

# HUMANIDADES E CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS:

Perspectivas  
Teóricas,  
Metodológicas  
e de  
Investigação

Luis Fernando González-Beltrán  
(organizador)

VOL VI



EDITORA  
ARTEMIS  
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## PRÓLOGO

Como la obra “Humanidades e Ciências Sociais: Perspectivas Teóricas, Metodológicas e de Investigação”, ha tenido gran éxito, nos complace presentar el Volumen 6. Si, ya son 6, y aquí tenemos 18 capítulos en tres secciones, donde agrupamos las investigaciones sobre Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales que abarcan la Educación, las problemáticas Sociales, y las empresas.

En el apartado que llamamos “Educación: Investigación y Nuevas tecnologías” incluimos 8 capítulos que abarcan desde la Educación Básica hasta la Universitaria, desde nuevas tecnologías, como las redes sociales, pasando por la enseñanza híbrida, hasta la Inteligencia Artificial. Como el nombre lo indica, son tecnologías nuevas, por lo que no se han establecido aún parámetros de normalidad con fines de comparación. Cuales tecnologías son más efectivas que otras, cuando se deben aplicar solas, y cuando en combinación. De esta forma, cada estudio que se realiza agrega un granito de arena al vasto océano del conocimiento. Iniciamos revisando la primaria rural, donde se propone que la Interculturalidad puede romper la desigualdad, la exclusión y la dominancia, resolver los conflictos y las tensiones en las perspectivas de vida, sus cosmovisiones y sus saberes. En el segundo capítulo se estudian las redes sociales y su posible efecto sobre las habilidades sociales. A continuación se ensaya la modalidad híbrida en la formación técnica y tecnológica, con mayor éxito, logrando un perfil óptimo. En cuarto lugar se utiliza un sistema digital de Enseñanza Aprendizaje, con Inteligencia Artificial, para traducir texto a lenguaje de señas y realizar la traducción en sentido inverso, mejorando la comunicación bidireccional. Esto representó un proceso de retroalimentación personalizada, y de forma inclusiva y equitativa. Seguimos con la medición del perfil agentivo en universitarios, midiendo el logro de metas y el aprendizaje colaborativo. Conforme los alumnos avanzan en los semestres, aumenta su percepción de agencia colectiva. Continuamos con la revisión de la técnica de observación de las prácticas educativas, como procedimiento metodológico de investigación, su interconexión, triangulación y procesamiento de datos. Incluimos a continuación un trabajo sobre Inteligencia Artificial donde se tratan cuestiones éticas como su uso responsable. Se detalla su aplicabilidad, sus límites, sus impactos tanto positivos como negativos y sus verdaderos alcances. El apartado finaliza con un capítulo sobre la práctica en el trabajo social. Proporciona ejemplos prácticos de estrategias y habilidades duras (técnicas) y blandas (comunicación, empatía).

En la segunda sección “Problemáticas Sociales y Ambientales” se ilustra un tema de actualidad, que incluye la posibilidad de desastre, de un camino sin retorno, como consecuencia del abuso de recursos que han provocado cambios climáticos, escases de agua y alimentos, incendios, inundaciones, pérdida de bosques y selvas, etcétera. Con 4 capítulos, esta sección trata de problemáticas analizadas para el caso de México, Colombia, Camerún, e Italia. Problemas comunes a una infinidad de países. Iniciamos con la certificación de Playas en Acapulco. Las playas son un recurso común, y aunque

los grandes hoteles se han apropiado de algunas, es un recurso de difícil exclusión, y la certificación, aunque necesaria, no es suficiente para la búsqueda de un turismo sustentable. Seguimos con la construcción de obras que responden a necesidades nacionales, pero que provocan problemas locales. Este caso corresponde a una repesa para generar energía, con fines de modernización y desarrollo, pero con consecuencias socioculturales en la comunidad donde se construyó. Como tercer trabajo tenemos el conflicto del uso del suelo, en específico, la minería contra la degradación del bosque. Oro y demás metales que pesan más en la balanza económica que el oxígeno y los alimentos. El cuarto y último capítulo de la sección trata de la estimación de eventos meteorológicos extremos, que son ahora más frecuentes por las malas decisiones que hemos tomado contra nuestro planeta. Como si tuviéramos recursos infinitos para depredar, las consecuencias de nuestros abusos se reflejan en un porcentaje de mayor peligro de incendios cada verano, pronosticados especialmente para Italia, pero que hemos sufrido en muchas otras partes del mundo.

