

Social Service Employees' Adaptation in the context of social work and health¹



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ABSTRAKT

Predkladaný príspevok sa zameriava na adaptáciu zamestnancov v zariadeniach sociálnych služieb v zdravotnom prostredí sociálnej práce. Hlavným cieľom výskumu je dospieť k pohľadu zamestnancov sociálnych služieb na ich adaptáciu na pracovisku — zariadeniach sociálnych služieb. Skúmať adaptáciu proces zamestnanca vzhľadom na jeho pracovné zaradenie, spokojnosť s pracovnými podmienkami a spätnú väzbu od nadriadených. Problematika je skúmaná prostredníctvom dotazníka na vzorke 101 respondentov (N=101). Z údajov získaných od respondentov vyplýva, že pracovná náplň zamestnanca je faktorom spôsobujúcim rozdiely v oboznamovaní sa s adaptačným procesom zamestnanca. Výskum ukázal štatisticky významný rozdiel medzi kvalifikáciou respondentov a ich spokojnosťou s adaptačným procesom v zariadeniach sociálnych služieb. Posledným skúmaným faktorom bol vek respondentov a spätná väzba od nadriadených, ktoré po overení vykazovali štatisticky významný rozdiel. Adaptácia zamestnancov je dôležitým faktorom nielen pre zariadenia sociálnych služieb, ale aj pre zariadenia vo všeobecnosti, pretože len správne adaptovaní zamestnanci sú schopní vykonávať svoje povinnosti v súlade s cieľmi a politikou zariadenia prejavujúceho sa v kontexte sociálnej práce zdravia.

KLÍČOVÉ SLOVÁ

adaptácia, adaptačný proces, sociálni pracovníci, pracovné prostredie, sociálna práca

ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the employee adaptation in social service facilities in the social work health setting. The main research objective is to arrive at the social service employees' view of their adaptation in the workplace — social service facilities. We examine the employee's adaptation process considering their job assignment, their satisfaction with working conditions, and feedback from their superiors. The issue is examined through a questionnaire on a sample of 101 respondents (N=101). The data obtained from the respondents show that the employee's job assignment is a factor causing differences in getting acquainted with the employee's adaptation process. The research has shown a statistically significant difference between the respondents' qualification and their satisfaction with the adaptation process in social service facilities. The last factor examined was the respondents' age and the feedback from superiors, which showed a statistically significant difference after verification. Employee adaptation is an important factor not only for social service

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facilities but also for establishments in general, as only properly adapted employees are able to carry out their duties in accordance with the goals and policies of a facility showing in the context of social work health.

KEYWORDS

adaptation, adaptation process, social workers, working environment, social work.

INTRODUCTION

A social work assignment, being considered a risky job, necessitates as much attention as it is given to social work clients and their social problems. In the dynamic work environment of social work, it is essential to account for all aspects of performance that affect both social work clients and the mere social workers. It is important to focus on professionals who are in daily contact with clients, who conduct demanding counseling, intervention, diagnostics, who cooperate with other professionals and align different forms of assistance, or who have to undergo lifelong learning. In the current global and constantly changing world, we perceive these and other contexts, such as self-care or exploring the resilience of social workers with a focus on critical thinking (Vranková a Balogová, 2024), to be fundamental in building a strong position of social work profession. The present paper focuses primarily on the key aspect of social workers' performance, namely adaptation. Adaptation, as identified in the section on the theoretical background, is a process in which social workers are exposed to the first pressures of their job, including their familiarization with the institution, establishing interaction with fellow workers, perceiving and observing ethical structures and, of course, fulfilling client-related work duties. Adaptation is often the decisive context for subsequent work processes that testify to the effectiveness of social workers' performance. We aspire to identify the impact of demographic pointers in social work, it is one of the indispensable pointers in research on social workers' adaptation to work conditions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Employee adaptation in a facility is an important process that affects the employee's proper performance, the competition against other facilities, and the achievement of work-coordination-related goals. From a psychosocial point of view, adaptation of a new employee involves conforming to new conditions or environment (Akker-mans et al., 2021; Schweitzer et al., 2023). The aim of the adaptation of a newly recruited employee is to integrate seamlessly into the facility structure and its social functioning in order to achieve the required performance standards. However, new employees, even though being knowledgeable and experienced, are not able to work as effectively as their „older colleagues“. This is due to different business cultures, evaluation systems, goals, societal norms, and team rules. An important factor that affects the employee's adaptation is also stress from the new environment and new working conditions. The sooner the company starts the adapting process of a new

