



Original research article

Mandated work duties of students: situational analysis of the actors involved

Marie Špiláčková^{1*} , Veronika Mia Racko¹ , Karla Pobucká¹ , Iva Tichá² ,
Věra Malík Holasová¹ , Pavlína Rabasová²

¹ University of Ostrava, Faculty of Social Studies, Department of Social Work, Ostrava, Czech Republic

² University of Ostrava, Faculty of Social Studies, Department of Health and Social Studies, Ostrava, Czech Republic

Abstract

Purpose: To comprehensively analyze the work duties of students from the Faculty of Social Studies at the University of Ostrava during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the perspectives and discourses of those involved in managing the crisis.

Methods: Interpretive paradigm, qualitative strategies, situational analysis, questionnaire survey, semi-structured interview.

Results: The result is a presentation of the discourses of different actors involved in the students' work duties. The students felt dissatisfaction with their work duty and valued the experience gained. The public administration authorities perceived inconsistency in the practices between the political subdivisions and appreciated the students' motivation to help. Social service organisations pointed out an absence of a crisis management methodology.

Conclusion: Social work educators should prepare students for mandatory work duties during crises or emergencies, such as at that time ongoing pandemic. They should also offer compulsory elective courses that introduce students to nursing activities needed during work duties, such as general care, meal preparation, and communication with clients. Recommendations for social service organisations and public administration should focus on crisis management and mentoring.

Keywords: COVID-19 in the Czech Republic; Situational analysis; Social work; Student; Work duty

Abbreviations:

CP – Communication Partner; FSS – Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ostrava; MSR – Moravian-Silesian Region; S – Student

Introduction

The submitted paper aims to explore and analyze the work duty of students from the Faculty of Social Studies at the University of Ostrava (FSS UO) during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the autumn of 2020. The focus is on the Moravian-Silesian Region (MSR NUTS 3). The analysis is conducted from the perspective of the key actors involved in addressing the pandemic. These include FSS UO students assigned to work duty, the MSR as the assigning authority, and social service providers where the work duty was implemented. The study also examines the discourses of these actors in the given situation.

Davis and Mirick (2021) note that the pandemic created a great demand for social workers and emphasise the importance of social work, a profession that co-creates a safety net for individuals and communities. At the same time, Wahlquist (2020) points out that social workers do not have to take on disproportionate risks.

The urgent situation required crisis management by the relevant public administration authorities to manage possible critical situations. The Czech government initiated cooperation with ministries, regions, cities, municipalities, and employers, and adopted anti-epidemic measures.

In March 2020, the Czech Government declared a state of emergency for the first time (according to Articles 5 and 6 of Constitutional Act No. 110/1998 Coll., on the Security of the Czech Republic) and adopted further emergency measures. Among other things, this had an impact on the provision of social services, and the health and social care sector came under the greatest pressure. The situation gradually worsened to the point where the Czech Government restricted visits and closed some social service facilities. Outreach, outpatient, and respite social services, such as day care centres, started facing restrictions (MoLSA, 2020b). Procházka (2020), however, also points to the positive circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Horecký (2021) suggests that social service managers became crisis managers within a short period of time. Care workers were often affected by the COVID-19 virus or quarantine,

* **Corresponding author:** Marie Špiláčková, University of Ostrava, Faculty of Social Studies, Department of Social Work, Českobratrská 16, 702 00 Ostrava, Czech Republic; e-mail: marie.spilackova@osu.cz
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and the care system was overburdened (Horecký and Švehlová, 2021). Lack of staffing made it difficult to provide standard quality care. There was an increased demand for volunteers and other auxiliary staff in social services.

During the state of emergency, the work duty and assistance was announced for the first time in April 2020, according to Section 2 of Act No. 240/2020 on Crisis Management (hereinafter Crisis Management Act). According to the Crisis Management Act, work duty means *“an obligation of a natural person to perform for the necessary period of time the specified work that is necessary for the resolution of an emergency situation, and that these persons are assigned to perform in the place designated by the crisis management authority and, according to the needs for the resolution of the emergency, beyond the business hours specified in the labour legislation”*.

