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## TRAINING PROGRAM FOR THE FORMATION OF GENDER COMPETENCE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Social work as a practical field of activity grounds on the values of social justice, support and respect for diversity. Researchers (Dvoriak, Karagodina and Semigina, 2020<sup>1</sup>; Leskošek, 2020<sup>2</sup>) state in the fact that the development of gender competence allows providing anti-discrimination services, implementing gender-sensitive strategies in the practice of social work, supporting the values of social justice and respect for human rights, while Dominelli (2002<sup>3</sup>) pursue the notion that insufficient understanding of the societal structures and their impact on group beliefs leads to a simplified social work practice.

This chapter reviews the components of gender competence and presents the training program for the formation of gender competence of social workers elaborated and piloted by authors. The research was conducted within the framework of the social realism approach (Wheelahan nad Moodie, 2021<sup>4</sup>) considering any education to be socially constructed, because it is people (employers, experts, professional associations, and educators themselves) who decide what skills and knowledge are needed to perform certain work functions and what the level of competencies should possess a person.

- 1 Dvoriak, S., Karagodina, O. & Semigina, T. (2020). Gender competences of social work students: do we need a transformative approach? *Social work and education*, 7(3), 279-288.
- 2 Leskošek, V. (2009). Introduction. In: Leskošek, V., ed. *Teaching gender in social work* (pp. 9-13). Utrecht: ZuidamUithof Drukkerijen.
- 3 Dominelli, L. (2002). *Feminist social work theory and practice*. Palgrave.
- 4 Wheelahan, L. & Moodie, G. (2021). Analysing micro-credentials in higher education: a Bernsteinian analysis. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53(2), 212-228.

As a starting point, it should be noted that literature (GenderKompetenzZentrum, 2010<sup>5</sup>; HRH2030, 2018<sup>6</sup>; Norman and Wheeler, 1996<sup>7</sup>; Timbers, 2022<sup>8</sup>) portrays gender competence as a complex entity containing four main groups of elements that are designed to answer the question: knowledge («what?»); abilities, skills, methods, tools, relationships («how?»); motivation, behavior, values, personal qualities, commitment to the idea of equality, reflection on one's own prejudices («why?»); levels («how good?»).

We share the key ideas of the recommendations of the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023)<sup>9</sup> that define three components of competence for the implementation of gender equality: commitment, methodological skills and specialist knowledge. Commitment means recognizing gender equality as both an organization's goal and one's own work; taking personal responsibility for implementing a gender approach in professional activities. Methodological skills include the ability to implement gender issues using appropriate methods and tools, as well as to identify, obtain and use the necessary gender-disaggregated data in the work. Specialist knowledge includes both a theoretical understanding of gender as a social construct and an in-depth knowledge of gender relations as social structures. They include knowledge of empirical facts about gender aspects in policy and organizational activities, as well as the ability to correctly classify and interpret gender-disaggregated facts and data.

Integrating a gender perspective into the curriculum should be seen as a process. Building new approaches should incorporate the Council of Europe (2019<sup>10</sup>) ideas that sexism manifests as unconscious biases that can be eliminated through awareness, training and education, and requires stronger measures, such as legislation. According to researchers (Webb, Walker and Bollis, 2004<sup>11</sup>), the formation of gender competence of social workers should be based on the principles of feminist pedagogy. These activities include: reshaping the relationship between

5 GenderKompetenzZentrum (2010). *Gender competence*. Retrieved from: <http://www.genderkompetenz.info/eng/gender-competence-2003-2010/gendercompetence/index.html>

6 HRH2030 (2018). *Defining and Advancing Gender-Competent Family Planning Service Providers: A Competency Framework and Technical Brief*. 2 ed. Retrieved from: <https://hrh2030program.org/gender-competency-tech-brief/>

7 Norman, J. & Wheeler, B. (1996). Gender-sensitive social work practice: a model for education. *Journal of social work education*, 32(2), 203-213.

8 Timbers, V. L. (2022). Teaching Note – Considering Competencies for Social Work Practice and Research With Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 58:1, 176-184.

