

Artículo de investigación

The structural model of social workers' professional prestige formation

Структурная Модель Формирования Профессионального Престижа Социальных Работников

Modelo estructural de la formación de prestigio profesional de trabajadores sociales

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Written by:

Krivososova Lyudmila Aleksandrovna³⁷<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4173-1507>https://elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=356627**Abstract**

The expansion and complication of the modern sphere of social services and social responsibility, aimed at improving the lives of the population, raises questions regarding the influence of the status and prestige of social workers on the result of their activities. The purpose of the article is to develop a model for the formation of public inter-corporate professional prestige of social workers, taking into account the specifics of the social environment and regional peculiarities.

Methods. The diagnostics of the level of social and inter-corporate prestige of social workers at the regional level was conducted by assessing the following three groups of indicators of professional activity, public and corporate prestige, which are the structural components of the proposed model. The study uses the results of sociological surveys conducted in the Khabarovsk Territory in 2016-2018, as well as the methods of structural and functional analysis. **Results.** The studies, conducted in the Khabarovsk Territory, showed that the growth of the prestige of social work and social workers is hampered by relatively high numbers of people in need and people with low incomes, high indicators of mortality and longevity, a high cost of living and high rates of migration. The low level of prestige of social workers demonstrates the need for eliminating the existing stereotypes by the administrative, methodical and educational methods. The article presents an algorithm for assessing the image of social workers using the

Аннотация

Расширение и усложнение современной сферы социальных услуг и социальной ответственности, направленной на улучшение жизни населения, ставит вопросы влияния статуса и престижа социальных работников на результаты их работы. Цель статьи – разработать модель поддержки общественного внутрикорпоративного престижа соцработников, с учетом специфики общественной среды и региональных особенностей. **Методология.** Диагностика уровня социального и внутрикорпоративного престижа соцработников проведена посредством оценки следующих трех групп показателей профессиональной деятельности, общественного и корпоративного престижа, являющихся структурными компонентами предлагаемой модели. В работе использованы материалы и результаты опросов, проведенных в Хабаровском крае в 2016-2018 годах, и методы структурно-функционального анализа. **Результаты.** Исследования показали, что рост престижа социальной работы и занятых в данной сфере сдерживается относительно высокими показателями численности нуждающегося населения и низких доходов, высокими показателями смертности и продолжительности жизни, высокой стоимостью жизни и высокими показателями

³⁷ Doctor of Sociology, Professor, Head of Department of social work and sociology, Far Eastern Institute of management (branch) of Russian Academy of national economy and state service under the President of the Russian Federation. lyudmila-krivososova@meta.ua

model as a tool to improve the quality of social work and the professionalism of social workers in the regional conditions.

Conclusions and application. The proposed model demonstrates the importance of increasing prestige as a factor in the improvement of social work, describes the method of constructing a model and the organizational and methodological actions for its implementation in practice. The conclusions and results may be of interest to various social structures and educational institutions to optimize the processes of social work, to present the means to increase the prestige of workers, as well as to improve their professional training.

Keywords: Factors of prestige formation, public and inter-corporate prestige, professional performance indicators, social worker

миграционных настроений. Низкий уровень престижа соцработников демонстрирует необходимость разрушения сложившихся стереотипов административными, методическими, образовательными методами. Предлагаемая модель демонстрирует значимость повышения престижа как фактора совершенствования социальной работы, описывает методику построения модели и организационно-методические действия по ее внедрению в практику. Выводы и практическая значимость. Статья представляет алгоритм оценки имиджа соцработников с использованием модели как инструмента повышения качества социальной работы и профессионализма соцработников в региональных условиях. Выводы и результаты могут быть интересны различным социальным структурам и образовательным учреждениям для оптимизации процессов социальной работы, средствами повышения престижа соцработников, а также совершенствования их профессиональной подготовки.

Ключевые слова: Факторы формирования престижа, общественный и внутрикорпоративный престиж, показатели профессиональной деятельности, социальный работник.