The work duty was imposed on full-time college and university students in the fields of education according to Section 110 (4a) and 4b) of Act. No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services, as amended, and on secondary school students in the fields of education according to Appendix 4 of Decree No. 505/2006 Coll., implementing certain provisions (Act No. 240/2000 Coll.; MoLSA, 2020a).

The mandated work duty was not always perceived and evaluated positively; its implementation had many downsides for all involved.

Kopecký (2020) points out that part of the responsibility for the confusion and chaos associated with the mandated work duty falls on the government. Imposing the work duty ensured staffing (especially in hospitals), but the government did not focus on further methodological management. This led to an inconsistent approach across different regions and facilities utilizing the work duty, as well as uncertainty for students.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, university students were exposed to psychological, social, socio-economic, and health effects. The psychological influences included worrying about oneself and especially about one's family (of infection and death). This is also mentioned by Garrett (2009), who considers worrying about family safety to be the most significant factor in reducing employees' desire to work. For social influences, there was a lack of social interaction (home quarantine, social isolation, impact of online forms of learning). Socio-economic influences included loss of income and change in living standards. There was a reduction in earning opportunities (reduction of part-time jobs, part-time work, etc.). Health influences included a lack of exercise, weight gain, reduced physical fitness, and health complications (Čermáková et al., 2020). Inclusion and involvement in work duties multiplied the aforementioned risks and uncertainties.

Jouza et al. (2020) observed that healthcare facility management had to continuously adapt to changing conditions, particularly in legislation, affecting both the provision of care and human resources management. This assertion was also true for social service facilities where the emergency situation affected both staff and social work students.

Research design

Situational analysis was chosen for the research framework, which today is also applied in social-science and educational research (Kalenda, 2016). Glumbíková (2020) notes that the reason for the emergence of situational analysis is the absence of situational aspect in the phenomena studied by classical grounded theory. The collected data are set in the context of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The authors' team approached data collection with a pre-conceived understanding of previous research on the im-

pact of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interview questions were formulated based on the published research (see peer-reviewed chapter: Špiláčková et al., 2022). All procedures in studies involving human participants were performed in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The research participants consented to the publication of the results in accordance with the conditions of the informed consent process.

Data sources

The data collection tool included expert interviews with deliberately and purposefully selected participants to address the issue of work duty in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewees included a representative from the Social Affairs Division of the Regional Authority of the Moravian-Silesian Region, who was part of the team managing and coordinating the work duty. Additionally, students from Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral programs at FSS UO, who participated in the work duty between 2019 and 2022, were also interviewed. The representatives of social service organisations were purposely selected, the main criterion being the number of students who undertook their work duty (for demographics, cultural information, and perspectives of the participants see Table 1).

Data collection

The first stage of the research was carried out in November 2020 through a qualitative survey of young adult students. This was administered online using Microsoft Forms software. An offer to participate in the survey was sent to students via a university email with a link to the questionnaire (those interested were made aware of the voluntary and anonymous nature of the research). The total number of completed questionnaires, and therefore communication partners, was $n = 11$.

Table 1. Characteristics of communication partners

(1) Role of actor/actress	(2) Organisation/Institution	(3) In-text abbreviation
(4) Social and legal protection officer for children	(5) Moravian-Silesian Region	(6) CP1-MSR
(7) Head of Social Services	(8) Social Rehabilitation Centre	(9) CP2-Social service organisation
(10) Director of the organisation	(11) Home for the elderly	(12) CP3-Social service organisation
(13) Director of the organisation	(14) Home for the elderly	(15) CP4-Social service organisation
(16) Student	(17) FSS	(18) CP5-S
(19) Student	(20) FSS	(21) CP6-S
(22) Student	(23) FSS	(24) CP7-S
(25) Student	(26) FSS	(27) CP8-S
(28) Student	(29) FSS	(30) CP9-S
(31) Student	(32) FSS	(33) CP10-S
(34) Student	(35) FSS	(36) CP11-S
(37) Student	(38) FSS	(39) CP12-S
(40) Student	(41) FSS	(42) CP13-S
(43) Student	(44) FSS	(45) CP14-S
(46) Student	(47) FSS	(48) CP15-S

Merit information from actors participating in addressing the issue (communication partners) was obtained in the second stage of the research (May to July 2022) through semi-structured interviews. Within these groups of questions, we created a core interview, on which several additional topics and questions were subsequently “snowballed” (Ferjenčík, 2010; Miovský, 2006).

