

POVERTY REDUCTION MEASURES IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK WITH FAMILIES

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Annotation

The problem of poverty is one of the biggest and most difficult to solve worldwide. Every fifth person in Lithuania experiences poverty. The aim of the article is to reveal the poverty reduction measures in the context of social work with families. The study involved 6 informants: 4 social workers and 2 case managers. The results of the study revealed that most often families experienced poverty due to: alcohol dependence, lack of social skills, and lack of motivation. Individuals experience financial difficulties, their physiological needs are not met. There are conflicts between family members, children are not taken care of. The study has found that reducing family poverty, social workers use the following assistance measures: provision of social services, family involvement in social life, and financial, emotional and material assistance. Providing help, they encounter: clients' reluctance to accept assistance, lack of motivation to work and change, and psychological problems of families.

Keywords: poverty, social work, social services, social assistance, social insurance.

Introduction

Poverty is a situation of a family or person in which the possessed income is not sufficient for a normal life. In 2016, the at-risk-of-poverty rate in the European Union reached 17,3%, while the risk of poverty was experienced by as many as 34% of families consisting of one adult and dependent children, which is more than a third of all families (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2018). Poverty in Lithuania is also a very burning issue. According to the data of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, in 2017, the at-risk-of-poverty rate in the country was 22,9%. Comparing 2017 with 2016, the at-risk-of-poverty rate increased by 1%, while in Lithuania, about 650 thousand of the country's population lived below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. In 2017, the at-risk-of-poverty rate in families with children reached 21,2%; compared with 2016, it increased by 0,2% (Official Statistics Portal, 2017). The European Union has developed a strategy "Europe 2020", which aims by 2020 to reduce the number of persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million. Member states have set aims and planned actions to help to reduce poverty at the national level. Lithuania has planned to reduce the number of people living in poverty and social exclusion down to 170 thousand (Study on Strategies for Fight against Unemployment and Poverty Reduction, 2014).

People living in poverty are repelled and excluded from public life (National Network of Poverty Reduction Organizations, 2019). In Lithuania, poverty reaches people representing various groups: youth, the elderly, children, the unemployed, employed people, and families raising children. According to economist Lazutka (2014), persons living in poverty do not have adequate income and cannot meet the minimal human needs and therefore experience various problems. Low income does not guarantee a full-fledged life, which may lead to worsening of the person's state of health and quality of nutrition. The consequences of poverty can be painful: people's dissatisfaction with life, lowering of the personality's self-esteem, and social exclusion. Insufficient income can lead to the loss of the place of residence, homelessness, and inaccessibility of education and educatedness (II-5 Study on the Implementation of Social Exclusion (Poverty) Reduction Policy, 2015). Poverty affects not only one person's but of the whole family's quality of life. When material, social or cultural poverty occurs in the family, the family is no longer stable, the psychological climate changes, and conflicts arise (Zabarauskaitė, Gruževskis, 2015). Persons who have acquired lower education and raise children are at higher risk to experience poverty due to less opportunities to participate in the labour market or because of the heavy burden of living costs (Skučienė, Lazutka, Čižauskaitė, Markevičiūtė, 2018).

Problem questions of the study: What measures of the social security system are applied in social work with families experiencing poverty? What measures to increase employment are used in social work in order to reduce family poverty and social exclusion?

What difficulties and problems does the social worker experience in providing assistance to people experiencing poverty?

The object of the research: poverty reduction measures in the context of social work with families.

The research aim: to find out poverty reduction measures in the context of social work with families.

The research objectives: 1. To find out the assistance measures used in social work for poorly living families and difficulties in providing them. 2. To identify the difficulties and problems of the social worker in providing assistance to people experiencing poverty.

Research methods: the analysis of scientific sources and legal documents, semi-structured interview, qualitative content analysis.

