

The Importance of Social Work in Assisting Individuals: Practice, Challenges, and Solutions

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Abstract— Addiction to psychoactive substances or other harmful habits is often linked to social, psychological, and economic issues, making social work a complex field that provides emotional, informational, and practical support. This article examines social work practices in assisting individuals facing challenges, highlighting key professional difficulties such as stigma, lack of motivation, limited resources, and emotional burnout. The analysis of social workers' experiences in working with individuals struggling with alcohol addiction highlights the key challenges they encounter. Many clients enter treatment not by personal choice but due to external pressures, frequently exhibit skepticism and defensiveness, refusing help or denying their problems. Possible solutions include interdisciplinary collaboration, innovative working methods, and improved accessibility of social services. Based on practical examples and scientific research, the article identifies the most effective strategies that help social workers address addiction-related issues more efficiently and promote sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration. Social workers play a crucial role in guiding clients toward self-awareness, recognizing the need for change, and preparing them for recovery. However, the clients' motivation and willingness to cooperate remain essential factors for achieving lasting positive outcomes

Keywords— *persons with alcohol addiction, reintegration, social worker.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of alcohol and other narcotic substances is integrated into the social customs and cultures of many countries. Most individuals who consume such substances do so without harming themselves or others. However, some people face problems that can negatively affect their own health and well-being, as well as that of their family members, friends, and the community. Alcoholism is often associated with serious life difficulties – lost jobs, broken relationships, mental health issues, legal problems, and even death from alcohol-related diseases or accidents.

Furthermore, alcoholism often impacts the loved ones of the dependent individuals, who experience emotional stress, violence, social isolation, and other issues. Due to these severe consequences, the treatment of alcoholism requires long-term support, which can only be provided by specialists from various fields, including social workers, therapists, doctors, and psychologists. Social workers play a crucial role as they not only help individuals address addiction issues but also support them on an emotional and social level.

Research aim: The aim of the research was to explore the challenges faced by social workers when working with individuals who have alcohol addiction.

Research objective: The aim of the research is to investigate the challenges faced by social workers when working with individuals with alcohol dependence.

The study involved 5 social workers working with individuals with alcohol dependence.

A qualitative research method was chosen for the study, and a semi-structured interview instrument was used to collect data, the obtained research data were processed and presented using the principle of content analysis.

The qualitative research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of research, ensuring the rights of the participants specified in [3],[4]. The participants of the study were informed about the purpose of the study and the methods of data collection, their right to privacy and security were ensured (no questions were asked that could harm the well-being of the participants). All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, confidentiality was guaranteed, and their names were coded and replaced with numbers to ensure anonymity.

Research problem: What challenges do social workers face when working with individuals who engage in harmful alcohol consumption, and how do they address these challenges?

Research sample: The study used purposive sampling, and participants were social workers who hold a social worker qualification and are or have been employed in roles working with individuals with alcohol addiction. Six social workers participated

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in the study. These social workers, who work directly with individuals affected by alcohol dependency, are professionals who maintain regular contact with their clients. To ensure effective service delivery, it is important to thoroughly examine the challenges these specialists face in their work. By identifying these challenges and applying effective strategies to address them, social workers will be able to improve the quality of their services and contribute to reducing the number of individuals affected by alcohol addiction.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The goal of social work when working with individuals suffering from addiction is to provide comprehensive assistance that helps not only overcome addiction but also ensures long-term recovery and reintegration into society. The main objectives of social work are described in table 1.

TABLE 1 THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF SOCIAL WORK

Acknowledgment of addiction problems	Recognition of alcoholism and understanding it as a chronic illness is the first step. The social worker helps the individual identify the addiction, understand its consequences, and make the decision to seek help.
Motivation to change	Social workers use motivational methods to help individuals discover their internal motivation to change their behavior. This can be achieved through motivational interviewing, where the person's values and desires to live a life free from alcohol are highlighted.
Psychosocial support	Social workers provide emotional support and assist individuals in addressing issues related to the causes of addiction, such as family relationships, employment problems, mental health disorders, and other contributing factors. They help clients explore these underlying issues, develop healthier coping strategies, and improve their overall well-being, which is crucial for overcoming addiction and achieving long-term recovery.
Involving the family and community	Social workers collaborate with family members to help them understand the dynamics of addiction, providing support and guidance. Involving the community can help create a healthy environment and establish preventive measures, further supporting the recovery process and reducing the risk of relapse.
Long-term support	Addiction is a chronic condition that requires long-term care. Social workers provide support even after the intensive treatment process, ensuring that the individual has continuous assistance to prevent a relapse into alcohol use.

Social workers constantly deal with complex life issues. Alcohol and substance use often form part of this mix, frequently occurring alongside mental health disorders, poverty, and domestic violence. These issues span all areas of social work and become not only an individual's problem but a societal one.