employee, the sooner it reaches the required performance level. This is beneficial for both the employee's satisfaction and the company's high staff efficiency and, consequently, clients' positive opinion of it. Worker onboarding is the process by which new employees adapt to new roles, to responsibilities pertaining to the job assigned, and to work environment. The adaptation process helps the employee to understand the corporate culture, values and policy, as well as the expectations and requirements resulting from the employment in the facility (Chudzikowski et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2021; Ge et al., 2023). An important part of the adaptation process is receiving supervision, mentoring, or coaching from employees who have been working in the facility for some time; their task is to familiarize new employees with the work culture, company practices, as well as with the specific skills and knowledge required in their work position (Hirschi & Koen, 2021; Nalis et al., 2022).

Sansfacon and Brown (2021) offer the results of their research into the understanding of the professional adaptation of internationally educated social workers. They examined the effects of both external and internal factors on this process. They consider the education of social workers in terms of knowledge and skills to be necessary in relation to their degree of adaptation. The research shows, among other things, that their education outside the country in which they work has an impact on their adaptation. If they did not receive an education (in this case in Canada), they had difficulty finding a job and experienced discrimination. No less important factor in adaptation is the balance of family and work life, which largely affects the overall worker's life, both personal and social (Ívana, 2020). Similarly, Ling, Shum, Kwan, and Xu (2021) dealt with social workers' adaptation during the pandemic crisis (in this case in Hong Kong). Their study reports on the exploration of 3 main themes in focus groups, namely changing work position, renegotiating contracts with supporters, and exploring new intervention methods. According to the results, adaptation was built in the sense of trial and error, which helped social workers gain more confidence when providing social services with new intervention methods. When using new intervention methods, a certain sense of resistance was observed; it resulted from the social workers' ignorance (e.g. of IT-supported provision of services, etc.), or it was due to the need to make quick changes in conventionalized work processes. The way in which employees (social workers) are becoming familiar with working conditions, or whether enough time is devoted to this part of the adaptation, also has significant impact on the work adaptation. Su, Wong and Liang (2023) say that these are so-called psychosocial resources that help to adapt successfully, emphasizing in particular the importance of paying the attention to working conditions and recognizing the dignity in the social worker's work. In many cases, social workers work in a team, and proceed case by case. Strengthening the adaptation of social workers in the group form of work is also possible through the so-called concept of empowerment. Empowerment helps to increase the competences and ability of self-management both in the employees themselves and collectively in the team. In addition to the above Edwards and Collinsons (2002), also emphasize the improvement of the so-called discipline of autonomy. Questions related to adaptation in the workplace or job satisfaction are not limited to the social and educational sectors; they also affect healthcare field. The results of qualitative research Raba'ah Hamzah et al. (2023) indicate that the adaptation process for nurses was more like being „thrown into the





water,” where nurses had little time to familiarize themselves with the work and the environment, etc. They were briefly told what was expected of them and then directly involved in the work. The research also highlights the problem of a shortage of personnel responsible for carrying out the adaptation process. Last but not least, the existing research has also considered age as a factor in the adaptation process — as evidenced by Kim and Kim’s (2022) research, older workers showed a higher level of adaptability than younger workers. Similarly, our research informs about the adaptation of social workers in terms of age. In addition to the mentioned research studies, adaptation in the social field has been observed and studied by author Levická (2012).

At the legislative level, the profession of social work is governed by Act No. 219/2014 Coll., the Act on Social Work and on the Conditions for the Performance of Certain Professional Activities in the Field of Social Affairs and Family, and on Amendments to Certain Acts. In the context of employee adaptation within the domain of social work, the adaptation process must comprehensively incorporate all statutory requirements, including professional competence for social work practice and the execution of social work within an employment relationship or an equivalent professional arrangement. With regard to qualification requirements, the aforementioned Act stipulates that the practice of social work mandates a second-level university degree in social work for social workers and a first-level university degree in social work for assistants.

