters system-wide improvements in health outcomes and cost control. The Kinzigal case illustrates this point: shared savings agreements between the coordinating company and two sickness funds resulted in a 7% reduction in healthcare expenditure (equivalent to €4,6 million for 31000 patients in 2012) while improving service quality [7]. Governance will involve a management council or coordinating unit responsible for standardizing clinical pathways, auditing outcomes, and ensuring efficient use of resources. As Ludvigh Cintulova et al. (2023, 2024b), Buzalova (2024, 2025) and Budayova et al. (2023) observed in marginalized Roma communities, decentralized yet coordinated healthcare interventions can significantly improve access and health equity. Vansač and Noga (2021) further emphasize the necessity of spiritual and psychosocial care in health delivery, especially under stress-inducing conditions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health institutions within the cluster will contract with the fund based on service-level agreements and key performance indicators, promoting transparency and continuous improvement. Authors Noga and Vansač (2022) and Vansač and Gulašova (2022) on long-term care demographics further supports the inclusion of elderly care facilities within such a cluster, with services tailored by both need and region.

In summary, the cluster functions as a cohesive network linked by a unified insurance fund, interoperable digital infrastructure, and standardized clinical and operational workflows. It operates in parallel with the public healthcare system yet remains interlinked. Some institutions may receive dual funding - public financing for baseline services via the NHSU and private compensation for supplementary services delivered to insured patients. This configuration embodies a public-private partnership model wherein the state ensures universal baseline access while the cluster delivers value-added services and innovation.

The proposed cluster would operate alongside the NHSU, with some institutions receiving dual funding. This public-private synergy promotes innovation while safeguarding universal coverage. Vansač et al. (2024a, 2024b) and Bundežlova et al. (2023) trace the transformation of senior care services in Slovakia—a contextually relevant example of how cross-sector collaboration can evolve traditional models into flexible, multi-stakeholder networks.

## Participants

The architecture of stakeholder involvement within the proposed medical cluster encompasses a spectrum of interrelated entities whose functions collectively shape the system's operational coherence. Chief among these are metropolitan healthcare institutions - municipal hospitals and outpatient centers - that constitute the principal care delivery infrastructure. Their participation is motivated by the opportunity to access supplementary financial inflows and expand patient reach without relinquishing their alignment with state-guaranteed service packages. Additionally, private clinics and diagnostic laboratories benefit from broadened client access via

their integration with the insurance fund. University-affiliated and departmental hospitals are envisioned to fulfill niche roles as centers of clinical excellence within the cluster.

The private insurance fund operates as the financial nexus of the cluster ecosystem. Conceived as a non-state, non-profit institution - or potentially a joint-stock organization - its founding stakeholders may include consortia of insurers, corporate employers, or health service provider associations. The fund functions analogously to sickness funds in social health insurance systems, aggregating premiums and disbursing reimbursements based on service contracts. Drawing parallels to the German model, where approximately 105 non-profit sickness funds co-exist with a diversity of private insurers [5], the Ukrainian fund would blend principles of solidarity-based pooling with optional private participation.

The population base - encompassing residents of urban and adjacent peri-urban zones - represents the cluster's demand-side actors. This heterogeneous group can be categorized as follows:

- Voluntarily insured individuals, who purchase coverage independently or through employer-sponsored schemes, receiving preferential access to cluster services with limited or no co-payments.
- Corporate plan beneficiaries, consisting of employees whose employers have negotiated comprehensive coverage through the fund, thereby ensuring seamless, cashless access to care.
- Self-paying patients, who access services directly on a fee-for-service basis and are afforded transparent pricing, standardized service quality, and opportunities for insurance enrollment.

Employers and corporate stakeholders serve as pivotal institutional actors, particularly on the demand side. By investing in workforce health through premium contributions and preventive programs, employers are positioned as strategic partners. The cluster offers them streamlined engagement via a singular contract encompassing a broad, integrated provider network. This arrangement enhances employee access while offer-

ring employers robust quality monitoring via performance metrics provided by the fund.

Public authorities, including national and municipal bodies, retain a regulatory and facilitative presence. The Ministry of Health and the NHSU establish regulatory frameworks, oversee quality assurance, and coordinate emergency medical response. Local governments may reinforce cluster operations by providing infrastructural support, enabling hospital autonomy, or spearheading public awareness initiatives regarding insurance literacy. Crucially, public oversight ensures equity by mandating that the private fund upholds non-discriminatory access and fulfills its contractual obligations to all patient demographics. In this regard, the state functions as both arbiter and integrator, aligning private innovation with overarching public health goals.

All cluster participants are bound through contractual relations mediated by the insurance fund. Providers sign agreements detailing reimbursement rates, performance expectations, and covered service volumes. Policyholders accept the fund's regulations, including network participation and service protocols. Employers enter into formal arrangements to extend coverage to their workforce, and municipalities may sign memoranda of understanding to coordinate service delivery, including emergency care protocols for both insured and uninsured individuals.

Given this complex multi-actor environment, a formalized governance structure is imperative. A cluster coordination council - composed of provider representatives, fund administrators, insured population delegates, and public observers - can provide strategic oversight, participatory decision-making, and system transparency.

