The Attitude of Social Workers to the Implementation of the Standards of Quality of Social Services[1]

Markéta Elichová, Anna Sýkorová

1. Introduction

The interpretation and attitude of social workers[2] to the Standards of Quality of Social Services (SQSS) is a topic that has not so far been complexly treated in the Czech Republic using data obtained in interviews with social workers, even though the innovation of the Standards of Quality which is being prepared and the expected social reform make the issue quite fundamental for contemporary social work.

The paper aims to establish the interpretation of SQSS and the attitude of social workers to them, both from the point of view of lived practice and from the point of view of the individual conception and understanding by the workers themselves. In particular, we deal with social workers' views of implementing the Standards of Quality in practice, the realisation of methodologies in the practice of particular organisations and the impact of the Standards on social work.

Since the object of our interest is the social worker, realising the theories and methods of social work in practice and so creating the form social work ultimately takes, we deal with the basic level of implementing SQSS in practice. On this basis, we will attempt to identify the possible strengths and weaknesses of this process. Since we believe, based on our expert knowledge as well as personal practice in non-state non-profit organisations, that the starting points and the essence of SQSS are good, we are especially interested in the barriers to implementing and realising SQSS in practice.

The results speak of the attitudes and the evaluative relationship of social workers to the issue of SQSS and therefore they offer the subjective view of important agents in the realisation of the expert discipline of social work in practice. We are aware that this view may be different, for example, from the way SQSS are conceived by the management of organisations or experts entering the organisations from the outside. However, we believe that it is important to address precisely this level because, by realising SQSS in practice, social workers are the direct agents of quality in the organisations, as confirmed by the description of the present situation below. Also, according to

2   In the text we use the masculine 'he' to represent 'social worker' to make the text clearer and to save characters.

Musil, the workers 'deal with what they expect of the Standards, i.e., with their pre-conception, rather than with what the text of the Standards requires'.[3]

1.1 Present situation

The users' quality of life gained importance in the context of social services in 2007 when the Law on Social Services was passed,[4] which made the newly reformulated SQSS into a norm, the fulfilment of which is at the same time the condition of providing social services.[5] But in practice it turned out, as confirmed also, for example, by an investigation in 2012, that the Standards are useful for the service only if the provider is capable of employing them according to his needs: he interprets their meaning, translates their wording to his situation and uses them as an instrument of service quality management. As a result of implementing the Standards the provider then determines the particular framework of his service.[6]

The practical impact of implementing the Standards of Quality in the practice of social services has brought many ambiguities and problems. For example, in some organisations the quality of social services has become a 'dreaded norm' and obtained the label of further administrative work burdening the social worker's performance and distracting him from direct work with the clients.[7]

With respect to the interpretational ambiguity of the Standards it has turned out that meeting some of the criteria and sub-criteria on the part of service providers is problematic.[8] Social workers are often incapable of making use of the freedom provided by the high level of generality with which the individual criteria of the Standards are defined.[9] At the same time, according to Musil, the overly general setting of the Standards has not brought sufficient pressure on changes, and organisations find it attractive to adjust the Standards to the habitual routine or seek ways of circumventing them or consider them as a merely administrative fulfilment without a real impact upon the attitude towards the clients.[10] In many cases, social workers create written methodologies which are non-functional, i.e., they do not correspond to the theoretical starting points employed in the organisation's practice,[11] but illustrate the social worker's idea of how to fulfil the duties given by the Standards. Often organisations copy the methodologies of organisations that have already passed the inspection process and do not adjust them to their own specificities.[12]

3   Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory. Řízení kvality dlouhodobé péče v ČR*, Praha: Galén, 2007, p. 46.
4   Cf. Oldřich MATOUŠEK, *Sociální služby: legislativa, ekonomika, plánování, hodnocení*, Praha: Portál, 2011.
5   Cf. Law no. 108/2006 Sb., on social services, § 82, 88.
6   Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb. Zpráva z výzkumu*, Individuální projekt MPSV: Inovace systému kvality sociálních služeb, November 2012, p. 6.
7   Cf. *Kvalita v sociálních službách*, expert conference, Brno, 7th April 2011, [DVD] ASPSS ČR, 2011;
    Vladimír HANZL, Evergreen: Inspekce kvality, *Rezidenční péče* 4/2011, pp. 12–13.
8   Cf. Miloš SLÁDEK, Inspekce kvality v domovech pro seniory jako ukázka střetu různých hodnot, in: *Hodnoty v prostředí sociálních a zdravotních služeb*, ed. Zuzana HAVRDOVÁ, Praha: Fakulta humanitních studií Univerzity Karlovy, 2010, p. 116; © MPSV, *Individuální projekt MPSV – Inovace systému kvality sociálních služeb* (online), at: http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/18616/Socprace_Clanek.pdf, accessed 9th December 2015; © MPSV, *Inovace požadavků na kvalitu sociálních služeb: Druhý návrh věcného řešení* (online), at: http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/15275/inovace.pdf, accessed 9th December 2015; © MPSV, *Pracovní dokument pro tvorbu věcného záměru zákona o sociálních pracovnících (profesní zákon). Konzultační dokument MPSV pro období červen až září 2014* (online), at: http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/18392/3a._Pracovni_dokument_profesni_zakon_cerven_zari_FINAL.pdf, accessed 9th December 2015.
9   Cf. Kristýna ČERMÁKOVÁ and Milena JOHNOVÁ (ed.), *Zavádění standardů kvality sociálních služeb do praxe. Průvodce poskytovatele*, Praha: MPSV, 2002.
10 Cf. Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory*, p. 45.
11 Cf. © MPSV, *Inovace požadavků na kvalitu sociálních služeb*.
12 Cf. Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory*.

