

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS OF EVALUATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN SLOVAK REPUBLIC 2013

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### Abstract

The article deals with the situation in the area of social services in Slovak Republic and general concept of the evaluation from the perspective of different authors. It also defines the objectives of the evaluation, types of evaluation and different kinds of assessment. Article is also focused on evaluation of social services as an important part of social work. It describes theoretical concepts, which have significant impact on the evaluation of social services in practise. Article also describes the „evaluation tree“, which branches represent different focuses and orientations of many authors of evaluation theories.

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### 1 Social services in Slovak Republic

In recent years is the area of social services increasingly discussed not only by the professionals but also by the all members of the society. In Slovak Republic has happend the several signifiant changes in the field of social services.

At present the area of social services is regulated by the Act on Social services no. 448/ 2008 Coll. According to this Act it is clear that social services are professional, utility and other activities with main purpose to help people in need. In modernising social services to better respond to changing needs, societal challenges and financing constraints, national authorities are increasingly diversifying the ways in which these services are organised, provided and financed. Social services are focused on:

- Prevention, solution or reduction of the unfavorable social situation
  - Enhancing of the abilities of clients to lead independent live and to promote their integration into society
- Ensuring of the necessary condition to satisfy the basic living needs
- Solution of the critical social situation
- Prevention of the social exclusion

There are few kinds of social services according to the Act on Social services:

- Social services to ensure necessary condition to satisfy the basic needs
- Social services to support the families with children
  - Social services to address the unfavorable social situation because of serious disability, illness or retirement age
- Social services using telecommunications technologies
- Support services

Social services in Slovak Republic are important part of activities of providers. In general the providers of social services are those who provide social services to clients. There are two kinds of providers in Slovakia – public and non - public.

Act on Social services no. 448/ 2008 Coll. defines also the obligations of the social services provides. The main obligation of providers is to elaborate and observe procedural, personnel and operating conditions of providing social services, so – called „standards of quality“. The standards describe what a quality social service should look like. They are a set of measurable and verifiable criteria. However, nowadays there are no standards of quality of social services in Slovak Republic. According to Krupa (2006) the quality of social services is a kind of match between supply of services and requirements of the clients in unfavourable social situation.

In social services, the concept of quality refers to the contents, conditions and results of the service. Social service is an instrument of social security. One strategy

to steer the increasing demand and supply is to turn formerly public systems into quasi - markets by complementing public services with new and additional providers (commercial and non - profit organisations). (Hoffmann, Leichsenring, 2011).

According to the several authors (Hrablayová et al. 2005) in recent years there were few ways of evaluation of social services, but as was already mentioned before, in Slovakia there are still no standards of quality of social services.

In history of social services in Slovakia there were some methods for evaluation of these services (Hrablayová et al. 2005) which included:

- Processual method of quality evaluation (criterias, indicators)
- Methods of social counselling and supervision
- Clients quality of life

By the term procesual method of evaluation the authors understood the systematic way of evaluation of the quality of social services by the scientifically formulated criteria, standards and quality indicators with the real situation of social services in the social environment. According to Hrablayová (et al, 2005, p. 17) *„comparison of the criteria (standards, indicators) with the real environment of the social services is carried out by the observation and evaluated by the teams of social workers.“* The effective evaluation of the quality of social services is also connected with the social counseling and supervision. Hrablayová (et al, 2005, p. 17) also says: *„The objective evaluation of the quality of social services is connected with the experimental verification tool of the evaluation of the quality and with the professionally implemented social counseling and supervision.“*

Today, there are defined the condition (not standards) of providing social services in the Annex no. 2 of the Act on Social services no. 448/ 2008 Coll.. In part A of this Annex no. 2 these conditions are divided into three categories with the maximum number of point which can an individual institution provided social services achieve. This is a category of procedural, personnel and operating conditions of the quality of social services. Part B of this Annex refferes to the evaluation scale of the implemantation of the quality of social services. In the part C there is the final scale of the evaluation of the implemented condition of the quality of social services.

For a comprehensive evaluation system of the social services would be helpful to introduce the above – mentioned standards of the quality of social services into the practise. By them it would be defined the level of the quality of provided social ser-

vices in all three categories which are currently defined in the Act on Social services as a conditions of social services. By the implementation of the quality standards the state would ensure providing quality social services primarily to clients of these services – to people who find themselves in unfavorable social situation. (Čámský et al. 2011)

Experiences with the evaluation of social services by the quality standards from other countries or documents on european level can be helpful in the process of evaluation of social services by the quality standards in Slovak Republic.

## 2 The term evaluation

Evaluation is a process which use a comprehensive set of methods by which is possible to evaluate the benefits of some programs. In the case of social work it is possible to evaluate different kinds of social programs or social services.