France's experience with territorial hospital groupings underscores the importance of inclusive stakeholder representation. Exclusion of private actors in nearly all 135 clusters undermined integrative potential and impeded care coordination. In contrast, the Ukrainian model's deliberate incorporation of mixed-ownership institutions is a foundational strength, enhancing both operational viability and systemic resilience [9].

In recent years, systemic stressors—including the COVID-19 pandemic, rising elderly care needs, and growing social inequalities—have

underscored the necessity for integrated, multidisciplinary approaches within healthcare and social services. As highlighted by Tománek, Radková, and Buzalová (2024), the pandemic exacerbated poverty and social exclusion among the elderly in Slovakia, revealing critical vulnerabilities in both institutional support and community resilience. These insights align with earlier findings by Subramaniam et al. (2018), who emphasized that elderly and homeless populations residing in rehabilitation and nursing homes present not only physiotherapeutic but also epidemiological and social care challenges. Their study underscored that multidisciplinary teamwork—combining clinical, epidemiological, and psychosocial perspectives—is essential for effective intervention.

Furthermore, manipulation and psychological exploitation have emerged as significant risk factors impacting psychosocial health. Svoboda et al. (2024) argue that manipulation in interpersonal or media contexts contributes to emotional instability and long-term social dysfunction, especially among youth and vulnerable individuals. This finding reinforces the importance of mental health awareness and preventative social strategies in both education and practice.

Lifelong learning and continued professional education are also central to enhancing the quality of social work. As Taraj et al. (2023) demonstrate, continuous education strengthens the capacity of social workers to address new and evolving social challenges, particularly those affecting marginalized groups. Their research stresses the need for adaptive training curricula that respond to demographic shifts, new technologies, and global crises such as migration and pandemics.

Together, these studies contribute to a broader understanding of systemic care for at-risk populations. They support a transition toward integrated, interdisciplinary models of service delivery—encompassing social work, public health, education, and psychology. The clustering of care networks, supported by regulatory public bodies and enhanced by private sector innovation, reflects the kind of collaborative structure needed to address complex social and medical needs [16, 17]. Crucially, public govern-

ance remains the guarantor of equity and accessibility, ensuring that even in diversified care ecosystems, the rights and dignity of the most vulnerable are upheld [18,19].

## Methods

This investigation employs a conceptual analytical framework, enriched with structural modeling components, to examine the applicability and potential impact of a metropolitan medical cluster within Ukraine's healthcare system. The research synthesizes peer-reviewed literature, comparative health policy analyses, and case study evaluations of integrated care models across multiple jurisdictions.

Empirical cases include France's territorial restructuring of hospital systems, Germany's insurer-based competition and integrated care experiments (e.g., *Gesundes Kinzigtal*), the United Kingdom's Integrated Care Systems (ICS) combining public and private actors, and the United States' vertically integrated private networks exemplified by Kaiser Permanente. Each model is assessed for contextual transferability and strategic relevance to Ukrainian healthcare realities.

Based on this review, a conceptual model of the cluster is developed, delineating four core subsystems - financial, clinical, informational, and managerial - and mapping the interdependencies that underpin their integrative function. A qualitative SWOT analysis is applied to anticipate operational challenges, resource constraints, and system-level synergies.

A comparative diagnostic contrasts the proposed cluster with the existing fragmented service landscape, characterized by patient self-navigation between siloed providers and disjointed financial streams.

The study draws on the theoretical foundation of economic cluster theory, which posits that co-location and collaboration among market actors enhance innovation diffusion, resource efficiency, and responsiveness. Business Process Reengineering (BPR) principles are embedded to explore radical simplification and workflow redesign, aligned with Lean healthcare management and continuous quality improvement philosophies.

Quantitative modeling was not conducted, given the pre-implementation status of the cluster concept. Instead, the analysis emphasizes logical coherence and feasibility within scenario-based planning. The transformation of abstract principles - such as financial incentive alignment - into tangible mechanisms (e.g., shared risk pools, outcome-based contracting) serves as a critical methodological axis. Kaiser Permanente's experience with capitation and preventive care models is invoked to illustrate the practical implications of prepaid systems and their alignment with system sustainability goals [11].

In sum, the methodology integrates conceptual theorization, systemic design, and applied translation of managerial and policy principles into an actionable cluster framework.

## Results

The proposed model of a virtual metropolitan healthcare cluster demonstrates substantial potential across key dimensions of system performance, as supported by theoretical projections and international benchmarking. The outcomes of this analysis are delineated along the following core dimensions (see Figure 1):

