

The Social Worker as a Full-fledged Member of a Multidisciplinary Cooperation within the Czech Prison System

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Abstract. *The legislative amendment to the external differentiation of prisons in the Czech Republic since 2017 mostly stems from the need to create a modern penitentiary rehabilitation of persons serving prison sentences. The fundamental aim is to ensure those conditions that contribute to the resocialisation of said persons and lower the risk of recidivism. What is emphasised in the context of this amendment is the greater significance of the multidisciplinary teams that work with prisoners as well as social work in prisons. The aim of this paper is thus to highlight the aspect of the importance of social work as a suitable, modern tool used by specialists, i.e. the social workers who become agents of aid or support for persons serving sentences. Our research was conducted using the qualitative method. It specifically comprised five interviews with social workers in the pre-release unit in prisons across the Czech Republic.*

Keywords: *multidisciplinary team, pre-release unit, prison sentence, social worker.*

Introduction

In order to outline this paper, we need to first define the basic thematic areas that obviously include the foundations of social work both in general terms and as part of the prison system in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, we will focus on the pre-release

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We use the job title: social worker in a gender neutral sense, though we acknowledge that this is a job that is done to a significant degree in our society by women.

The definition of social work follows from the way ensuring proper social functioning, where social work is defined as “the ability of people to carry out tasks from daily life and engage in a relationship to other people in a way that is satisfying for them themselves and for others and corresponds to the needs of an organised community” (Navrátil, 2001, p. 13). Furthermore, according to Barker, social work “is a professional activity directed to help an individual, group or community increase or restore the capacity of social function and create social conditions suiting this aim. Social work consists of the professional application of the values of social work, and principles and methods to fulfil one or more of the following aims: to help people obtain services; provide counselling and psychotherapy to individuals, families and groups; to help communities or groups receive or improve healthcare services; participate in relevant legislative processes” (2014, p. 408).

Social work may also be defined by attitudes toward possible societal change. “Societal change can be defined as the transformation of quantitative and qualitative relations among material and mental elements and strengths in the social structure. It thus involves transformation to the fundamental structures of the whole society. Societal changes are permanent phenomena in social life. However, they are becoming particularly intensive in the modern era” (Jandourek, 2001, p. 280). Concerning the profession, Matoušek (2016, p. 231) states, “Social work is a social-science discipline as well as a field of practical activities that aim to reveal, explain, ease and resolve social problems.”

There are a whole range of authors who have attempted to define the content, conceptions and aims of social work, yet only some of the definitions actually serve to delimit the professional field of this subject. For example, Navrátil (2001, p. 184) claims that “social work is simply what social workers do.” Based on the concept of social work, similar, and overwhelmingly general, claims are, however, insufficient because they lack a clear definition and specification in relation to other fields.

The assumption of defining social work, in and beyond the scope of prisons, is to provide social support to individuals/groups that are socially disadvantaged and encounter specific problems or complicated life circumstances. This support or form of assistance should be provided by experts in the given field. In addition, it should be at the fully professional level. The aim of this support/assistance is thus the prevention of social problems, as well as the examination of specific problems that have already arisen and possible proposals for their solution.

Therefore, social work “is based on humanistic values, and **social workers** are expected to act in accordance with the ethical positions of the professions, even when the real-world circumstances often entail quite a few difficulties” (Malík & Holasová, 2014, p. 104).

Specialist literature (Gulová, 2011; Matoušek, 2016; Musil, 2010; Nečasová, 2001) presents a whole range of necessary personality prerequisites to work as a social worker, and their cultivation, development and learning depend on the specific social worker. They are defined and described by the authors in different ways. Furthermore, they are prerequisites that are clearly defined in Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on Social Services (Sbírka zákonů České republiky, 2006) and include, for example, the required education, definition of professional activities, etc. Therefore, it may be asserted that a social worker must satisfy two groups of prerequisites – professional and personality. At the same time, we consider it necessary to mention that both groups of prerequisites are intertwined and cannot be distinguished entirely separately.

