DOI: 10.21277/sw.v1i8.320

PECULIARITIES OF SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGUES' PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE ASPECTS OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Albina Kepalaitė, Asta Vaitkevičienė, Eglė Drungėlaitė
Šiauliai University, Lithuania

Abstract

Social workers' and social pedagogues' sense of power is very important for providing social assistance and support to clients and learners. Sense of power depends on meeting the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Failure to meet these needs due to lack of reward, punishments or cultural rituals reduces or completely restricts the subjective experience of power, increasing defensiveness and psychopathology. Social workers and social pedagogues provide social assistance and support to their clients and learners based on the empowerment strategy. It is therefore important to investigate whether the very social workers and social pedagogues feel empowered. This study aims to disclose social workers' and social pedagogues' psychological empowerment peculiarities with regard to demographic characteristics, gender, profession, qualification category and the occupied share of the post.

Keywords: *the self-determination theory; needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness; empowerment, social workers, social pedagogues, Lithuanian Employee Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (LPEQ – 9).*

Introduction

The self-determination theory is grounded on the mutual link between meeting basic needs and consequences of meeting these needs, which means that meeting basic psychological needs – of autonomy, competence and relatedness – promotes immediate wellbeing and enhances intrinsic resources, contributing to the person's later resilience, while non-fulfilment of needs and disappointment causes a bad condition, increases defensiveness and psychopathology (Vansteenkiste, Ryan, 2013). The needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness can be constrained by rewards, punishments and cultural rituals.

Deci & Ryan (2000) state that social contexts supporting the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness: a) enhance intrinsic motivation; (b) facilitate internalisation and integration of extrinsic motivation, leading to more autonomous motivational or regulatory directions; (c) promote or enhance pursuits or life goals that continuously ensure satisfaction of

the basic needs (Deci, Rayn, 2000). Therefore, autonomous regulation of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic pursuits determine positive emotional experience, high-quality heuristic activity, responsibility for results and higher self-esteem as well as better mental health and the person's maturity.

The transition from extrinsic motivation towards intrinsic motivation can include several transformations that mature a personality and fill the content of self-determination. Disclosing how this happens, Vansteenkiste & Ryan (2013) highlight three features of human behaviour and mental functioning: 1) people are active beings who tend to change and optimize their living conditions; 2) human activeness increases the level of synthesis and self-organization, which takes place thanks to intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions. At the intrapersonal level, through their intrinsic language and self-criticism people constantly improve their interests, expectations and personal values, at the same time moving to the interpersonal level and combining them with other people. This integrative tendency means that healthy people strive to integrate themselves into the matrix of social relations both by improving their interests, expectations and personal values and by internationalizing environmental requirements; 3) this movement is not automatic but depends on the fulfilment of three basic needs: autonomy (experience of will, encouragement and approval of one's own activities), relatedness (experience of love and care with significant other persons) and competence (experience of self-efficacy interacting with the environment). The experience of self-efficacy is a sense of personal power that can determine the direction of the personality's development and influence behaviour in the future.

Social workers and social pedagogues provide social assistance and support to their clients and learners based on the empowerment strategy. Gvaldaitė (2009) emphasizes that applying the empowerment strategy in social work, it is important for clients to emphasize the importance of possibilities and conditions, provide information on the ways of adapting to the environment and social integration, as this knowledge can draw out the intrinsic human potential and stimulate problem solving.

In the Lithuanian language, the term empowerment from the standpoint of meaning first of all seems directed to another person who lacks power, is in a state of helplessness. However, such understanding reduces the empowerment process to provision of information and persuasion to take initiative. In fact, applying the empowerment strategy, social workers and social pedagogues must not only persuade their clients or learners but also encourage them to use their experiences, help the clients to discover attractive and positive examples of social life that are close to their experiences and that they could follow, observe whether and how these examples are taken over, and in the event of failure, look for other possibilities.

Empowerment is derived from demonstration of the example of power and delegation of power, which involve a transition from the client's or learner's observed and partly controlled behaviour to autonomous behaviour. This transition is a transformation of motivation of the client's or learner's behaviour. Externally controlled behaviour requires external pressure or reward. Identified and imitated behaviour means that the client or learner understands and appreciates the importance of imitated actions. Introjectional regulation of behaviour shows that performance of actions/failure to perform actions depends on the pressure of intrinsic emotions of guilt or shame. Integrated regulation is the most autonomous type of motivation of behaviour, which discloses that actions are performed fully understanding their necessity both at the intrapersonal and interpersonal level.

