IMPROVING THE QUALIFICATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE CONDITIONS OF TRANSFORMING THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN PANDEMIC

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Abstract: The research aims to investigate the quality of education in the mode of distance learning on the basis of SHEI "Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University" in the process of training specialists in social work and social protection. The assessment of distance learning of scientific and pedagogical workers by social workers on the basis of the survey is considered and their digital literacy is determined. The peculiarities of the formation of professional competence of social workers in the process of professional development are highlighted. The results of the experimental study showed the positive aspects of digital competence of research and teaching staff in the pandemic COVID-19.

Keywords: Advanced training, COVID-19 pandemic, Digital literacy, Social workers, University

1 Introduction

Improving the education system at the current stage of development of Ukrainian society in the process of integration into the international space is to improve the quality of educational services and ensure access to education for all citizens, modernize educational content, continuity of education and training, manifested in the renewal of postgraduate education. A component of postgraduate education in the process of innovative development of Ukrainian education is the system of professional development of employees, in our case social workers. It, in turn, consists of continuous self-education, raising the level of qualification in accordance with the requirements of society and the state, improving professional skills and competence, acquiring additional knowledge and introducing innovative technologies.

The transformation of the educational process in the minds in the conditions of COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the transfer of learning into distance and mixed learning, resulting in the development of information technology. This issue has been considered by a number of scholars, including C. Bonfield, M. Salter, A. Longmur, M. Benson, T. Adacha [3], R. Watermeyer, T. Creek, K. Knight, J. Goodall [18], R. Ellahi, A. Khan, M. Shah [5], R. Zozulyak-Sluchik [21], K. Ovusu-Forjur, K. Kumson, D. Henson [13], T. Zhu [20].

Transformation of worldviews, standardization of education, European integration processes have contributed to the fact that continuing education has become a conscious need, a means of competitiveness, a criterion of professionalism, interpreted by scientists as a willingness to continue their careers, deepen knowledge, skills, improve skills through active participation in the development of the field of specialization and experimentation with innovations aimed at improving practice [1].

The importance of postgraduate education in the system of continuing vocational education is to eliminate gaps in basic education, supplement new knowledge in connection with the intensive development of social work as a science, comprehension of practical experience, achieving a higher level of constant change in social practice through constant professional self-improvement. Professional self-improvement of personality is a conscious professional activity in the system of continuing education, aimed at improving the professional level of the specialist, his professional self-realization, further development of professionally significant qualities and includes four stages: awareness of the necessary work; definition of the

program of self-improvement; search self-improvement; awareness and purposeful change of self [16].

This issue has been considered by a number of scholars in their works: continuity of professional education was analyzed in the works of S. Arkhipova [1], N. Tzygan [17], analysis and content of professional training is presented by O. Budnyk [4], A. Zagorodnya, N. Dichenko, N. Chobitok, M. Voznyk, L. Honchar, M. Petrova [19], G. Mykhailyshyn, M. Dovha [11], problems of modeling and formalization in a higher education institution were covered by I. Linde, M. Petrova [7], teaching technologies were paid attention to by M. Petrova, I. Buzko, Y. Dyachenko [14], competencies were considered by V. Koval, Y. Polezhaev , A. Bezkhlibna [6], M. Kuzkin, O. Protas, T. Fartushok, J. Raevska and I. Ivanov [9], changes in the educational process – by O. Baklanova , M. Petrova, V. Koval [2], motivational aspect in modern conditions – by M. Petrova, V. Koval, M. Terpavicharova, A. Zerkal, A. Radchenko, N. Bodnarchuk [15], and so on.

Professional development is the professional training of employees, which aims to increase the level of their theoretical knowledge, improve practical skills and abilities in accordance with the standards of education, that are updated and the requirements for which are constantly growing. Further training of social workers is carried out by educational institutions, including postgraduate education institutions, having the appropriate license issued in the prescribed manner [17].

The form of professional self-improvement of social workers is advanced training courses for social workers conducted by state and public organizations, including higher education institutions. In the period from November 25, 2021 to November 26, 2021, advanced training courses for social work specialists and employees of the social protection system were held on the basis of the Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University.

Transformational processes in education during the pandemic have led to various problems, in particular, Yu. Malyovanyi (2020) highlights: lack of previous experience and knowledge of remote process management, incomplete provision of educational equipment and lack of quality Internet communication [8]. Of course, evidence of this is the improvement of the education system to meet modern requirements of society, which will consist primarily in improving the digital literacy of providers and recipients of educational services. In this context, the purpose of our study the assessment of distance learning by social workers on the basis of SHEI Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian University in the process of training specialists in social work and social protection workers.

