

Current issues of socio-pathological phenomena prevention and its professionalisation in schools in the Slovak Republic

Jolana Hroncová

UMB Banská Bystrica

Abstract. *The increase of socio-pathological behaviour in the society, especially in children and young people, has created the need to increase the effectiveness of prevention and its professionalisation in schools. In Slovakia, the Act on Education has enabled social pedagogues to work in schools; they are involved in prevention, intervention, re-education and reintegration activities, as well as in socio-educational counselling for students, parents and teachers. Particular attention is paid to students from socially disadvantaged environments. Due to the lack of financial resources, only few social pedagogues work in Slovakian schools, and prevention activities are often the responsibility of teachers.*

Key Words: *social pedagogue, prevention, sociopathic phenomena, professionalization, intervention, re-education, resocialization*

Zapobieganie patologiom społecznym i jego profesjonalizacja w szkołach w Republice Słowackiej

Abstrakt. *Wzrost zachowań socjopatologicznych w społeczeństwie, a zwłaszcza wśród dzieci i młodzieży, spowodował potrzebę zwiększenia skuteczności oraz profesjonalizacji działań zapobiegawczych podejmowanych w szkołach. Obowiązująca w Słowacji Ustawa o szkolnictwie umożliwia pedagogom społecznym podejmowanie pracy w szkołach, gdzie są oni zaangażowani w prowadzenie działalności zapobiegawczej, interwencyjnej, reedukacyjnej i reintegracyjnej, a także w poradnictwo społeczno-edukacyjne dla uczniów, rodziców i nauczycieli. Szczególną uwagę poświęca się uczniom pochodzącym ze środowisk zubożałych i patologicznych. Ze względu na ograniczenia finansowe liczba pedagogów społecznych w słowackich szkołach pozostaje niewielka, a działalność zapobiegawczą prowadzą często nauczyciele.*

Słowa kluczowe: *pedagog społeczny, zapobieganie, zjawiska socjopatologiczne, profesjonalizacja, interwencja, reedukacja, resocjalizacja*

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Social need for prevention professionalisation and its reflection in national and European documents

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The transformation and integration processes in the Slovak Republic, along with contemporary global problems, have brought about a sharp increase in socio-pathological and socially undesirable behaviour in children, young people and adults. The caring professions, with no appropriate conditions for development in our country before 1989, are much involved in tackling these negative and undesirable phenomena. All social problems can be solved on various levels and the most effective solution is to prevent them, in particular at the level of primary prevention. In recent decades, the issue of socio-pathological phenomena prevention has become a frequently used term, especially in the theory. However, its practical implementation, especially for children and young people, is more formal than real, particularly in school. The effectiveness of children and youth sociopathic behaviour prevention is conditional on systematic and planned training, erudition and also experience of workers implementing preventative steps. Therefore, a professional approach to prevention has now become a categorical imperative, not only in schools, but also in health care institutions, the police, public administration institutions, etc. The professional character of prevention is also emphasized in European and national strategy documents dealing with the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena, e.g. the EU Drugs Strategy (2005-2012), as well as the Crime Prevention Strategy in the Slovak Republic (2007-2010), its updated forms, and other documents. The priority given to prevention over cure has long been emphasized, because it is more in line with humanizing tendencies, is more effective and more beneficial economically. The Crime Prevention Strategy in the Slovak Republic (2007-2010), already updated for the next period, states as its first priority aimed at prevention of crime among children and young people that the condition underlying the effectiveness of prevention activities is “to know the life of current young people” and also that it “will not be possible without further professionalisation of prevention aimed at minors and “young adults” without special training of those whose job it is to prevent. This is just not only for the Police, but also for schools, cultural and educational facilities, central and local government authorities, and also social work facilities.” The Crime Prevention Strategy in

the Slovak Republic also indicates the deficiency of training programmes in the field of undergraduate and postgraduate education for teachers, social workers, police officers, etc., including programmes on knowledge of criminology, how to prevent socially undesirable phenomena and similar fields. Based on various theoretical studies published in journals, collections and other sources as well as practical experience, it may be stated that preventing socio-pathological phenomena are dealt with by a number of entities almost without any mutual co-operation. Consequently, the effectiveness of preventive projects, often financed generously from national and European funds, is relatively low. This is why it is necessary for a professional approach to be implemented starting at the level of primary prevention in schools and school facilities and also in institutions co-operating with them in the task of prevention.