Research methodology and organization

The qualitative research was chosen to achieve the aim of the study. The study involved 6 informants: 4 social workers and 2 case managers from the institutions providing social services in Šiauliai region (Lithuania). The investigated persons were selected according to the nature of work: these were social workers and case managers working with families. The study was conducted between December of 2019 and April of 2020. The qualitative research data were analysed employing the qualitative content analysis. Conducting the qualitative content analysis, the informants were encoded, the participants' identities are not mentioned anywhere. The following coding was used: "I1" – the first informant, "I2" – the second informant, "I3" – the third informant, "I4" – the fourth informant, "I5" – the fifth informant, and "I6" – the sixth informant.

Research results

To reduce poverty, it is important to find out what causes it. The study revealed the causes of family poverty. The data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Causes determining the emergence of family poverty

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
INTERNAL FAMILY PROBLEMS	Lack of social skills	"<...> due to lack of social skills ..." (I1); "<...> social skills are most often lacking <...>" (I2)	6
	Alcohol dependence	"<...> due to the use of alcohol <...>" (I2); "<...> poverty occurs in drinking families" (I4)	13
	Drug addiction	"<...> due to drug use <...>" (I2); "<...> use <...>drugs<...>" (I2)	2
	Addiction to gambling	"<...> due to direct addition to gambling <...>" (I2)	1
	Family model	"<...> due to the family model seen in childhood <...>" (I1); "<...> because of the way of life <...> seen in childhood <...>" (I1)	3
	A person with a disability in the family	"<...> persons raising children who have disabilities or if they themselves have a disability <...>" (I6)	1
	Lack of motivation	"<...> lack of motivation <...>" (I4); "<...> absence of motivation <...>" (I6); "They are unmotivated <...>" (I5)	5
EXTERNAL FAMILY PROBLEMS	Low education	"<...> because they don't have education <...>" (I6); "<...> lack of education <...>" (I4)	2
	Non-involvement in the labour market	"<...> due to unemployment <...>" (I3); "<...> the attitude of families towards work is lax <...>" (I6); "<...> there is no motivation to work <...>" (I6)	11

The study revealed that families experienced poverty due to internal and external problems. External problems are determined by environmental factors (education, labour market); while internal, by the behaviour of family members.

Summarising authors' and informants' statements, it can be stated that most often families experience poverty due to: lack of social skills, alcohol dependence, and non-involvement in the labour market. *Specialists* encounter alcohol dependence of family members, due to which they cannot get a job, the family's physiological needs remain unsatisfied because all the money received is spent on alcohol. Addictions cause conflicts between family members, parents no longer take care of their children. Social workers pointed out that families usually did not know how to live properly and take care of the family well-being. Research data demonstrated that families often experienced poverty and could not break out of it because they

did not want to look for a job. Adults do not want to perform public interest activities. Poorly living families get used to receiving social assistance and doing nothing. If the employment service offers the job, adults refuse it. This is proved by the statements of the subjects: “<...> *due to unwillingness to work <...>*” (I1), <...> *the attitude to work is lax <...>*”(I4). Families also experience poverty due to drug addiction, addiction to gambling, the family model, the person with a disability in the family, and lack of motivation. It was found that families did not have any motivation to change the current situation. Poverty is also passed from one generation to another – people who lived in poverty in their childhood often experience poverty in adulthood as well. A higher risk of experiencing poverty arises if there is a person with a disability in the family, whose care requires more financial, material, and human resources. Often individuals do not have the necessary education, which makes it more difficult for them to establish themselves into the labour market.

Social work is one of the most efficient measures to tackle the problem of poverty. When the family does not have financial resources, problems are solved by the provision of social services (Bitinas et al., 2010). According to Barčiukienė (2010), social services help individuals to return the abilities to take care of themselves and to integrate into the society more easily. The study sought to find out what social services were provided to families living in deprivation. The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Social services provided for families

