



Original research article

The competencies and practical activities of social workers in Ústecký region in Czechia

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Abstract

Introduction: The main goal of the work is to analyze how social workers identify their specific competencies regarding the general characteristics of the workplace and how they subjectively evaluate their abilities and capabilities to fulfill these competencies in the Ústecký region in Czechia.

Methods: The data were obtained from a combined convenience online and paper-pencil survey. Respondents were employees of the 48 social services organizations in the Ústecký region: 101 females and six males. The one-factor analysis of variance comparing means and two non-parametric tests, the Friedman test and Kendall's W test, was employed, as well as Spearman's rank correlation coefficients for data analysis.

Results: The most significant part of the working time of the respondents is devoted to the administration working with clients. Social workers primarily use communication skills and knowledge of social work methods. On the other hand, they use language skills and research methods sparingly. Respondents recognize the essential skills to solve crises, make quick decisions, and control their emotions. On the other hand, they consider writing project applications, raising money, managing people, and creativity the least necessary skills. The respondents find demanding administration the most difficult. On the other hand, they have the most minor problems with identifying clients' needs, determining the goals and methods to achieve them, and working with clients from different cultural backgrounds. The respondents mostly solve the dilemmas of the number of clients and time constraints of the social worker, as well as practical problem-solving and legislative constraints.

Conclusion: The social workers' activities are divided into administrative and direct work with people. Communication skills and knowledge of social work methods are considered most important for fulfilling professional duties. The possibility of finding quick solutions in a crisis helps them to achieve these duties.

Keywords: Competence; Dilemmas of social work; Skill; Social services; Social work

Introduction

The competence of social workers, the application of the competence approach, and its use in everyday practice is a topic of discussion among experts (Drisko, 2014; Kourgiantakis et al., 2018) and field professionals. The reason may be that if a worker can cope with the requirements of the work position, he or she is competent and capable (Poulin and Matis, 2015); see Scheme 1. Social work competencies are framed by positivist and constructivist theories, including systems theory, psychosocial theory, humanistic theory, psychodynamic theory or social learning theory, social constructivism, and conflict theory (Poulin and Matis, 2019).

The Council on Social Work Education defines social work competencies as “the ability to integrate and apply knowledge, values, and skills into practice in a purposeful, planned, and professional manner to promote human and social well-being” (Barták et al., 2023). It is also important to mention the contribution

of Marion Bogo and her book *Achieving Competencies in Social Work Through Field Education* (Bogo, 2010). Marion Bogo presented the Competency-based evaluation (CBE) Tool (Bogo et al., 2002) that consists of Values and Ethics, different uses of self, Empathy and alliance, Assessment, Intervention Planning and Implementation, Report Writing, and Presentation Skills. It is important to note that this competency assessment framework relates to the education of students in the field of social work, and it is therefore assumed that educated social workers already possess these competencies at a relatively good level.

Performance appraisal of social workers is an important issue. Aburn et al. (2016) published a paper offering a substantive interpretation of the concept of resilience, which they consider to be an essential social worker competency. They see resilience as the ability to “maintain” a healthy outlook and not to carry work issues into everyday life.

Wongphuka et al. (2017) focus on the competencies of social workers practicing social entrepreneurship. They argue

