

# Values and human resource management in social work - dimensions and interrelations

Research Group: 3.4  
Research field: Social Work

Head of the research group  
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rositsa Simeonova  
Members of the group  
Prof. Dr. Liliana Strakova  
Ass. Prof. Dr. Atanas Genchev

## Project guidelines

The scientific problem of the dimensions and interrelationships of values and human resource management in social work, which is the subject of study by the presented project, is complex, multidisciplinary and innovative in nature. It is not sufficiently studied in its constituent components in the Bulgarian context, and as interconnections of the studied phenomena and comparative analysis with studies in other countries it is not studied internationally. This determines the relevance and significance of the study. This determines the relevance and significance of the topic under study, and the results of the study are expected to contribute to the specialized scientific literature on social work in Bulgaria.

All good governance, and even more so in the system of social policy and social work are based on a system of professional and moral values and norms that set the benchmarks, the planned direction of changes in any social organization. The values synthesized in ethical codes of social work have a deterministic role in relation to the behaviour of all managers of social organizations, as well as in relation to practicing social workers. Their study at the theoretical and empirical level is a significant research task that we aim to achieve through the current project.



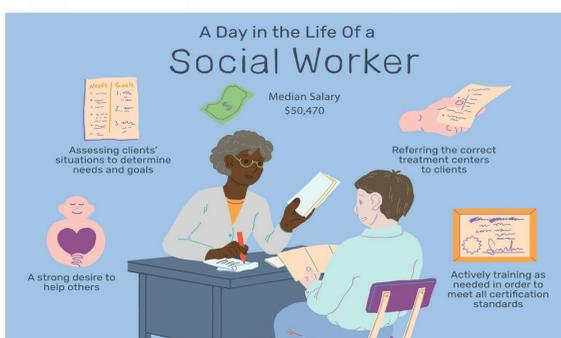
## Introduction

Values in social work outline the framework and grounds, the foundation of positive social programs and measures that aim to raise the quality of life of people who need support and protection. The focus of planned and implemented social activities is always the small, weak person – sick, poor, old and infirm, abandoned child, crumbling family, discouraged unemployed, spiritually confused, etc. This is the strength of social work.

Theoretically and practically, poverty remains one of the main reasons for the need for social work. For social work, man is always a value no matter how poor, sick, unemployed, inactive, etc. In his work with various target groups – children and families, people with disabilities, elderly people, refugees, unemployed and others – the social worker is expected to protect the interests of the client and at the same time comply with social norms.

The prepared first scientific publication on the topic of the project directs the research interest to the value approach and its theoretical and practical dimensions in the education and practice of social work. In particular, the importance of values and human rights in the social sciences and in particular in the training of students in social work and in the professional practice of social workers is theoretically justified.

The second part of the article presents and analyses the results of an empirical study on the knowledge and implementation of human rights as fundamental values in professional social work. In conclusion, on the basis of theoretical and empirical analysis on the topic, conclusions and recommendations for improving the academic training and continuing qualification of professionals in the field of social work are outlined.



## Methodology



The research team aimed to explore the attitudes and opinions of practicing social workers and social work students on issues related to the knowledge and implementation of human rights as fundamental values in the professional practice of social work.

For the realization of the purpose of the study, a complex methodology was constructed and applied, based on the human rights scales developed by Jane McPherson, kindly provided by the author to the Bulgarian research team.

Dr. McPherson is a professor of social work at the University of Georgia, USA. Since 2012, it has been developing several research tools (scales) aimed at exploring the knowledge and application of human rights by students and professionals in social work, namely: Human Rights Exposure in Social Work (HRXSW) и Human Rights Engagement in Social Work (HRESW) (McPherson & Abell, 2012), Human Rights Lens in social work (HRLSW) (McPherson, 2015; McPherson, Siebert, & Sibert, 2017), Human Rights Methods in social work (HRMSW) (McPherson, 2015; McPherson & Abell, 2019).

The research team translated into Bulgarian, adapted and tested in the Bulgarian semantic and cultural context these scales and constructed a questionnaire containing 3 sections: 1) Knowledge and engagement with human rights in social work (some of them related to those enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948); 2) Scope of human rights in social work; 3) Methods of human rights in social work.

Each of the sections contains a certain number of statements with which respondents agree or disagree on a 7-point scale - from 1 - I completely disagree to 7 - I fully agree.

