Choosing social-educational professions in post-soviet countries: international comparison

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Introduction

The motivation functions as the most important and decisive factor in choosing the profession Therefore it has an especially remarkable role in the further professional activity of a social-educational worker to raise one's qualification and progress as a specialist (Келасьев, 1994). The issue of the professional motivation for choosing social-educational work-studies is becoming increasingly important in post-soviet countries, where the institution of social worker is new and the social exclusion is so widely expressed. The issue of the professional aptitude of students is also important in various professional fields, however in social-educational professions it's importance is exceptional. The profession of social-educational work is based on competences that are constantly expanding and becoming more and more complex.

In scientific literature the variety of different aspects for this issue is analysed. Some studies discuss the ideal characteristics of social worker (Келасьев, 1994; Leliūgienė, 1997), the motives for choosing social-educational professions (Corey, 1992, Vincent, 1996), and the role of motivation in choosing the profession (Kregždė, 1988; Jovaiša, 1998). In post-soviet countries no similar comparative study has been conducted before. Economical, political, social and demographical changes in the society are recognized in social-cultural factors that impact the professional motivation. That is why a new knowledge is required that can illuminate the role of social-cultural factors in the professional motivation for social-educational professions.

Analysis of the above-mentioned theoretical and empirical studies raises some important research questions. Firstly, what personal qualities a person choosing social-educational work career should possess to be able to perform in a motivated and highly professional manner? Secondly, do institutions of higher education provide favourable educational and psychological environment for the development of the relevant professional motivation and value-orientations?

The problem that the article deals with is the analysis of the dominating professional motives for the social-educational work and the establishment of the influence of social-cultural and personal factors on it. The aim of this paper is to determine whether the dominating motives in choosing social-educational work-studies conform to theoretical characteristics of individual's aptitude for social professions. Methods used in the paper are the analysis of theoretical literature, the statistical program SPSS-10 and the method of comparison of data from three post-soviet countries.

The article consists of three parts. The first one seeks to give a theoretical basis for the analysis of the professional motivation for social-educational professions. The second part

presents the methodology of Prof. Kelasjev used for the investigation. The third part analyses the results of the empirical investigation in revealing the professional motivational expression in different social-cultural environments of the social-educational professional studies.

Specific Character of Social-Educational Work

In many societies, the social-educational work professions are considered to be new and related to the recent development. They make part of a civilised society as a sphere that is created by society itself in the course of its social development (Lorenz, 1995). Social-educational work is a profession aimed at helping a person, a family or a group, which is in the difficult life or work situation (Leliūgienė, 1998).

Social-educational professions are distinctive in terms of their mission and changing tasks legitimated by society (Келасьев, 1994, Leliūgienė, 1997). Their problematic and complex character is determined by the broad spectrum of tasks and functions. Social-educational professions demand from individuals not only broad interdisciplinary education and but also special competences. Madsen's theoretical structure of social-educational worker's competences illustrates high requirements for this profession:

- *Productive*, defining the ability to perform various practical and technical professional functions using different methods and technologies;
- *Expressive*, representing the dimension of aesthetics and emotions, which is based on the aesthetical sensitivity;
- *Analytic/synthetic*, representing the perceptual and cognitive dimension and enabling to use various methods of inquiry and critical thinking;
- *Communicational*, determining the relationship between communicating individuals and expressed as the ability to share experience with a client;
- *Operational*, integrating the above competences and determining the quality of social-educational work (Madsen, 1993).
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It is obvious that these competences should be developed in the course of training of social workers through theoretical studies and practical activity. However, the only education is not sufficient because the quality of social-educational work depends also on individual's specific features, physiological characteristics, value system, professional interests and other factors. That is the reason why it is important not only to create an effective training programme, but also to identify and develop certain personal qualities, which should be possessed by social worker (Petkevičiūtė, Malinauskas, 1996).

The issue of professional aptitude is very important because individuals who are inapt for a certain professional activity waste many resources and incorrectly perform their work tasks in the future. Socio-educational professional activity is complicated and oriented to the client, therefore some researchers claim that this work requires individuals to be characterized by certain qualities and features. The professional activity of the socio-educational work requires special psychological qualities, intellectual capabilities, special training and various competences.

Motivation is another important factor in diagnostics of professional aptitude for social work career. It was determined that motivation is the key factor behind individual's efforts to continually develop one's competence in the course of professional activity (Leonavičius, 1996; Келасьев, 1994). The choice of the profession is a complex phenomenon, which is determined by various social and psychological factors. *The choice of a profession is the choice of a certain professional activity taking into account one's own interests, vocations,*

abilities as well as the demands of the labour market (Leonavičius, 1996). It can be determined by the values of the society, the prevailing political, social and economic conditions.