The fact that the obligations and standards are difficult to understand and can be subjectively interpreted has also had a negative impact on the sphere of quality control, i.e., inspections. In the control regime, the Standards are measurable criteria, but, according to Paleček and Kocman, the criteria can never reach the schematisation level necessary for measurement, since they are qualitative and open to interpretation. So, the measurability of the criteria is not based on some firmly established metrics, but on interpreting them. But no stable inspectorial interpretation exists.[13] Moreover, in connection with inspections, the Standards are an ambivalent instrument, which on the one hand says that the providers are experts in fulfilling the Standards, but on the other hand, in the course of inspections, this role of the providers is set in fundamental doubt. So, in the course of inspections two expert interpretations of the Standards confront each other.[14]

As a result, the proper meaning of the Standards, which strives to guarantee an optimum setting of the service with respect to the user, maintaining his dignity and maintaining or reinforcing his social integration, is often misunderstood in practice.[15] The behaviour of some social workers contradicts the ideals of social work as an expert discipline, which strives to maintain or develop the social functioning of individuals, families, groups, communities and the whole society, based on the value of every human being and on human rights.[16] By their orientation to the personal goals of the service users, the Standards make it possible to concretise abstract ideals, such as human dignity, autonomy, etc.[17]

This interpretational ambiguity and the problems associated with it, for example, unnecessary administrative burdening, is addressed by the revision of SQSS currently being prepared by the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs as part of the project Innovation of the System of Quality of Social Services.[18]

2. The methodology of the research investigation

The investigation was realised by means of the semi-structured interview method. The research set consisted of social workers in organisations and public offices, from all regions of the Czech Republic, and all forms of providing social services were represented. There were 25 interviews conducted, which were carried out by ten trained questioners. The data collection took place in October, November and December 2013. The organisations and workers were selected according to pre-determined parameters for the individual regions (type of service and municipality size). The interviews were conducted in the respondents' workplaces.[19]

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13 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb*, p. 8; Pavel ČÁSLAVA, *Zpráva o výsledcích ankety mezi členy AÚSP k tématu zvyšování kvality sociálních služeb*, Sokolov: Asociace ústavů sociální péče, 2003; Jana DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Kvalita sociálních služeb se zhorší, *Zdravotnické noviny* 49/2004, pp. 16–18; Libor MUSIL et al., *Působení politiky sociálních služeb na kulturu poskytování osobních sociálních služeb ve vybrané organizaci. Závěrečná zpráva z výzkumu*, Brno: Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí, 2007; Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory*, p. 46.

14 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb*, p. 9.

15 Cf. Law no. 108/2006 Sb.

16 Cf. IFSW, *Definition of Social Work* (online), at: http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/, accessed 9th December 2015; Pavel NAVRÁTIL, *Teorie a metody sociální práce*, Brno: Marek Zeman, 2001, pp. 11–12; Oldřich MATOUŠEK, Prolegomena k teorii sociální práce, *Fórum sociální práce* 1/2011, pp. 15–16.

17 Cf. Miloš SLÁDEK, Inspekce kvality v domovech pro seniory jako ukázka střetu různých hodnot, p. 115.

18 Cf. © MPSV, *Individuální projekt MPSV*; © MPSV, *Inovace požadavků na kvalitu sociálních služeb*; © MPSV, *Pracovní dokument pro tvorbu věcného záměru zákona o sociálních pracovnících*; © MPSV, *Projekt Systémová podpora profesionálního výkonu sociální práce* (online), at: http://www.mpsv.cz/cs/17865, accessed 9th December 2015.

19 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ, *Přihláška týmového grantového projektu*. Supported by the grant of the Grant Agency of the University of

The data was processed by qualitative methods (coding, categorisation, topic analysis). The communication partners' answers were coded and the codes were divided into categories and subcategories.

For the purposes of this text we decided to present the analysis and conclusions inferred from the answers to four of the interview questions, which directly concerned the Standards of Quality: Did you take part in implementing SQSS in the practice of your organisation?[20] How do you realise the methodologies according to SQSS in practice?[21] In what way did SQSS affect social work?[22] Why do you think SQSS were created?[23] The other interview questions dealt with the situation of social work in the Czech Republic.

Out of the total number of 25 respondents (R) we processed the answers of 21 of them. The other four social workers worked in public offices, had never encountered the Standards of Quality in their work and in their own words could not provide relevant answers concerning implementing the Standards in the organisation's practice. Although the content of SQSS and work with them are not part of the *Minimum Standard of Education in Social Work of the Association of Educators in Social Work* (ASVSP),[24] familiarity with the Standards of Quality is among the skills that are sometimes required at examinations of the expert competence of civil servants.[25] That is why, for the purposes of the subsequent analysis, the social workers working in public offices were classified in a special category.

With respect to the goal of the research investigation and to the interpretation of data we operationalise the following concepts:

- Attitude to SQSS – how the social worker perceives, judges and evaluates the Standards, in the sense of an attitude or an evaluating relationship;[26]
- Interpretation of SQSS – how the social worker interprets the Standards (grasping and understanding them) with respect to his practice in the organisation, or clarification of the text's meaning especially with respect to subsequent practical application;[27]
- Social worker – we use the definition of Law 108/2006 Sb., on social services, § 109 and 110.[28]

South Bohemia GAJU no.117/2013/H 'Conception of Quality of Social Work in Connection with the Self-Definition of Social Workers and Their Helping Profession', 2013.

20 By this question we intended to establish how SQSS were implemented in the organisation's practice and whether and how the social workers participated in it. We were also interested in the temporal aspect of implementing SQSS, from the point of view of inception (based on the obligation determined by the Law on Social Services, or earlier), and from the point of view of process (a single event, or a continuous process). The issues that came up were further developed.

21 This question was intended to establish the functioning in the organisation's practice, how the standards are implemented in practice, how they are employed in the organisation's everyday life, how they are reflected on and experienced by the social workers themselves, the other employees, the management, or the clients. Supplementary questions were asked to develop the answers.

22 This question was intended to establish whether and to what extent the social workers reflect on their profession in a broader context, whether they are not narrowly focused on the practice of the organisation, and whether and to what extent they are familiar with and perceive the situation related to SQSS in the field of social work as an academic and practical discipline.

23 The question established the subjective personal view of the reason for creating the standards. The interviewer guided the communication partner to answer based on his own experience and reflections on it, not merely based on a knowledge of SQSS.