The effective performance of social work necessitates the continuous expansion of professional knowledge, not only through legally mandated educational qualifications but also via supplementary studies and professional development initiatives. To ensure the optimal structuring of the adaptation process for employees, it is imperative that social work education aligns with the core values and ethical principles of the profession, as articulated by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). According to IFSW (2020), it is essential to provide support and protection for employees, graduates, and service users engaged in the educational process. The aforementioned organization also states that it is important to ensure that social service employees have access to excellent quality education, opportunities that also include social work knowledge derived from research, experience, policy and practice.

METHODOLOGY

The present study examines the adaptation process of employees within social service facilities, with a primary objective of providing an analytical perspective on adaptation in relation to job position, age, and educational background. To achieve this objective, the research was structured around three key research questions:

Do differences exist in the adaptation process across various job positions within the field of social services?

Does the educational attainment of respondents influence their satisfaction with the adaptation process in social service settings?

Is age a determining factor in the receipt and perception of feedback regarding the adaptation process in social services?



To explore these questions, the study formulated a research problem that examined multiple dimensions of adaptation. Specifically, the research focused on the design and implementation of the adaptation process from the standpoint of employees' job roles, their level of satisfaction with adaptation procedures, and the nature of feedback provided upon the completion of the adaptation process.

A questionnaire was chosen as the main research method of data collection. The questionnaire is one of the most common methods of data collection for this type of research. It is a method used in social sciences to obtain data on the adaptation process of social workers and to identify the environmental factors determining the adaptation process collectively and quickly. The questionnaire was designed in line with the following hypotheses:

- H1: We assume a statistically significant difference between the employee's work position and the positive adaptation process in social service facilities.**
- H2: We assume a statistically significant difference between the qualification of social workers and the degree of satisfaction with the adaptation process in social service facilities.**
- H3: We assume a statistically significant difference between the social workers' age and the feedback from their superiors.**

The questionnaire consisted of two logically interconnected parts. The first part contained demographic questions focused on sex/gender, qualification (training), age, and work position of employees in social service facilities. The second part focused on identifying the factors affecting the adaptation process of employees of social service facilities. The questions in this section dealt with the expression of employees' satisfaction with the adaptation process, their acquaintance with the mere adaptation process, as well as their opinions on the receiving feedback from superiors. The questionnaire deployed a five-point Likert scale and open statements with a supplementary construct.

In the research component of the questionnaire, the questions were structured in a logical and interconnected sequence to ensure alignment with demographic characteristics. The section addressing respondents' job classification categorized participants into specific professional roles, including social workers, caregivers in social service facilities, managers or directors in the field of social work, administrative personnel engaged in social work-related tasks, and other relevant positions within the sector. To assess respondents' familiarity with the adaptation process, a Likert scale was employed, ranging from „Strongly Agree“ to „Neutral“ to „Strongly Disagree.“ Similarly, the level of satisfaction with the adaptation process was evaluated using a Likert scale. However, for a more comprehensive analysis, additional options were incorporated, including satisfaction with communication from management, the quality of professional training provided during adaptation, the extent to which legislative frameworks on employee rights and responsibilities were integrated into the adaptation process, and other pertinent factors. Furthermore, the study examined the role of feedback within the adaptation process by investigating the form in which feedback was provided, whether it was delivered continuously throughout the adaptation period or solely at its conclusion.



The research was carried out online using the Google forms app. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents into their mailboxes. In order to ensure a sufficient number of administered questionnaires, the research was carried out over a half of a year, from January to June 2023. The random selection method was used in the selection of respondents, which ensured that each respondent had the same opportunity to participate in the research and the same likelihood of being approached. In terms of research ethics, participation in the research was voluntary, participants were familiar with the research topic and personal data protection was also ensured.

The questionnaire was distributed to 500 social workers from all over Slovakia on the basis of a random selection. The selection of respondents was conducted through a random sampling method, utilizing a database of social service facilities compiled by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family, in conjunction with a database maintained by Higher Territorial Units in the Slovak Republic.

The return rate was 101 completed questionnaires, which represents a percentage of 20.2%. For research purposes, the return on questionnaires is at a reasonable level. The respondents' answers served the basis for descriptive processing of demographic data on employees in social service facilities, as well as the basis for statistical verification of the established hypotheses.