Resumen

La expansión y la complicación de la esfera moderna de los servicios sociales y la responsabilidad social dirigida a mejorar la vida de la población plantea dudas sobre el impacto del estatus y el prestigio de los trabajadores sociales en los resultados de su trabajo. El propósito del artículo es desarrollar un modelo para apoyar el prestigio social corporativo de los trabajadores sociales, teniendo en cuenta las características específicas del entorno social y las características regionales. Metodología El nivel de prestigio social y corporativo de los trabajadores sociales se diagnosticó mediante la evaluación de los siguientes tres grupos de indicadores de actividad profesional, prestigio social y corporativo, que son componentes estructurales del modelo propuesto. El trabajo utiliza materiales y resultados de encuestas realizadas en el territorio de Khabarovsk en 2016-2018, y métodos de análisis estructural y funcional. Resultados Los estudios han demostrado que el crecimiento en el prestigio del trabajo social y de los empleados en esta área está limitado por tasas relativamente altas de población necesitada y bajos ingresos, altas tasas de mortalidad y esperanza de vida, alto costo de vida y altas tasas de sentimiento migratorio. El bajo nivel de prestigio de los trabajadores sociales demuestra la necesidad de destruir los estereotipos existentes por métodos administrativos, metodológicos y educativos. El modelo propuesto demuestra la importancia de aumentar el prestigio como factor para mejorar el trabajo social, describe la metodología para construir un modelo y las acciones organizativas y metodológicas para su implementación en la práctica. Conclusiones y relevancia práctica. El artículo presenta un algoritmo para evaluar la imagen de los trabajadores sociales utilizando el modelo como herramienta para mejorar la calidad del trabajo social y la profesionalidad de los trabajadores sociales en condiciones regionales. Las conclusiones y los resultados pueden ser de interés para diversas estructuras sociales e instituciones educativas para optimizar los procesos de trabajo social, medios para aumentar el prestigio de los trabajadores sociales, así como para mejorar su formación profesional.

Palabras clave: Factores de formación de prestigio, prestigio social y corporativo, indicadores de actividad profesional, trabajador social.

Introduction

The expansion and complication of the modern sphere of social services and social responsibility, aimed at improving the lives of the population, raises questions regarding the influence of the status and prestige of social workers on the result of their activities. The implementation of an effective social policy is directly related to the activities of social work specialists. Modern social work is one of the socio-cultural institutions of society, and the specificity of its functioning lies in the humanization and harmonization of social relations by means of creating an effective system of human adaptation to certain temporary conditions.

The emergence of a relatively new profession, a social worker, in modern Russian society takes place against the background of a contradiction that cannot be overcome yet. On the one hand, social workers are in demand in the system of enterprises, organizations, and institutions of social protection and social services for the population. On the other hand, the profession and the type of professional activity have low prestige in society, especially among young people. This circumstance was the reason for the fact that the staffing level in the enterprises and institutions of the social sphere in the Khabarovsk Territory amounted to only 88%. The average salary in the industry is on average 39% lower than in the regional industry. A significant part of the staff – employees over the age of 50 years – amounts to 44%. Only 8% of workers under the age of 30 years, and 7% of the entire composition have specialized education (Ministry of Social Protection of the Khabarovsk Territory, 2018).

These results also show an insufficiently positive attitude of the population towards the profession. 72% of the respondents noted the low level of attractiveness of the profession, 68% believe that social work is performed by low-skilled people who cannot get employed anywhere else. At the same time, almost 90% of the respondents believe that the profession “a social worker” is simply necessary for modern Russian society. There is some understanding among the respondents that this profession (32%) requires a multidisciplinary special education, mastering many competencies, methods, technologies, is associated with a severe psychological load and professional burnout, and is worthy of respect and reverence (Krivonosova, 2017).