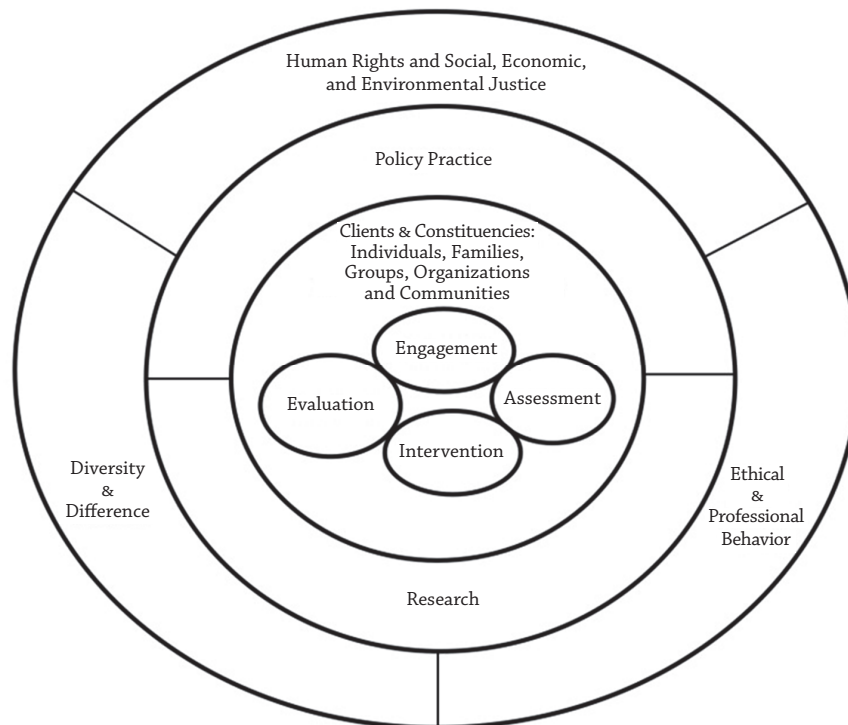
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<http://doi.org/10.32725/kont.2024.030>

Submitted: 2023-09-06 • Accepted: 2024-05-06 • Prepublished online: 2024-05-17

KONTAKT 26/2: 183–190 • EISSN 1804-7122 • ISSN 1212-4117

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Source: Poulin and Matis (2015)

Scheme 1. Competencies of social workers

that the desired competencies in this area are emotional and social intelligence and a sensitive perception of ethics, forming the so-called invisible part of the competencies.

An essential approach in the field of competencies (which originated in the 1980s) is the study of cultural competencies (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). These are increasingly important in social work and have considerable potential in our setting concerning to target groups (e.g., migrants and ethnic minorities).

Another framework for social work competency research and practice is the self-efficacy assessment approach (Holden et al., 2017). In contrast to the above approaches, this approach is comprehensive and does not focus on a selected aspect of competency. The authors use the Self-Efficacy Regarding Social Work Competencies Scale (SERSWCS) instrument to assess social workers' self-efficacy.

This article is based on the concept of competences as defined by Marion Bogo (2010), who emphasizes the so-called meta-competences, i.e., "*cognitive competencies that relate to professional knowledge, relational competencies with people and colleagues, personal and professional competence evident in qualities that facilitate practice in an organizational context and ethics and values and second the procedural, technical and clinical competencies that may be articulated at two levels: generic to the profession, and specific to specialization within the profession*" (Bogo, 2010, p. 74). Later, Marion Bogo (Csiernik and Hillock, 2021) elaborated on the holistic competence model in social work, including skills, knowledge, self-regulation, and judgment.

Given the context of this article, it is also necessary to mention the research on social worker competencies in the Czech Republic. More recent publications include the papers of Čajko Eibicht et al. (2021) that deal with the vital topic of reflectivity as a central attribute of professional competence. The competencies of social workers are also an important topic

in human resources management in social services (Pacáková et al., 2023). The bulk of the research is dedicated to the application of competencies when working with different target groups, e.g., the Roma community (Ondrášek et al., 2023) or people with addiction disorders (Barták et al., 2023).

Materials and methods

Aim

The paper's main objective is to assess the subjective recognition of competencies and subjective perception of practice activities among social workers in the Ústecký region in the Czech Republic.

Study design

The data were obtained from a convenience online and paper-pencil survey. Respondents were employees of the 48 social services organizations cooperating with the researchers' workplace in the frame of the INUL project since 2012. Data collection took place in the first part of 2016. To identify the competence framework in the practice setting, we used questionnaires inspired by the approach of Marion Bogo (2010). We extended and adjusted by a focus group with social workers and a brief behavioral interview (BEI) with social work program graduates. The questionnaires were collected online and in person.

