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**PERSONALITY FACTORS OF COPING  
WITH THE WORKLOAD OF  
A SOCIAL WORKER**

**OSOBOWOŚCIOWE CZYNNIKI  
RADZENIA SOBIE Z OBCIĄŻENIEM PRACĄ  
PRACOWNIKA SOCJALNEGO**

**ABSTRAKT**

W prezentowanym artykule autorka identyfikuje i analizuje czynniki radzenia sobie w wykonywaniu zawodu pracownika socjalnego. Przedstawia przykłady strategii radzenia sobie, które pracownik w zawodach wspomagających może zastosować w radzeniu sobie z obciążeniem pracą. W części empirycznej identyfikuje, analizuje i na podstawie intensywności korelacji przedstawia zależności między poszczególnymi zmiennymi a strategiami zarządzania obciążeniem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** radzenie sobie, korelacja, osobowość, pracownik socjalny, strategia, obciążenie pracą

**ABSTRACT**

In the presented article, the author identifies and analyzes the factors of coping in the implementation of the profession of social worker. It presents examples of coping

strategies that a worker in the helping professions can use in managing workload. In the empirical part, it identifies, analyzes and, based on correlation intensities, presents the relationships between individual variables and load management strategies.

**Key words:** coping, correlation, personality, social worker, strategy, workload

## INTRODUCTION

In his helping profession, a social worker is exposed on a daily basis to stressful situations that affect not only his work, but are often transmitted and combined with stressful situations that arise in his family and personal life. It is therefore very important to be able to work with these stressful situations in accordance with current life so that there is no solution or accumulation of these situations and, last but not least, an increase in susceptibility to the risk of burnout.

### 1. PERSONALITY OF A SOCIAL WORKER

Abraham Maslow (founder of humanistic psychology) argued that the mentally and socially normal personality is described by integration, consistency and interconnectedness (ie unification, articulation, interconnection). Human organization is a natural and normal state of man. On the contrary, the disorganization of the human body and psyche is a pathological state of man. [Machalová 2010] states that:

1. The human organism and personality can theoretically be analyzed by separating its parts, but no part can be understood in isolation. Man is a whole and so it works and manifests itself.
2. An individual's personality presents an important need for self-realization (or self-updating). People move towards realizing their own individual potential of emotions, abilities, values and

abilities according to their own circumstances and according to the possibilities of the environment in which they live.

3. The individual potential of a person is realized under the condition that the person lives in a stimulating environment. Potential is a crucial basis for the development of the human and the development of the human personality. Social workers carry out their professional activity (profession) in accordance with the functions of social work. This means within specific activities of social assistance to clients – individuals, groups and communities in dealing with their social events. [Mátel, Schavel et al. 2014]

One of the tasks of social workers is – to implement various activities of professional social assistance through a professional approach and within the framework of their own professional competencies. In addition to urgent help, social assistance also means professional guidance of people to active cooperation and, finally, to socially independent action. The real source of individual social change is hidden in the potential of each social client. Social assistance is about overcoming people's social helplessness and promoting their social capacity. Clients are professionally guided to self-help in a social and mentally stressful situation. [Machalová 2013]

During their work, social workers solve a myriad of client problems and problematic situations that can affect not only the performance of work, but also the experience of work and personal life. The social worker is thus constantly threatened by enormous workload, stress and stressful situations that directly or indirectly affect his work performance. The personality traits that a social worker should have thus indirectly come into conflict with situations that are many times dynamically changing and unpredictable. Therefore, it is appropriate that each social worker has not only supervisory meetings, the possibility of completing coping strategies, but also an individual family background (narrower or wider) that helps him to reverse the emergence of various types of burnout

syndrome. Professor M. Machalová [2013] states for inspiration and to encourage all professionals who work with people and who are in contact with „hopeless” clients, we only recall the characteristics of self-realizing people who, although they have survived many crises in life, precisely because of crises more aware of the value and uniqueness of their own personality.

Abraham Maslow, based on a long and passionate search for potential in each person, stated that self-realizing people:

- were realists in life.
- accepted themselves and others, their surroundings and the world as it is.
- were spontaneous.
- focused more on solving the problem than on themselves.
- created an atmosphere of impartiality and loved their privacy.
- were independent.
- evaluated people and things impartially and in a new way, not according to the usual stereotypes.
- had spiritual experiences, although not always or necessarily religious experiences.
- have identified themselves with the human race. They showed a social interest, a feeling for others, for the community.
- tended to have deep intimate relationships with a few close people, less attracted to superficial contacts with a wide range of people.
- had democratic values and attitudes.

