

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL CURATOR FOR CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF CRITICAL THINKING

*LÝDIA LEŠKOVÁ¹, KATARÍNA MIČKOVÁ², ERVÍN WEISS³, FILIP MAKÁŇ⁴,
JOSÉ GARCÍA MARTÍN⁵*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59505/IRHNS.22352007.2025.4.05>

¹Catholic University in Ružomberok,
Faculty of Theology,
Košice,
Slovenská republika

²Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra,
Nitra,
Slovenská republika

³Theological Institute in Spišské Podhradie,
Catholic University in Ružomberok,
Slovenská republika

⁴Department of Sociology,
Faculty of Education,
University of Granada
Campus de Cartuja s/n, 18071 Granada,
Spain

Contact:

doc. PhDr., Ing. Lýdia Lešková, PhD. mim prof. – lydia.leskova@ku.sk;

PhDr. Katarína Mičková, PhD., univ. doc. - katarina.mickova@ku.sk

Mgr. Ervín Weiss, PhD. – eweiss@ukf.sk

Mgr. Filip Makáň - filip.makan814@edu.ku.sk

José García Martín - jgarciamartin@ugr.es

research instrument. The data collected was analysed, and subcategories and categories were created based on open coding. In the secondary interpretation phase of the qualitative data, axial coding was applied, and the interrelationships of the categories were anchored by the paradigmatic model. Results: The results of the qualitative analysis research highlighted the negative connotations of social curators in relation to their administrative burden and the performance of their administrative role in social intervention. In terms of emotions experienced in the context of administrative tasks, participants declared strongly negative emotions. Conclusion: The starting point to change the attitude of social curators, to the performance of the administrative role and the administration as part of the intervention, is in the reduction of administrative tasks, the elimination of duplication of registers and records, as well as in the strengthening of work teams by tribal employees and the delegation of competences to project workers, but also in the use of supervision to eliminate the manifestations of the burnout syndrome and to contribute to the achievement of well-being. This change requires the use of critical thinking.

Keywords: administrative role, critical thinking, qualitative analysis, social curator.

Introduction

Social work is widely recognized as a human rights profession (Tarshish, 2024), in which professionalism is one of the core values (Bajan, 2023), and at the same time it strives to promote the individual freedom of each person (Binetti, 2021). An indispensable prerequisite for understanding the current state of addressing the issue of the work and position of the social curator in the social system of the Slovak Republic is the definition of the basic characteristics related to the issue.

Part of the intervention, as an important tool in solving problematic situations in the social sphere, is the helping worker - the social curator (Hamarova, 2024; Pavlikova et al., 2023, Čulenová et al., 2024), who often solves negative consequences in society (Tkacova et al., 2023), Svoboda Hoferková et al., 2022; Bielík et al., 2022) and is also an important factor in the formation of the client's internal ethical compass (Kralík, Mahrik, 2019). In the framework of the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office, he acts in a state-employee relationship (*Act No 400/2009 Coll. on the Civil Service and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts*), carries out measures of social curatorship, performs the function of a guardian, and ensures the continuous protection of the life, health and favourable development of the child (*Act No. 305/2005 Coll. on Social Legal Protection of*

Children and Social Guardianship and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts). He can perform these tasks to the full extent and to the required quality if he has created favourable conditions, as their inadequacy may cause difficulties in work and negatively affect the final effect of the activity (Lešková, 2023).

A social curator is a professional who possesses specific prerequisites, qualities and abilities. The expected effects of his intervention, during which he uses personal decision-making (Fila et al., 2024), are manifested at the moment of client independence. The curator acts in several roles, each of which presupposes the mastery of methods that belong to his general skills. The role of the administrative worker (Brintzenhofeszc et al., 2024) is carried out daily and consists of several activities: maintaining the client's file, keeping electronic records, preparing documents and collecting data for statistical processing. Administration has its justification and it can be argued that the non-bureaucratic organization of social work leads to a certain unstructuredness. Warham (2024) sees administration as an essential part of social work in all its stages.

Keeping client files represents a wide range of administrative tasks, which include initial registration, ascertaining the degree of child endangerment, creating individual social work plans, records of interviews as well as field social work, written documents when a child is placed in a facility for the execution of a court decision, decisions on the upbringing measures taken and educational measures, records of evaluation of measures, participation in court hearings. Keeping of records and the types of records which the social curator must keep are the records of case files and records of upbringing measures and educational measures, always broken down into: minors under 14 years of age and minors in the age category 14 to 18 years. Adults shall be removed from the register.

The social curator shall obtain, collect and process information for statistical surveys, while preparing the monitored indicators for monthly and annual statistical reports. The social curator's administration also consists of the use of basic application software, primarily KIDS – an information system for registering children, and a Document Management System for the comprehensive management of all documents, which is also related to the growth of digital technologies (Lešková et al., 2024; Presi et al., 2024). The use of critical thinking is inevitably related to this activity.