El tercer apartado “Economía, Empresa y Gestión”, con 6 capítulos, trata sobre la economía desde el caso de los particulares, a las pequeñas tiendas, a la relación entre Universidades y Empresas, pasando por las PYMES, las decisiones de inversión en empresas de mayor envergadura, y finalizando con el papel de la mujer en la economía. Iniciamos con una de las consecuencias económicas del COVID, el repunte de los pagos electrónicos, el cierre de las tiendas físicas, la educación digital, y la persistencia de la digitalización. Seguimos con las tiendas y su competencia y los desafíos que enfrentan contra las multinacionales. Se sugiere, entre otras estrategias, la cooperación entre las tiendas, mejorar el marketing, ajustar los precios, etcétera. El tercer capítulo presenta a las pequeñas y medianas empresas, con un débil vínculo con las Universidades, que no poya de manera clara la transformación empresarial, ni la gestión del conocimiento. La baja inversión en infraestructuras que impulsen la inteligencia empresarial impide ajustarse al orden global. Continuamos con un tema con íntima relación: la Cultura Organizacional, que debería impulsar en este sector, la gestión del conocimiento, las estrategias corporativas, estabilidad y armonía. El quinto capítulo habla del presupuesto de capital y las decisiones de inversión. Antes de la toma de decisiones tan crucial, las oportunidades de inversión deben clasificarse según los rendimientos esperados, y aquí se revisan diversas técnicas con dicho objetivo. La obra finaliza analizando el rol que la mujer juega no digamos en la economía, sino en toda la sociedad. Se revisa la obra de Soledad Acosta, prolífica escritora, periodista, historiadora, que reivindica la educación de las mujeres para construir una mejor sociedad.

Esperamos que este Volumen, además de muy completo, y muy variado, resulte también muy placentero en su lectura.

Dr. Luis Fernando González Beltrán  
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)

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SOLEDAD ACOSTA DE SAMPER: CONTEXTO, HISTORIA, HÉROES Y HEROÍNAS EN SU ESCRITURA

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## CAPÍTULO 8

### MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES: THE ROLE OF HARD AND SOFT SKILLS IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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**ABSTRACT:** Maintaining professional boundaries is essential to the effective practice of the social work profession. However, to practice the profession effectively, the social worker must know the complex and soft skills necessary to successfully set and maintain these boundaries. Through a combination of theoretical foundations and empirical research findings, the chapter provides practical examples and strategies that social workers can use in various work contexts. The research includes semi-structured interviews with ten professionals working in homes for the elderly and shelters. Data analysis presents how these professionals balance necessary knowledge and technical skills (hard skills) and empathy, communication, and listening skills (soft skills) in establishing and maintaining

client relationships. Finally, a discussion presents the possible consequences of crossing professional boundaries. It provides recommendations for educating and training social workers to enhance their ability to work effectively with clients and maintain professional distance.

**KEYWORDS:** Professional relationship. Social worker. Client. Hard skills. Soft skills.

**MANTENER LOS LÍMITES PROFESIONALES: EL PAPEL DE LAS HABILIDADES DURADAS Y BLANDAS EN LA PRÁCTICA DEL TRABAJO SOCIAL**

**RESUMEN:** Mantener los límites profesionales es esencial para la práctica eficaz de la profesión de trabajador social. Sin embargo, para ejercer la profesión con eficacia, el trabajador social debe conocer las habilidades duras y blandas necesarias para establecer y mantener con éxito estos límites. Mediante una combinación de fundamentos teóricos y resultados de investigaciones empíricas, el capítulo ofrece ejemplos prácticos y estrategias que los trabajadores sociales pueden utilizar en diversos contextos laborales. La investigación incluye entrevistas semiestructuradas con diez profesionales que trabajan en residencias de ancianos y centros de acogida. El análisis de los datos presenta cómo estos profesionales equilibran los conocimientos y las habilidades técnicas necesarias (habilidades duras) y la empatía, la comunicación y la capacidad de escuchar (habilidades blandas) a la hora de