Social work with people who have been charged with crimes is conducted on multiple levels, depending on the punishment of the person sentenced. It may be done both as part of a prison sentence or when an alternative punishment has been imposed. According to Hendrych, the most complicated field is direct social work with clients serving an unconditional sentence (Lukáš, 2018).

Hanzelová (2018) describes the specific environment of prisons and working with people serving a sentence. Specifically, it places higher requirements on the social worker, even in the field of socio-psychological skills, crisis intervention and mediation. The basic requirement to work in this job is empathy, accepting the person serving the sentence for who they are, the art of individual approach, the ability to provide a service and, last but not least, the ability to adapt to the ossified prison system.

Matoušek (2020, p. 41) also draws attention to the importance of knowledge and experience of the social workers, “so that the social worker may be able to help the prisoner, he/she must win his/her trust as a client. The social worker needs to be specialised in this as well as in a wide range of pregraduate education and experience. They must be familiar in all processes of treating persons in prison, but also in his/her legal interests and needs outside prison.”

In addition to the job of social workers, we should consider all actors, employees in terms of evaluation when, according to Zpěvák et al. (2016), it is necessary to highlight the need for and importance of effective evaluation of social workers related to various methods of employee evaluation within the Czech Civil and Labour Codes.

Punishment is one of the basic corrective means and at the same time measures that follows on from an offence where social conventions, rules or norms were seriously breached, and it also serves as a deterrent against this behaviour and conduct. The system of punishments is defined by social norms, primarily the law (Kubíčková & Kměťík, 2011).

The punishment should be handed down as early as possible after the offence, and the crime should be appreciable and, with exceptions, clear to the perpetrator (Sochůrek, 2007). It must be imposed in accordance with the main principles of prison sentencing. Regarding the person sentenced, it must therefore be carried out so that above all their dignity is respected, the harmful effects of deprivation of freedom are limited, while the

need to protect society, maintenance of the prisoners' health and support for attitudes and skills that will enable them to lead a self-sufficient life in accordance with the law and help them reintegrate into society upon release must not be jeopardised (Act No. 169/1999 Coll.).

To fulfil the purpose of a prison sentence, it is necessary for the legally-set means "to impact the accused so that they reduce the risk of recidivism of criminal behaviour and lead to a self-sufficient life in accordance with the law after release, protection of society from perpetrators of criminal acts and prevention against other crimes" (Act No. 169/1999 Coll.). The purpose of punishment is not retribution. Instead, the main purpose is to protect society as well as correct the behaviour of the perpetrator, limit recidivism and support the perpetrator's integration back into society.

The Czech Republic in the Context of the Prison System

"Work in the prison system should be considered as one type of state service and prison staff as state clerks with a large scope of social work (Černíková et al., 2008, p. 71). The prison service is regulated by Act No. 555/1992 Coll. on Prison Services and Corrections Officers of the Czech Republic (Sbírka zákonů České republiky, 1992) as amended. In this act, the duties of the Prison Services, their organisational structure, responsibilities and authorisation of the corrections officers, responsibility to keep records on individuals in detention, custody or prison are listed. It also regulates the economic activities of the Prison Services. Administration and security of prisons and detention centres are among the main duties of the Prison Services. It transports and escorts people serving prison sentences, keeps records of people in custody, prison and detention. It is economically active and provides employment for prisoners. It also provides education for staff members and carries out research in the field of penology and many others. Modern society has become accustomed to the relative advantages the process and the results of legal regulation have. In particular, there is the possibility of state coercion (coercion of a public authority) to strengthen faith in its unlimited ability and possibilities (Víšek et al., 2022).

