

WORK EFFECTIVENESS FACTORS IN THE OPINION OF SOCIAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES – RESEARCH STATEMENT

Ewa Grudziwska¹, Marta Mikołajczyk²

Abstract: The subject of the analysis presented in this paper are work effectiveness factors in the opinion of social workers and probation officers. The research was conducted among 121 persons: 64 probation officers executing judgments in family and minors related cases, and 57 social workers. The method of a diagnostic survey was applied during the research. The results show that 62.5% of probation officers consider their work effectiveness as moderate and 31.2% consider their work effective when 64.9% of social workers consider their work moderately effective and 31.6% claim their work is effective. Undoubtedly, the effectiveness of work of both probation officers and social workers depends largely - in the opinion of respondents - on their professional experience and skills, good contacts with the local community in which they work or work autonomy, though the high prestige of the profession is not a factor supporting effectiveness of their work. The presented research results can not refer to the entire population of representatives of these two professions, but they indicate further directions of research on the broadly understood professional identity of representatives of social services in Poland.

UDC Classification: 304; **DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.12955/cbup.v6.1217>

Keywords: social service, social work, probation officers, work effectiveness

Introduction

Social services representatives are, among others, probation officers and social workers. Both professions have a few common features. The first common feature is the objective of their activity, usually associated with assistance. According to the Social Welfare Law, the essence of social assistance is providing help to individuals or families in strengthening or regaining abilities of functioning in society by performing correspondent social roles and creating conditions favoring the aforementioned (Article 6, point 12). Though, probation consists in providing help and support in supervised social rehabilitation (which in a broader contexts results in an improved public security), reduction of crime, child rights protection and reduction of social disorders (Wirkus, 2015).

The profile of a supported subject is also a common feature of court guardianship and social work. Regardless of the fact if an individual enters into a conflict with the law or not, they require orientation, a guide, and a coordinator who shall support improvement of the difficult living situation of the individual. Moreover, both the probation officer and the social worker may work with a person, but they need to take into consideration the fact that the person is a member of a broader social system, of a family, a local community.

Representatives of both professions use similar tools (including but not limited to, community interviews, contracts, or motivational conversations) and work according to specified, similar work phases, which (in ideal conditions) are executed as follows: from making the first contact, diagnosis (understood as defining the client's/supervised person's situation), through defining scope and schedule of performance of activities, till completing the intervention. In the end, the professions of probation officers and social workers are regulated professions. It means that there are regulations defining requirements (qualifications, competences) of the persons who want to perform the professions.

The differences between social work and guardianship are: the supervised person's decision and motivation to initiate the assistance process. In the first case the decision is usually voluntary (the client asks for help by themselves and sometimes it is done by others: extended family members, neighbours or adequate services), in the second case the help is imposed (the contact is made as a result of a court judgment). They also have different places of performing their duties. While a social worker usually meets a client in a social welfare centre or at their place of residence or stay (which is regulated by the Regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy regarding family community interview, § 2.3), the probation officer also reaches closed institutions such as penitentiary facilities or juvenile detention centres. It should be emphasized, however, that those who are in trouble with the law can also (and in some cases they even have to) use social assistance. There are also

¹ Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, The Maria Grzegorzewska Pedagogical University, egrudziwska@aps.edu.pl

² Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, The Maria Grzegorzewska Pedagogical University, mmikolajczyk@aps.edu.pl

different definitions of a social worker and probation officer's work subjects. In social welfare and social work, the term of "a client" is used and in guardianship – "a supervised person". Moreover, the circumstances of completing assistance process are different too. A social worker decides with the client, but guardianship can be waived by the court.

Literature review – Efficiency of activities performed by probation officers and social workers

In 2017 in Poland, social assistance centres employed over 55 thousand people, including nearly 20,000 social workers (the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy). In turn, the number of court probation officers in 2015 was estimated at around 5,000 (Dmochowska, 2016). The responsibilities of both professional groups are positively evaluated by the society. According to a report of the Public Opinion Research Center, 70% of respondents recognized a social worker as a profession of public trust (CBOS, 2004), and 96% of those participating in a survey commissioned by the Ministry of Justice confirmed to know the role of a probation officer. Out of them 66% positively assessed their activities (TNS OBOP for the Ministry of Justice, 2011).