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
PROVISION OF GENERAL SOCIAL SERVICES	Consulting service	“<...>consulting <...>” (I1); “<...>consultancy <...>” (I3)	7
	Information service	“We inform what services they are entitled to <...>” (I2); “<...> we provide information to them <...>” (I3); “Of information <...>” (I6)	8
	Mediation and representation service	“<...> various representations <...>” (I3); “<...> there is particularly much mediation <...>” (I3)	11
PROVISION OF SPECIAL SOCIAL SERVICES	Catering service	“Provision with food products <...>” (I4); “<...> Provision with food <...>” (I6); “<...> and with food <...> to help <...>” (I2)	4
	Transport organization service	“<...> transportation service <...>” (I4)	1
	Development and maintenance of social skills	“<...> development and maintenance of social skills <...>” (I4); “<...> we develop social skills <...>” (I4)	8
	Provision of basic clothing and footwear	“<...> we help with clothes <...>” (I3); “... to assist ... by giving footwear <...>” (I2); “<...> we arrange so that they get <...> clothing assistance <...>” (I3)	7

Summarizing the research data, it can be stated that social workers mostly provide general social services to families experiencing poverty: consulting, information, and mediation/representation. Informants stated that they tried to consult family members, provide the necessary information, guide them to other institutions, and mediate for them in other institutions. Specialists provide families with information about social benefits and services they are entitled to. Mediation services are also provided when the family needs assistance of other institutions (non-governmental organizations, medical institutions). This is proved by informants’ statements: “<...> consulting <...>” (I1), “<...> we inform where they can arrange documents <...>” (I2), “<...> there is particularly much mediation <...>” (I3).

Research data indicate that social workers also provide families living in poverty with special social services (organization of catering and transport, development and maintenance of social skills, provision with basic clothing and footwear). To provide families with food, specialists often apply for food assistance to the Food Bank. When families do not have opportunities to go to the shops, social workers arrange transport for them. Social workers organize charity events willingly attended by the community. The study found that most often specialists provided the service of development and maintenance of social skills. The provision of this special social service is their daily routine. Due to social exclusion, individuals do not remember standing rules of the society and its established norms. Social skills of families are

developed so that they can smoothly participate in the social life, take care of their household and family autonomously, and solve the problem of poverty.

Conducting the study, it was important to find out all employed measures that help to reduce poverty. The data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Measures helping to reduce poverty

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
MATERIAL ASSISTANCE	Provision of household items	"<...> provision with <...> clothes <...>" (16); "<...> provision with <...> basic household items" (16)	12
	Cooperation with organizations	"<...> afterwards, we cooperated with the Food Bank <...>" (11); "<...> we cooperated <...> with Caritas <...>" (11)	11
	Community assistance	"<...> charity received from people <...>" (11); "<...> we find sponsors who help them, bring <...>" (13)	5
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	Social assistance benefits	"<...> we organize benefits <...>" (11); "<...> children's money is also allocated <...>" (11); "<...> we arrange so that they get benefits <...>" (13)	15
	Compensations	"<...> compensations for heating help <...>" (11); "<...> compensations for <...> water help" (11); "The compensations received help <...>" (13)	3
	Social insurance benefits	"<...> maternity benefits <...>" (16); "Unemployment insurance benefits <...>" (12)	5
	Social assistance for pupils	"<...> exercise books are bought for children in schools <...>" (14); "<...> stationery <...> is bought <...>" (14); "<...> free meals <...>" (14)	5
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	Emotional support	"<...> emotional support <...> help to solve problems <...>" (15); "Emotional support is very important" (15)	20
	Promotion of motivation for change	"<...> through introducing awareness <...>" (11); "<...> it is necessary to motivate families to act <...>" (16)	11

Summarizing the obtained data, it can be stated that social workers and case managers initiate and organize the provision of material and financial assistance to families, inform about the possibility to receive assistance, mediate and provide emotional support. Although Gruževskis et al. (2011) state that the most effective measures to reduce family poverty are financial and material assistance, the research data has shown that, in the first place, emotional support must be provided. Social workers identified emotional support as very important and effective, stating that they tried to motivate families, listen to them, advise them, and help them find appropriate ways of solving problems. It was identified that emotional support helped to solve quite many family problems. Families experience not only material deprivation but also anthropological and social poverty causing psychological problems. Emotional support is a great way to solve them. The study helps to reveal that assistance will not be effective if the family is not motivated to solve its problems and if no connection and trust between the specialist and the client is established. Respondents stated that poverty could only be reduced by changing clients' awareness. If the client lacks self-confidence, does not understand that he/she has problems and does not have motivation to solve them, no assistance provided by the social worker will be of use. The investigated person stated: "... you must establish contact and seek that he understands that he needs that help ..." (13)