"The duties of the Prison Services are carried out by corrections officers, administrative service, the Education Unit and authorised bodies of the Prison Services" (Raszková & Hoferková, 2013, p. 63). The corrections services watches over, transports and escorts persons in custody or prison. Furthermore, it protects the prison and... is divided into guard, supervision and escort shifts or, if required, groups of dog-handlers and transport department (Raszková & Hoferková, 2013). Corrections officers provide security and order in court premises and state bodies as well as security in carrying out certain decisions in cases where the law directly allows it.

The system of external differentiation of prisons uses the adopted method of risk/needs assessment in the Czech Republic in its full escape. This method concentrates on determining the risk factors of a person serving a sentence (likelihood and severity

of recidivism) so that both static (immutable) and dynamic (mutable) personality traits of the person in prison are analysed. This method includes the evaluation of the motivation of the person serving a sentence, their ability and willingness to contribute to changing their life. From among European comparisons, the Czech Republic was, up to 30 Sept. 2017, one of the last states using this model where the court assigns the prisoner to a certain type of prison depending exclusively on criminal law criteria. The solution of entrusting decision-making to prison services instead of courts is generally considered more flexible and efficient because, unlike the court, prison services and have a better possibility to recognise the personality of the prisoner, and have on staff the proper specialists (psychologists, social workers and pedagogues), and the time the person serves in prison provides ample opportunity to study their personality.

From the Prison Services' 2020 Statistical Yearbook (online), it is evident that the number of people in prison in that year was 19,285. Taking a historical view, we see that for the period 2016–2020 the average number of people in prison was tending to decline, since the average number of people in prison for 2016 was 22,018.

Since 2017, the legislative amendment of the external differentiation has been based on the need to create a modern penitentiary rehabilitation of people serving prison sentences. The basic aim is to create those conditions that contribute to the resocialisation of these individuals and lowers the risk of repeated offences.

Černíková et al. (2018) contend that there are phenomena in custodial centres and prisons in conflict with attempts at correcting behaviour and attitudes of prisoners despite all attempts of the staff to minimise them ... these negative phenomena and risks are especially:

- mutual demoralisation of prisoners as a result of prisonisation;
- strengthening rigidity, indifference, submissiveness as pseudo-adaptation mechanisms;
- severing of social relations, not only useless, but mainly socially useful (breakup of the family);
- social stigmatisation;
- the development of an inferiority complex or experience with homosexual sex, the risk of contact with drugs and the favouring and glorification of asocial and antisocial forms of behaviour.

The phenomenon discussed in relation to prison is often bullying, which has a high latency and manifests in highly variable forms.

Doing Social Work with a Focus on a Specific Pre-release Unit

The definition of a **pre-release unit** is grounded in legislation where the Act on Prison Sentencing and on the Amendment to Certain Related Acts, i.e. Act No. 169/1999 Coll. Sec. 74 defines the pre-release unit as follows: "... the pre-release unit can be established in prisons, and prisoners who served a sentence over three years and prisoners requiring

assistance in the creation of favourable conditions for self-sufficient living in accordance with the law are generally placed into them for a reasonable period prior to the end of their sentence. The rehabilitation programmes following placement into the pre-release unit are updated and intended to prepare them for self-sufficient living in accordance with the law.”