The motivation of career choice reflects not only individual's subjective decision, but also evaluation of social-cultural circumstances and internal assumptions (Kregždė, 1988). Such social-cultural factors as professional status, organization of the educational system, gender stereotypes, social background etc. influence the structure of motives that determinate the choice of the profession.

Recent literature on career choice and career development also emphasises values as motivating factor. Hoel (1995) argues that the choice of career depends on the structure of priorities in different areas (such as work and family) of one's life. Following these perspectives, three dimensions of professional motivation may be suggested:
- External achievements (salary, status, security, career opportunities, etc.);
- Realisation of individual's creative abilities (determined by education, hobbies, interests, etc.);
- Humanistic orientation (where the key role is played by direct interaction with the client and ability to help).

It is obvious that among individuals who choose social-educational worker's career the human orientation dimension should dominate.

Summarising, social-educational work professions require specific characteristics and personal qualities from individuals who choose them. Two factors - individual's values system as well as professional motivation - plays an important role in choosing social work career.

Methodology
The study was aimed to test the hypothesis: a number of social work students are unmotivated, and some of them are even inept for social work career because admission to universities and colleges in Lithuania is based on competition. In many European countries, secondary school certificate is not sufficient for being admitted to social work studies - additional requirements are applied (Келасьев, 1994; Leliūgienė, 2001). It was decided to compare three groups of social-educational work students enrolled to universities of Byelorussia, Lithuania and Russia. The aim was to determine the need for a system of selection of applicants for social work education in Lithuania.
The study was conducted in May 2001 using the instrument developed by Prof. Kelasjev and his research group from the Russian Scientific Academy in Moscow (Келасьев, 1994). The questionnaire was aimed at diagnosing already at the beginning of studies the individuals unsuitable for social-educational work. In the latter version, some questions giving important demographic information about respondents were added. The questionnaire was adopted for Lithuanian respondents by giving it for a control group that consisted of 24 second-year social-educational work students in Kaunas University of Technology in March 2001.

The questionnaire consists of five open-ended questions, 51 closed questions. There were three demographic questions about the age, gender and demographic place of respondents. Eight dimensions are incorporated into the structure of the questionnaire:

- *Motivation* as one of the key expressions of professional interest based on conscious choice and professional orientation.
- *Benevolent relations with other people* as an important factor in social-educational work with clients.
- *Empathy* as a significant feature in working with people and manifested as understanding of people's problematic situations, compassion and readiness to collaborate with clients and colleagues.
- *Aggression* as unsuitable for social workers; it can manifest itself through jealousy, hostility, indifference, coldness, wish to compete and criticize.
- *Relationship with oneself* as love and respect to oneself, which facilitates adaptation and orientation in the social environment.
- *Communicational and organizational skills* facilitating successful communication with clients, ability to influence, manage the group, etc.
- *Health condition* as a significant factor in successful social work career.
- *Personal anxiety* as an indicator of professional inaptitude for social work.

Each of these dimensions was represented by six questions, except for motivation, which was represented by seven. The respondents were asked to choose the answer from the three possible variants: yes, no and I do not know.

Results

The sample consisted of 225 first-year social-educational work students and was selected using the convenience method. 136 students from 6 Lithuanian universities, 57 from M. Tank Pedagogical University in Minsk (Byelorussia), and 32 from Viatskij University, Kirov (Russia) filled in the questionnaire voluntary.

In Figure 1, respondents' distribution by gender is presented. Figure 2 shows age of the respondents.

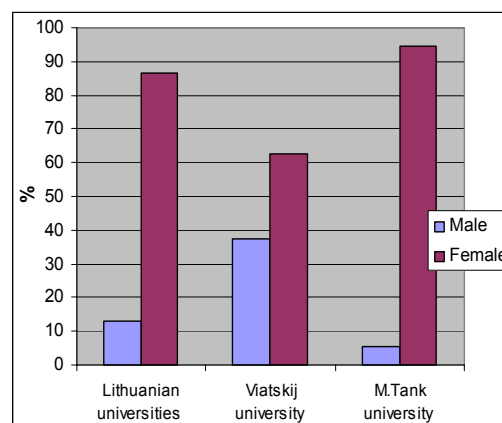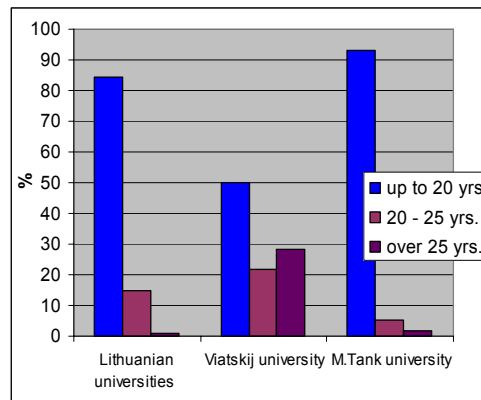**Figure 1: Students' distribution by gender (n=225)**

