SOCIAL WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The entire world faced a crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The social impacts of the pandemic were severe, the movement of people was strictly limited, and schools, day care centres, and youth centres were closed. This affected social workers working with children and youth activities. The goal of this article is to analyse the memories of social workers working with children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania. In order to explore the memories of social workers, a qualitative research methodology was used, and non-probability purposive sampling was applied for finding research participants. In-depth interviews were used for data collection, with each research participant facing one main question: describe your everyday activities during the pandemic. Qualitative content data analysis was applied. Three categories were formulated and are presented in the article: challenges of social work during the pandemic; positive factors of work during the pandemic; and ways of working during the pandemic. These were followed by seventeen subcategories: adaptation to restrictions; organizational work; teaching; cooperation with other institutions; filming; IT knowledge; psychological aspects; activeness and tension at work; spending

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more time together; improved competencies; closer communication with other institutions; closer communication among social workers; courses and seminars; volunteers; IT programmes; various types of consultations; and creativity. The challenges and positive aspects revealed show that social workers looked for ways to adapt to new working conditions and were ready to overcome challenges in order to help children and youth during the pandemic.

Keywords: *social work, children, youth, COVID-19 pandemic*

Introduction

Social work deals with inherently complex and ambiguous situations, for which no known, predefined solutions exist, but it requires the active use and reflective re-evaluation of knowledge, skills, and values (Zegarac et al., 2018). The field of social work involves complex, competitive practical approaches in different service and practice settings, with procedures and norms applied in different sub-systems and social sectors relevant for the wellbeing of children and youth (Zegarac et al., 2018). Alongside all kinds of complex situations in everyday life and the peculiarities of each social worker, they additionally faced a crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic. Unprecedented policies and strategies were implemented to contain the spread of this disease, which resulted in around one third of the global population being subjected to COVID-19 lockdown. The social impacts of the pandemic were severe, moving around was strictly limited, and schools, day care centres, and youth centres were closed. This affected social workers working with children and youth. Fear and anxiety about a new disease and what could happen can be overwhelming, and caused strong emotions in adults and children. Public health actions, such as social distancing, can make people feel isolated and lonely, and can increase stress and anxiety. Recounting the professional values (service, human rights and social justice, dignity and worth of people, privacy and confidentiality, importance of human relationships, and integrity) which COVID-19 undermined and, in some instances, overturned, it has become increasingly notable that, if any profession was most hurt by the pandemic, it is the social work profession.

Social workers are committed to realizing social values such as diversity, inclusion, justice, and equality in often complex circumstances. Usually, they do so in direct contact with service users. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this physical proximity was accompanied with risks to physical health for service users and their social network, as well as for professionals, their colleagues, and their loved ones. Direct contact, an important basis for social work, could no longer be taken for granted, and had, as a matter of fact, become a source of ethical tension. Social workers talked about lacking sufficient support for making conscious and responsible choices regarding physical proximity, especially since sufficient protective devices were lacking or were unsuited for their work (Banks et al., 2020a; Banks et al., 2020b).

A scientific literature review shows that the pandemic situation has been analysed by many authors (e.g., Droit-Volet et al., 2020; Pitlik, 2020). There is already some research which has considered the impact of the pandemic on doctors, nurses, social workers working with adolescents, and other professionals (Banks et al., 2020; Carlucci, 2020; Dauti et al., 2020); however, none has yet considered the effect of the pandemic on social workers who work with children and youth at youth centres, orphanages, and community houses. Therefore, the research question of this article is: What are the memories of social workers regarding challenges or positive elements

during the COVID-19 pandemic? The goal of this article is to analyse the memories of social workers working with children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania. The objects of the research are social workers' memories of working during the pandemic. Using non-probability purposive sampling, eight research participants were invited for in-depth interviews. Qualitative content data analysis was performed by formulating categories and subcategories.