This study was conducted due to the need for a theoretical and methodological analysis of the

prestige of the profession of social workers in the structure of stratification relations and the relations, specified by regional needs. *The aim of the work* was to identify the conditions and factors that contribute to increasing the prestige of the profession, formulated by the needs of the population living in a particular territory, within a specific social infrastructure and resource capabilities. *The hypothesis of the research*: the monitoring measurements that assess the prestige of social workers across a particular territorial community will help to identify specific factors contributing to the formation of their professionalism and positive image, as well as identifying territorial dominants, developing the sphere of social services and the mechanisms of providing social guarantees.

Research Background

Prestige is considered one of the subspecies of social prestige, making it possible, given the status and role, stratification, personality and professional characteristics of an individual, to concretize his or her main professional indicators. These indicators can be represented as a social system (model), determining the degree of interaction and interdependence of its individual structural components.

The studies interpret the prestige of the profession, considering it as a rational type of activity (Zakharenko, 2016; Walker & Tracey, 2012), based on the social preferences of an individual of social selectivity. Many authors consider professional prestige as an individual's desire to conceal personal insecurity in their own professional stability and importance. Zhan (2001) describes the hierarchy of occupations in the public consciousness as a necessary attribute of socialization.

Vorotilkina and Nekozyreva (2017) use the category of “professional prestige” to identify individuals within the prestigious class, analyzing in this regard the specific characteristics of the public consciousness that determines the degree of prestige of separate phenomena and processes (Krivonosova, 2014). The problems of the indicators of the social prestige model are touched upon in the analysis and evaluation of social workers associated with vocational training and advanced training (Zakharenko, 2016; Zhan, 2015).

The prestige of the profession of a social worker has been studied since the mid-1950s, but it

cannot be said that nowadays it is explored as intensely (Olin, 2013). A similar recent study (Argüello, Baiocchi & Wolf, 2018) showed a general positive perception of social work and its “helping” nature, accompanied, however, by a low assessment of its prestige by residents and social workers in California. Kagan (2015) also found that in Israel, it is considered that social workers choose a profession based on values, ideology, and ethics; therefore, the government is obliged to improve their employment terms and conditions. This leads to the need for socialization and the identification of social workers (Beddoe, 2013; Miller, 2013; Turtiainen, Väänänen & Varje, 2018).

Materials and Methods

While determining the totality of indicators reflecting the level of public and inter-corporate prestige, the authors use the established approaches, reflecting the essence of personal satisfaction of the need for recognition and self-actualization. A person, by nature, needs a sense of self-confidence, a sense of self-worth and value. This is especially true for social workers; the need for prestige is obtained through the

