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FACULTY OF PEDAGOGY
DEPARTMENT OF “SOCIAL WORK”**

ABSTRACT
of a dissertation

ON THE SUBJECT:

**COMMUNICATION BARRIERS BETWEEN THE SOCIAL WORKER AND THE
FAMILY MEMBERS OF SOCIAL SERVICE USERS**

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INTRODUCTION

Communication problems are undoubtedly a challenge and can create extreme tension not only in everyday life but also in professional work. There is serious research and accomplishments in clarifying the essence of communication processes. Various factors enhancing or hindering communicative relations are sought and discovered.

In the present work, the focus is on the emergence of communicative barriers as a consequence of an informational act, determined by the psychological characteristics and personal characteristics of the participants in the communicative situation. Often these specifics remain underestimated or insufficiently analyzed in the communication process, and this can deform or hinder the interaction. Communication may be spontaneous, driven by unconscious impulses, or consciously planned when professional intervention is required. Theoretical approaches to the essence of communication consider various aspects of it, emphasize different sides of it.

The conceptual framework of the theoretical-empirical research is based on the understanding that the problem of the manifestation of barriers in communication is interdisciplinary and could not be considered in isolation in the social work, as it is related to the specifics of behavior and the level of development of human relations. The interdisciplinary perspective implies a combination of theoretical paradigms from similar fields of the humanities and social sciences, mainly based on psychology and sociology, giving a generalized view of the problem under consideration. The author's understanding is that, first of all, the essence of social work should be clarified and from there an analogy should be made to the manifestation of barriers in communication, with the research focus falling on the building of quality relationships filled with trust, so that the effectiveness of the offered and received social service to be at a level higher than expected.

The nature of professional communication is strongly influenced by the individual characteristics of the communicators, by the level of their self-knowledge and by the development of their communication skills. The subjective determinism of communicative processes implies a thorough study of personal structures and the respective discovery of opportunities to optimize the communicative behavior of social workers, as they determine the main line and maintain the necessary direction and dynamics of communication. The social worker's communication is seen as professional communication, requiring constant regulation and modification of one's own behavior so that it is possible to achieve maximum effective

interactions with diverse clients or their relatives. The requirements for the social worker, on the one hand, are defined by the duties and responsibilities towards the institutions, on the other hand, by the specifics of the users and their needs, and this poses the question of creating one's own system of concepts and skills that would facilitate their activity.

The nature of professional communication between the social worker and the client largely determines the quality of the social service provided, as well as the process of helping. The regulation of the relations that arise is carried out by the social worker, as they are expected to be professionally competent. The high emotionality of working relationships in the field of helping often puts professionals in a situation of difficult choices on how to regulate their own behavior and control their emotional reactions. In the context of social work, psychological knowledge can enrich the toolkit with which certain problems are solved, when overcoming barriers in communication between professionals and relatives of clients using social services, and respectively for clients to receive better quality of care that satisfies their needs. Focusing on the emotional side of the work allows the spread of emotional intelligence in a way that is suitable for developing the social culture of social workers in working with users and their inner circle. Thus, an opportunity is created to integrate more qualities in the personality in order to achieve professional goals and acquire the appropriate skills necessary to deal with the situations that the social worker is forced to face.

Relevance of the researched problem

The observation of relationships in the context of social work provides opportunities to expand existing theoretical aspects and create a new approach that examines barriers to communication in order to facilitate and increase the quality of services that are provided in social work. Thus, helping relationships have the opportunity to develop and public attitudes towards them to improve. This increases the efficiency in daily work and the pressure - of social workers, users and the inner circle, in a purely practical aspect, can be reduced, while the level of stress or professional exhaustion can be less expressed. A higher quality of communication encourages the search for social assistance and this leads to an increase in trust, an increase in the rating of social services, and inevitably affects job satisfaction.

Structure of the study

Interest in the manifestation of barriers in communication is dictated by their influence on professional interaction in social work not only with users of social services, but also with their relatives. Communication is not elementary but a multispectral process, structured by the

interaction of many different circumstances, depending on situational, social, psychological or personal characteristics. Such an assumption rests on some theories and concepts of the nature of communication, each of which has its own grounds and contribution to clarifying this phenomenon. The diagram in Fig. 1 clearly shows the structure on which the theoretical justification of the present study is formed.

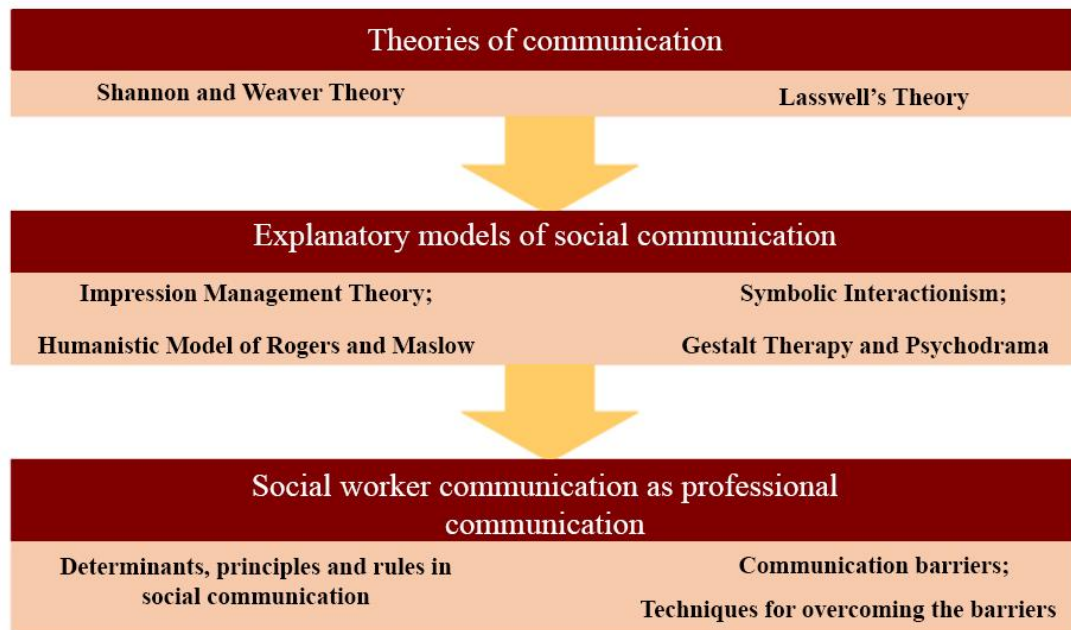


Fig. 1. Summarizing scheme of communication models on which the theoretical concept of the dissertation is based

In social work, professionals face the challenge of making quick and efficient decisions, dealing with crisis situations, analyzing the behavior of their clients or their immediate environment. For this reason, rational, controlled behavior is required of them to enable the creation of a working relationship between the helping professional and the user of social services, which only emphasizes the key role of communication in building quality and trusting relationships.

The object of the study is professional communication in social work, while the

subject - the barriers in the communication of the social worker in their interaction with the user of a social service and a representative of their inner circle who takes care of them.

The aim of the dissertation is to investigate barriers in the social worker's professional communication with elderly people above working age and those close to them, by studying the impact of the barriers imposed on trust in the provided social service.

Tasks of the dissertation research:

1. On a theoretical level, to describe features of social communication and their projection in interpersonal interaction when providing social support.
2. To present models of communication applicable in the professional interaction between specialists and users of social services and their relatives, when the case requires communication with more participants in the helping process.
3. To study the specifics of communication in the provision of residential-type social service for elderly people depending on the provider and the way of financing the social service (respectively, private and municipal providers of social services).
4. To differentiate, systematize and typologize common barriers in communication between the social worker and relatives of the user of a social service in a specialized environment.
5. At an applied level, to analyze the influence of barriers in communication on the trust of relatives and users towards the presented social service and towards the staff and the institution that offers it.

The overall theoretical-empirical study is aimed at verifying the following **hypothesis**:

Knowing, taking into account and minimizing the influence of barriers in the social worker's communication with users of social services contributes to improving the working attitude and increasing confidence in the professional activity of the social worker.

FIRST CHAPTER

THEORETICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN A SOCIAL WORKER AND A CLIENT

1. Theoretical overview of communicative models and approaches for describing communication as a social phenomenon

Communication processes in social work should objectively be considered in a cultural, philosophical, social, psychological, even historical context, as well as through the specific discourse of communication theory. In the field of the professional social environment, it is important to clarify what characterizes these processes and what is the relevance of the basic communication models to the professional social activity and how the interaction of the elements manifests itself in the specific communication relations, since professional

communication requires consciously controlled behavior. "The accumulation of different meanings and points of view towards communication is a natural result of the continuous complication of the communication process and the increasing dependence of the effectiveness of people's actions on their ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships" (Tsvetanska, S.: 11) . Communication skills are central to our culture and are defined as a key human skill. It could not be said that communication in the social work process has been sufficiently and fully researched but the interest of scientific knowledge in it deepens and shows the huge influence it exerts on the professional work of the social worker in their work with clients and relatives.

In many instances in this dissertation, attention is focused not only on the exchange of information, but also on the ability to do so. The ability to communicate in certain patterns, but also to follow rules, shows the tendency to create quality social interaction. This includes the possession of various skills such as mastery of body language, tone of voice, speech, etc. When the parties involved in the communication process manage to create the impression they want to convey, suppress negative attitudes and maintain a positive attitude towards each other, they begin to create trusting and quality relationships with the interlocutor. Communication in a professional environment considers communication as an expression of behavioral reactions provoked by the specifics of situations. Landmarks for the functional and conceptual side of communication in social work would be difficult to define, and this can have an impact on the organizational side of relations, the system for creating, transmitting and processing information. During most of their working time, employees communicate with managers, colleagues, subordinates, clients, relatives, etc., which requires them to carry out planned, guiding, coordinating professional communication. This process is only possible if it is qualitatively organized and controlled "...social work transforms its status and acquires elements of norming, regulation, organization, standardization. This process affects the methodological pluralism in the profession, as it is expressed in the application and following of methodological guidelines, methodological codes and manuals, standards for social work" (Mekhandzhyska, G.: 48). Thanks to this planned activity, professionals are given the opportunity to work more efficiently and prospectively, and in the context of communication through feedback and to make more reasonable decisions about the problems and needs of users. Then communication is clear, meaningful and a prerequisite is created for building relationships of trust and cooperation with customers or their close environment.