1. Social work in a time of pandemic

Similar to all known pandemics throughout history, COVID-19 has been accompanied by a large degree of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and economic disaster worldwide (Pitlik, 2020). Bhattacharya (2020) and Nicola et al. (2020) defined a range of social impacts on society: social distancing and self-isolation; travel restrictions; reduced workforce across all economic sectors; job loss; school closure; disruption of normal life of children; decreased demand for commodities and manufactured products; increased need for medical supplies; increased demand in the food sector; panic-buying and stockpiling of food products; domino effect on health, healthcare, and nutrition; "infodemic", e.g., spread of panic and fear through social media; and xenophobia against specific ethnic/geographic groups. According to Ahmed et al. (2020), such factors led to acute panic attacks, stress, fear and anxiety, obsessive behaviour, hoarding, paranoia, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and similar problems. The social impact of the pandemic has been very severe and will have consequences for a long time, especially on children and youth. Due to the pandemic, schools were closed and extracurricular activities were stopped. For some children and youth, schools were a place where they were not only learning but also receiving hot food and socio-educational services.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, working conditions for social workers changed. Direct contact, an important basis for social work, could no longer be taken for granted. According to Banks et al. (2020), social workers felt that they lacked sufficient support for making conscious and responsible choices regarding physical proximity, especially since sufficient protective devices were lacking or were unsuited for their work. Furthermore, all the services they work in faced increased demand: most notably mental health, housing, and family violence services. All areas of the community sector experienced added pressure through this increase in demand for services, in costs incurred for delivering those services, and in working through the restrictions as they performed their work. As people were confined within their homes, social workers had to find new ways of communicating and helping those who needed social services. Social workers at every level have the skills and capability to not only address safety for today but to translate fear, grief, and loss into empowerment and social transformation. According to Carlucci (2020), with resilience, stamina, self-direction, flexibility, and self-confidence, social workers easily inculcate the adaptability required in this demanding profession. Countries around the world tried to find solutions in different sectors as well as in the social work sector. Social workers had to find their ways of work in the pandemic through their own experience.

Research regarding social workers' experience and the challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic in various countries show that they all experienced online working, lack of knowledge of using new technologies, unsafety, etc. (Bank et al., 2020; Dauti et al., 2020). However, according to Farkas and Romaniuk (2020), despite all of the inconveniences brought about by the pandemic, relationships with clients remained the central method of work, and

social workers all around the world tried to find new ways to provide services.

2. Research methodology

In order to discover the memories of social workers, a qualitative research methodology was used. This methodology was used because of the novelty of the topic and the fact that there have not been many studies conducted in this field of investigation. The COVID-19 pandemic is a novel entity, so little is known about social work in the pandemic. Qualitative data collection methods play an important role in providing the information that is useful in understanding the processes behind observed results and assessing changes in people's well-being (Kabir, 2016). For this type of qualitative research, the best instrument for collecting data is an interview. An in-depth interview is a one-on-one conversation, thus allowing the research participant to talk freely. In this case, non-probability purposive sampling was used, as the aim was not to test a hypothesis regarding a broad population, but to develop an initial understanding of a small population number in depth, i.e., to examine memories of real-life activities. According to Taherdoost (2016), purposive sampling is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices. It was decided to look for potential participants in a targeted manner in various institutions where social workers work with children and youth. Eight participants took part in the research – social workers working with children and youth in day-care centres (3), in youth centres (3) and in a child community house (2). Each research participant received one main question: describe your everyday activities during the pandemic period. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Content analysis of the collected data was performed, and the main principles of ethics – confidentiality and fairness – were followed. The names of research participants are not disclosed, and research participants are presented by codes in the text. The main limitation is that interviews were conducted in the Lithuanian language, so there could be some meaning lost while translating into English, which may affect the validity of the research. Some sentences or phrases could lose their identical meaning when translating into English.

