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Training of child welfare social workers: American, British, and Ukrainian approaches

Підготовка соціальних працівників до роботи з дітьми: підходи Великої Британії, США та України

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Abstract

The article considers the training of child social workers in the UK, the USA, and Ukraine. The study aim relates the structure, content, and forms of training. Theoretical, and comparative methods allowed to generalize the available data on the issue current state of professional training of social workers. The results of the study allow concluding that the common features of American, British, and Ukrainian system of social workers training for the work with children are: (i) the use of a variety of teaching forms, methods, and technologies; (ii) the curriculum orientation on the unity of theoretical and practical components; courses addressing direct work with children and families, social policy, social services for children and families with much attention to the aspects of adoption, foster care, juvenile justice, child abuse, child neglect, etc. The research outcomes testify that the principal difference between models of social workers training is the accent of curriculum in the UK and the USA on the issues of preventive

Анотація

У статті розглядається питання підготовки соціальних працівників до роботи з дітьми у Великій Британії, США та Україні. Мета дослідження – розглянути структуру, зміст та форми підготовки. Теоретичний та порівняльний методи дозволили узагальнити наявні дані щодо проблеми сучасного стану професійної підготовки соціальних працівників. Результати дослідження дозволяють зробити висновок, що спільними рисами проаналізованих систем підготовки соціальних працівників до роботи з дітьми є: (i) використання різноманітних форм, методів і технологій навчання; (ii) орієнтація навчального плану на єдність теоретичної та практичної складових; дисципліни, що стосуються безпосередньої роботи з дітьми, соціальної політики, соціальних служб для дітей з великою увагою до аспектів усиновлення, прийомної сім'ї, ювенальної юстиції, жорстокого поводження з дітьми, бездоглядності тощо. Результати дослідження:

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care, social and legal protection of children, and in Ukraine – on the deviation's correction, on the therapeutic assistance.

Keywords: children at risk, courses, curriculum, social work with children, training of social workers.

Introduction

Social, economic and political crisis of modern society has common features in different (socially, culturally, historically, and politically) countries, namely: the strengthening of social exclusion among the children and youth, the proliferation of deviant displays (theft, drug addiction, begging, prostitution, etc.). Family is becoming less capable to both care for children and fulfil parental responsibilities, often creating conditions dangerous to the child's life and development. As a result, many of children experience physical, mental, and social problems. They find themselves at risk due to potential danger of the further deepening of social deformation of an individual. Social-legal protection and support of at-risk children (neglected, difficult to up-bring, with mental dissabilities, etc.) is to become the priority direction of modern social state policy. Thus, it actualizes the issue of professional training of social workers for the work with children. The object of the current study is the professional training of social workers for the work with children in the UK, the USA, and Ukraine. The study aim relates the courses content and knowledge, skills and attitude they develop.

Theoretical Framework

There has been a number of researches conducted in the area of social work, child welfare, and general issues of social workers training in the UK (Bartosh et al., 2007; Bartosh et al., 2021; Boyko, 2017; Connolly & Morris, 2011; Davey & Bigmore, 2009; Davies, 2012; Pichkar, 2002; Rogowski, 2013), in the USA (Apgar, 2017; Cournoyer, 2013; Ensher et al., 2009; Hepworth et al, 2013; Lane et al., 2002; Maluccio et al., 2002; Morales et al., 2009; Nichols, 2011; Sobchak, 2004; Webb, 2011), and in Ukraine (Kozubovska & Shandor, 2016; Lukashevych & Semygina, 2009; Panok & Levchenko, 2014; Petrochko, 2011; Ren', 2011; Tyuptya & Ivanova, 2008; Zvyeryeva & Laktionova, 2004), which we base our further scientific findings on.

що принципова відмінність між моделями підготовки соціальних працівників є акцент навчальних програм у Великій Британії та США на питаннях профілактики, соціального та правового захисту дітей, а в Україні – на корекції відхилень, на терапевтичній допомозі.