For the statistical processing of differences, categorical variables were used and validated through the Student's T-test for parametric statistics. Statistically important are the determined values (p) lower than $p < 0.05$. The research findings result from the social workers' answers to the above questions in the questionnaire. The Statistica software version 12 was used for statistical evaluation.

RESULTS

The research dealt with the issue of adaptation of social service facility employees. It should be emphasized that managerial positions in a social service facility include not only top managerial positions, but also those at the personnel, financial, or other departments that affect the activities of other employees. This classification serves as a basis for verifying the hypothesis aimed at determining a statistically significant difference between the employee's work position and familiarization with the adaptation process in a social service facility. For the purpose of verifying the established hypothesis, respondents were supposed to express their opinion on individual factors of the adaptation process in the social service facility. The factors were given in the form of a five-point Likert scale and were aimed at the explaining of the adaptation process in the hiring phase, in pursuing work tasks, in becoming familiar with the vision and policies of social service facility, in the organization of work and the complete structure of social service facility, and they were asked to set a time frame for the completion of the adaptation process in the social service facility. The hypothesis was verified through the Student's T-test for two independent variables, which shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the employee's assignment to a position and familiarity with the adaptation process in a social service facility. The result is confirmed by the p -value of the statistical test of $p=0.009$, which is smaller than the reliability coefficient of 0.05. We accept and confirm the hypoth-

esis focused on the existence of differences between the employee's assignment to a position and familiarization with the adaptation process in a social service facility, because there is a statistically significant difference between them. The result is shown in the Tab. 1.



Subject of research	N	Average	Standard deviation	p-value
Adaptation process of the employee	19	2,947	0,310	p=0.009
	38	2,711	0,203	
	26	1,115	0,250	
	18	1,059	0,337	

TABLE 1. Evaluation of adaptation process research (own processing)

The second part of the research focused on the existence of a statistically significant difference between the respondents' qualification and their satisfaction with the adaptation process in the social service facility. Respondents expressed satisfaction with the adaptation process through a five-point Likert scale, whereby 1 was completely disagree, 2 disagree, 3 I cannot assess, 4 agree, and 5 completely agree. To verify the established hypothesis, Students T-test was used for two independent variables. It shows a statistically significant difference between the respondents' qualification (received education) and satisfaction with the adaptation process in the social service facility. The result of the established hypothesis is a p-value of 0.0398 which is a smaller value than the reliability coefficient of 0.05. The result is shown in the Tab. 2.

Subject of research	N	Average	Standard deviation	p-value
Satisfaction with the adaptation process	29	2,345	0,188	p=0.0398
	28	1,929	0,212	
	34	1,059	0,179	
	9	0,444	0,338	

TABLE 2. Satisfaction of adaptation process research (own processing)

The last hypothesis examined the differences between the respondents' age and the feedback from their superiors. The respondents expressed opinions on feedback from superiors through a five-point Likert scale, where, as in the previous research question, option 1 meant completely disagree, option 5 meant completely agree. The hypothesis was verified through the Student's T-test for two independent variables, which shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the age of the respondents and the feedback from senior employees in the social service facility. The result of the established hypothesis is a p-value of 0.0087 which is a smaller value than the reliability coefficient of 0.05. The result is shown in the Tab. 3.



Subject of research	N	N	Average	Standard deviation	p-value
Satisfaction with the adaptation process	(18-25)	31	2,345	0,188	p=0.0087
	(26-39)	29	1,929	0,212	
	(40-59)	33	1,059	0,179	
	(60+)	7	0,444	0,338	

TABLE 3. Satisfaction of adaptation process research (own processing)

The conducted research confirmed the acceptance of all hypotheses and statistically significant differences between the employee's work position and familiarization with the adaptation process. The differences were also confirmed between the employees' received education and their satisfaction with the adaptation process. There is also a statistically significant difference between the respondents' age and the feedback from their superiors.

It follows that it is important to pay attention to these factors for the employee's proper adaptation not only in the social service facility, but also in any other establishment.