Alcoholism is one of the most common forms of addiction, with serious consequences for the individual, their family, the community, and society at large. It is a chronic disease that often leads to physical, mental, and social difficulties. Lithuanian Department of Drug and Alcohol Control's report [14] states that "alcohol consumption can negatively affect not only the individual but also others in their close environment, family, and work. In 2023, 36.2% of all families requiring case management needed these services due to potential or existing parental alcohol addiction (35.6% in 2022)." Problems with relationships,

employment, finances, and housing are often the reasons why individuals with unhealthy alcohol use seek advice and help from health and welfare services [6]. Treating this disease and providing support for people with addiction is a key social work task. Social work with individuals suffering from alcohol addiction not only includes treating the illness but also providing comprehensive support to the individual and their family to ensure sustainable recovery and reintegration into society. Social workers consistently work with individuals who have substance use problems, making their role essential in assessing the issue, carrying out prevention, intervention, and organizing effective practices [5]. Given the complexity of the phenomenon, a systemic approach is necessary, and the work should focus on promoting social acceptance and long-term aspects of the individual's life: personal (social skills and daily living quality), biological (referral to medical institutions), and environmental (work habits, lifestyle) [8]. According to [10], [6], [11], social workers are not only tasked by the state but should actively engage with the most vulnerable individuals who require the greatest support. Their duty is to provide comprehensive social support, helping the individual reintegrate into society.

According to [13], social workers operate in a constantly changing social, political, and cultural environment, directly interacting with individuals from diverse social backgrounds, behaviours, and various social issues. Since addiction is a complex phenomenon, a systemic approach is essential, and social work can become a crucial long-term healthy factor, influencing personal (social and daily living skills), biological (e.g., referral to medical institutions), and environmental (work habits, quality of life) aspects [9]. [1] notes that social workers are almost always involved when there is an alcohol consumption issue. This is not only their legal responsibility but also part of broader areas of work, such as domestic violence, family crises, or working with individuals facing mental health difficulties. According to [1], social workers' activities related to substance use encompass three main roles. First, they must integrate the topic of addiction into their work to ensure appropriate assistance for clients, their families, and loved ones. Second, their task is to encourage individuals to change consumption habits and harmful behaviours, both for themselves and their relatives in the process. Third, social workers must support individuals in striving to adopt and maintain healthier consumption habits, ensuring long-term support. Research shows that social workers face numerous challenges when working with individuals with addictions: lack of client motivation, emotional burnout, lack of services, and intersectoral cooperation, as well as the societal stigma surrounding alcohol. Studies also emphasize that in order to improve the effectiveness of these professionals' work, it is necessary to ensure better professional preparation, increase the availability of social services, and strengthen emotional support. According to social learning theory, alcohol addiction could be a learned behaviour influenced by others and to overcome this it is very important to strengthen skills, create alternatives and support positive social activities [15].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study investigated the challenges faced by social workers when providing services to people with alcohol addiction. It was found that social workers face challenges when providing assistance to people with alcohol addiction. The researchers divided the challenges experienced by social workers into three subcategories of challenges: frequent forced treatment, refusal of help, denial of problems and lack of motivation. When talking about forced treatment, the study participants mentioned: "Rarely does a person come to the institution for treatment on their own" (2). "Often the court requires treatment" (3). "Sometimes, when relatives can no longer stand it, they bring them by force,

threatening them; at that time, they agree, but later they often bring them with the police" (4).

According to the participants, a major challenge for social workers working with individuals suffering from alcohol dependency is that they typically come for treatment not of their own accord, but due to pressure from law enforcement or family members. They often deny having any problems, claiming that they have no issues. In these cases, achieving positive results becomes extremely difficult. As one of the study participants stated: *"They say nothing happened to them, they were just told to come here" (1). "A major problem is people's defensiveness and isolation" (3). "Many individuals are sceptical about treatment and do not want help" (6).*

After analysing the data provided by the study participants, it can be concluded that social workers face several fundamental challenges when working with individuals with alcohol addiction. First, many of these individuals enter treatment institutions not of their own free will, but due to external factors, such as law enforcement or family pressure. This causes constant resistance, and their motivation to change is often low. Second, individuals with addiction often demonstrate a defensive and sceptical attitude, which complicates the task of the social worker. Some deny that they have a problem, others distance themselves from the offered help and do not engage in the treatment process. These situations emphasize that successful work with individuals requires not only professional help, but also the use of individualized motivational methods in order to reduce resistance and promote constructive cooperation.