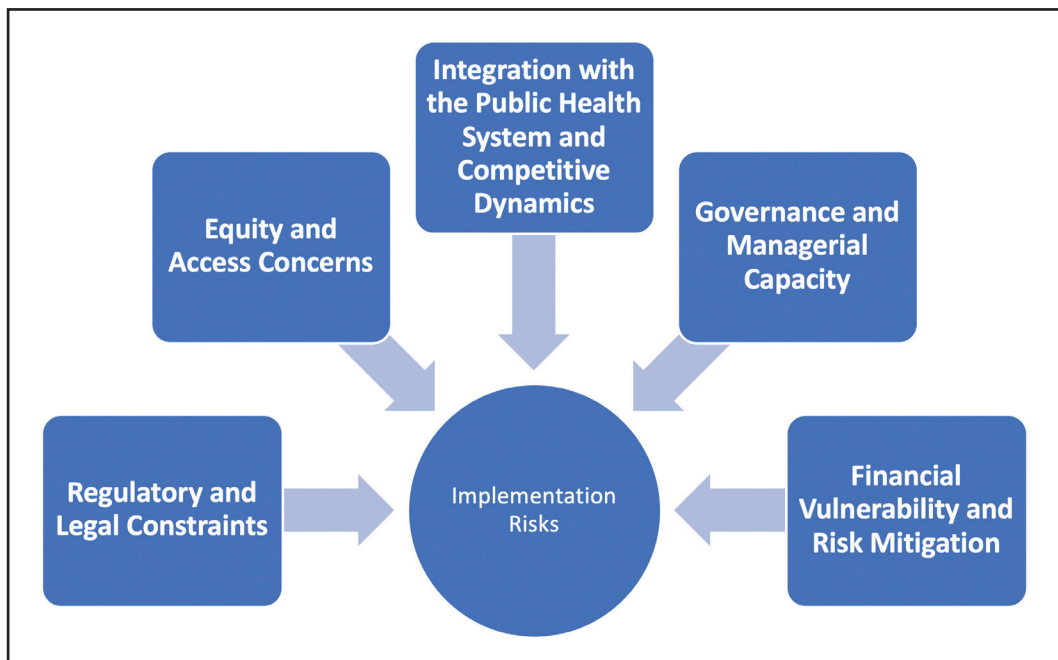
- **Enhanced Resource Efficiency:** Cluster integration eliminates service duplication and optimizes facility use. Coordinated patient

**Figure 1** Key Analytical Outcomes  
(Compiled by the Author)



routing and centralized diagnostics increase efficiency, as seen in France's GHT reform [9]. The Ukrainian model, backed by a private fund, enables reinvestment of savings and resource redistribution. Kinzigal (Germany) achieved 7% savings through integrated care [7]. With 70% of Ukraine's budget spent on inpatient care [1], clusters can rebalance focus toward outpatient and preventive services.

- **New Funding Streams and Sustainability:** The cluster fund pools fragmented private spending into a transparent, accountable mechanism. Addressing historical mistrust in Ukraine's insurance sector, it enforces standards and accountability. Corporate wellness programs evolve into scalable insurance schemes. France's system shows that private insurance (13.7% of spending [10]) strengthens financial resilience. Like Germany's non-profit sickness funds, the model emphasizes reinvestment over profit, ensuring long-term viability.
- **Improved Quality of Care:** Standardized protocols ensure consistent service quality across providers. Centralizing complex procedures in high-volume centers improves outcomes ("volume-to-value"). France's shared medical projects support this [9]. Ukraine's fund could incentivize accreditation and continuous education. A unified quality monitoring system would track key indicators like mortality, readmission, and satisfaction.
- **Prevention and Population Health:** Prepaid models incentivize prevention over treatment. The cluster focuses on vaccinations, screenings, and chronic disease management. Kaiser Permanente exemplifies this model [11]. Physicians are salaried, hospitals are cost centers, and unnecessary hospitalizations are minimized. Ukraine's fund could reward GPs for meeting preventive health targets, reducing future costs and boosting productivity.
- **Patient Experience and Equity:** A unified digital platform streamlines access, scheduling, and coverage verification. Patients benefit from consistent quality, transparent pricing, and shared medical records. This improves trust in the system - especially vital in Ukraine. The fund can support a solidarity mechanism to subsidize care for the

**Figure 2** Structural and ethical implementation model risks (Compiled by the Author)

uninsured and co-finance services beyond state coverage.

Despite its advantages, the model faces structural and ethical implementation risks, as summarized in Figure 2:

- **Regulatory and Legal Constraints:** Ukraine's current legislative framework does not yet accommodate regionally based non-state health insurance entities. Comprehensive legal reform - including amendments to insurance, health, and fiscal codes - is required to authorize parallel fund operation without jurisdictional conflicts. Safeguards must also be established to prevent service double-financing. Encouragingly, the Ministry of Health has articulated a vision for systemic insurance reform, formalized in its August 2023 roadmap (Order No. 1530) [12], which may eventually legitimize this cluster-based financing architecture.
- **Equity and Access Concerns:** A pronounced risk lies in the emergence of a two-tiered system, wherein uninsured or economically disadvantaged populations are structurally marginalized from superior cluster-based services. To mitigate inequity, state actors must reinforce public system investment and explore mechanisms for subsidizing private insurance acquisition among vulnerable populations. France's practice of covering supplementary Mutuelle insurance premiums for its lowest-income citizens (approx. 7%) offers a viable template [4]. Policy instruments such as targeted vouchers, tax deductions, or means-tested premium subsidies could be adapted for the Ukrainian context to ensure inclusivity.
- **Public-sector medical institutions** may view the formation of privately coordinated clusters as a threat to their professional staff retention and patient volume, particularly with regard to affluent and insured segments. Such dynamics risk exacerbating disparities between cluster-affiliated and non-affiliated facilities. This concern is supported by regional research highlighting systemic imbalances when services and care standards are not uniformly distributed (Slaš'fan, Lesňáková, & Zámková, 2024; Buzalová, Oláh, Pavlovičová, & Dirgová, 2025). To preclude systemic fragmentation, cluster integration should be conceptualized not as a parallel structure, but as a supplementary financial and organizational layer within the existing hospital district fra-

mework. In this construct, hospitals designated by the Ministry of Health as core or supra-cluster facilities continue to receive public funding via the NHSU while concurrently accessing private resources through cluster participation—thereby reinforcing, rather than isolating, their systemic function.