Delegating the sense of power and responsibility to their clients or learners, specialists providing social assistance juggle factors that determine the client's or learner's situation, trying to inspire a perception that only the very clients or learners can be the creators of their well-being. It could be stated that the client's or learner's empowerment requires social workers or social pedagogues to direct their efforts to act at three levels: at the micro level, persuading and encouraging, monitoring and controlling; at the mezzo level, accumulating the resources of the client's or learner's closest environment; and at the macro level, caring about supplementing resources if they are insufficient, giving publicity to noticed social problems, the solution of which requires both redistribution of resources and restructuring of functions and responsibilities between separate institutions. Directing their efforts at three levels in order to achieve the client's or learner's welfare, social workers or social pedagogues must not only trust in their competence, have relative freedom to make decisions but also see meaning in this distribution of their efforts.

Thus, reasonably the question arises: How much power do social workers and social pedagogues have in order to achieve changes (Ruškus, Mažeikienė, Naujanienė, Motiečienė, & Dvarionas, 2013)? Do the very social workers and social pedagogues feel empowered? If yes, how much and to what degree? Are they self-confident and to what extent? How freely can they make decisions? Do they still feel meaning, having chosen such profession? What gives them strength and resilience? Which variables are/can become sources of their empowerment?

The peculiarities of social workers' and social pedagogues' wellbeing in the professional field were most often investigated looking at them through manifestation of anxiety (Alifanovienė, Vaitkevičienė, & Lučinskaitė, 2007, 2011), experiences of stress (Kepalaitė, 2013a; 2013b) and reasons (Alifanovienė, Vaitkevičienė, Vladykienė, & Šarauskienė, 2016). So far, social workers' and social pedagogues' wellbeing has not been looked at from the opposite side – empowerment. The *Lithuanian Employee Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (LPEQ – 9)*, created by Tvarijonavičius, Bagdžiūnienė, & Žukauskaitė (2016), provides a possibility to fill this gap.

Thus, ***the aim of this research*** is to disclose the peculiarities of social workers' and social pedagogues' psychological empowerment with regard to demographic characteristics, gender, profession, qualification category and the occupied share of the post. To reach the aim, ***the following objectives*** were foreseen:

1. To compare peculiarities of social workers' and pedagogues' total indicator of psychological empowerment and dimensions of psychological empowerment;
2. To disclose the total indicator of psychological empowerment of specialists providing social assistance and support and peculiarities of psychological empowerment dimensions with regard to gender, the qualification category, the occupied share of the post and salary.

The research subject is peculiarities of social workers' and pedagogues' psychological empowerment.

Methodology

Investigated persons. The study was attended by 171 respondents: 104 (61%) social workers and 67 (39%) social pedagogues; 67 (39%) of them live in the largest cities of Lithuania – Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai; 15 (9%), in smaller cities and towns. Half of the respondents, 89 (52%), did not indicate their place of residence. There were 163 (95%)

women and 8 (5%) men among the respondents. The respondents' age varies between 23 and 57 years. Part of the respondents who participated in the study have acquired higher and the highest qualification categories: 4 (2%) social workers and social pedagogues have acquired the expert's category; 16 (9%) social pedagogues have the methodologist's qualification, there were no social workers with such category; 36 (21%) social pedagogues and 2 social workers have the senior specialist's category. Other 120 (70%) respondents have the initial qualification of the social pedagogue and social worker. The majority of the respondents, 135 (79%), work full-time; 13 (8%) respondents work more than full-time; and 23 (13%) respondents work less than full-time. According to income, respondents distributed into three groups: there were 12 (7%) respondents earning less than 300 Euros; 145 (85%), earning the average salary of 300-600 Euros; 14 (8%), earning most, more than 700 Euros.

Methodology of the research: social workers' and social pedagogues' psychological empowerment was identified employing *The Lithuanian Employee Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (LPEQ – 9)*. Publishing the questionnaire, its authors issued a permission to use the questionnaire in scientific research without a separate consent of the authors (Tvarijonavičius, Žukauskaitė, & Bagdžiūnienė, 2016, p. 38). The questionnaire consists of 9 statements, which respondents were asked to rate from 1 to 6 points: 1 point – *strongly disagree*; 2 points – *disagree*; 3 points – *somewhat disagree*; 4 points – *somewhat agree*; 5 points – *agree*; 6 points – *strongly agree*. The statements of the questionnaire identify three dimensions of employees' psychological empowerment: *trust in competence, meaning* and *decision-making*. *Cronbach's alpha* (α=0,842) of the questionnaire shows a sufficiently high level of internal consistency of this methodology, which is suitable for group research (Vaitkevičius & Saudargienė, 2006). This coefficient corresponds to Cronbach's alpha coefficient 0,82 established by the authors of the Lithuanian scale (Tvarijonavičius, Žukauskaitė, & Bagdžiūnienė, 2016). *Cronbach's* α for the dimension of *meaning* α=0,724; *Cronbachs'* α for the dimension of *trust in competence* α=0,729; *Cronbach's* α for the *decision-making* dimension α=0,739 with regard to this sample are close to internal consistency coefficients for separate dimensions established by the authors of the questionnaire (Tvarijonavičius, Žukauskaitė, & Bagdžiūnienė, 2016).