Participants

In terms of sample composition, we obtained answers from 107 social workers (101 females and six males) from the Ústecký region, which corresponds to the general situation in the social sphere in the Ústecký region. If we were to define other

demographic and social aspects, the most numerous categories were workers aged 41 and over – 44 respondents, 36 people represented the category under 30, and 27 participants in the 30 to 40 years group. Regarding education, the requirement regarding the educational level of social workers according to the relevant legislation is already clearly fulfilled in our sample. Therefore, the most represented group includes graduates with a bachelor's degree (58) and a master's degree (19). The structure, according to experience in the social sphere, is rather informative, where the distribution is more or less even:

- Thirty-three respondents had up to 3 years of experience.
- Thirty-five respondents had 4 to 10 years of experience.
- Thirty-seven had over 11 years of experience (2 persons did not provide this information).

Measurements

Socio-demographic variables

The questionnaire contained basic information about the respondents, including age, gender, highest level of education (in social work), year of education, and length of experience in social work.

Work position

We asked questions about the legal form of the organization where the respondents currently work, the main target groups they encounter in social work, overall satisfaction with their work, and participation in continuing professional education.

Independence in social work performance

The next part of the questionnaire included questions about the possibility of making independent decisions as part of their position.

Performed activities, evaluation of individual competencies and their relationship

A few questions were related to the scope of individual activities performed as part of the position. Another part of the questionnaire was devoted to the subjective evaluation of individual competencies and the perceived strengths and weaknesses around competencies and activities.

Data analysis

Data were processed by descriptive and analytical statistical methods using SPSS software. We employed the one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing means and two non-parametric tests: the Friedman test and Kendall's W test. We also used Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, with a significance level 0.05.

Results

Work domains

Work domains are one of the categories that are perceived differently in organizations. By this, we mean that not all organizations regularly review and update the content of their job descriptions. Respondents were presented with a battery of activities that are primarily related to the performance of the job itself, i.e., directly related to the content of the work activity performed. Here, respondents were asked to rate which activities are essential to them (1 = critical, 6 = minimal). The results are presented in Table 1.

Testing showed some statistically significant differences. From the values of the individual averages, we can see that the

Table 1. Means and variances and items per question: On a scale, rate how much of your work activity is devoted to the following activities

	Average	Variance
k3a – working with the client	1.80	1.59
k3b – administration	1.64	0.83
k3c – handling legal matters	3.66	2.51
k3d – organisational matters	3.14	2.28
k3e – management of people	3.13	3.25
k3f – project management	4.12	3.79
k3g – economic security of the organization	4.05	3.29
k3h – education	3.39	2.22
k3i – cooperation with public institutions	2.54	1.56
k3j – work planning	2.46	2.17
k3k – writing projects	4.28	3.96
k3l – working with data	2.83	2.42
k3m – implementation of social science research	4.23	2.06
k3n – cooperation with the professional public	3.58	2.64
k3o – communication with the public and the media	4.15	3.07

most significant part of the working time of the respondents is devoted to “administration” and “working with clients”. The last time is devoted to “writing projects”, “conducting social research”, “communication with the public and the media”, and “project management”. For the activities “economic support of the organization”, “writing projects”, and “carrying out social research”, most respondents answered that they do not do these at all. In contrast, “administration” is performed to some extent by all respondents and “work with clients”. The variance values show that respondents were most consistent in their answers to the question on “administration”.

For further processing (factor analysis), the relationships between the activities needed to be analyzed. We investigated the dependencies between the individual items as a basis for further investigation. For this purpose, we used one of the non-parametric methods, Spearman correlation (see Table 2).

The table shows that the most substantial direct dependence is between the answers k3d–k3e (*organizational issues – people management*), k3e–k3o (*people management and communication with the public and media*), k3f–k3g (*project management and economic support of the organization*), k3f–k3k (*project management and project writing*), k3g–k3k (*organization's economic support and project writing*), k3m–k3o (*social research and public and media communication*), and k3n–k3o (*cooperation with the professional public and public and media communication*). In these cases, the more time a respondent devotes to one of the activities in the pair, the more time they devote to the other activity.