Author Nová [2020, p. 134] is based on the assumption that “spirituality plays an important role in the educational process, because the development of the spiritual dimension of the individual can, inter alia. contribute to the acceptance of meaningful values that influence his behavior and actions“.

## 2. STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Oravcová [2004, p. 274] states that „a stressful situation is a situation characterized by the disproportion between the requirements, demands of a given situation and the capacity, abilities, skills needed to cope with it.” Stressful situations occur in the work environment and in private life. Each individual copes with the load individually according to their abilities and possibilities. the management of stressful situations takes place in a different way for each person. Several authors divide them into three main forms of load management:

- problem-oriented management (behavior aimed at reducing or eliminating the threat)
- coping focused on emotions (trying to change one's own experience of a stressful situation)
- escape management (change of environment, conditions or people in the vicinity) [Gáborová, Kollárik, Šišanská et al. 2013].

Oláh et al. [2009] state that a social worker is confronted with difficult human destinies on a daily basis, often has a significant impact on the lives of clients, and enters into the most intimate interpersonal relationships. These are often acute conditions that are unpredictable and one cannot prepare for them. At other times, the social worker is in the position of administrator and considerable sums of money pass through his hands. „The special function of a social worker results from his special position in relation to the client and the environment itself, when his professional performance includes his ability and willingness to participate in solving people's problems.“ [Raková, Bednarek 2015, p. 47]

Stressful situations can accompany a social worker in working with the client, family and community. they affect the perception and experience of workers, which is reflected in their behavior and has a significant impact on the performance of their work. The profession requires the deployment of a complex personality with both theoretical

knowledge and character traits and practical experience. Thus, the personal dispositions of a modern social worker should include characteristics such as flexibility, dynamism, initiative, perseverance and social feeling. Prompt response and selection of appropriate procedures are a necessity in resolving client crises. [Dimunová, Berešová 2015]

Mann [2004] adds that as a result of intensive work with the client's emotions, helping workers also suffer from helping fatigue in the form of secondary trauma. Secondary trauma represents a surrogate stressful experience that results from the action of the story of the trauma by someone who directly experienced it [Cunningham 2003]. Also on the basis of "direct assistance in a stressful event, for example in the form of crisis intervention after a mass car accident. Although the social worker is not directly in the role of victim of a serious event, this event of the client can have the same impact on him. As a result, he may feel manifestations of secondary trauma in the form of frightening dreams, feelings of helplessness or frequent thoughts about the client's situation." [Cunningham, 2003, p. 451]

Excessive stress, burnout, and the experience of secondary trauma affect an individual's health, there is an increase in emotional exhaustion and feelings of anxiety [Redeke, Mahoney 2000]. The overall quality of life and at the same time job satisfaction, efficiency and work efficiency of social workers can be affected.

In their research, Hricová et al. [2017] present the results of research showing that the social workers addressed report "increased levels of perceived stress and strain. In addition, social workers experience an average level of secondary traumatic stress, but as the number of years worked increases, the risk of secondary trauma increases. Based on the results, we can also say that the level of secondary stress is likely to fluctuate over the years worked, there are certain critical periods when a worker could be more prone to the development of secondary trauma. Such a period could be the first 3-5 years of work in the helping

profession. „ In this context, Barnett and Cooper [2009] state that workers in the helping professions are very often at risk of excessive stress and burnout. They provide assistance to others, although their internal and external resources may be overburdened. The authors Asquith, Clark, Waterhouse [2005] describe social work as a profession in crisis. According to them, social work in Britain has lost its course and points in particular to the following contentious areas: the crisis of professional identity, erosion of professional associations, lack of professional recognition, shortage of skilled social workers, insufficient recruitment, high turnover and alarmingly high numbers of people leaving professional social work. conditions, lack of resources necessary to ensure effective practice of social work and more.

The position of the social worker is different in different areas. The overall satisfaction of a social worker in the performance of his profession is influenced not only by subjective but also by objective conditions which are created by employers, regulations, decrees. There are a number of unfavorable situations in the work of a social worker, which can affect not only the performance and activity of the social worker, but also his current experience and thus also the motivation for further activities of social work. Many times social workers compare their position and position in the profession with other helping professions not only in the field of working conditions, wage evaluation, but also the overall understanding and tradition of the profession in the Slovak Republic.