The main purpose of the evaluation is provide services of the highest quality and still to improve these providing services. Evaluation is a process of valuation of some phenomenon. It is also a kind of survey if provided and used activities led to the expected results. Under the term evaluation it is possible to understand several ideas about what and how to evaluate. (Poluncová, 2011)

Evaluation is a wide concept and in general it is possible to evaluate everything. For example to evaluate the state interventions into the public sector. In this case evaluation can take part in three levels – at the level of project, program or policy.

Malíková (2003, In Poluncová, 2011, p. 11) defines the term evaluation as „*a process of the results evaluation which have been completed in order to achieve given purpose.*“ This author pays attention to the importance of feedback and she also argues that evaluation makes sense only if the results get back to the policy – makers.

Patton (1997, In Poluncová, 2011) defines the evaluation of programs as a systematic collection of the informations about the activities and outcomes of program with the purpose to reach the conclusion about this program, to improve its efficiency and to take the decisions about future program direction.

Weiss (1988, In Poluncová, 2011) describes evaluation as a systematic evaluation of the activity and results of the program or policy, compared to the explicit or implicit standards, and it also means a source to achieve improvements in the program or policy.

The subjects of evaluation of programs and services are: *what* (subject of assessment itself), *when* (time plan of assessment), *how* (methods of evaluation) and *who* (to be evaluate and who should evaluate the programs – evaluators). (Ondrušek, 2009)

### 3 Evaluation of social services

The theoretical basis for the evaluation of social services is the evaluation theory. According to this theory evaluation is focused on activity. It is guided by the intention of the value determination or by the impact of the policy, program, practise, intervention or service. Evaluation is conducted from the perspective of recommendations or changes (Clarke, 1999).

Evaluation of social services is a systematic collection of informations. According to Erath (2001, In Kahánková, 2007) the biggest benefit is that social services are regularly reviewed, monitored and evaluated by the diverse management of evaluation.

The main aim of evaluation of social services is the orientation on feedback of existing social programs and their use in practise. According to the evaluation theory there are two kinds of evaluation:

- Single – system evaluation (evaluation of efectivity of someone's work which is usually managed by the social worker)
- Program evaluation (aplication of evaluation approaches, techniques and knowledge to development of planning, implementation and effectiveness of programs. (Chen, 2005 In Smutek, 2009)

There is a question in connection with evaluation of social services: What should be evaluated? The best answer according to Smutek (2009) is that the programs or social services with different focus should be evaluated, for example social policy programs, programs related to the employment policy or intervention programs in every area of welfare state. They are also focused on field of education, crime, social security and social services. The main purpose of evaluation of these programs is to improve social welfare/ well – being of population.

Stufflebeam a Shinkfield (1985, In Smutek, 2009, s. 10) say that: „*The most important purpose of the evaluation is not to test, but to inform.*“ Discovering new informations and knowledge is not the purpose of the evaluation of social services.

But there is another important purpose - to study the effectiveness of the social program or social services.

According to Rossi and Freeman (1993 In Smutek, 2009) the evaluation of social programs is performed for many different reasons:

- To access the value of runtime programs, to access the utility of the programs
- To determine the utility of innovative programs and initiatives
- To improve the efficiency of program management and administration, meet the standards of the responsibility to the program sponsors, donators and other interested stakeholders
- Evaluation may also help to real and methodological knowledge of social sciences

The outputs of evaluation are a kind of „technical“ expresion of operation of the program (social service), while the results/ outcomes represent total exposure of the program in reaction on changes in society. Results are wider expresion which includes both: technical work of the program (outputs) and intervention of the program on the whole society.

When we uncover the relationship between theory and evaluation, it is important to distinguish between theories about evaluation and theories in evaluation. The first mentioned theory deal with Shadish et al. (1991 In Smutek, 2009) in their review of some main theories which speak about practical program evaluation. According to these authors, the evaluation theory tell us where, when and why should some methods be applied and others not. A clear and comprehensible theory of evaluation should include five major components:

- Social programming
- Knowledge construction
- Knowledge use
- Valuing
- Practise

#### **4 Theoretical backgrounds of the evaluation of social services**

Smutek (2009) argues that the theory of evaluation of social programs and services plays many different roles and it can provide the selection of appropriate scientific methods and methodological approaches to evaluators. The theory also

helps to focus the evaluation in the right direction, because it leads evaluators directly to the main key issues and problems. However, according to Smutek (2009), the theory of evaluation of programs and services is often overlooked in scientific literature.

In the area of the evaluation theories it is very important to distinguish between *theory about evaluation* and *theory in evaluation*.

*Theory about evaluation* describe the theory which is applied to the current practise of the evaluation. It is a theory which speaks how to practise the evaluation.