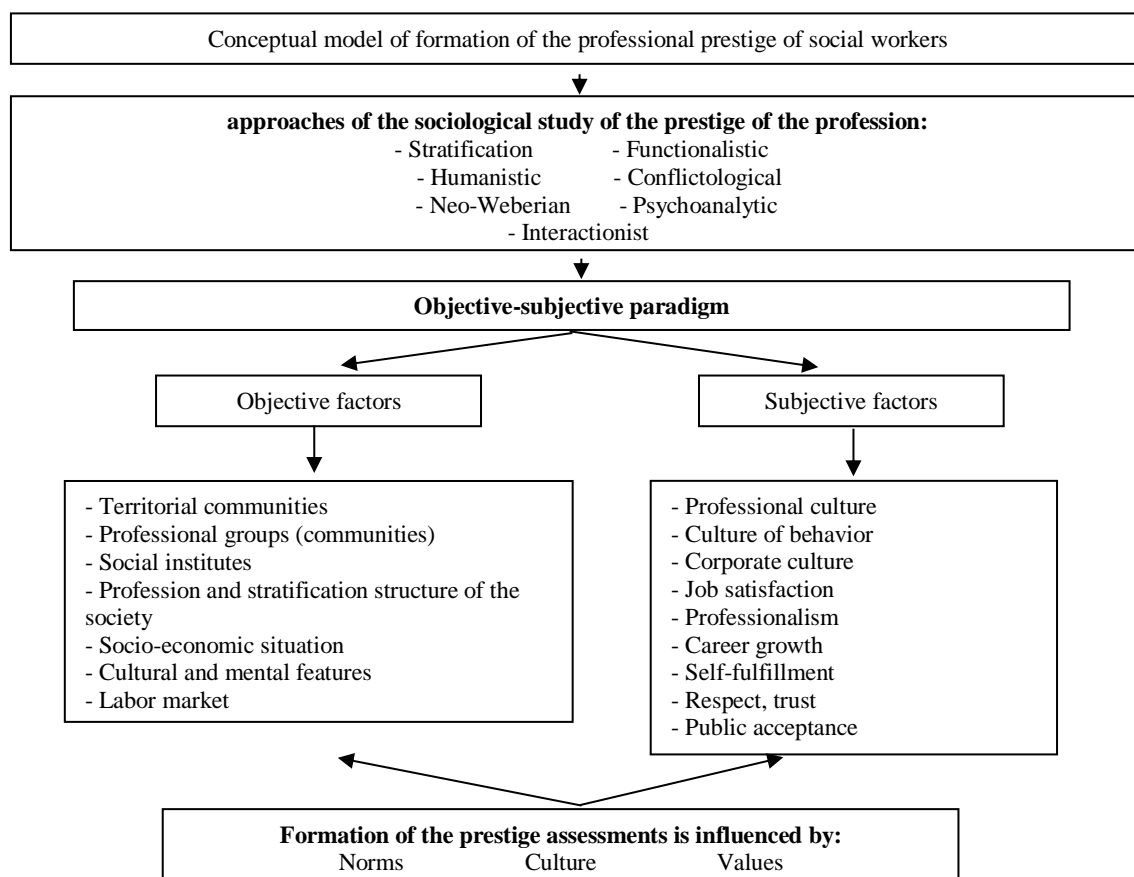
achievement of career, success, reputation, fame, power, and high social status. Here, only the desire of an individual is not enough. In a society with a high level of synergism, the satisfaction of higher human values associated with the full disclosure and assessment of personal potential is the dominant goal. Prestige is viewed here as a means of realizing an individual’s need for recognition, which relates to the needs of a higher level, is regarded as a mechanism for professional growth.

The study was conducted in three stages.

Stage 1. Development of the model

The model was developed based on the studied professional capabilities of social workers by means of structural and functional analysis, display design and concept, modeling of three blocks of constituent models: a block of indicators of social prestige, a block of indicators of inter-corporate prestige, and a block of indicators reflecting the structure of social work at the regional level of the Russian Federation, the Khabarovsk Territory (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The levels and approaches of a sociological study of the formation of the professional prestige of social workers. Author’s development



Stage 2. Analysis of the sources of functional statistics reflecting the results of social work in the Khabarovsk Territory, Russia.