The table also indicates two statistically significant indirect relationships between the questions k3a–k3e (*client work and people management*) and k3b–k3m (*administration and social research implementation*). In these cases, the more time a respondent devotes to one of the activities in the pair, the less time they devote to the other activity in the pair.

Table 2. Relationships between work activities

	k3a	k3b	k3c	k3d	k3e	k3f	k3g	k3h	k3i	k3j	k3k	k3l	k3m	k3n	k3o
k3a	1.00	0.13	0.19	-0.18	-0.26	-0.01	-0.11	0.04	0.31	0.01	-0.11	-0.05	0.05	0.10	-0.06
k3b	0.13	1.00	0.07	0.10	0.03	-0.06	-0.09	0.01	0.30	0.27	-0.14	0.25	-0.25	0.13	-0.02
k3c	0.19	0.07	1.00	0.21	0.10	0.09	0.10	0.20	0.28	0.19	0.14	0.00	0.13	0.20	0.16
k3d	-0.18	0.10	0.21	1.00	0.66	0.27	0.26	0.15	0.22	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.24	0.26	0.43
k3e	-0.26	0.03	0.10	0.66	1.00	0.47	0.45	0.23	0.03	0.21	0.33	0.13	0.25	0.27	0.50
k3f	-0.01	-0.06	0.09	0.27	0.47	1.00	0.71	0.25	-0.05	0.10	0.80	0.09	0.34	0.15	0.37
k3g	-0.11	-0.09	0.10	0.26	0.45	0.71	1.00	0.30	-0.08	0.18	0.62	0.12	0.29	0.11	0.43
k3h	0.04	0.12	0.20	0.15	0.23	0.25	0.30	1.00	0.32	0.46	0.15	0.18	0.16	0.06	0.22
k3i	0.31	0.30	0.28	0.22	0.03	-0.05	-0.08	0.32	1.00	0.46	-0.09	0.23	0.17	0.44	0.13
k3j	0.11	0.27	0.19	0.22	0.21	0.10	0.18	0.46	0.46	1.00	0.05	0.36	0.18	0.33	0.26
k3k	-0.11	-0.14	0.14	0.23	0.33	0.80	0.62	0.15	-0.09	0.05	1.00	0.02	0.33	0.11	0.33
k3l	-0.05	0.25	0.00	0.24	0.13	0.09	0.12	0.18	0.23	0.36	0.02	1.00	0.19	0.25	0.22
k3m	0.05	-0.25	0.13	0.24	0.25	0.34	0.29	0.16	0.17	0.18	0.33	0.19	1.00	0.43	0.50
k3n	0.10	0.13	0.20	0.26	0.27	0.15	0.11	0.06	0.44	0.33	0.11	0.25	0.43	1.00	0.51
k3o	-0.06	-0.02	0.16	0.43	0.50	0.37	0.43	0.22	0.13	0.26	0.33	0.22	0.50	0.51	1.00

Work competencies

The starting point was to define the skills that workers use at work. The assessment used a scale of 1 = often, 6 = not. First, we compared the level of responses to each question in this group (Table 3).

Table 3. Means and variances of items per question: On a scale, rate which of the following skills you use in your work

	Average	Variance
k8a – presentation of the results of your work	3.40	2.83
k8b – language skills	5.01	1.69
k8c – knowledge of computer science	2.39	1.92
k8d – development of individual plans	2.64	4.65
k8e – use of new methods of social work	2.83	2.71
k8f – knowledge of different cultures	3.30	2.68
k8g – psychological approaches	2.35	2.00
k8h – knowledge of research methods	4.30	2.42
k8i – legal knowledge	2.38	1.71
k8j – communication skills	1.17	0.46
k8k – data analysis and interpretation	3.52	2.48
k8l – knowledge of computer science	2.48	2.35
k8m – knowledge of social work methods	1.80	1.12

The values of the individual averages show that respondents use “communication skills” and “knowledge of social work methods” the most. On the other hand, they use “language skills” and “knowledge of research methods” the least. From the values of the variances, we can conclude that respondents are the most consistent in their view of the abilities of “communication skills” and, where appropriate, “knowledge of social work methods”. On the other hand, respondents were the most disparate in the option concerning the skill of “making individual plans”.