24 © ASVSP, *Minimální standard vzdělávání v sociální práci ASVSP, Asociace vzdělavatelů v sociální práci* (online), at: http://www.asvsp. org/standardy, updated 6th March 2014, accessed 9th December 2015.

25 Cf. © INSTITUT PRO VEŘEJNOU SPRÁVU PRAHA, *Soubor zkušebních otázek k ověření zvláštní části zvláštní odborné způsobilosti pro výkon správních činností při sociálně-právní ochraně dětí* (online), at: http://www.institutpraha.cz/overeni-zoz/zkusebni-otazky/ zoz-zvlastni-cast/kurz-7, accessed 9th December 2015.

26 Cf. Milan NAKONEČNÝ, *Psychologie: přehled základních oborů*, Praha: Triton, 2011, p. 467; Milan NAKONEČNÝ, *Sociální psychologie organizace*, Praha: Grada, 2005, p. 43.

27 Cf. Dušan HENDRYCH, *Právnický slovník,* 3. substantially extended edition, Praha: C. H. Beck, 2009, p. 295.

28 Cf. Law 108/2006 Sb., § 109 and 110 (abbreviated): *The social worker performs social investigations, secures social agendas, social-legal counselling, analytic, methodological and conceptual activity, expert activities in facilities of social prevention services, screening activity, crisis intervention, social counselling, social rehabilitation, establishes the needs of the population and coordinates the providing of social services. The prerequisites of performing the vocation of a social worker are legal capacity, integrity, good health and expert qualification.*

3. The issue of implementing and realising SQSS in practice

This chapter describes and evaluates the respondents' answers to two questions concerning the implementation of the Standards of Quality in the practice of particular organisations. In the answers, we have identified two main groups of social workers: one described the positive aspect of implementing the Standards (good practice), while the other described the negative aspects. A third, and least numerous, group of social workers manifested ambivalent answers. According to the analysis of the answers obtained, two respondents described elements of good practice of implementing the Standards, but also mentioned several problematic points, which was due to the fact that SQSS implementation in their organisations had just begun.[29]

3.1 Positive aspects

In accordance with expert knowledge, the following positive aspects of work with SQSS were identified.

Standards implementation based on practice

According to 14 of our communication partners, the implementation of SQSS in their organisations was based on their practice. The Standards were not created abstractly, but the social workers co-created them with their colleagues under expert supervision and with training, as the following statements confirm: 'Well, I think that (we realise) fine, because those standards of ours arose as if out of practice, that the practice is described, occasionally we learn a new impulse, so I think that those standards of ours mirror our work.' (R 12); 'The implementation was based on practice and need, but I know we had some expert guidance.' (R 7)

The social worker as realiser of implementing the Standards in the organisation's practice

Twelve social workers were in their own words the main persons creating the methodologies related to implementing and fulfilling SQSS in the organisation, as illustrated, for example, by the statement of R 1 or R 12: 'In fact I am part of it in this very moment, because in fact we are remaking the Standards altogether, and I have a key part in that in a way.' (R 1); '… but the greatest part rests on the social worker, who must style it and somehow administratively incorporate it into those rules.' (R 12)

The role of the worker implementing the Standards of Quality in an organisation is beneficial for social workers, because, as Kocman and Paleček mention, implementing the Standards has forced the workers in many services to start thinking conceptually about the process of working with the client, with respect to the sense of social services and client rights protection.[30] Another positive aspect is the fact that when social workers have an opportunity to work with SQSS according to their needs, they translate their wording to their own situation and clearly grasp the particular framework of their service, and the SQSS are useful for the service, in accordance with the results

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29   Social workers working in public offices had not encountered SQSS at work.
30   Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb*, p. 6.

of the 2012 investigation.[31] Moreover, through their education, social workers are competent for this, ideally in cooperation with the organisation's management.

Involving all employees in the process of SQSS implementation

In accordance with Mátl and Jabůrková, who state that the available literature identifies cooperation, i.e., the active participation of all of the workers in the organisation, as a prerequisite of successful service quality management, or in accordance with *Quality in Civil Counselling*, which states that quality management in practice is also aided by the co-creation of the internal rules,[32] six of our workers spoke of the greatest possible level of involving all employees in the process of implementation: 'It is important that the standards are created by the whole team, so that every worker can participate in the service …' (R 12) In some facilities even the clients took part in creating the methodology: 'Here even the clients participate in making the methodology, because they think up some such basic things, for example, crisis situations. We ask them how they would solve this and then we give them the methodology in a simple way, in a simple language, so that they can react accordingly. And then the more complex methodologies are created by the workers.' (R 11)

Lived practice in accordance with the methodologies

Twelve social workers stated that in their organisation the employees are familiar with the methodologies and standards and proceed according to them; they also evaluated individual planning as well regulated and functional. Four workers even described a satisfaction with the standards prevailing in the organisation. They make it possible to improve the quality in the organisation, because the workers are aided by specific methodological procedures, which must be easily available and alive.[33]

The workers understood even the necessary administration as part of SQSS implementation and realisation without negative connotation, as it is in a reasonable measure necessary for the proper functioning of the service, as confirmed, for example, by Musil.[34]

3.2 Negative aspects

Six interviews contained statements witnessing to a problematic implementation and realisation of the Standards of Quality in practice. The negative aspects listed below are often the opposite of the positive aspects identified above and offer examples of poor practice as described in chapter 1.1.

Unfamiliarity with the Standards

In several cases the social workers, according to their statements, do not know SQSS at all, with, for example, R 17 stating: '… I don't know. But I can refer you to someone who will tell you more

31 Cf. ibid.
32 Cf. Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory*, p. 51.
33 Cf. ibid.
34 Cf. Libor MUSIL, Standardy kvality a sociální práce v sociálních službách, *Sociální práce / Sociálna práca* 1/2004, pp. 53–74.

about it. But… I don't know.' From these respondents' other answers, it is possible to infer that in their organisation SQSS were implemented without contact with the employees, who only know that they are supposed to go by the manual they received. The same respondents therefore also manifested the following aspect.

