The Conative Dimension of the Social Worker's Personality

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Original Article

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Abstract:

Objective: The aim of the research is to identify the essential conative attributes of the social worker's personality necessary for the practice of the profession, as they encourage effective interaction with social work client. At the same time, to find out the perception important social worker will qualities by university students of social work in the line of acceptance of professionalism, prosociality and motivation to apply themselves.
Design: Qualitative analysis, focus groups method.
Participants: The research sample consisted of four focus groups, together 30 undergraduate full-time bachelor's and external master's students Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Social Work and Social Policy, University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava.
Methods: We applied guided group discussions, using focus groups as the data collection method.

Results: The intention was to identify a key aspect for the development positive character dispositions of the helping professional. The results of the qualitative analysis confirmed the necessity of high internal motivation for prosocial behaviour. Focus groups participants reported that interest in the profession of social worker is preferably associated with an internal motivation to help others. The intrapersonal disposition is individual, authentic and non-transferable. Results identified motivation and self-regulation as essential conative dimensions.

Conclusion: Create educational module for university students of social work to support the conative dimension of personality. The conative dimension of a social worker's personality plays a fundamental role in provided intervention quality. It is necessary to continuously develop and empower motivation to positive will qualities through social-psychological trainings, webinars, supervision meetings.

Introduction

The conative dimension of personality represents that part of personality which relates to willpower, goal-directed action, decision-making and motivation to act. It is actually an aspect of the psyche, influencing the individual's initiative, guiding and maintaining behaviour in order to achieve selected goals. Will means the range of psychological qualities and processes that lead to the achievement of goals, especially when one needs to overcome barriers in order to gain them. This is crucial for the social worker. Positive dispositions of the conative dimension of personality are associated with individual qualities such as patience, goal-orientation, responsibility, perseverance, decisiveness, initiative, consistency, principle, self-control, self-esteem, independence, creativity, bravery, and the ability to complete tasks, among others (Kopecká, 2011).

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the conative dimension of the helping professional's personality and emphasize the necessary character qualities needed for a successful helping intervention. We perceive the conative dimension of personality primarily in attributes such as motivation, goal-orientation, endurance, and self-regulation. Motivation has a major influence on behavior, specifically external motives, identified as impulses, e.g., reward, recognition, and internal so-called incentive motives, which include self-actualization, personal growth. Motivation naturally encourages a person to act. In addition, the helping professional should have a sense of purpose so that he or she is able to set goals and work systematically towards them. Furthermore, endurance, that demonstrates his resilience to barriers, the ability not to give up in the face of partial failures. An important feature of the helping professional in social work is self-regulation in the sense of control of emotions and behaviour. Equally essential is to act independently and make decisions without accepting external pressure. In principle, the conative side of personality should express a balance between spontaneity, impulsivity and decisiveness in planning, decision-making and action. This is the privileged capital of the helping approach that stabilizes the client.

We are based on the scientific knowledge that not only inborn genetic factors, but also the environment significantly contribute to the formation of personality (Thorová, 2015).

Allport (1937) say the personality of an individual is the mode of adjustment or survival that results from interaction of his organic cravings (segmental drives) with an environment both friendly and hostile, through intermediation of a plastic and modifiable nervous system. Therefore, education has a formative influence on personality development, not excluding undergraduate preparation for a profession, while we

consider as relevant a person's continuous interest in self-assessment. The ability to self-reflect is an essential component of social worker personality preparation. This dimension is fulfilled in social psychological training in self-knowledge and communication skills. We formulated the research problem as follows: University students of social work perceive the importance of forming the conative side of personality in significantly unclear outlines in the perspective of meaning.

Methods and selected theory

The basic method of the qualitative research, focus groups discussion was used. We were doing content analysis data that we gathered through focus group discussions. We used method of searching and labelling relationships. It means when participants put certain selected phenomena in context. We say about shared product of the participant and the researcher (Masaryk, 2021). The researcher is not a disinterested observer but a key instrument of analysis.

In the transcribed focus group interviews, we used open coding to systematically search for themes, differentiate attitudes, narratives and emotional frames. By thematically decomposing the text, we selected categories that we interpreted in relation to the research topic (Hendl, 2016). Participants were asked open-ended questions designed to gain their opinions according to selected discussion line and categories. We recorded the frequency of narratives and words with concrete feature towards the topic.

A broad-spectrum theory differentiation of personality characteristics usually recognizes several dimensions in which they are identified in external manifestations of behavior. A dimension of intelligence expressed in the cognitive processes of perception, imagination, thinking. The vitality of behaviour and feeling is characterised by temperament, the key point being the strength and dynamics (speed and rhythm) of psychomotor reactions. The specific dimension of personality is the will as an authentic disposition of man, the evolutionary highest form of behavioural regulation. It is associated with human character as a complex of external manifestations of personality, actions and patterns of behavior (Nakonečný, 2015).