If we view the responses focusing on skill use as an evaluation of the individual skills used by several raters (respondents), we are interested in the agreement of these raters. Thus, we are interested in the relationship between the activities. In addition to the frequency of activities, we were also interested in their relationships. It was also necessary to analyze the relationships between the activities for further processing. We investigated the dependencies between the individual items as a basis for further investigation. For this purpose, we used one of the non-parametric methods, namely Spearman correlation.

Table 4 shows that there are somewhat weaker dependencies between the questions in this group than there were for the work activities (job domain). Nevertheless, most of the dependencies emerged as significant. The most substantial direct dependency was found between the pairs k8c–k8l (*knowledge of computer science and knowledge of computer science*), but there was also a strong dependency between the pairs k8d–k8e (*making individual plans and using new social work methods*), and k8e–k8m (*using new social work methods and knowledge of social work methods*). There is little strong dependence between k8g–k8h (*psychological approaches and knowledge of research methods*) and k8h–k8k (*knowledge of research methods and data analysis and interpretation*). There was no inverse dependency in this block, which means that if a respondent uses one of the skills, they also use the other of the pair.

Abilities and skills

Skills and competencies are integral to the overall job profile regarding the competency frameworks. In the group of job competencies, we included a battery of questions where we investigated which skills and abilities respondents consider essential in their work (1 = very important, 6 = not at all important). We first compared the level of responses to each question in this group. We compared using a one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA test) comparing means. The values obtained are shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Relationships – work skills used

	k8a	k8b	k8c	k8d	k8e	k8f	k8g	k8h	k8i	k8j	k8k	k8l	k8m
k8a	1.00	0.28	0.23	0.26	0.32	0.27	0.33	0.40	0.09	0.08	0.21	0.16	0.15
k8b	0.28	1.00	0.00	0.16	0.11	0.23	0.07	0.25	0.17	0.01	0.17	0.01	−0.05
k8c	0.23	0.00	1.00	0.21	0.10	0.17	0.12	0.16	0.31	0.24	0.29	0.88	0.18
k8d	0.26	0.16	0.21	1.00	0.58	0.28	0.28	0.30	0.14	0.23	0.17	0.15	0.30
k8e	0.32	0.11	0.10	0.58	1.00	0.42	0.41	0.42	0.05	0.16	0.11	0.04	0.54
k8f	0.27	0.23	0.17	0.28	0.42	1.00	0.40	0.31	0.28	0.29	0.15	0.12	0.29
k8g	0.33	0.07	0.12	0.28	0.41	0.40	1.00	0.45	0.10	0.27	0.19	0.13	0.40
k8h	0.40	0.25	0.16	0.30	0.42	0.31	0.45	1.00	0.30	0.06	0.45	0.21	0.37
k8i	0.09	0.17	0.31	0.14	0.05	0.28	0.10	0.30	1.00	0.20	0.21	0.30	0.10
k8j	0.08	0.01	0.24	0.23	0.16	0.29	0.27	0.06	0.20	1.00	0.17	0.27	0.38
k8k	0.21	0.17	0.29	0.17	0.11	0.15	0.19	0.45	0.21	0.17	1.00	0.37	0.17
k8l	0.16	0.01	0.88	0.15	0.04	0.12	0.13	0.21	0.30	0.27	0.37	1.00	0.22
k8m	0.15	−0.05	0.18	0.30	0.54	0.29	0.40	0.37	0.10	0.38	0.17	0.22	1.00

Table 5. Means and variances per question: Importance of skills and abilities at work

	Average	Variance
k11a – deal with crisis situations	1.41	1.04
k11b – make quick decisions	1.57	0.85
k11c – empathy	1.40	0.71
k11d – people management	3.21	3.02
k11e – controlling emotions	1.61	1.07
k11f – creativity	2.69	2.03
k11g – work planning	1.71	1.30
k11h – client motivation	1.74	1.36
k11i – writing project applications and raising money	4.29	3.83
k11l – knowledge of the organization and their competencies	1.98	1.41

The values of the individual averages show that the respondents consider the most essential skills to be “*solving crises*”, “*making quick decisions*”, and “*controlling emotions*”. On the other hand, they consider “*writing project applications and raising money*”, “*managing people*”, and “*creativity*” to be the least necessary skills. From the variance values, we can conclude that respondents are most consistent in their view of “*empathy*” and the ability to “*make decisions quickly*”. On the other hand, respondents were the most disparate when asked about “*writing project applications and raising money*” and “*managing people*”.