establecer y mantener relaciones con los clientes. Por último, se discuten las posibles consecuencias de traspasar los límites profesionales. Se ofrecen recomendaciones para educar y formar a los trabajadores sociales con el fin de mejorar su capacidad para trabajar eficazmente con los clientes y mantener la distancia profesional.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Relación profesional. Trabajador social. Usuario. Habilidades duras. Habilidades blandas.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In social work, as in other professions that deal with human resources, workers must maintain professional boundaries, especially for the sake of the effectiveness and ethics of the profession. In order for workers to be able to keep the aforementioned professional boundaries, they must have the appropriate hard and soft skills related to their profession. Regarding hard skills, (Hartl et al., 2010) say that they are those skills that are measurable and can be learned. For example, we can include education or other knowledge and skills. This is contrasted with soft skills, which are not measurable. These include empathy, communication skills, and listening skills. Peacock's soft skills are critical in creating close, trusting client relationships.

Maintaining a professional boundary between the social worker and the client serves not only to protect the social worker but also the client. As for the social worker, established boundaries can protect them from, for example, burnout syndrome or ethical dilemmas that can arise with boundary crossing. Clearly defined boundaries provide a safe framework for interactions and help maintain trust and respect in professional relationships.

The aim is to explore how hard and soft skills contribute to maintaining professional boundaries in different social work settings. A theoretical foundation and examples from practice will highlight how social workers use these skills to effectively perform their tasks and maintain healthy (professional) relationships with clients. This research provides an insightful look into how these professionals balance hard and soft skills in establishing and maintaining professional boundaries.

## 2 HARD SKILLS OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

As mentioned above, hard skills are those that are measurable. In the context of social work, we can say, for example, the training of social workers, which in the Czech Republic is governed by the Act on Social Services 108/2006 Coll., which requires a social worker to have at least a higher degree in social work or a university degree (bachelor's or master's degree) in social work or a related field. Since social work is a multidisciplinary

field, a social worker should acquire adequate knowledge of psychology, sociology, law, pedagogy, medicine, economic sciences, and, last but not least, philosophy, from where social work draws its ideological basis, during their studies at university (Navrátil, 2001). The social worker then translates this knowledge into their practice within the target group of clients with whom they work. As Donéevová (Consell et al., 2023) points out, the core hard skills within social work practice include assessing and evaluating the client's social situation, crisis intervention, and knowledge of ethical standards. In terms of **determining and evaluating a client's social situation**, Baláž (2018) points to three components within the assessment of a client's social situation. These three components include the importance of assessing needs and risks for individual clients and in the context of the broader groups and settings to which clients belong. This assessment involves analyzing the relationships and interactions between these components. The aim is to achieve a holistic view of the nature of the problem that affects a multi-level approach. Epistemological comprehensiveness refers to the social worker's ability to combine deductive reasoning, which uses general principles and theories to explain specific phenomena, with an inductive approach, which relies on observation and experience to achieve a deeper understanding. When a social worker can integrate these two ways of thinking, they can achieve a more comprehensive assessment of a situation. However, a comprehensive evaluation does not mean it must be complete or include all aspects of the problem. It is mainly about gaining the broadest and most profound understanding of the situation, but this will always have limits.