3. Challenges of work during the pandemic

Three categories (challenges of social work during the pandemic, positive factors of work during the pandemic, and ways of working during the pandemic) and seventeen subcategories (adaptation to restrictions, organizational works, teaching, cooperation with other institutions, filming, IT knowledge, psychological aspects, activeness and tension at work, spending more time together, improved competencies, closer communication with other institutions, closer communication among social workers, courses and seminars, volunteers, IT programmes, various types of consultations, and creativity) were formulated.

Adaptation to restrictions. Social workers working with children and youth in children's community houses experienced severe pandemic restrictions. One research participant observed that there was "*…limited going outside for children…<>…children had to be in a flat among four walls…*" (R1). Furthermore, she recalls how she tried to explain these restrictions and rules to children: "*…the hardest part, especially for the young children, was to explain; of course we had been given instructions, we had consultations, we tried to find out how to give them to the children*

first…" (R1). She remembers sitting the children down around a table and talking with them. In order to explain the new rules to the children, the research participant remembers consulting with psychologists: "*… a lot of consultations, and we consulted with psychologists, called, asked how to treat children…*" (R1). Other research participants also shared their memories about restrictions, and these memories show that it was difficult to work under different kinds of limitations during the pandemic. The restrictions and limitations were sudden and new to social workers; they had never experienced them before, which is why it was not only difficult for them to adjust to this different situation themselves, but also to explain this adjustment to children and youth. Usually, people fear things which they do not understand clearly.

Teaching. As the analysis of the everyday activities of social workers shows, one of their main activities is to help children with homework. If children do not understand the topic learnt at school, they ask social workers to help with their homework. While analysing social workers' memories of working during the pandemic, it is clear that, for most of them, teaching and helping with studies was the main activity. One research participant observed that "*…children were not used to learning online, so we had to be with them all the time. They were not able to connect, we had to sit together …*" (R3). Social workers had to become teachers and explain material to children: "*…I helped to prepare for lessons, to make homework…*" (R8). These memories show that social workers had to put their main efforts into teaching children subjects which are usually taught at school by teachers. It did not matter whether the social worker worked at a community children's house, a day-care centre, or a youth centre – all had to work as teachers. Moreover, for some of the research participants this was extremely difficult, as they did not possess that kind of knowledge. Not everyone can teach chemistry or physics: "*…it was difficult to help children to learn online, as we do not ourselves understand everything – chemistry, physics, we do not understand…. <>… the grades went down, and children were angry…*" (R3). As can be seen from this memory, this situation can even put a social worker in conflict with a child as they are not able to help with complex subjects such as chemistry or physics.

Organizational works. Research participants mentioned that they had to do a lot of organizational work to ensure that everyone had a computer, tablet, or other material so that that children and youth had what they needed: "*I gathered information about children – whether they have all of the required materials; if the family needs help*" (R6). At the same, time social workers also had to do paperwork, as they did before the pandemic. Before the pandemic, they usually did paperwork from morning until lunch, whilst children were at school. During the pandemic, however, the situation was different, as most had to sit with children in online lessons, meaning that they had to reorganize their day and find time to make plans, fill in documents, prepare new projects, or write reports. Research participants' memories show that social workers have to be well organized in order to perform many different activities.

Cooperation with other institutions. While analysing memories from the pandemic period, it can be seen that some research participants felt a lack of communication with other institutions during the pandemic, or they felt that they were doing somebody else's job: "*…relations with teachers were complicated, as we had to do their work…*" (R3), "*… I had to work instead of a speech specialist…*" (R4). This situation shows that perhaps these relationships were not close before the pandemic, and that the pandemic situation highlighted this problem and provided ideas as to what can be improved.