Not involving the employees in the process of implementing SQSS

We will supplement what has been described above with short quotations: 'No [I was not involved].' (R 17); 'I was not involved in the process at all.' (R 10)

Implementing SQSS 'top-down'

Social workers stated that they are expected to work according to methodologies and manuals, which are given, as said by R 15: '… so those Standards, I did not get the impression that all have an awareness of that. It was rather some manual, which was in a computer somewhere, everyone was supposed to have it, everyone was supposed to go by it, but I don't know to what extent the people even read it, to what extent anyone talked to them about it…, they just sent it to us as a ready-made paper, well, with which none of us has really become acquainted.'

Adopting other organisations' methodologies

An interesting phenomenon was the concurrence of adopting written methodologies having to do with realising SQSS in practice from other organisations and evaluating SQSS as nonsensical or useless. An example is R 19: 'I think that the Standards are quite useless in the nursing service… It is just a pointless order.' The respondent then described how the (adopted) methodologies are non-functional and burdensome for the employees, as well as for the organisation's functioning, which can happen in case the Standards are not properly grasped, as the *Incentives for Revising the Standards of Quality of Social Services* confirm.[35]

Creating all-encompassing and inflexible written methodologies

The statement of R 22 demonstrates the way of creating and working with written methodologies associated with the criteria of the individual standards that we have described: 'I must say that [we realise the methodologies] with much difficulty. We regulate something, then some conditions change and the methodologies must be changed and adjusted again, so it is very difficult from the point of view of time, because the changes are numerous.'

The social workers linked the issue with the temporal burden of realising SQSS in practice, but when the topic was analysed in more depth in the conversation it turned out that in fact they are speaking of an inappropriately regulated form of the methodologies in the organisation. The written methodologies created in the organisations were over-extensive and over-specific, with an

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35 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb.*

inflexible updating process. This phenomenon is associated with anxiousness about inspections, which often leads providers to create a surplus of written procedures, and as a result the created materials are too complex, the workers don't know them, and are unfamiliar with them.[36]

Realising the Standards in practice as a complication to performing social work

Some social workers were convinced that the Standards make social work unnecessarily complicated and that the changes they bring are merely formal. The respondents stated a discord between the written methodologies and practice (see the quotation of R 15 above) or unfulfilled principles of social services in the created methodologies, which regulate the workers in the organisation. The latter was described, for example, by R 10: '… it complicates the work with the client, it is just a kind of labelling.' These problems in implementing the Standards of Quality in practice are also confirmed by the research of Mátl and Jabůrková.[37]

Interpretational ambiguity of the Standards

The respondents described the ambiguity and unclarity of the individual criteria. For example, R 11 stated: '… but no one could explain them fully.'

4. The (non-)contributions of SQSS for social work

In their answers to the question dealing with how SQSS affect social work, the social workers distinguished between several levels: macro – the field as a whole; meso – the realisation of social work in social services viewed under the aspect of own experience at the level of organisations providing social services; and micro – the professional performance of the social worker.

The contributions of SQSS for the field of social work

The following were perceived as contributions of the Standards to the field of social work by nine workers:
- grounding social work as a discipline;
- making social work easier;
- greater transparency of social work;
- professionalising social work;
- conceptual thinking about the process of working with the client, as confirmed (besides the respondents) also by Kocman;[38]
- greater focus on the client, as stated by the respondents and confirmed by the literature;[39]

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36 Cf. ibid; © MPSV, *Inovace požadavků na kvalitu sociálních služeb.*
37 Cf. Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory.*
38 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb*, p. 6.
39 Cf. Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory*; Martin BEDNÁŘ, Úvod do standardů kvality sociálních služeb, *Sociální práce / Sociálna práce* 2/2007, pp. 57–60; Kristýna ČERMÁKOVÁ and Markéta K. HOLEČKOVÁ, Úvod, in: *Standardy kvality sociálních služeb – výkladový sborník pro poskytovatele: Výstupy z tematických diskusních setkání a práce odborných týmů pro jednotlivé oblasti Standardů kvality sociálních služeb*, pp. 5–6 (online), at: http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/5966/4_vykladovy_sbornik.pdf,

- protecting the client's rights, see for example the statement: 'Yes, I think it has focused social workers on what is important, this focus on the client, as on the human being who is at the centre of what is going on and whose rights should not be violated, and it's not the workers' goals that should be realised, but the clients' goals. So some sort of protection of interests or privacy, protection of the client's safe space, intervention by the social worker only to the extent that the client wants.' (R 15);
- new methods of work;
- supervision of organisations, see for example the statement: 'Well, they are certainly important for some supervision of the work…' (R 25)

The contributions for social services

The following were stated as contributions for social services by the respondents:
- that the quality of the social services provided has become the topic of public discourse;
- improving the quality of the services;
- self-definition of the organisation;
- that they gave an ordering and a form to providing social services, clear rules for work, as described, for example by R 15: 'When the service has its rules and limits, it is much easier to provide it even for the workers, because they don't have to improvise';
- the measurability of the quality of social services;
- the unification of providing social services. The Standards of Quality determined and unified the issues that social services must focus on, as confirmed by R 21: '… We and the clients have gained a better orientation in the services. It has brought a certain standard of what we have to offer and what the clients can expect.'

The contributions for social services listed above are also confirmed by Kocman and Paleček.[40]

The contributions for social workers

According to the respondents' statements, the Standards have made the following contribution to the social workers themselves:
- the challenge to work on the deficiencies and thereby to improve service quality;
- expanding their knowledge, as confirmed, for example, by the response of R 9: '… when I meet a citizen who asks me if I know where they could go with that person, then I know what that organisation does and I know that I can send them there. It has expanded my knowledge.'