Before the start of the research, all communication partners were informed about the research topic and its purpose (intention). The main principles of ethical conduct in the research included obtaining informed consent (Hendl, 2016).

The third stage of the research served to support the saturation and validation of the data collected (this was achieved through the cyclical nature of the research, specifically through the technique of feedback from communication partners when looking into and authorising the interview transcripts). Emphasis was also placed on triangulation, which was fulfilled by the triangulation of researchers/interpreters and communication partners (a specific coder was determined for the communication partners (1) students; (2) representatives of the Moravian-Silesian Region, and (3) representatives of social service organisations); and also by triangulation of data collection techniques (online qualitative questionnaire survey, face-to-face interviews). Data analysis and data interpretation followed.

Data analysis

The research design of situational analysis allows for the development of qualitative research on the impacts of the pandemic on the education of social work students – which is undersized and inadequately developed in the Czech Republic.

The analysis process included verbatim transcription of the data, followed by standard open coding, selective coding, and axial coding. The transcribed material was analysed using MAXQDA 2022® qualitative data analysis software. During the analysis, a memo-writing technique was used to record analytical ideas, questions, and thoughts related to the participant statements (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007).

Thanks to this practice, it is possible to both preserve the complexity of the studied environment and not unnecessarily extract the studied phenomenon from it (Glumbíková, 2020). The following relational map reflects the work duty during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fig. 1). This map captures all the key elements involved in constructing narratives about the work duty during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. It illustrates the complexity of the environment studied and serves as the basis for analyzing the collected data. Overall, eight thematic categories emerged from the analyses, which are interpreted in detail below.

Results

The first wave of the pandemic as an experience base for strategy adaptation

During the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, actors were already using the experience gained during the first wave to develop strategies on how to effectively communicate and organise the work duty. The actors from MSR and social service organisations assessed the cooperation and coordination as adequate to the situation.