Filming and video making. There was a time when filming a dance and sending it to a teacher was an interesting and innovative method, but with the pandemic this situation changed. From the memories of research participants, it can be seen that, during the pandemic, everything was supposed to be filmed and sent to teachers: "…*we were asked to film how children tell a story in English, how they dance for dancing lessons, how they do sport exercises for physical education lessons*…" (R5). Even extracurricular activities had to be filmed. It was exhausting to film all the time, and sometimes social workers had to film the same thing several times as the child made a mistake. These memories show that using technologies was not so easy, and could be quite a tiring activity.

Lack of IT knowledge. The pandemic and its wide-ranging implications have accelerated the demand for digital skills in many occupations. Effective use of digital skills has proven to be a driver of resilience, helping workers and entire organisations adapt to the new realities shaped by the pandemic. Research participants observe that "…*information technology, this is a variety of knowledge…<>… we had very little to deal with just before quarantine. We still used only the simplest ones available, Messenger or Skype apps, but already during the quarantine we had to move to Zoom, Teams, and completely new tools*…" (R2). Social workers' memories show that they encountered challenges when suddenly starting to use so many different programmes which were not common before. This was especially complicated for those who had to join lessons and extracurricular activities with children, as they had to remember passwords, use different programmes, learn themselves, and teach children. It can be said that the working conditions of social workers changed suddenly, almost overnight, and IT usage was a real challenge.

ctiveness and tension at work. Changing working conditions can obviously highlight active work and tension at work. The research participants shared how busy they were during the pandemic period: "*I can say that there is no time left to rest during a pandemic at all*…" (R1). The research participants remember the pandemic period as an intensive working period. They tried to perform their work as best as possible during the pandemic, but many things were new for them, so they had to learn a lot themselves, to teach children, to create new activities, to take part in seminars, to do documentation work, etc.

Psychological aspects. Tension and uncertainty bring psychological aspects, especially when a person meets things that are unknown to them. Research participants talk about their "…*fear of losing visitors to the centre and constant fear that they will not come back after the pandemic*…" (R2). During the pandemic, they saw children and youth bored, and they had to think all the time about what kinds of activities to offer them: "…*the hardest part was seeing the declining motivation of the children and feeling that the connection with the child could quickly disappear*…" (R5). Another research participant talks about patience and anger: "…*it took patience, not to show anger, when the child maliciously refused to learn*…" (R7). One research participant says that the hardest part of the pandemic was communication no longer being face-to-face: "…*I would like to have more training on how to maintain or make contact with children and youth when communication is mostly not face-to-face, because it's the hardest part of a pandemic*…" (R5). Social workers communicating with clients in their environment and other institutions experience emotional, physical, and psychological overload. Pressure from the environment and internal discomfort, which they experience, causes stress and anxiety.

4. Positive factors of working during the pandemic

Spending more time together and closer communication. Research participants remember that during the pandemic they managed to make closer relationships with children and youth as they had to share the same space together, played games together, and had more time to make food, read books, and paint and decorate rooms together: "…*during the pandemic, we had a close relationship with the children, we had stronger communication because we were with them all day together*…" (R3). One research participant pays attention to the fact that they talked more with children in that period, whilst the other one shares that they tried to use Zoom and talk with each child in order to show that they were not left alone: "…*we tried to use Zoom for an individual talk with every child in order to give motivation and show we really take care of them*…" (R5). Time for being together and doing different activities is one of the ways to build closer relationships with children and youth. Nevertheless, during the pandemic period, the research participants not only spent more time together, but also had time to improve their competencies.