- **Governance and Managerial Capacity:** The cluster's operational success hinges upon the availability of cross-disciplinary managerial expertise capable of navigating complex inter-organizational environments. Strategic leadership must encompass proficiency in healthcare delivery, insurance operations, financial modeling, and stakeholder engagement. Identifying and cultivating such leadership constitutes a critical path dependency. Previous case studies highlight resistance from healthcare personnel, rooted in apprehensions about new accountability and performance evaluation mechanisms (Šupolová, Barkasi, & Bárta, 2024; Majda et al., 2024). A staged implementation—initiated through a pilot cohort of voluntarily participating facilities—offers a pragmatic approach to demonstrating viability and fostering institutional buy-in.
- **Financial Vulnerability and Risk Mitigation:** The sustainability of the insurance fund requires proactive risk management strategies to buffer against systemic shocks, such as epidemiological crises, geopolitical disruptions, or environmental catastrophes. Institutional resilience can be enhanced via catastrophe reinsurance contracts, actuarially sound premium structures, and the establishment of contingency reserves. Research on healthcare service delivery during conflict and post-crisis settings underlines the necessity for such buffers (Murgová et al., 2022; Jackulíková et al., 2021). During early-stage operations, capitalization from donor institutions or municipal co-funding mechanisms may serve to offset initial liquidity constraints and promote financial equilibrium.
- While challenges exist, the empirical and theoretical basis for the proposed model is robust. International exemplars—including Kaiser Permanente, Gesundes Kinzigtal, and the NHS's Integrated Care Systems—demonstrate

that vertically and horizontally integrated health systems can achieve superior health outcomes, optimize cost structures, and improve stakeholder satisfaction. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, health clusters enable systemic synergy by fostering collaborative learning, resource optimization, and adaptive governance across institutional boundaries (Laca et al., 2024; Ludvigh Cintulová & Budayová, 2024). In the Ukrainian context, where the healthcare delivery ecosystem remains largely fragmented and devoid of coherent private network organization, the proposed model addresses a critical structural gap by offering a framework for coordinated multi-stakeholder engagement.

## Conclusion

Amid persistent underfunding and rising demand for accessible, high-quality medical services in Ukraine's metropolitan regions, the conceptualization of a virtual, privately coordinated medical cluster represents a strategic avenue for systemic modernization. The model facilitates a hybridized governance architecture wherein private actors contribute financial flexibility, operational agility, and user-centric design, while the public sector retains its foundational mandate for regulatory oversight and equity assurance.

Rather than displacing the existing public health infrastructure, the cluster model complements and reinforces it. Public institutions within the cluster continue to deliver state-guaranteed services while accessing supplementary investment to modernize infrastructure, enhance staff remuneration, and strengthen clinical capabilities (Trnková, 2019; Nemčoková & Trnková, 2025, Barkasi, Barta, 2024). Financial incentives are oriented toward outcomes and value-based care, promoting disease prevention and long-term efficiency gains. In doing so, the model operationalizes international best practices while remaining attuned to local institutional realities.

Comparative international experience—spanning France's territorial hospital integrations, Germany's cooperative insurance-provider frameworks, the UK's regional care partnerships, and the United States' integrated

private networks—affirm the efficacy of such interventions in diverse health system contexts. Although each national setting possesses unique constraints, shared principles of solidarity, transparency, and managed competition remain universally relevant. The Ukrainian model draws on these principles to synthesize a reform pathway that combines accessibility with market-oriented efficiency.

Importantly, the cluster initiative could serve as a scalable pilot for broader health insurance reform in Ukraine. Initially operating on a voluntary basis, it provides a platform for testing governance structures, reimbursement mechanisms, and regulatory instruments in a semi-autonomous, learning-oriented environment. Through iterative adaptation and evidence-based refinement, the model holds the potential to evolve into a cornerstone of national insurance architecture (Vansač, Kenderešová, & Noga, 2024; Poloňová & Bednáriková, 2022).

In sum, metropolitan health clusters supported by private insurance funds offer a practical, theoretically grounded, and internationally validated approach to addressing systemic inefficiencies and equity gaps in Ukraine's healthcare system. Their phased implementation - grounded in strategic collaboration among public institutions, private stakeholders, and civic actors - can deliver measurable improvements in care quality, financial protection, and institutional trust. With appropriate regulatory facilitation and outcome-based evaluation, the model warrants experimental deployment in one of Ukraine's major urban regions as a precursor to nationwide adaptation.

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# Promoting Resilience in Children Attending Primary Schools

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## Abstract:

**Aim.** Resilience is a process that leads the individual throughout his education, professional development and life in individual spheres (working, family, school, personal, social). It helps us manage stress, trauma, conflicts and other difficult situations in life. The concept of resilience is used in various sciences, helping professions where the main aspects are key competences such as self-knowledge, self-regulation, critical thinking, optimism and a healthy lifestyle that can be acquired and developed through targeted training. Therefore, we are talking about the concept of resilience as a process that is not congenital but which is learned by life, education and education, improves.