1.1 Defining the concepts of communication and intercommunication

In Latin-influenced languages, “communication” expresses a certain action and its result, i.e. can be translated as "message". In Bulgarian, the ambiguity of the word is lost and it is more appropriate to use the term "intercommunication", and it is precisely this process and its essence that is depicted by the word "interaction". It, in turn, reflects purposeful action between at least two people to achieve change in the worldview, attitudes and behavior of others. "In the Bulgarian language, both words are intensively used - communication and intercommunication, which differ in their origin, but not in their meaning." (Tsvetanska, S.: 11) In scientific literature, the concepts of communication and relationships are interchangeable. From the point of view of metalanguage, communication is seen as a system of coded relationships between the listener and the speaker, which at any moment can change their positions, i.e. the listener becomes the speaker and vice versa. According to other definitions, for an action to be defined as communication, there needs to be a transfer of information and reflection in one or two parties, rather than simply a transfer along the communication channel. Based on this and bearing in mind the specific way of conveying information and the motives of the person, an interaction of social norms, socially appropriate roles, social rules that facilitate the intentional process in professional communication is determined. Good interactions are determined by individual attitudes, past experiences, values, subjective judgments, etc., which only emphasizes the complex and complex nature of any communication where there is an exchange of information and feedback. Different schools consider different determinants, but none explains the entire phenomenon.

1.2 Types of communication

Of interest to the topic is interpersonal communication framed by professional rules and requirements. The qualitative course of a specific, professionally conditioned communication is determined by many factors - environment, experience, age, motivation, style, regulated relationships to prevent complications in crisis situations, individual abilities to influence and build trusting relationships as a prerequisite for commenting on unsatisfactory or satisfactory achievements. Each of these factors can be a prerequisite for unlocking a communication barrier at some stage of the interaction.

1.3 Theories of communication, social communication and communication models

In interpersonal interaction, the ability to socialize develops, deploying various abilities, influencing the overall personality. In the context of the current observation on communicative processes in social work, it seems appropriate to direct the interest to the socio-psychological

reasons determining the peculiarities of communication in a work environment. The detailed examination of models and theories supports the thesis that knowing the specifics of a professional communicative act can prevent the emergence of barriers, as well as increase the trust and quality of social care. An example that illustrates the multi-layered nuances of communication and shows its complexity is the model of the anthropologist Dell Hymes with emphasis on some components: topic, scene and situation. Context is emphasized in this model. He concretizes and illustrates his view of communication through the acronym *SPEAKING*.¹

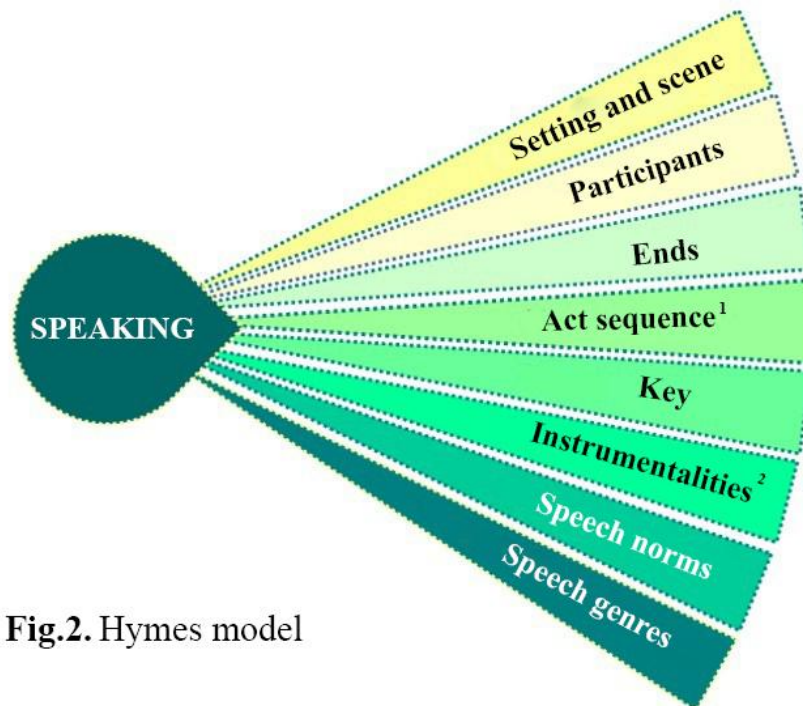


Fig.2. Hymes model

¹ i.e. form and content of the message
² i.e. channels for conveying the message and form of speech; oral, written, dialect, etc.

(from Hymes, Dell H. (1968). *The Ethnography of Speaking*)

In interpersonal communication, it is difficult to trace causal relations, the reasons that provoked one or another behavior. For example, if a person is convinced that others are neglecting them, they start behaving distrustful, and no matter the other's behavior, they interpret it as confirmation of the disrespect shown to them and accordingly behaves hostilely, which does not facilitate the communication process.

¹ **S** – Scene and setting, **P** – Participants, **E** – Ends, **A** – Act Sequence, **K** – Key, **I** – Instruments, **N** – Norms, **G** – Genre.

A disadvantage of most models, apart from linearity, is the inability to account for all prominent systems involved in the communication process. The different level of communication skills would also determine how ineffective or effective a professional communication would be. For the qualitative progress of an interaction, it is necessary to pay special attention to some behavioral manifestations in communication. The ability to communicate is one of those qualities that a social worker must possess, because most of the time they work with other people and with the information that is exchanged between them. The main thing that deserves attention is not whether it is communicated, because it is an indisputable fact that it is done, but how qualitatively and effectively it happens.

2. Theoretical directions and their modern application in social work

Different theoretical schools consider different aspects of communication. None of the theories manage to fully explain the overall manifestation of this phenomenon. The different concepts do not contradict each other but complement and build on each other. Although they appear similar, looking at different elements shows a variety of perspectives and focus falls on specific important areas of the communication process.

2.1 Shannon and Weaver model

In the 1950s, the first multi-component models appeared, which are used in modern times. Such is the classic six-element model of Shannon and Weaver, which considers communication in a broader sense, as a system with two communication processes. Weaver further developed the model by adding the element of noise, and Weaver later supplemented it with the idea of feedback. In this way, a comprehensive model applicable to most professional relationships is identified. The sender of the message keeps a feedback loop with their own message to get confirmation that it was received by the addressee in the way the addressee intended. This reveals communication as a social interaction, and the introduction of feedback is considered the beginning of the modern understanding of communication as an interactive process. In social work, the emphasis is on the decoding process, how the message is received by the relative or the user of the social service and how the feedback is received. This circumstance helps the social worker to navigate the process itself. If the received message is distorted, then the feedback is also distorted and the social interaction is deformed. With this danger in mind, the social worker can focus some of their attention on preventing this kind of distortion.

2.2. Lasswell model

In Lasswell's classic model, the focus is on the social-psychological process. This ranks it among modern interactive models, confirming the growing importance of communication in modern times. This model is of interest to social work because it considers the evaluation of results in practice and is widely applicable because it exhausts many aspects in a communication process, but it must be taken into account that at each stage noise can occur, which in turn it can distort the meaning of the message and, accordingly, make communication difficult, as well as provoke the manifestation of communication barriers. Each one of these models introduces additional actions or functions that, applied in the context of communication between the social worker and the user's relatives, contribute to revealing important aspects and specific characteristics of the processes in professional communication.

2.3. Social work and explanatory models of social communication relating to relationships with relatives and clients

Other models in communication, which explain social communication and are relevant to social work and specifically to the activity of the social worker, are manifested in Social Communication Theory. Emphasis is placed on the transmission of a meaningful message between two consciousnesses and the presence of movement of thoughts in social time and space (Sokolov V.A., 2002). This movement is possible only between subjects involved in the social sphere, and by default it becomes clear that there is a communicator and a recipient. In social communication, it is important to note the meaning that fills the content of the message, its significance. The specific relationship of the social worker with the users also determines the more specific goals, which, from the point of view of the Social Communication Theory, refer to the transmitted message. It includes the knowledge and skills of the communicator (social worker), the ability to share their professional and personal experience with other people, to actively influence, to provoke emotionality and to react according to the situation (some need emotional dilution or showing sympathy), but almost always the recipient is looking for emotional support. When it comes to social communication, it is meant exactly this movement in social space and time - knowledge, skills, stimuli, emotions. As for the recipient, they do not simply accept information or facts but must assimilate the meaning, i.e. to integrate the received message into their individual mental processes and to understand it. Otherwise, communication could not take place.

2.3.1. Symbolic interactionism

Through this Theory of Symbolic Interactionism, George Mead examines the impact of the exchange of symbols and their impact on the dynamics of relationships between people in society. His contribution to the study of how the social environment influences the individual is significant. "Mead drew on behaviorism but redefined human behavior as a response to individual interpretations of the world rather than the world itself" (Oliver, C., 2011). Respectively, if a social worker maintains a high level of social behavior regardless of the situation, either abstracting or suppressing some of their personality characteristics (such as aggression, for example), the chance of success increases both in their relations with consumers and in interaction with their colleagues and the environment as a whole.

2.3.2. Erving Goffman's Impression Management Theory

Social impact is inherently emotional and contains a mental exchange of feelings, impulsive or spontaneous ideas, images, representations. Goffman developed the Symbolic Interaction Theory using Mead's idea that self-concepts are influenced by social interaction and the reflected impression of others. His research focuses on impression management and how it affects people, observing relationships within their social games. According to him, every action is undertaken in order to maintain some desired impressions that a person wants to create and maintain in front of others. In this sense, the social roles a person portrays reveal the value system through which they filter their behavior. Through social roles predictability can be achieved in social life. Social work and the activity of the social worker is a kind of social structure, and if some social position is to be defended, this can happen more successfully through a good mastery of the set of social roles and their skillful application according to the situation.