Thus, the main variables are: the total empowerment coefficient and indicators of psychological empowerment subscales: *of meaning, decision-making, trust in competence*.

Additional variables: gender, profession (social worker or social pedagogue), the qualification category, workload (the occupied share of the post), the amount of salary.

The research process. The questionnaire together with demographic variables: gender, age group, profession, the qualification category, the share of the post, the amount of income, the type of workplace, solved social problems and the request to complete the questionnaire were placed on the website www.apklausa.lt. The online questionnaire was distributed to the members of The Association of Social Pedagogues of Lithuania and The Association of Social Workers of Lithuania, e-mails with the request to complete the questionnaire were purposely sent to various institutions providing social assistance, social wardship and care as well as to educational institutions where social pedagogues work.

Methods of statistical analysis of research data: the data were analysed employing *IBM SPSS statistics 21*. The strategy for handling statistical data is oriented in two ways: to variables and to the individual.

In the statistical analysis focused on variables, the descriptive statistics criteria were applied, percentiles and the Tukey's Hinges M-estimator were used to identify the distribution of indicators. The total indicator of empowerment and indicators of empowerment dimensions

were compared using non-parametric *Mann-Whitney* and *Kruskal-Wallis* criteria, because the distribution of all empowerment indicators does not meet the requirements for normal distribution (p>0,05).

In the statistical analysis focused on the individual, the K-means cluster analysis was used.

Research Results and Their Discussion

Research Results by Main Variables and Their Discussion

Having calculated social workers' and social pedagogues' total indicator of empowerment according to the methodology for calculation of the empowerment indicator and according to empowerment dimensions (*competence, meaning and decision-making*), the means of indicators and other data of descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Data on the Total Indicator of Empowerment and Empowerment Dimensions

Total indicator of empowerment and empowerment dimensions	M	SD	Trimmed Mean	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Md	Min	Max	Huber's M-Estimator[a]	Tukey's Biweight[b]	Hampel's M-Estimator[c]	Andrews' Wave[d]
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound							
Total indicator of empowerment	4,608	0,658	4,61	4,51	4,71	4,56	2,11	6	4,6116	4,6186	4,6180	4,6192
Indicators of empowerment dimensions												
Trust in competence	4,729	0,514	4,739	4,627	4,830	4,666	2	6	4,7305	4,7227	4,7370	4,7220
Meaning	4,600	0,064	4,637	4,473	4,727	4,666	1	6	4,6640	4,7039	4,6805	4,6901
Decision-making	4,497	0,066	4,533	4,366	4,627	4,666	1,33	6	4,5353	4,5689	4,5443	4,5699

a. The weighting constant is 1,339.
b. The weighting constant is 4,685.
c. The weighting constants are 1,700, 3,400, and 8,500
d. The weighting constant is 1,340*pi.

Social workers' and social pedagogues' total indicator of empowerment discloses that the obtained mean of empowerment is only by six tenths higher than the value of the fourth point *somewhat agree*. A relatively small difference of the total indicator of psychological empowerment from the fourth point discloses that social pedagogues and social workers feel moderately enabled in their professional space. The sense of power in the professional field is not strong; it is more unsteady, unstable.

The descriptive statistics data on empowerment dimensions revealed that *competence, meaning,* and *decision-making* differ from each other according to the total mean and truncated mean. The respondents gave the highest points to their *competence* (M=4,729; SD=0,514). Taking into account the values of assessment points for questionnaire statements, this is not a very high estimate, as estimates evaluating social pedagogues' and social workers' competence vary between 4 and 5 points: from *somewhat agree* to *agree*. The respondents rated manifestation of another dimension of empowerment – *meaning* – in their professional

field by one tenth of the point lower than *competence* (M=4,600; SD=0,064). The least mean of estimators was obtained evaluating the *decision-making* dimension (see Table 1, total M=4,49 and the truncated mean M=4,53, SD=0,066). It is likely that the lack of the sense of decision-making power may affect the relatively low indicator of employees' psychological empowerment.