Ключові слова: діти групи ризику, дисципліни, навчальний план, соціальна робота з дітьми, підготовка соціальних працівників.

Professional training of social workers for the work with at risk children in the UK, the USA, and Ukraine has become the object of scientific interest of Kozubovska et al., (2016), Shpenyk (2016), Tsybul'ko (2014), and Vinnikova (2003). In our research we also rely on the data gathered personally while implementing international joint projects on mastering of social workers' training in Ukraine (International Renaissance Foundation: Publication of e-journal "Social Work in Ukraine and Abroad"; Tempus-Tacis project JEP-10243-96: Establishing the Social Work Department at Uzhhorod University; Tempus EU project NP-21007-2000: National Network of Educational Institutions in Social Work; Tempus EU project 144562-TEMPUS-2008-UK-JCPR: Advancing the Three Cycle System in Social Work Education in Six Countries; Projects of Cooperating Netherlands Foundations for Central and Eastern Europe: Adaptation and Integration of Children and Youth with Limited Abilities into Society.

Methodology

The following research **methods** have been applied:

- Theoretical – the secondary analysis of philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical sources on the issue under consideration has given the possibility to systematize and generalize the available data;
- Comparative – has allowed finding a new angle in the issue of social workers training, to identify the peculiarities of professional training of social workers in higher educational institutions of the UK, the USA and Ukraine. We have narrowed our interest to the content of social workers training for the work with at risk children;
- Empirical – observations, questionnaires, and interviews with scholars and practical social workers within previously

implemented international projects have given an opportunity to analyze comprehensively the experience of professional training of social workers for the work with children.

Results and Discussion

Social work is a profession requiring: in-depth professional knowledge, practical abilities and skills; demonstration of professional and personal qualities and high level of psychological readiness. It is also viewed as a practice-based, whereas social work students are expected to apply the theories and concepts while addressing problems at individual, group and community levels.

It is for this reason Dhengle (2016) puts forward the view that social work education consists primarily of two main components, theory-based knowledge and social skills development through field work. We also support the argument of Mallick (2007) that the fieldwork practicum constitutes as an essential and unique component of its curriculum and has its central meaning and importance.

Social work practice includes a wide range of activities such as individual counselling, generating awareness about social issues, mobilizing resources to meet the community needs, and participation in social movements. While speaking of countries under consideration the wide-ranging social work activities can be classified by three levels:

- (1) Micro-level social work practice is individualistic in orientation and therapeutic in nature. At this level, a social worker deals with individuals or groups, comprising of individuals, facing similar problems. At the same time, individualistic practice highlights causative economic, political, and social factors that give rise to problems at the micro-level.
- (2) Meso-level social work practice is either therapeutic or critical in nature or both, is focused on community. A social worker applies community organization, as method of social work practice, to address the concerns raised by people in the community. A social worker also develops knowledge on the rights of people and deliberates on the macro-interventions to exercise these rights.
- (3) Macro-level social work practice is critical in nature and involves the application of social action and social work research as methods of social work practice. A social

worker is engaged in a process of organizing people to alter the oppressive structures in the society, brings about a social change by empowering people.

Social work with children, aimed at keeping children safe, promoting relationships with parents and careers, and supporting the developmental needs of children at all ages, is carried out in the UK, the USA, and Ukraine at the following levels:

- Individual work (e.g., with children who have either suffered from/are at risk of violence; with parents or people inclined to violence directed against children);
- Group work (e.g., with families providing counselling and/or assistance on issues of upbringing and educating of children, establishing relationships in the family, etc.);
- Community work (e.g., provision of high-quality foster care, provision of adequate social services for the population, organization of community groups for self-assistance, etc.).