2.3.3. Attribution theory

Attribution theory is concerned with how the perceiver of social information uses it, i.e. how they examine the causal relationships of events. Attributional theory is not precisely formulated, it combines ideas, rules, hypotheses about the way in which conclusions are made about one's own behavior and that of others. Fritz Heider is the one who is interested in people's attributions because, according to him, the way we understand the social world through the lens of common sense can help us describe our experiences. Usually, when something occurs around us, we think about its meaning that leads us to inferences with which we can predict or control the social environment. The need to expect, predict and influence what will happen is explained by the behavior that caused it and the pressures of the environment. People are

looking for reasons for what is happening around them. This search and ways of analyzing the environment and the behavior of the participants in a situation can be useful in the work process of the social worker with the user.

2.3.4. Humanistic model

Humanists profess the idea that people are motivated by the desire to actualize themselves. According to Rogers, the fully functioning person is the self-actualizing person. It bequeaths us to be supportive, helpful and understanding, and this is embedded in many of the principles of the helping professions and professionals who work with people, including social work. This also helps to better understand motivation in the work environment. Maslow, as a representative of the humanistic school, also focused only on the positive qualities of people. The main thesis advocated in the theory of the hierarchy of needs is that people constantly experience desires. If basic needs are satisfied (physiological needs, need for security), then higher-order desires (belongingness, respect, self-actualization) may appear. According to Maslow, self-actualizing people have a truer perception of reality and build more peaceful relationships with it. Clarity is acquired, the false and the dishonest are quickly distinguished, a more correct judgment of people is developed. In social work and in everyday social interaction, gaining such a broad-spectrum view of the overall process in a work situation can be of benefit to both professionals and users and their families.

2.3.5. Psychodrama model

At the beginning of the 20th century, Moreno focused on the methods and techniques of psychodrama to promote positive relationships, to connect people with each other and to develop empathy in conflict resolution, to acquire or improve social skills. Psychodrama can be a good practice and an innovative way to improve self-awareness and an effective tool in solving communication problems arising at work. Experiments have been done with nurses (Oflaz et al., 2011) about the emotional side of work and the influence of emotions in the development of self-awareness in a setting of offered professional care. Drama-methods applied in lessons on mastering different emotional states help to reveal unconscious emotions, attitudes, values that are central to the communication dilemma.

2.4 Relevance of theories and models in social work towards communication and uncovering resources for application in the practice of social workers

Expectations for specialists in social work are high, since the problems of clients and relatives are related to overcoming many crises, deficits of any nature, and the specialist is required to quickly navigate the situation and offer competent support that satisfies all participants in the communicative process. The environment in which the activity of the social worker develops is tense and requires a lot of knowledge and skills in order to plan future actions and maintain quality relations with the client and their relatives. "Social work aims at limiting social inequality and achieving a balance in people's opportunities for development, education, minimizing adversity in the lives of those who cannot cope with their own problems - poverty, illness, old age, disability, unemployment and etc." (Strakova, L.,: 21).

In social work, communication carries the specific characteristics of social interaction and the quality of communication is among the most essential components in the provision of social services. The exchange of certain information in the communication process and reaching an acceptable solution in both parties is important to achieve successful professional communication. From the interaction of the social worker with clients and relatives depends the quality of supportive care, the satisfaction of the client, the improvement of their condition and the professional satisfaction of the provider of the social service. With their involvement, clients also make a significant contribution to achieving quality communication, because their communicative responses can help to open perspectives to the caring process. The manifestation of empathy in social work is part of the specific professional and personal qualities necessary for the exercise of this profession. In the essence of the personal profile of the social worker is the ability to show empathy "... empathy is described as a complete emotional-cognitive system in several layouts - in an emotional layout as empathy, in a cognitive layout as understanding, meaning and evaluation of the experience, and in behavioral layout as an active component and collaboration" (Boyadzhieva, N.: 63). The ability to show empathy is a way to achieve trust and successful relationships in the social environment. In our modern times, this is a key characteristic for the manifestation of emotional intelligence and corresponds to the ability to build quality relationships with others. It largely applies to professionals in the helping professions because it allows the focus to be on the moods, the display of tolerance, the inclusion of certain attitudes or the motivation of others to communicate. Thus, various manifestations of communication barriers can be minimized and have a limited influence on the process of perceiving information, unencumbered by prejudices, attitudes or stereotypes.

- requirements for professional communication in social work

In social work, the exchange of information between the client and the professional is important to the helping process. Practical work requires the creation of a model to facilitate the communicative process. (Fig. 3) below shows on the one hand the client who, contacting a social worker, expects to receive from this communication an opportunity to share thoughts, feelings, needs, and on the other hand the social worker who, from the position of an expert, has the ability to develop and improve relationships.

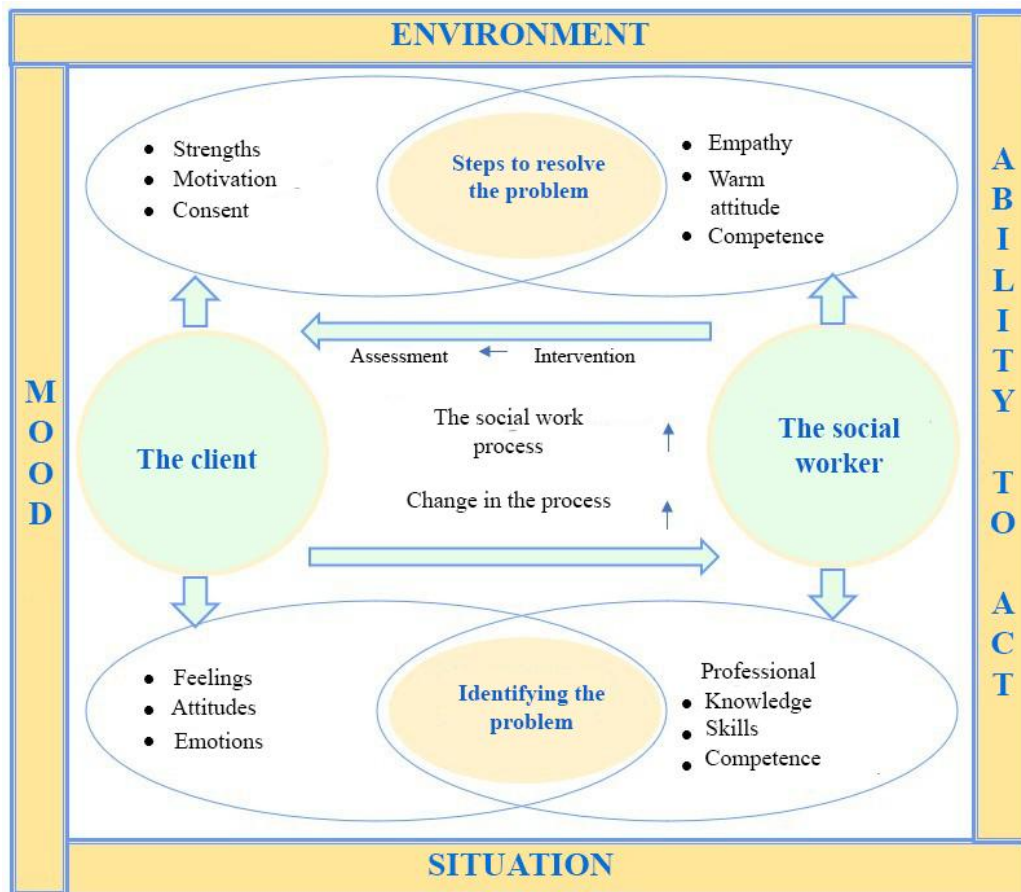


Fig. 3. Communication pattern in social work practice (according to IJRSA, 2019)

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The social worker, on the basis of their knowledge, competence and experience, collects data from the non-verbal and verbal behavior of the client, from the environment or the situation, in order to form a more complete expertise and accordingly recommend the most appropriate measures for providing help and support. The next step in this process is to make a change to improve the client's condition. The appropriate realization of the follow-up actions shows how much the specialist's assessment was adequate for the moment and successful in the future. An important clarification is that in order for the professional to intervene, both parties (client, relatives) must agree with the prepared action plan. Through this communication, the priorities

are clarified, which lead to the successful engagement of the client with the realization of the set tasks.

- specifics of communication barriers in the social practice

In the social practice, it is important to circumvent or avoid sensitive fields where causes of barriers may arise. By describing the working relationship pattern in individual social practice, S. Tsvetanska highlights some of the most frequently occurring communication barriers at each stage of the unfolding of the helping process. One type of barriers refers to the influence of subjectivity in communication and the occurrence of perceptual errors in the mutual perception between the social worker and the client. Another group of barriers is related to the use of the language of words and body language when working on the client's case (Tsvetanska, S., 2021b).

Communication barriers in social work are diverse in nature and are characterized by multiple causes. The signs that determine the prerequisites for the emergence of barriers can be divided into two groups - external and internal.

Each of these two large groups of prerequisites has its specific manifestation in communication in social work and is the cause of the emergence of potential barriers, as shown in Fig. (4) below.

The external prerequisites for the appearance of barriers arise from the situational nature of interpersonal communication, which has no independent meaning outside of the specific conditions that give rise to it. Communication in a professional environment arises on the occasion of a specific problem, which sets the framework of the topic and the content of the communication. In addition, the process of information exchange always takes place in a situational context - time, place, duration, which is why every act of communication, even on similar issues, is different and unique. It is no coincidence that most theoretical models describing the communication process contain noise as a component - as a reflection of the situational context. Noise as a barrier is most often associated with irritants coming from the external environment that interfere with the adequate perception of the speaker's speech. In addition, noise can be interpreted not so literally, but as "noise" in the communication channels between communicators, noise in the management of communication in the institution that provides the social service. Different interpretations of noise are possible, but in all cases they are united by the idea of an obstacle that muffles the qualitative perception of communicative signals and does not allow them to be understood in their entirety and in a pure form.