The non-contribution of SQSS for the performance of the profession by social workers

Eight respondents stated a negative influence of SQSS on social work at its micro-level, in particular:
- the non-grasping of individual planning. This category was succinctly described by R 20, who said: 'A good thing is individual planning, although it is often misunderstood, in my experi-

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accessed 9th December 2015; Pavel ČÁMSKÝ, Jan SEMBDNER and Dagmar KRUTILOVÁ, *Sociální služby v ČR v teorii a praxi*, Praha: Portál, 2011.
40 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb*.

ence. The commercial sphere and computer programs have entered into this massively. I think the people misunderstand it';

- administrative burdening, decreasing the time available for direct work with clients. According to the social workers, the Standards burden them with excessive administration, which has changed the distribution of the time available for the individual activities in performing social work. Some of the respondents spoke of the burgeoning of bureaucracy, but the connection with the limitation of the time available for contact work with the clients was always mentioned: 'The really bad thing about the Standards is the unbelievable growth of bureaucracy. It is catastrophic. A great de-personalisation has taken place. The workers are inundated with papers and they have no time to work with the client.' (R 20) 'Unfortunately the Standards have brought a great administrative burdening. A terrible increase in bureaucracy. One is always in paperwork. For us and for the workers on the ground it is quite complicated, we don't have as much time for the clients.' (R 6) It is true that with the present conception of the Standards the elaboration of methodologies required by the Standards present a great administrative burden for the services, as confirmed by the *Incentives for Revising the Standards of Quality*.[41]

Zero contribution

According to Bednář, the Standards bring new methods and views into the practice of social services and are innovative in many respects,[42] and yet some of the social workers even said that SQSS had no influence on social work at all: 'In no way [did they affect social work], all stayed as it was. Most of the specifications in the Standards had been addressed before in another form, for example by the internal regulations, i.e., in a similar form. So it corresponds with the present Standards, only the form was adjusted, but the content remained the same.' (R 3) But how the respondent's quotation shows, and as confirmed by his other formulations, the issue of quality had been addressed in his organisation already before the Law on Social Services and the obligations it stipulates came into effect.

5. Why SQSS were created

Most social workers think of SQSS in the context of *developing the management of quality in social services,* as confirmed by the answers of 15 of them to the question designed to establish their view of the reason for creating the Standards. For example, R 3 stated: '[The Standards] were created in order to regulate relationships; a minimum of qualities was laid down which organisations will be obliged to keep at the same level at least. I also see a gradual unification of the services provided, but in the sense of a certain guarantee for the clients that all facilities will provide quality services.'

On the other hand, three of the interviewed social workers see no rational reason why the Standards were created, or their meaning, as confirmed for example by the statement of R 18: 'I simply don't know [why the Standards were created]. This paperwork, for all this paperwork they don't have time to work with the client. There must be a record of everything, just sit at a computer and take notes whenever something is done around those people. I don't see the meaning in this.'

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41 Cf. ibid, p. 10.
42 Cf. Martin BEDNÁŘ, Úvod do standardů kvality sociálních služeb, p. 59.

These respondents *reduced the issues of SQSS to the issue of several problems* that affected them practically (for example, growth of administration, the requirement for a written documentation of the client, the obligation of individual planning, etc.), *they did not think about the principles of SQSS and their meaning.*

Three respondents stated both positive and negative aspects of the Standards' creation.

6. Sources of problems in implementing the Standards of Quality in practice

Based on the results of our investigation, we attempted to identify the possible sources of the lack of success of implementing SQSS in practice for the required development of the management of quality in organisations that help people in an unfavourable social situation, who are more threatened by discrimination and social exclusion, and often have less power over their own lives. We think that three sources of problems can be identified and described:
- the form of the Standards;
- inappropriate work with the Standards;
- shortcomings on the part of the social workers.

Each of these categories has a broader context. These problems occur at the level of *whole society*, at the level of *organisation leadership and management*, and at the *individual* level, i.e., the level of the individual social workers and their work.

The form of the Standards

The problem of SQSS is the ambiguity and lack of clarity of the individual criteria, accompanied by its heterogeneous interpretations by workers at various positions in the organisation providing social services, as well as by inspectors, employees of regional authorities, trainers and other experts who lecture and publish in the field. The Standards' high level of generality has turned out to be a problem in practice, which makes them, to a certain extent, difficult to grasp in implementing them in practice, as confirmed also by the statements made by our communication partners.

This finding is confirmed by the investigation of Kocman and Paleček[43] and by the incentives of the MPSV (Ministry of Work and Social Affairs) on the *Innovation of the Quality of Social Services.*[44] According to the MPSV workgroup, the principal shortcomings are the insufficient adaptation of the Standards to different types of services and target groups, the problematic character of the Standards as an instrument of control, the Standards' lack of clarity and complexity, excessive administrative burden and lack of connection with other elements of the system.[45] In combination with the other listed factors these shortcomings can in practice exert a negative influence on the quality of the provided services. Here we are already partially speaking of the following source of problems.

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43 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb.*
44 Cf. © MPSV, *Inovace požadavků na kvalitu sociálních služeb.*
45 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb*, p. 5.

Inappropriate work with the Standards

An erroneous and inappropriate grasp of the Standards and their individual criteria, i.e., for example, implementing them in a manner out of touch with the organisation's practice, lack of communication in the workers' team, copying methodologies, creating an excess of written procedures, not grasping the breadth of application possibilities and adjustment to particular practices that the Standards enable due to their generality, as confirmed by the results of our investigation and the investigation of Kocman and Paleček,[46] bring about the subsequent non-functionality of implementing SQSS in practice, as opposed to the opposite, also noted in the investigations, which brings about functionality.

This level of problems in implementing and realising SQSS in practice is linked especially with the level of the organisation, its mode of management, its abilities and skills and the management of quality regulation. The sphere of quality in the organisation was also affected by factors such as the presence, frequency and quality of the supervision provided, which the workers in some organisations used to address and grasp the issues of the Standards' criteria, the adequacy of regulating the workers' educational plans according to the organisation's and workers' needs, the quality of the educational activities, etc.

In organisations in which our communication partners were employed and where a poor practice of implementing and realising SQSS occurred, the workers' statements enabled us to record a phenomenon described by Musil et al. based on their investigation – in the practice of organisations the goals and means of providing social services are not interconnected.[47] In other words, the respondents described a gap between the theoretical starting points (mission, goals of the organisation) and the practice (everyday work in the facility), which again refers to a certain lack of competence on the part of the management.