In **crisis intervention**, a critical hard skill of a social worker is mainly the ability to respond quickly and effectively to situations where the client or his environment is in an acute adverse situation. Crisis intervention is the interaction process between the crisis intervention worker and the client. This process is directed from the starting point (establishing contact) to the endpoint (termination and evaluation) (Květenská, 2014). Špatenková (2017) divides the crisis intervention process into 3 phases: introduction and conclusion. In order to successfully provide help, it is essential in the introduction to establish contact with the client, who may experience a wide range of emotions and behave unpredictably. It is, therefore, necessary to approach the client with understanding and accept their behavior without immediately judging them or trying to change them. At this stage, the technique of accepting the client with all his expressions, based on the principles of unvarnished understanding and uncritical acceptance, is essential. This helps the client feel less alone and allows them to express themselves and their emotions. Acceptance does not mean agreement with the client's behavior but rather a recognition

of the client's right to experience and express emotions. In addition to acceptance, it is essential to ensure the safety of the client and the environment. This may include physically separating the client from sources of danger, reassuring the client's emotional state, or ensuring the presence of other professionals who can assist when needed. In the next section, the state, information needs to be gathered to assess the client's situation and establish a clear plan. The social worker should also map the client's social supports, which are essential for subsequent help in overcoming the crisis. Once the client has regained the ability to make independent decisions and help themselves, the crisis intervention approaches its conclusion based on an awareness of what caused the crisis and how it might be overcome in the future.

Last but not least, it is essential that the social worker knows ethical standards, which are an integral part of their profession. Ethical standards and rules are set out in the Global Statement of Ethical Principles for Social Work, which the International Federation wrote of Social Workers. Some basic ethical standards include, but are not limited to, fairness, respect, and other ethical rules that a social worker should be familiar with when practicing their profession. These rules are updated based on societal developments and can provide a framework for behavior in the case of a close relationship with a client. However, it is essential to mention that each country and organization has adapted these rules based on their practice with the target group.

Knowledge of the theoretical basis of the profession enables social workers to maintain boundaries in the relationship with the client and to identify possible convergence in this relationship.

### **3 SOFT SKILLS OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES**

Soft skills, which include intra – and interpersonal skills such as communication, working in multidisciplinary teams, and adaptability, are essential for personal growth, social participation, and employability. They are distinct from technical or 'hard skills' and are essential for learning and development through education (Shaffie et al., 2018). The essential soft skills a social worker should have as a professional include empathy, effective communication, active listening, emotional intelligence, and more. Research from the year 2016, which was concentrated on the conceptualization of soft skills, has also confirmed that soft skills such as communication, adaptability, problem-solving, and reliability are considered key to the employability and success of social workers (Shaffie, MD. ALI, & MOHD. YUSOF, 2016). In the context of empathy and communication, it is



essential to mention that the social worker is part of the helping profession that takes responsibility, and its essence is to respect differences in society. *Empathy*, the ability to understand a client's experiences without needing personal bonding, is a fundamental communication skill for social and healthcare workers. It encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions and is essential for social workers and health professionals to effectively fulfill their role in therapeutic change (Moudatsou et al., 2020). Communication skills are an essential part of a social worker's soft skills. This skill is based on communicating in the client's language. This skill also includes communication with the public sphere, closely linked to social work. Interpersonal skills are manifested in the ability to engage representatives of different professions in discussion, which is essential for solving complex problems. Leading a discussion to reach a common understanding is also essential, as is the ability to persuade and resolve conflicts effectively, skills essential for successfully fulfilling professional tasks (Mandro, 2023). In communication, the social worker should also be able to maintain clear boundaries, which also involves the ability to say "no." This is essential to maintaining healthy worker relationships while caring for oneself. Self-care is essential to physical and psychological well-being, which impacts the professional life of social workers.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 OBJECTIVE

The aim of the presented case studies is to specify hard and soft skills in the context of the professional boundaries of the social worker-client.

In order to achieve the stated aim, the following sub-objectives were used, which align with the research questions.

Sub-objective 1: Social workers' experiences of stressful situations.

Sub-objective 2: The effect of length of experience and education in social work on the social worker-client relationship.

### 4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question was: What is the importance of hard and soft skills on professional boundaries in the social worker-client relationship?