The primary purpose of social workers in prison services is to prepare a prisoner for the life awaiting him/her upon release. Thus, the social worker endeavours to rectify the prisoner’s behaviour to the extent considered adequate or reasonable. He/she focuses on resocialisation of the individual. However, this task is not simple. The prison environment has (or may have) a negative or demotivational effect on the individual. Therefore, the person serving a sentence often does not show the slightest interest in the assistance offered by the social worker. The problem also arises because the social worker’s client has not chosen help, so in the majority of cases he/she may reject cooperation. Subsequently, the client may display aggressive behaviour or, in contrast, be completely unresponsive toward the social worker. Matoušek (2020, p. 42), who mentions the influence of the environment the client comes from among others, describes this problem in greater detail. “The social worker should work to fulfil the resocialisation vision with the client who he was unable to choose and, moreover, with a client, whose background prevents him/her from cooperating with the helping professional. If he/she has had experience with a public authority, he/she did not often regard it as beneficial. Furthermore, the social worker works with the client for whom there is a greater likelihood of recidivism than so-called first-time offenders. His/her education will most often be, statistically speaking, basic (primary level) or in some cases with training. With the highest likelihood, it will mean a client afflicted with psychiatric or substance abuse disorders than a client without these impediments.” Successful resocialisation thus requires finding an authentic source of motivation for the person serving a prison sentence. It is necessary to compel him/her to cooperate and commence working on themselves. It is worth constantly reminding ourselves that he/she does everything for him/herself, not for others or the achievement of some reward. At the same time, the social worker should more guide the person serving a prison sentence correctly and only help him/her, support him/her in his/her activities and interests. He/she should mainly advocate for change him/herself.

Among the other tasks falling within the social worker’s remit is the creation of a preliminary social assessment of the person serving a prison sentence, as well as the creation of his/her treatment programme. For the period the person serves in prison, the social worker holds both individual and group interviews. He/she remains in contact with the victims of the perpetrator of the crime. He/she also cooperates with the family of the perpetrator and his/her close friends. Therefore, he/she focuses on the personal life and problems of the person in prison, his/her relations with the family and other next of kin. If the perpetrator is in debt and finds themselves in financial distress, the social worker even provides him/her with financial advice. The social worker in the

prison services also cooperates with the court. He/she compiles reports on the person serving a prison sentence for the decision of the court where the appeal to suspend a sentence, temporary release or early release and parole has been made. Additionally, he/she takes part in discussions/meetings in the prison and beyond and cooperates with a variety of state or non-profit organisations that offer support or assistance related to working with people after serving a sentence.

The goal of the pre-release unit is to safeguard the conditions for smooth transfer of the person in prison into civil society and to provide him/her the necessary assistance so that he/she will be better prepared for independent living upon release. The purpose is to reduce the possible risks of their failure to integrate into society and thus also contribute to the prevention of criminality.

The team of qualified social workers working in the pre-release unit is mainly composed of a special pedagogue, psychologist, trainer and social worker. The respect and positive view on the roles of staff, even from different organisations, is a basic component of an effective cooperative relationship. To promote teamwork, it is very important the team's members accept individual differences, learn to understand and respect others and build personal relations with other members of the team in mutual cooperation. Each member of the team is a unique asset (Stárek, 2022). These employees ensure the everyday operation of the unit and professional activities related to performing the treatment programme and fulfilling the purpose of a sentence, including preparing the person in prison for reintegration into society upon release. By making the multidisciplinary work team in the prison manage to make the offender identify with his correction and new life in society and take steps forward with new goals, he/she develops the individual and his/her aptitudes and thus utilises every positive element of the personality of the person in prison.

Training and counselling activities focused especially on life upon release are undertaken with a person placed in the pre-release unit.

It primarily covers:

- minimising the consequences of both components of prisonisation,
- building practical life skills,
- deepening the relationship of the person in prison with his/her family,
- social counselling founded primarily on the systematic and professional assistance for the person in prison to deal with his/her familial and social problems,
- familiarisation with current social changes,
- familiarisation with legal norms and regulations necessary for the creation and consolidation of legal knowledge and at least a basic orientation in ordinary legal relations,
- creating a positive relationship to work, support of work habits, if needed for building, revitalising or stabilising work habits,
- instruction in basic social behaviour,

- preparation for possible negative attitudes of close and wider social contexts – among other social stigma (labelling, stigmatisation) and the often resulting negative effect of similarity.

The activities of the pre-release unit are carried out in accordance with the law on prison sentencing. The main goal for the person placed in the pre-release unit is the smooth transfer from the prison environment into ordinary life. Skills and habits essential for entry into independent living upon release are formed and strengthened here (Kalvodová, 2016).