Although their prestige is noticeable, social workers and probation officers criticize factors influencing the effectiveness of their work. It needs to be clarified that the effectiveness criterion refers to the relation between the cost and the effects of intervention (Theiss, 2010). It determines the level of "economy" of activities and allows to determine whether the assumed goals were obtained at the lowest cost (Ornacka, 2008). Relatively often, effectiveness is identified with efficacy (Bartkowicz, 2016). This is a mistaken approach, because efficacy is a separate determinant describing whether and to what extent the objectives of impacts have been obtained (Theiss, 2010). Łukasz Kwadrans believes that the expectations of effectiveness and efficacy of probation officers are very extensive. First of all, the society expects appropriate responses to inappropriate behaviour of people who do not comply with the accepted norms; secondly, families, and sometimes even the supported persons expect the desired effect of interactions; and thirdly, the probation officers themselves would like a sense of efficacy and efficiency and tools that would allow them to change attitudes and behaviours in the proceedings of the convict as soon as possible (Kwadrans, 2013). Similar wishes also apply to social workers.

Based on the conclusions of the published research, it can be clearly stated that both probation officers and social workers, in addition to the sense of mission resulting from their profession, are accompanied by quite a big disappointment with their work conditions. Ł. Kwadrans emphasizes that probation officers are the only service that uses their own tools and resources, including cars and mobile phones, to carry out their tasks under the applicable laws. The effectiveness of their actions is reduced moreover by: excessive workload (too few job posts, excessive bureaucracy, disrupted office-field work relation), lack of supervision, small number of trainings, lack of funds for training and developing work skills, and lack of security in dealing with supervised individuals (for example: in 2011, there were 274 cases of physical assault and aggression, and 163 cases of domestic animals attacking probation officers) (Kwadrans, 2013).

Difficulties encountered by social workers while performing their duties can be divided into: resulting from relationships with others, that is, clients, superiors, colleagues, representatives of governmental institutions, self-government and non-governmental institutions (Trawkowska, 2006); formal (changing regulations) and organizational difficulties. The latter, that would seem quite prosaic, significantly limiting the effectiveness of their actions and hence contribute to the lack of job satisfaction. According to Małgorzata Porąbaniec, only 6 out of 132 social workers employed at the Municipal Family Support Center in Kielce felt full satisfaction, 42 were rather satisfied, 44 expressed a sense of non-fulfilment, 35 were dependent on the professional situation, and 10 dissatisfied with it. This was caused, among others by: receiving low salary, lack of recognition for the job or difficult working conditions. The respondents complained about: too many documents to complete, too many client environments, tiring fieldwork, lack of appropriate software, or crowded rooms (Porąbaniec, 2011). In addition, the factors limiting the effectiveness of social workers' work, include as well: poor condition of buildings, lack of office equipment, lack of funds for commuting to clients (Flaszyńska, 2014).

The presented results regarding the effectiveness of social workers 'and probation officers' actions show clear discrepancies between the expectations of both groups and the actual results. For this

reason, it is necessary to conduct a broader analysis on this subject and sensitize decision-makers to the working conditions of the representatives of social services.

Data and methodology

The survey was conducted among 64 professional court probation officers executing family court decisions. The comparative group was made up of 57 social workers working in social assistance centres. The age of the subjects is within 28-59 years. The average age of the respondents is 43 years. 94 women and 27 men were surveyed, whereas in the group of probation officers there were surveyed 57 women and 7 men. All surveyed probation officers had a master's degree, but only 48 social workers had a master's degree and 9 have completed a higher vocational education. Analyzing the work experience of the respondents, in the group of probation officers 11 officers have performed the profession for up to 5 years, 26 people from 6 to 20 years old, while 27 people have a work experience of over 20 years. In turn, among the social workers the most numerous group are people with work experience from 6 to 20 years, i.e. 45 persons. 6 social workers have work experience of over 20 years, and 6 people have worked in the profession for less than 5 years.

The empirical material was collected using the diagnostic survey method, using the questionnaire technique, and an original questionnaire was used as the research tool. Statistical calculations were performed using IBM SPSS, version 24.0.

Results and Discussion

In the first place, the respondents were asked to indicate the factors which in their opinion determine the work effectiveness. Detailed data is presented in Table 1. The respondents could choose more than one answer.