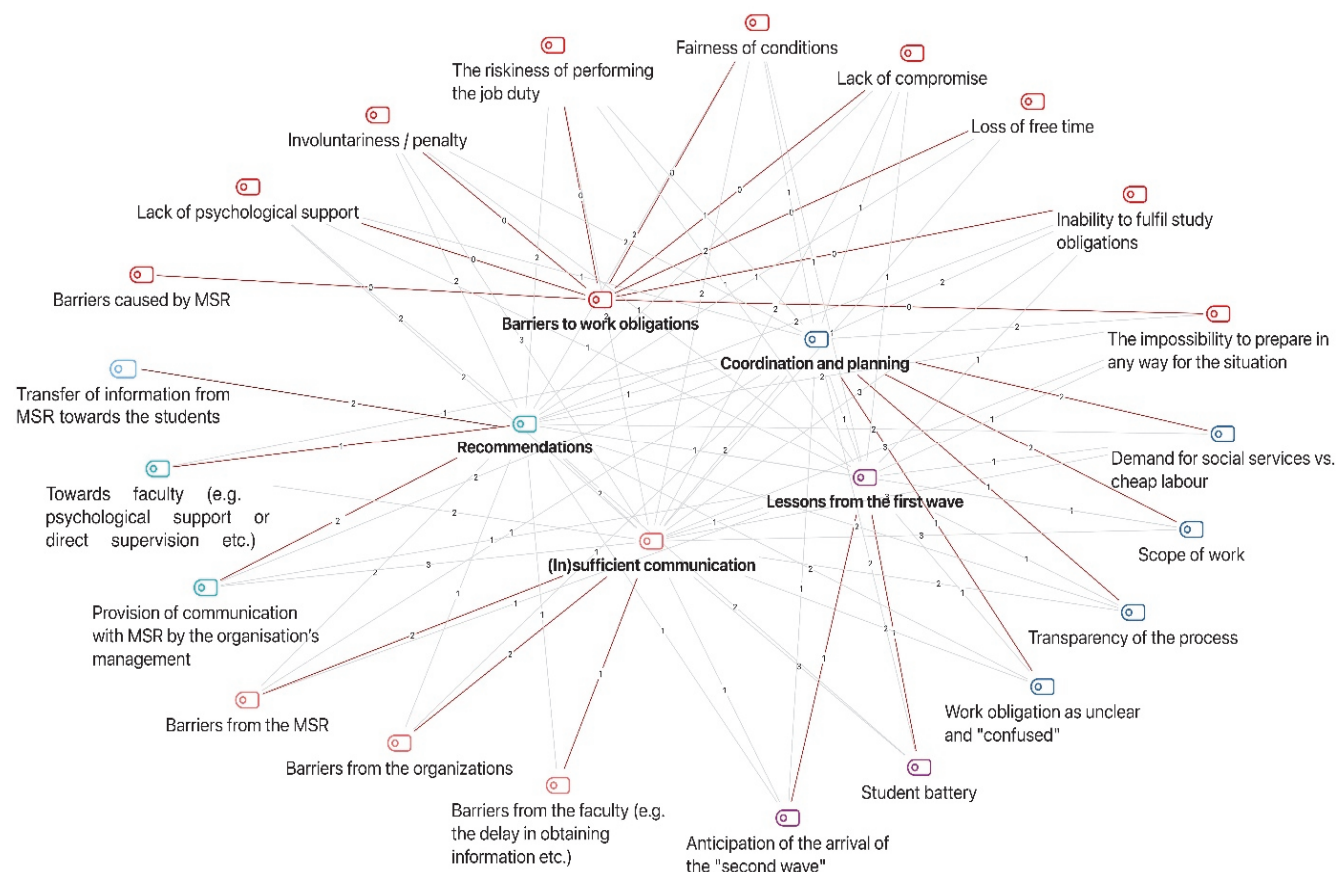


Fig. 1. Relational map of the reflection on work duty during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic

Coordination and planning

One of the differences between the second autumn wave and the first spring wave was an obligation to provide a negative COVID-19 test. The reason for this was understandable, but it significantly delayed each student's start in social services by as long as four days, even though the social services had an acute need for the student. The communication partner, however, applauded the responsibility of the students who were earnestly taking tests. *"I don't think I've even had anybody test positive. Everybody was able to start working, so it worked"* (CP1-MSR). This made the assistance effective and secure for social services. Representatives from social organisations were equally positive about the situation.

The regional authority endeavoured to maintain student involvement in work duties only for the agreed period. Unfortunately, due to the number of students and the associated administration, this was sometimes hard to manage. *"With the high numbers, it was impossible to keep an eye whether they weren't staying longer than absolutely necessary"* (CP1-MSR). There were instances where students themselves called to ask if they were still required to stay on duty as the person they were covering for had already returned. Social service organisations themselves demonstrated a lack of knowledge as to when to stop the work duty. *"Like, in that social service, they didn't know if they should keep them [students] there all the time"* (CP1-MSR). It was all about communication and inquiring in a timely manner.

Students talked about the difficulty of fulfilling their study obligations: *"... some are unable to attend the exam due to their work duty"* (CP9-Student); *"... Work duty has taken away three months of my regular life and the chance to prepare for exams"* (CP12-Student). Thus the regional authority endeavoured to bring students back to their studies, especially in their final years, so that they could manage the preparation in the exam period. The regional authority staff contacted social services to ask if they still needed a particular student or offered to exchange them with another student. *"When we saw that the students of final years were about to come back, whether they were secondary school students, university, or college students, we called the facility to ask if they still needed them; 'do you need new reinforcements... we will arrange for it'... even though it was administratively more demanding, we didn't let them down. MSR made sure those kids could get back to what they're studying"* (CP1-MSR).

The above account was also confirmed by other communication partners, *"... some meeting with a prospective service user and/or some administration, not so much. For us the priority was to provide care, it was more about social activation, being with the person, talking to them, holding their hand, and that presence with the person..."* (CP3- Social service organisation). Students, on the other hand, perceived their work assignment somewhat negatively [see more in the "(In)sufficient communication" section].