The pre-release unit is equipped as close as possible to an ordinary home. In addition to the living areas, a cultural room, drying room, therapeutic room and kitchen are found in the pre-release unit. The kitchen is equipped with appliances, dishes and a dining area. Special, training and therapeutic activities are held in the therapeutic space. The individuals placed here may also use a washing machine, iron and relaxation aids. All activities in the pre-release unit follow a daily timetable and individual treatment programme plan following a weekly schedule. Attention is paid to the individual approach of each person with the participation and mutual cooperation of professional employees. The individual's daily requirements are thus provided by the following: an educator, a social worker, a special pedagogue, a psychologist and a permanent supervision service.

External activities are done primarily to prepare the people serving sentences for the civil society and ability to find their way in it upon release (Španková, 2013).

Furthermore, the social worker uses the SARPO tool (SARPO = Souhrnná Analýza Rizik a Potřeb Odsouzených [Summarised Prisoner Risk and Needs Analysis]) when making a social assessment – preparing a personal social history in sections on living, employment, family, social contacts and finance. He/she updates these areas with the relevant recommendations to set up a treatment programme or for social diagnosis and individual sociotherapeutic plan. The tool assesses the likelihood of repeat offence on the part of the person once released, focuses on the categories of persons in prison classified by static and dynamic risks, differentiates among internal (life in prison) and external (life in society) risks and recommends suitable and effective intervention (Drahý, Hůrka, & Petras, 2018).

The rehabilitation programme is tailored for each person serving a sentence. It factors in the needs of the individual, is drawn up using the comprehensive report on the person serving a sentence and aims primarily to eliminate or lower the risk that led the person in prison to commit a crime (Bidermanová & Petras, 2011). Bidermanová and Petras (2011) contend that the formulation of rehabilitation programmes require consideration of the personality, attitudes, interests and needs of the person serving a prison sentence. The special training activities are pre-determined by the person in prison. However, they may choose interesting activities at their discretion. At the moment when the rehabilitation programme is approved by the prison director, it becomes binding on the person in prison, and he/she must properly fulfil it. The

instructor then regularly carries out an evaluation of the treatment programme and a special-needs pedagogue updates it as required. The treatment programmes contain the education activities, work activities, interest activities and special training activities. This may, for example, include therapy and counselling, as well as sport, music, languages, etc. The social worker and other qualified employees attempt to guide people in prison to successful resocialisation through these activities.

The area of creating external relations involves the activities that take place outside prison. They mean for the person serving a sentence an opportunity to maintain contact with the outside world. For example, it includes visits to cultural and sporting events or volunteer work for the community or non-profit organisations. Through these activities, the person serving a prison sentence learns about changes in social circumstances that took place while they were inside. This area of activities also includes building relations with a social curator, with Probationary and Mediatory Services and with organisations that provide social counselling services with debt consultants, spiritual advisers, etc. Serving a sentence adversely impacts not only the person in prison but also his/her whole family. The creation of external relations thus also includes the support of contacts of the person in prison with family and friends for the period of their sentence – in other words people close to them. It involves written contact and visits. The aim is primarily to strengthen social relations.

The social worker in the pre-release unit provides information to the person serving a prison sentence. The prisoner will need this information to live a life after release, for example, whether they have valid identity documents, with which office they should register upon release, where they may live, whether they have money for travel and for the first days upon release and where they may request emergency support and material distress benefit. If the person serving a prison sentence has need of security from a social curator, a prison social worker contacts the social curator for adults in the prisoner's place of permanent residence and arranges contact or a visit in prison or, if need be, provides the prisoner with the address of the curator and he/she contacts them him/herself. The social worker in the pre-release unit provides, for example, social and legal counselling focused on guiding the person serving a sentence through the social security system, on acquiring basic knowledge and skills when dealing with authorities, when it is necessary to ensure primary social needs in the event of hardship after serving a prison sentence, and all-round stabilisation of the personality with a focus on a meaningful life upon release. As part of social work, the social worker also maintains direct professional contacts with social curators, branches of the labour office, the Probation and Mediation Services Center, non-state non-profit organisations and other institutions providing mainly social services, support or protection of persons. S/he cooperates with social security authorities, for example: s/he helps convicts with filling in applications for old-age or disability pensions. The social worker prepares a social assessment as part of a comprehensive report on the prisoner, including updating it with the relevant recommendation for establishing a rehabilitation programme, a