Prevention of socio-pathological phenomena in Slovak social pedagogy

The founding father of Slovak social pedagogy is O. Baláž, and when laying the foundations for the first concept of social pedagogy, created under the influence of Polish and German social pedagogy, as well as Czech and Slovak sociology of education, he emphasized the importance of prevention in his social pedagogy research. In his paper "About the Issues of Social Pedagogy"¹, he states: "I fully agreed with the opinion of Wroczyński, who saw the importance of social pedagogy not only in studying education in a broader social context, in its environmental interdependence, but also in studying its prophylactic and compensational aspects. Today it is even more true than thirty years ago that it is very important for man, especially for a young person, that education foresees the potential threats and develops activities to overcome negative influences. Such a compensation of deficiencies, unsatisfied needs and negative influences is necessary in education, both at school and in the family and free time. Therefore, social pedagogy is increasingly important." O. Baláž paid great attention to extracurricular activities for pupils. Such activities are considered one of the most important factors in preventing socio-pathological

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¹ O. Baláž: *K problémom sociálnej pedagogiky*, „Pedagogická revue“ 1996, nr 48, p. 496.

phenomena, as is emphasized in all current European and national documents, e.g. the Crime Prevention Strategy in the Slovak Republic, National Drugs Strategy (2013–2020), and also the Action Plan of EU member states and the EU Drugs Strategy (2013–2020). In the Slovak socio-pedagogical and andragogical literature, preventive competencies of social pedagogues are systematically and comprehensively analyzed by C. Határ in his publication *Social Pedagogy in the System of Socio-Pedagogical Counselling, Prevention and Prophylaxis*², who focuses considerable attention on this issue in his monograph *Social Pedagogy, Social Andragogy and Social Work*.³ The preventive competence of social pedagogues is also focussed on by Z. Bakošová in the collection *Social Pedagogy*, as well as in the publication *Social Pedagogy as Life Aid*⁴ and other works. Other publications in the Slovak socio-pedagogical literature include books by J. Hroncová et al. *Social Pedagogy in Slovakia*,⁵ J. Hroncová, I. Emmerová et al. *Social Pedagogy – Development and Current State*,⁶ I. Emmerová, *Preventive and Socio-Pedagogical Work with Problem Children and Youth*,⁷ M. Niklová and L. Kamarášová, *Social Pedagogy and Prevention of Socio-Pathological Phenomena*,⁸ which offers a broader discussion of the prospects of a social pedagogue in school and I. Emmerová's *Current Issues of Pupils' Problem Behaviour Prevention in School*⁹ and *Prevention of Socio-Pathological Phenomena in School*.¹⁰

Several authors focussed considerable attention on the prospects of social pedagogues in the field of social pathology prevention in and out of school at the SOCIALIA 2007 *Socio-Pathological Phenomena Prevention in Children, Youth and Adults* international conference, which

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² C. Határ: *Sociálny pedagóg v systéme sociálno-edukačného poradenstva, prevencie a profylaxie*, Nitra: PF UKF, 2010.

³ Idem, *Sociálna pedagogika, sociálna andragogika a sociálna práca*, Nitra: PF UKF, 2006.

⁴ Z. Bakošová: *Sociálna pedagogika ako životná pomoc*, Bratislava: Public promotin, 2008.

⁵ J. Hroncová et al., *Sociálna pedagogika na Slovensku*, Banská Bystrica: PF UMB, 2012.

⁶ Eadem, Emmerová Ingrid et al., *Sociálna pedagogika. Vývoj a súčasný stav*, Banská Bystrica 2009.

⁷ I. Emmerová, *Preventívna a sociálno-výchovná práca s problémovými deťmi a mládežou*, Banská Bystrica 2012.

⁸ M. Niklová, L. Kamarášová: *Sociálny pedagóg a prevencia sociálnopatologických javov*, Banská Bystrica: 2007.

⁹ I. Emmerová: *Aktuálne otázky prevencie problémového správania u žiakov v školskom prostredí*, Banská Bystrica 2011.

¹⁰ I. Emmerová: *Prevencia sociálnopatologických javov v školskom prostredí*. Banská Bystrica: 2007.

