

SOCIAL COUNSELING AS A FORM OF CHARITABLE ASSISTANCE

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Abstract:

Charitable counseling and volunteer engagement play a crucial role in supporting individuals and communities in need. This study explores the theoretical foundations, forms, and practical applications of charitable and social counseling within nonprofit and religious organizations. It examines the role of volunteers in delivering services, providing social support, and enhancing the effectiveness of charitable initiatives. The interdisciplinary nature of charitable counseling is highlighted, encompassing social work, pedagogy, theology, psychology, and management perspectives. Key factors such as volunteer motivation, demographic characteristics, and types of engagement including NGO work, hospice volunteering, and community-based initiatives are analyzed to demonstrate how structured support and

professional guidance contribute to both the welfare of beneficiaries and the development of civic responsibility among volunteers.

Keywords: charitable counseling, social work, volunteering, nonprofit organizations, hospice volunteering, civic engagement, altruism, pastoral support

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to present an overview of social counseling in Poland based on in-depth, original research. A synthetic presentation has been made regarding the functioning of this form of assistance in Social Welfare Centers of varying sizes, as well as the barriers limiting its development. The findings revealed a gap between municipal centers and those located in cities with county rights. This expertise highlights not only the existing disparities but also the comprehensive conditions affecting the development of specialized counseling in Poland and the possibilities for overcoming these barriers, which allowed for the formulation of reliable recommendations. The aim of this report was to prepare recommendations for the Expert Team regarding the directions for the development of specialized family counseling. Achieving this required an analysis of the current state of specialized counseling and a projection of its future development. The first part of the report is dedicated to analyzing the current state, while the final part contains the recommendations.

The Role and Tasks of Specialized Counseling in Social Assistance, with Particular Emphasis on Specialized Family Counseling

Specialized counseling in social assistance represents a critical element of modern social work, aimed at addressing complex and multifaceted problems that affect individuals, families, and communities. Unlike general counseling, specialized counseling focuses on specific social, psychological, or legal issues, providing tailored interventions based on professional expertise.¹ Within the field of social assistance, one of the most significant areas of specialization is family counseling, which seeks to strengthen family functioning, prevent crises, and promote the welfare of children and other vulnerable family members.²

1 Kotlarska-Michalska, A. (2015). *Poradnictwo społeczne: Teoria i praktyka*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.

2 Szmagański, J. (2008). *Zarys pracy socjalnej*. Wydawnictwo Śląsk.

Tasks of Specialized Social Counseling

The tasks of specialized counseling can be divided into several key domains:

1. Assessment and Diagnosis

Specialized counselors gather detailed information about clients' social, psychological, and environmental circumstances. In family counseling, this includes evaluating family dynamics, parenting practices, financial stability, and the presence of risk factors such as domestic violence, addiction, or chronic illness.

2. Intervention and Support

Interventions are designed to address the identified needs of the client. In specialized family counseling, this may involve individual or group therapy sessions, conflict resolution strategies, parenting guidance, or mediation between family members. Counselors also facilitate access to external resources, including legal advice, financial aid, or health services.

3. Education and Prevention

A critical task of specialized counseling is the prevention of future crises. Family counselors often provide educational workshops, parenting training, and skills development sessions aimed at improving communication, problem-solving, and coping mechanisms within the family unit.³

4. Coordination and Advocacy

Specialized counselors act as coordinators between clients and other social services. In family counseling, they may liaise with schools, medical institutions, social welfare offices, or charitable organizations to ensure comprehensive support. Advocacy for clients' rights and needs is a fundamental part of the counselor's role.⁴

Social Welfare Centers are implementers of social policy aimed at creating conditions for building an integrated and effective system for preventing and resolving social problems. One of the key elements of this system is ensuring continuous access to specialized counseling, which can be utilized by individuals and entire families requiring such support.

3 Kotlarska-Michalska, A. (2015). *Poradnictwo społeczne: Teoria i praktyka*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.; Koprowski, J. (2011). *Caritas i pomoc bliźniemu: Teologiczne i praktyczne podstawy działań charytatywnych*. Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów.

4 Rokicka, E. (2014). *Wolontariat i organizacje pożytku publicznego: Wyzwania i funkcje społeczne*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

Specialized counseling can be considered from two perspectives:

- as a system with a defined organizational structure, aimed at addressing the diverse problems of individuals or families in specific psychosocial contexts; and
- as specific activities undertaken by professionals assisting individuals experiencing difficulties.