The study reveals that social workers inform about social assistance benefits, compensations, social insurance benefits, initiate and organize the provision of social assistance to pupils. Social assistance is aimed at ensuring the minimum standard of living for the family. Information and mediation are also provided regarding allocation of compensations for heating of the dwelling, drinking water and hot water for families, which helps them to save a share of their income. The State Social Insurance Fund allocates unemployment and maternity social insurance benefits. These benefits help when the family experiences a temporary crisis (loses a job), preventing the family from sinking into crisis. Social workers organize social assistance for children: provide the necessary learning tools (stationery, exercise books, sportswear), organize free meals for pupils. The support provided to children helps to reduce children's social exclusion at school. Poor families receive the following material assistance: they are provided with household items (furniture, household appliances, clothes, and other).

Specialists cooperate with various non-governmental organizations (Mother Teresa's House, Food Bank, Caritas, Freedom Gate), which provide various assistance.

One of the most commonly used measures to reduce family poverty is social assistance benefits. However, this measure is not always effective; therefore, it is important to find out the impact of social assistance benefits on poverty reduction. The data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The impact of social assistance benefits in reducing family poverty

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
IMPACT OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE BENEFITS	Poverty reduction	"<...> help <...> to meet basic needs" (16); "<...> cash assistance helps if there is a crisis in the family <...>" (15); "<...> assistance helps the family not to sink into crisis <...>" (15)	11
	Poverty promotion	"<...> abuse benefits <...>" (12); "<...> Benefits promote unemployment" (14); "<...> where there is alcohol I really don't think it reduces that poverty <...>" (14); "<...> really not the cash assistance helps <...>" (15)	30

The sub-category "Poverty promotion" reveals that social assistance benefits do not have an impact on the fight against poverty. Cash social assistance often only exacerbates poverty in families. Received cash assistance benefits enable families to meet their needs, and there is no reason for them to look for a job and support the family on their own. Besides, often, the money received is not used for its intended purpose (food, clothes). It was identified that the income received was not used to meet children's basic needs – clothes and school supplies. It was found out in the study that social assistance benefits promoted family dependence on the assistance of surrounding people, absence of autonomy, and lack of motivation to tackle the poverty problem autonomously. Families do not want to escape from poverty because they know that they will still be taken care of. The subject stated: "<...> they have caught hold of those social benefits and they themselves remain in poverty <...>"(11). The study conducted by the state audit demonstrated that 86% of persons who had been provided with social assistance benefits and advantages had not been guaranteed the minimum level of consumption needs. This shows that the adequacy of social assistance benefits remains relatively low, and the living standards of the poorest households have hardly improved (Public Audit Report, 2019).

The research data indicate that there are cases where social assistance benefits influence the fight against poverty. Cash social assistance benefits the family that is motivated to tackle the poverty problem and that is not interested in becoming a long-term recipient of social assistance benefits. If the family is conscious and ready to use the received social assistance benefits for the family's welfare, then the cash social assistance is beneficial. Financial assistance also helps families who experience a temporary crisis and encounter temporary problems. When family members lose their jobs and steady income, social assistance benefits are an effective measure for poverty prevention. In this case, financial assistance helps to ensure the family's basic needs, not to lose motivation to solve the arisen problems. The investigated person was telling: "<...> cash assistance helps if there is a crisis in the family <...>" (15). Summarizing the data of the study, it can be stated that social assistance benefits influence the fight against poverty if they are used for the intended purpose – to meet the family's basic needs.