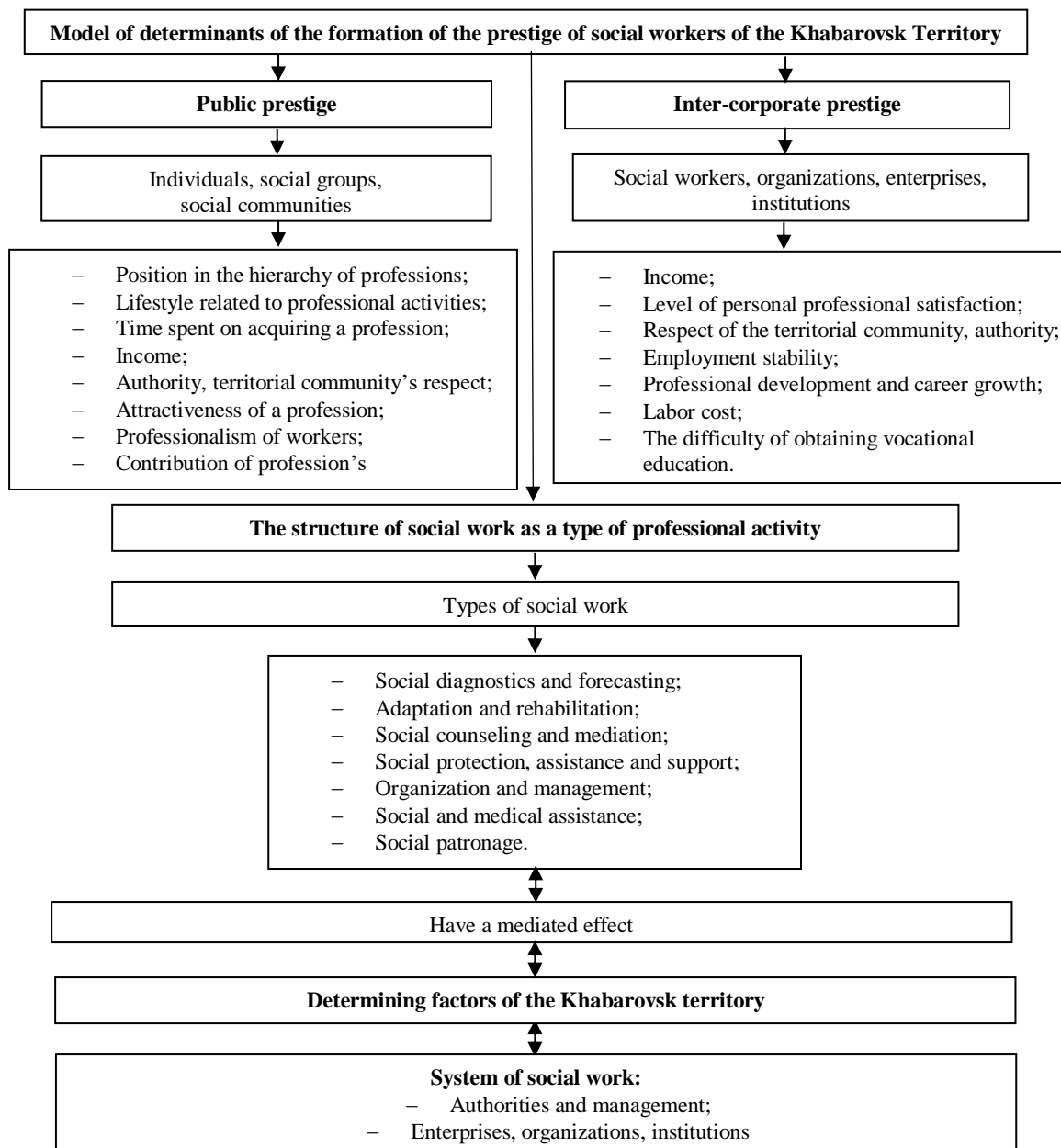
Stage 3. At this stage, two sociological studies were conducted. The first one is “Social determinants of the formation of the professional prestige of social workers in the Khabarovsk Territory”. The number of respondents was 600 people, the type of sample: quota, stratification. The residents of the Khabarovsk Territory were recruited as respondents on the basis of age and professional characteristics, as well as with low incomes. The type of research: experimental, the tool – a questionnaire.

The second one is “Social worker today: a socio-cultural portrait”. The number of respondents was 50 people, the type of sample: mechanical, the specialists of the social security management bodies, the employees of specialized social support and social services were involved. The type of research – expert, the tool – a questionnaire.

Results

The model of determinants of the formation of the prestige of social workers of the Khabarovsk Territory in the modern conditions is a system of indicators, shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Model of indicators determining the formation of the prestige of social workers of the Khabarovsk Territory. Compiled by the author



Source: Compiled by the author.

The model consists of three main blocks of indicators, reflecting the essential characteristics and status-role positions of social workers in the modern structure. The first block presents the factors that have a direct impact on the formation of two main subspecies of prestige – public and corporate. The second block consists of the indicators, indirectly influencing the development of the process of prestige appraisal formation.

The author considers the individuals, social groups constituting territorial communities as the main objects forming the social prestige of social workers. Inter-corporate prestige is formed by the social workers themselves by the method of self-assessment of the proposed indicators. The structural content of the blocks of the designed model is presented by the author in such a way that within each block there are specific indicators that make up the system of the modeled structure.