Another type of barriers based on external preconditions are administrative barriers. They arise from normative, organizational and/or institutional limitations and peculiarities in the provision of a social service. The strict regulation of the conditions under which support is provided to people in need, the formalization of communication relations, adherence to regulations without an attempt to understand the specifics of the client's actual case could create a barrier and leave an impression of inhumane treatment. The declarative expression of support by specialists is one of the most common barriers that reflect a decrease in trust in communication in the individual social practice (Tsvetanska, S., 2021b). On the other hand, if the organization of work in an institution has imperfections, there is a lack of good communication and coordination between employees, effective team interaction is not demonstrated. This usually affects the quality of work with the client. Administrative barriers also refer to the degree of flexibility of the organization to respond to unforeseen situations, atypical cases, emergencies that are not previously described in the procedures and standards for providing social support but require professional intervention and specific communication.

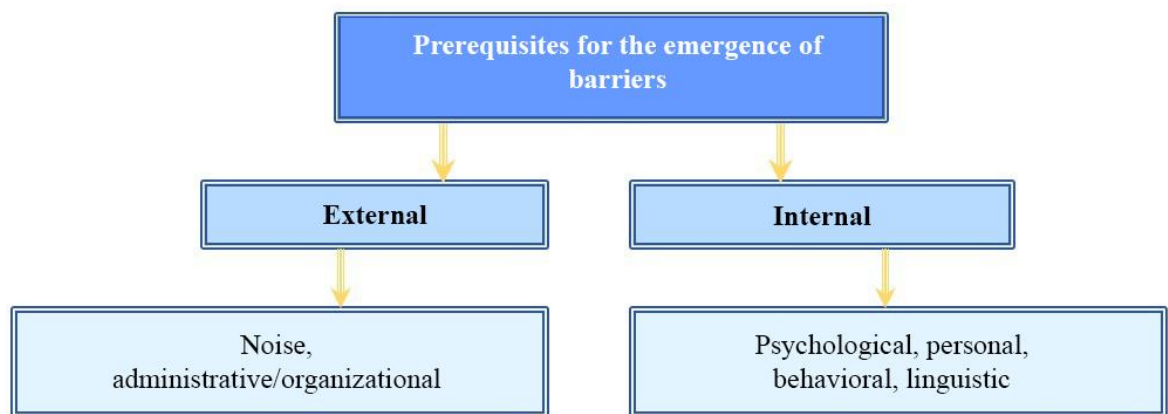


Fig. 4. Prerequisites for the emergence of barriers in social work

The internal prerequisites for barriers in communication are projected in the way of fulfilling the roles of helper and client and reflect on the nature of interaction in individual social work. A strong influence over the communication process can be observed in the deficits of communication skills of participants in the interaction. This is a common barrier that is typical for both individual social practice and group social practice (Tsvetanska, S., 2021a). The low level of the possessed social skills affects the clients' ability to express their experiences and achieve a depth of awareness of the problem in the helping process. Special attention should be paid to the barriers that arise when feedback is ineffectively provided, as this is a major mechanism for stimulating the client's activity to take steps to change (Tsvetanska, S., 2021a;

2021b). If there is an inaccuracy in the perception, understanding or reception of the message and the way of reflecting (giving feedback), any communication goal can seriously suffer.

Language barriers are manifested in social work with people who do not speak the language of the country in which they receive support (e.g. refugees, migrants), with clients who have a different mother tongue; in children or adults with speech disorders. Language barriers can also be caused by deficits in the vocabulary, peculiarities of the style of expression - use of slang, regional dialects, limited vocabulary, terminological load of the language, etc.

One group of barriers refers to the influence of individual personality characteristics of communicators such as temperament, concentration of attention, personality type, level of self-esteem, openness to new experiences, etc. These are psychological barriers and they are projected in the way of verbal expression in the interaction of the client with the helping specialist, in the degree of trust in the offered help, in the formation of expectations from the process. One subgroup of psychological barriers relevant to social work is emotional barriers, as emotional states and temperament reflect the way of communication and affect the reactions of the communicators. These include fears, shame, guilt, anger, disgust. They appear in violation of ethical principles, contempt, emotional instability, momentary states, negative emotions. They also unfold when the emotional state or hasty reaction dominates the information exchange, affecting both parties in the communicative process (social worker - client); they can be a filter through which to seriously change the way they perceive the other person, the situation, and this affects their opinion of each other. Since social work is emotionally saturated, these kinds of barriers challenge the professional's self-reflection and self-control.

Studying the prerequisites for the emergence of barriers allows a change of functional relationships that "...construct a specific pattern of interaction and experience that involves the client in a stimulating and supportive environment, as well as in a process of internal change, overcoming barriers and external remodeling and embodiment of the achieved level of development" (Mekhandzhiyska, G.: 17). Knowing the types of barriers and their characteristics allows to reveal the difficulties in the process of communication and to activate mechanisms to improve relationships and the overall individual development of the professional and the user.

In social work, communication barriers can be seen as a serious challenge to the social worker's professional skills. The ability to take into account the specific characteristics of the client can

help to circumvent problematic relationships with families or other social groups with whom the client interacts.

Barriers provoked by misunderstanding of the message arise when the information from the communicator is misinterpreted for some reason - phonetic, semantic, stylistic or logical.

Psychological barriers to interpersonal communication are all the conscious and unconscious difficulties that can arise between subjects as soon as they come into psychological contact with each other. In such situations, these obstacles are sometimes recognized but sometimes not realized by the participants in the communication. The degree and nature of their awareness is also different. Relationships are conditioned by inexplicable and often unpredictable psychological phenomena such as feelings of dislike, mistrust of the other, and this inevitably reflects on the information.

Various classifications of possible communication barriers that can hinder communication can be found in different sources. Examining the classification that Lunenburg offers for the manifestation of communication barriers can complement the general view of the complex and numerous aspects that define them “A number of barriers slow down effective communication. They can be divided into four categories: process barriers, physical barriers, semantic barriers and psychosocial barriers” (Lunenburg, C. Fred, 2010: 10).

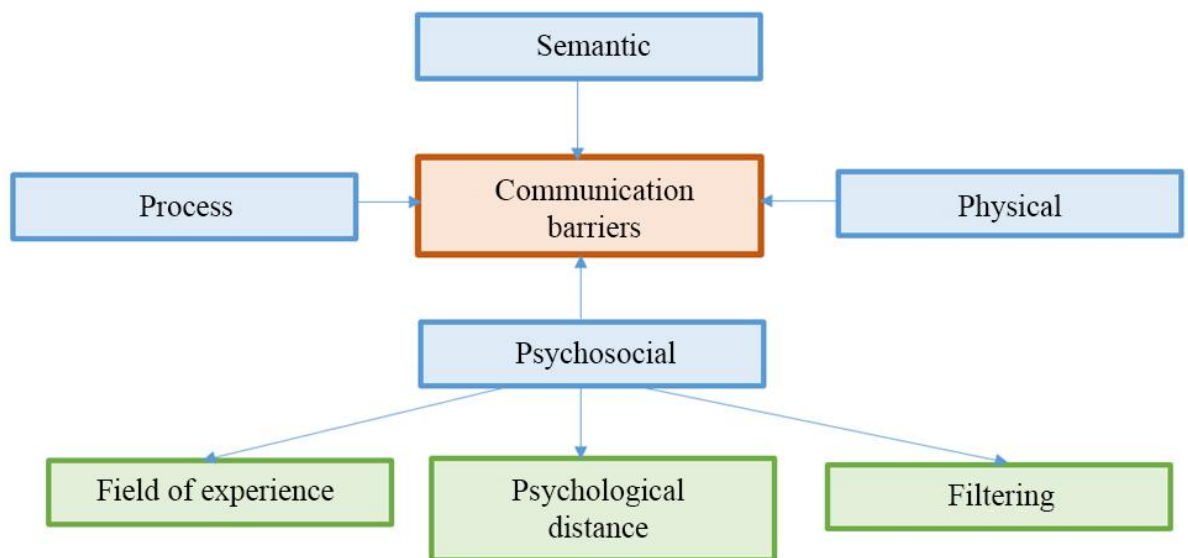


Fig. 5. Communication barriers according to Lunenburg (Lunenburg C. Fred, 2010: 10)

- in process barriers at each step of the communicative situation, a breakdown may occur (in the sender, the encoding, the channel, the decoding, the receiver, or in the feedback), this can affect the transfer of information and, accordingly, disrupt understanding.

- in the case of physical barriers, distraction may occur from a telephone conversation, visitors, distance between people, etc.

- psychosocial barriers are seen as dependent on:

- field of experience – human origin; perceptions; values; biases; needs; expectations;
- filtering – is obtained from needs, interests and emotions, through which a person sees and hears not the real situation or information, but what they would like to see or hear. And despite the fact that the obvious is considered, very often the process cannot be mastered and communication breaks down;
- the psychological distance - often derived from the actual distance.

Participants encode or decode the message in the context of their experience, and if there is a large difference in experience between the social worker and the client, communication can seriously suffer. Practical social work is aimed at solving pressing problems, and success depends on appropriate communication with the client and their environment.

- common barriers in the working relationship between the social worker and the user of social services

In their practice, professionals are faced with the challenge of quickly and effectively making decisions, dealing with crisis situations, analyzing the behavior of their clients or the people in their immediate circle. Focusing on the manifestation of psychological blind spots in professional communicative social work contributes to shaping relevant discourses for working with them and creating a conceptual framework allowing to master or minimize their impact, which helps to master some communicative barriers. Everyone has blind spots regardless of their profession or intellectual status – they are inevitable because they are a construct of the human psyche. The optimistic thing is that they are manageable and the way to counter them is good self-knowledge. The mechanism by which they act represents the lowering of a barrier to the adequate, rational perception of information from the surrounding reality. Sensitivity is lost, a problem-causing behavior pattern is triggered because the information is distorted. In

any case, the distorted subjective perception affects the judgment and the finding of optimal solutions.