Zelina (2004) notes Royce's theory of personality, which distinguishes sensory-motor, cognitive and affective systems, and a style-value system. The last one is the least genetically, but much more environmentally and educationally primarily determined. In other words, external control regulates human behaviour.

The basic research concept focuses on the conative dimensions of personality as the will-related ranges of an individual. They relate to aspects of life associated primarily with goal-directed action and motivation. Conativity (from Lat. conatus - effort, trying) refers to an individual's ability to initiate, regulate, and maintain behavior in order to achieve certain goals.

First topic in goup discussion was selection the crucial conative dimensions of personality as a basic professional qualities social worker There were selected categories:

- *Motivation (internal, external),*
- *Intentionality* and *goal-orientation*,
- *Endurance* and *self-regulation*,
- *Autonomy* - a measure of independence in decision making and the ability to direct one's own behavior according to internal principles.
- *Behavioral energization* - the intensity and dynamism with which an individual performs actions (e.g., proactivity vs. passivity).

In this perspective, the structure of the focus group discussions had fixed in several lines.

- Conative dimensions as will ranges of the individual.
- Character qualities as a part of the helping professional's entity.
- Identified indicators of the conative dimension.
- Perception of the conative dimensions, character features as a necessary disposition of an erudite social worker.

The helping character entity

Human character significantly determines creativity, axiologization (values, attitudes), but especially all motivation to achieve goals. Zelina (2003) suggests that helping behaviour should

be *expressive* (hiding nothing) *adaptive*, but also *alimentary* (traditional, habitual) and *appetitive* (searching, exploration of experience). Character is formed by natural predispositions, but also by education, values or by experiences.

Allport (1937) points out: Traits are only covenient names to types or qualities of behavior which have elements uncommon. They are not psychological entities but rather categories for the classification oh habits. Character qualities are stable and long-term personality features, that influence behaviour, decision-making and interpersonal relationships. They are divided into four basic groups: *moral features*, *social features expressing relationships with other people*, *work features*, and *personality features expressing relationships with oneself*. In this context, we created the following codes:

1. *Moral qualities* - are usually expressed in relation to values and ethical rules. Research paticipants selected: Honesty, Responsibility, Fairness, Solidarity - willingness to help others, altruism, Humility - modesty, awareness of one's own limits.
2. The *social characteristics* - expressing mainly the relationship to other people. Informants included: Empathy, Sociability, Tolerance, Assertiveness, Patience.
3. About *work qualities* we talked in the context of the relationship to work and duties. Participants named Endurance, Discipline, Responsibility, Precision, Creativity.
4. *Personal qualities to oneself* - express the relationship to self. Were selected Self-esteem, Self-control, Courage, Optimism, Adaptability (cf. Hall, Lindzey, 1999; 2002, Čerešník, 2025).

The determination of will action

By describing the personality structure of the social worker, we base on the theory of personality features "The Big Five" - Extraversion (liveliness), Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness (Costa, McCrae, 1985; Deary, Matthews in Armstrong, 2009).

In this sense we reflected on the desirable will attributes necessary to successfully practice. The conative dimension of a social worker's personality is associated to motivation, will and purposeful activity in professional activity. It naturally influences approach to work, ability to cope difficult situations and to help clients effectively.

Research informants in focus group discusions selected the most necessary key *conative dispositions of a social worker. There were*:

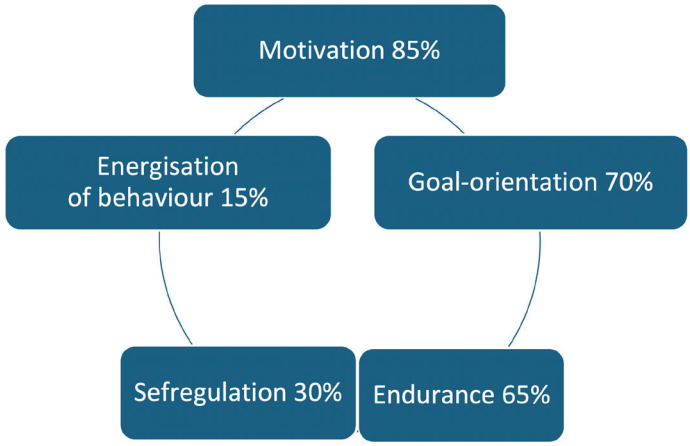
- *Internal motivation* - the need to help others, to improve their life situation.
- *Empathy* and *engagement* - the ability to empathize with the client's situation, without projecting, to actively participate in problem solving.
- *Endurance* and *resilience* - coping with frustration and persevering to achieve positive outcomes despite obstacles.
- *Self-discipline* and *responsibility* - ability to organize work responsibilities, be a reliable partner to clients.
- *Adaptability* and *flexibility* - ability to adjust to changing conditions, respond to individual client needs.
- *Teamwork* - willingness to work with colleagues, other professionals to achieve best results.
- *Ethical values and integrity* - acting in accordance with moral rules, emphasis on fairness, respect for human dignity