**Methods.** In our paper we present the findings of a qualitative research study conducted in cooperation with teachers of el-

elementary schools in the Nitra region. The aim was to get an overview of the role of resiliences in the professional practice of teachers, to identify how the resilience manifests itself in pupils from the perspective of teachers, how teachers perceive it, respond to it and examine the stressors that pupils are exposed to in primary education. We conducted research through qualitative methodology, we used the observation method and the semi-structured interview. The research sample consisted of five qualified early primary school teachers (gender distribution: four women and one man). At the end and part of the discussion, we compared the results of research with similar research and proposed recommendations for practice.

**Results.** The results of this study highlight resilience as a key attribute in the lives of primary school pupils. The findings suggest that resilience can be naturally fostered through everyday classroom practices by capitalising on the inherent features of primary education, such as consistent rule-setting, the cultivation of a positive classroom and school climate, effective communication, value development, emotional regulation, and other supporting factors.

**Conclusion.** The concept of resilience is a key dimension in the field of education and vocational training. It is an essential part of the education and training of children, which significantly affects the process itself in terms of functioning, managing situations, reactions as well as the success of the pupil.

## Introduction

Resilience, also referred to as mental toughness, is defined as a set of qualities that enable an individual to cope with both favourable and unfavourable life circumstances. As Šolcová (2009, p. 11) asserts, resilience may be described as “the cumulative result of dynamic processes of interaction between the child, family, and environment over time.” The concept of resilience differentiation is a widely discussed topic.

Many Czech authors use the term “resistance” as a synonym for “resilience,” although it is a concept open to varied interpretations. Paulík (2017) outlines three possible approaches to characterising resistance. In the first, resilience is understood as a relatively stable foundation underpinning the processes or strategies through which an individual withstands stressful situations. Secondly, resilience can be seen as a process enabling an individual to adapt flexibly to negative environmental changes. The third approach conceptualises resilience as a dynamic state, reflecting the degree to which

an individual’s adaptive processes have been shaped by previous experiences with stress and the way such situations were managed (Paulík, 2017). Although the specific features of resilience may vary across authors, a common denominator is the individual’s ability to adapt to stress or stressful situations. Therefore, resilience can be understood as the capacity to adapt to stress, overcome adversity, and transform seemingly negative experiences into opportunities for growth and advantage. The development of resilience is shaped by the complex interaction of personal, cultural, and environmental factors.

## Definition of key terms related to resilience

Several terms have emerged from the general definitions above that are either integral to the concept of resilience or closely linked to its existence and development. It is therefore necessary to clarify and briefly characterise the following related concepts: adaptation, stress, strain, competence, and risk and protective factors.

## Adaptation

Adaptation constitutes a fundamental characteristic of all organisms. It encompasses behaviours essential for maintaining functionality, survival, and successful interaction with the environment. According to Cannon (1939), the process of adaptation involves the interconnection of biological and psychological functions that ensure the maintenance of homeostasis, that is, the internal equilibrium of the organism (Paulík, 2017).

## Stress

As Paulík (2009) states, individuals are continuously engaged with their environment throughout their lives, which places varying demands upon them. Stress is, therefore, defined as any situation in which an organism is exposed to demands that require a certain level of effort or energy to handle. A defining feature of stress is the development of pressure originating from various sources, which may be either short- or long-term in nature.

The term “**stress**” has assumed a prominent position in both academic and everyday discourse, as evidenced by its widespread use in scholarly literature and the public. Hartl and Hartlová (2010) associate the well-known fight-or-flight response with acute stress, which emerges suddenly and demands immediate reaction. In contrast, chronic stress involves prolonged exposure to stressors, gradually depleting the body’s physiological and psychological resources until they are exhausted. Since family conflicts and financial problems are significant sources of stress, the social worker needs to support improving communication among family members (Tkačová & Pavlikova, 2024, p. 103). As Oláh and his team of authors (Olah et al., 2024) point out, effective communication is important, representing the degree of understanding and the ability to communicate with each other; but also understanding the barriers and communication challenges that cause difficulties in communication or make it impossible, and these barriers need to be overcome in order to provide assistance in an effective manner. Communication as such is an essential part of life. With the help of communication, we can

progress in life and solve everything necessary. (Planka et al., 2024) As Garcia (2024) defined from a psychological perspective, the current generation of youth is associated with significantly higher incidences of stress, depression, and general apathy.

## Coping

Paulík (2017) states that there is a strong connection between coping mechanisms and the adaptation process. While adaptation is often discussed in general contexts associated with stress, the term coping is more specifically used in situations involving excessive or overwhelming stress, where individuals must exhibit increased commitment and resourcefulness to manage the demands placed upon them. **Competence** refers to the abilities a pupil gradually acquires and is prepared to apply in real-life situations. In relation to resilience, competencies are considered adaptive in nature and are demonstrated by the pupils at their particular developmental stage.

## Risk and protective factors

The final group of terms to be addressed comprises risk and protective factors, which are among the most significant concepts associated with resilience. The labels ‘risk’ and ‘protective’ inherently indicate the expected direction of an individual’s response. Šolcová (2009) defines risk factors as stressors present in an individual’s environment. These stressors have been shown to increase the likelihood of maladaptive responses or contribute to negative changes in physical or mental health, academic performance, or social functioning. Risk factors categorises as either proximal or distal. Proximal factors directly affect the individual and may include, for example, problematic sibling relationships, parental conflict, or the influence of negative peer groups. In contrast, distal factors exert a more indirect influence—such as growing up in a high-risk neighbourhood (Šolcová 2009). As Čakarová et al. (2025, p. 29) point out, it is important to realize that these children often come from environments that are not ideal for their physical, mental, and social development, which can have lasting consequences.