Figure 2. Students' distribution by age (n=225)

Analysing the data in the dimension of professional motivation some moments should be stressed. Students from the Lithuanian universities differ from their counterparts by lack of prior professional experience (76.5%) and low interest in their future work (16%). These numbers suggest random and unmotivated choice of the profession. About ¼ of students point out that they cannot imagine the professional social-educational work. At the same time they do not expect their future work to be "convenient and easy". Thus, based on answers to the latter questions, professional motivation cannot be evaluated as very low. The largest number of students would like to work as social-educational workers (73%) and represent clients in legal matters (56.6%).

The results from Pedagogical M. Tank University in Minsk do not show low professional motivation either. However, only 26% of students had a prior social work experience. Respondents do not express high interest in the future social-educational work profession (17.5%). Likewise in Lithuania, most of respondents would also choose a profession of social-educational worker (93%), and clients' legal representation (80.7%).
Due to the small sample size, it is most difficult to interpret the results from Viatskij University. Contradiction in the results is reflected by the fact that 50% of respondents had prior work experience but as many as 69% were not interested in social work before studies. 12.5% claim that social-educational work appeals to them by "neatness and convenience". This depends on the kind of practical experience the individuals had. It is surprising that almost 1/5 do not want to be social-educational workers (19%).
Open-ended questions and propositions give respondents a possibility to indicate the key motives behind their choice of social-educational profession. These motives are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of responses about the motives of choosing social-educational work professions (%)

Motives	M. Tank University	Viatskij University	Lithuanian Universities
Wish to help people	46	41	43
Wish to get education or a degree	2	31	4
Self-actualisation	2	9	-
Wish to associate with people	3.5	12.5	8
Wish to be useful	2	6	2
Wish to be useful to the country	3.5	6	-
Getting knowledge	2	3	3
Like this profession	14	-	31
Love children	21	25	7
Induced by friends or family	3.5	-	4
Chose incidentally	2	-	24
Personal reasons	-	-	3

The results suggest that the key motive behind the choice of social-educational work is the need to take care of others. Other researchers also emphasise this motive as common among social work students (Corey, 1992; Vincent, 1996). In their case, social-educational work is chosen as a vocation. It gives the best possibilities for the feeling of satisfaction in the professional activity and its results.

The motives behind the humanistic orientation (wish to help people, self-actualisation, wish to be useful, love for children, etc.) and behind the realisation of individual's creative abilities (pursuing education, liking the profession, prompted by family) are equally important for the respondents as the comparison shows. Material rewards (wish to get a diploma) are most important for respondents from Viatskij University. It can depend on their older age.

The respondents from Lithuanian universities emphasise the motive "like this profession", whereas respondents from other countries stress "love for children" as the most important motive. Many Lithuanian students emphasise self-actualisation, whereas groups of respondents from the Slavonic countries emphasise the object of their future activity pointing out children as the key target group. This fact can be explained by the shift in the social-educational work content and practice in Lithuania under the influence of European social work dimensions. In terms of client groups, the social-educational work encompasses not only children, but also families with social problems, former prisoners, drug addicts, lonely mothers and others, which makes understanding of this profession more complex.

Another tendency is different perception of social-educational professions. Respondents from the Slavonic universities stick to the older understanding of social-educational profession as work with children. In conclusion, the definition of social-educational work in Lithuania is the same as in European countries, whereas in two Slavonic universities the older definition is still dominating.

Educational motives, such as wish to acquire education and knowledge are important, whereas family's and friends' opinion is not determinant. The fact that students of Lithuanian universities choose social-educational profession randomly can be explained by the changing status of social-educational professions and the changes in the education system. Random choices of the social-educational work career are compensated by individual's human oriented disposition and wish to help people.

Respondents from M. Tank and Viatskij universities pointed out a motive uncommon among Lithuanian students: "being useful to one's country". It can be explained as a relic of the communist ideology lacking pragmatism and individualism of western countries. This allows to state that the professional motivation is approached as a product of it's social-cultural environment.

