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**FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL GROUP OF
SOCIAL WORK SPECIALISTS IN MODERN RUSSIA: SOCIOLOGICAL
ANALYSIS**

Specialty 22.00.04 - Social structure, social institutions and processes

STRUCTURAL ABSTRACT

Thesis work for the degree of candidate of sociological sciences

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Relevance of the research topic. The study of the peculiarities of professional activity is becoming more and more relevant direction of sociological science, because the profession, along with its main function, contributes to the formation of professional behavior patterns regulating the interaction of professional groups. The professional development of an employee is often accompanied by certain risks that may affect not only one specialist, but the entire professional group. In this case, the professional activity will be accompanied by dysfunctions and will no longer meet the expectations of society.

To concretize the professional group of the research, let's turn to the profession of "social work specialist". Social work as a practical activity appeared much earlier than it was recognized as a profession in Russia. The current situation significantly complicates the formation and development of a professional group of specialists in social work, as the practice of social services is ahead of the theoretical understanding of professional experience, complicating the process of "fitting" it into the social structure.

The need for sociological analysis of this professional group is due to the increasing demand for social protection of socially vulnerable groups in a situation of economic instability. There is a need to identify the extent to which the content of professional activity, rules of operation and models of behavior of the professional group "social work specialist" correlate with the goals of the state social policy and expectations of clients in providing quality services. The research of the professional group "specialist in social work" will make it possible to reveal the factors that influence its formation and development in modern Russia.

There are several theoretical problems that require sociological research. There is no clear definition of the professional group "specialist in social work" in the scientific literature. The group is quite young, as it emerged in Russia only in 1991, so it is currently in the process of formation and development. The composition of its representatives is heterogeneous and includes employees of government agencies, non-profit organizations and voluntary associations. In addition, the entry into force of the professional standard No. 571n of 22.10.2013

"social work specialist" began to regulate only one function of social work related to social services, while the traditionally established functions of social protection and social security remained outside the scope of the professional standard.

The analysis of specifics of professional activity of social sphere workers today remains mainly a subject of psychological researches within the limits of theories of activity and personality. A few sociological studies of social work mainly concern professional roles and the image of specialists. The problematic aspects of the formation and development of the "social work specialist" professional group remain poorly covered.

The problems identified require theoretical reflection and empirical verification. The sociological analysis allows the author to consider specialists in social work as a professional group, the activity of which consists in interaction with socially unprotected, vulnerable groups of the population in need of social support; to analyze the problems and factors influencing the development of the professional group "social work specialist", to outline the trends of its development.

The aim of the study is to identify the factors contributing to the process of formation and development of the professional group "social work specialist", and to develop practical recommendations for improving this process.

Achievement of the set goal assumes solving the following ***research tasks***:

1. To reveal specificity of process of formation of professional group "social work specialist" within the limits of the offered methodology of the sociological analysis.

2. To reveal the features of the professional group "social work specialist", related to its heterogeneity, which is expressed in its structuring into subgroups, due to the content of professional activity.

3. To analyze the professional-status and value-normative factors of formation and development of the professional group "social work specialist".

4. To reveal problems, specificity of formation and tendencies of development of professional group "social work specialist" on the basis of author's empirical researches.

The object of research is the process of formation and development of the professional group "social work specialist" in the modern Russian society.

The subject of the research are the factors of formation and development of the professional group "social work specialist".

Theoretical and methodological basis of the dissertation research were the theoretical approaches, which were singled out by the author during the literature analysis: within the framework of the *activity* approach, the profession is considered as a kind of labor activity, and the professional group as an education, which has certain characteristics: special training, availability of knowledge and skills of professional activity, public authority, availability of qualification, connected with duration and complexity of labor mastering. The *structural and functional* approach allows to analyze professional and labor functions influencing the process of functioning of professional activity and to consider professional groups as an element of social and professional structure of society. The analysis of professional groups on the basis of the *institutional approach* makes it possible to investigate the mechanisms that determine the prestige of different professions, the motives for choosing a profession, the attitude to work, the degree of readiness to comply with professional standards. Values and goals of professional groups, professional culture of organizations, subjects and their relations within professional groups became the peculiarity of the analysis of the profession within the *neo-institutional* approach.