social diagnosis and an individual sociotherapeutic plan for each specific convict. He/she participates in drug prevention counselling and is a member of expert commissions that assess convictions for placement in a security level and for its change. He/she participates in the proposal to decide on the granting of a suspension of the execution of the sentence, allowing the free stay of convicts outside the prison, reassignment or relocation of convicts. He/she participates in establishing the necessary contacts with the prisoner's relatives and in addressing his/her social problems. The social worker finally helps prisoner in processing new identity documents, birth certificates, insurance cards and the like.

Social work with a person serving a sentence prior to release – the main goal of social work with people serving a prison sentence prior to their release is addressing problems that could prevent social reintegration. The problems that must be most often addressed are loss of employment, lack of funds, indebtedness, inadequate housing and risk of return to substance abuse. It is also necessary to realise that the individual serving time, even through their own fault, experience a temporary loss of freedom that entails additional negatives complicating the return to ordinary civilian life. An individual in prison is pulled by two diametrically opposed influences. On one hand, there is the positive influence from the treatment programme that involves the expert activities of the social workers, pedagogues, and psychologists and on the other hand, there is the effect of prisonisation – the person in prison is so-called institutionalised or, put another way, unable to function in ordinary life and at the same time is exposed to pressure from other prisoners from whom the individual adopts a range of undesirable attitudes and values that again prevents successful reintegration into society upon release.

Unfortunately, a prison sentence always means the prisoner is estranged from his/her next of kin, social circle and family. As a result of imprisonment, current and former prisoners are often stigmatised. The releasee will very likely encounter similar demanding, complicated and burdensome difficulties as during the prison sentence itself. This circumstance is a one of the most significant factors in successful social reintegration is a functional family background (Jůzl et al., 2016).

Prior to release, it is essential for the prisoner to have a valid national identity card. If he/she does not, the social worker will register him/her into the list for issuing new identity documents. The prison cooperates with the relevant authority that keeps records and issues new identity documents. If the releasee cannot afford the administration fee, it is covered from the expenses of the state budget of funds – the administration fees for drawing up birth certificates and national identity cards for insolvent releasees. As a rule, an employee of the office comes to the prison once a month to process with the convicts the copies of identity cards.

Before release, insolvent releasees are provided with a sum of money for travel to their permanent residence, to relatives or to a hostel. If the releasee does not have money for the trip, the social worker finds out how much transport from the prison to the releasee's destination will cost. The social worker will add an addendum with the

financial amount that will be paid to the releasee upon release from prison (Davidová et al., 2010).

The releasee set on a new path with a little money that he/she earned in prison or the travel allowance he/she was provided with and with the discharge certificate leaves the prison for the world that may be alien for them. A rapidly developing society is different, shops are elsewhere, public transport goes to places different to what he/she remembers. For this reason, it is important to work with the prisoner before the end of his prison sentence.

Research

As part of the **research objective**, we primarily investigated how social workers themselves view doing their job as a social worker in the context of the place of operation, i.e. the pre-release unit in selected prisons across the Czech Republic. We worked with the idea that each of the social workers thought about or is thinking about their professional orientation and justifies their work with a given target group, which is specific and, in our case, also characteristic with regard to the given environment. Realising them, finding answers to these questions and thinking about them, however, requires the necessary care and time, not only through the lens of the social workers themselves, but also of the professional public. We therefore investigated the professional view of the given profession in the context of the respondents' own reflection.