One of the most efficient measures reducing poverty is oriented to involvement of people experiencing poverty in activities (II-5 Study on the Implementation of Social Exclusion (Poverty) Reduction Policy, 2015). Conducting the study, it was sought to find out how social workers involved families experiencing poverty into the social life. The obtained data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Family involvement in the life of the society

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
PROMOTION OF SOCIAL ACTIVNESS	Project activities	"<...> children have the opportunity to visit a children's day care centre in our service <...>" (12); "<...> we encourage participation in <...> projects" (16)	5

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
	Community events	"<...> and parents are invited to Christmas celebrations <...>" (12); "<...> we organize festive events <...>" (14); "<...> we hold various meetings between families <...>" (15)	11
	Educational activities	"<...> to offer educational programs <...>" (11); "<...> to offer courses <...>" (11); "<...> to offer trainings <...>" (11)	6

The study revealed that families were involved in the life of the society through project and educational activities, community events, and social programs. Respondents stated that children living in poverty often visited day centres where they could do their homework, go on various trips, and participate in educational programs. Families are encouraged to attend festive events. Social workers organize community trips to which disadvantaged people are invited. Trips are free; therefore, families are willing to travel. The subjects stated: *"We organize various events and encourage <...> participation <...>"* (14), *"<...> are invited to go on organized trips"* (14). Children are encouraged to participate in non-formal education, where they will have opportunities for self-realization, spend their free time meaningfully, and get involved in the public life of the school or another institution. Parents are offered to participate in courses, educational programs, where they have the opportunity to acquire new abilities and develop existing skills. Children are involved in the social life and social exclusion is reduced by means of implementing social programmes for children.

Providing assistance to families living in poverty, social workers and case managers perform a wide range of roles. The roles performed are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Roles performed by the social worker

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
ROLES IN THE PROVISION OF FAMILY SUPPORT	The role of the teacher	"<...> we moralize <...>" (11); "<...> we must speak <...>" (11); "<...> we must <...> consult <...>" (12); "<...> the teacher <...>" (16); "<...> of the adviser <...>" (14)	9
	The role of the mediator	"<...> we mediate <...>" (12); "Of the mediator <...>" (13)	4
	The role of the empowerer	"<...> and we empower <...>" (11)	2
	The role of the lawyer	"<...> to defend <...> in some way <...>" (11); "<...> we represent <...>" (13)	4
	The role of the informant/consultant	"<...> we must inform <...>" (12); "<...> of the informant <...>" (14); "<...> of the consultant <...>" (13)	4
	The role of the family member	"<...> the role is <...> as the mother's <...>" (13); "<...> you become like a member of the family <...>" (13)	4

The results of the study showed that specialists providing assistance to the families performed the roles of the teacher, mediator, empowerer, lawyer, informant/consultant, and the family member. It was found that social workers developed various skills of their clients, taught them how to behave in certain life situations, and provided various advice. Families are taught how to behave in public, how to run a household. Besides, the social worker and the case manager cooperate and communicate with the employees of other institutions, find out the necessary information. Communicating with other institutions, the social worker represents family interests and helps to obtain services in other institutions. Social workers provide the necessary information to their clients about services and assistance they are entitled to and their provision. They also consult on other institutions' work and services that are necessary for families. Social workers and case managers seek to empower clients to solve their problems and be autonomous. Specialists perform more than just these official roles. They usually become sort of a family member. The research revealed that social workers felt responsible for the family's well-being and became mothers of families: they had to take care of family matters, solve their problems alone, without the intervention of family members. Social workers get

involved in the family life and get used to the problems in it. The subject was telling: “<...> you treat yourself as <...> the mother of that family <...>” (13).

Providing assistance to families living in poverty, social workers often encounter difficulties, which is why reduction of poverty existing in families is not always successful. Social workers find it difficult to provide assistance because often the usual measures of social assistance (social services, social assistance) do not help to solve family problems (Žiūkas, 2015). The study sought to find out what difficulties social workers faced in providing assistance to families experiencing poverty. The data are presented in Table 7.