A social worker is trained to grasp both the problem symptoms and causes, to find ways to overcome them. Further research in this area (Shaparenko, & Sopivnyk, 2014; Tymenko, 2003; Yakovlev, & Kabachenko, 2011) shows that there are fundamental and common principles educational institutions rely upon in the training of social workers:

1. Knowledge of national standards of social work. One of the central issues in the quality assurance of standards of social services is the nature of relationship between social workers and their clients, which should be based on partnership, mutual respect and trust.
2. Diversity of social groups, communities, and lifestyles requires in-depth knowledge of social work theory and models with all social groups and age categories as well as knowledge of law to provide legislatively the social services.
3. Learning process is the fundamental basis for the further professionalism, which is considered by scholars as a set of personality characteristics of an individual, necessary for the successful performing of professional tasks. Social worker's professionalism, the idea of social worker's activity as an orientation towards a person as the highest value is central.

4. The principle of professional and personal development is the basis for the training of social workers. A social worker is to acquire a significant amount of knowledge, skills and abilities in combination with relevant personal qualities and ability to find non-standard solutions to the client's problems.
5. The success of professional activity of a social worker-to-be depends on the strict implementation of ethical norms and principles.

The training programs for social workers in the UK, the USA, and Ukraine offer courses on social work practice with various categories of clients at all levels (micro, meso, and macro practice). They also provide courses that ensure knowledge on the social context of social work practice, the dynamics of its changes, values and ethics of social work, and the formation of awareness of the need for further professional development. The social worker training in the countries under consideration is characterized by its multilevel approach, high-quality curriculum, focus on field practice, and supervision provided. The comparative analysis indicates that significant attention is paid to extracurricular activities, individual self-study, and research and development of students. All of these focus on instilling knowledge for practical application rather than knowledge for its own sake. The peculiarities of individual training include: 1) no strict time periods allocated for studying the course, allowing students to learn at a pace that suits their abilities; 2) a strict requirement to complete the material thoroughly, with the transition to new topics possible only after mastering the previous ones; 3) development of a personal study program by the student under guidance; 4) lectures used only as a form of directing the learning process, not the primary source of information; 5) the need for self-study, critical thinking, and a creative approach to the educational process; and 6) an increased role of essay writing, among other activities.

The most popular practice in training social workers is the case method, which involves studying specific situations. This method allows for collective creative discussion based on a concrete, truthful situation that contains original practical experience, helping to develop specific practical skills. Students analyze and discuss situations with real clients of social agencies, learning approaches to solving problems from different perspectives based on their knowledge, experience, and observations.

The branch standard of higher education for training social workers in Ukraine was approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2019. Accordingly, the list of courses in the normative curriculum is clearly defined and is designed to prepare general social workers, that is, specialists in the common practice of social work. Selective courses are provided depending on the possibilities of specific educational establishments. Thus, bachelors are taught general courses (such as Social Welfare, Social Work Methods, Social Policy, and System of Social Services) as well as specialized courses that focus on working with children and families, domestic violence, teamwork, and community development (such as Social Work with Children and Families, Social Work with Individuals Inclined to Deviant Behavior, Social Work with People with Special Needs, etc.). The issue of social work with children is addressed within each of the courses.

The available evidence, based on surveys conducted by Best Accredited Colleges (2021), The Council of Social Work Education (2023), and U.S. News on Education (2022), suggests that in the USA, to obtain a Bachelor of Social Work degree, students need to complete a training program in a college or school of social work accredited by the Council of Social Work Education. In the UK, social work education is provided in colleges or universities accredited by the Care Council for Wales, Northern Ireland Social Care Council, Scottish Social Services Council, or Health and Care Professions Council in England (The Complete University Guide, 2023). After receiving their Bachelor of Social Work degree, graduates in these countries can begin their careers as general social workers. Accredited programs offer specialized courses for aspiring social workers, including:

- *Child Development (psychological, mental and physical)*. Knowledge of behavior and peculiarities of development helps a social worker to assess whether a child develops «normally» or needs specialist's attention. In such cases, a social worker needs knowledge and skills that guarantee the provision of such help. Thus, a child welfare social worker-to-be is to acquire KNOWLEDGE on: 1) "normal" physical, mental, and emotional child development; heredity; impact of environment; adaptation; attachment theory; individual characteristics and identity development (ethnic, cultural and sexual differences with particular attention to the problems of socialization and practice of child's up-brining); 2) deviations

- in the child's development; 3) influence of social and emotional difficulties on the child's development; traumatic events and their consequences (divorce, loss, physical or mental illness, racial discrimination); psychosomatic disorders (e.g. anorexia nervosa, self-harm); alcohol, drug misuse; inability to adapt to the surrounding circumstances; SKILLS to: 1) observe; 2) evaluate "non-normal" behavior and physical development; 3) develop a child care plan; 4) collaborate with parents and other caregivers, professionals; ATTITUDE that: 1) while considering the needs of a child, age, gender, health conditions, race, religion, language, culture, and life experience are to be taken into account; 2) assessment of a child's development is to be placed in the center of appropriate attention. At practice, a student is to: observe a child; evaluate the physical behavior of a child and its development by the norms; evaluate the quality of caregiver's care towards a child; discuss with a specialist the possibility for healthcare worker to visit a child in a hospital; present the results of assessing the health of a child in the form of diagrams, charts, etc.; prepare a care plan for parents having a child with special needs.
- *Child Welfare Services:* This course establishes the connection between child welfare policy, services, and social work practice. It builds upon the course in social welfare policy, and enables students to use an action-based advocacy approach to provide policy-informed services and to participate in policy implementation and change. The course provides the historical view of the treatment of vulnerable children and the subsequent development of child welfare services, continuous with evolution and enactment of early child welfare policies through to the emergence of modern child welfare policies and their impact on child welfare systems in a multicultural society.
 - *Communication with Children and Young People:* Child welfare social workers-to-be learn how to work with children as with their clients, they are to develop the fundamental ability to communicate directly with children, youth and adults, which is the ability to observe, to be sensitive, to be aware of reaction and emotional interaction. Students also develop the ability to listen to children, maintain a conversation with them, enter their world and understand their perspective. Thus, a child welfare social worker-to-be is to acquire KNOWLEDGE on: 1) the legal right of children to speak for

- themselves and decide for themselves at any age, the duty of local authorities to take into account the religion, race, language of each child; 2) the variety of communication methods (language, game, drawing, drama, joint activity), which determine the level of child's development and are the basis for the effective work; 3) the importance of available resources (time, place, equipment, funding); 4) the consequences of loss, separation, poor health on the ability of children to communicate; 5) the role and possibility to involve other professionals in working with children; SKILLS to: 1) listen and talk with children and young people attentively, at the same time allowing relationships to evolve at such a pace as a child chooses; 2) use a language appropriate to the child's age, take into account the child's linguistic capabilities, gender and culture; 3) use different skills to play, recommend appropriate toys and games, demonstrate understanding of non-stereotyping by gender/ culture/ religion; 4) recognize the child's need for communication in the language child chooses; 5) tell unpleasant news and not to cause aggression; 6) maintain a positive self-image of a child; ATTITUDE that: 1) every child has to tell about his/her life something special, thus the decision on the child's future is to be also unique; 2) clients have the right to know about the purpose of communicating with them, and how it is going to be used; 3) they are to respect the origin of the child with whom they work. At practice a student can: organize visits to a group in a kindergarten, discuss with educator's children's abilities and skills, study the existing multi-race books and toys; comment on factors that hinder the communication with parents, children and young people. Activities aimed at communication involve observation, interview with a child.
- *Child Abuse:* The basic understanding of «injustice» phenomenon, of the role of social work and social agencies in protecting children together with basic skills on recognition and identifying of general signs and symptoms are necessary for all social workers and social welfare agencies. a child welfare social worker-to-be is to acquire KNOWLEDGE on: 1) partnership with parents and the wider family as the first step in protecting a child as a requirement of justice; 2) forms of child abuse, basic theories and researches on child abuse, its nature and quantitative indicators; 3) the