Two sub-research questions were used to answer the main research question linked to the research objectives.

Sub-research question 1: How do social workers assess the impact of stressful situations on their professional performance and decision-making?

Sub-research question 2: How does the length of experience and education influence social workers' approach to ethical dilemmas in the client relationship?

#### 4.3 METHODOLOGY OF THE INVESTIGATION

The method used was an explanatory case study to explore causal relationships (Mišovič, 2019). In the following case studies, the research questions mentioned above will be presented, along with the theoretical background of social workers' hard and soft skills in the context of the social worker-client relationship in nursing homes and shelters.

The data collection technique was a semi-structured interview, which lasted approximately 45 minutes. Only women were interviewed since the selected social institutions do not employ male social workers. They were contacted via email, and the interviews occurred at the institution. Before starting the research, an "informed consent to participate in the research" was obtained.

The data were analyzed using open coding, and thematic analysis was used for interpretation.

#### 4.4 RESEARCH SAMPLE

The research sample consisted of 10 social workers employed by a church organization in the South Bohemian Region of the Czech Republic. The sample selection was purposeful and utilized a snowball method. The selection criterion was employment in a nursing home or elderly care facility that is part of a church organization providing social services in the South Bohemian Region of the Czech Republic.

The respondents are identified as follows:

R1: A social worker employed at a shelter for men:

A 59-year-old woman who graduated from a secondary education institute and later from a higher vocational school for social work. She has been working at a shelter for men for five years and was previously employed as a nurse in an elderly care facility.

R2: A social worker employed at an elderly care facility.

The social worker is 33 years old and graduated from university (MA) with a specialization in social work. The respondent is married, has two young daughters, and lives in a town approximately 10 km from the home for the elderly. At the time of the research, she had been working in the facility for five months, having previously worked as a social worker at the employment office and, before that, at a center for people with mental illness.

R3: A social worker employed at a shelter for mothers with children.

The social worker is 30 years old, has a boyfriend, no children. She graduated from the College of Social Work. She did not complete her bachelor's degree and finished her third year. At the time of the interview, she had been working in a shelter home for about one year. Before that, she worked for four years as a social worker in a care home for the elderly.

R4: A social worker employed at a shelter for men.

The social worker is 49 years old and divorced but has a boyfriend. She had a son, but he died ten years ago. She graduated from a university of social work (Bc.). She has worked in a men's shelter for 3.5 years and previously with people with disabilities. In the past, she founded a civic association.

R5: A social worker employed at an elderly care facility.

The social worker is 38 years old, married, and has one child (8 years old). She was graduated from university (BA). She has been working in the facility for 13 years. The husband also works in the social facility.

R6: A social worker employed at an elderly care facility.

The social worker is 44 years old, married, and has one child (17 years old). She has graduated from a higher professional school of social work and is finishing her bachelor's degree. She has worked in a care home for the elderly for 23 years and has not worked anywhere else in the past.

R7: A social worker employed at an elderly care facility.

The social worker is 55 years old, married, with a grown-up son with his children. She graduated from secondary school of economics but finished her university degree in social work (BA). She has been working in social work for 23 years.

R8: A social worker employed at an elderly care facility.

The social worker is 47 years old, married, and has a son (22 years old). She has a university degree in social work (MA). Before that, she worked at the court. The social worker is married. She has been a supervisor for one year; before that, she worked at the court, where she was in charge of guardians.

R9: A social worker employed at a shelter for mothers with children.

The social worker is 43 years old and married with two children. She has a university degree in public management (MA). She has worked in a shelter for mothers with children for three years. Before that, she was a non-teaching worker at a school.

R10: A social worker employed at a shelter for mothers with children.

The social worker is 30 years old, lives alone, and has no children. She graduated from university with (a BA) specializing in social pedagogy. She has been working in the shelter for seven years. She has never worked anywhere else before.

## 4.5 RESEARCH LOCATION

The research locations included both state-run social services and those provided by church organizations, all operating within the South Bohemian Region of the Czech Republic.