Improved competencies, seminars, and courses. Through their memories, the research participants noted that the pandemic was a time during which they improved their IT competencies: "…*we really have improved our knowledge in IT usage, if not for the pandemic maybe I would have never used some programmes in my life*…" (R5). Moreover, one of the research participants remembers how she improved her creativity as she tried to use her imagination us much as possible in order to think of interesting things to do with children and youth to avoid boredom: "…*we have learnt to use our imagination as we had to think of something interesting to do with children*…" (R1). Social workers tried to improve their different competencies in order to help children and youth; they were not just sitting and waiting, they were learning and attending different seminars and courses. According to research participants' memories, during the pandemic they had the possibility to take part in seminars: "...*courses for COVID challenges at work, courses to improve computer competencies*..." (R8). One of the research participants mentioned that the pandemic was good for remote territories as all seminars were online, so it did not matter where the participant lived, as everyone could attend: "…*we are in the most geographically inconvenient location, really far from the big cities, and now we had every opportunity to attend the best seminars, conferences…*" *(R2).* Social workers were not left alone, and online seminars and courses even helped to reach social workers who usually do not want to travel long distances or have no possibility to attend seminars or courses physically.

Volunteers. At the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers demonstrated an exceptional display of solidarity across the world. Volunteers have been assisting vulnerable groups, correcting misinformation, educating children, and providing essential services to those who need it the most. During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers were invited to help across different sectors, and youth centres, day-care centres, and children's community houses were no exception. Volunteers helped social workers to perform various activities: "…*a lot of added value with young people and children was given to us by volunteers, as they are exactly the same as their peers and really know how to attract youth; they started to organize various quizzes, crazy virtual shows* …" (R2). Research participants and volunteers complemented each other's activities during the pandemic by helping each other in everyday activities. Volunteers helped to create various activities for children and youth, and social workers helped them to finish their accredited volunteering and earn points for entering university. Social workers' memories

express the advantage of volunteers in their work with children and youth, as they can help with online contact and activities.

5. Ways of working during the pandemic

IT programmes. Although the research participants earlier mentioned how challenging it was to suddenly have to learn to work with many new programmes, later they discussed what they have learnt and the new programmes that they used in order to interact with children and youth, such as Kahoot, Discord, Zoom, and Salto-youth: "…*every day, we posted quizzes on social media like Kahoot, used the Discord platform, and played a variety of games with young people, during which we were able to interact with sound*…" (R5). These newly learnt programmes can be used not only during the pandemic, but also after it is over.

Various types of consultations. The research participants mentioned that they used various types of consultation during the pandemic, such as individual or group work: "…*we had more individual consultations*…" (R5), "*...group work online…work in a team…*" (R8). This shows that social workers working with children and youth paid more attention to communication in order to prevent them feeling alone. They had more time to listen to each child or youth, to hear about their hobbies, and to talk individually on topics which are interesting for each individual. This situation helped them to show every child that they care about them, and this was a time when social workers planned to have more individual consultations – a positive development for children and youth.

Creativity. The pandemic period required creativity from social workers working with children and youth. The research participants recalled that they had to be more creative in order to organize activities for children or youth in the pandemic period: "…*I had to use more creative ways, to think of new activities*…" (R6), "…*I created activities myself, I reached for them online, took part in courses and was learning myself how to create games online*…" (R4). One of the research participants remembered how she liked to be involved with creativity, and discussed how she created games according to children's interests: "…*I had to think what to do for children during the day, it was really challenging, but I attended seminars and learnt new games, I tried to create games according to the interests of children*…" (R7). Two further research participants expressed their joy at being able to discover many other alternatives at work. The memories of the research participants show that creativity during the pandemic period was a useful factor. Social workers have to be creative as they are continually engaged in trying to find imaginative solutions to difficult problems. Two participants mentioned that they started using art therapy in their work with youth and children, and even for themselves to relax.

6. Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional challenges for social workers working with children and youth, had a major impact on the situation and well-being of children and their families, and simultaneously affected the ability of welfare systems to provide services for children and youth. According to Jentsch et al. (2020), it became apparent that social work professionals, including those responsible for child protection, were no longer able to rely fully on established measures and strategies in order to fulfil their responsibilities. Instead, new approaches had to be

tried out in difficult circumstances that were characterized by uncertainty. Social workers working with children and youth had to find the best ways to provide good services. The memories of the research participants working with children and youth showed that during the pandemic they searched for the best possible ways to meet the needs of children and youth and worked for their best interests. They felt responsibility for their work and educated and taught children and youth to cope with the consequences of the pandemic and lockdown, thus trying to improve their social lives and reduce the social exclusion that evolved due to the pandemic.