At present, a social worker assumes a lot of responsibility not only for the client and for his work with a person, but also for the possibility of solving a difficult life situation. Therefore, it may happen that the objective and subjective experience of social worker satisfaction with the performance of the profession may be inconsistent with his further implementation of activities. Overall job satisfaction includes various partial satisfaction. There is a relationship of interaction between the two phenomena. Overall satisfaction significantly determines the degree of

satisfaction with individual aspects of work and satisfaction with partial factors of work supports overall satisfaction. Job satisfaction theories point to factors related to external working conditions that are independent of the worker. They correspond to the so-called hygienic factors from the two-factor theory of job satisfaction of Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman [In Štikař, Rymeš, Riegel, Hoskovec 2003], which include: interpersonal relationships, supervision, working conditions, salary and safety and corporate policy. The second, separate group consists of factors that affect the content of the work. They named them as motivating factors, while their existence or fulfillment affects satisfaction.

### **3. COPING LOAD MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

Coping as such represents a course in which the individual tries to manage the load. Each individual has their own way of coping.

According to Vágner [2004], methods of balancing can be differentiated according to whether they are aware or unconscious. Coping is therefore a conscious choice of a certain strategy, when its purpose is to improve the overall balance, whether as a result of a change in attitude, situation, evaluation, or experience of the situation.

Coping strategies and their ability to choose determines a person's ability to withstand stressful life situations that are associated with emotional experience, confirms [Cintulová, 2010].

According to Mill et al. [2008] coping is often perceived as a mediator of the relationship between emotions and stress. Fick [1993] argues that the term coping comes from English. It is related to adaptation, the personality of the stressed and has an emotional character. Vágnerová [2004] talks about two approaches to coping:

- 1) coping aimed at solving the problem,
- 2) coping aimed at maintaining acceptable subjective well-being, reducing negative experiences and maintaining mental balance.

Nákonečný [1997] has a similar division of coping methods:

- 1) focus on elimination, reinterpretation of negative emotions, ie emotionally oriented coping,
- 2) focus on reassessing the situation, on changing the meaning of the situation, or appraisal-focused coping, ie focusing on reevaluation,
- 3) focus on eliminating or changing external conditions causing stress, ie instrument-oriented coping.

There are many divisions, approaches, ways of coping with stressful situations. Carvera and Scheier (1989) present research on stress management strategies:

1. planning, when we think about what steps we can take, how best to deal with a stressor, – active coping, undertaking active procedures with the intention of eliminating or at least alleviating stress. Carver et. al [1989] claim to be similar to Lazarus and Folkman [1984, In Carver et. al, 1989] on problem-oriented strategies,

- suppression of competitive activities, in which we focus our attention on relevant activities,
- seeking emotional social help, seeking compassion or understanding,
- seeking instrumental social assistance, such as advice, information,
- behavioral release or abandonment of an attempt to achieve,
- acceptance, ie acceptance of reality,
- denying or denying the severity of the stressor,
- positive reinterpretation, active coping strategy,
- religion as a means of growth and positive reinterpretation, turning to it in a stressful situation,
- alcohol or drug use, form of escape,
- focusing on emotions and their expression, focusing on experiencing and venting feelings,

- mental relaxation, such as dreaming or alternative modes of action,
- self-control, where the individual tries not to act prematurely and tries to maintain perspective. The division into different coping strategies (Brief-COPE subscales) has been changed based on several of Carver's research and observations.

#### 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main goal of our research was to find out how personality factors affect coping in the work of a social worker. The social worker is responsible not only for himself and his work, but also for the people he meets at work. However, his role is not only to manage them, but also to lead, organize, plan and control them. During the performance of these functions, there are often situations that bring stress and burden, are crisis for him, it is difficult to manage them. And since he is not only responsible for himself, it is especially important that he can identify these situations correctly, manage them successfully and prevent them in the future. Therefore, our goal was to find out how his individual personality factors, resp. properties influence behavior in stressful situations.

The partial goals we set for the needs of this research were:

1. To find out what are the dominant personality traits of the social workers of our research group and also to what extent the individual strategies are used by them.
2. To determine whether there is a relationship between personality traits (extroversion, friendliness, conscientiousness, openness to experiences, neuroticism) and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).
3. Find out if there is a relationship between resilience and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).

4. Find out if there is a relationship between age and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).

Determination of working hypotheses:

1. There is a relationship between personality traits (extroversion, friendliness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism) and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).
2. Is there a relationship between resilience and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions)?
3. Is there a relationship between age and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions)?

Hypothesis no. 1: We assume that there is a relationship between personality traits (extroversion, friendliness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism) and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).

Hypothesis no. 2: We assume that there is a relationship between resilience and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).

Hypothesis no. 3: We assume that there is a relationship between age and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).

#### **4.1. ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH**

The implementation of this research took place from September 2020 to November 2020. We carried out the research through a questionnaire in electronic form. We addressed the questionnaires to the two Labor, Social Affairs and Family Centers in the Spišská Nová Ves district, whose responsible leaders we contacted in advance to approve the implementation of our research. We sent out 100 questionnaires via the Internet, and 84 (return of 84%) completed questionnaires were returned.