was held at the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica in co-operation with the Faculty of Education of University of Hradec Králové and the Slovak Pedagogical Society at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. This issue was central the main papers presented in the plenary session: J. Hroncová in her presentation *Sociopathic Behaviour Prevention in Children and Youth in the Subject of Social Pedagogy – History, Present, Perspectives*; B. Kraus and P. Sýkora from the Czech Republic, in their paper *Social Pedagogy and its Role in Prevention in Elementary School*. Other presenters also dealt with this topic, in particular I. Emmerová *Social Need for the Work of a Social Pedagogue in School*, L. Karamášová *Competences of a Social Pedagogue in Socio-Pathological Phenomena Prevention*, and M. Niklová *Social Pedagogue in Socio-pathological Phenomena Prevention – the Past, the Present and Perspectives*. The conclusions drawn at the conference accentuated the need, arising from the increase in sociopathic behaviour in children and young people, for a professionalization of prevention in elementary and secondary schools and for the position of a prevention specialist to be held by a social pedagogue whose training and profiling focuses on professional work in the field of socio-pathological phenomena prevention, especially in children and young people. The conclusions of SOCIALIA 2007 indicated the necessity to add the function of social pedagogue to the nomenclature of occupations and establish it in legislation, because this is a dynamically developing field of activity which is both greatly required and regulated in developed European countries. The social need and educational practice called for this function to be established in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and in 2008 the Slovak Republic legally instituted the position of social pedagogue in schools and school facilities, an act which we greatly appreciate.

The preventive dimension of social pedagogy was also presented at other SOCIALIA international conferences organized by the Faculty of Education of MBU in Banská Bystrica. SOCIALIA 2009 focused on the *Professional Competences of Social Pedagogues and Social Workers in Theory and Practice in the Slovak Republic and Other Countries of the European Union*, while SOCIALIA 2011 was entitled *Participation of Public Administration Institutions and Helping Professions in Socio-Pathological Phenomena Prevention in Children, Youth and Adults in the Slovak Republic and Other Countries of the European Union*. The focus of these conferences was to present the results

of VEGA projects in which members of the “Banská Bystrica School of Social Pedagogy” and their colleagues participated.¹¹

The greatest attention to the work of social pedagogues in school was paid at the international seminar *Social Pedagogue in School*, held at the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica on 6 November 2012. The plenary speeches discussed the legislative possibilities for the employing a social pedagogue in Slovakia (Hroncová, J. – *Socio-Pathological Phenomena Prevention in the Subject of Social Pedagogy and in the Profession of a Social Pedagogue – Historical Aspects and the Present*), in the Czech Republic (Kraus, B. – *Prospects of Social Pedagogy and Social Pedagogues in Current School in the Czech Republic*) and in the Republic of Poland (Walancik, M., Walancik-Ryba, K. – *Prospects of Social Pedagogues in Practice in Poland with Particular Regard to Socio-Pedagogical Work at School*). Other plenary speeches and presentations in smaller groups pointed to the different conditions relating to the work of a social pedagogue in schools in the Slovak Republic, where the function of a social pedagogue had already been legislatively established, which was not yet the case in the Czech Republic and Poland.

The seminar *Social Pedagogue in School* laid down several objectives:

- to present the current state of theory dealing with a social pedagogue’s personality, competences and prospects in practice;
- to conduct an analysis of the current state of school legislation dealing with the prospects of social pedagogues in Slovakia and to compare the situations in schools in our country and abroad;
- to encourage an exchange of knowledge and experience at the level of theory, methodology and practice among social pedagogues, with particular regard to the socio-pedagogical work of social pedagogues in kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, both in regular schools and special ones;
- to establish, strengthen and deepen mutual cooperation between the Faculty of Education of MBU, as Slovakia’s only training centre with a Master’s degree programme “Social Pedagogy” and higher

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¹¹ For more details see: *Socialia 2009. Profesionálne kompetencie sociálnych pedagógov a sociálnych pracovníkov v teórii a praxi v SR a v iných krajinách Európskej únie*, Banská Bystrica: PF UMB, 2009; *Socialia 2011. Participácia inštitúcií verejnej správy a pomáhajúcich profesií na prevencii sociálno-patologických javov u detí, mládeže a dospelých v Slovenskej republike a v iných krajinách Európskej únie*, Banská Bystrica: PF UMB, 2011.

education institutions abroad, and also to foster cooperation with practicing social pedagogues;

- to monitor the most serious problems and needs of social pedagogues as professional staff in schools and school facilities, which emerge in the course of their socio-pedagogical and preventive work with children and young people.¹²

In order to solve problems connected with the prospects of social pedagogues in school, the experience of school social pedagogues from elementary and secondary schools proved extremely valuable, in that it indicated numerous problems connected with the performing this role. Of particular note was the urgent need for a professionogram of social pedagogues at the school level, as they lacked both methodological handbooks for their socio-pedagogical work and opportunities for further education. Various research projects at the “Banská Bystrica School of Social Pedagogy” deal with these problems and aim to help social pedagogues in schools to tackle them.