Not all children are able to process traumatic events quickly, if at all. On the other hand, protective factors are defined as “characteristics that, in interaction with adversity or opposition, reduce or eliminate the potential negative effect of risk factors” (Šolcová, 2009, p. 14). They help to moderate the impact of individual vulnerability, although their presence does not automatically result in resilience.

The family environment, peer relationships, educational institutions, and the wider community all play a crucial role in shaping resilience. In this case, resilience is considered to be the result of the interaction between environmental conditions, personal experiences, and available opportunities. In an educational environment, all the factors specified above interact with and influence resilience. Hamarova’s research points to the need to accept broader contexts. In this context, we should not neglect the factor of family environment (bad upbringing) and media age, which respondents identified as the main causes of socially deviant behavior of some people (Hamarova et al., 2024, p. 31). However, as Čakarová and co-authors (2025, pp. 33) point out, the fact that adaptation to a different language environment may distort a child’s performance in tests is also not taken into account. Overall behavior can be classified as problematic because it does not correspond to the norms of behavior in the facility.

The following features typically characterise a school environment that supports health and well-being: shared decision-making and planning, community involvement, a supportive physical and social environment, positive relationships between the school and the wider community, clearly articulated health policies, and access to appropriate health services (Stewart et al., 2004). Findings from an Australian health promotion initiative, which addressed, among other themes, the resilience of school-age children, have confirmed the substantial influence of the school environment on the development of mental resilience. Schools where pupils reported positive relationships with adults and peers, a sense of connectedness, and a strong feeling of autonomy were associated with higher levels of self-rated resilience (Stewart et al., 2004).

These findings support a multi-level approach to mental health support, as advocated by the World Health Organisation. In theory, we also talk about the term “mental health”, which is an umbrella term for mental disorders, psychosocial disabilities, mental conditions associated with significant suffering, impaired function, or risk of self-harm (Petrovic et al., 2024, p. 57).

A further important dimension concerns the use of leisure time, including its theoretical foundations, practical implementation, and potential for supporting children’s strengths. The concept of leisure time relies on the view of individuals as creators of cultural and material values, regardless of their health status or age (Kováčová, 2004, p. 8]. According to Kratochvílová (2004) a range of actors—including the family, educational institutions, local communities, municipal and regional authorities, and the state—contribute to the formation of a favourable social climate, the development of moral values, and the provision of suitable conditions for the meaningful use of leisure time, particularly for children, adolescents, and other citizens. However, we must realize that not all of them come from a favorable family and social environment. As stated by Čakarová et al. (2025, p. 27) It’s important to recognize that these children often come from environments that are not ideal for their physical, psychological, and social development, and it can have lasting effects. The way individuals spend their leisure time—whether in purposeful, enriching activities or passive disengagement—significantly impacts how leisure is perceived as both a personal and social value, and plays a role in shaping their overall lifestyle. As stated by Slašťan et al. (2024, p. 117), passive disconnection can also pose a threat in a certain sense. It disrupts personal relationships and overall quality of life.

## Results

This qualitative study focuses on promoting resilience in primary school children (years 1–5). Three fundamental research objectives were defined at the outset:

- To provide a comprehensive account of the manifestations of resilience exhibited by younger school-age pupils during lessons, as

- observed by teachers;
- To identify the methods used by early primary school teachers to foster resilience in pupils;
- To determine the stressors that younger school-age pupils are exposed to, as perceived by teachers.

**Research Methodology**

The research sample consisted of five qualified early primary school teachers (gender distribution: four women and one man). Efforts were made to ensure a balanced representation of urban and rural schools in the Nitra Region. Another key selection criterion was teaching experience, as resilience is a relatively recent but widely acknowledged concept in education. The sample, therefore, included teachers working with fourth- and fifth-graders, ranging from novice to experienced professionals.

Brief participant profiles are as follows:

- Petr, aged 55, is a fourth-grade class teacher at a village school with 27 years of experience.
- Jitka, aged 42, teaches at the same school as Igor and has 16 years of experience. She is one of two fourth-grade class teachers, where classroom observations were conducted.
- Andrea is the deputy head teacher at a village school. Although not a class teacher, she regularly teaches multiple subjects in primary (years 1–5) and lower-secondary (years 6–9) school. She has 25 years of teaching experience.
- Marta has been teaching at a city school for 12 years. She is a class teacher for one of the two Year-5 classes.

- Pavla is a Year-4 class teacher at a city primary school. She has two years of teaching experience.
- Data collection methods included classroom observation and semi-structured interviews.

**Discussion**

The first research question addressed was: *What manifestations of resilience can be observed in primary school pupils during lessons, from the teacher’s perspective?* Based on the collected data and teachers’ statements, three key categories of resilience-related behaviours were identified:

- Positive personality traits,
- Interpersonal relationships,
- Specific individual abilities.