In addition to the frequency of activities, we were also interested in their relationships. If we view the question data as ratings of individual activities by several raters (respondents), we are interested in the agreement of these raters. For further processing, analyzing the relationships between the activities was also necessary. We investigated the dependencies between the individual items as a basis for further investigation. For this purpose, we used one of the non-parametric methods, namely Spearman correlation. The resulting values are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Relationships between skills and abilities

	k11a	k11b	k11c	k11d	k11e	k11f	k11g	k11h	k11i	k11l
k11a	1.00	0.34	0.09	0.18	0.26	0.22	0.21	0.26	0.03	0.25
k11b	0.34	1.00	0.22	0.19	0.23	0.21	0.13	0.24	−0.09	0.16
k11c	0.09	0.22	1.00	0.24	0.22	0.45	0.21	0.29	0.22	0.07
k11d	0.18	0.19	0.24	1.00	0.15	0.48	0.29	0.27	0.54	0.25
k11e	0.26	0.23	0.22	0.15	1.00	0.32	0.30	0.30	0.08	0.35
k11f	0.22	0.21	0.45	0.48	0.32	1.00	0.35	0.38	0.44	0.30
k11g	0.21	0.13	0.21	0.29	0.30	0.35	1.00	0.39	0.11	0.38
k11h	0.26	0.24	0.29	0.27	0.30	0.38	0.39	1.00	0.22	0.47
k11i	0.03	−0.09	0.22	0.54	0.08	0.44	0.11	0.22	1.00	0.18
k11l	0.25	0.16	0.07	0.25	0.35	0.30	0.38	0.47	0.18	1.00

The table shows weaker relationships between the items in this group than there were for the previous groups' questions. Still, most of the dependencies emerged as significant. The most vital direct dependencies were found between the pairs k11d–k11i (*managing people and writing project applications and raising money*), or only less strong dependencies between k11c–k11f (*empathy and creativity*), and k11d–k11f (*managing people and creativity*), or k11h–k11l (*client motivation and knowledge of organizations and their competencies*). There was no inverse dependency in this group of questions, which means that if a respondent has a problem with one of the skills, they have a problem with the other of the pair.

Again, respondents were allowed to add other skills and competencies that they considered essential and were not listed in the response options. Due to the low number of free answers or answers given by the respondents, this is, again, statistically insignificant data. However, it confirms the perception of generic or non-generic competencies in social work. Other skills and abilities mentioned include the ability to listen, to transfer competencies to the client – not to try to control him/her, the ability to cooperate and negotiate (necessary when communicating with employees of other organizations and the Labour Office), the ability to learn quickly, to apply knowledge to practice, to orient oneself quickly in a problem, time management, the ability to arm oneself against bureaucracy and come to terms with the information that a given situation cannot be solved (or rather that you have no way to help solve it), experience in the field of healthcare (e.g., the impact of specific disorders and diseases and their effect on the lives of clients), and stress management. According to the above list, it is evident that these are individual skills and abilities required by the specific position held or a characteristic so crucial to the respondent that he/she was unable (unwilling) to include it in the broader selected categories. Based on the analysis (eigenvalues greater than 1 are in red), the ideal number of factors is 2. These two factors explain 58.8% of the total variability. In terms of personal perception of the importance of skills and abilities, we can identify the first factor, which can be called skills and abilities focused on direct work with the client or target groups; the second factor can be characterized as economic and organizational (supportive in ensuring quality and practical social work), where these workers can implement special activities, which, however, do not specify.