DISCUSSION

The study by Morris et al. (2021) focuses on proposing a model for the social workers' adaptation. The authors state that in the adaptation process, it is necessary to focus on the connection of social work activities with leadership, work culture, and overall management of the social facility. This process should be pursued as supervision or coaching to effectively manage the onboarding process and feedback. This study also confirms our hypothesis, which is aimed at examining the importance of feedback from superiors. The authors further focused on the examining of the adaptation process and measuring the social workers' loyalty, i.e. how long they stay in the facility. Lin and Wu (2022) state that in the adaptation process it is necessary to know the company's leadership style in order to achieve team performance. In the model, team performance is influenced by charismatic leadership, discipline-focused leadership, and dominance-focused leadership through mediation of adaptation and social interaction. In addition, it examines how moderators examine team behavior and orientation towards learning goals, which were also part of our research in connection with the social worker's satisfaction with the adaptation process. Miller et al. (2021) conducted research on the social workers' professional readiness after completing the adaptation process. The data represented a sample of 63 respondents: many respondents stated that they were not ready to meet the requirements and challenges they faced, and that professional support was extremely important even after completing the adaptation process. The findings suggest that additional support for social workers should include mentoring and peer support. In addition, there is a need for better employee management within social service facilities. This research can be compared with the verified hypothesis focused on satisfaction with the adaptation process, which was the subject of the present research.

Research by Kumpunen et al. (2023) examines the adaptation of employees in a social service facility in the United Kingdom, stating that the adaptation process must include information on the structures, processes, and results of activities. In the research, they state that adaptation processes have not been clearly described. The adaptation process also includes increasing employee engagement, which was examined by Siyal (2023). The research has shown that the interactive motivation framework has contributed to the positive impact of inclusive leadership on employee engagement in the onboarding process. In the research, the author confirmed the relationship of leadership with mental safety and work engagement. According to the study, these relationships increase work engagement and also the willingness to work in a social service facility for a long time. The issue of managing people and in relation to the adaptation process of social workers in social service facilities was also addressed by Song et al. (2023). Their research shows that ethical leadership contributes to the innovative behavior of social workers and to long-term activity in social service facilities. On the contrary, in an environment with low innovative activity of the adaptation and personal process, employee turnover prevails at a higher rate.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the initial considerations defined in the introduction and in the theoretical basis of the study were confirmed.

The research on the adaptation of social service workers holds significant relevance for several reasons. Social work is a highly demanding profession that requires substantial expertise and commitment. Despite its societal importance, it is often undervalued in financial terms. In this context, social service professionals primarily serve the broader objectives of the social work discipline rather than their individual interests. From a practical standpoint, ensuring effective adaptation processes is crucial for mitigating work-related stress, trauma, and burnout. Social workers play an essential role in assisting individuals, families, communities, and organizations in achieving stability and progress. Just as social work clients require empowerment and support, social workers themselves must undergo continuous professional development to enhance their competencies and, in turn, improve client outcomes. Another critical implication of this research is the concept of adaptability, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions. Given the dynamic nature of the social work environment, professionals must be equipped to adjust to evolving challenges and continuously refine their approaches to client care. A well-structured adaptation plan fosters resilience, enabling employees to navigate workplace challenges more effectively and sustain their professional growth. Each experience will allow them to gain more resilience and be prepared for many other situations that may arise. Social work, by its very nature, is oriented toward problem-solving and innovation, compelling practitioners to seek novel solutions that optimize client well-being. The ability to adapt is thus integral to both personal and professional satisfaction. This knowledge is self-management in terms of implications for social work and its employees, which forces social service employees to constantly look for new ways out of a given situation. In social work, responsibility is often shifted to





clients and they are asked to be flexible in their thinking, to expand the way they can approach situations. Thinking outside the box brings other possibilities and helps us break repetitive cycles of behavior. The ability to adapt to given conditions helps in the development of personal and professional satisfaction.

Adaptation is an important process in social workers' performance; it is essential for the optimal and socially functioning environment in which the assigned tasks can be properly performed. The examined demographic data recorded differences in the adaptation process among social workers and confirmed the stated hypotheses. The subsequent discussion draws even more attention to current and increasingly relevant topics in connection with adaptation in the work environment. It is important to point out that social workers' work and work environment in which they are located (residential or outpatient) are in a reciprocal relationship, which is important to observe, support, and harmonize.

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