## 4.2. RESEARCH TOOLS

They collected data for the research through a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire was devoted to socio-demographic data, which were gender, age, number of subordinates, the activities of the organization in which they work and the department of social worker activities. The second part was focused on personality traits, respectively. how social workers perceive themselves as a person. Specifically, we used 25 adjectives that are used to denote given personality factors. Respondents in each of them had to express how, their given property is described on a scale of 1–8 (where 1 – completely inaccurate, 2 – very inaccurate, 3 – relatively inaccurate, 4 – a little inaccurate, 5 – a little accurate, 6 – relatively accurate, 7 – very accurate, 8 – very accurate). The next part was devoted to determining the degree of resilience, which we measured using a scale based on the view of resilience as the ability to recover, recover from stress and the ability to return to the original state. Respondents had to state how they cope with stress, resp. stressful situations. Their task was to express the extent to which they agreed with each of the 6 statements that described coping with stressful situations by circling one of the numbers on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree. After reverse polarity of items, we worked with a summary score.

The last part of the questionnaire was designed to determine the level of use of individual load management strategies. Respondents had at their disposal 20 situations, which we call stressful. By circling one of the 4 digits, they expressed how they used to solve individual situations and thus the degree of use of individual strategies of coping (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions), where 1 – untrue, 2 – untrue, 3 – quite true, 4 – absolutely true.

### 4.3. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH FILE

Our research was focused mainly on social workers in the district of Spišská Nová Ves. The research group consisted of 84 respondents, of which 67 were women, representing 80%, and 17 men, representing 20%.

Table 1 Gender distribution of respondents

	n	%
Women	67	80
Men	17	20
Together	84	100

Source: own processing

Through the sociodemographic part of the questionnaire, we also determined the age composition of the research group, the youngest respondent was 20 years old and the oldest 55 years, the average age was 34 years. Respondents who participated in the research work in various departments of the Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, the largest representation was social workers who serve in direct contact with the client in the department of material need, their number was 60, representing 71%, followed by respondents, who work in the department of social and legal protection of children and youth and social guardianship, there were 16 of them, ie 19%. Subsequently, they were the heads of departments, respectively. directors and representatives of departments represented by 8 respondents, i. 10%.

Table 2 Percentage distribution of respondents by classification

	n	%
Department of Material Need	60	71
Department of Social and Legal Protection	16	19
Head of department	8	10
Together	84	100

Zdroj: vlastné spracovanie

#### 4.4. INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS ANALYSIS OF DOMINANT PERSONALITY TRAITS AND EXTENT OF USE OF COPING STRATEGIES

The first goal of this research was to find out what are the dominant personality traits of social workers in our research group and also to what extent they use individual strategies. Based on the data obtained through the questionnaire, we found out how the respondents perceive themselves as a person, how their given property describes them on a scale of 1–8 (where 1 – completely inaccurate, 2 – very inaccurate, 3 – relatively inaccurate, 4 – a little inaccurate, 5 – a little accurate, 6 – fairly accurate, 7 – very accurate, 8 – very accurate). For better orientation and evaluation of the results, we divided the offered adjectives according to personality characteristics and selected an option from the offered options that describes them exactly. We found that up to 30 respondents considered themselves extroverts, 20 friendly, 24 conscientious, 8 open and only 2 neurotic.

Table 3 Dominant personality traits of social workers

	n	%
Conscientiousness	24	28,6
Friendliness	20	23,8
Extroversion	30	35,7
Neuroticism	2	2,4
Openness	8	9,5
Together	84	100

Source: own processing

To determine the preferences in the load management strategies, we divided the respondents in each management strategy based on the standard deviation and created 4 categories: 1. low preference of the

given strategy, 2. slightly below average to average preference, 3. average to slightly above average preference, 4. above-average preference. We then calculated the percentage of preferences for each strategy and displayed in a table. We found that proactively coping is represented by a slightly below-average to average preference.

Table 4 Utilization rate of the load management strategy – proactive management

	n	%
low preference of the given strategy	16	19
slightly below average to average preference	34	40
average to slightly above average preference	24	28
above average preference	10	13
Together	84	100

Source: own processing

Table 5 Utilization rate of the load management strategy – solution avoidance

	n	%
low preference of the given strategy	17	21
slightly below average to average preference	33	40
average to slightly above average preference	13	14
above average preference	21	25
Together	84	100

Source: own processing

We found that a slightly below-average to average preference is represented by 40% avoidance of the solution.