Involvement and mobilisation of participants / Student battery

Participant engagement and mobilisation played a key role in the effective planning and coordination of the workload. Following the declaration of the government resolution on the work duty requirement regulation, letters were sent to all universities by the regional authorities and lists of students were requested from all regions across the country. According to the communication partner, this is a common practice. The objective was to obtain lists of students in the affected fields, differentiated by school, field of study, and city. *"Some are divide*

by the region, or we need to filter it, that's administrative stuff" (CP1-MSR).

The division by cities was intended to prevent unnecessary commutes. *"So that, if needed we would not send someone from Hradec to Havířov. But this system was already developed last year"* (CP1-MSR). In addition to the commuting distance to a facility, poor accessibility of the organisation's headquarters also caused difficulties. A positive aspect was the reimbursement of travel costs compared to the first wave: *"They had a sort of a travel order. It was more sophisticated, more refined compared to the spring"* (CP1-MSR).

During the interviews with students, the topic of voluntary involvement in work duties came up. Despite MSR being bound by legislative processes that mandated the work duty, students quite negatively perceived the inability to decide independently whether or not they wanted to perform the work duty. *"Because I started from the very beginning with a feeling of involuntariness, and that the workplace team was not being nice... I felt like I did all the work instead of the employees"* (CP7-Student). Students often mentioned the "threat" of a financial fine if they did not start: *"They definitely shouldn't threaten a CZK 50,000 fine if I don't start"* (CP12-Student).

The statements of the communication partners show that the engagement of male and female students took place on two levels: (1) students were approached by organisations through MSR, (2) students themselves actively contacted organisations with offers of help. *"We were approached by the students, whether the inquiry was from the regional authority or directly, if we needed any help. Essentially, when they reached out, we told them that anytime, if they could come right away, they're welcome to"* (CP2-Social service organisation).

(In)sufficient communication

There was significant variation in participants' accounts regarding the organization of work duty, especially in terms of communication. In this respect, we consider it essential to point out that the discursive positions of the research participants related to the studied situation are crucial for the perception and (self-) reflection of the implementation and "being part of" work duty. To visualize these perspectives, we have used a positional map (see Fig. 2).

According to stakeholders working in social service organisations, the communication with MSR was most intense at the beginning of the implementation of the work duty, and then when a problem or question arose. However, the representatives of the organisations were most often in contact with the FSS UO representatives, because most of the students were recruited for the work duty through the MSR study at the FSS. *"Otherwise, I can't say that any of the educators approached us, asked any questions... I don't think they did at all. Apart from you, who had some questions"* (CP4-Social service organisation).

The ongoing communication with MSR was, according to one communication partner, very flexible. *"At that particular moment, it wasn't like we were waiting for someone to call back... essentially, a table was sent out to be filled in and then the response was that someone would come immediately, and that's what happened"* (CP3-Social service organisation).

Another actor perceived the provision of communication with MSR by the organisation's management as an advantage, while the organisation's representatives did not experience a lack of manpower and therefore addressing work duty, thus they did not consider dealing with the MSR representatives as a key issue. *"We had a lot of support from the management and the head office, which ensured communication with MSR"* (CP3-Social service organisation). According to the communication part-

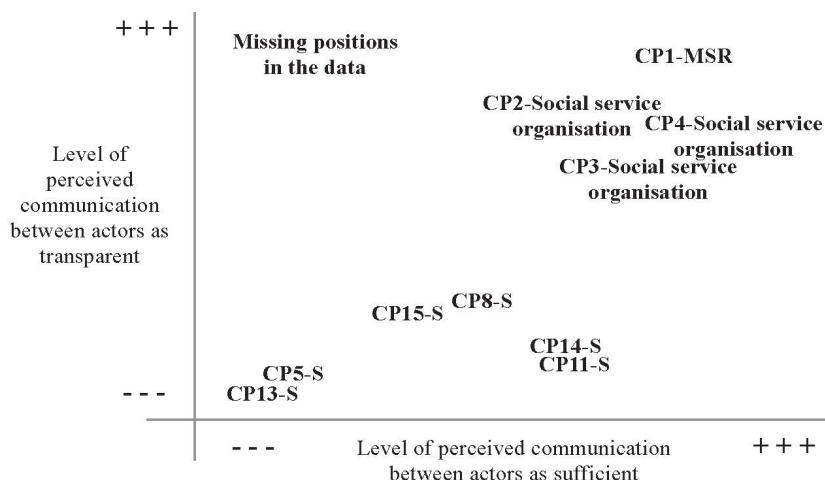


Fig. 2. Position map of discursive perception of actors in relation to communication strategy