To determine the parameters of sociological analysis of the process of formation and development of a professional group, we used a multi-paradigm approach. Its advantage is the consolidation of the above approaches and a multidimensional analysis of the specifics of the formation and development of a heterogeneous professional group "social work specialist". Factors identified on the basis of multi-paradigm approach allow analyzing the content of professional

activity, peculiarities of professional status and social significance of the profession, norms and values inherent in a professional group, characteristics of professional behavior and personality of a specialist and assessing their impact on the process of formation of a professional group "social work specialist".

The empirical basis for the study was:

- the survey. The research sample consisted of 450 people, employees of social protection, social support and social services institutions of Yekaterinburg. The target sample was made on the principle of respondents' belonging to the professional activity of specialists in social work;

- an online survey conducted by the author from May 2013 to June 2017. The object of the study consisted the final year students of higher educational institutions of training and specialty "Social work", full-time and part-time education of the city of Yekaterinburg. (Target selection, total number of respondents 200, including graduates of Ural Federal University (N=50), Russian State Social University (branch) (N=20), Russian State Professional Pedagogical University (N=100), Ural State Pedagogical University (N=30));

- telephone survey of social work specialists of Yekaterinburg city institutions. The number of respondents is 200 (including: the Employment Centre (N=34), the Integrated Social Services Centre (N=63), the Public Service of Medical and Social Expertise (N=8), the pension system (N=26), the social protection system (N=35), the multifunctional centre (N=13), non-profit organizations (N=13), public associations (N=8)), for each telephone survey, a checklist was filled out to assess the quality and availability of services of social institutions ("secret client").

- analysis of documents presented on the official websites of 150 state social protection and social services institutions of Yekaterinburg (employment centre, integrated social services centre, state service of medical and social expertise, pension system, social protection system, multifunctional centre). The purpose of the analysis is to identify the relevance of the education of social work specialists to their position.

Scientific results obtained by the author and their novelty:

1. The use of the multiparadigm approach with the allocation of professional-status and value-normative grounds as a methodology allowed to define social work specialists as a professional group which is in the process of formation. The methodology of the multiparadigm approach makes it possible to reveal the specificity of the process of forming a professional group "social work specialist", which is expressed in the fact that the status of this professional group is marginal. The marginal status of a professional group is understood as the "border" position of a professional group in the social and professional structure of society. As criteria for marginalized status, we propose: 1) lack of uniform professional standards for all representatives of the professional group. 2) lack of unified official regulations governing the activities of the three main subgroups of specialists in social work (specialists from state, non-profit and public organizations).

2. The structure of the professional group of social work specialists based on the results of empirical research influencing the professional and status characteristics of the subgroup is presented. Select: 1. "Cabinet" workers - all professional duties are performed without interaction with the client. 2. "Field" - professional activity consists of working at the client's home, or in places of concentration of socially vulnerable categories of population. 3. "Universal" - combine functions of work with clients, registration of the documentation and carry out patronage out of institution.

3. It is revealed that the *values and norms* of a professional group have not been formed, despite the action of the code of ethics of a social work specialist. Violation of ethical standards by social work specialists is perceived by clients as almost a norm. Applying for assistance to social security or social service institutions, clients condescend to the negligent attitude of specialists, violation of professional ethics.

4. It has been established that the process of formation and development of a professional group of specialists in social work is accompanied by professional

deformation and poorly formed professional identity of its representatives. But the use of adaptive behaviour strategies improves their functioning in a multitasking environment.

Significant results of the study are the following conclusions:

1. There is a simplified view of social work in society - most people do not distinguish between the specifics of "social worker" and "specialist in social work", so it is regarded as low-skilled and feasible for anyone. In general, the professional group "social work specialist" is unattractive on the labor market, given its high social importance. Low competitiveness of social services leads to the fact that "casual" people who do not have the necessary personal qualities and do not have professional characteristics are more often included in the professional group.

2. We fix the incompleteness of the process of formation and development of the professional group "specialist in social work", heterogeneity of its professional status. Completion of the institutionalization process involves: the adoption of professional standards that cover the activities of all representatives of social services (social protection, social services, social security); the approval of standards will make it possible to receive specialists with professional education, which will form the professional identity of the group "social work specialist".