Preparing and running the interview

As an auxiliary scenario for conducting the interviews, we used a prepared structure applicable to the topic, which stemmed from general thematic areas. The topics of the interviews were based on the focus of the entire research investigation. The interview was always made up of three areas – the primary area was focused on the general characteristics of the workplace and the socio-demographic structure of the respondent. The second thematic area was the reflection of social work in prisons, specifically in the pre-release unit and the description and perception of the professional role of the social worker, but also a look at the trends and concepts of social work within the prison service in the Czech Republic. The final, third part, focused on the reflection of the social workers' own work with an emphasis on their personal professional needs, skills and professional outlook for the future.

We were aware of the latent risk in the fact that an interview with a fixed and prepared structure of questions could be somewhat misleading. Therefore, thematic questions were used, which we further modified according to the course of the interview with individual respondents.

A total of five semi-structured interviews were conducted. The respondents agreed to the interview and the subsequent use for the interpretation of the obtained data, as did their superiors or employers. None of the social workers approached refused a request for an interview for research purposes. It should be mentioned that the cooperation with selected social workers and the authors of this academic article also stems from cooperation on other research activities and was not an initial unknown contact.

We used a dictaphone to record the entire interview. Each of the respondents was familiar with the use of this technique, and no one objected to it. In the event that any of the respondents did not agree to the use of a dictaphone, an option was ready to record the respondents' answers in writing during the interview. The interview took place in the premises of the individual respondents' workplaces, which the workers knew. The meetings always took place without the presence of uninvolved third parties. The creation of open contacts was initially induced by all respondents with general questions about the topic. The aim was to gain trust. Creating a friendly atmosphere, being tactful and showing reasonable interest in the respondent's testimony helped to achieve a relaxed interview. The questions were formulated neutrally so as not to indicate the expected answer. We strived to ask short questions, if possible in straightforward sentences. A strategic method was chosen, where the questions started with more general problems/ranges of topics and then focused on very specific topics. The task of the interviewer was to ensure that questions were asked in a standardised fashion, with the same emphasis, during all interviews. The analysis of the respondents' reactions, their behaviour and also non-verbal expression during the interview – body movements, gestures, facial movements, facial expressions, smile, laughter, gaze – was not overlooked. All five interviews took place without any unexpected or awkward situation that could break the trust between the respondent and the interviewer. All five social workers approached showed maximum helpfulness, but also an interest in the topic. The average time allowance of each interview lasted about 75 minutes.

The characteristics of the respondents, the target group of respondents was not limited in any way by gender, age, skin colour, religious belief, educational attainment or length of time in the job position of a social worker. In order to be able to answer the research questions, we collected information from a certain group of people. They are workers who are classified as “social worker in prisons” and thus do social work in prisons, specifically in institutions that have a pre-release unit.

The research sample is thus composed of social workers from various prisons throughout the Czech Republic. For clearer comprehension, we have listed them in Table 1.

Table 1*List of respondents*

respondent	gender	age	Education attained	The qualification requirement to fill the position	Time spent in working in prisons	prison	Region in CR	Prison capacity
R no. 1	woman	48	VOŠ – DiS.	yes	26 years	Ostrov nad Ohří	Karlovy Vary	1,109 places
R no. 2	woman	28	VŠ – Bc.	yes	2 years	Plzeň	Pilsen	1.207 places
R no. 3	man	52	VŠ – Mgr.	yes	27 years	Znojmo	South Moravia	156 places
R no. 4	man	24	VOŠ – DiS.	yes	1 year	Břeclav	South Moravia	314 places
R no. 5	man	38	VŠ – Mgr.	yes	8 years	Jiřice	Central Bohemia	766 places