Especially in social work, the professional has to expect with overcoming external barriers as well as internal conflicts. The formation conative dimension of a social worker's personality is important in relation to effective and long-term work in this profession. It helps to maintain a balance between personal involvement and professional limits. Determination of will action means that each person's behavior is not random, but is influenced by a variety of factors. Primarily refers to the processes of making decisions and carrying out goal-oriented actions.

Results

Motivation, goal-orientation and endurance were identified in the in all focus groups as essential personality dimensions necessary for the practice of the profession.

Graph 1 The most perceived conative dimensions – ranges



(Source: author's own processing)

They perceived motivation as the most important conative dimension, determined by internal or external factors that encourage individuals to act (e.g., self-actualization, achievement, social recognition). They considered personal beliefs about one's own disposition to help to be essential. The impulse is a strong sense of helping others, founded on the desire to give a helping hand to people in difficult life situations. Also a sense of solidarity and justice. Therefore, we agree with the statement (Slastan et al., 2004), that social worker as advisor helps clients get insight into their attitudes, feelings and ways negotiations. However, personal experience also plays a significant part in motivation if one has gone through difficult life situations oneself, has seen a loved one struggle with psycho-social problems.

We share Hvozdik's (1986) claims that personality formation is actually more or less the shaping of motivational lines and levels, the formation of life goal and the search for the meaning of life. Another important conative dimension is represented by purposefulness or intentionality. Based on the focus group discussions, the ability of the helping professional to set goals and work systematically to achieve them is essential. In addition, participants identified endurance and self-control. They identified it with the social worker's key ability to overcome barriers and regulate impulsive behaviour in favour of long-term goals. In addition, autonomy and self-regulation are also desirable. However, there is a danger that the social worker's decision-making and ability to autonomously manage own behaviour will be affected by interactions with individuals or social groups exposed to significant pressure of society. As a last key dimension, focus group participants included behavioral energization. That is, the engagement with which the Helping person undertakes activities (proactivity vs. passivity), intensity, and dynamism.

Naturally from presented conative dimensions, individual will characteristics are key. In this sense, focus group participants as essential selected a conative quartet individual quality: moral qualities, social qualities, work qualities, and qualities expressing a relationship with the self. Research participants highlighted a significant relationship between character qualities and required skills in a social worker.

Discussion and conclusion

The advantage of qualitative research investigation is the generation of new hypotheses, new understanding, and the creation of theory. The regularity of the data that we have gathered are a guarantee of validity (Masaryk, 2021).

According to the research study *'Conative Dimension of Attitude: An Investigation on Student Influencing Stimuli in Decision-Making*

Processes', among the physical, psychological, social and virtual factors that influence students' decision-making in choosing a university, the influence of virtual factors on students' decision-making resonates the most (Lixandru, Măiță, Shuleski, 2024). In the context of our research reflection, the interest in study social work is primarily associated with internal motivation. Virtual and marketing appeals had only a partial influence on their decisions.

Honzák (2022) points out that members of the helping professions invest much more in their work than just knowledge and skills. They invest a part of their personality. Especially co-

Table 1 Perception of character qualities as necessary dispositions of an erudite social worker

Personality features of the conative dimension	Participants bachelor level undergraduate education/ full-time form	Participants bachelor level undergraduate education/ external form	Participants Master's level undergraduate education/ full-time form	Participants Master's level undergraduate education/ external form
Moral qualities	X	X		
Social characteristics	X	X	X	X
Working qualities			X	
Relationship to oneself				X

(Source: author's own processing)

Table 2 Perceptions of specific social worker character qualities

Personality qualities that need social worker	Necessary skill/ frequency/ **almost always**	Necessary skill/ frequency/ **often**	Necessary skill/ frequency/ **sometimes**	Necessary skill/ frequency/ **rarely**
Patience	X			
Goal-orientation	X			
Responsibility		X		
Endurance	X			
Decisiveness		X		
Initiativite			X	
Consistency			X	
Essentiality		X		
Self-regulation		X		
Autonomy		X		
Creativity			X	
Bravery				X

(Source: author's own processing)

native dimension. Working with people and their sufferings is more demanding than working with non-living material. Empathy along the lines of sharing the client's story and emotions is expected. Reflection that requires authentic personality characteristics of the helping person. The client's surrendered pain may be half, but it should be added that the other half remains in social worker.