The hypothesis that students with pre-course social work experience are better motivated and have a higher degree of professional aptitude has been confirmed. With regard to the aptitude for social-educational work, some tendencies can be pointed out. In Table 2, the results related to positive characteristics are presented.

Table 2. Positive characteristics in professional aptitude (%).

Scales	M. Tank University	Viatskij University	Lithuanian Universities
Motivation	55	59	50
Benevolent relationship with people	50.5	64	56
Empathy	46	44	49
Aggression	37.5	43.5	42
Relationship with myself	42	56	42.5
Communicational-organizational skills	37	54	39
Personal anxiety	54	57	62
Health condition	56	53.5	60

The motivational aspect has already been analysed. The results in the Table 2 correlate with Table 1 results, which also showed rather high professional motivation. Respondents from Viatskij University with the highest percentage of social-educational work experience also have the highest professional motivation (59%).

Benevolent interaction with people is important in social-educational work. Respondents of all groups are characterised by broad spectre of psychological features, dominated by goodwill.

The dimension of "relationship with myself" gets the highest percentage (56%) from the respondents of Viatskij University, which is probably due to their higher average age as compared to the other two groups. Individuals over 20 years old often have higher self-confidence and positive attitude to oneself, are more demanding to oneself, etc.

On the communicational and organisational skills, the group from Viatskij University received the highest score (54%). These skills enable the individuals to successfully communicate with clients, to manage the group, etc.

No remarkable differences were found concerning health and personal anxiety. Social-educational work is closely related to stress situations that require good physical and mental health. Students' responses manifested high personal anxiety, which points to the risk of mental instability among the respondents.

Analysing the relation between motives in various cultural groups of respondents some differences are indicated. Correlations were found not high but some significant relations should be discussed. Respondents from all the sample scored highest on relation of items "have a social-educational work experience" and "have a clear picture of social work profession" (0.234**); "easy to communicate with strangers" and "easy to convince other" (0.250**); "easy to communicate with strangers" and "usually I take initiative in decision making" (0.213**). These items represent motivational and communicational dimensions.

This can be grounded, that respondents express disposition to social-educational work and have a professional interest to it.

Summarising the results of all dimensions, it can be concluded that professional aptitude in all groups is in general satisfactory. Following Kelasjev's methodology, each respondent's answers were analysed in order to determine how many of them were inept for social-educational work.

Table 3: Ineptitude for social-educational professions (number of individuals)

	M. Tank University	Viatskij University	Lithuanian Universities
One dimension	3	7	19
Two dimensions	-	2	2

As it is seen from the Table 3, only 3 persons from M.Tank University, 7 from Viatskij University and 19 from the Lithuanian universities are inept for social-educational work on one dimension out of the suggested eight. On two dimensions the number of inept individuals is even smaller. None of the respondents is inept for social work on three dimensions. These results of professional inaptitude show that there is no reason to speak about a tendency of inept individuals joining social-educational work-studies. Respondents from M.Tank University had the lowest percentage of people who chose the studies incidentally (2%), which indicates the motivated career choice. This result correlates with the number of only three students who were inept on one dimension.

It can be concluded that individuals choose social-educational work profession driven by human oriented and self-realisation motives. Individuals that choose social-educational work incidentally, join special educational environment, which makes them better motivated. Even though a number of respondents stated that their choice had been random or had been caused only by a wish to get a degree. It is obvious that universities perform an important educational function of developing relevant personal characteristics and attitudes.

More generally, the results indicate the shift in the entire system of social-educational work training in post-soviet countries. It is caused by the changing relationship between the individual and the socio-cultural environment as well as by changes in the social-educational work practice, emerging dominance of humanistic attitudes.

Conclusions:

1. The results of the eight professional aptitude dimensions indicated that respondents' aptitude is satisfactory and corresponds with relevant characteristics of social-educational worker. There is no need for the student selection system for social-educational work-studies in post-soviet countries. In terms of professional motivation, two groups of motives were important: the humanistic orientation and the self-actualisation.

2. Although some respondents' choice of social-educational work was incidental, higher education institutions provide students with favourable educational environment and good psychological climate that help to develop relevant value-based attitudes and professional motivation.

3. As the international comparison showed, the professional motivation is approached both as a product of it's social-cultural environment and as an individual wish to self-realization what makes the structure of professional motivation different in various cultural contexts. The structure of professional motivation for social-educational work illuminated the impact of social-cultural changes and processes.

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