Within the category of **Positive Personality Traits**, personality traits were included that associate with a constructive self-perception and a positive outlook on the surrounding environment. These encompass, in particular, friendliness, openness, and cheerfulness. Traits such as diligence and perseverance are also part of this category, as they support pupils in their school efforts and encourage persistence in the face of difficulty.

The second category, **Interpersonal Relationships**, consists of abilities and social skills that facilitate pupils’ integration into peer groups and enhance their capacity to manage stress. These include the ability to communicate effectively with both teachers and classmates, resolve conflicts constructively, and trust the teacher.

**Table 1** Categorisation of manifestations of resilience in children as perceived by teachers.

Resilience categories as perceived by teachers	Individual manifestations of resilience in pupils
Positive personality traits	Friendliness, openness, cheerfulness, diligence, and perseverance
Interpersonal relationships	Communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and trust in teachers
Specific individual abilities	Fearlessness (in educational matters), ability to stay calm under pressure/resistance to emotional breakdown

Source: Own research

**Table 2** Categories of teachers' practices that support pupil resilience

Categories of teachers' practices promoting resilience	Individual teachers' practices
<b>Social support</b>	Supporting pupils, showing interest in pupils, respecting pupils' needs, sharing experiences, using the power of stories, supporting group functioning, taking an individualised approach with students, and acting as a guide
<b>Creating a safe environment</b>	Establishing rules for everyone and cooperation with experts
<b>One's competencies</b>	Creating opportunities for success and experiencing failure

Source: Own research

The third category, *Specific Individual Abilities*, comprises traits directly linked to school resilience. These include the ability to remain calm and unafraid in the face of assessments, such as tests or oral exams, as well as the ability to cope constructively with failure.

The second research question was formulated as follows: *What practices do primary school teachers (Years 1–5) employ to support pupil resilience?* Based on the combined results of both data collection methods, four categories of teachers' practices that foster resilience in pupils were identified.

The first category, *Social Support*, encompasses all teachers' practices that contribute to the development of positive relationships with pupils, thereby reinforcing the teacher's role as a source of emotional and social support. These include both verbal and non-verbal forms of assistance, as well as expressing interest in pupils and their families, and showing respect for pupils' individual needs. Additionally, this category encompasses specific pedagogical practices designed to help pupils connect educational content to real-life experiences, such as encouraging them to share personal stories and employing narrative approaches to facilitate the processing of challenging life situations. Social support is understood not only as the relationship between teacher and pupil, but also in terms of fostering positive peer relationships. Teachers consistently highlighted the importance of classroom support. For instance, teacher Igor explained his pedagogical approach concerning a pupil with below-average school performance:

*"I endeavour to acknowledge and value each modest accomplishment."* Teacher Jitka shared a personal observation from her family experience: *"I noticed this with my older son, who has severe ADHD and couldn't concentrate... It was clear that he really valued encouragement."* Her statement also suggests that such an experience has shaped her professional behaviour, as she now offers words of support spontaneously and without conscious effort. Within the category of social support, a personalised approach emerged as a central theme. According to the teachers, tailoring responses to the individual needs and observed resilience levels of pupils is a key component in fostering resilience. Teachers' interactions and pedagogical strategies appear to be influenced by how resilient a pupil is perceived to be. Thus, two distinct subcategories were identified: Non-resilient Pupils/Pupils Displaying Low Resilience and Resilient Pupils/Pupils Demonstrating Strong Resilience.

### **A) Non-resilient pupils/ pupils displaying low resilience**

Teachers noted that pupils exhibiting lower levels of resilience often require a tailored pedagogical approach. Teacher Marta described her response to such pupils: *"It seems that there is a difference in my behaviour, in the way I treat him... I must adopt a different approach."* She elaborated on her experience with one girl with lower resilience: *"When she is not doing well, she tends to give up. In such situations, I try to help her ... I try to help her complete the task. So that she knows how to work."* Teacher Andrea

**Table 3** Categories of stressors affecting primary school pupils in the school environment

Teacher's perspective on categories of school stressors	Teachers' explanations of stressors
Peer rejection and feelings of failure	Teacher Jitka: "When I am accepted, I feel good. That's definitely a success. When I'm not accepted, it feels like failure. Why don't they want me? When I'm struggling and not accepted, it becomes very stressful."
Tests and 'meaningless' grades	Teacher Adela: "It's the tests... I think it's the testing itself. It's stressful, and sometimes the grade, on the other hand, means nothing."
Fear of failure and parental reaction	Teacher Marta: "It's not the test itself that's stressful, but the bad grade and the thought of having to show it to my parents and see their reaction." Teacher Petr: "There's fear of how the parents will react, especially when the pupil already knows they won't react well."
Witnessing inappropriate behaviour	Teacher Pavla: "Probably when I catch them doing something they shouldn't be doing."

Source: Own research

provided an example of a pupil who pretended to know the answer, although it was not true: "He is not yet resilient enough to say, 'I don't know.'" According to her, the only way a teacher can react in such a situation is, "To reassure him that it's not a mistake now – but if he continues to do this in the future, it will be." Teacher Jitka added her own experience and suggested that the most effective way to build resilience in such pupils is through a gradual, structured approach: "To strengthen his resilience, it would be counterproductive to let him give up completely. ... A gradual, step-by-step approach in helping him overcome challenges."