Shortcomings on the part of the social workers

With the present form of the Standards and their 'risks' described above in being correctly grasped and being put into practice in an organisation requires a competent social worker, who is supported by a competent management and possibly other experts. As confirmed by Matoušek's statement that shortcomings on the part of the social workers have to do with his ability to perform social work,[48] as well as by the statements of our communication partners, in organisations where such workers are lacking (several respondents manifested problems in knowledge, skills, identification with the profession and organisation, attitude to the work and interest in it), implementing the Standards of Quality in practice and fulfilling their meaning grapples with problems. It is probably best documented by our finding of the lack of understanding of individual planning as a process of cooperating with the client and adjusting the service to his needs, which at the same time brings many benefits for the employee, including his protection. (In our country-wide investigation among social workers the skill of individual planning was mentioned as most lack-

46 Cf. ibid, pp. 5-17.
47 Cf. Libor MUSIL and Pavel BAREŠ – Jana HAVLÍKOVÁ (ed.), *Výkon profese sociální práce v systémech sociální ochrany ČR. Závěrečná zpráva o řešení veřejné zakázky ZVZ 217*, Praha: VÚPSV, 2011, pp. 367, 375, 394.
48 Cf. Oldřich MATOUŠEK, *Sociální služby: legislativa, ekonomika, plánování, hodnocení*, p. 13.

ing, immediately after psychological knowledge, fundraising and economic knowledge.[49]) This indicates a contradiction in separating the theory from the practice of social work and the general from the particular in the context of social services. It may be caused by an unsuitable form of educating the social workers at post-leaving certificate level and in whole-life learning and by insufficient personality preconditions for their professional performance.

It should be possible to change the present state of problematic fulfilment of some of the criteria of the Standards on the part of social services providers by entering each of the defined sources of problems.

7. Conclusion

By means of the research investigation described above we have attempted to grasp the attitude of social workers to SQSS, their interpretation of the Standards at the individual level and from the point of view of lived practice; we have identified the strengths and weaknesses of the process and pointed out the possible connection of the conception of social work with the attitude to the Standards.

The findings of our investigation, as well as similar ones,[50] can be used as a starting point for formulating the areas for innovation, support or development, so that the quality of social services and the management of quality in them can be better secured and developed.

We think that in focusing directly on the social worker as a direct agent of realising quality in practice it is necessary to reinforce the motivation of social workers to lifelong learning,[51] so that, for example, the situation cannot arise that a social worker doesn't even know the Standards or rejects individual planning. It holds not only that professional growth is one of the basic practical competencies of social work,[52] but also that the Law on Social Services imposes the obligation of continuous further education.[53] The ability and willingness to improve one's education is an expected and appreciated quality of the workers, because it indicates among other things a rounded professional identity and the effort to perform high-quality work.[54] Social work, realised as part of social services as a professional activity, requires extensive professional preparation[55] and is classified among the demanding helping professions. That is why education in social work, both professional training and further development, is a lifelong process with the goal of acquiring further knowledge and skills, including professional experience, which the workers acquire in or-

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49 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ et al., *Sociální práce*, Praha: Grada, 2017 (in print); Jana PETRÁŠKOVÁ, *Kompetence sociálních pracovníků v soudobé společnosti*, České Budějovice, 2015, bachelor's thesis, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Faculty of Theology, thesis supervisor Markéta Elichová.

50 Cf. for example Ondřej MÁTL and Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, *Kvalita péče o seniory*; Libor MUSIL, Standardy kvality a sociální práce v sociálních službách; Miloš SLÁDEK, Inspekce kvality v domovech pro seniory jako ukázka střetu různých hodnot.

51 Cf. © Libor MUSIL, *Stanovisko Vědecké rady MPSV pro sociální práci k návrhu věcného záměru zákona o sociálních pracovnících a samosprávné profesní organizaci sociálních pracovníků* (online), at: http://www.socialniprace.cz/soubory/stanovisko_VR_k_ZSPR_brezen2013.pdf, accessed 12th March 2014.

52 Cf. Zuzana HAVRDOVÁ, *Kompetence v praxi sociální práce: metodická příručka pro učitele a supervizory v sociální práci,* Praha: Osmium, 1999.

53 Cf. Law no. 108/2006 Sb.

54 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ and Anna SÝKOROVÁ, Kompetence sociálního pracovníka: co učí školy a co vyžadují zaměstnavatelé, *Sociální práce / Sociálna práca* 1/2015, p. 82.

55 Cf. © MPSV / ODBOR 22, *Návrh koncepce celoživotního vzdělávání sociálních pracovníků a výchovy k lidským právům*, p. 4 (online), at: http://www.epolis.cz/download/pdf/materials_45_1.pdf, accessed 1st December 2015.

der to develop their personality or to perfect their profession.[56] But as David Pospíšil, the director of the Department of Social Services, Social Work and Social Housing of the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs (MPSV), claims, low motivation to lifelong education is a problem especially in those social workers whose incomes are very low on a long-term basis. He also says that these factors have been reflected upon and ought to find a place in the professional work that is now being prepared.[57]

Money and rewarding workers in social work and social services are an important issue in themselves. MPSV evaluates rewarding employees in social services as a serious, persisting problem and as quite dismal and unaddressed on a long-term basis and states that the problem needs urgent solving. It is aware that this results not only in a great fluctuation of the workers, but also in the unavailability of adequate care and its decreasing quality, which includes disabling the development of social services.[58]

But it is also important to address the quality of lifelong learning, which is currently subject to criticism.[59] At present the quality of the courses offered varies markedly and in many cases the courses focus not on acquiring the competencies needed in social work, but on changes in the legislation.[60] If we focus on the educational offer in more detail, we find that various courses are virtually the only form of further education, are mostly one-day long, and are at the same time those most demanded for financial reasons. The topics of the courses are often repeated, so that the situation can arise when a worker who has been working in the social sphere in one position for several years grapples with the problem of finding a course that he has not yet taken. The educational offer also lacks activities focused on supporting the implementation of new knowledge and skills in practice.[61]

The education of social workers is an important aspect of the situation, because, according to Janebová, it is the medium between theory and practice[62] (our results showed their separation in some respects) and, according to Bednář, it has a fundamental effect on the development of the quality of social work.[63] It has numerous shortcomings, as confirmed by another study of ours.[64] We can also state the absence of the conception of quality of social work in the *Minimum Standard of Education of ASVSP* (Association of Educators in Social Work),[65] in which 35 schools are associated[66] which educate social workers at post-leaving certificate level and for which the

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56 Cf. © MPSV / ODBOR 22, *Návrh koncepce celoživotního vzdělávání sociálních pracovníků a výchovy k lidským právům*, pp. 6 a 8 (online), at: http://www.epolis.cz/download/pdf/materials_45_1.pdf, accessed 1st December 2015.