Factors	Probation officers		Social workers	
	N	%	N	%
Extensive work experience	49	76.6	46	80.7
skills and interests	46	71.9	31	54.4
relevant higher education	28	43.7	11	19.3
self-improvement	37	57.8	26	40.6
identification with the performed profession	31	48.4	25	43.6
identification with work place	11	17.2	10	17.5
good relations with colleagues	24	42.1	37	64.9
good relations with superiors	22	34.4	33	57.9
sensitivity to persons in care/clients' issues	26	40.6	30	52.6
independence and autonomy in action	43	67.2	21	36.8
flexible working methods	30	46.9	19	33.3
good contacts with the local community	44	68.7	36	63.1
good economic and housing conditions	13	20.3	13	22.8
aesthetics of the workplace	10	15.6	10	17.5
high prestige of profession	8	12.5	13	22.8

Source: Authors (2018)

Table 2. Factors hindering the performance of professional duties in the opinion of the respondents

Factors		Probation officers		Social workers	
		N	%	N	%
excessive bureaucracy	hindering	56	87.5	49	86.0
	Not hindering	4	6.2	3	5.3
	hard to say	4	6.2	5	8.8
lack of office assistant support	hindering	37	57.8	16	28.1
	not hindering	14	21.9	30	52.6
	hard to say	13	20.3	11	19.3
too many supervised individuals/clients	hindering	49	76.6	35	61.4
	not hindering	9	14.1	13	22.8
	hard to say	6	9.4	9	15.8
no access to business computer/phone	hindering	31	48.4	12	21.0
	not hindering	18	28.1	27	47.4
	hard to say	22	34.4	18	31.6
too low salary	hindering	39	60.9	17	29.8
	not hindering	19	29.7	27	47.4
	hard to say	6	9.4	13	22.8
bad organisation of work at the institution	hindering	30	46.9	37	64.9
	not hindering	16	25.0	4	7.0
	hard to say	18	28.1	16	28.1
lack of work satisfaction	hindering	20	31.2	23	40.3
	not hindering	17	26.6	12	21.0
	hard to say	27	42.2	22	38.6
experiencing stress at the workplace	hindering	16	25.0	22	38.6
	not hindering	22	34.4	15	26.3
	hard to say	25	39.1	20	35.1
lack of means to meet the needs of supervised individuals/ clients	hindering	54	84.4	49	86.0
	not hindering	3	4.7	4	7.0
	hard to say	7	10.9	4	7.0
too large region / area of work that makes it difficult to contact supervised individuals / clients	hindering	59	92.2	51	89.5
	not hindering	3	4.7	1	1.7
	hard to say	2	3.1	5	8.8

Source: Authors (2018)

The surveyed probation officers are of the opinion that the most important factors determining the effectiveness of their work include: extensive professional experience (76.6%), skills and interests (71.9%), good contacts with the local community (68.7%), independence and autonomy in action (67.2%) and self-improvement (57.8%). The lowest impact on the effectiveness of their own professional work, in the opinion of probation officers, is the prestige of the profession (12.5%), aesthetics of the workplace (15.6%) as well as identification with the workplace (17.2%). In turn, the surveyed social workers believe that the most important factors determining the effectiveness of their professional work are: extensive professional experience (80.7%), good relations with colleagues (64.9%), good contacts with the local community (63.1%), skills and interests (54.4%) and sensitivity to the affairs of their clients (52.6%). According to social workers, the efficiency of work is affected in the smallest degree by: identification with the workplace (17.5%), aesthetics in the workplace (17.5%), as well as having a relevant higher education (19.3%).

Further questions asked to the surveyed representatives of social services concerned the identification of factors that in their opinion make it difficult to perform the professional duties entrusted to them. Detailed data is presented in Table 2 the respondents could choose more than one answer.

The data presented in Chart 2 shows that the factors that make it the most difficult for the respondents to fulfil their professional duties are - according to probation officers: too large work area, making it difficult to get in touch with a supervised individual (92.2%), lack of means to meet the needs (material, living, medical) of supervised people (84.4%), too low remuneration (60.9%), too many individuals under supervision (76.6%), excessive bureaucracy (87.5%), and thus no office assistant support (57.8%). While, according to the surveyed social workers, the factors that hinder their work to the highest degree include: too large work area (89.5%), lack of means to meet customer needs (86%) and excessive burden of office work (86%), poor organization of work at the institution (64.9%), and too many clients per one employee (61.4%). A factor which in the opinion of the surveyed probation officers makes it difficult for them to carry out their work, in the lowest degree, is experiencing stress at the workplace (34.4%), while social workers indicated: no office assistant support (52.6%), no access to the business telephone or computer (47.4%) and too low remuneration - 47.4%. It is worth noting that the surveyed representatives of social services could not unequivocally determine whether the lack of job satisfaction makes it difficult for them to perform their professional duties.