Table 6 Utilization rate of the load management strategy – seeking social support

	n	%
low preference of the given strategy	10	12
slightly below average to average preference	40	48
average to slightly above average preference	24	29
above average preference	10	11
Together	84	100

Source: own processing

We found that the search for social support is slightly below the average to average preference of 48%. Analysis of the relationships between personality traits and coping strategies Our second research goal was to determine the existence of a relationship between personality traits (extroversion, friendliness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neurotism) and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).

Hypothesis no. 1: We assume that there is a relationship between personality traits (extroversion, friendliness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism) and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions). Based on the analysis of data obtained through the questionnaire, hypothesis no. 1 confirmed only in the case of the personality characteristic „Conscientiousness and the strategy of coping with the avoidance of the solution”. We found that the higher the level of conscientious social workers (they achieve higher scores in this personality characteristic), the less they use the strategy of coping with stress - avoiding solutions, respectively. the more conscientious the police are, the less they avoid dealing with stressful situations (Table 7).

Table 7 Identified correlations between personality traits and coping strategies

	Proactive management	Search for social support	Avoiding solutions
Extroversion	0,038	0,020	-0,07
Friendliness	0,059	-0,063	0,063
Conscientiousness	-0,110	-0,069	<b>-0,298**</b>
Openness	-0,065	-0,049	-0,103
Neurotism	-0,043	0,015	-0,014

Source: own processing

### ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESILIENCE AND BURDEN MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Our third research goal was to determine whether there is a relationship between resilience and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions).

Hypothesis no. 2: We assume that there is a relationship between resilience and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions). By correlation analysis of data, we found that hypothesis no. 2 was only confirmed in the case of the Search for Social Support burden management strategy. We came to the conclusion that the higher level of resilience in social workers is significantly related to the strategy of coping - burden of seeking social support, respectively. social workers who have a higher capacity for resilience use a strategy of seeking social support in coping with stressful situations (Table 8).

Table 8 Identified correlations between resilience and stress management strategies

	Proactive management	Searching for social support	Avoiding solutions
Resiliencion	0,017	<b>0,202*</b>	-0,061

Source: own processing

## ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND COPING STRATEGIES

Our last research goal was to find out whether there is a relationship between age and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions). Hypothesis no. 3: We assume that there is a relationship between age and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions). Using the analysis of data obtained by the questionnaire, we found that hypothesis no. 3 was not confirmed in any case. We conclude that there is no relationship between age and coping strategies (proactive coping, seeking social support, avoiding solutions (Table 9).

Table 9 Identified correlations between age and coping strategies

	Proactive management	Searching for social support	Avoiding solutions
Age	0,084	-0,099	-0,108

Source: own processing

## CONCLUSION

Today's lifestyle can be called stressful. Everywhere we demand the best possible results, whether at work, in the family or at school. Therefore, it is possible to consider the biggest source of stress is work, respectively. employment. Employers place high demands on employees to perform at their best, and employees have high demands on their employers to provide them with the best possible working conditions and an adequate financial reward for their work, it can be said that this is a vicious circle full of requirements. Our area of research was social workers, as they have a responsibility not only for their work, but also for the people they manage and with whom they meet on a daily basis. In the performance of their functions, which include management, leadership, organization, planning and control, they often encounter situations that can be defined as stressful, resp. stressful. And given the high degree of

responsibility, it is essential that they are able to correctly identify and then deal with these situations and avoid them in the future. In order to manage all this successfully, it is essential that they know themselves as personalities, what personality traits they have, so that they can develop them for the benefit of themselves, their subordinates and, last but not least, for the benefit of the society in which they work.

In the quantitative research we conducted with social workers in the district of Spišská Nová Ves, we not only determined the degree of use of coping strategies in the practical management of avoiding solutions and seeking social support, but we analyzed their relationships between personality traits and coping strategies, between residency and load management strategies and between age and load management strategies. Based on the results of our research, we can state that the higher the level of conscientious social workers, the less they use load management strategies. It is such a personality trait, which in our understanding is understood as the final consequence of the satisfaction of the implementation of a social worker in practice and thus shows a subjectively very low possible failure rate from the point of view of a social worker. In analyzing the relationships between resilience and coping strategies, we found that a higher rate is very significantly related to seeking support. In analyzing the relationships between age and coping strategies, we found that there is no relationship between age categories and selected and strategies that are beneficial in coping with the social worker's workload. However, this relationship needs to be examined more in the future, especially in terms of the expansion and scaling of age categories, not only in terms of the age of the social worker, but also in terms of the period of the social worker profession.

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