9 European institute for gender equality (2023). *Institutional transformation. Step 9: Developing gender equality competence*. Retrieved from: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-institutional-transformation/step-9-developing-gender-equality-competence>

10 Council of Europe (2019). *Recommendation on Preventing and Combating Sexism*. Retrieved from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/recommendation-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism>

11 Webb, L., Walker, K. & Bollis T. (2004). Feminist pedagogy in the teaching of research methods. *International journal of social research methodology*, 7(5), 415-428.

the teacher and the learner, empowerment, building a community, the right to vote, respect for the diversity of personal experience, challenging traditional views. In feminist pedagogy (Louise-Lawrence, 2014<sup>12</sup>), the process of awareness and attitude towards learning as activism becomes important.

In 2021, the new training program for the formation of gender competence of social workers was designed and piloted by authors.

We embraced the theories of andragogy, critical and feminist pedagogy as the theoretical and methodological foundations for the training program development. The program also stands on gender-sensitive, feminist and anti-discriminatory theory and practice of social work; gender, competence and transformational conceptual approaches. The interdisciplinary connections were considered, such as gender sociology, social policy, conflict theories, social psychology, social and demographic statistics, ethics and legal foundations of social work.

Focus and content of the program was built up with regard to the findings of the gender bias study (Yaroshenko and Semigina 2022<sup>13</sup>) conducted prior the elaboration of the training materials. The study highlights the impact of culture and social norms on perceptions of gender and gender stereotyping. Similar impacts are observed in other research (Semigina, Yurochko and Stopolyanska, 2022<sup>14</sup>; Voitovska, 2020<sup>15</sup>).

With regard to all issues described above, the objective of the new training program (72 academic hours) was defined as the formation of gender competence of social workers to solve applied tasks related to the provision of services to candidates for the creation of family forms of education, which involve the application of the theory and methods of gender-sensitive and feminist social work.

The main tasks were defined as follows: (1) to provide information about modern approaches to understanding the essence and components of gender competence in the context of gender-sensitive and feminist social work; (2) activate the process of reflexive understanding of one's own views and experiences related to gender issues; (3) to form motivation to contribute to the achievement of gender equality; (4) to develop the necessary practical skills and abilities aimed

12 Louise-Lawrence, J. (2014). Feminist pedagogy in action: reflections from the front line of feminist activism – the feminist classroom. *Enhancing learning in the social sciences*, 6 (1), 29-41.

13 Yaroshenko, A., & Semigina, T. (2022). Exploring Gender Stereotypes among Prospective Foster Families. *Socialinė Teorija, Empirija, Politika Ir Praktika*, 25, 62-79.

14 Semigina, T., Yurochko, T. & Stopolyanska, Y. (2022). 'Everyone is on their own and nobody needs us': women ageing with HIV in Ukraine. In: M. Henrickson, C. Charles, S. Ganesh, S. Giwa, D. Kwok, & T. Semigina, T. (Eds.), *HIV, sex, and sexuality in later life* (pp. 46–63). Bristol, UK: Policy Press

15 Voitovska, A. I. (2020). *Henderna sotsializatsiya student-s'koyi molodi z osoblyvymy osvritnimy potrebamy v umovakh VNZ: dys. ... d-ra fil.: 231* [Gender socialization of student youth with special educational needs in higher education institutions: diss. ... Ph.D: 231]. Uman: Uman State Pedagogical University named after Pavlo Tychyna (in Ukrainian).

at the implementation and implementation of the gender approach in the practice of social work; (5) provide post-training support.

At the stage of designing the training program, it was determined that the following competencies should be formed in its participants:

- understanding the essence and components of gender competence; ability to apply feminist theory in the practice of social work; recognition of types of modern forms of sexism in the context of neo-traditional family models; understanding the specifics of the formation of gender identity in the process of socialization; knowledge on basic approaches to understanding the hidden curriculum; ability to apply nonviolent communication and leadership as tools for social change;
- ability: to plan and implement gender-sensitive interventions; to predict the gender effect; to carry out a gender analysis of educational materials; to recognize their own gender stereotypes; to avoid discriminatory practices; to use tools and teaching technologies with a gender focus; to be a leader in implementing the ideas of gender equality.

Among the expected learning outcomes are the following: master knowledge of gender issues in social work; carry out a reflexive search for the origins of one's own limitations and values; recognize gender dimensions of practice and find personal motivation to support anti-discrimination interventions; acquire the necessary practical skills and abilities for the implementation and implementation of the gender approach; to develop willingness to cooperate during supervisions.

This short-term program might be delivered for social work students and for the workers of social services, both with formal or informal education, preferable the latter.