If we focus on the *theory in evaluation*, we find out that the emphasis is on the specification of the functioning of some program or intervention.

In the evaluation of social services is very important to mention term system theory. According to Chen (2005 In Smutek, 2009), social program must have two functions to succeed:

- It must ensure the transformation of inputs to desired outputs
- program needs to be in constant interaction with its environment in order to get the resources and support which are necessary to sustainability

According to Chen (2005 In Smutek, 2009) based on system theory it is possible to conceptualise every intervention program which includes following five components:

- inputs - sources received from the environment (such as finance, technology, equipment, staff or the clients)
- transformation - during this phase implementors provide services to clients
- outputs - are the result of a transformation which are necessary to achieve the program objectives
- feedback - programs need information on whether the inputs are adequate, or if clients receive quality services
- environment - a variety of factors, which may be social norms, political structures, economy, interest groups and others. According to Chen social sustainability of the program often depends on how the environment perceived program outcomes.

Crucial to the success of the program can be as contextual support environment at the micro level as well as at the macro level. Micro - level contextual support can be understood as social, psychological, and material support that clients need

to make social intervention program effective. In addition to micro - level support should social program makers take into account the macro level of the social context, it means the community standards, cultural, political and economic processes which surround action of the social program.

One of the important question in program evaluation is if program achieve goals and also the question how program achieve these goals. Also in holistic approach to evaluation important is to seen all circumstances which led to the program outcome. In this holistic approach there is a connection between ecological context and system theory.

In the theoretical concepts of the evaluation of social services it is important to mention the author Alkin (2004) who is the author of the „evaluation tree“. According to this author the evaluation roots have grown to the „evaluation tree“ and each branches of this „evaluation tree“ represent the different focus and the orientation of the delegates of the various theories of evaluation. In this „evaluation tree“, each branches always represent only one main theory:

- Branch of use
- Branch of methods
- Branch of assessment

The trunk of the evaluation tree has two bases:

- Responsibility
- Systematic social research

The main branch of the evaluation tree (branch of methods) is the continuation of the trunk of the social research. This is the evaluation as research, or evaluation guided by research methods, branch. „*This branch we have designated methods since in its purest form, it deals with obtaining generalizability, or “knowledge construction,” as Shadish, Cook, and Leviton (1991) refer to it.*“ (Alkin, 2004, p. 13 – 14) Another branch is the valuing branch. Initially inspired by the work of Michael Scriven (Alkin, 2004)), the valuing branch firmly establishes the vital role of the evaluator in valuing. Those on this branch maintain that placing value on data is perhaps the most essential component of the work of evaluator. Alkin(2004, p. 14 – 15) also sad that „*Some subsequent theorists extend the evaluator’s role to include systematically facilitating the placing of value by others (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The third major branch is use, which, with the pioneering work of Daniel Stufflebeam (initially with*



*Egon Guba) and the work of Joseph Wholey, originally focused on an orientation toward evaluation and decision making. In essence, work done by theorists on this branch expresses a concern for the way in which evaluation information will be used and focuses on those who will use the information.*“

In relation to the evaluation tree Alkin (2004) says that the need and desire for accountability are necessary for the evaluation. The importance of evaluation for activities or sources used in the implementation of programs is evident especially in programs supported by government institutions. The task of evaluation is not to limit any activity of organizations functioning at the state level, but the purpose is to improve and strengthen programs for the society and for the clients who use them.

At present most evaluations are performed to improve institutional performance. So, the results of these evaluations are often used in political or other government decisions.

## 5 Conclusion

The evaluation plays an important role in the system of social services. The current evaluation of public policies, social services and social programs is based on earlier experiences in social sciences in several important aspects. The primary interest of the evaluation is to explain and predict, build theories and analysis in order to be useful not only for the policy makers or social services and program makers.

It is very important to focus on the clients as a target group of social services in evaluation theory. According to this it is very important to mention author Thomas Cook (Smutek, 2009) who says that all stakeholders should be included in process of evaluation. According to him it is also important to cooperate with clients (as a one group of possible stakeholders) in decision – making process – what actually should evaluation examine.

Chen (2005 In Smutek, 2009, p. 172) says that: „... *small group of theoretical researchers and methodologists developed the basis of evaluation theory and methodology for evaluation practitioners who applied the evaluation theory into the practise.*“ Evaluators need basis concepts, strategies and tools to beginning their work. According to Chen (2005 In Smutek, 2009) all this mentioned before is important for cooperation between theoretical researchers and practitioners. It is necessary to connect academical and practical information in whole evaluation process.

However, it is necessary to use the theoretical knowledge about evaluation in the whole process of the evaluation of social services. It is also important to connect these informations and knowledge with the practise primarily at the increasing of the quality of provided social services.

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