ners, the MSR portal was a crucial communication tool. The different organisations had user access to this and their own user accounts. Another important means of communication was via email: "... we sent documents by email. Everything was super fast and concise. The crisis managements were communicating with each other – both the city and the region – so we didn't have a problem with that, and I think it would go a lot faster now" (CP4-Social service organisation).

The students involved had an entirely different perception of the ongoing communication. Communication and transfer of information from MSR to the students was generally incomplete. "Access to information had large gaps, ... I therefore assess the communication as completely dysfunctional, non-transparent, and unfair" (CP13-Student).

When it comes to communication between students and employees of the organisation, according to the communication partners, the work position or function of the employee was what mattered. "The training by the organisation's staff in charge of us was absolutely fine – clear, distinct, there was space for questions and no one was 'afraid to ask'. As for the facility management, there was no room for compromise, the behaviour was directive, unpleasant, debilitating, non-transparent..." (CP13-Student). Students also perceived their job description and workload as "meaningless/nonsensical and useless" (CP5-Student) in terms of compensating for the normal understaffing of the facility.

The MSR representative mentioned the confusion between involving students in work duty and activities typically handled by employment agencies. Social service organisations were informed about the ongoing work duty and were invited to send an inquiry in the form of an affidavit as needed. "The affidavit requirements were tougher this time" (CP1-MSR). The affidavit content was a request for a specific number of students who would not be substitutes for long-term sick leave, but for COVID-19 related sick leave, or for caring for a family member, etc. The demand of social service organisations was high. "We felt that with such a large wave, and such a large demand, we needed to handle it a little bit more" (CP1-MSR). The starting point was always emphasized, that: "students are not cheap labour ... that students cannot be exploited" (CP1-MSR).

Communication partners' replies indicate that they perceived the delay in obtaining information and the failure of Faculty to provide clear instructions or practices as challenging. "Poor communication and nervousness. Students felt in limbo

and 'went' to lecturers for reassurance in their studies and advice. In this case, the Faculty seemed uncertain and gave neutral answers, making students even more nervous" (CP15-Student). On the other hand, students assessed the regular online meetings for each subject course as helpful.

The recommendation of communication partners in this case is to give students a sense of reassurance from the faculty. This is related to the students' statements about insufficient provision of psychological support or direct supervision: "You force but you do not support." "I very much lacked better psychological help and support. The possibility of supervision" (CP11-Student). Although a supervision group of five academics was provided by the faculty, according to some students this offer was easy to be overlooked or underpromoted, "I didn't know there was such a thing. If there was, it was very poorly advertised, and over time everyone has 'forgotten' about it" (CP14-Student).

Discussion

A pandemic is characterised by the occurrence of a disease with a high incidence across a large territory over a certain period of time (Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic was a multidimensional crisis that affected almost all areas of public and private life (public health, economic activity, labour market, education, and public finances). Its scale and response varied across European countries, but also within regions. The primary health crisis evolved into a socio-economic crisis, triggered by efforts to prevent the spread of disease (Duprey, 2020).

We can agree with Kopecký's (2020) claim that the Czech Republic had little experience in dealing with emergencies, but it can be agreed with the MSR representative, that its awareness and experience increased during the second wave. Legislation that had not been used much until then was used to address the coronavirus crisis. The purpose of the mandated work duty was primarily to ensure sufficient human resources in the provision of care in hospitals and social service facilities. The use of the student work duty to deal with the coronavirus crisis is unique, at least on a European scale. The research revealed that the perspectives of different actors, the regional authority representatives, the social service organisations, and the students differ significantly. The work duty had its pitfalls in terms of planning, coordination, and remuneration.