Social workers' difficulties in providing assistance to families

Table 7

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	PROOF STATEMENT	NUMBER OF PROOF STATEMENTS
DIFFICULTIES IN PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES	Reluctance to accept assistance	“<...> hostile disposition <...>” (11); “<...> when we have assistance <...> they do not accept <...>” (11); “<...> do not even want to accept assistance <...>” (12)	13
	Lack of motivation to change	“Such life is acceptable to them <...>” (13); “<...> lack of motivation <...>” (16); “<...> Don't want to solve problems themselves <...>” (14)	10
	Lack of motivation to work	“<...> it is not worth working, we often hear <...>” (11); “<...> they are very reluctant to seek employment <...>” (13); “<...> they don't even think about work <...>” (13)	11
	Psychological problems of families	“<...> With lack of self-confidence ” (14); “<...> low self-esteem <...>” (16); “<...>with <...> underestimation of oneself” (14)	5

Conducting the study, it was revealed that, in general, providing assistance to families living in poverty, social workers faced clients' reluctance to accept assistance, lack of motivation to work and change, and psychological problems of families. Families living in poverty are often unwilling to communicate and accept the offered assistance. Individuals visit specialists only because they have to, and they do not use the assistance provided to them. Social workers encounter clients who do not want to be autonomous – they demand that everything is done for them and their problems are solved. Poorly living people avoid getting involved in the labour market. The attitudes towards work is lax – they avoid looking for a job on their own. Adults register at the employment service only to receive social assistance benefits rather than to find a job and earn money themselves. Often individuals simulate illnesses: state that they feel unwell and require to make determination of a disability. They also claim that it is “not worth” working for them because the amount of cash social assistance they receive does not differ from their salary. Informants stated: “<...> reluctance to work because it is very convenient not to work and <...> to sit at home <...>” (12). Social workers encounter low self-esteem, self-humiliation, lack of self-confidence and underestimation of abilities in families. Families forget their positive qualities, abilities and remember only their problems. Families living in poverty distance themselves from the society, do not participate in public events of the community and this way lose their communication skills, self-confidence, no longer know how to behave in public, which makes it difficult for them to communicate with specialists. Often individuals are afraid to express their thoughts, reveal feelings, and unburden themselves.

Conclusions

1. To reduce family poverty, social workers provide general social services such as counseling, information, mediation, and representation as well as special social services such as catering, transport organization, development and maintenance of social skills, provision with basic clothing, footwear. Cooperating with organizations and the community, specialists initiate and organize the provision of material and financial assistance for families, pupils, inform about the possibility to receive assistance (social benefits, compensations, social insurance benefits), mediate and provide emotional support. Families are informed and mediation is provided regarding allocation of compensations for heating of the dwelling and drinking and hot water to families. The State Social Insurance Fund provides unemployment and maternity social insurance benefits. It has been found that an important way of promoting families' social activation is their involvement in community, project, and educational activities. The study has found that the financial assistance for families living in poverty has both negative and positive effects. Social benefits often only deepen the poverty existing in families due to the irrational use of assistance, lack of motivation to work, satisfaction of basic needs, which causes

reluctance to get involved in work activities and maintain the family. Social benefits promote dependence of families on the assistance of people around them, their lack of autonomy and motivation to eliminate the causes of poverty. The research data also reveal that the financial assistance benefits families that are motivated to solve the poverty problem and are not interested in becoming a long-term recipient of social benefits.

2. Providing assistance to families, social workers encounter clients' reluctance to accept assistance, lack of motivation to work and change, and psychological problems in families. Families experience poverty due to: alcohol dependence, drug addiction, addiction to gambling, lack of social skills, the family model, lack of motivation, non-involvement into the labour market, low education, and the person with a disability in the family. Individuals experience financial hardship and material deprivation. Conflicts occur between family members, children are not taken care of, which leads to children's problem behaviours. Families living in poverty experience social exclusion.

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Received: 19 March 2021

Accepted: 31 May 2021