The questionnaire was prepared for completion in an online format (through the Google Forms platform), and social work students from universities in Bulgaria, as well as social work professionals (mainly social workers) from the Social Assistance Directorates (at the Agency for Social Assistance), Sofia Municipality and licensed social service providers from all over the country.

## Results

The survey involved 376 respondents, of which 90% as to be expected were women and 10% were men. 25% are students (bachelor or master) in Social work, and 85% are social work professionals (of which 78% are social worker).

The respondents from the survey work in various social services and activities for protection and support (including the provision of social benefits) aimed at multiple target groups (people with disabilities, children and families, homeless, unemployed, young people, etc.). 74% of the respondents work in state organizations, 15% in municipal and 10% - in non-governmental, private, as volunteers or do not practice.

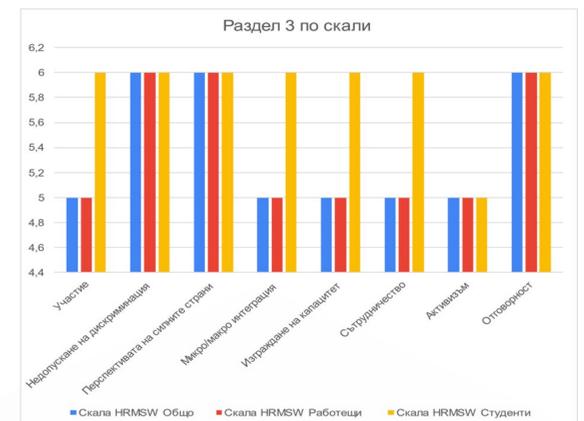
The data obtained on the statements from the sections "Knowledge and engagement with human rights in social work" and "Scope of human rights in social work" of the questionnaire show that, for the most part, both social workers and social work students believe that poverty is a violation of the human right to a dignified life.

The respondents who participated in the survey recognized some of the mentioned human rights, which they consider to be realizable in the scope of social work. It is noteworthy that the average absolute values of the individual statements included in the scale are also almost the same, with the exception of the third "Lack of access to medical care is a violation of human rights", which is about one unit higher, thus determining it in the higher degree of consent. This means that access to medical care is a recognised human right that needs to be ensured and supported in social work.

The data presented for the third section (Figure 1) of the study outline the conclusion that the surveyed persons are generally familiar with the methods of human rights in social work, but social work students agree with a greater range of different methods for the realization of these human rights in social work compared to social work practitioners.

The article presents and analyzes only part of the rich empirical data collected through the constructed complex methodology.

Fig. 1. Summary results for section „Methods of social work“ of the questionnaire



## Conclusion

The implemented theoretical-empirical study of the value approach in education and practice of social work proved in a categorical way the importance of human rights as fundamental values in the process of forming the competences of professionals in the field of social work as part of their academic training, as well as the impact of the knowledge of these values and rights for their effective implementation by social work professionals in their practice.

The presented results of the empirical study on the knowledge and protection of human rights by students and professionals in the field of social work outline the following main conclusions:

In general, both students and social work practitioners have a good awareness of basic human rights and realize the importance of their realization and protection for the well-being of social work clients. There are no significant variations depending on the demographic characteristics of the two groups of respondents – education, form of education, work experience in the field, age and gender.

o Social workers to a greater extent than students see their responsibility in the direction of organising various social services that have a supportive effect and lead to better social inclusion of their clients.

- o Practicing social workers to a greater extent, compared to students, identify problems related to violation of the rights of clients who identify as "unworthy of care" (inactive social and labour market, alcohol and drug abusers, etc.). The richer professional experience of specialists leads to them sharing more often: "when I look at my clients, I see violations of their rights, where others can see them as their failure". These results outline the need for training of social work students to lead to a higher degree of motivation to work with "difficult" clients, to a willingness to protect the interests of the client in each case.
- o In general, social work students express stronger support and agreement with the basic methods of realization of human rights in social work than social work practitioners. These data are probably due to the more recent and thorough theoretical background of social work and of more recently graduated professionals.
- o Another possible reason is that some of the practicing social workers in Bulgaria have not graduated in Social work program, and therefore do not have formed key basic and specific professional competences, an important part of which are the knowledge of values in social work, human rights and methods for their realization in professional practice. These possible reasons point to the need for a more presence of this issue and in the continuing professional development of helping professionals in the field of social work.