2 Materials and Methods

The following methods were used to achieve this goal:

1. Method of analysis and synthesis (determining the basis of the problem of continuity of vocational education and training of social workers, their scientific justification, transformation processes in education);
2. Quantitative and qualitative analysis (analysis of experimental results);
3. Abstract-logical (the results of the study were theoretically summarized, conclusions were given and formulated on training of social workers in the transformation of the educational process in a pandemic);
4. A survey of social workers in the process of professional development of social workers on training courses for social workers and social protection workers on the basis of SHEI "Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University" was conducted;
5. Mathematical and statistical processing for the analysis of the obtained results.

3 Results

To establish contact between all participants in the training of social workers, we used the platform Google Meet, which was chosen by all participants before the course. The following topics and types of classes were used to improve the skills of social workers at the courses of specialists in social work and social protection workers at the Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University:

1. Characteristics of persons/families with children who belong to vulnerable groups and/or are in difficult life circumstances (l);
2. Features of the work of social workers with young families (l/s);
3. Regulatory and legal support of social services (l/s);
4. Safety of employees during social work. Prevention of burnout (l/s);
5. Methods for determining the needs of the population of administrative-territorial units in social services (l/s);
6. Social support of the adoption family (l/s);
7. Social services and their types, basic social services, provision of social services in accordance with public services (p);
8. The mechanism of interaction of the subjects providing social services, carry out social work (l/s);
9. Ethical aspects of social work (l).

On November 26, 2021, with the help of the Google Survey system, we conducted a survey of social workers to determine the quality of education in distance learning and the specifics of professional competence of social workers in the process of professional development on the basis of Precarpathian National University named after Vasyl Stefanyk. 62 specialists in the social sphere took part in the survey. The questionnaire contained 4 questions with closed-ended answers. The survey lasted about 5-7 minutes.

The process of forming digital literacy of research and teaching staff of educational institutions should take into account modern approaches to the development of the educational environment in today's conditions, as this will be the basis for considering the interaction of teachers with social professionals. Of course, this feature will help shape digital literacy more effectively than it was before the coronavirus pandemic.

In frames of the first question "Social workers' assessment of digital literacy of educational and pedagogical staff of educational institutions", social workers assess the digital literacy of teachers at a high (72.6%) and sufficient (27.4%) level (Figure 1):
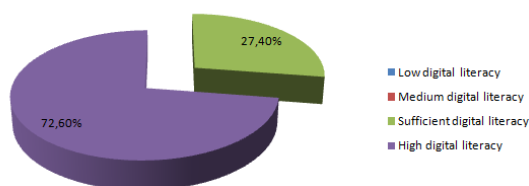

Figure 1 – Social workers' assessment of digital literacy of scientific and pedagogical staff of an educational institution

It should be noted that the digital literacy of research and teaching staff in the phenomenon under study is defined as a necessary condition for the formation of professional competence of social workers and employees of the social protection system in advanced training courses.

The second question "Have you acquired good knowledge, skills and abilities in the process of professional development of social workers and social protection workers at the university" was answered as follows: social workers have acquired good knowledge, skills and abilities (82.26%) and partially (17.74%) (Figure 2):
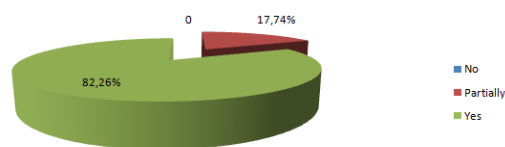

Figure 2 – Have you acquired good knowledge, skills and abilities in the process of professional development of social workers and employees of the social protection system at the university?

Based on this, it should be said that the training of social workers and workers of social protection is a complex interconnected process which results in the acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities that are implemented under certain conditions.

The third question "What form of training on refresher courses at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic do you support", was answered as follows: social workers supported a mixed form of training (54.84 %%), as well as traditional – 32.26% and distance – 12, 9% (Figure 3):
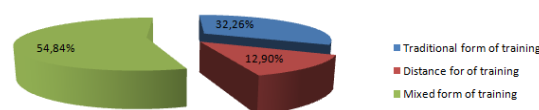

Figure 3 – What form of refresher training do you support at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic?

It should be emphasized that the mixed form of education was supported by the majority (54.84%) among the surveyed social workers, as evidenced by the adaptation of educational services to the informatization of education and the availability of information and communication technologies.

Any training always has the best result in the traditional form of training, where there is communication and contact interaction of the lecturer with students. Given the modern educational requirements faced all of us, the learning society was forced to move to distance learning. As the training of social workers showed, there are some shortcomings: not all social workers have the equipment for video conferencing and stable Internet connection (no camera or microphone). Some of them went to video conferences from mobile devices. The videoconference chat suggested questions that the lecturer answered at the end of the lesson.

