

The Supervision in Social Work. The Michael Balint Method in Providing Psychological Support for Social Workers, Policemen, Soldiers, and Firemen

Summary

The social worker or policemen should have broad skills in mobilizing people to action for individuals and groups. Looking at the particular desirable personality traits and skills of social workers can conclude that the emotional and somatic personality include: empathy, the ability to recognize emotions in themselves and others, the ability to control their own emotions and influence it, emotional balance, good mental health and psychosomatic. The personal development of social workers involved in helping Balint groups.

Keywords: stress, illness, social work, Balint group

Introduction

Social workers are exposed to risky situations in life, including stress, burnout, illness resulting from stress and other negative factors. Research and professional practice suggest that among the many personality traits that need to be taken into account when selecting people to work in the field of social work, the following types of intelligence should be considered: 1. cognitive, 2. emotional, 3. spiritual and 4. social. The article discusses the role and importance in the work of social workers, policemen, soldiers mentioned types of intelligence.

Researchers and practitioners are increasingly devoting more attention to subjective factors conducive to human welfare. This problem has traditionally been studied in terms of objective indicators such as income, health and living conditions, etc. It is known, however, that the economic indicators are important for the proper development of the people and the nation. As many studies show, it is also important to identify and measure of subjective welfare indicators, relating

to an individual assessment of their own well-being, life satisfaction, social relationships, work and health goals and personal accomplishments¹.

In the field of health psychology many studies indicate a need to consider the quality of life as a proper interpretation of the concept of the health perspective subjective. Furthermore, the quality of life must be considered, not only in relation to health. It is a broader concept, moving areas and activities of daily life, which does not necessarily depend on the condition of man and can go beyond physical limitations. All individuals, depending on their health status, social roles, personality, style of interaction with the environment, develop their personality which means good quality of life².

Most researchers agree that health is a multidimensional construct that includes the physical, social and psychological dimensions. This approach was first expressed in the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and reaffirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) meeting in Alma-Ata (1986), where it was confirmed that health cannot be treated only as a lack of pathological symptoms, but also to be they understand the physical and psychological well-being. At the same time it formulated the principles of a new approach to the diagnosis and treatment of diseases: created biopsychosocial model of health. George Engel said that limitations and weaknesses of the biomedical model of Western medicine, which focuses on the symptoms and physical ailments, and offered a broader view of the problem, focused on the patient as a person, as a carrier of specific cultural characteristics, that gives an individual sense and experience of health and illness³.

The International Classification of Functioning (ICF), issued by WHO in 2001, stresses the need for evaluation of health conditions from a positive perspective, i.e. from the perspective of human functioning. ICF evaluated in a study of what people are currently doing in their daily lives and in the environment. This approach changes the point of view of science and study the consequences of the disease (such as discomfort or limitation of activity) on the determination of the components of health in terms of physical disease sources, daily activity and participation in social life. The salutogenetic perspective emphasizes the active role of the person in the interaction with the environment. It is clear that two people in the same state of health may exhibit different levels of operation. It depends on variables that are different from physical condition, but not least are health related:

¹ A. Fave, *The impact of subjective experience on the quality of life*, [in:] M. Csikszentmihalyi, I.S. Csikszentmihalyi, *A Life Worth Living*, Oxford 2006.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem.

personality traits, family support and social environment, economic and financial situation, level of education, level of knowledge of the culture, social policy.

With respect to persons engaged in professions such as social workers, educators, teachers, therapists, policemen, soldiers, firemen etc., which rely on helping other people in vulnerable situations, health understood as a multidimensional feature is necessary for competent and effective action. Selection and selection of employees to these professions should therefore include a psychological evaluation, and it should take into account, among others, the level of sense of life, neuro-psychosomatic health, resistance to stress, etc. Investigated social workers, policemen, probation officers, social animators have a common interest: human survival and suffering. Looking at the particular desirable personality traits and skills of social workers, policemen etc. beyond the appropriate level of sense of life, we can say that the emotional and somatic personality includes: empathy, the ability to recognize emotions in themselves and others, the ability to reign – to the extent possible – their emotions, emotional balance, good mental health, and psychosomatic health. In the sphere of cognitive and behavioral competencies to the desired policemen, social workers etc. include: the willingness to listen, the ability to gain trust, communication, objectivity, and decisiveness. Many of these features is formed in the process of education and personality development, and depends on genetic predisposition. Competences of personality needed to act as a professional policeman social worker can and should be developed also on the job, by participating in trainings and workshops developing emotional intelligence, improving accurate recognition and naming of emotions, their expression, control emotions, control of impulses emotional, stress management and limiting its effects, postponing the time satisfying their own desires, deepening of insight into their own psychophysical states, to develop their own spirituality, religion, communication skills, and social intelligence – which consists of cognitive and emotional intelligence.