The visualization of interpersonal interaction through Shannon and Weaver's communication model shows the danger zone vulnerable to distortion of perceived information. The communication process can be complicated by the appearance of a blind spot in both the sender and receiver. If in feedback the communicator manages to distinguish the blind spot in the receiver and registers the manifestation of their blind spot, and if this is kept in mind throughout the interaction process, then there will be fewer obstacles and misunderstandings between the two parties. It is important to take into account the risk of blind spots on both sides of the communication process, because otherwise distorted information will make communication difficult.

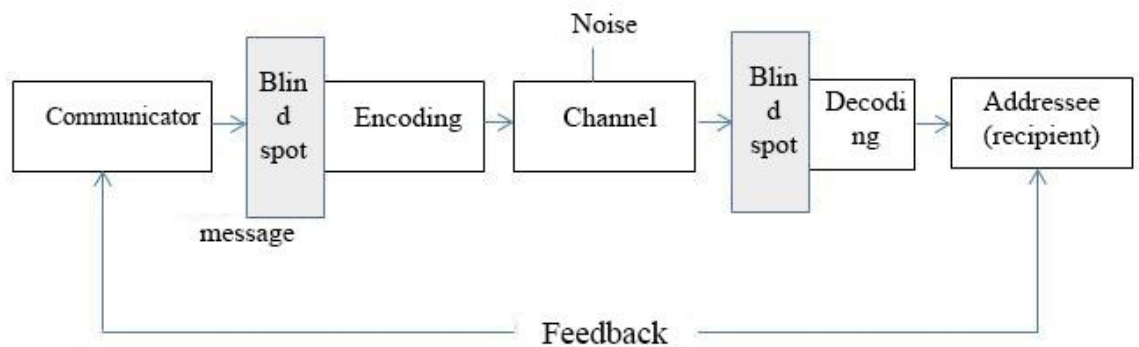


Fig. 6. Shannon and Weaver model supplemented with the “blind spot” component

In social work, it is important how the user or the relatives receive information and how they reflect it because this helps the social worker to navigate the process itself. It doesn't matter on what channel the information is transmitted - if it is deformed during decoding, then the feedback is also deformed. This is the vulnerable area where one of the blind spots can manifest – then an additional barrier in social interaction appears. In the context of social work, with this danger in mind, the social worker can focus their attention on preventing this kind of distortion. Purposeful regulation of one's own behavior is a prerequisite for achieving the goals of communication. In relationships with others, behavior changes and self-control is crucial. It is essential for those in need of professional care, users and their relatives, to build a stable relationship that meets their requirements or expectations.

Opportunities to overcome communication barriers

The nature of the communication between a social worker and a client largely determines the quality of social services provided, as well as the success of the helping process. The regulation of communication and the relationships that arise in it is carried out by the social worker, as they are expected to be professionally competent in this regard. However, the high emotionality of the work-related relationships of helping often puts professionals in a situation of difficult choices about how to regulate their own behavior and control their emotional reactions. In this regard, social workers need specialized preliminary training and learning of role models of behavior that they can apply flexibly in response to the demands of professional interaction.

Often the actual living space of the client is limited and narrowed, and on an improvised "stage" it is expanded and supplemented through the freedom for interpretation, creativity and experience. Thus it becomes a space for development and personal growth. Application of drama techniques in the professional relationship of the social worker with the client allows building a more reflective and flexible communication. Drama techniques can help connect the social worker and the client in the communication process. The elements of theater are widely applicable in the study of personality, interpersonal relationships, conflicts and problems arising from feelings and emotions. A rich variety of dramatic tools (such as the monologue, projection, working with resistances, role-reversal, the double self, the mirror, the auxiliary world, the realization, etc.) can assist the process of portraying and presenting oneself. The purpose of all these support mechanisms is not to turn social workers into actors, but rather to encourage them to be persuasive on the 'stage' (professional setting) when communicating with their clients. Drama techniques facilitate communication by making it more figurative, metaphorical, emotional. Applying them would allow the social worker to improve his or her skills in solving the problems shared by the clients, to empathize and better understand the states in which they fall. Examining problematic situations through the lens of the theatrical game helps to find non-standard options for dealing with everyday tasks, helps to subsequently apply the failed models in real life, to arrive at the choice of more than one solution. The mastery of fictional imaginary conflicts is transformed into new knowledge and reactions, the ever-seeking inquiring mind is stimulated, self-knowledge is expanded, more effective social contacts unfold, self-reflection is developed.

- simulating emotional intelligence

Recognizing other people's emotions allows self-regulation of behavior, increasing the skill of interpersonal communication, improving the skills of assessing reality, self-motivation,

empathizing or merging with others. In the work process, demonstrating emotional intelligence allows not only a real assessment of oneself and personal qualities such as strengths and weaknesses but also the ability to self-control. One of the main qualities of social work professionals is the display of empathy, but of course this is not the only quality required. There are some generally valid qualities applicable in the helping process - the combination of extroversion, intuitiveness, sensitivity, reasonableness, receptivity characterize the mental portrait of the helping specialist; among the frequently mentioned personality traits can be mentioned, in addition to empathy, responsibility, patience, optimism, sense of humor, etc. However, practical and reflective training is important for the development of personal qualities and professional skills.

For practicing social workers, in order for there to be a lasting tendency to develop quality relationships unencumbered by communication barriers, it is necessary to develop concepts of emotional stability and emotional flexibility.

3. Methodology for conducting empirical research - description of barriers in communication in homes for the elderly between helpers, relatives and residents

Conducting research that tracks how communication barriers arise in the process of communication allows studying the problems in the practice of social workers and the opportunities for clients to receive a more complete social service.

The research design illustrates the logic by which the data collected are related to the original research questions and the conclusions reached by the research.

The collection of information is a combination of interviews, observations and events in the institutions, thanks to which real problems are more clearly outlined, and are subject to appropriate evaluations and replacement with alternatives to improve the situation under consideration.

Empirical research is conducted using qualitative methods - case study, action research. "The researcher and participants jointly connect theory with practice to drive social change" (Bhandari, P.: 2022). The relations in social institutions between social workers and relatives of those accommodated in homes for the elderly are examined (case study). "A case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon." (McCombes, S.: 2022), the method is qualitative research observation, data processing and analysis. Conducting qualitative research allows for in-depth exploration of

underlying features and meanings of a phenomenon or issue and "...involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences" (Bhandari, P.: 2020). In social work with the elderly, the method allows for an in-depth analysis of specific communicative situations and a focus on details that highlight common barriers in helping interaction from the behavioral perspective of the subjects involved. Work with elderly people deserves special attention because this service is increasingly in demand and occupies a large sector in social work. "A significant part of social workers' work is working with adults. And this is a specific activity that requires knowledge of their mental characteristics" (Ilyin, E.: 2013). The qualitative research is based on the theoretical analysis of concepts clarifying the essence of the communication process in social work with an emphasis on manifestations of psychological and personal characteristics in building relationships of trust between social workers and users of their services.

The case study method is widespread in the field of social research. Its characteristic is that it is always considered in some context. In the specific case, it is considered in the context of communication and the manifestation of barriers that prevent it. This method in its essence is not strictly structured and the steps are determined by the researcher. It is very effective in the study of processes and phenomena. Of course, it is not without some disadvantages that should be taken into account (the relative subjectivity that depends on the qualities of the researcher and their experience with similar studies; the other significant disadvantage is that the results of the studied case are not applicable to another case, even if it was similar).

Studying cases in the social worker's practice provides valuable information about the specifics of the communication process, the way the partnership works, and the nature of the barriers that appear. "A communication barrier is anything that prevents us from receiving and understanding the messages that others use to convey their information, ideas and thoughts" (Kumbakonam, U. 2016). Analyzing the behavioral side of communication clearly outlines the limitations in maintaining quality relationships in professional work. Each of the participants in the communication makes contact in a certain way depending on their attitudes, desire to share, emotionality or social experience.

The existing concepts and explanatory models of communication are applicable in social work and help to clarify the reasons for the occurrence of communication barriers in typical or specific situations. The aim is to check how the application of communication models helps in clarifying the obstacles that arise in interactions and the ways to overcome them. The various

cases provide guidelines for the in-depth and comprehensive consideration of the essence and inherent features of the phenomena related to the manifested barriers related to communication and planning of further actions. Relationships considered in a socio-psychological context allow a broader interpretation and planning of different goals, a more flexible response to the problems not only of the individual, but of communication in the entire life process. In modern homes for the elderly, opportunities for active social interaction are limited, so it is important to find ways to improve communication and the social environment. According to a study by Williams K. & all, about 5% of adults over the age of 65 or 1.43 million people live in nursing homes (NHs) today (US Administration on the Topic of Aging, 2000), as it is expected this number to grow to 3 million by 2030 (Siegel, 1996). This shows the need to create conditions for effective communication. Social contacts are important for the well-being of older adults. In practice, communication takes place mostly with the staff, and the responsibility for filling this vital need is transferred to them. Quality interpersonal relationships with the elderly influence their life expectancy.

The specific psychological characteristics of the elderly should not be underestimated either (fears of loneliness, conditions due to the loss of a loved one, retirement, fixation on disease symptoms, feelings of insult, feeling of uselessness, burden of relatives, disrespect, suffering from a deteriorating health condition, depression, suicidal thoughts). These characteristics are related to relationship building and are manifested in older people's expectations of residential care. The time professionals spend communicating and the manner in which they conduct it leave a lasting impression on communication situations. This once again emphasizes the importance of psychological features as a prerequisite for the appearance of psychological barriers. A better knowledge of age characteristics in people from the last stages of ontogenesis facilitates not only communication but also the mastery of some specific features of their invariance. Active social work with elderly people implies the creation of competencies for an adequate social communication. With appropriate questions, it can guide and facilitate the sharing of thoughts, judgments, feelings. Feedback turns out to be a key mechanism for driving change in the client's state. However, social workers often have to give negative feedback or express a critical attitude, and this requires special communication skill so as not to hurt the client and not to provoke resistance or non-cooperation. People in need find it difficult to accept reality as it is without it hurting or demotivating them. Psychological barriers inevitably dominate social work, since in most cases they are the result of deficits in social competence and difficulties in the emotional expression of experiences. This also requires a specific

preparedness of the social worker to react in situations of personal crises, insecurity or negative attitude of clients towards social work institutions.