The next question concerned the assessment of the effectiveness of their professional work by the representatives of the social services. Detailed data is included in Table 3.

Work effectiveness	Probation officers		Social workers	
	N	%	N	%
definitely effective	1	1.6	1	1.7
effective	20	31.2	18	31.6
moderately effective	40	62.5	37	64.9
non-effective	1	1.6	1	1.7
definitely non-effective	2	3.1	-	-

Source: Authors (2018)

62.5% of probation officers assessed their professional work as moderately effective, while less than 1/3 of respondents think that their work is effective. Only 4.7% of the surveyed group of probation officers believe that their work is ineffective. Among social workers, less than 65% of respondents considered their work as moderately effective and 31.6% consider their work as effective. Only one of the surveyed social workers stated that their professional work does not bring the expected results.

The last issue that the respondents were to address is the assessment of professional expectations in the context of the effectiveness of the performed work. A detailed distribution of results is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Evaluation of professional expectations and effectiveness of actions in the opinion of respondents

Professional expectations		Probation officers		Social workers	
		N	%	N	%
Intellectual	I highly appreciate the possibilities of expanding my knowledge in the institution in which I work	37	57.8	31	54.4
	I do not have large opportunities to expand my knowledge	24	37.5	21	36.8
	The necessity to constantly update my knowledge is a time-consuming duty for me	3	4.7	5	8.7
Prestigious	I am highly motivated to get professional promotion and social prestige	25	39.1	10	17.5
	I am moderately motivated to get professional promotion and social prestige	35	54.7	35	61.4
	Social prestige in the profession that I do is impossible to achieve	4	6.2	12	21.0
Moral	I strive to achieve the acceptance of my superiors and colleagues	24	37.5	28	49.1
	The recognition and favour of my superiors and colleagues is indifferent to me	25	39.1	19	33.3
	I do not expect recognition and favor from my superiors and colleagues	15	23.4	10	17.5
Social	I especially strive for friendliness and friendship of my colleagues. because it is indispensable at work	36	56.2	41	71.9
	I am not seeking to maintain friendly relations in the workplace	27	42.2	16	28.1
	I avoid entering into friendly relationships at work	1	1.6	-	-
Creative	I strive to share my work observations and analyzes related to supervised individuals / clients with my colleagues	56	87.5	48	84.2
	Conducting observations and analyzes in my work is not a special value for me	7	10.9	8	14.0
	Conducting observations and analyzes in my work is indifferent to me	1	1.6	1	1.7

Source: Authors (2018)

In the field of intellectual professional expectations, both surveyed probation officers and social workers believe that the institution in which they work provides them with the opportunity to expand their knowledge at a very high degree. When it comes to expectations regarding professional prestige, representatives of both professional groups are of the opinion that their motivation to gain professional prestige and promotion is moderate. Recognition and favor of supervisors and associates is indifferent to 39.1% of surveyed court probation officers, while nearly half of social workers are more likely to seek acceptance and favor on the part of people with whom they cooperate and their supervisors - 49.1%. Social expectations are particularly important for representatives of both probation officers (56.2%) and social workers (71.9%). Only one of the surveyed probation officers avoids entering into a friendly relationship at the workplace. Regarding creative expectations determining the effectiveness

of work, probation officers (87.5%) and social workers (84.2%) strive to share their observations and conclusions from work with their colleagues.

The obtained research results show that probation officers consider the effectiveness of their own professional work as moderate, with a tendency to positively perceive their professional work. Similar results were obtained by K. Gogacz (2012) and A. Witkowska-Paleń (2008), whereas now a greater percentage of probation officers assess their work as effective. Factors which, according to the surveyed persons, hinder the performance of professional duties are above all excessive bureaucratization, too many supervised individuals, lack of office assistant support, too large of a work area, too low salary and lack of access to a business phone or computer and poor organization of work at the institution. In turn, among the factors determining the effectiveness of professional work, the surveyed probation officers indicated, among others, professional experience, skills, independence and autonomy in action, good contacts with the local community and self-improvement. Expectations of the respondents regarding the effectiveness of their work show that it is important for them to have good relationships with colleagues, the opportunity to share their knowledge and reflections related to their work, as well as the opportunity to expand knowledge necessary to perform professional duties.