3. The parameters of differentiation of the professional group "specialist in social work" have been revealed: a) type of organization (representatives of social work are heterogeneous group, it includes employees of state institutions, non-commercial organizations and public associations). b) motives for choosing a profession (in the professional group the majority of "casual" people who chose this profession unknowingly, but there are also those who chose the profession "specialist in social work" consciously or by family succession - there is a minority of such people). c) specialized education (only one third of social work specialists were trained in their specialty, while the rest came from other areas, this fact affects the level of professionalism of specialists). d) peculiarities of functional responsibilities (social work specialists are differentiated by those who interact

with clients and those who work exclusively with documents and universalists who combine all labor functions).

4. It is revealed that both positive and negative factors influence the process of formation and development of the professional group. A hierarchy of factors that may hinder the development of a professional group is presented: imperfection of the evaluation of a candidate's professional competence in employment; non-conformity of the level and direction of training; non-conformity of the competences of specialists who received specialized education with the requirements of the professional standard; unformed values of social service and humanistic orientation in a professional group; absence of strategies of adaptive behavior for the solution of stress situations; episodic nature of the professional group; ambiguity and contradictions in the regulation of professional activity; unsatisfactory physical conditions of work; insufficient financing of social services; low attractiveness of the profession "social work specialist" in the labor market..

5. The factors promoting formation and development of professional group "the expert on social work" are revealed: presence of specialized education in a direction "social work" promotes formation of professional competence and increases arsenal of strategies of behavior of the expert. The use of adaptive strategies of behavior will contribute to the successful combination of social work specialists with deforming moments of professional activity. Therefore: by the middle age it is necessary to form problem-oriented behavioral strategies and neglect the strategy of "avoiding" stressful situations; specialists who spend the whole day with clients are recommended to use the strategy of behavior "search for social support" more often, since due to the conditions of their professional activity it is ignored.

Recommendations have been developed for authorities and educational organizations of the heads of social support and social service institutions, as well as for social work specialists: (a) introduction of a *comprehensive methodology for assessing professional performance* in the course of certification and professional

selection for the post of social work specialist. This methodology includes: a description of the institution, a professional and psychogram of a social work specialist, which gives a detailed description of the profession, the employee's function, his or her job duties and the requirements of the profession to personal characteristics. In addition, the "working time photo" of a specialist in social work is a part of the complex methodology, which reflects the approximate time spent on operations during the working week. *b)* the introduction of the institute of mentoring or *social support* for young specialists will allow the most successful adaptation to professional activity, which will reduce the risk of professional deformation; *c)* it is necessary to form the *competence of* specialists in the *choice of strategies of behavior* in the conditions of multitasking and teach strategies for dealing with stressful situations in professional life. These recommendations will contribute to the formation and development of a professional group of specialists in social work.

Theoretical significance of the work is:

- allocation of professional-status and value-normative factors of formation and development of a professional group;
- definition of a professional group "social work specialist" and the specifics of its professional activity;
- definition of the concept of "competence" in the choice of behavioral strategies in conditions of multitasking and justification of its role in the process of formation and development of a professional group of social work specialists;
- identification of factors of professional deformations development of social work specialists, substantiation of the role of adaptive behavior strategies in prevention of their development;
- revealing trends in the development of the "social work specialist" professional group.

Practical significance of the work. The results obtained in the course of the research may be used by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation to revise and supplement the professional standards for "social

work specialists" and "social workers" and the standards for the provision of social services; by the Ministry of Social Policy of the Sverdlovsk region to develop an optimal algorithm for interagency cooperation; and by heads of state, public and non-profit social organizations to optimize their work.

The materials of the work can be used in teaching the courses "Psychology of social work", "Prevention and overcoming of professional deformations", "Professional diagram of a social worker", "Introduction to the profession "Social work", "Deontology and ethical foundations of social work" during the training of bachelors and masters in the direction of training "Social work" for the formation and development of a professional group of specialists in social work.

The theme of the research corresponds to the specialty passport 22.00.04 - Social structure, social institutions and processes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Prof. Zinovyeva A.', is centered on the page.