The logic of the material presentation of was determined by the principles of andragogy. The teaching content moves from actualization and familiarization with the life and professional experience of social workers to its further integration into consideration of theoretical issues. In order to intensify educational activities, we combined the case-study method together with the seven-step circular model of case analysis.

The designening and piloting of program materials took place using the action research (Stringer, 2014<sup>16</sup>). In this strategy, have the right to an active voice in the process of generating new knowledge, and researchers, in turn, participate in implementation activities. This approach involves an activity that

16 Stringer, E. (2014). *Action research*. 4th ed. London: Sage publications.

is simultaneously a form of research, learning and practical action. In our training, we combined it with the resilience approach and strengths-based perspective (Stoliaryk & Semigina, 2022<sup>17</sup>).

The training program consists of four modules («Commitment», «Implementation», «Involvement», «Support»), which contain topics with a focus on the components of gender competence. The program includes interactive learning methods, independent work, testing, content analysis of texts, as well as post-training support. Table 1 presents the structure and content of the program.

Table 1

**The structure and the content of the training program for the formation of gender competence of social workers**

Module	Topics of the modules	Content	Forms / methods of teaching
1	2	3	4
COMMITMENT	<b>Topic 1. «Awareness»</b> (motivational and value component) – 16 hours	Acquaintance; exercises «Associations», «Start», «Wizard», «Gendered family», «Possibilities vs limitations», «The world upside down». Theory: gender stereotypes.	Mindfulness, projective methods, imagination, work in small groups, presentations, lectures.
	<b>Topic 2. «Self-awareness»</b> (reflective component) – 4 hours	Independent work. Theory: ambivalent sexism, gender stereotypes.	Testing, self-analysis, self-study of the theory.
IMPLEMENTATION	<b>Topic 3. «Practice»</b> (activity-operational component) – 16 hours	Discussion, case analysis, exercises «Feminist poker», «Toxic masculinity». Theory: gender sensitive and feminist social work, components of gender competence, gender socialization and identity, gender analysis.	Case studies, work in small groups, role play, mindfulness, projective methods, presentations, lectures, gender analysis of the text.
	<b>Topic 4. «Information»</b> (subject-informational component) – 4 hours	Independent work. Theory: hidden curriculum.	Content analysis of texts and videos, self-study of the theory.
INVOLVEMENT	<b>Topic 5. «Charismatic leadership»</b> (leadership component) – 16 hours	Exercises «Privileges», «IQ or EQ?», «Leaders with a plus and minus sign», board game «Being a woman». Theory: types of leadership, gender aspects of charismatic leadership, communication as a tool of change.	Discussion, work in small groups, board game, presentations, final survey.

17 Stoliaryk, O. & Semigina, T. (2022). *Social work with families raising children with autism: A strengths-based intervention*. Tallinn: Teadmus.

*Continuation of table 1*

1	2	3	4
SUPPORT	Post-training support – 16 hours	Group, individual supervision, Balint groups.	Dialogue, case studies, Balint method.

16 students of the College «Education» of the Open International University of Human Development «Ukraine» were involved in the approbation of the program. It was delivered as an informal education approach.

We used diagnostic assessment to identify prior knowledge instead of making assumptions. Through the teaching we empowered students to reflect their new knowledge and skills, to consider the educational case through the lenses of the own prejudices and dominant gender ideology, as well as to discuss on a gender-sensitive framework for the provision of services that will contribute to the expansion of the rights and opportunities of clients.

The results of the training program piloting (Yaroshenko and Semigina, 2022<sup>18</sup>) manifested that the development of interest in gender issues and the process of forming the gender competence of social workers are related to an increase in the level of knowledge, their acquisition of practical skills in the use of gender tools, the development of gender reflection, assimilation of the idea of gender equality as a value, the ability to recognize sexism and gender stereotypes, with supervisory support for gender-sensitive practice.

Our experimental work also confirms that the training should encourage women's agency (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014<sup>19</sup>) and empower participants to tackle existing gender stereotypes. The program has to embrace such gender awareness-raising methods that help to facilitate the exchange of ideas, increase the level of awareness and general sensitivity promote gender equality.

To conclude, it is worth stressing that the social workers training for enhancing gender competence should foresee: the application of the principles of critical and feminist pedagogy; the introduction of innovative interactive technologies; the implementation of programs on informal gender education; the combination of a feminist approach with a resilience approach and an approach based on strengths.

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