### B) Resilient pupils/ pupils demonstrating strong resilience

Teachers reported that working with more resilient pupils is generally easier. Teacher Marta observed: "With one of them, I'm confident... I may ... I may raise my voice or be more assertive... I know he won't break down, you know..." She added that one of the signs of resilience is the ability to resist peer pressure: "She doesn't cry because someone says something about her out loud in front of the class..." Teacher Jitka described resilient pupils as: "Friendly, open,

sporty, cheerful. They may also be naturally intelligent." Also, teacher Petr highlighted a link between cognitive traits and resilience: "Strongly resilient pupils are not afraid to assess their own skills and knowledge... They can resolve peer conflicts..., communicate well, ... and they show perseverance and thoroughness in their schoolwork." Andrea argued that the child's environment and upbringing influence resilience; she also stated that resilient pupils trust their teachers: "It is the upbringing and the environment in which these kids live, and then it's us, how we actually guide them, and it is the trust."

The second category of teachers' practices, **Creating a Safe Environment**, involves fostering a sense of psychological safety for primary school pupils, including ensuring that all pupils respect clearly defined rules and expectations. Another key practice is collaboration with professionals, such as school psychologists, special education teachers, or social pedagogues, who play an essential role in supporting pupils' resilience.

The third category, **One's Competencies**, encompasses practices designed to assist pupils in identifying their strengths and limitations. A recurring theme across the interviews was the im-

portance of creating opportunities for success, particularly for pupils who need additional support. Teachers actively constructed scenarios that promoted resilience and school growth. This category also recognises the value of failure. While failure may appear as a risk factor, the frequency and intensity of failure experiences are crucial. Understanding one's limits is considered an essential element of resilience – and children can develop this understanding through carefully managed experiences of failure.

As noted earlier, collaboration with external professionals is considered a key component in fostering resilience. Most teachers indicated that other experts, especially psychologists, were actively involved in the classroom. Teacher Jitka described the establishment of regular cooperation with the school psychologist during the current school year due to ongoing difficulties in her class, stating, *“It’s really great that we have a psychologist at school who guides us...”*

Teacher Igor reported working closely with both the school psychologist and a special education teacher in cases involving pupils with low resilience and limited cognitive abilities. Another particularly challenging case involved an emotionally unstable pupil who *“responded highly inappropriately to a remark ... to reprimands for inappropriate behaviour. The pupil suddenly started screaming, crying, throwing classroom items, ... and began to threaten with suicide.”*

The third research question was formulated as follows: *From the perspective of primary school teachers, what stressors do pupils encounter in the school environment?* Interview data revealed four categories of commonly reported stressors: Peer rejection and feelings of failure, School exams, tests, and grades, Fear of failure and parental reaction, and Witnessing inappropriate behaviour.

The first category of stressors is **Peer rejection and feelings of failure**. Teachers indicated that such experiences can be critical to pupils' further personal development. Interview responses referred to a psychological analysis of a well-known collaborator, highlighting the profound impact of rejection, particularly when combined with poor school performance. These

situations, which pupils often perceive as personal failure, are typically accompanied by intense stress.

The second category, **Tests and ‘meaningless’ grades**, remains one of the most recognised and widely discussed sources of school-related stress. Despite the evolving nature of educational systems, pupils continue to experience anxiety related to cognitive performance and low grades, mirroring patterns observed decades ago.

The third category, **Fear of failure and parental reactions**, is closely linked to the previous one. In this case, however, the stress arises not from school failure itself, but from the anticipated parental response. Such a situation can be especially problematic when parents expect high performance despite a pupil's limited school capacity, or when pupils feel compelled to avoid disappointing their parents.

The fourth category, **Witnessing inappropriate behaviour**, is associated with pupils' anxiety about being caught breaking school rules. In such cases, the fear of punishment can be a significant source of stress.

## Conclusions

The results of this study highlight resilience as a key attribute in the lives of primary school pupils. The findings suggest that resilience can be naturally fostered through everyday classroom practices by capitalising on the inherent features of primary education, such as consistent rule-setting, the cultivation of a positive classroom and school climate, effective communication, value development, emotional regulation, and other supporting factors. The involvement of other educational professionals also plays a crucial role. Without the support of special educators, social educators, school psychologists, and social workers, the practical promotion of resilience would be significantly hindered. Many schools are developing multidisciplinary support teams that involve various professionals, who contribute to identifying and addressing risk factors that may adversely affect pupils. Our research has revealed that teachers and supporting school team members have a clear understanding of the risk factors that can, without their help, negatively impact pupils. Understand-

ing the stressors to which pupils are exposed is considered essential for providing meaningful resilience support. While resilience may develop organically through daily school activities, the findings also underscore the need for intentional and structured approaches. Teaching pupils specific coping strategies to manage stress independently appears to be a promising direction. Planka (2025, p. 272) states that the concept of empowerment could be beneficial. The process focuses on transferring power, i.e., providing assistance to people who feel powerless and developing their abilities and potential to resolve situations and problems. By doing so, schools contribute to the development of individuals who are capable of facing future challenges with stability and strength. We should not forget about teachers, focus on their support and eliminate burnout. Psychological hygiene as Hubkova (2024, p. 18) is key and includes skills for positive thinking and a good relationship with oneself; social skills that help prevent stress in interpersonal relationships; good time management; skills in managing stressful situations (processing psychological problems, relaxation, effective communication, etc.); seeking help in difficulties.

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