Summary of research

The summary of the research entails a reflection on the daily workload of social workers who work in prisons, specifically in the pre-release unit, across the entire Czech Republic. The findings show that this work is demanding in terms of the often difficult interaction with the target group, as well as the necessary knowledge of legislative standards, cooperation in a multidisciplinary team and cooperation with other entities outside the prison. If we consider the fact that administration consumes up to 60% of a social worker's time on top of direct work with the client, there is often very little space left for working with the client itself. The very essence of working with prisoners in the pre-release unit can therefore be burdened or overshadowed by the administration, a fact all respondents confirmed. The social workers themselves draw attention to the importance of multidisciplinary cooperation and also to the aspect of follow-up services, which are of a social nature, which will support or help the given person to fully socialise back to life outside the prison walls. The multidisciplinary team is perceived by all involved social workers as a new trend or concept of social work itself, which brings new possibilities not only as a tool for themselves, but also as a new stimulus for their clientele. Respondent No. 1 and Respondent No. 3 point to the importance of new trends. In the context of their long-term professional experience, they perceive it as necessary that social work has its own noticeable development, which reflects the needs of society as a population, but also of each target group – in our case persons serving a prison sentence.

All social workers answered that they are only one component of the team in which they collaborate, and the result is joint work. Among the colleagues with whom they work, the answers were: educator, pedagogue, psychologist, special pedagogue, etc. Then colleagues from other departments, such as the financial or health department. Three respondents spoke in a variety of ways about cooperation with non-profit

organisations and city authorities. It was evident that all social workers consider their work to be very varied. Also, the consideration of the degree of respect and esteem for the persons who are in the given institution necessary for their effective work stood out. It emerged from the interviews that the most challenging situation in the work of a social worker in a prison is the purposeful behaviour of clients, when the social workers do not feel that the work they perform (in terms of time and effort) has an appropriate value and meaning. Respondent No. 4 also mentioned that acknowledging purposeful behaviour is also a challenging act, especially when dealing with clients, for example when they apply for parole without justification.

The smooth transfer from prison to ordinary life is certainly a major question and perhaps also a kind of philosophical consideration. Respondents unanimously stated that they mainly try to ensure that the client/convict has somewhere to return to. That is, in the most basic sense of the word. *“We try to get them accommodation, some shelters, hostels in the winter, so that we don’t just abandon them out on the street... for people who didn’t have the opportunity to get a job and are going with practically no money, we also try to provide them with the necessary amount for the trip”*. They also talked about securing some form of social housing and transferring contacts to the social curator at the place of new residence.

The interviews also revealed that the work of social workers is very varied and also complex. It starts at the intake department during the first contact with the prisoner and ends with the final interview with the client. Topics covered in social work in prisons include, in particular, financial situations (debts), acquiring personal documents and payment of alimony. The subject of the victim is also an important topic, if the criminal activity generated it. According to responses from informants, important information is how the client views the victim.

A significant topic that emerged from the interviews is also often burnout syndrome, which can, among other things, result in the social worker losing the necessary professionalism when working with clients. According to all respondents, the problem is often a very demanding spectrum of clients. The most challenging thing, also according to all respondents, is to maintain boundaries and take care of psychological balance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the work of a social worker in prison is not only important and beneficial for the prisoner upon release, but also for our entire society, as it contributes to the reduction of the risks of failure in the reintegration of the release into society and also contributes to the prevention of crime. The job of a social worker in the prison system is psychologically demanding and specific, not only in the environment in which he/she provides independent social work, following the observance of all safety principles, laws, internal regulations, in acting according to the code of professional ethics, but mainly due to the diversity of clients.

The targeted effort of the social worker is to secure conditions for the person serving a sentence and provide him/her with the necessary help to prepare him for an independent way of life.

The work of these social workers and other professional workers in prisons deserves recognition and greater attention not only from professionals, but also from the general public. Care should also be given to the workers themselves, not only in the context of professional development, professional therapeutic support and reflection of one's own needs and feelings. The challenge is also the reflection of new trends and concepts in social work, where an exemplary use is a multidisciplinary team of which a social worker should be a member.

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