Challenges Social Workers Face in Motivating Clients with Addiction Problems. The study participants emphasized that social workers working with individuals who have addictions often notice a lack of motivation among their clients. It was observed that many clients arrive at the treatment facility not because they genuinely want to seek help, but due to external obligations, such as court or police requirements. Only a small proportion of clients truly have the motivation to change and undergo treatment. As the participants stated: *"It's very easy and goes well when working with a motivated person" (1). "But when someone comes in who has no motivation to change, you can do whatever you want with them, they still don't want anything and reject any help" (3). "Motivation is often fake... there is often no real desire, just pretension" (4).*

The participants noted: *"There are cases when a person comes and asks for help, but that's very rare" (5). "Often they leave, going to the store on their way home, and everything starts over. Sometimes, even in the hospital, they manage to use substances" (6).*

According to the participants, individuals with addictions often fail to understand the extent of their problems, refuse help, and lack the internal motivation to change. Some come only for formalities, just to "check-in," but as soon as they leave, they return to their old habits. There are also cases where people use psychoactive substances even within treatment facilities, which further complicates their situation. These challenges present significant difficulties for specialists, as effective help can only occur when individuals genuinely want to make changes. Social workers not only need to provide the necessary support but also continuously search for ways to encourage clients' motivation to seek treatment and change their lifestyles.

The second identified category – "Challenges related to social workers' collaboration" – includes three subcategories: communication challenges, participation and effectiveness

challenges, and attitude challenges. *"As I said, sometimes it is very difficult to reach an agreement with child protection services." (1); "<...> sometimes I wish doctors were more active, I would like to have consultations and more specific guidelines." (3); "Sometimes it feels like we are speaking different languages<...>."(6)* Regarding communication challenges, the study participants emphasize that one of the difficulties is collaboration between institutions. While collaboration occurs, each institution often focuses only on its own area or specific aspects, which can cause difficulties, especially in child protection, where coordination of actions from various institutions is required. Participants also mentioned communication problems with doctors, noting that sometimes it is difficult to communicate and discuss the patient's situation. They emphasize that doctors lack initiative, especially when detailed consultations are needed for certain conditions that would require closer collaboration with social workers. This leads to situations where social workers have to perform tasks not directly related to their main activities, which may create an additional workload. Communication challenges arise due to the autonomy of institutions, lack of cooperation, insufficient initiative, and the absence of inter-institutional collaboration. When discussing attitude challenges, the study participants emphasize that each institution often tends to "pull" towards itself, defending its own perspective or limiting its actions only to its area of responsibility. This causes problems, especially in matters concerning children's rights or cooperation with the police. The participants point out that some institutions are too strict or misjudge clients' situations. They also express the opinion that the role of the doctor and their recommendations regarding treatment should be respected, rather than imposing decisions or opinions. Furthermore, in some situations, collaboration with the police could be beneficial, but it doesn't always happen effectively – the police sometimes act too harshly, rather than focusing on mutual information sharing and control, without aiming for punitive measures.

The third category – "The service provision process for individuals with alcohol addiction in addiction centers" – includes three subcategories: counseling, treatment, and information. When discussing counseling, the study participants emphasize that individuals first approach a doctor, who provides counseling on alcohol addiction and determines the level of addiction, as well as what treatment plan should be applied. The doctor also offers consultations and educates patients about the effects of alcohol on their mental health. When describing the treatment process, participants note that the treatment plan may include doctor visits at specific intervals, such as after one week, one month, or three months. During treatment, medications may be prescribed, and inpatient treatment may be offered, which involves intensive care and monitoring. Additionally, doctors aim to involve the patient in the recovery process and monitor how they accept help and adhere to the treatment plan. Psychosocial motivational programs, rehabilitation, and the Minnesota program may also be offered to help patients achieve recovery.

Regarding information provision, the study participants emphasize that social workers are the first to provide information to patients, discussing the negative consequences of alcohol consumption. This information includes not only physical but also social, legal, financial, and even spiritual consequences.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Social work with individuals suffering from alcohol addiction is a complex and important process that requires a holistic approach to addiction treatment and rehabilitation. This involves not only direct support for individuals with addiction but also assistance and support for their families to ensure a sustainable recovery and reintegration process into society. Recognizing addiction as a chronic disease and applying appropriately tailored interventions can significantly improve the quality of life for individuals with alcohol addiction and enable them to successfully integrate into society. It is essential for social workers to possess the necessary knowledge and skills to provide support and foster changes that help individuals cope with addiction and ensure long-term recovery.

The analysis of social workers' experiences in working with individuals struggling with alcohol addiction highlights the key challenges they encounter. One of the most significant difficulties is that many clients enter treatment not by personal choice but due to external pressures, such as legal obligations or family influence. This lack of voluntary participation often leads to resistance and diminished motivation to engage in the recovery process.

People with addiction frequently exhibit skepticism and defensiveness, refusing help or denying their problems, which makes it harder for social workers to involve them in treatment. Some clients may misrepresent their situation or deny their struggles, even when clear evidence of addiction is present. This behavior, often rooted in self-defense or an attempt to navigate the system, further complicates the efforts of social workers, requiring them to employ specialized skills to help clients acknowledge and accept their condition.

Additionally, individuals who show no progress or actively resist help pose further challenges, as their unwillingness to engage meaningfully in treatment increases the likelihood of relapsing. Social workers play a crucial role in guiding clients toward self-awareness, recognizing the need for change, and preparing them for recovery. However, without the clients' motivation and willingness to cooperate, achieving lasting positive outcomes remains difficult.

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