To the fourth question "Which of the topics you read are the most relevant in your professional activity?", social workers answered like this: characteristics of individuals/families with children belonging to vulnerable groups and/or are in difficult life circumstances (30.6%), features of the work of social workers with young families (6.45%), regulatory and legal support of social services (12.9%), safety of workers during social work and prevention of burnout (4.8%), methods of determining the needs of the population of administrative-territorial units in social services (8.1%), social support of the adoption family (11.3%), social services and their types, basic social services, provision of social services in accordance with public services (11.3%), the mechanism of interaction of entities that provide social services, carry out social work (6.45%), as well as ethical aspects of social work (8.1%) (Figure 4):
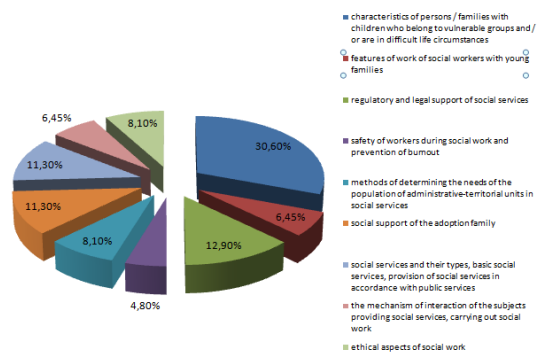
Figure 4 – Which of the topics you read are most relevant to you in your professional career?

According to the results of the answers, the most relevant topic of professional activity of social workers is the characteristics of persons/families with children who belong to vulnerable groups and/or are in difficult life circumstances (30.6%), i.e., the category of recipients of social services work.

The analysis of the survey allowed us to conclude that the professional training of social workers in the process of professional development on the basis of SHEI "Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University" involves a successful process of forming professional knowledge, skills and abilities with rational use of new technologies in the social sphere, taking into account standards for their professional competence, including self-study and self-development.

4 Discussion

The results of the evaluation of distance learning at the Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University of specialists in social work and social protection workers as recipients of educational services in the process of professional development showed positive transformations introduced on the basis of the university, appreciated by social workers. This suggests that the elements of distance learning based on the results of respondents should remain after the end of quarantine restrictions caused by the pandemic.

In particular, G. Marinchenko believes that communication between participants in the educational process is an important component of the educational process and socialization of the individual. Namely communication and joint work should be the basis for the organization of the educational process by distance learning or with the use of distance education technologies in educational institutions [10].

According to N. Tzygan, the process of professional development of a specialist is of bilateral interest. On the one hand, the organization and management are interested in the development of professionalism of employees. Continuous professional growth of a specialist contributes to improving the quality of social services, which is the basis for creating a positive image of a social institution, development and employment at a certain level in the market of social services, increasing the prestige of social services. On the other hand, the employee himself is interested in his professional development, because it allows him to more actively address the problems of clients seeking help, enables increasing his credibility among colleagues and clients. Also, professional development represents the prevention of professional burnout of social workers, which is an urgent problem in the social sphere [17].

As we can see, the influence of modern trends in society determines the further direction of the tasks of professional development and updating the content, forms, methods, and technology of teaching social work practitioners – such as the transition of the traditional form to distance learning due to various trends in social work; creation of a proper innovation and educational environment; the orientation of the training

program to improve the skills of social workers; updating the system of knowledge, skills, and abilities; promoting the choice of topics in the training of social workers.

Thus, the modern requirements of society demand highly qualified specialists who are able to solve in optimal ways and with proper methods the problem of recipients of social services, as the development of innovative technologies is growing. This is important in the exchange of knowledge and experience in the development of social work skills and the provision of services in accordance with current legislation in an informative society caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

5 Conclusion

At the heart of the scientific and pedagogical staff in improving the skills of social workers and employees of the social protection system, there is the development of their desire for continuous personal and professional self-development and self-improvement. The reference point in the process of this study at the Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University is the priority of mastering theoretical and practical experience and forming professionalism in social specialists.

The implementation of professional development of social workers at the university level as an institution of work in all areas of working with entities was carried out through the following elements: partnership and integration; innovative learning for the needs of society; improving the quality of education based on the latest achievements in education and science; compliance of the scientific and pedagogical team with modern requirements. Therefore, the conditions for updating the training of social practitioners are seen in the regulatory and legal and educational and methodological support, observing organizational, pedagogical and social characteristics. The prospect of further research is the development and justification of a structural and functional model of training social workers (practitioners) at the university level in an innovative environment.

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