In working with people, especially with people in difficult situations, stress, phase emotional crisis etc., important are skills of establishing and maintaining relationships with people of different experiences, people from different cultural backgrounds, people of different ages, and somatically and mentally sick people⁴. In the activity of social workers, policemen, and firemen, it is important to communicate effectively and efficiently, both verbally and non-verbally. The effectiveness of communication depends on the predisposition of workers, and especially on their emotional and cognitive intelligence.

⁴ *Osamelosť a kosociálny a psychologický jav. Prežívanie osamelosti vo vybraných sociálnoterapeutických skupinách*, ed. E. Žiaková, AkcentPrint, Prešov, 2008.

Working in Balint groups and personal development⁵

Michael Balint (1896-1970), a Hungarian psychoanalyst, developed after World War II, in one of the clinics in London, a new concept of training medical students and doctors, based on the combination of competence of general practitioners and psychoanalyst. In the 1970's in Western countries, concepts and practical forms of vocational training and psychological support for those working in the area of helping other people have begun to include doctors, including psychologists, educators, social workers, volunteers, teachers, workers in the area of social support, policemen, etc. Application groups of Balint in the area of social support, education and supporting the social workers used to minimize the effects of occupational stress and to develop emotional intelligence. Balint groups organized courses serving to improve the efficiency of helping people in vulnerable situations, and providing psychological support to people⁶.

The main aim of the Balint group working is to analyze the participants psychological process occurring between the participants and their clients. The analysis of the relationships between clients, victims, perpetrators etc. is an essential subject of working in Balint groups⁷.

Policemen, firemen, and social workers meet regularly once or twice a week or month, in a group of 10 to 15 people on the average. A group leader must have an appropriate authorization. One of the members of the group presents a psychological problem of a patient/client, victim etc. The participant gives the name of the patient/client, the age, professional situation, family, health, and other information important in his or her view. The most important is the psychological problem, which arose in relations of the policemen or social worker with the patient/client – for example, difficulties in establishing contact, fear of the reaction for requesting personal information, fear of a counselor about the health and future of the patient/client, and other emotional reactions to a patient/client or his or her family members. After presenting the problem, the participant answers a series of 5-6 short questions from the members of the Balint group for additional information need to complete the picture⁸.

⁵ K. Mausch, *Zastosowanie metody Grup Balinta w pracy socjalnej*, „Praca Socjalna” 2010, No. 6; K. Mausch, E. Ryś, *Duševná kondícia sociálnych pracovníkov. Noopsycho-somatická štúdia*, Ružomberok, 2008; K. Mausch, *Michael Balint i jego koncepcja kształcenia lekarzy w efektywniejszej pracy z pacjentem*, „Przegląd Lekarski” 1997, 54, 12.

⁶ M. Balint, *Der Arzt, sein Patient und die Krankheit*, Stuttgart 1984; idem, *Psychotherapeutische Techniken in der Medizin*, Stuttgart 1980; M. Balint, J.S. Norel, *Fünf Minuten pro Patienten*, Frankfurt 1975; *Materiały 21. Międzynarodowej Konferencji Balintowskiej*, Aachen 1994.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem; R. Kielhorn, *Materiały niepublikowane z I. Sympozjum Balintowskiego*, Kołobrzeg 1993.

During the rest of the group session, each member of the Balint group has the right to express opinions on how the presenting participant explained the problem or the psychological impact on him or her, and above all, the emotional reactions, feelings, associations, ideas or fantasies caused by the presentation. It should be noted that even the strangest, far associations, and fantasies can be expressed by the participants of the meeting, revealing hidden and unexpressed correct motives of the patient/client, victim, policemen, or social worker. Further development and course of the relation in question can be discussed, including possible alternatives, aiming to solve the problem. This part of the Balint session is the most important from the point of view of the group, and it often involves excitement of the group members in the form of emotions, even tears, emotional expressions etc.