Each of the blocks consists of several indicators of one of the subspecies that are consistently included in them. Thus, the indicators of social prestige can be assessed by the position in the hierarchy of other professions; lifestyle, which is associated with professional activities; the time spent on acquiring a profession; income; authority, respect of the territorial community; the attractiveness of the profession; professionalism of employees; the result of professional activity.

The most significant and designating determinants of the professional prestige of social workers at the inter-corporate level are personal professional satisfaction, labor cost, professional development and career growth, income, and employment stability.

The study showed that, both in Russia and in the Khabarovsk Territory, the importance and prestige of social workers are formally declared; however, there are still no full-fledged mechanisms for their implementation. Social institutions not only do not show proper assistance in forming the prestige of social workers but also perceive this process relatively neutrally or are even opposed to it. Consequently, public opinion within the territorial community in relation to social workers develops spontaneously against the background of the population's virtual lack of knowledge and understanding of this profession. This circumstance does not contribute to the

development of prestige within the professional community. According to the results of the study, social workers especially feel the lack of opportunities for their own self-actualization, since the structure of this profession has rather limited opportunities to climb the upward status ladder due to professional training and abilities. The industry weakly demonstrates the creation of mechanisms for the reproduction of the need for high professionalism and social significance.

The low status of the profession in the territorial community prevents the influx of young highly qualified specialists into the industry and significantly reduces the motivation for professional work of those already employed, limits the desire to improve their skills and aspiration to master the profession at a high level. Although the level of professionalism of social workers is assessed by the authors as insufficient, it can still be stated that the representatives of this professional group have a sufficiently high potential for professional growth. This is evidenced by a positive motivation for professional activity (69.7%), which contributes to the desire to improve the professional level and qualifications (87.4%), a high degree of satisfaction with the profession (70.1%), a high level of the development of personal qualities (74.2%) (Krivonosova, 2017). It is revealed that the most significant and designating determinant of the professional prestige of social workers at the inter-corporate level is personal professional satisfaction, the authority of the profession among not only the clients but also the territorial community. The main components of the authority of this profession, according to the author, are personal and professional qualities, such as respect for direct recipients of social assistance, professional development and orientation to career growth.

The social and inter-corporate prestige is directly influenced by the system of values, which serves for individuals, social groups and communities as a guide for the behavior and activities of social workers.

Understanding the motives of clients, on the one hand, and social workers, on the other one, is of great importance in forming the content of activities and makes it possible to work out such social development programs that will best meet the interests of the segments of the population in need.

Among the most significant indicators affecting prestige are professional competencies, in particular, knowing the technologies of social

work, elaborated in recent decades. Particularly noteworthy is the possession of the technologies of social diagnostics of clients and their problems, the prediction of events and situations, social rehabilitation, habilitation, prevention and adaptation, the implementation of social mediation, counseling and patronage, and the organization of the work of social institutions. The practice of work indicates that many of the above-listed types of professional activity are at the stage of initial development, but they are quite significant for the full-scale development of the industry and profession. Other technologies of social work, including those that are already actively used, such as social protection, social assistance, social services, and social rehabilitation, require further development.

The study revealed quite significant factors. The lack of a holistic view of the structure, content, and possibilities of social work also has a negative impact on the formation of the prestige of social workers. For the most part, in difficult situations, people rely on themselves and rarely seek the help of social protection specialists.

The results of the study of social and inter-corporate prestige allowed determining the professional prestige of social workers as a phenomenon of public consciousness, which reflects the subjective hierarchy of occupations, the attractiveness of professional activities, determined by the difference in the degree of complexity and responsibility, the duration of obtaining the necessary education, and the level of income. The prestige of the profession is an integral assessment of the synthesizing value,

prescribed for social work; it is considered at the level of the method of moral encouragement in the form of authority and recognition, stereotype, reflecting the significance and importance of the process and the final result of the work of the examined professional cohort.