The research participants shared their memories of working during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to an analysis of the challenges and positive aspects of their work during the pandemic. The pandemic situation brought many restrictions and limitations that, according to Pitlik (2020), were accompanied by a large degree of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Research data shows that social workers working with children and youth met a set of restrictions that were applied to their work. While they initially felt fear, they had to find ways to explain the situation to children and youth and to continue their work by finding the best ways to adapt to restrictions.

Amadasun (2020) observed that social workers have the responsibility of playing a crucial and frontline role in helping and supporting people that are affected by COVID-19, and that the responsibilities of social workers are not limited to the fight against the spread of COVID-19. The experience of the research participants also shows that their activities were not limited to their regular roles, as during the pandemic they took on additional responsibilities, becoming teachers who helped children and youth with lessons and homework in different subjects as it was difficult for children to learn online without help.

The workload of childcare workers has increased significantly due to distance learning, helping children prepare for lessons, psychological stress at work due to working conditions (including personal safety), and new requirements. Social workers express activeness and tension at work as well as psychological difficulties. According to Banks et al. (2020), social workers during the pandemic had to have the skills and capability to translate fear, grief, and loss caused by the pandemic into empowerment and social transformation. However, research data showed that social workers experienced psychological challenges themselves.

Uncertainty stimulates social innovation for social workers (Schiavo, 2015) by facilitating a rapid and broad uptake of synchronous virtual care telephone and video appointments. Research participants had to learn to work with different IT programmes, to film, and to make videos. In some ways, the pandemic has brought social work closer to the goals of integrating innovative technologies in practice (Berzin et al., 2015). Online services allowed children and youth who live in remote places to be reached. These benefits were noted in the research, even though at first it sounded like a challenge to work with IT programmes which had not been applied before. Social workers described this as an increase in their competence. Other competencies, such as creativity and professional knowledge, were also improved due to the quantity of seminars and courses available online. According to several authors, social service providers have demonstrated a great deal of creativity in their use of technology to deliver services and maintain relationships with clients, and to provide continuity of care, necessary emotional support, and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic (Boahen, 2020; Farkas & Romaniuk, 2020; Galea et al., 2020). This allowed social workers to apply new methods in their work such as IT programmes, different kinds of consultations, and more creative activities.

According to Nelson (2021), the pandemic has taught people to be flexible and adaptable in finding new ways and places, and people have found more time to be together, found more time for reflection, accelerated life changes, not hurried to judge or suspend others, etc. Research participants remember that during the pandemic they managed to forge closer relationships with children and youth as they had to share the same spaces together, played games together, had more time to make food together, read books together, and painted and decorated rooms together.

Cooperation among different institutions is needed at any time, but especially during a pandemic, when the need for help changes and increases. According to Dominelli (2020), the art of helping others involves giving and receiving help as people, as professionals, and as members of a community. Social workers cooperate with schools, doctors, speech specialists, etc.

Research participants and volunteers complemented each other's activities during the pandemic. Volunteers helped social workers organize activities for children and youth, helped to do homework, brought things to children and youth at home, and prepared different shows for online games. Social workers helped volunteers to fulfil accredited volunteering during the pandemic. Volunteers build the resilience of communities and help to develop a sense of ownership of development interventions. The nature of the COVID-19 crisis, with its need for social distancing, accelerated the utilization of online volunteering services, enabling volunteers to support communities remotely (UN Volunteers, 2021).

Social workers are experiencing and adapting to a new normal, and this includes increasing influence on well-being and community (Ashcroft et al., 2021). In addition, the profession contributes to the fabric of societal functioning and caring about children and youth. As such, the memories shared in this research could be a great help to formulate the support that social workers need in order to help them feel comfortable in their place of work, as well as defining the competencies that future workers should develop.