To get a more exhaustive analysis of psychological empowerment, it is important to identify manifestation of the total indicator of psychological empowerment and dimensions of empowerment by strength between different representatives of social assistance and support profession. Table 2 discloses the proportions of respondents who feel poorly, moderately or strongly empowered by the total indicator of psychological empowerment and empowerment dimensions.

Table 2. Levels of the Total Indicator of Empowerment and Dimensions of Empowerment by Profession

Levels of the total indicator of empowerment	Profession				Total	
	Social worker N=104		Social pedagogue N=67			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Poorly empowered	9	5,3%	7	4,1%	16	9,4%
Moderately empowered	80	46,8%	49	28,7%	129	75,4%
Strongly empowered	15	8,8%	11	6,4%	26	15,2%
Levels of the empowerment dimension ***Trust in competence***						
Poorly trusting in their competence	24	14,0%	9	5,3%	33	19,3%
Moderately trusting in their competence	69	40,4%	48	28,1%	117	68,4%
Strongly trusting in their competence	11	6,4%	10	5,8%	21	12,3%
Levels of the empowerment dimension ***Meaning***						
Poorly feeling meaning	11	6,4%	7	4,1%	18	10,5%
Moderately feeling meaning	78	45,6%	50	29,2%	128	74,9%
Strongly feeling meaning	15	8,8%	10	5,8%	25	14,6%
Levels of the empowerment dimension ***Decision-making***						
Not self-confident in autonomous decision-making	15	8,8%	4	2,3%	19	11,1%
Moderately self-confident in autonomous decision-making	79	46,2%	53	31,0%	132	77,2%
Self-confident in autonomous decision-making	10	5,8%	10	5,8%	20	11,7%

A marked minority – 9,4% of specialists providing social assistance and support – feel poorly empowered (4,1% of social pedagogues and 5,3% of social workers). The majority – 75,4% of all the specialists who took part in the survey – feel moderately empowered. 46,8% of social workers and 28,7% of social pedagogues feel this way. 15,2% of the total number

of the specialists who took part in the survey (8,8% of social workers and 6,4% of social pedagogues) feel strongly or highly empowered.

12,3% of the respondents gave the maximum point rating their competence, being convinced that they fully support statements disclosing competence. 6,4% of social workers and 5,8% of social pedagogues thought so; more than half of the respondents moderately trust in their competence (40,4% of social workers and 28,1% of social pedagogues); one fifth of the respondents poorly trust in their competence (14% of social workers and 5,3% of social pedagogues).

One tenth of the respondents (6,4% of social workers and 4,1% of social pedagogues) hardly saw meaning in their work or had considerable doubts about it. Three-fourths of all the respondents (45,6% of social workers and 29,2% of social pedagogues) moderately felt meaning in their work. The work seemed strongly meaningful for 14,6% of specialists providing social support (8,8% of social workers and 5,8% of social pedagogues).

Slightly more than one tenth (11,7%) of the respondents rated their personal possibilities of making decisions in the professional field giving a maximum point – *strongly agree* (5,8% of social workers and the exactly same share of social pedagogues). There were slightly more than three fourths of the respondents (77,2%) who were moderately self-confident in autonomous decision-making (46,2% of social workers and 31% of social pedagogues). The respondents who feel not self-confident in autonomous decision-making made up slightly more than one tenth of all the respondents (8,8% of social workers and 2,3% of social pedagogues).

Summarizing the obtained results with regard to the levels of the total indicator of empowerment and the levels of empowerment dimensions, it can be stated that the majority of surveyed social pedagogues and social workers feel moderately empowered, they moderately feel the *meaning* in their performed work, moderately trust in their *competence*, and feel moderately able to *make decisions* on their own. A smaller share of specialists providing social assistance feel poorly empowered than a slightly larger proportion of such specialists who feel strongly empowered according to the total indicator of employees' psychological empowerment.

Looking at the dimensions of psychological empowerment, a larger share of social support specialists poorly trust in their *competence* compared with a share of specialists who strongly trust in their competence. However, the meaning in the provision of social assistance and support is envisaged by a larger share of specialists who strongly feel it compared with the respondents who poorly feel the *meaning* in their work. With regard to the decision-making dimension, the share of specialists who poorly feel the *decision-making* power and the share of specialists who strongly feel this power are almost equal.