Legislative background of a social pedagogue’s prospects in practice in the Slovak Republic

The history of Slovak social pedagogy is much shorter than that of German or Polish social pedagogy. This is why it should be appreciated that the present school legislation already enables a social pedagogue to work in school, where we are ahead of Poland and the Czech Republic. However, social pedagogues have long been established in German schools.

Before 2008, the profession of social pedagogue was defined only in one legislative act, this being the Act No. 279/1993 on school facilities, according to which social pedagogues could work in educational prevention facilities, in centres for educational and psychological prevention, medical and educational sanatoria and diagnostic centres.

On 1 September 2008, the new *Act No. 245/2008 on upbringing and education* came into effect, the Section 130 of which defines the system of educational counselling and prevention in schools and in school facilities. In accordance with this act, the social pedagogue belongs to other components of the educational counselling and prevention system, cooperating

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¹² J. Hroncová, I. Emmerová, et al., *Sociálny pedagóg v škole*, Banská Bystrica: PF UMB, 2012, p. 5-6.

in particular with the family, school, school facilities, employers, public administration bodies and civil associations. However, according to this act, social pedagogues perform their main work in the school system from kindergarten up to secondary school – Section 27 (2) a) to f) and within school facilities (school dormitories, Section 117 (5)). Parts of the educational, psychological and special educational counselling and prevention system facilities are the centre for educational and psychological counselling and prevention, and also the centre for special educational counselling, where a social pedagogue may also work. A social pedagogue may work in special educational establishments (Section 120) including diagnostic centres, medical and educational sanatoria and re-educational centres. The activities of these special educational centres are regulated by *Decree No. 323/2008 on special educational establishments*. According to the Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on upbringing and education and Section 117, school educational establishments include school dormitories. The *Decree No. 236/2009 Coll. on school dormitories* issued by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic regulates the activities of dormitories. With regard to Section 6 thereof, the activities may include those performed by the staff of school facilities for educational counselling and prevention related to Section 130 (5) of the Act No. 245/2008 on upbringing and education, also including a social pedagogue.

Another legislative norm regulating the profession of a social pedagogue is Act No. 317 Coll. on teaching staff and professional staff. According to this Act, a social pedagogue is classified as a professional employee (Section 19), while Section 24 defines a social pedagogue's activities as follows: "A social pedagogue performs professional activities within the scope of prevention, intervention and counselling, specifically for children and pupils threatened by socio-pathological phenomena, from socially disadvantaged environments, drug addicted, or otherwise disadvantaged children and pupils, their legal representatives and the teaching staff of schools and school facilities. A social pedagogue fulfils the tasks of social education, pro-social, ethical behaviour support, socio-pedagogical diagnostics of environment and relations, socio-pedagogical counselling, prevention of socio-pathological phenomena and re-education of behaviour. A social pedagogue performs expertise activities and public education activities".

Annex 1 and Annex 2 of the *Decree No. 437/2009 Coll.* of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic of 20 October 2009 *laying down the qualification criteria and special qualification requirements for individual categories of teaching*

staff and professional staff, give further details of prospects for graduates in social pedagogy, based on graduates' qualifications. In Part XIV (Clause 4), the Decree enables a social pedagogue to hold the position of a tutor in schools and school facilities for handicapped pupils, on fulfilling the qualification criteria of a first and second degree in social pedagogy supplemented by a qualification in special education. A social pedagogue without a formal qualification in special education may only work in special educational establishments. Annex 2, Part IV sets out the qualification criteria for the position of "Social Pedagogue", who is included in the professional staff of schools and school facilities, the professional staff of facilities under the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, as well as the professional staff of centres for educational and psychological counselling and prevention, and finally the staff of centres for special educational counselling.

Currently, already two legislative norms enable social pedagogues to work as members of the professional staff in schools, from kindergartens to secondary schools; however, the reality is quite different. According to monitoring conducted in 2013, at present approximately 18 social pedagogues work in Slovak elementary schools (regular and special) while approximately 6 work in secondary schools.

The best situation is in Trenčín, where they have been working part-time in 8 elementary schools and have been paid from the city of Trenčín budget since 2009.

Based on the empirical findings of our 2009 study, a majority of elementary school head-masters wished to have a social pedagogue on their staff, but had no funds for such a salary.

In addition to the aforementioned legislative norms enabling employment of social pedagogues in schools and school facilities, social pedagogues work also in the field of prevention in the state administration, in accordance with *Act No. 305/2005 on the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship*. This is especially common at the Offices of Labour, Social Matters and Family at the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children and Social guardianship, where they find the best prospects so far. Slovak law regulates the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship to ensure¹³:

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¹³ D. Paučíková, *Inštitucionálne a legislatívne zabezpečenie sociálno-výchovnej starostlivosti v súčasnosti a jej diferenciacia*, In: *Zborník vedeckovýskumných prác Katedry pedagogiky* č. 7, 2011, p. 193.