Strengths and weaknesses

As fitness for work can be perceived individually and subjectively, we have included an assessment focused on strengths and weaknesses concerning the definition of the work activity performed in this segment. We start from the assumption that everyone perceives their strengths and weaknesses in job performance. First, we compared the level of responses to each question in this group. We made this comparison using a one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA test) comparing means (Table 7).

The values of the individual averages show that respondents find “*demanding administration*” the most difficult. On

the other hand, they have minor problems with “*identifying clients' needs*”, “*determining the goal and methods to achieve it*”, and “*working with clients from different cultural backgrounds*”. From the variance values, we can conclude that respondents are most consistent in their responses in terms of “*identifying client needs*”, “*analyzing and interpreting data*”, “*successfully estimating client needs*”, and “*assessing the risks and impacts of their activities*”. Respondents were most divided on the question concerning “*challenging administration*”. If we view the data as an assessment of individual weaknesses and strengths by several raters (respondents), we are interested in the agreement of these raters. Next, we investigated the dependencies between the items. For this purpose, we used Spearman correlation. The resulting values are shown in Table 8.

The most substantial direct dependencies were found between the pairs k10b–k10c (*identifying a goal and methods leading to its achievement and using new methods of working*), k10d–k10e (*dealing with problem clients and successfully assessing clients' needs*), k10e–k10f (*successfully assessing clients' needs and working with clients from different cultural backgrounds*), k10e–k10h (*successfully assessing client needs and identifying client needs*), k10g–k10h (*assessing the risks and impacts of one's actions and identifying client needs*), or only less strong dependencies between k10b–k10g (*identifying a goal and the methods leading to its achievement and assessing the risks and impacts of one's actions*), k10e–k10g (*successfully assessing client needs and assessing the risks and impacts of one's actions*), or k10h–k10l (*identifying client needs and motivating the client to address the situation*).

Table 7. Means and variances of responses to the question: What problems do the following activities cause you?

	Average	Variance
k10a – data analysis and interpretation	3.77	0.96
k10b – determining the objective and methods to achieve it	3.98	1.02
k10c – use of new working methods	3.87	1.15
k10d – dealing with problem clients	3.58	1.20
k10e – successfully assessing client needs	3.76	0.98
k10f – working with clients from different cultural backgrounds	3.94	1.09
k10g – assessing the risks and impacts of your activities	3.80	0.99
k10h – identification of client needs	4.00	0.87
k10i – monitoring changes in legislation	3.30	1.41
k10j – limitation of emotions in client work	3.59	1.29
k10k – end of work with a client	3.90	1.11
k10l – client motivation to solve the situation	3.31	1.31
k10m – demanding administration	2.85	1.73

Table 8. Weaknesses and strengths of the activities performed (Spearman correlations – 0.05 significance level)

	k10a	k10b	k10c	k10d	k10e	k10f	k10g	k10h	k10i	k10j	k10k	k10l	k10m
k10a	1.00	0.34	0.25	0.04	0.13	0.06	0.23	0.18	0.05	0.15	0.16	0.21	0.30
k10b	0.34	1.00	0.50	0.14	0.40	0.34	0.48	0.49	0.14	0.08	0.16	0.30	0.15
k10c	0.25	0.50	1.00	0.08	0.23	0.29	0.28	0.32	0.06	0.12	0.07	0.19	0.15
k10d	0.04	0.14	0.08	1.00	0.53	0.34	0.30	0.36	0.24	0.32	0.18	0.31	0.18
k10e	0.13	0.40	0.23	0.53	1.00	0.56	0.46	0.69	0.18	0.33	0.32	0.46	0.04
k10f	0.06	0.34	0.29	0.34	0.56	1.00	0.32	0.45	0.09	0.21	0.19	0.20	0.02
k10g	0.23	0.48	0.28	0.30	0.46	0.32	1.00	0.61	0.33	0.18	0.34	0.30	0.14
k10h	0.18	0.49	0.32	0.36	0.69	0.45	0.61	1.00	0.30	0.35	0.35	0.44	0.13
k10i	0.05	0.14	0.06	0.24	0.18	0.09	0.33	0.30	1.00	0.36	0.08	0.19	0.18
k10j	0.15	0.08	0.12	0.32	0.33	0.21	0.18	0.35	0.36	1.00	0.36	0.30	0.15
k10k	0.16	0.16	0.07	0.18	0.32	0.19	0.34	0.35	0.08	0.36	1.00	0.14	–0.01
k10l	0.21	0.30	0.19	0.31	0.46	0.20	0.30	0.44	0.19	0.30	0.14	1.00	0.23
k10m	0.30	0.15	0.15	0.18	0.04	0.02	0.14	0.13	0.18	0.15	–0.01	0.23	1.00