If clients' and learners' empowerment is the main strategy in the professional activities of social assistance and support specialists, the obtained results according to the total indicator of empowerment are unfavourable. Empowering their clients and learners, social workers and social pedagogues both have to have good theoretical knowledge of the peculiarities of the empowerment process themselves (levels, stages, hindrances and possibilities) and believe in the empowerment perspective and, in particular, in their own powers to provide social assistance and support. Unfortunately, the results show that the proportion of specialists who strongly believe in their power is relatively low – only 15%.

Research Results by Additional Variables and Their Discussion

Observations of Vansteenkiste & Ryan (2013) on the dynamics of factors determining intrinsic motivation disclose that the experience of self-efficacy is not a constant state of experience. Changes in external conditions and the pursuit to adapt to changes in the environment make people review their interests, expectations and personal values anew and adapt them to changed circumstances. Thus, trust in one's competence, the decision-making power can alter, and along with changes in values and expectations, trust in meaningfulness of work or performed actions can also change. The field of social assistance and support provision is very dynamic and constantly changing, raising permanent challenges for specialists. In this field, women outnumber men. Therefore, it is important to study and analyze whether male and female specialists providing social assistance and support feel equally empowered, whether they equally trust in their competence, whether they can equally freely make decisions, and whether they equally believe in meaningfulness of the chosen profession.

The data on the relation between additional variables (gender and profession) and the total indicator of empowerment and indicators of empowerment dimensions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Indicators of Social Workers' and Social Pedagogues' Psychological Empowerment with Regard to Gender and Profession

With regard to gender					
Total indicator of psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment dimensions	Women (N=163)	Men (N=8)	U	Z	p
	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Total indicator of psychological empowerment	4,60 (0,65)	4,65 (0,74)	592,000	-,440	,660
Meaning	4,61 (0,84)	4,45 (0,87)	609,000	-,317	,751
Trust in competence	4,73 (0,66)	4,71 (0,86)	643,000	-,067	,947
Decision-making	4,48 (0,86)	4,79 (0,73)	528,500	-,911	,362
With regard to the profession					
Total indicator of psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment dimensions	Social worker (N=104)	Social pedagogue (N=67)	U	Z	p
	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Total indicator of psychological empowerment	4,57 (0,66)	4,66 (0,64)	3181,500	-,959	,338
Meaning	4,58 (0,86)	4,63 (0,82)	3418,000	-,211	,833
Trust in competence	4,70 (0,69)	4,78 (0,65)	3262,000	-,713	,476
Decision-making	4,44 (0,87)	4,59 (0,85)	3213,000	-,865	,387

No statistically significant difference between men's and women's total indicator of empowerment and empowerment dimensions was identified, $p>0,05$. The statistically significant difference between social pedagogues' and social workers' subjectively felt psychological empowerment with regard to dimensions was also not identified, $p>0,05$. Both social workers' and social pedagogues' total indicator of psychological empowerment is relatively the same. Both social workers and social pedagogues experience dimensions of empowerment in the field of their profession also relatively equally.

The salaries received by respondents differ. As a rule, the salary rises along with rising competence, which is acknowledged and assessed by awarding a higher qualification degree. The amount of the salary can also pertain to the occupied share of the post at the workplace. Therefore, the hypothesis was raised that social workers' and social pedagogues' subjectively felt empowerment can depend on the amount of income received, the qualification degree and the occupied share of the post. The table shows the relation between the respondents' salary and subjectively felt psychological empowerment dimensions.

Table 4. Comparison of Social Workers' and Social Pedagogues' Psychological Empowerment Dimensions with Regard to the Salary, Post and Qualification Category

With regard to the salary						
Total indicator of psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment dimensions	Earning least (N=12)	Earning moderately (N=145)	Earning most (N=14)	χ^2	df	p
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Total indicator of psychological empowerment	4,53 (0,75)	4,58 (0,65)	4,88 (0,57)	4,114	2	0,128
Meaning	4,61 (0,94)	4,58 (0,86)	4,83 (0,69)	1,100	2	0,577
Trust in competence	4,39 (0,92)	4,74 (0,64)	4,85 (0,72)	3,519	2	0,172
Decision-making	4,61 (0,68)	4,44 (0,89)	4,97 (0,62)	6,015	2	0,049
With regard to the occupied share of the post						
Total indicator of psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment dimensions	Working more than full-time (N=13)	Working full-time (N=135)	Working less than full-time (N=23)	χ^2	df	p
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Total indicator of psychological empowerment	4,88 (0,61)	4,58 (0,63)	4,57 (0,77)	3,731	2	0,155
Meaning	4,82 (0,75)	4,57 (0,84)	4,65 (0,93)	1,243	2	0,537
Trust in competence	4,90 (0,58)	4,71 (0,65)	4,72 (0,87)	0,894	2	0,640
Decision-making	4,95 (0,76)	4,48 (0,82)	4,33 (1,10)	4,955	2	0,084
With regard to the qualification category						
Total indicator of psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment dimensions	Employees without the qualification category (N=120)	Employees with higher qualification category (N=31)	Employees with the highest qualification category (N=20)	χ2	df	p
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Total indicator of psychological empowerment	4,57 (0,71)	4,66 (0,47)	4,71 (0,58)	1,501	2	0,472
Meaning	4,58 (0,91)	4,66 (0,62)	4,67 (0,71)	0,125	2	0,939
Trust in competence	4,45 (0,93)	4,77 (0,46)	4,78 (0,62)	0,637	2	0,727
Decision-making	4,95 (0,76)	4,56 (0,75)	4,68 (0,62)	1,146	2	0,564