Conclusion

Work effectiveness is an extremely important part of the professional functioning of representatives of social services, in particular of probation officers and social workers, because it directly contributes to work satisfaction and indirectly determines the quality of employees' lives, affects their motivation and commitment to the appointed tasks.

In addition, the effectiveness of work is affected by professional competences, which include both those related to education as the competences related to skills that will allow to perform professional duties. The respondents indicated their significant role.

Whether the performed work brings positive, and above all, lasting results is important for those under the supervision of the probation officer, as well as for the social welfare clients (in relation to social workers) and the whole society. In relation to social rehabilitation, work effectiveness is most often analyzed in the context of the criterion of the criminal recidivism rate, positive motivational changes and positive participation in social life are definitely less frequently considered, while almost no attention is paid to the organization of the work, the expectations of social service representatives, issues related to remuneration or the working conditions (excessive bureaucratization, too many supervised individuals / clients, etc.).

References

- Bartkowicz, Z. (2016). Skuteczność resocjalizacji – w kręgu drażliwych pytań. *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, T.XXXV, Z.2, 45-53. DOI: 10.17951/lrp.2016.35.2.45.
- Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej. (2004). Opinia społeczna na temat zawodów zaufania publicznego, komunikat z badań, BS/73/2004, Warszawa, Retrieved from http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2004/K_073_04.PDF
- Dmochowska, H., (2016). Mały rocznik statystyczny GUS. Warszawa: Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych.
- Flaszyńska, E. (2014). Problemy służb społecznych – wnioski z rozmów z pracownikami socjalnymi. W: M. Sędzicki, *Pomoc w praktyce. O różnych wymiarach wsparcia* (34-40). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Gogacz, K. (2012). Różnicowanie oddziaływań resocjalizacyjnych społecznych kuratorów sądowych a efektywność dozorów probacyjnych. Radom: Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa w Radomiu.
- Kwadrań, Ł. (2013). Oczekiwane efekty resocjalizacyjne a rzeczywiste możliwości oddziaływania kuratorów sądowych. *Polish Journal of Social Rehabilitation*, 4, 275-287.
- Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, Statystyki pomocy społecznej, Statystyka za 2017 rok, Retrieved from <https://www.mpips.gov.pl/pomoc-spoeczna/raporty-i-statystyki/statystyki-pomocy-spoecznej/>
- Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości (2011), Raport końcowy z badania opinii publicznej, Wizerunek wymiaru sprawiedliwości, ocena reformy wymiaru sprawiedliwości, aktualny stan świadomości społecznej w zakresie alternatywnych sposobów rozwiązywania sporów oraz praw osób pokrzywdzonych przestępstwem, Raport przygotowany przez TNS OBOP dla Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości, Retrieved from https://www.ms.gov.pl/Data/Files/_public/foto/ministerstwo_sprawiedliwosci_raport-koncowy.pdf
- Ornacka, K. (2008). Rola ewaluacji w pomocy społecznej, w: J. Staręga-Piasek, A. Hryniewicka, *O potrzebie ewaluacji w pomocy społecznej* (21-44). Warszawa: Instytut Rozwoju Służb Społecznych.
- Porąbaniec, M. (2011). Pracownik socjalny – urzędnik czy profesjonalista. W: J. Szymanowska, *Ewaluacja w pracy socjalnej. Badania, kształcenie, praktyka* (395-415). Kraków: Impuls.

Rozporządzenie Ministra Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z 25 sierpnia 2016 w sprawie rodzinnego wywiadu środowiskowego, Poz. 1406.

Theiss, M. (2010). Kryteria ewaluacji. W: B. Szatur-Jaworska, *Ewaluacja w służbach społecznych (45-60)*. Warszawa: Mazowieckie Centrum Polityki Społecznej.

Trawkowska, D. (2006). Portret współczesnego pracownika socjalnego. Studium Socjologiczne. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk.

Ustawa z 27 lipca 2001 o kuratorach sądowych Dz. U. z 2017 r. poz. 60.

Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 o pomocy społecznej, Dz. U. z 2017 r. poz. 1769.

Wirkus, Ł. (2015). *Stres w pracy kuratora sądowego. Studium teoretyczno – empiryczne*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Impuls.

Witkowska-Paleń A. (2008). *Instytucja społecznego kuratora sądowego w opinii osób pełniących funkcję kuratora: na podstawie badań wśród kuratorów społecznych w Sądach Rejonowych w Tarnobrzegu, Nisku i Stalowej Woli*. Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II.