Conclusions

Social workers experienced both challenges and positive aspects while working during the COVID-19 pandemic. For social workers working with children and youth, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a test to prove their creativity, resilience, and flexibility; they have had the opportunity to renew their commitment towards the most vulnerable people in society, discovering unusual ways of helping while developing solidarity with other practitioners, citizens, volunteers, and local communities. According to the memories of research participants, social workers working with children and youth experienced different challenges in their work concerning: adaptation and restrictions, organizational work, educating, cooperation with other institutions, filming and video making, a lack of IT knowledge, some psychological threats, activeness, and tension at work. However, there were also some positive factors of working during the pandemic, such as: spending more time together, improving competencies, closer communication with other institutions, closer communication among social workers, possibility to take part in various seminars online, work with volunteers, and, of course, learning to use new methods at work such as new IT programmes.

The challenges and positive aspects revealed in this study show that social workers were looking for ways to adapt to new working conditions and were ready to overcome challenges

in order to help their clients. It is important to document the memories and experience gained during the pandemic, and to organize this by sharing seminars and meetings. There should be more seminars and courses for social workers working with children and youth, teaching them how to use different kinds of IT programmes, how to use the apps popular among children and youth, and presenting up-to-date activities which could be used in everyday social work activities with children and youth. Governments should pay more attention to cooperation among institutions in order to help social workers to work with children and youth.

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SOCIAL WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Summary

Despite of all kinds of complex situations in everyday life and the peculiarities of the work of social workers, the entire world is facing a crisis with the COVID-19. The social impacts of the pandemic was severe, moving around was strictly limited, schools closed, and day-care and youth centres were closed. This affected the activities of social workers working with children and youth.

The goal of this article is to analyse the memories of social workers working with children and youth during the pandemic in Lithuania. The objects of the research are the memories of social workers working with children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to discover the memories of social workers, a qualitative research methodology was used. Non-probability purposive sampling was applied for finding research participants: social workers working with children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. In-depth interviews were used for data collection. Each research participant received one main question: describe your everyday activities during the pandemic period. Content analysis of the collected data revealed three categories (challenges of social work during the pandemic, positive factors of work during the pandemic, and ways of working during the pandemic) and seventeen subcategories (adaptation to restrictions, organizational works, teaching, cooperation with other institutions, filming, IT knowledge, psychological aspects, activeness and tension at work, spending more time together, improved competencies, closer communication with other institutions, closer communication among social workers, courses and seminars, volunteers, IT programmes, various types of consultations, and creativity). The main principles of ethics – confidentiality and fairness – were followed.

Social workers experienced challenges and positive aspects while working during the COVID-19 pandemic. For social workers working with children and youth, the COVID-19 pandemic was a test to prove their creativity, resilience, and flexibility; they had the opportunity to renovate their commitment towards the most vulnerable people in society, discovering unusual ways of helping and reinforcing solidarity with other practitioners, citizens, volunteers, and local communities. According to the participants' memories, social workers working with children and youth experienced different challenges at their work concerning adaptation and restrictions, organizational work, education, cooperation with other institutions, filming and video making, lack of IT knowledge, psychological threats, activeness, and tension at work. Despite this, there were also some positive factors of working during the pandemic, such as spending more time together, improving competencies, closer communication with other institutions, closer communication among social workers, the possibility to take part in various seminars online, work with volunteers, and learning to use new methods at work such as new IT programmes. The following suggestions were formulated after the research: there

should be more seminars and courses for social workers working with children and youth, teaching them to use different kinds of IT programmes and the apps popular among children and youth; more seminars with up-to-date activities which could be used in everyday social work activities with children and youth should be presented; and the government should pay more attention to cooperation among institutions in order to help social workers while developing children or youth.

__Keywords__: social workers, COVID-19 pandemic, children, youth.

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