The statistically significant difference between social pedagogues and social workers who receive different salaries is identified only for one dimension of psychological empowerment – *decision-making*, p=0,049. No statistically significant difference with regard to other dimensions of psychological empowerment (*meaning* and *competence*) was identified, p>0,05.

No statistically significant difference between social pedagogues and social workers who work less than full-time, full-time and more than full-time and the total indicator of psychological empowerment and empowerment dimensions was identified.

There is no statistically significant difference between social pedagogues' and social workers' qualification categories with regard to psychological empowerment dimensions, p>0,05.

Summarizing the total indicator of psychological empowerment and indicators of empowerment dimensions with respect to additional variables, it can be stated that the relation between additional variables and psychological empowerment with regard to this sample is very weak; it was identified only with regard to one variable *salary* and one psychological empowerment dimension *decision-making*. Social assistance and support specialists who receive the highest salary are usually employed on a full-time basis or work more than full-time and have a higher or the highest qualification category. Therefore, it seems as if natural to expect that specialists who have established themselves in the professional field and made a career should feel more empowered than at the beginning of their career. However, no relation was found between the occupied share of the post and the total indicator of psychological empowerment and indicators of empowerment dimensions as well as between the possessed qualification category and the total indicator of psychological empowerment and indicators of empowerment dimensions.

Research Results by Individual Peculiarities and Their Discussion

Cluster analysis enabled to distinguish four groups of respondents according to combinations of indicators of empowerment subscales (see Table 5).

Table 5. Cluster Centres by Indicators of Empowerment Subscales

Empowerment dimensions	Values of cluster centres			
	1 cluster	2 cluster	3 cluster	4 cluster
of meaning	4,67	2,08	4,01	5,21
of decision-making	3,57	1,92	4,28	5,14
of competence	4,69	3,75	4,30	5,15
Respondents' distribution (N, %)	27 (16%)	4 (1%)	64 (37%)	78 (46%)
Names of groups	**Group 1. Poorly balanced**	**Group 2. Particularly poorly balanced**	**Group 3. Moderately balanced**	**Group 4. Well balanced**

The first group consists of the respondents whose general empowerment structure is more dominated by the dimensions of meaning and competence while the decision-making dimension is less expressed. The representatives of this group make up 16% of this sample. It can be assumed that the respondents of this group trust in their competence, see meaning in their work but more often feel helpless in decision-making and influencing other people. The representatives of this group can be relatively called more reflective than acting.

The second, the smallest group (1%) consists of the respondents who not only trust in their competence less but also see the meaning in their work least and feel most helpless in decision-making compared with all the representatives of this sample. Thus, the representatives of this group either may have exhausted their resources in their professional activities, have lost their motivation to work in their profession or simply are inappropriate for the social worker's and social pedagogue's profession. It can be assumed that they require assistance reviewing their professional compliance with their occupied positions most.

The third, one of the largest groups (37%), consists of the respondents who moderately trust in their competence, see the meaning in their work and feel able to influence and make decisions.

Almost half of all the representatives of the sample (46%) fell under a group of respondents whose dimensions of meaning, decision-making and trust in competence are mostly expressed in the empowerment structure compared with other representatives of the sample. It can be assumed that namely these social workers and social pedagogues have adapted to the requirements of the profession best and are able to activate their clients' empowerment.

Summarizing the results of the cluster analysis, it can be assumed that almost one fifth (17%) of social workers and pedagogues of this sample in the empowerment structure feel most helpless in decision-making, and the smallest share of them see the meaning and trust in their competence least. This could aggravate their further professional activity, cause ineffective professional contacts with clients. It could be predicted that this group could be shortly also supplemented by one third of the representatives of this sample (37%), whose dimensions of meaning, decision-making and trust in competence are moderately expressed in the empowerment structure, provided that the needs of their competence, autonomy and relatedness are limited or suppressed. The empowerment structure according to expressed dimensions of meaning, decision-making, trust in competence of almost half (46%) of the representatives of this sample is balanced.