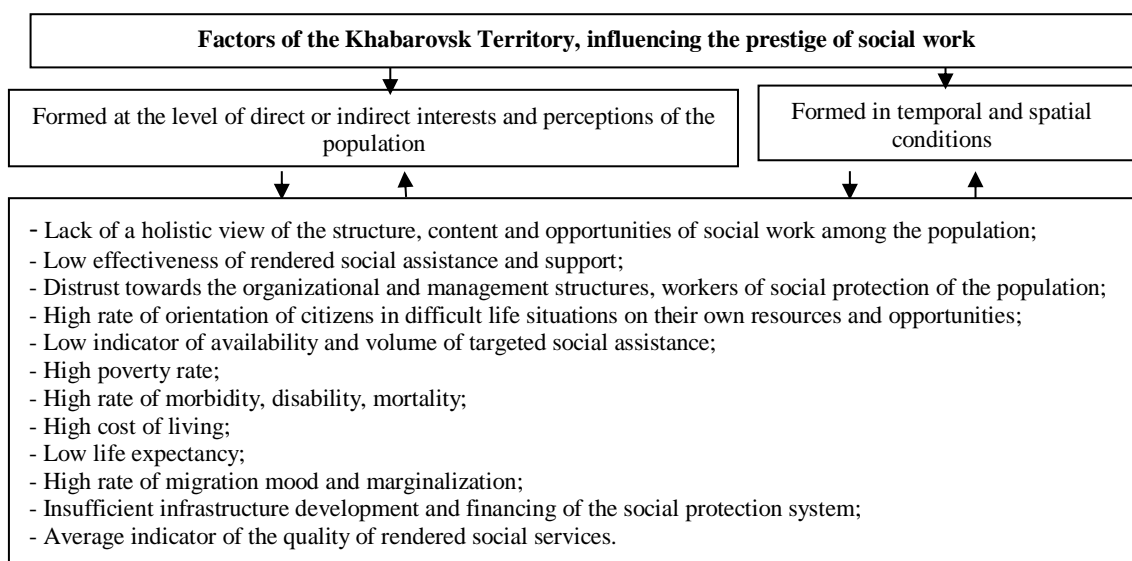
The next component of the model of the determinant of the formation of the prestige of the studied professional cohort is the organizational and management structure, branches of industry, social work in the Khabarovsk Territory. The content of this block includes the authorities and administrations, enterprises, organizations and institutions that are directly involved in the performance of assigned functions.

The content of the components of this block is the result of the organization and direct professional activity of social workers, based on modern technologies, innovative methods, standards, and also on reforming the regulatory, financial and economic framework.

The content expressiveness of the indicators of this block will be determined by the regional specifics of social and economic development, budget security and the structure of social expenditures for social development.

Thus, when designing a model that ensures the prestige of social work in the Khabarovsk Territory, special attention was paid to regional peculiarities reflecting the specifics of this only and having a direct impact on the formation of the prestige of social workers (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Factors of the Khabarovsk Territory, influencing the prestige of social workers. Compiled by the author



All indicators are represented by specific values that are compared with social norms and standards, as well as with indicators of other regions of Russia. The distinguished regional determinants are determined, as well as taking into account external features, including the geographical remoteness of the territories of the region, isolation, poorly developed transport infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified personnel. The latter indicator especially influences the formation of a negative attitude of the population towards the social protection system and the low indicator of the prestige of social workers in the region.

One of the basic indicators of the formation of the prestige of social workers in this direction is their position in the hierarchy of other professions. It is noted that according to the results of the research, when entering higher and secondary vocational institutions, former school graduates practically do not choose the training direction "Social Work". Educational institutions of the Khabarovsk Territory constantly do not fulfill the target numbers of recruitment for these directions of vocational training.

Prestige is one of the main indicators of the choice of profession, which is dictated not by the mythical "need", "significance", but by life realities, requirements such as income, employment guarantee, career growth, public attitude to this profession, personal growth prospects, which have to be fulfilled in a situation of increasing importance of a profession.