The results of the research focused on the impact of the second wave of the pandemic in autumn 2020. Protective measures such as compulsory testing of staff and volunteers in residential social services, home quarantine of the sick, curfew restrictions, etc., were introduced (Horecký and Švehlová, 2021), as confirmed below by the MSR representative: *"The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed restrictions on education across all disciplines, bringing unique challenges for social work and healthcare professions"* (CSWE, 2020). The spread of coronavirus has affected all educators, including universities.

Research indicated that students would need exceptions, primarily because they feared putting someone in their household at risk. Many students were carrying out their work duties in their place of residence, where they may not have physically lived for a long time, and thus were forced to return, perhaps to their older parents or grandparents. At the same time, students perceived greater psychological stress during the pandemic; not only were they concerned about the health of loved ones and family, but they also experienced an absence of social contact, etc. (Kohls et al., 2021). Anxiety, depression, boredom, and anger were among the common symptoms (Chew et al., 2020). The FSS UO students reported that they were unable to adequately prepare for their academic obligations and attend their exams. The MSR officers described an effort to return students to their studies as soon as possible. Students were entitled to monetary compensation for their work duty, according to the recommended procedure by MoLSA (2020a): *"If it is the performance of work duty for which the amount of compensation cannot be determined by agreement or by the procedure under the Civil Code, compensation shall be set at an amount corresponding to the usual wage for the same or similar work"*, yet the majority of students perceived the financial remuneration as insufficient.

Several problems were encountered in relation to the performance of work duties, many of which correspond to Kopecký's (2020) research, with significant agreement in the aforementioned areas of the place of performance of work duty, inability to perform study duties, and lack of information. There was a very significant agreement of FSS students with the published output of Kopecký (2020) and also of Vrátná (2020) in the area of job description, where students perceived their workload as not matching their qualifications (for example: cleaning and disinfecting premises), and also perceived disrespectful treatment and communication barriers. The daily work of the students consisted of daily care of clients, which included, among other things, delivering and serving meals, personal hygiene assistance, including bathing, positioning, disinfecting surfaces, changing linen and bedding and, of course, personal communication with the clients, who were often feeling lonely due to the ban on family visits.

Due to the substantial spread of the disease among the facility staff, students also performed work that was not directly within their competence. The representatives of the organisations agreed that the students' job description was based on the priority of providing direct care to clients, which was not in line with the students' perceptions. Furthermore, the representatives of the organisations emphasised that students faced the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic head-on, and were competent in helping clients, even though they experienced many problems and faced crises in their personal lives. At the same time, this likely brought to the surface their motivation for the helping profession (Morris et al., 2020). It is conceivable that, in practice, students may also be required to provide direct care to clients outside of pandemic periods – and this could be a subject for specific research.

In contrast to Kopecký's (2020) published output, the FSS students did not mention the confusion around remuneration taxation and social security contributions as an issue.

According to Truhlářová et al. (2021), there was a student mobilisation, with the state shifting the unmanaged pandemic onto the shoulders of students in social and health. This is also mentioned by Kopecký (2020), who attributes "blame" to the state for a number of uncertainties surrounding students' work duty. Thus, in their statements, students refer to "confusions and chaos" that arose from the inconsistent actions of all the actors involved.

From the point of view of the representatives of social service organisations at the beginning of the dissemination of COVID-19, there was no methodological regulation of the functioning and crisis management of social services during the pandemic. Social service providers were called upon by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) to update their crisis plans and practices in emergency situations. MoLSA issued recommended procedures and guidelines (Lusková, 2020a; MoLSA, 2020a). According to Kliment and Nádvorníková (2020), crisis management of social work and social services performance was guided by experiences from abroad, models from literature and other professions. The coronavirus crisis necessitated the introduction of across-the-board regulatory measures (closure or restriction of social services, bans on visits, introduction of anti-epidemic measures, etc.) in rapid succession, which led to the emergence of new emergency situations among direct care workers in social services and social workers. The communication of social service organisations with MSR was perceived as flexible in the context of this crisis situation, which for larger organisations was covered by the organisation's management.

Davis and Mirick (2021) point out that social work organisations did not include internship students in their crisis plans during the pandemic and did not have plans in case of disruption of student internships. The interview with the MSR representative suggested that such a document could serve as an implementation guideline for work duty. Absence can cause various difficulties (lack of coordination, students not being utilised to the maximum, lack of staff...).