right to a private life, which may also result in the hiding of the facts of abuse; 4) the ways of assistance provision to families (of different ethnic/ cultural/ racial background); 5) cooperation between the central government and local authorities in administration of child protection; criminal and civil liability, rules of witnessing, administrative system (circulation of documentation); rules, procedure and professional practice in solving a case; 6) methods of intervention, their pros and cons in specific cases, results and consequences of intervention; 7) influence of abuse in childhood on the development of self-determination and self-esteem; 8) doubts and hesitation regarding the intervention in child abuse cases and the responsibility of social workers for this; 9) policy, procedures for institutional care of a child and consequences of their violation; SKILLS to: 1) use knowledge on appropriate child protection system in the region; 2) support individuals or families, where a conflict of interest may exist; 3) participate in the process of joint discussion of the case; 4) submit documents on the case to appropriate authorities, to the court; ATTITUDE that: 1) all children (regardless of race, culture, class) as a result of their dependence (social, emotional and physical) need protection from potential injustice; 2) the form and means of protection should be flexible, depending on the needs of particular child; 3) separation, as a form of child protection, can strengthen the view that injustice (sexual or emotional) is a consequence of child's fault. At practice, a student is: to discuss with a practice teacher the possible solutions to the situation with child protection; to attend a criminal trial; to discuss with parents of the offended child their attitude to the particular service; to discuss with parents the child protection; to take part in the conference on the child protection.

- *Planning and Process of Care* (the care for children and youth, foster care and adoption, post-institutional care, etc.): Students are taught how to determine the potential of the child's family (especially when it is planned to move the child to another family); possible harm to a child. Thus, a child welfare social worker-to-be is to acquire KNOWLEDGE on: 1) the role of a social worker, other professionals and agencies in supporting children and families; 2) the diversity of resources within and outside the care system: centers of day-care; family

centers; foster placement; boarding schools for children; foster families; staying at home "for the accusations under control"; services for children with special needs; 3) the consequences of poverty, unstable marital relationships, family crises, divorce on parental possibilities in the upbringing of children; 4) various racial and cultural types of family life and upbringing of children; 5) legal conditions for a child taken out of care; 6) practical and emotional needs of a child after being taken out of care; 7) problems of return to a family; 8) pros and cons of the system of post-institutional care; 9) factors of motivating to fostering; 10) the legal aspects of adoption, its procedure, and peculiarities of the work of social services in adoption; SKILLS to: 1) consider the circumstances of an individual family, a child in the broader context from the point of view of needs and rights of a child and parents; 2) find the best options and opportunities for children and parents; 3) foresee possible conflicts of interest and act in the interests of a child; 4) carry out a detailed analysis and assessment of a child in the family environment; 5) assess pros and cons of staying under the care; 6) learn about the child's preferences, health status, educational opportunities, special needs, especially in relation to religion and culture; also transfer this knowledge to the new career of a child; 7) organize meetings or contacts between children, parents and new careers; 8) explain to children, parents and careers their rights and responsibilities; 9) conduct a situation re-assessment and prepare a care plan; 10) regularly visit a child in placement; monitor the health of a child, educational / social / emotional progress; 11) plan the conditions for taking a child out of care; 12) visits a child after the child is taken out of care; ATTITUDE that: 1) every child has the right to protection from possible harm and injustice; 2) children have the right to develop identity within a culture or an ethnic group; 3) parents must be aware of their responsibility and role in the upbringing of children; 4) parental rights and duties should be respected; 5) parents should actively participate in the situation assessment and decision-making; 5) the placement of a child should be well-planned, taking into account the child's desire and feelings; 6) a child has the right to have ties with past relationships; 7) authorities are to ensure and maintain child's well-being; 8) careers should be considered as partners

in the process of fostering; 9) a child, taken out of care, deserves help and the authorities are responsible for its provision. At practice, a student can: accompany a social worker in the process of placing a child under the foster care; analyses the reaction of a child and discuss it; ask foster careers about their fostering experience; try to choose foster careers for a child; attend meetings on the selection of foster careers and participate in the discussion of documents.