SECOND CHAPTER

EMPIRICAL STUDY OF BARRIERS IN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SOCIAL WORKER AND CLIENT WHEN A SOCIAL SERVICE IS PROVIDED

1. Design of the empirical study

Minimizing communication barriers in social workers' professional interactions with relatives and clients are key to the effectiveness of social work. The communication of the social worker with the clients, users of their services, is insufficiently studied at the theoretical and empirical level. Although very important, at a conceptual level it is still poorly described. The methodology for the study of communicative barriers is based on the understanding that human behavior, although determined by generally known social regularities, has a specific individual manifestation. In order to capture the specificity at the individual level in each individual communication act, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of the social and professional context, when familiarizing with the client's case and analyzing the trust in communicating with them. On the basis of familiarization with the method, the methodology for analysis is formed, which will serve to differentiate common barriers in the social worker's communication with relatives and clients.

-Working on a case (case study)

It is a method that is widely used in social work because it tracks a wide variety of individual responses and specific behaviors. In social work, the discovery and understanding of the client's problem takes place through communication and maintaining active contact. The case study in social work is "...psycho-social, a psycho-educational attitude, sharing and having a relationship between the helper and the client, aimed at making sense of the situation, mobilizing internal and external resources to achieve change towards a better life" (MTSP : 48). Through the analysis of specific cases from the practice, the manifestations of common communication barriers and the reasons for their occurrence are studied. Through the work on the cases, some specific psychological features in the behavior are observed, which are a prerequisite for the emergence of barriers. The choice of this method allows to study in depth more unpopular phenomena and processes that appear in the process of communication.

The other method used in studying the problem is:

- Research in the act sequence

As a method structured for learning from experience in the act sequence, observing one's own behavior also involves social workers in the research process so that they examine their own daily professional activity. The reflection of social workers towards their professional behavior in working with clients' relatives is an essential mechanism for systematizing characteristics of behavior in a professional environment and for understanding their effectiveness in relation to working with people in need. Research in the act sequence as a method allows for a multi-layered study of the social worker's behavior in communication with users and relatives in the direction of existing barriers and these barriers are analyzed and systematized according to several interdependent criteria. One could not ignore the manifestation of anxiety, attitudes, expectations, the manifestation of empathy in attempts to bypass possible communication barriers. Research in the act sequence aims to differentiate some psychological aspects of behavior related to emotions that influence the occurrence of communication barriers.

Another method that enriches the perspectives of the problem under consideration is the semi-structured interview which allows discussion of issues on which it is difficult to gather information through other methods. Conducting semi-structured interviews separately with social workers, with clients and with members of their inner circle allows clarification of the subjective perception of communication barriers and their awareness. Interviews allow clients to tell their stories in as much detail as they want. In an open conversation, questions can be of a more general nature, thus encouraging sharing. The success of applying this method depends on the researcher's ability to select important data. Another variation of this method is the nondirective interview, which is based on Rogers' idea of client-centered therapy.

- Method of observation in social work

An important method for gathering information. The data collected from the observation is the basis for the analysis of the results. Observation can be free, methodical, etc. The title suggests that in free observation there is no pre-planning of what is being observed. The success of this observation is determined by the observer's ability to be aware of what they observe. In the specific studied case, observation is used to track and evaluate communication processes that provoke communication barriers. The goal is to study communication barriers that appear in the daily life of adults, taking into account individual reactions from relationships with employees, relatives and cohabitants. Emotional and behavioral reactions that are indicative of a certain type of behavior (aggressive, distant, friendly) are considered.

Observation is a dynamic method and is used in parallel with other research tools. Manifestations of barriers are studied through the observation, and the desires for participation, activity or passivity, conflict, oppression or empathy, anxiety, prejudice, attitudes, expectations, tendency to share, trust or distance. The positive thing about this method is that the observation is direct and the researcher directly observes the processes of interest.

Planned observation includes the essence of the observed processes (manifestation of communication barriers) and the goal is to reveal, through emotional manifestations or individual (specific) reactions of adults, their attitude to each of the observed barriers. In this way, an assessment of the main characteristics of the manifested processes is distinguished according to obvious indicators - spontaneous emotional reactions, sharing of personal experiences, sensitivity to the experiences of others - empathy, non-verbal reactions, difficulties in reflecting information (feedback). The phenomenon associated with the manifestation of communication barriers requires an analytical interpretation of psychological phenomena beyond visible behavior and emotional reactions. Each observation is recorded immediately after the meetings because otherwise some of the information may be lost and this may affect the results.

Conducting the empirical research to discover barriers in the communication of specialists with relatives and users of social services

The research is focused on the interaction social worker - relatives, client(s) and, in particular, on the separation of barriers that are based on psychological mechanisms - level of emotionality, subjectivity of perception, etc.

Through fieldwork and conducting multiple observations in a real working environment of the process of providing social services to adults in nursing homes and through semi-structured interviews with social workers and with their clients and relatives, the specificity of situations is revealed, related to problems in relationships, impaired communication or specific manifestations of subjectivity in communication that significantly affect the development of the case. The manifestation of communication barriers directly affects the effectiveness of social support and the satisfaction of social workers with their professional activity. The essence of good relations lies in clarifying the reason for which relatives, client and social worker communicate, and this is a necessary clarification to create a positive and qualitative relationship in the process of helping. Barriers to communication in social care can take many forms and should be considered when planning and delivering care.

Specialists are required to be empathetic, self-possessed and calm when dealing with diverse and complex cases. The issue of quality communication in the care of the elderly is essential to social work because of the emotional state that the institutions providing this care evoke.

Description of the empirical study on the manifestation of barriers in the social worker's communication with relatives of users of residential care for the elderly

Expanding knowledge of communication barriers helps to improve interactions at the interpersonal level, helps to minimize and master them, for a functional change in the approach to work. This can positively influence relatives, clients and social workers to better express emotions, opinions, concerns or wishes with patience, respect, and understanding. The studied cases of communication between a social worker, a client and relatives allow to derive the specificity of communication barriers depending on the context in which the residential type of care is provided. The study of communication barriers focuses on one of the important aspects of social work providing residential care for old people. The problem under consideration shows the specific way in which emotional or other psychological states become an obstacle in communication. When offering a social service related to the separation of the person from their usual family environment and permanent placement for year-round care in homes for the elderly, the help is in the direction of social reintegration.

-selection of institutions in which to observe real cases from the practice

The research is constructed around two cases of provision of the social service - residential care for the elderly, in institutions, that differ in the way the social service is financed. In the first case, the client (or his relatives) pay the fee corresponding to real living expenses or according to a contract with the manager of the relevant establishment, and in the second case – the same service is financed with funds from the state budget, adding 70% of the monthly income of the accommodation applicant. By case we will understand the institutions in which communication is realized in the process of helping the elderly. Each case includes the so-called "sub-cases" - related to communication with specific clients, users of the residential social service.

A total of 6 sub-cases were studied in a real working environment, being selected according to the method of payment, the specificity of the institution, according to the desire to participate, status (gender, age, social status), social activity of the examined persons and relations with relatives. Attention is focused on the particular characteristics of users with an emphasis on relationships and those communicative acts through which the presence of communicative

barriers is ascertained. The work is also aimed at comparing the cases from the point of view of the criterion of financing the service and how this affects the mechanisms of communication with users who state the need for social support. Here, a thesis stands out - that the financing and the working and living conditions of the subjects in the communication have the potential to create barriers in communication, and therefore the cases are selected on this basis as well. The individual characteristics of the participants in the communicative process affect the strategies and ways of managing relationships and the implementation of tasks, as well as the possibility for specialists to find meaning in their work. Everyday, common communicative situations were observed, and the process is sufficiently complex and determined by many features, therefore two relatively clearly identifiable indicators are tracked, such as the attitudes through which information is filtered and the subjectivity of perception.

2. Differentiation of communication barriers from observed cases

Spring (state institution)

S. M. 81 years; male

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

Emotional, indicated by internal experiences of shame, fear, or guilt. Manifested through non-verbal behavior and through verbal rationalizations filled with guilt. Psychological, which affect social activity, the anxiety of contact with people, and this reflects on taking actions of a different nature and on the style of communication. The situation is reinforced by the problem of loneliness in his daily life - a negative attitude towards himself.

A. L. 74; male

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

The deteriorated physical condition from the diseases that afflict him often tire him, and the physical discomfort is a barrier to communication because he becomes insecure, depressed, that he is not functioning at full speed. His mood becomes unstable and he refuses to communicate. Aging is painfully accepted and difficult to integrate into mental processes, and this reflects on the subjective acceptance of oneself.

V. R. 68; male

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

Primarily personal, determined by character traits, psychological (attitudes, expectations), emotional and behavioral. Also provoked by negative attitudes towards the institution by the deficit of social and communication skills.

From the observed cases, barriers provoked by feelings, attitudes, expectations, and hasty conclusions stand out, which prevents the objective acceptance of information. They are manifested when the balance of communication is disturbed, the accuracy in conveying the message and the speed with which the distance is shortened, that is, the establishment of a relationship filled with trust is prevented.

Summer (private institution)

The three sub-cases, through which a deeper understanding of the barriers is aimed, were selected, as with the state institution, on the basis of their interest and willingness to cooperate for the study.

D. R. 82; female

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

Weak feedback, low concentration, lack of interest in conversations, attention deficit, negative attitudes towards further life, strong emotional reactions and inability to control oneself emotionally.

N. C. 79; male

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

Cognitive disorders greatly affect communication because information is received selectively and is difficult to make sense of. Confusion, disorientation, inability to listen, loss of mental abilities, specific individual reactions, display of character and negative attitude towards others are observed.

