

SELF-CARE FOR PROFESSIONAL HELPERS IN CONDITIONS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

^aMAGDALÉNA HALACHOVÁ, ^bVLADIMÍR LICHNER

*Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Faculty of Arts,
Department of Social Work, Moyzesova 9, 040 59 Košice
email:^amagdalena.halachova@upjs.sk,^bvladimir.lichner@upjs.sk*

The article was created as a part of a grant APVV-14-0921 Self-Care as a factor of coping with the negative consequences of the practicing the helping professions.

Abstract: This article focuses on the characteristics of the realized self-care for the specialists in the helping professions. The main goal of the research was to clarify the characteristics of the self-care with selected specialists and also to find out whether statistically important differences exist between the social workers and educators. The results, in summary, do not prove a significant difference in self-care depending on the profession. On the contrary, it is interesting to find out there are significant differences because of universal and work self-care.

Keywords: self-care, helping professions, social workers, educators.

1. Introduction

The self-care is an important part of the professional equipment not only of helping professionals. It brings them benefits in terms of improving personal, professional or social competencies. It is also an important part of working with the client. Brings also benefits to individuals in terms of increased resilience, mental wellbeing, or pleasure from their work. In the case of a self-care failure, however, it brings many risks in the form of negative phenomena in the workplace environment. Helping professionals pay attention to self-care of their clients. One of the goals of their work is to achieve improvement in self-care area. On the other hand, they often neglect their own self-care. Social workers, as well as teachers, are constantly struggling with a lot of problems that are both psychologically and physically challenging. Careful consideration of the self-care is therefore a basic work skill for these.

2. Self-care

The concept of a self-care is a scientific term that has recently been used in many areas of the knowledge. It is used in a medicine, nursing, public health, psychology, social work, pedagogy, as well as in the other areas, especially for the helping professions. Self-care at an individual level is a feature that each individual has (Lovaš et al., 2014). Self-care is most often defined as a multidimensional concept involving physical, mental and social dimensions. It helps to ensure a sufficient quality of life for individuals. It is an important part of a self-concept. (Cameron, Leventhal 2003) It comprises several components, including physical, emotional, spiritual, social and relaxation areas. (Tartakovsky 2015) The paradox of this phenomenon can be the fact, that while one person can classify the situation as self-care, other can view it as stressful. For example, team sport, which on one hand can be seen as a form of a relax on the other hand it can be seen as a form of competition, which can cause people who are involved in it to be stressed almost frustrated. (Williams-Nickelson 2006)

An inherent part of the work in tough, dynamically changing conditions of providing care is uncertainty, risk environment, time pressure and serious consequences of decisions. These circumstances emphasize the importance of the factors used in the decision-making process, which are connected to the emotional experiencing of persons in the problematic situation. (Gurňáková 2013) The important part is that, if an individual is capable of helping themselves, that individual has prerequisites to help the others, which is more than desirable in the scope of social work. Self-care is a necessary support of good social work practice. Self-care has importance for social workers in the performance of their work and in the personal life. Murphy and Dillon (2003) warn about the stressful environment, which social workers face daily. That is why it is important to focus on the behavior, experiencing and inner well-being of the social worker in the context of their work. On the contrary, Cunningham

(2004) considers the further education of social workers in the field of self-care most important. By that, he means organizing different lectures, which content would be correct usage of self-care strategies, which can considerably improve the physical, mental, professional, spiritual and interpersonal field of social workers.

Expert, working in the field of helping profession isn't just a professional, but also a balanced personality. They focus on thorough fulfilment of their own responsibilities, have positive effects on the social environment in which they live or work, improve the situation of the client and even can contribute to the higher status of their work in a given society. In this sense, the self-growth and development are especially important because an expert is considered as a part of some higher unit. Expert is a real authority which in the end increases feelings of personal responsibility. It is expected that they will approach the profession and to the solution of problems from the point of view of collective good and ethics. (Naagarazan 2006) If the aforementioned elements are in harmony with lives of social workers, they are capable of focusing on themselves, manage their personal and professional growth. They can appropriately make decisions, work with the clients or other experts, focus on achieving goals set out in given time and to contribute to positive changes in social work as well as in profession. An essential instrument of every social worker are in most cases social workers themselves, that is why it is important that this tool is working effectively and efficiently, which increases their potential to work with a client.

The work of an educator is a practical activity, but besides the relationship of the teachers to the objects of their work activity (kids, youth), the relationship with themselves is also important. (Đurič et al. 2000) To realize their personal values, several particulars are required. Bezáková (2003) says that it is important to base it on the theory of "six S", which consists of six areas, that expert should focus on. Those are self-reflection, self-evaluation, confidence, self-control, self-regulation, and self-creation. In this regard, it is useful to highlight important of self-care strategies with experts in helping professions. Using right strategies can not only increase happiness with own life but to a large extent, the society is influenced as well. (Liba 2000)

3. Research

The primary goal of the research was to analyse the characteristics of self-care with experts in helping professions. Data collection was conducted by quantitative research using questionnaire survey. The survey used close-ended questionnaires *Self-regulation in the fields of self-care and Carried out Self-care*. Lovaš (2014) is the author of the both questionnaires. They are focused on finding out the frequency of self-care done at the moment in the form of specific activities by 5-point scale. The research sample was formed by experts from helping professions, specifically social workers and educators. All in all, 240 respondents took part. 120 social workers and 120 educators. The research was focused on three parts of Slovak Republic, district of Bratislava II., district of Revúca and district of Košice. To be exact, in every district 40 social workers and 40 educators took part. The reason for this was expected different economic and the educational level of the experts and also differences in the possibilities and opportunities for carrying out self-care.