- *Social Work with Children, Youth and Families*. The course focuses on the professional knowledge and skills required to work effectively with vulnerable children and families and aims to convey to students an understanding of the realities and complexities of practice in the child protection field. It includes the following aspects:

- (i) *Principles of Social Work with Children and Families*. After completing the session students are able to explain: the potential and limits of social work with children and families; historical context of child's welfare; anti-oppressive social work with children and families; partnership with family members and other agencies; focusing on people's abilities and resources, client impoverishment, listening to children. Thus, in practice, a student can: consider a specific case of a family with children and comment on potential and limits of social practice interference; consider a specific case and comment on how a school, social services, and a social worker might oppress a client; consider a specific case and determine the possibilities for cooperation and partnership with family members in solving the problem, as well as the consequences of possible non-cooperation of family members; list agencies (health/education/social services, community resources, voluntary organizations, other) children in need may be in contact with; provide ideas on what can ensure a social worker to listen properly to a child.
- (ii) *The Process of Social Work with Children and Families*. After completing the session students are able to explain the meaning of process in the context of social work practice; outline the process of social work with children and families (ASSESSMENT (make an assessment of needs and difficulties) → PLANNING (agree a plan of work in relation to your assessment) → IMPLEMENTATION (carry out your plan

of work) → EVALUATION (evaluate your work)); explain the impact of values on this process. At practice, a student can: define the term «process», «the process of social work»; work out the process, procedure of working with a family who have addressed the social agency.

- (iii) *Direct Work with Children in the Family*. After completing the session students are able to: outline different ways of direct work with children; give examples of wide range of needs of children, which social workers come into contact with; indicate opportunities and constraints placed upon social workers in responding to children's needs; assess personal skills in communicating with children; explain the meaning and use, the strengths and limitations of child observation in social work practice; identify reasons for involving children in decision-making. Thus, in practice, a student can: name professionals from different spheres (medicine, education, leisure) who have direct contact with children; comment on what is essential (physical, emotional and social needs) for the child's development; identify specific knowledge and skills for appropriate communication with children; prepare a plan of work with a child who is harassed at home, who uses only a foreign language of communication (establishing an initial contact with a child; using simple words, gestures, correct tone of voice, toys, involving parents in communication at the initial stage, etc.).
- (iv) *The social and political context of social work with children and families*. After completing the session students are able to apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory.

Assessment of students' knowledge is checked through observation of a student in practice placement, feedback on the student's practice; analysis of student's records during case management; assessment of student's written works or projects with the analysis of knowledge and skills applied.

Conclusions

The curriculum on training of social workers in the UK, the USA, and Ukraine includes courses on: social work practice with various categories of clients at all levels (micro-, meso-, and macro practice) as well as courses that contain knowledge the social context of social work practice, (the dynamics of) its changes; values

and ethics of social work; formation of awareness of the need for further professional development and improvement. Students are taught: to perform direct work with children and families; to cooperate with various social services; to carry out assessment, planning, and monitoring. The principal difference between models of social workers training is the accent of curriculum in the UK and the USA on the issues of preventive care, social and legal protection of children, and in Ukraine – on the deviation's correction, on the therapeutic assistance. Field practice – is an obligatory component of curriculum to obtain the qualification, which is aimed to develop the students' skills and abilities, and attitude. The practical experience, is gained in specialized institutions and/or volunteer practice with children. Much attention is paid to extracurricular work, individual, self-study and research and development of students.

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