B. B. 85 years; female

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

The speech disorder creates a prerequisite for a barrier in conveying and understanding the message. This characteristic due to illness affects the character, the expectations of a quick and complete recovery affect many mental and emotional processes and the overall behavior. Thus,

the barriers that are unlocked (besides the linguistic ones caused by the process itself or the behavior) turn out to be another challenge in everyday work.

In the described cases, the goal is to identify prerequisites for the emergence of communicative barriers in the communication process. During the observations, those caused by mistrust, fear, emotional instability and the specificity of institutions as a social environment stand out. What most clearly shows how the barriers manifest themselves is the broken structure of the relationship, which compromises communication. It manifests itself through conflicts and biased assessments and distortion of information. The cases show that barriers arise from different absorption of messages (incorrect transmission, reception, understanding).

Table 1. Factors for the emergence of communication barriers

Physiological	Psychological
Deteriorated physical condition, impaired sensory and cognitive functions, fatigue, worsening of disabilities	Expectations, attitudes, emotions, prejudices, cognitive biases

Both institutions (Spring, Summer) offer social care, which carries a very strong emotional charge both for relatives who feel guilt or shame for not being able to cope with the care of their relative, and for residents who are faced with the bleak prospect of deepening illnesses, insufficient meetings with loved ones, fear of the unknown. This deepens worry, anxiety, depressive states - all elements that can affect the way information is processed and barriers to communication appear. At first glance, it may seem obvious that attitude, emotions, patience are key to the emergence of barriers but the client's frustration with insufficient care is also important, as this can prevent sharing and thus damage trust.

Table 2. Relationships and barriers in communication between the social worker and the resident's family

Type of social support	Home "Spring"		
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Relatives	Deceased wife, two daughters (they live	Two children - a girl and a boy (they	Recently divorced with third wife and

	in USA), cordial family relationship	live in South Africa), ex-wife (lives in Spain, they do not communicate)	brother, no children; on bad terms with his brother
Social worker	Communication difficulties due to technical problems	Neighbor of the client, on good terms with him, difficult communication with relatives - misunderstanding about the costs of treatment	It is difficult to communicate with both the client and the brother because of the negative attitude of the brother towards the staff; in turn, the social worker avoids contact
Communication barriers	Delayed communication creates a sense of disinterest and undermines trust	Bad feedback, lack of trust	Deficit of social and communication skills
Type of social support	Home “Summer”		
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Relatives	Son - lives abroad most of the time; tension in their relationship	Wife and two daughters; one daughter lives abroad, the other often travels on business trips; the three provide care	One daughter who does not live in Bulgaria, a sister in poor health

		according to their means	
Social worker	Relations filled with goodwill and tolerance	Maintains constant and active contact the relatives	Does not maintain contact with the daughter, maintains contact with the sister
Communication barriers	Rather, between relatives, the reasons for them being more of an emotional nature.	The barriers themselves are transferred to the communication with the specialist.	Barriers caused by prejudice regarding the ethnicity of staff

During the specific cases from the practice, some characteristic psychological features in the behavior are observed, which are a prerequisite for the emergence of barriers. These are the level of emotionality of the participants in the communication, the social worker's ability to control their emotionality and their ability to understand the emotional signals sent by the client's relatives in the communication process. Observing behavior in a natural living environment makes it possible to explore undisguised feelings, spontaneous reactions, to penetrate the experiences and perceptions and real problems of the researched persons, relatives and specialists.

The specific cases and features of age changes further complicate the work of professionals from the helping professions. Alienation, the manifestation of mistrust, cause suffering and dissatisfaction, and this inevitably complicates and deforms communication. Successful organization in social institutions is directly dependent on quality communication between specialists, clients and their relatives, therefore a thorough examination of the elements in this process is of key importance. Ineffective communication also complicates relationships in the work team and causes mistrust among employees. Communication in long-term care is made difficult by multiple co-morbidities and the resulting array of complications. Health deterioration also causes a breakdown in communication.

The empirical data on the types of barriers in the professional activity of social workers in their interaction with the relatives of social service users, in addition to the conducted research

activity and the analysis of the case studies with a focus on emotions research as a predictor of the emergence of psychological barriers, observations of the environment and the notion of relationship openness over time, help to clarify the indicators, criteria and signs by which barriers in communication in social work stand out.

Table 3. System for marking communication barriers in social work

Indicators	Criteria	Signs
Trust	Openness Topics of conversation Efforts to shorten the distance in relationships	Frequency of meetings Interest in the topics Intensity and duration of interactions Rate of sharing
Feedback	Reaction to what was said Untimely action Is the information filtered Is the message being distorted	Acting according to the message Asking for help Fully accepted information Logic of the answer Orientation to the goal of communication Incorrect assumptions
Attitudes, expectations	Empathy anxiety aggression loneliness evaluation motivation for action change in attitude	Understanding, feeling in control, conflict proneness, forming an opinion, Reluctance to communicate, Confused social attitudes, Increased need for social contacts

place in the social environment. The study of the process of communication and the reasons for the emergence of communication barriers in social work with people from homes for the elderly showed the serious need to find ways to quickly overcome the crises caused by their difficult adaptation to the new social reality. In the center of attention is the issue related to personal characteristics, specific emotional reactions, psychologically traumatic events that lead to problems in the psycho-social support provided by specialists.

Altered communication between the elderly and their environment is observed at all levels of interaction. From elementary domestic and everyday relations to more complex emotional, cognitive connections, in which insurmountable "gaps" of misunderstanding, bitterness and disappointment appear for all participants in the communication itself. Often, these insurmountable conflicts lead to an escalation of relations with relatives, who, worried by deep remorse due to the complex situation in which they find themselves, are forced to turn to social institutions for help.

All this gives reason to look for options, programs for this type of work and satisfaction of needs, which support the gradual adaptation not only to the new situation and social environment, but also to others and to oneself, both of the elderly, as well as of their family and relatives. The goals and principles of the activity of social workers must be united around maintaining a harmonious unity between institutions, relatives and users.

The development of the empirical part leads to results that bring added value to the activity in social work and the conceptualization of the professional dimensions of the social worker's behavior. More specifically, the achievements of the research find application in the real practice of social workers. Clarifying the problem of communication barriers and the mechanisms for their formation supports their awareness and gives directions for actions to neutralize them. Professional helping is rarely the focus of research because it is considered not to be a manifestation of voluntary responsiveness, but concerns a reward, career, or social prosperity, motives important to professional activity. What is specific about this professional activity is the degree of competence, responsibility for process control, action planning, which reflects on helping relationships. The task of the social worker is to solve problems, to organize his or her activities in institutional systems that focus on satisfying specific, often emotionally saturated needs. In their professional work, social workers acquire competences and skills that constantly require updating in order to achieve expertise, high quality of the service offered, mastery of situations and developing abilities to make appropriate decisions.

- proposals for overcoming problems in communication based on the summaries of the researched process

Establishing socio-cultural programs in which social services can be effectively involved in stimulating and renewing the spirit of the older person will lead to improved relationships and increased trust. If, through quality social work, modern social systems manage to cover the subjective, personified needs of the elderly, then it is likely that concepts will emerge to control anxiety as a consequence of neurotic conditions. Physical activity would be particularly effective in reducing the level of anxiety, delaying the aging process and preserving quality of life for a longer period of time.

Building quality communication and appropriate professional behavior requires continuous development of motivational skills, updating knowledge and ability to manage relationships. The development of these qualities is important for the practice of social work and for the perspectives that open up to the profession, and the possibilities for a better training of personnel. The ability to exercise a plethora of different behaviors allows to increase the ability to work qualitatively and quickly in similar or repetitive situations. Thus the very behavior practiced by the communicator is improved. Repeated appropriate behavior in specific social situations helps communicators become more adept at choosing what behavior they consider appropriate. If the communicator is sure of his or her choice of behavior, they will be calmer and more concentrated in the execution of the communicative process, they will listen more carefully and there is no danger of being focused on what answers they would give to potential questions and thus missing facts or key data submitted by the client's relatives. They could also play their role better, apply their actual experience. Passing in this way, the process of communication will improve the practice and the very effectiveness of communication.

Taking into account some factors such as social frustration, characterological predispositions, desire to dominate, aggressive manifestations as a defensive reaction or manifestations of self-assertion, the type of reactions in a difficult or conflict situation can be predicted. This can be taken into account when designing a program that aims to develop and expand the communication skills and abilities of professionals.

On the basis of the conducted research and monitoring of the progress of the communication processes, individual modules can be developed, which can be combined freely, according to individual needs or interests. Modules to pay attention to different types of behavior and preparation to deal with different difficulties of the daily life of clients, which have become an

urgent necessity. On the job, social workers meet clients or their relatives with different communication skills and levels of communication. In order to avoid socio-psychological crises, it is important how timely it is and what the intervention is. This could also feed into the design of training programs and communication strategies.

It depends on the competence of the specialists to create a predisposing atmosphere when there is a manifestation of angry outbursts, straining the situation, to stimulate tolerance and kindness, to control their emotions, to encourage the old people to transform the negative into positive, to activate their curiosity for some activity, to build trust and generally encourage and stimulate positive change. Activities of a playful nature can be noted here, which are related to building stable social relations and improving social functioning. For example, various board games such as chess, which bring residents together and create a serene atmosphere. Specific cases and features of age changes further complicate the work of professionals. Alienation, the manifestation of mistrust, cause suffering and dissatisfaction, and this inevitably complicates and deforms communication. The work of social workers with elderly clients requires serious and in-depth knowledge of the specifics of their behavior. The good training of professionals allows them to select the most suitable means of providing assistance according to the individual needs of the elderly client, and from there to organize activities such as hobbies, for example, which stimulate communication.

IMPLICATIONS

The dissertation research is aimed at highlighting specific barriers in the communication of social workers in the process of providing social services. The selected problem area is studied at the theoretical and empirical level using a complex of mutually complementary methods - analysis, synthesis, generalization, observation, case work. The research data confirm the previously formulated hypothesis and give grounds for the conclusion that the set goals and objectives have been met. The overall theoretical-empirical study outlines interesting features of professional communication in social work and allows the following conclusions and generalizations to be made.