Conclusions

1. Having used ***LPEQ – 9***, this study for the first time identified Lithuanian social workers' and social pedagogues' total indicator of psychological empowerment M=4,608; SD=0,658; min=2,11; max=6 and peculiarities of the dimensions of psychological empowerment: *trust in competence* M=4,72; SD=0,514; *meaning* M=4,6; SD=0,064; *decision-making* M=4,49; SD=0,06 in a small sample of social workers and social pedagogues. The total indicator of psychological empowerment and indicators of psychological empowerment dimensions are not high. In the context of the self-determination theory, these indicators are not understood as invariable or stable. Although psychological empowerment is primarily associated with intrinsic motivation, according to the self-determination theory, changing circumstances of people's lives go along with an interactive process between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, which can also determine the variation of psychological empowerment indicators to one or another side.
2. In the investigated sample 9,4% of social pedagogues and social workers feel poorly empowered. 75,4% of social pedagogues and social workers feel moderately empowered. 15,2% of social workers and social pedagogues feel strongly empowered. No statistically significant difference of the total indicator of empowerment between social workers and social pedagogues has been identified. Statistically significant difference between social workers and social pedagogues with regard to dimensions of psychological empowerment – *meaning, trust in competence, decision-making* – has not been found.

3. There is no statistically significant difference of the total indicator of empowerment between men and women providing social assistance and support. Statistically significant difference of the dimensions of psychological empowerment – *meaning, trust in competence, decision-making* – between men and women providing social assistance and support has not been identified either.
4. No statistically significant difference of the total indicator of empowerment between specialists providing social assistance and support with regard to the occupied share of the post, qualification category and salary has been identified. No statistically significant difference of dimensions of psychological empowerment – *meaning, trust in competence, decision-making* – between specialists providing social assistance and support with regard to the occupied share of the post, qualification category and salary has been identified. Week statistically significant difference was detected only with regard to one dimension of psychological empowerment – *decision-making* between social assistance and support specialists earning moderately and most.
5. The cluster analysis directed to individual differences enabled to distinguish four groups of representatives of this sample by expression of empowerment dimensions in the general structure of empowerment*: Group 1. Poorly balanced; Group 2. Particularly poorly balanced; Group 3. Moderately balanced; Group 4. Well balanced*. This sample is dominated by social workers and social pedagogues whose empowerment structure is *well balanced* in terms of expression of empowerment dimensions and the smallest share of this sample is made up of respondents whose empowerment structure is *particularly poorly balanced* – could hinder professional activities.
6. The total indicator of psychological empowerment and dimensions of psychological empowerment were investigated in a small sample of social workers and social pedagogues, therefore, it would be advisable to repeat the study in a much larger sample of specialists providing social assistance and support, including additional components of the context of psychological empowerment manifestation: work related requirements for employees, emotional load and load related to the scope of work, requirements for quality of performed work, the amount of possibilities provided to employees, of received information and available resources to deal with work related problems.

References

Alifanovienė, D., Vaitkevičienė, A., & Lučinskaitė, L. (2011). Socialinių pedagogų ir socialinių darbuotojų profesinėje veikloje išgyvenamas nerimas [The anxiety experienced by social pedagogues and social workers In professional life]. *Specialusis ugdymas [Special Education], 2*(25), 57–62.

Alifanovienė, D., Vaitkevičienė, A., & Lučinskaitė. L. (2012). Socialinių darbuotojų ir socialinių pedagogų išgyvenamo nerimo ypatumų analizė: specialistų nuomonės aspektas [Analysis of the Characteristics of Anxiety Experienced by Social Workers and Social Pedagogues: the Aspect of Specialist Opinion]. *Tiltai [the Bridge], 4*(61), 135–149.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, *11*, 4, 227–268.

Gvaldaitė, L. (2009). Įgalinimas socialiniame darbe [The empowerment in the social work]. *Socialinė teorija, empirija, politika ir praktika [Social Theory, Empirics, Policy and Practice]*, 2009, *5*, 42–53.

Kepalaitė, A. (2013a). Socialinių pedagogų streso ir jo įveikos strategijų sąsajos [Social educator's stress and coping strategies]. *Ugdymo psichologija [Educational Psychology], 24*, 27–34.