## 5 RESULTS

### 5.1 STRESSFUL SITUATIONS CONCERNING SOFT SKILLS

Regarding soft skills in stressful situations, the respondents agree on the importance of effective communication with the client, which is essential not only for future cooperation but also for clear boundary setting between the social worker and the client. R1 states that she tries to find a way to communicate with clients who are aggressive or under the influence of alcohol and substances. In terms of communication with clients, the respondent learned during the internship to establish communication with clients even if they behave aggressively or are under the influence of drugs; in this case, the respondent keeps clear boundaries: *“If they behave aggressively, I do not communicate, if they are under the influence of alcohol, drugs, I do not communicate. Communication is postponed until later.”* The respondent also refers to the importance of howling when communicating with clients and the style of communication. R1 stresses that *“there is no such thing as bad communication; you always have to find your way to it.”* In this context, she also emphasizes the tone of voice that needs to be maintained when communicating with clients.

R1 attempts to maintain professional boundaries in the context of psychological bonding and physical bonding, mentioning, *“Like, they will touch your shoulder, yeah, but touching intimate zones that do not exist. So there are certain boundaries.”* R10 also refers to maintaining professional boundaries in the context of physical distance, which she tries to maintain by saying that if the client is very contactable, *“she tries to have contact across the table.”* R7 points out that she has a *“friendly relationship with clients, but I have to maintain and keep some distance because I mainly do the client’s paperwork, all the administration contracts up to death. At the same time, working with the family from the beginning of the service to the end.”* Other respondents agree on the same.

Respondents working in men's shelters also mention that clients try to use social workers, but this is countered by the clearly stated rules that the social services follow to keep herself and her family safe; she mentions, *"I am careful about posting any photos of my loved ones."* They emphasize the need to protect their privacy, as clients come to them as *"blank paper"* and often have criminal histories. R1 describes her fear of clients with criminal histories. She also mentions that she was initially afraid of communicating with clients. However, now she is more confident: *"In the beginning, I was scared about communicating with them. If I am doing the right thing, what am I doing? Now, I would say I am more confident like that."* The respondent also states that she can react immediately to dangerous situations and must not let fear take over, *"You have to deal with the situation immediately, so I do not think about whether I am scared, but I have to deal with it immediately."* R4 and the others mention that she does not give out his private number; clients don't even know where he lives. As for her privacy, she says, *"I listen to them, I talk to them, but I don't give them my privacy."* As for the respondents from homes for the elderly and shelters for mothers with children, they are open about their privacy. Clients know basic information about them in terms of family. R6 says, *"The clients know that I have a daughter, how old she is, and what she is doing for school, but it's kind of generic, more girly, it's not."* R7 points out that female clients are allowed more insight into their private lives than male clients. She says, *"I only let them go where I want them to go. I don't have a problem sharing with the ladies that I have a son, that he has children, that he is there and there, that my husband makes me angry; I don't have a problem with that."*

## 5.2 THE EFFECT OF LENGTH OF EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK ON THE SOCIAL WORKER-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

Based on the statements of all ten respondents, it is evident that theoretical knowledge is essential for practice in social institutions. However, practice is needed, which is associated with further education, in order to be able to perform social services well. R1: The respondent states that her experience at school only provided her with a theoretical base for her future work in the field of social work, but she also points out that school does not provide a complete overview of all the skills needed for the job, especially in dealing with specific client problems, which leads to the fact that every social worker has to learn during their practice, as each field has its specificities that need to be learned during the practice: *"I do not think school will give you everything you need for this job."* R2 also points out the importance of theoretical knowledge related to social work. However, as she mentions, *"We have a complicated accounting system here; you need to experience it more than once."* This is an example of a hard skill essential for the proper