1. The working relationship between the social worker and the user of a social service is based on active communication which is determined by the performed social and professional roles of the participating subjects. It often requires the involvement of family members or relatives of the user, who provide care or pay for the social service if necessary. This makes the

communication model multi-component and creates prerequisites for the emergence of more barriers in transmitting and receiving information.

2. Communication between the social worker and the user of a social service (or persons related to them) is defined as professional communication. It is aimed at implementing a process of helping in response to the specific needs of the client. The social worker as a professional is reasonably expected to be able to regulate his or her own behavior and relationships with the client, so as to ensure the quality of the social service through positive and supportive communication. In this plan, there is an expectation that the social worker will be professionally prepared to avoid barriers in communication, as well as to master mechanisms for overcoming naturally occurring difficulties caused by individual differences and perceptions of clients.

3. Communication in social work is a manifestation of social communication in the professional context of helping relationships and bears its marks. At a theoretical level, it can be described by existing basic models of social communication. The study of these models in the dissertation research showed that the classical model of Shannon and Weaver was the most suitable for describing communication in social work. Based on the theoretical analysis, the model of communicative interaction between a social worker and a client brought feedback to the forefront as a leading component for structuring the communication process. From the point of view of the specificity of manifestation of the model in social work, it was enriched with the "blind spot" component as a frequently occurring barrier that affects the communicative process.

4. As a result of the work on a case in institutions for the provision of social services to old people and the elderly, specific barriers in communication were highlighted, which relate to various stages of the process of interaction between the social worker and their client. One part of the barriers is observed in the initial stage of communication - when negotiating the relationship between the specialist and the client. Representatives of the client's family are also an active party in this negotiation. Relatives of the social service user often have high expectations of the support provided, which is stated vaguely or in an aggressive tone, in everyday language that sounds challenging. The discrepancy in mutual expectations is reflected in the choice of linguistic means of expression and gives rise to inaccuracies in the perception of messages in communication. Problems with encoding information also create subsequent

problems with decoding, which leads to distorted results of the entire process of communicating and setting boundaries in relationships.

5. Analyzing cases from the practice showed that barriers in communication can be provoked by all participating subjects if there is a deficit of social skills and an insufficiently high level of communicative competence. Prerequisites for the emergence of barriers are the individual differences in the communicative and psychological characteristics of the personality, both of the social worker and of the client. Subjectivity in interpersonal perception, the presence of stereotypes or prejudices, the level of self-awareness are the most often differentiated prerequisites for barriers in communication in a professional environment. In addition, the quality of the social worker's professional experience also appears to be a factor in the emergence of barriers. In social workers with long experience, a stable communication style is observed, which is standardized due to the repetition and similarity of situations. Some professionals have an established behavior that allows for less flexibility and variability in communication. And the expectation of the client and their relatives is for an individual approach and for a special treatment. If this is not demonstrated in communication, it usually creates resentment and destroys trust.

6. An obstacle to building cooperation in communication is the negative attitudes that families and employees in social institutions have towards each other. Family members have an unrealistic view of the capabilities of the nursing home team and believe that they should be scrutinized for the care they provide for their loved ones. When there is a low level of trust or a negative attitude on the part of clients, this is understood by social workers and they increase their anxiety and irritation, which affects their way of communication.

7. The identified communication barriers in the dissertation research have a complex nature and do not appear independently. They are related to each other and can be grouped into categories according to different criteria. The basic categories in the classification of barriers are: psychological barriers, external and internal barriers, language barriers. They manifest themselves in a specific way in communication when providing a social service to the elderly, due to the peculiarities of their old age and working with clients who have many concomitant diseases, which also affect the way of communication. The target group of observed persons is characterized by increased anxiety, fear of death, fixation on past experiences in much earlier stages of the life cycle, emotional sensitivity, difficulties in expressing feelings and thoughts. This requires social workers to approach communication with their clients very carefully,

taking into account their individual characteristics and current state of health. Manifestations of empathy, the ability to master critical and unforeseen situations without causing fear in the client, the ability to avoid conflicts are extremely important for the social worker's professional communication with old people. In addition, communication aims to create a sense of psychological protection and security in adults, especially in cases where there are broken relationships between them and their family members. Disrupted communication between relatives reflects on the working relationship in the provision of social service in nursing homes. Social workers need to make efforts to minimize the effects of strained relationships in the family environment and help all members of the family system to overcome a series of barriers in their communication.

8. Research evidence from the case work shows that communication is influenced by the institutional context in which social service provision takes place. In social work organizations where the client (or their relatives) pay for the social service, a higher degree of mutual respect and a calm tone of communication is observed. In cases where the user does not pay for the social service, more dissatisfaction and doubt about the care provided is demonstrated. In these cases, the team caring for the elderly person needs to put more effort into communication in order to gain trust and build a cooperative relationship.

9. The appearance of barriers in communication is provoked by factors of the organizational environment and the overall management of the activities of providing social services for adults. For example, when social workers are overloaded with tasks or work simultaneously on the case of several clients, there is a lack of time for the full deployment of communication acts. Short and limited interactions increase the anxiety of people at advanced and old age, and they begin to react emotionally in communication and with increasing anxiety. Increased emotionality becomes a barrier to communication and blocks the process of adaptation to the environment, especially in clients who are new users of the social service. The presence of such barriers requires rethinking the organization of activities in institutions for social work with adults, the way of distribution of work tasks, so as to free up more time for communication with the elderly, listening to them and providing emotional support. The need for communication, for sharing memories and experiences is a basic need for the elderly and the level of satisfaction of this need affects the satisfaction provided from the offered social service.

10. The emergence of communication barriers is a natural process that can be observed in all types of social interactions. The key question is not so much why barriers occur but how to

overcome them in a way that supports the achievement of communication goals. Effectively overcoming barriers and not allowing them to negatively affect the realization of the helping process is of essential importance for practical social work. The ability of social workers to extinguish the influence of barriers in communication corresponds directly to trust in the social institution, in the offered social service and in the meaning of social work.

11. The research focus on communication barriers and opportunities to overcome them directs attention to the professional training of social workers and to the need for continuing qualification in the area of communication skills. Social-communicative competence is an essential part of the competence profile of the modern specialist in the helping professions. The helping process takes place through active, two-way communication in which relationships are created, assessments and expectations are exchanged, and mutual perceptions are regulated between participants. This process is highly individualized, situational, and hardly amenable to absolutely precise standardization and description as a flow algorithm. This requires social work professionals to be well prepared in advance to react adequately to the unpredictable twists and turns in communicative interaction and to master the highly emotional situations in which they find themselves. In addition to the initial professional training, professional development activities have an important share in the professionalization of communication in social work - trainings for the development of social skills, supervision for social workers and others, through which to work on building attitudes towards clients, to get to know oneself and mastering techniques to reduce the impact of communication barriers.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, communication has a defining role in relationships but because it is naturally woven into everyday life, the complexity and essence of this process is not appreciated. The specificity of the communication process is such that both parties participating in the exchange of the message may not take into account many of the factors that influence them, and thus themselves create a prerequisite for the appearance of barriers. If the focus is on the behavior of people, on their ability to share views, then the doubts about building trust between them would be significantly reduced. No matter how good one's communication skills are, there can always be uncertainty in the exchange of information, as well as signals of distortion in the way ideas are interpreted. Despite the opportunities provided by communication, misperceptions can provoke emotions that create serious obstacles and prevent them from being successfully overcome.

The significant place of social work in the social system is determined by the functions it performs through its various social assistance organizations. The review of the scientific literature and the analyzes of the studied processes in communication with clients and relatives show different aspects of the problem related to the manifestation of barriers in communication. The general idea of the role of psychological and individual characteristics and the influence of emotional experiences related to changes in the social and life status of clients and their impact on relatives explain the increased demand for social services; this is also due to the popularity and high confidence in the quality they offer. In their practice, social workers, especially when working with the elderly, have to intervene urgently in solving problems, and success depends on appropriate communication with the client and their environment. Good communication is an integral part of the problem-solving process, which necessitates the need for social workers to develop their communication skills. The development of personal and professional qualities (active listening, giving and receiving feedback with appropriate paraphrasing through professional and personal experience, showing empathy, concern, patience, etc.) show the competence of the social worker and, respectively, this affects the advisory process, improving the situation and increasing confidence. The comprehensive approach chosen in the context of the study of communication barriers allows their registration, awareness and transformation of the behavior of both clients and their relatives. For the precise interpretation of communicative situations, it is important to consider the ambiguity of all elements in the ongoing process. It must be taken into account the emotional reaction, the behavior, the situation, and the complexity of human nature must not be ignored at all - otherwise the judgment is built on the basis of incomplete information. Through the study of communication barriers and their impact on trust in working with specialists, ways to overcome them can be sought. Interpersonal relationships provoke processes of development and growth and in this sense model the social environment and influence the way individuals function in modern times.

CONTRIBUTIONS

1. The theory of social communication has been enriched by describing the specific manifestations of communication in the professional context of social work.
2. A systematization has been created to identify potential barriers in the social worker's professional communication, which is oriented towards highlighting basic prerequisites for minimizing their influence.

3. On a theoretical and empirical level, various types of barriers in the professional communication of the social worker in the provision of social services for adults and elders been clarified.
4. Mechanisms for awareness and self-regulation of the behavior of social workers in the process of communication have been clarified, which favor overcoming barriers in professional communication in social work. They are derived and substantiated in an original way - from practice to theory: the study of cases of communication of social workers with users of social services and with their relatives becomes the basis for generalizations at a conceptual level about the profession of a social worker.
5. The results of the analyzed empirical data contribute to the development of qualification programs for practicing specialists in the field of communication skills. They can serve as a starting point for constructing training and continuing education programs for social workers aimed at building attitudes and regulating behavior when interacting with clients in the process of providing social services.

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