Kepalaitė, A. (2013b). Socialinės pedagogikos pirmo kurso studentų streso įveikos ypatumai [Stress

coping peculiarities of the first year social educology students]. *Specialusis ugdymas [Special Education], 2* (29), 94–100.

Ruškus, J., Mažeikienė, N., Naujanienė, R., Motiečienė, R., & Dvarionas, D. (2013). Įgalinimo samprata socialinių paslaugų kontekste [The concept of empowerment in the context of social services]. *Socialinis darbas. Patirtis ir metodai [Social Work. Experience and Methods], 12* (2), 9–43.

Tvarijonavičius, M., Bagdžiūnienė, D., & Žukauskaitė, I. (2016). Patikslinto lietuviškojo darbuotojų psichologinio įgalinimo klausimyno (PĮKL-9) psichometriniai rodikliai [The psychometric characteristics of the revised lithuanian employee psychological empowerment questionnaire (LPEQ – 9)]. *Psichologija [Psychology], 54*, 24–42. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15388/Psichol.2016.54.10344

Vaičekauskaitė, R. (2017). Pasekėjo įgalinimo prielaidų konstravimas. [Constructing the Preconditions for Empowerment of Followers] *Logos, 61*, 198–205. DOI:10.24101/logos.2017.61

Vaitkevičius, R., & Saudargienė, A. (2006). Statistika su SPSS psichologiniuose tyrimuose: mokomoji knyga [Statistics with SPSS in Psychological Research: A Study Book]. Vilnius: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla.

Vansteenkiste, M., & Ryan, R. M. (2013). On Psychological Growth and Vulnerability: Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Need Frustration as a Unifying Principle. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, *23*, 3, 263–280. DOI: 10.1037/a0032359.

PECULIARITIES OF SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGUES' PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE ASPECTS OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Summary

Albina Kepalaitė, Asta Vaitkevičienė, Eglė Drungelaitė,
Šiauliai University, Lithuania

Social workers and social pedagogues provide social assistance and support to their clients and learners based on the empowerment strategy. Empowerment is related to meeting basic psychological needs – of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Non-fulfilment of needs and disappointment increases defensiveness and psychopathology and it promotes immediate wellbeing and enhances intrinsic resources. The needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness can be constrained by rewards, punishments and cultural rituals.

The aim of this research is to disclose the peculiarities of social workers' and social pedagogues' psychological empowerment with regard to demographic characteristics, gender, profession, qualification category and the occupied share of the post. The research subject is peculiarities of social workers' and pedagogues' psychological empowerment. Social workers' and social pedagogues' psychological empowerment was identified employing *The Lithuanian Employee Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire* (LPEQ – 9).

The data was analysed employing *IBM SPSS statistics 21*. The strategy for handling statistical data is oriented in two ways: to variables and to the individual. In the statistical analysis focused on variables, the descriptive statistics criteria were applied, percentiles and the Tukey's Hinges M-estimator were used to identify the distribution of indicators. The total indicator of empowerment and indicators of empowerment dimensions were compared using non-parametric *Mann-Whitney* and *Kruskal-Wallis* criteria, because the distribution of all empowerment

indicators does not meet the requirements for normal distribution (p> 0,05). In the statistical analysis focused on the individual, the K-means cluster analysis was used.

Having used *LPEQ – 9*, this study for the first time identified Lithuanian social workers' and social pedagogues' total indicator of psychological empowerment. The total indicator of psychological empowerment and indicators of psychological empowerment dimensions are not high. In the context of the self-determination theory, these indicators are not understood as invariable or stable. Statistically significant difference between social workers and social pedagogues with regard to dimensions of psychological empowerment – meaning, trust in competence, decision-making – has not been found.

No statistically significant difference of the total indicator of empowerment between social workers and social pedagogues has been identified. Statistically significant difference between social workers and social pedagogues with regard to dimensions of psychological empowerment – meaning, trust in competence, decision-making – has not been found. No statistically significant difference of dimensions of psychological empowerment – *meaning, trust in competence, decision-making* – between specialists providing social assistance and support with regard to the occupied share of the post, qualification category and salary has been identified. Week statistically significant difference was detected only with regard to one dimension of psychological empowerment – *decision-making* between social assistance and support specialists earning moderately and most.

The cluster analysis directed to individual differences enabled to distinguish four groups of representatives of this sample by expression of empowerment dimensions in the general structure of empowerment. This sample is dominated by social workers and social pedagogues whose empowerment structure is well balanced in terms of expression of empowerment dimensions and the smallest share of this sample is made up of respondents whose empowerment structure is particularly poorly balanced – could hinder professional activities.

Corresponding author's email: menas885@gmail.com