4742 people work in the structures of the state system of social protection of the population, of which 8.1% are employees up to 30 years old, 8.8% of employees are people of retirement age (Ministry of Social Protection of the Khabarovsk Territory, 2018). The presented statistics provide an opportunity to predict the need for the reproduction of young specialists, as well as the creation of a system of retraining and advanced training.

Discussion

There are two points related to the results of the study, associated with the assessment of the indicators of the prestige of social workers. On the one hand, the results offer material related to the prestige and professionalism of social workers. On the other hand, they offer to compile informational support for subsequent interactive assessments, for example, of the quality of social services provided to the population, the work of enterprises, organizations, social institutions, the

quality of social guarantees, that is, to be used in higher hierarchical levels of the social structure of the region. In this sense, the used indicators can be classified into two large groups: the unified ones, obtained by using official statistics and the special ones, obtained by public opinion polls and opinions of social workers themselves, paying particular attention to the subjective component of information: the well-being of the population, its motives, values and needs. All this implies the need to integrate this kind of information into the management system, similar to the experience of the United States, where the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare was established in 2009, aimed at "recognizing outstanding social work scholars and practitioners; informing social policy... and agencies seeking information; ...application of research to the design and development of more effective public policies, social welfare programs, and social work practice" (Barth, Gilmore, Flynn, Fraser & Brekke, 2014).

The next point is the question of measuring the indicators. The main difficulty in measuring the image of social workers is the heterogeneity of its indicators in terms of measurement scales. Thus, for example, the objective indicators of the 3rd block (social conditions of the Khabarovsk Territory) are measured in metric scales; however, nominal rank scales (estimation) are used to measure the subjective indicators, which makes it difficult to calculate the integral total indicator. The subsequent studies can use a variety of options for effectively converting information to the required parameters.

The low prestige of social workers, including the self-assessment of social workers themselves, negatively affecting their professional identity, is characteristic not only of Russia but also of the world (Hobbs & Evans, 2017; Cordoba, 2016).

The use of factors specific to the Khabarovsk Territory and influencing the prestige of social workers allowed concretizing the following actions for the prestige appraisal formation of the profession. The main one is the measures to systematically and purposefully increase the prestige of the profession, such as the implementation of programs to attract young professionals, the introduction of measures of social support for specialists, and changes in the remuneration system. The need to continue joint scientific and practical work of social services and universities, as well as media coverage of the best achievements of specialists in this field (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013), disclosure of the specifics and the significance of work for the

population, the formation of the professional community, is confirmed by foreign experience (Gruppen, Mangrulkar & Kolars, 2012; Leigh, 2014).

For example, one of the reasons for the low prestige of social workers in the region is their low wages, which are shaped by the specifics of the regional labor market; the study suggested various options for increasing it. The analysis of enterprises and institutions of the social sphere gives reason to understand that in the near future, social workers with the knowledge of the following specializations will be in demand in the Khabarovsk Territory: social welfare, pension and insurance, psychological and pedagogical, socio-medical, and managerial. The regional market also responded with a request to the communicative component in the professional activity, putting forward professional requirements for achieving results. This block of information identifies the opportunities and changes in the social work management system, allows reviewing a number of aspects that have a complex effect on the process of prestige appraisal formation, and include not only the internal but also the external environment of the social work institute, as well as socially-oriented non-profit organizations and the media.

There are further prospects for the professionalization of social work using this methodology, since it can have a positive effect on the level of work of the representatives of this professional cohort and, with certain efforts of the authorities and the leadership in this area, contribute to bringing social work in the region to a qualitatively higher level.

Conclusion

The article presented a model as a tool to improve the quality of social work and the professionalism of social workers in the regional conditions. The prestige of a social worker in society is directly related to the quality and results of his or her work, which requires various efforts of representatives of the profession, authorities and management bodies, as well as various means of communication to raise it to a higher level, which implies the availability of objective information about the population's attitude to social workers, formed taking into account the regional particularities. Thus, the model can be used in any territorial community.

The conclusions and results may be of interest to various social structures and educational

institutions to optimize the processes of social work, to present the means to increase the prestige of workers, as well as to improve their professional training.

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