The survey by Kliment and Nádvorníková (2020) showed that there were concerns, uncertainty, and fear among both social workers and clients. There was an absence of crisis management methodology at the level of social service provider organisations. Social service workers drew information from central (government) level, regional sources, and/or professional associations.

Based not only on our research results, it is evident that health and social risk during a pandemic are intertwined, and that quality crisis management and effective crisis communication are essential. Crisis situations in organisations require effective management that includes professional trust, accuracy, mutual cooperation, and timely decision-making. Crisis management introduces new work teams, carries out situation analyses, and implements short-term measures. It is characterised by shortened decision-making, elimination of hierarchy, and the application of a crisis budget (Šefčík et al., 2009).

The aftermath of the pandemic has been felt by most social service providers and their clients. The adverse effects of the pandemic are still present today. On the other hand, according to the the Open Society Fund (OSF) survey in the Czech Republic, the pandemic also brought positive moments for NGOs. Many organisations have expanded or streamlined the ways in which staff work, improved communication within the organisation, explored new topics and directions for the

organisations' activities, and established new collaborations. Many organisations have also streamlined and expanded communication with clients (OSF, 2021). A major positive that we have perceived from the research is making the content of social workers' work visible to the public and, at the same time, an increase in the social prestige and importance of the social work profession.

Hopefully, over time it will be possible to assess to what extent the mandating of the work duty to students was necessary and whether sufficient staffing in the exposed facilities could have been ensured by other, less invasive (i.e., especially labour legislation) instruments (Kopecký, 2020). Representatives of the MSR and social service organisations agree that it would be good to work with volunteers in future crises.

Conclusion

The results of our research show that the situation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on the lives of students, clients and social service organisations, as well as educators and government authorities. The public has also had the opportunity to experience the social work profession more closely through the media and/or personal experience. This experience offers an opportunity to reflect on the process of managing the situation at the societal level and to draw conclusions for the birth of more sophisticated and effective practices and recommendations for dealing with such emergencies.

Concrete recommendations for social work educators can be categorised in two areas. The first is to prepare students for the fact that the mandating of work duty within a crisis or emergency situation may occur – and what this entails. The ongoing pandemic is a good example of this. Next, it is the offering of compulsory elective courses and topics in which students would be introduced to nursing activities that seemed to be most needed during the work duty, namely general hygienic care of the client, preparation and serving of meals, communication with the client, etc.

The interconnection between subjects and courses, along with opportunities for students to practice complex scenarios in simulation centers, training apartments, and through virtual reality, is crucial. Additionally, providing students with a brief course on basic theoretical and practical skills for direct client care during emergencies is also important. The promotion of volunteering within the studies is also an important element.

The second area of concrete recommendation to social work educators is the actual implementation process of the work duty. Here it seems necessary to ensure that there is sufficient awareness of its implementation for both students and particular subject/course teachers. The teachers would then create individual conditions for combining the students' study and work duties within the work duty. Furthermore, they would offer students participating in work duty opportunities for psychological support and supervision. A case in point is the university counselling centre and its specialised services, which constitute a concrete solution. The above recommendations are in line with the research findings of Špiláčková et al. (2022), which looked at students' experiences of work duty and volunteering during the first pandemic wave in spring 2020.

For social service providers, the focus should be on communication and mentoring. Social service organisations can continuously ensure staff readiness for work with students.

Training opportunities in mentoring and communication skills development should be encouraged in workplaces. In an emergency, staff should prepare for a possible influx of students in the workplace, and explicitly define the type and scope of work that staff can expect students to perform.

Recommendations for the public administration stem primarily from when and how to communicate or mandate work duty. The focus should be on crisis management, optimisation of crisis plans as part of crisis management, and the administration's management in cooperation between educational institutions, the regional authority, and the state. Subsequently, recommendations should be developed that will result in clear rules and guidelines for effective communication in the context of mandating work duty. For example, a dedicated information portal could be established.

There is a need for system changes in the setup of recommended practices, as well as of control mechanisms to ensure rights and obligations for all stakeholders involved in the emergency

Ethical aspects and conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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