When attempting to systematize knowledge about specialized counseling activities, it is important to consider the fundamental concepts associated with this distinct area of supporting individuals and families:

1. Specialized counseling is a specific professional activity focused on helping individuals resolve problematic situations, taking into account their internal experiences. The specialist works to help the person change habitual ways of thinking, attitudes, decision – making processes, and problem-solving approaches, in order to maximize the constructive use of their own potential and minimize adverse environmental conditions, ultimately increasing the likelihood of overcoming the problem.
2. The primary goal of specialized counseling is to improve the quality of life of those seeking assistance, foster their development, and optimize actions related to various aspects of individual, group, family, and professional functioning.
3. The essence of counseling lies in creating conditions for the individual to regain or acquire the ability to solve problems independently, make appropriate decisions and implement them, and to avoid actions in the future that could lead to problematic life situations.⁵

Types and Forms of Social Counseling Provided within Social Assistance

Legal counseling involves providing the client with information about the generally applicable laws in Poland and their practical application, in particular through: presenting and explaining relevant legal provisions, providing templates of legal documents, and drafting legal motions. Legal counseling consists of identifying various options for resolving a problem through available informational resources, presenting these options to the client along with their potential consequences, supporting the client in choosing a course of action while respecting their autonomy in decision-making, and, if necessary, jointly creating an action plan with the client. It includes, among others, assistance in drafting

⁵ Majdański, K. (2006). *Miłość i odpowiedzialność w praktyce duszpasterskiej*. Wydawnictwo KUL.

legal documents in the areas of: family law (divorces, separations, limitation of parental authority, appointment of legal guardians or foster families, etc.), criminal law (initiating and conducting criminal proceedings), and administrative law regarding housing rights for families. Legal counseling is provided by a licensed lawyer or a law student under appropriate supervision.⁶

Psychological counseling is a form of assistance offered to individuals experiencing psychological crises, adjustment difficulties, or prolonged traumatic situations. It can be conducted in the form of several sessions aimed primarily at identifying the problem and exploring ways to resolve it.⁷

Psychological counseling can be divided into four phases:

- Problem diagnosis: identifying the difficulties the individual is unable to cope with.
- Determining maintaining factors: identifying factors that perpetuate the problem and difficulties related to its resolution.
- Exploring solutions: seeking new ways to overcome the difficulties.
- Empowering the client: supporting the individual in implementing changes and fostering traits that facilitate coping with the current situation.

Additionally, psychological counseling also involves preventive measures aimed at mitigating potential risks to an individual's or group's functioning. It is provided by a licensed psychologist.⁸

Family/pedagogical counseling involves actions taken by a professional prepared to work with families, in collaboration with institutions and organizations interested in the proper development and upbringing of children and youth, including supporting the proper functioning of the family. The scope of family/pedagogical counseling is broad and encompasses various forms of assistance provided to children and adults. In general, this support focuses on complex educational issues, mainly concerning difficulties parents encounter in child-rearing, dysfunctional parent-child relationships, parental divorce, destructive behaviors of children (truancy, running away, substance use, etc.), and foster care issues. The essence of family/pedagogical counseling is, among other things, striving to correct parental educational practices by attempting to change habits, routines, methods of influencing the child, and relationships

6 Słowik, J. (2015). *Poradnictwo specjalistyczne w pracy socjalnej*. Wydawnictwo Difin.

7 Majdański, K. (2006). *Miłość i odpowiedzialność w praktyce duszpasterskiej*. Wydawnictwo KUL.

8 Słowikowska, Z. (2014). *Poradnictwo w Kościele: Teoria i praktyka pomocy pastoralnej*. Wydawnictwo UKSW.

among family members.⁹

Crisis intervention is a set of actions aimed at rapidly managing a crisis that the individual cannot resolve using their own resources. These actions include emotional, physical, medical, and material support and may involve providing shelter or, in the case of children, immediate care. The goal is to restore a relative state of balance. Crisis intervention precedes further counseling or therapeutic activities aimed at addressing the underlying problems causing the crisis. A characteristic feature of crisis intervention is its reactivity—it is usually initiated when an urgent need arises. By nature, intervention is incidental and dynamic, requiring rapid and intensive action.¹⁰

Standards for Providing Specialized Counseling

Specialized counseling provided to individuals or families should adhere to fundamental principles that ensure the client's basic sense of emotional security. These principles include:

- Free of charge: Clients receive services regardless of their financial resources, income, or material status, without any fees, including administrative charges.¹¹
- Confidentiality: Consultations are conducted under conditions of full confidentiality, and documentation created during counseling is stored securely to prevent access by unauthorized persons. Clients must also be informed of limitations to confidentiality in cases where information must be shared with authorized authorities (prosecutor, court, police).
- Professionalism: Consultations are conducted by qualified specialists with the competencies and skills necessary to work thoroughly on a specific issue, taking into account the client's perceptual capabilities.¹²
- Ethics: Counseling is based on full respect for the client, their dignity, and autonomy, regardless of the values or methodology applied by the professional. During cooperation, the counselor respects the client's independence and right to make sovereign decisions while seeking the best possible solutions to their problems.

9 Koprowski, J. (2011). *Caritas i pomoc bliźniemu: Teologiczne i praktyczne podstawy działań charytatywnych*. Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów.

10 Rudnicki, S. (2012). *Praca socjalna: Teorie, metody, umiejętności*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

11 Szmagański, J. (2008). *Zarys pracy socjalnej*. Wydawnictwo Śląsk.

12 Otrębski, W., & Żurko, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Poradnictwo specjalistyczne w pracy socjalnej*. Wydawnictwo KUL.

- **Accessibility:** Counseling is provided to any client requesting assistance as soon as possible, and in cases of crises threatening health or life, it is delivered immediately through intervention.

The Process of Providing Social Counseling

Social counseling is a structured form of professional assistance aimed at supporting individuals, families, and communities in addressing social, emotional, and practical challenges. It occupies a critical position within the fields of social work, nonprofit management, and charitable activities, as it not only addresses immediate needs but also fosters long-term social integration and empowerment.¹³ The process of social counseling typically involves several stages, including assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation, each of which requires specialized skills and ethical considerations.

Assessment and Needs Identification

The initial stage of social counseling focuses on understanding the client's situation and identifying their needs. This involves collecting comprehensive demographic, social, and psychological information, as well as understanding the broader environmental factors that may affect the client's circumstances.¹⁴ Effective assessment is both holistic and individualized, considering personal characteristics such as age, education, social background, and family environment, as well as systemic factors such as access to services and community support networks.¹⁵

Planning and Goal Setting

Once needs are identified, the counselor works collaboratively with the client to establish goals and develop a structured plan of support. Goal setting in social counseling is grounded in principles of voluntariness, self-determination, and

13 Kotlarska-Michalska, A. (2015). *Poradnictwo społeczne: Teoria i praktyka*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM; Szmagański, J. (2008). *Zarys pracy socjalnej*. Wydawnictwo Śląsk.

14 Otrębski, W., & Żurko, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Poradnictwo specjalistyczne w pracy socjalnej*. Wydawnictwo KUL.

15 Rudnicki, S. (2012). *Praca socjalna: Teorie, metody, umiejętności*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

client participation, ensuring that the interventions are tailored to the unique context of each individual or group.¹⁶ Planning may include referrals to specific programs, workshops, or charitable services, as well as establishing timelines and expected outcomes for interventions.

Intervention Strategies

Intervention represents the active phase of counseling, where strategies and resources are mobilized to address the client's needs. Interventions in social counseling can be diverse, including direct support, educational programs, advocacy, and facilitation of access to social and charitable services.¹⁷ Volunteers often play a crucial role in implementing these interventions, particularly in nonprofit and charitable organizations, by providing both practical assistance and social support to beneficiaries.¹⁸

Monitoring and Evaluation

An essential component of the counseling process is continuous monitoring and evaluation. This allows counselors to measure the effectiveness of interventions, adapt strategies as needed, and ensure that clients are progressing toward their goals. Evaluation also provides critical feedback for the development of organizational practices and volunteer training programs, enhancing the overall quality of service delivery.¹⁹

16 Słowikowska, Z. (2014). *Poradnictwo w Kościele: Teoria i praktyka pomocy pastoralnej*. Wydawnictwo UKSW.

17 Koprowski, J. (2011). *Caritas i pomoc bliźniemu: Teologiczne i praktyczne podstawy działań charytatywnych*. Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów.; Majdański, K. (2006). *Miłość i odpowiedzialność w praktyce duszpasterskiej*. Wydawnictwo KUL.