In terms of the research, the importance was on the connection between various fields of self-care with selected respondents and also a connection between universal self-care and one experts focus on at their workplace. Furthermore, the research was dealing with the differences in self-care with the selected experts in the helping professions. The main goal of the work was to clarify nature of self-care with the experts in helping professions. From this point of view, the research was focused on finding out

the differences between self-care between social workers and educators. The results are in table 1 below.

Table 1 - Mann – Whitney U-test – differences in Self-care from point of view of profession

Profession	n	X	z	p(α)
Social Workers	120	120,82	-0,071	0,944
Educators	120	120,18		

This shows that there were no significant differences found in the self-care. On the basis of the discovery, it can be stated that there are no differences between social workers or educators, specifically in physical and emotional self-care. Activating element, their self-regulation in physical or emotional care does not show differences. Also, no differences were found in their inhibitory elements, that means in the control of their physical or emotional state. In reality, this can mean that focus of selected experts on personal growth and development is not higher than sticking to the principles of a healthy lifestyle. It can be said, that all respondents consider self-care as a part of a complex entity and all the fields have almost the same level of importance for them. Even if there are no clear significant differences from point of view of the profession, an answer of social workers and educators differed slightly. It can be said that emotional and physical self-care with educators shows slight differences, their focus on their own subjective or physical balance doesn't need to always be in balance. On the basis of the findings, it can be said, that there can be differences in self-care with educators in terms of how they care for their physical health and how they control their emotions.

Because we were interested in differences between social workers and educators focused on personal growth and development, the goal of the research was to find out, which experts are trying more, more precisely care more for personal growth, more precisely development in personal growth. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2 - Mann – Whitney U-test – differences in field of personal growth and development from the point of view of profession

Profession	n	x	z	p(α)
Social Workers	120	3,354	-0,782	0,434
Educators	120	3,289		

There were no statistically important differences. That means, in self-regulation, concerning the emotional field of self-care from the point of view of social workers and educators no differences were found. From this point of view, we find it necessary to highlight, that the results show the fact, that it is important to view the human being as an entity, no matter what their profession, age or education is. Personal growth and development is a basic instrument for realizing the value or carrying out of the goals. That is why we don't see findings in the field as negative since self-realisation in the field of mental self-care should be a cornerstone for self-care for every human being. Despite that the importance between experts was not found, their answers show slight differences. It can be said that social workers focus on the field of personal growth and development slightly more than educators. Working with personal plans and goals requires time and focus to themselves. A possible reason for differences is a lack of time for self-care from the point of view of educators, precisely their focus on fulfilling needs of children and parents.

If the individual is focusing on the development of personal potential, we see it as necessary to point out differences that were found out from the point of view of the place of the profession. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3 Kruskal-Wallis test – development of potential from the point of view of place of profession

Potential	Place of profession	n	X	z	p(α)
	Bratislava II	80	4,12	-1,652	<0,001** *
	Revúca	80	3,01		
	Košice	80	3,26		

Because the research was focused on finding out the differences between selected experts in three regions of Slovakia, in terms of developing potential big statistical differences were found depending on the place of the profession of respondents. This in big part can be connected with previous findings, which are presented in table 3 higher. Where an individual is and works has a big influence on their self-regulation in terms of personal growth and development. Findings prove, that experts working in the district of Bratislava II. focus on developing their potential more than experts from other districts. Because the majority of respondents were social workers and educators, it is important to consider education in the field of personal growth and development, that means acquiring new knowledge and skills in various fields of working with people and also developing of creativity or mental hygiene.

The biggest difference was between district of Bratislava II. and district of Revúca. This can be attributed to different life standards of these towns. According to the statistic concerning development potential of the district of Revúca, the evaluation of population showed unfavorable results. On the contrary, in last few years, Bratislava was among the top cities concerning life standard in all categories. The district selected by us, Bratislava II., is in the eastern part of Bratislava and consists of neighborhoods of Podunajské Biskupice, Ružinov, and Vrakuňa. On the basis of the research, concerning the quality of life in Bratislava, the district Bratislava II. was identified as the worst from the point of view of the quality of life of people who live here. This was the main reason for selecting the district for comparison. In the contrast district of Košice showed in this context average results compared to the other districts.