Leskova, Mahrik, Janiga (2024) in this sense say, that the human need for acceptance and love is a fundamental and enduring aspect of the human experience, persisting throughout the lifespan.

The conative dimension of personality relates to will, motivation, goal-orientation and the tendency to act. It is a willful extension that corresponds to how one approaches actions, decisions, and problem solving. Conative qualities are different from the cognitive (thinking) and affective (emotional) aspects of personality.

We have created essential social-psychological educational modul, that is need for involment in study programme. It would prepare social work students continously encourage to gain knowlede about themselves. The basic aim of the module is to include training in psychosocial eduacational area. Selected the most repeated narratives from research informants:

Motivation – *„We think, that is needed an internal or external force that stimulates behavior and decisions. The most important element in relation to the social work profession. "*

Willpower and self-discipline scored lower in the focus group participants' ratings. However, this was mainly because, of the qualities offered, goal-orientation more significantly expressed the helping intervener's priority in the sense of goal setting and systematic orientation. Research informants share:

The initiative – „It is necessary the ability to act and take professional responsibility without the requirement for external impulses. Sensitively guiding the client, courage and decisiveness. Quick and effective decisions. "

Endurance – „We perceive as a great disposition, willingness to continue to act despite barriers and failures. "

Autonomy – „Social worker must possess the ability to act independently without the need for continuous guidance. "

Adaptability – „Necessity to handle difficult situations. Flexibility to adapt to new situations and challenges. "

Berry (2009) points out that conative dimension of personality is often studied in work psychology. Most often in the context of motivation and self-development, as they are closely connected to an individual's efficiency and effectiveness. We can say it depends from a special individual conative mechanism that plays an important role in the formation of a psychologically personality resilience. Is the consciousness of self-efficacy, the subjective idea of one's own ability to control and manage one's own life. This is a key element of a mature personality.

Self-efficacy beliefs are associated with successful coping with difficulties and stress, health-enhancing behaviors, and better handling of cognitive tasks (Thorova, 2015).

Blatný and Plháková (2003) indicate that the conative component of personality is closely connected with self-regulation, i.e. the ability to control one's behaviour, emotions and thoughts in order to achieve goals. The results of the research study confirmed that participants' reactions to their own human behaviour can be material or evaluative. Material ones motivate the individual, for example, to engage in activities would not otherwise do or would prefer to avoid them. In the case of interest in the social work profession, the evaluative reaction, which is just associated with self-regulation, is particularly exposed. It brings the satisfaction of maintaining certain human and social standards and one's own self-esteem.

Used content analysis through focus goups in social-psychological optics reflects finding the so-called ideal identity in the personality of the help person. It is characterized by a deep understanding of one's own person, flexibility, an active approach to life, a perception of one's own effectiveness and resilience to social pressures. Aimed narratives showed: *„Social workers need positive self-perception, communication skills, self-confidence, the ability to make realistic plans, and an interest in new and professional experiences predetermine the development of the*

helping professional. "So the results of our research study concerning the appropriate conative dispositions of a social worker can be identified with Jung's personality typology. The personality need have some preferences. Relationship to other people, disposition to gather, convenient evaluate informations and make decisions base on understanding (Armstrong, 2009).

We agree with statement Svatošová (2011) that te helping professional has to own himself. We think its necessary to achieve this elementary conative level for encouraged prosocial guided helping action. In addition group discussions evaluted the basic imperativ about specific conative dimension erudite social worker: *„The most important is avoid a restrictive relation with the client! "In* intervention engagement of social worker, should apply the principle of moderation. The extremes of compulsive helping packaged in self-offering for the client, taking responsibility for solving his own problems, as well as a superficial helping exposure, are a manifestation of a low coefficient of the conative dimension of personality. Moderation is a fundamental character quality in professional engagement, accompanied by a continuity of erudite and pro-social action. At the same time the helping professional must focus on the self in order to be able to use all the positive dimensions of one's own existence (personality entity) for the client. Moderation leads the helping professional to apply help in a balanced measure in the right way.

From this reason is important to enhance the hours of practical education in confrontation with the client of social work. Trainings aimed at self-awareness, self-regulation and endurance. This is an essential element in the development of the ability to regulate one's own behaviour with a helping accent towards the social work client. In addition, informal team building and burnout prevention programs are important in support mental health, also volunteering activities that help internal setting for long-term work in the helping professions.

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