57 Cf. © David POSPÍŠIL and Martin HOLIŠ, *Debata – Jaký je stav dalšího vzdělávání sociálních pracovníků v ČR?* (online), at: http://www.socialniprace.cz/debata.php?id=7, accessed 4th December 2014.

58 Cf. © MPSV, *Národní strategie rozvoje sociálních služeb na rok 2015*, p. 17 (online), at: http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/21192/NSRSS.pdf, accessed 25th May 2016.

59 Cf. Melanie ZAJACOVÁ and Filip NOVOTNÝ, Informace o stavu připravovaného profesního zákona, *Sociální práce / Sociálna práca* 3/2014, pp. 35–38.

60 Cf. Tereza MORONGOVÁ, *Motivace sociálních pracovníků k celoživotnímu vzdělávání*, České Budějovice, 2015, diploma thesis, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Faculty of Theology, thesis supervisor Markéta Elichová.

61 Cf. Dana NEJEDLÁ and Veronika PAVLÍKOVÁ BROŽOVÁ, Proč chceme dále vzdělávat pracovníky v sociálních službách – chceme pozitivní změnu v praxi nebo jen splnění zákonného požadavku, in: *Profesionalita, perspektivy a rozvoj sociální práce: Sborník z konference X. Hradecké dny sociální práce,* Hradec Králové: Gaudeamus, 2013, pp. 51–55.

62 Cf. Radka JANEBOVÁ, Úvahy nad genderovým tichem aneb Je gender relevantní kategorií v sociální práci?, *Sociální práce / Sociálna práca* 2/2008, p. 101.

63 Cf. Martin BEDNÁŘ, Kvalita sociální práce, in: *Encyklopedie sociální práce*, Oldřich MATOUŠEK et al., Praha: Portál, 2013, p. 520.

64 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ and Anna SÝKOROVÁ, Kompetence sociálního pracovníka.

65 Cf. © ASVSP, *Minimální standard vzdělávání v sociální práci ASVSP.*

66 Cf. © ASVSP, **Členové** (online), at: http://www.asvsp.org/clenove, accessed 4th December 2015.

Minimum Standard is obligatory. The work that has begun on innovating the sphere of Theory and Methods of Social Work represents an opportunity. (The *Minimum Standard* also does not react to the willingness for further education, but the competence of professional growth should be imparted by the school within the most widespread competence model of education in social work.[67])

A specific sphere that needs to be reinforced in education is the skill of individual planning.

Another sphere on which attention can be focused within the educational process is the development of critical self-reflection and the cultivation of the social worker's personality, which is inseparably tied to the profession.[68] Several studies[69] confirm that this is one of the ways necessary for reinforcing a professional identity and adopting the values of social work, which in practice results in the increase of professionality, i.e., of a professional conception of social work, which according to our results appears to be the most fitting for increasing the quality of social services.

We think that in practice it is also necessary to support the availability of quality supervision, which also serves to develop the workers' expertise, as confirmed by the results of our investigation. At present, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a good supervisor. The results of student surveys realised as part of the GAJU project,[70] and our own experience, show that the management often takes part in the supervision, that the management is informed about particular statements the workers made in supervision, that money is lacking for a visiting high-quality supervisor, etc.

As Clark and Newman stated, the professionality of social work must be combined with managerialism.[71] That brings us to another problem sphere that has not been mentioned so far – the level associated with the management of the organisation providing social services. According to Malík Holasová, the high-quality services of social work must be in harmony with the organisation's overall management. The organisation's workers must take into account that social facilities are not only institutions providing help, but also companies whose company functions must be maintained in order for the purpose of providing help to be fulfilled. To this purpose the organisation must be managed and the management's assignments must be realised.[72] If the management is competent, it should strive to support the development of quality in the organisation. But as we have described elsewhere, the management frequently consists of social workers (also due to the wages level in social services), who often do not have sufficient competences for it, since teaching management and administration is not a standard content of the post-leaving certificate study of social work. Although the graduate's profile of the *Minimum Standard of ASVSP* states this skill, it is not listed among the theoretical and practical disciplines that are obligatory for the educator. As a result, this sphere of education is neglected by some schools and the graduate need not be sufficiently equipped for the sphere, which less than two years of practice will make up for without further education (unless he has a sufficiently strong competence of professional

67 Cf. Jitka NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Vzdělávání v sociální práci, in: *Encyklopedie sociální práce,* Oldřich MATOUŠEK et al., p. 511.

68 Cf. Oldřich MATOUŠEK et al., *Encyklopedie sociální práce*; Táňa FALTISOVÁ, Náplň práce a profesní identita sociálního pracovníka, *Sociální služby* 2010, pp. 8–9; Zuzana HAVRDOVÁ, *Kompetence v praxi sociální práce: metodická příručka pro učitele a supervizory v sociální práci*, Praha: Osmium, 1999.

69 Cf. for example Markéta ELICHOVÁ et al., *Sociální práce*; Ladislav OTAVA, Institucionalizace sociální práce a sebezkušenost sociálních pracovnic, *Sociální práce / Sociálna práca* 3/2016, pp. 105–116; Juliet C. ROTHMAN, *The Self-Awareness Workbook for Social Workers,* Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999.