- a) prevention of occurrence of family crisis situations;
- b) protection of the rights and legally protected interests of children;
- c) prevention of disorders in psychological development, physical development and social development, and prevention of their deepening and recurrence, in children and persons of full age;
- d) elimination of an increase in socio-pathological phenomena.

Employing social pedagogues in practice in the field of prevention is also enabled by *Act No. 448/2008 on social services*, stipulating that social service as a professional activity aimed at providing help or ensuring that help is provided to a person in a family or a community, in order to:

- a) prevent the occurrence of, solve or mitigate an adverse social situation;
- b) preserve, recover or develop a person's ability to live independently and to promote a person's social inclusion;
- c) ensure the necessary conditions for satisfaction of a person's basic needs;
- d) settle a social crisis;
- e) prevent social exclusion.

It may be stated that social pedagogues in Slovakia are relatively well established in state administration institutions, where, according to our findings, most of such graduates work; a significant number also work in school facilities for educational counselling and prevention, in particular in psychological counselling. Relatively rarely are they employed in special educational establishments. Their employment situation in the field of penitentiary and post-penitentiary care is better.

Cooperation of schools and school facilities for educational counselling and prevention with other entities

An increase in the effectiveness of primary prevention in elementary and secondary schools and school facilities requires not only prevention efforts at a professional level, but also closer and more intensive cooperation between schools and other institutions participating at various levels in the prevention of sociopathic behaviour among children and young people. Social pedagogues in schools and school facilities must place emphasis on a system approach in their primary prevention effort. Plans for preventive

activities in school should include co-operation with families, because “a good family is the best prevention”. Primary prevention is of limited effectiveness without the active involvement of pupils’ parents. Cooperation with the Police Force is also necessary both at the regional and district level. Regional prevention coordinators already perform this function mostly with required knowledge at a professional level. Thus, action plans for preventive activities should include other entities involved in prevention at the regional and district level. The most important of these are centres for educational and psychological counselling and prevention, and the Departments of Social and Legal Protection of Children and Social Guardianship at the Offices of Labour, Social affairs and Family. However, it is a pity that these establishments rather “extinguish the fire” than prevent it. It is a paradox that despite the increase in deviant behaviour among children and young people as well as among adults, the number of such employees is being reduced, along with the government grants financing their activities. Isolated and often only formally reported preventive activities in individual institutions, including schools, will bring no required effect.

The current increase in deviant behaviour of children and young people already requires a professional approach to prevention in schools and school facilities along with their close cooperation with other entities within the state administration and self-government whose role involves prevention at various levels.

The current activities of social pedagogues in various state administration and self-government institutions form a solid foundation for the development of closer and more intense cooperation between all entities implementing prevention activities, as there is still great potential in this respect.

Conclusion

The increase in deviant behaviour of children and young people already requires primary and secondary prevention at a professional level in the school environment, from kindergartens to secondary schools, in accordance with Act No. 245/2008 on upbringing and education and Act No. 317 Coll. on teaching staff and professional staff. These preventative actions are to be performed by a social pedagogue as a member of the

professional staff, trained in preventative-educational activities during their studies at a higher education institution. Professional prevention has been emphasized for decades in all European documents and in Slovak national documents dealing with the prevention of crime, drug addiction and other socio-pathological phenomena. However, it is a pity that the function of a prevention coordinator has remained in the school legislation along with the function of a social pedagogue. The prevention coordinator is only an additional function for the school teaching staff – teachers that do not require special remuneration. The transfer of responsibility for prevention in schools to prevention coordinators, thus teachers, overloaded with their own teaching obligations, without the required background knowledge in the field of prevention, and without regular remuneration for this function, is merely a formal and not real solution to the problems. This is reflected in the low effectiveness of prevention, often only formally reported by schools in their plans for preventive activities. According to our empirical data, pupils often know neither their prevention coordinators nor the preventive activities reported by schools. In addition to insufficient funds for this function, the unwillingness of head teachers to employ social pedagogues is also due to insufficient information about this profession. However, the current increase in deviant behaviour of pupils has already brought about the need for schools to accept in a greater extent the legislative possibilities for employing social pedagogues in schools, a solution which will help to increase the effectiveness of primary and secondary prevention and to reduce problem behaviour in pupils in the school environment.

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