A common discussion of members of the group has the following aims:

- help to understand the person assisting the client's problems and his or her attitude to these issues,
- improve the effectiveness and impact of aid to the customer by the helper,
- enable survival of participants in the Balint group through assisting "catharsis" – coming clean, thus reducing stress and weakening its effects,
- support participants, suggest them new solutions to problems in working with the patient/client etc.⁹

Participants in Balint groups develop their professional competence (knowledge). They form their psychological skills in action group – in confrontation with other social workers, policemen, firemen, etc. By participating in Balint groups, they become more resistant to stress, better cope with the effects of stress, become less at risk of burnout or can reduce its effects, become also more effective and efficient at work and more resistant to manipulation from clients, victims etc. According to Balint, not the amount of time devoted to the client is the most important, but the intensity of this contact, which affects, among others, the ability of policemen, firemen, and social workers for empathy, motivation to provide assistance, professional qualifications, resistance to stress etc.¹⁰

⁹ R. Kielhorn, *Materiały niepublikowane z I. Sympozjum Balintowskiego*, op. cit.; *Materiały 21. Międzynarodowej Konferencji Balintowskiej*, op. cit.

¹⁰ M. Balint, *Der Arzt, sein Patient...*, op. cit.; idem, *Psychotherapeutische Techniken...*, op. cit.; M. Balint, J.S. Norel, *Fünf Minuten pro Patienten...*, op. cit.; *Materiały 21. Międzynarodowej Konferencji Balintowskiej*, op. cit.

Conclusions

Changes in social life, their complexity, and intensifying pathological phenomena, make it necessary for policemen, firemen, social workers, and soldiers to acquire skills of psychologists, psychotherapists, organizers of social life, and others from a wide range of experts. The helpers should have broad skills in mobilizing individuals and groups for action. From an examination of the particular desirable personality traits and skills of helpers, a conclusion arises that the emotional and somatic personality should include: empathy, the ability to recognize emotions in themselves and others, the ability to control their own emotions and to influence it, the emotional balance, and good mental and psychosomatic health. In the sphere of cognitive and behavioral capabilities –the willingness to listen, the ability to gain trust, communication skills, objectivity, and decisiveness¹¹. In shaping and developing the above-mentioned personality traits of helpers, very useful are Balint groups. Michael Balint focused in their approach to the patient on a combination of traditional methods of treatment used by biologically oriented medicine and the techniques used in psychotherapy¹². Today in Balint groups organized for policemen, soldiers, social workers, etc., there is a need to focus attention primarily on the development of emotional intelligence, and on equip them with the skills to cope with stress in order to, among others, defend themselves against burnout, and somatic and psychical diseases and disturbances.

Bibliography

1. Balint M., *Der Arzt, sein Patient und die Krankheit*. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1984.
2. Balint M., *Psychotherapeutische Techniken in der Medizin*. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1980.
3. Balint, M., Norel, J.S., *Funf Minuten pro Patienten*. Frankfurt, 1975; *Materiały 21. Międzynarodowej Konferencji Balintowskiej*, Aachen, 1994.
4. Fave A., “The impact of subjective experience on the quality of life,” in Csikszentmihalyi M., Csikszentmihalyi I.S., *A Life Worth Living*. Oxford, 2006.
5. Kielhorn R., *Materiały niepublikowane z I. Sympozjum Balintowskiego*, Kołobrzeg, 1993.
6. *Materiały 21. Międzynarodowej Konferencji Balintowskiej*, Aachen, 1994.
7. Mausch K., “Zastosowanie metody Grup Balinta w pracy socjalnej,” *Praca Socjalna* No. 6/2010.

¹¹ *Problemy i tendencje rozwojowe we współczesnej pedagogice społecznej*, red. A. Radziejewicz-Winnicki, Wydawnictwo Śląsk, Katowice, 1995.

¹² K. Mausch, E. Ryš, *Duševná kondiciasociálnych pracovníkov. Noopsycho-somatickášťudia*, Katolícki Univerzitet w Ružomberku, Ružomberok, 2008.

8. Mausch, K., Ryś, E., *Duševná kondícia sociálnych pracovníkov*, Noo-psychosomatická štúdia. Katolícki Univerzitet w Ružomberku, Ružomberok 2008.
9. Mausch, K., *Michael Balint i jego koncepcja kształcenia lekarzy w efektywniejszej pracy z pacjentem*, "Przegląd Lekarski" 1997.
10. *Problemy i tendencje rozwojowe we współczesnej pedagogice społecznej*, ed. A. Radziejewicz-Winnicki, Wydawnictwo Śląsk, Katowice 1995.
11. *Osamelosť ako sociálny a psychologický jav. Prežívanie osamelosti vybraných sociálnozdravotníckych skupín*, ed. E. Žiaková, AkcentPrint, Prešov 2008.