functioning of a social work setting. The training is as necessary as the experience gained during the internship. Based on her practical experience, she gained confidence in her client relationship and understood the specifics of working with the target group. It is also evident from R3's experience that hard skills have shaped her practice.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The research findings revealed that effective communication plays a very important role in coping with stressful situations in the context of soft skills. This communication style includes the ability to communicate with aggressive clients or clients under the influence of alcohol and substances. The “ignore” communication style is one of the most effective methods of therapeutic conversation with an aggressive client. Staff may use this strategy when the client is experiencing only very low-intensity negative emotions. The client does not differentiate between what he thinks and says (Holečková, 2013). Effective communication, empathy, and active listening are essential not only in shelters, where social workers are often exposed to aggressive clients but also in homes for the elderly. Given the nature of the target group of seniors, social workers must listen actively. However, it is essential to distinguish between active listening and mere hearing. Hearing can be defined as incidental, involuntary, and effortless. We are constantly surrounded by noise, so “hearing” the sounds of cars, trains, workers, etc., is essentially automatic because we do not pay much attention to these sounds. In contrast, listening is focused, voluntary, and intentional. The listener must pay attention to the whole story the speaker is telling. This means paying attention not only to the content but also to the intonation, the use of language, and body language (Plesnik, 2022).

It is also essential to set clear professional boundaries in the relationship with the client. This is essential not only for social workers who work in shelters with socially excluded clients but also with clients in homes for the elderly. Po while maintaining clear professional boundaries. In today's age of social networking and modern technology, keeping boundaries professional affects the mental and physical plane and the virtual world. There are new challenges in professional boundaries, such as client requests for “friendships” that can cause confusion or directly violate the boundaries of dual relationships. 'Refusal of friendship' can trigger feelings of distrust in the client, leaving the service without adequate alternative options and arrangements. Not responding quickly to a request from a client (a message via electronic communication or social networks) who expects that the social worker will always be available can also be a problem (Mátel, 2021). Ensuring clear boundaries is essential to ensure not only the safety of social workers but also the safety of clients, as unclear boundaries can result in,

for example, overlapping roles between social worker and client, where it is unclear who has what responsibility. Over-helping can lead to social worker burnout, which can result in ineffective client support. In this context, the social worker must be able to separate professional and personal life.

Based on the statements of all respondents, it is clear that theoretical knowledge is essential for practice in social institutions. However, practice is also necessary and associated with further education to perform well in social work. The experience gained during the internship is also necessary, as social workers working in institutions for extended periods point to gaining confidence and a greater understanding of the specifics of the target group. This raises the question of how to prepare future social workers for their practice better. How can social work education be enhanced by teaching hard skills? How can theoretical and practical knowledge be more closely linked in the training? Social workers in the Czech Republic must complete at least 24 hours of training per year for staff education. As part of these courses, it is advisable for social workers to attend courses focusing on professional boundaries in the social worker-client relationship and practice dilemmatic situations.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The research highlighted the importance of hard and soft skills in maintaining professional boundaries in the social worker-client relationship. The results showed that effective communication plays a very important role in dealing with stressful situations in the context of soft skills. The most effective method in communicating with aggressive clients is the “ignore” strategy, where the resolution of significant issues is postponed until a later time, i.e., when the client calms down. In the context of soft skills, an empathetic approach to the client and active listening are also essential. The social worker should also be able to set clear professional boundaries in the relationship with the client to avoid unwanted dilemmas or burnout.

Regarding hard skills, social workers agree that the knowledge acquired during training is essential but only teaches some things in practice. Practice with a given target group will give social workers the skills to deal with specific tasks with that target group. The combination of hard and soft skills is indispensable for successfully performing the social worker’s role and maintaining healthy professional relationships.

Based on the findings, training programs for social workers should further emphasize the importance of both types of skills and provide a platform for their development and integration in practice. In addition, methods of teaching hard skills should be improved to reflect the needs of practice better, and more investment should

be made in the training of soft skills, which are often overlooked but essential for quality social service delivery.

Last but not least, it is essential that social workers are aware of their personal limitations and can take care of their mental and physical well-being. Maintaining healthy professional boundaries is a matter of skills but also of personal care and self-esteem.

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