4. Discussion

The following part will offer a view of some other researches which are to do with the topic. First research was conducted by experts from the Department of Educational psychology at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. Board of advisors came forward in 2012 with the information that the number of registered advisors is rising daily in Malaysia. With the speed of the growth in this field, there will be expected higher demands in their professionalism in future. They consider self-care absolute necessity and state that human being itself is the most important tool in achieving subjective satisfaction. According to them, it is necessary that every advisor uses in their work process their personal characteristics, life experiences and also expert knowledge. That is why if they are not aware of their own personal needs and unsolved conflicts or if they suppress them in a way, this way they will be creating sort of barrier in personal growth and development and that can lead to failures in process of helping others. The research was qualitative; the main goal was to find out strategies of self-care with given advisors. On the contrary, our research was quantitative because our goal was to get exact and objective data about research issues. Research samples were comprised of four advisors with main criteria being at least 7-year practice. Other criteria were to be a part of a group of advisors, with the base in Klang valley, one of the busiest and most sophisticated areas of Malaysia. The duration of their practice was between 8 to 25 years. Research sample in author's research was 120 social workers and 120 educators and length of practice was between 6 months and 20 years. Research in Malaysia found that all four respondents use self-care in the personal and professional environment. Self-care in work environment could be meant by this. Also, research done by us was focused on finding out the relationship between ordinary, universal self-care and one which is the focus of respondents at

the workplace. The goal of our research was to find out differences, but in case that we would have to focus on connections the correlation coefficient would be 0,875 which shows very positive correlation. Also, it can be stated that respondents taking part in our research consider not only personal self-care but also professional one important. On the other hand, Malaysian experts could by the term self-care in the professional field mean professional growth and development of the advisors. At this point, the author's research field of personal growth and development could be parallelized. The goal was to find differences in this field between social workers and educators, where no statistically important differences were found. It is useful to say that personal growth and development is considered a basic tool for the realization of values or achieving goals of every human being. This thought was showed on the basis of the complex perception of human being, no matter their profession, age or education. Also, the research in Malaysia points to the fact that the experts say, that human is a complex being and because of that, it should approach self-care in the same way.

Another research was conducted by experts from World Health Organisation from Thailand, whose results show that self-care differs depending on many social determines and health conditions of people. They found out that 87% of respondents which took part in the research answered that ways they care about themselves are influenced by the environment in which they live. Also, the author's research was based on the assumption of differences of respondents, place of living, the number of kids and others. Experts from Thailand prove that self-care is focus and decision of an individual which in big part depends on the family, community and also local or socio-cultural aspects which influence the individual. In conformity with what was mentioned, results of our research warn about the influence of these aspects from several points of views. We found out major significance concerning the environment in which the individual lives. It can be said that environment in which the individual lives influences self-care majorly and it is up to the individual how they grasp possibilities and opportunities which the environment offers.

5. Conclusion

The article was focused on self-care in helping professions and to compare social workers and educators in three regions of Slovakia. Based on expected differences the three districts were selected: Bratislava II., Revúca, and Košice. Assumptions about differences between experts of helping professions were confirmed. Based on realizing the need of helping others the assumption was that they will take care of themselves in the same way. Here it is important to highlight self-care as a multidimensional concept which forms a necessary part of the life.

Self-care is one of the aspects which is a major contributor to the happiness in private or work sphere. It is an important element which influences the quality of life of every individual and that is why important to focus on conscious influencing of health on the basis of defined steps. Experts of helping professions are a distinctive group because their focus is on helping others. This means that focus on self-care can significantly help to balance personal and work sphere, also help physical, mental or emotional health.

Literature:

1. LOVAŠ, L. et al. 2014. Psychologické kontexty starostlivosti o seba. Košice: UPJŠ.
2. TARTAKOVSKY, M., 2015. The 7 Vital Types Of Self-Care. Psych Central. [online]. 2015 [cit. 2016-02-09].
3. WILLIAMS-NICKELSON, C., Balanced living through Self-Care (183-191) in WORELL, J. and C. D. GOODHEART. Handbook of Girl's and Women's Psychological Health. 2006. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. ISBN 0-19-516203-5.
4. GURŇÁKOVÁ, J. et al. 2013. Rozhodovanie profesionálov: Sebaregulácia, stres a osobnosť. Bratislava: ÚEP SAV. ISBN: 978-80-88910-45-9.
4. MURPHY, A. & C. DILLON., 2003. The Counseling Process [online]. 2015.
5. CUNNINGHAM, W. A. et al., 2004. Separable Neural Components in the Processing of Black and White Faces [online]. 2004.
6. NAAGARAZAN, R.S.A., 2006. Textbook on Professional Ethics and Human Values. [online]. 2006.
7. ĎURIČ, L. et al. 2000. Výchova a vzdelávanie dospelých. Andragogika. Terminologický a výkladový slovník. Bratislava: SPN. ISBN 80-08-02814-9.
8. BEZÁKOVÁ, R. 2003. Osobnosť a profesionalita učiteľa. Technológia vzdelávania [online]. (3). ISSN 1338-1202.
9. LOVAŠ, L. & M. HRICOVÁ. 2015. Self-regulation and Performed Activities in the Sphere of Self-care. Individual and Society. 18(1), pp. 26-32. ISSN 1335-3608.

Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AM, AN, AO