Discussion

The research results showed that the approach of Marion Bogo (2010) to field-based competencies may bring some valuable outcomes for the discussion about the competencies of social workers in the Czech setting (Elich, 2019; Elichová and Sýkorová, 2015; Havrdová, 1999). They also bring some inputs for social work education in the Czech Republic (similar to the research of Nicholas et al. (2019); communication skills and the possibility of dealing with crises are appreciated by the responded social workers in Ústecký region and considered most important. Social workers in the Ústí region reported frequent use of competencies and skills that are related to the considered core of the social work profession, like empathy, dealing with crises as well as people motivation (compare Newel and Nelson-Gardell, 2014), except for engagement in the research. Like Iovu and Lazăr (2022), we found that the social workers are not engaged in the research activities and do not devote their working time to this activity. However, the research activities are considered to be part of the ethical code of conduct. This is also in line with the research of Barták et al. (2023). This finding can be considered significant, given that social workers are not engaged in research, but quite a lot of attention is paid to it during their training. Our results also align with Elich's (2019) research conducted nationally in the Czech Republic. Both studies show the importance of communication skills.

On the other hand, both studies address slightly different competencies, as there is no universal approach to measuring competencies (Elich, 2019). According to the quoted author, if we evaluate the definition of competencies defined by Bogo (2010), the respondents evaluate the most critical competencies that could be classified as meta-competences. On the other hand, the performance of their practice is realized within procedural competencies, which are influenced by meta-competencies.

The research confirmed the contradiction between where social workers see the focus of their work, i.e., in solving social situations of the people they work with, and the administrative and data burden – which is an integral part of their work and is logically considered as an aspect of the quality of their

work (for discussion of the administrative burden compare Mrhálék and Kajanová, 2018).

The presented research has some limitations that need to be taken into consideration. The first is the limitation of the year of data collection. This may make the data seem outdated; however, Iovu and Lazăr (2021) also published their research on social work competencies, with a substantial delay in data collection in 2018. Since the data collection, no research has been carried out on the activities and competencies of social workers across the areas of practice in the Ústí nad Labem Region – and the presented data have never been published before. Recent articles by other authors dealing with specific target groups or areas of competencies are not necessary in the relationship to the activities of social workers. Although the data are rather old, they still have some predictive power and can be used for further research. The use of older data can be justified by the need to publish a validated assessment of social workers' competencies and activities using an approach that is developed abroad (see above) and, to some extent, differed from previous data collection by other domestic researchers, i.e., to validate the possibility of this approach.

Conclusion

Our research has shown that when social workers in the Ústí nad Labem region evaluate their activities, they put administration, working with people first, and working with data. However, they rate communication, knowledge of social work methods, communication, and other skills – such as finding solutions to crises – as the most important. While unsurprising, the results are essential for social work practice and education. In particular, a focus on reducing the administrative burden can be recommended for social work praxis. Some administrative tasks can only be carried out by a social worker; on the other hand, it is possible to consider the involvement of administrative staff to relieve social workers of these activities, as is the case, for example, in healthcare. Future research should examine how administrative burden affects social workers' performance relative to their mission's core objectives. The results also have important implications

for training social workers and lifelong learning, where more attention should be paid to the administration issue and its possible simplification – while maintaining the high quality of services provided.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank P. Balek, who co-created the initial questionnaire, and P. Kuchař and Z. Burianek for their valuable statistical advice.

Ethical aspects and conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. We obtained implied consent from respondents to participate in the research by completing the online questionnaire or returning the paper questionnaire.

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