18 Grotkowska, G. (2012). *Zarządzanie wolontariatem w organizacjach społecznych*. Fundacja Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego.; Rokicka, E. (2014). *Wolontariat i organizacje pożytku publicznego: Wyzwania i funkcje społeczne*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

19 Corey, G. (2017). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Egan, G. (2014). *The skilled helper: A problem-management and opportunity-development approach to helping* (10th ed.). Brooks/Cole.

Ethical and Professional Considerations

The provision of social counseling requires adherence to ethical standards, including confidentiality, respect for client autonomy, and cultural sensitivity. Counselors must balance the provision of professional guidance with respect for the client's personal choices and social context.²⁰ Additionally, the integration of volunteers into the counseling process necessitates careful supervision and training to maintain professional standards and ensure the safety and well-being of clients.

The process of providing social counseling is multifaceted, combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills to support individuals and communities effectively. From assessment and planning to intervention and evaluation, counseling requires a holistic approach, ethical sensitivity, and the collaborative involvement of professionals and volunteers. In charitable and nonprofit contexts, social counseling not only addresses immediate social needs but also contributes to broader goals of social cohesion, empowerment, and civic engagement.

Examples of Good Practices in Organizing and Providing Counseling

Educational/Family Counseling – Consultations and advice are provided regarding proper educational interactions, childcare, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills. Educational counseling also addresses parenting difficulties and ways to resolve them. Additionally, counseling covers issues such as domestic violence and addictions.²¹

A fundamental condition for an optimally functioning system of specialized counseling is, above all, ensuring an adequate level of accessibility to specialists and the types of services they offer.²² The implementation of this principle should be achieved through continuous efforts to accomplish the following goals:

- coherence of the counseling system,
- complementarity of the offered support services,
- clarity of actions classified as specialized counseling,

20 Hill, C. E. (2009). *Helping skills: Facilitating exploration, insight, and action*. American Psychological Association.

21 Bera, R. (2014). *Poradnictwo i pomoc społeczna*. Wydawnictwo UMCS.

22 Kotlarska-Michalska, A. (2015). *Poradnictwo społeczne: Teoria i praktyka*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.

- constant attention to the high substantive quality of counseling,
- adequacy to local counseling needs,
- an appropriate network of institutions providing counseling according to needs,
- diversification of profiles among relevant entities.²³

Conclusion

In order to minimize the negative impacts on families and to counteract any dysfunctions and problems resulting from social changes, it is necessary to take actions aimed at increasing the accessibility of specialized family counseling, particularly for clients in small municipalities and towns with up to 20,000 inhabitants. This requires ensuring an adequate number of specialists and financial resources for this purpose. A good solution could be to utilize European Union funds. As indicated by the conducted analysis, small centers most often have only one specialist in a single field—for example, if there is a psychologist, there may be no lawyer or educator. This disrupts the possibility of providing comprehensive family counseling, which should draw on the knowledge of specialists from all relevant fields. It is therefore necessary to establish interdisciplinary teams composed of specialists employed outside the Social Welfare Center (OPS), e.g., in schools, health centers, or municipal offices. To ensure that counseling is delivered at the desired level of quality, it is essential to develop standards for specialized family counseling that will be recommended for all institutions and support organizations. An indispensable element of the specialized family counseling system is monitoring and the flow of information between all entities involved in the counseling process. Only cooperation among all support institutions can provide comprehensive assistance to families.²⁴ With social changes—such as the dynamic development of the information society or economic disparities among communities—it is necessary to address any dysfunctions and problems arising from these transformations. Continuous professional and substantive development of staff employed in institutions and organizations is therefore essential, so that specialists possess the appropriate knowledge and skills required for effective work with families. For small centers, a good solution could be the establishment of a nationwide forum where specialists—educators, psychologists—can exchange their experiences regarding

23 Marynowicz-Hetka, E. (2007). *Pedagogika społeczna. Podręcznik akademicki*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

24 Słowik, J. (2015). *Poradnictwo specjalistyczne w pracy socjalnej*. Wydawnictwo Difin.

the tasks they perform, and where the good practices they present would be accessible to all. The simplest way to provide access to training for staff could also be through e-learning methods. To gain knowledge regarding the implementation of specialized family counseling, it would be valuable to conduct periodic research, which would enable the proper direction of counseling development in light of changing social conditions. This expertise combines theoretical assumptions with the practical implementation of specialized family counseling, based on information collected from social welfare centers of various sizes in Poland. In this study, I aimed to highlight the most important aspects affecting the level of task implementation, indicate difficulties, and suggest possible solutions.

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