70 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ, *Přihláška týmového grantového projektu.*

71 Cf. Věra MALÍK HOLASOVÁ and Libor MUSIL, Manažerismus, in: *Encyklopedie sociální práce*, Oldřich MATOUŠEK et al., p. 247.

72 Cf. Věra MALÍK HOLASOVÁ, *Kvalita v sociální práci a sociálních službách,* Praha: Grada, 2014, p. 127.

growth).[73] High-quality courses focused on developing managerial skills also tend to be very expensive.[74]

Thanks to the meaningfully conceived MPSV project 'Innovation of the System of Quality of Social Services', various formulations and requirements of the individual criteria have been changed in the proposed wording of the innovated SQSS, which are now better interconnected with the provider's legal obligations according to Law 108/2006 Sb.[75] in the amended form, which is now in the consultation stage. Innovating the Standards should also significantly reduce the amount of information in written materials, as well as the number of documents; the reporting system should also be simplified.[76] The education of inspectors has also been newly conceived. It is necessary that, once the amended law has been ratified, the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs will suitably support the providers of social services in implementing the changes, for example, through expert support or by suitable manuals – the problematic sphere of SQSS, which we have identified, could be addressed in this way. Of course, we have mentioned that each area of problems, due to which the implementation of the Standards in practice is unsuccessful, has a broader context at several levels. Here the risk is the legislative process itself. It is not certain whether the wording of the innovated SQSS will not be changed for various reasons in the process of amending the Law on Social Services; one intervention can disrupt the compact character of an interconnected whole…

On comparing our results with the theoretical starting points we have described, the analysis of the respondents' answers we have obtained has allowed us to reach fairly positive conclusions. In most of the investigated areas, answers testifying to good practice and to a professional grasp of SQSS issues prevailed. However, the predominance of positive aspects over negative ones does not constitute an optimum situation in the sphere of SQSS.

At the same time, the results of the research investigation imply that at present the interpretation and attitude of the individual social workers is very important, as they play a crucial part in the process and co-create the helping organisation by giving it a form, by formulating its mission and central documents and by performing in the helping profession itself.[77] Their attitudes, experience, abilities, knowledge, the way they approach their work, their activity and passivity, their ability to think conceptually and to apply theories in practice are all very important.[78] The concluding question which arises asks for whom the criteria of quality are formulated, and especially for which level or state of the field of social work. Generally speaking, the question is to what extent SQSS are correctly set. For it seems that in their present form they cannot guarantee the legally required minimum conception of quality, when their implementation is not supported by professional social workers, as confirmed by our investigation and by the results of the investigation, which was conducted among providers and inspectors as part of the project Innovation of the System of Quality of Social Services.[79] However, we think that the Standards of Quality should ensure a certain minimum quality even where such professional workers are lacking. The

73 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ and Anna SÝKOROVÁ, Kompetence sociálního pracovníka.
74 Cf. © REMEDIUM, *Manažerské dovednosti* (online), at: http://www.remedium.cz/vzdelavaci-programy/kurz-manazerske-dovednosti-pro-manazery-pomahajicich-profesi.php, accessed 28th December 2016.
75 Cf. © MPSV, *Individuální projekt MPSV.*
76 Cf. © MPSV, *Inovace požadavků na kvalitu sociálních služeb.*
77 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ, Pěstování orchidejí a praxe charitativních organizací, *Caritas et veritas* 1/2011, pp. 30–33.
78 In this context, it is crucial that the workers are supported by the organisation's management and by the local authority.
79 Cf. David KOCMAN and Jan PALEČEK, *Podněty k revizi standardů kvality sociálních služeb*, pp. 14–15.

question also remains as to what extent the organisation's management can secure high-quality employees in professions that have a low level of social prestige[80] and wages below the national average.[81] This can be supplemented with an example from practice: the members of the consultation group preparing the new wording of the Standards as part of the project Innovation of the System of Quality of Social Services identified the fact that it is difficult to find qualified and motivated social workers in places other than large cities.[82]

We are aware of the fact that the standards of the field of social work and of social services are interconnected, both being affected by many variables. At present the so-called Professional Law is very important, which could facilitate the development of social work in the Czech Republic and as a result the situation in social services could improve. But waiting for that need not be effective, which is why we welcome the innovation of SQSS and the amendment to the Law on Social Services which is being prepared, with which the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs is reacting to the needs and the situation in the profession of social work, because we think that the path towards the quality of social services ought to be addressed from both sides – by increasing the professionality of social work and the professionality of social services.

80 Cf. Markéta ELICHOVÁ et al., *Sociální práce.*
81 Cf. © MPSV, *Národní strategie rozvoje sociálních služeb na rok 2015*, p. 17.
82 Personal communication at the meeting of the GAJU no. 117/2013/H team members on 15th July 2015 concerning the professionality of social workers.

The Attitude of Social Workers to the Implementation of the Standards of Quality of Social Services

Abstract

Based on analysing the results of a research investigation, the paper describes the attitude of social workers to the Standards of Quality of Social Services, especially from the point of view of the individual conception and grasp of the meaning of the Standards for social work by the workers themselves, and especially with respect to their practice in a particular organisation. The views and attitudes of the social workers are set in the context of the present situation in the field of social work and of the innovation of the Standards of Quality which is currently being prepared by the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs. Based on the investigation, the text describes three main sources of problem in implementing the Standards, which occur at all levels, from the level of society to the level of the individual. These are followed by proposals for the solutions. The text also addresses the issue of education in social work as a factor that significantly affects the formation of social workers' attitudes.

Keywords: Standards of Quality of Social Services, social workers, implementation, education

Author contact

Dr. Markéta Elichová
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice
Faculty of Theology, Department of Ethics, Psychology and Charity Work
Kněžská 8, 370 01 České Budějovice
elichova@tf.jcu.cz

Anna Sýkorová, M.Sc.
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice
Faculty of Theology, Department of Ethics, Psychology and Charity Work
Kněžská 8, 370 01 České Budějovice
annasykorova@tf.jcu.cz