Such an administrative burden can lead to a breach of personal well-being for the social curator (Dima et al., 2021; Mack, Rhineberger-Dunn, 2021; Tu et al., 2022) and the gradual onset of burnout syndrome, as pointed out by several authors (Ivzhenko, 2020; Stanley, Sebastine, 2023; Huang et al., 2021). The issue of the relatively high administrative burden on the helping professions has also

been commented on by Laan (1998), who states that social workers need to be equipped with the skills (especially great patience) to handle administrative paperwork.

Methodology

The research was conducted using a qualitative design. The topic was the administrative role and administration of the social curator.

Profile of research participants - social workers of the body for the social protection of children and social curatorship - social curators.

The aim of the research was to find out how participants perceived the issues within their work as social curators to be risky for the effective implementation of their interventions on behalf of clients in the context of the implementation of the administrative role.

The research problem was that of the curator in an administrative role. The areas investigated are: a) the administrative role in the intervention process; b) administration and its necessity in the work of the social curator; c) the emotions experienced about the required administration of the social curator; d) dealing with the administration of the social curator.

The basic research question was: What do curators see as the cardinal problem in their social intervention in terms of performing an administrative role in the intervention process?

Specific research questions (SRQ):

SRQ 1: How do participants perceive the administrative role in the social intervention process?

SRQ 2: How do participants perceive the need for an administrative role in the work of a social curator?

SRQ 3: What emotions do social curators experience in the context of the administrative work carried out?

SRQ 4: What are social curators' perceptions of administration and the administrative role of the curator?

Research tool – a phenomenological type of focus group was used (Parker, Tritter, 2006; Berrondo, Gambaro, 2023; Wong, 2008), which was facilitated to avoid straying from the topic. Suggestions made during the meeting were written

down and then subjected to content analysis. Based on the open coding, core codes, sub-categories and categories were identified and presented using the card layout technique. Secondary analysis was carried out by axial coding and the interrelationships of the categories were applied in a paradigmatic model.

Results

Table 1. Characteristics of focus groups

Focus group	Number of members			Practice in the field	
	Total	Men	Women	Interval	Average
1	12	1	11	1 – 20	5.7
2	13	0	13	1 – 38	8.5
Total	25	1	24	1 – 38	7.1

Source: own elaboration

A detailed focus group transcript ensured data collection. Categories were defined for each of the study areas as expressed by the research questions and discussion topics. At the outset, individual participants were informed of the focus of the focus group. Subsequently, each specific research question was discussed, responses were recorded in writing, and the output was processed using open coding techniques. The results are presented in Tables 2 - 5.

Table 2. The administrative role and its perception

Code name	Subcategory	Category
-----------	-------------	----------

Tasks - commas	Data – numbers	Bureaucratic apparatus
Calculations		
Data collection		
Bureaucracy	Administrative	
Documentation, documents, files		
Office work		
Cumulation of tasks	Failure to catch up	Endangerment of the worker
Procrastination		
Absence of well-being	Impairment of health	
Work under pressure		
Work under pressure		

Source: own elaboration

The open coding for the first specific research question in the area of perceptions of the administrative role in the social intervention process identified 10 codes from which four sub-categories and two categories were created, namely bureaucratic apparatus and worker threat.

Table 3. Need of administration

Code name	Subcategory	Category
My paperwork	Papers	Burden
Records		
Duplicate Work	Burden	
Excessive writing		
Nonsense	Uselessness	
Uselessness		
Unnecessary paper		
Time-wasting	Waste of time	Loss
Waste of time		
Destruction of forest	Destruction of forest	
Waste of paper		
"The most important job"	Irony	Ridicule
It's just "necessary paper"		
"Making" papers for files		
Paper can take a lot contempt	Contempt	
Long live bureaucracy		

Source: own elaboration

For the second specific research question, the need for administration in the work of the social curator, 16 codes were identified, from which seven sub-categories and three categories were created with titles of burden, loss, and ridicule.

Table 4. Experienced emotions in the context of administrative work

Code name	Subcategory	Category
-----------	-------------	----------

Despair	Inability	Burnout - burnout syndrome
Frustration		
Sadness		
Anxiety	Fear	
Fear		
Stress	Tension	
Nervousness - irritability		
Fatigue	Exhaustion	
Exhaustion		
Rage	Anger	Aversion
Anger		
Resentment - aversion	Antipathy	
Dislike		
Frustration	Dissatisfaction	
Profanity		
Indifference	Apathy	Lethargy
Disinterest		
Attenuation	Passivity	
Inhibition		

Source: own elaboration

For the third specific research question in the area of emotions that administration in the work of a social curator evokes, 19 codes were identified, from which 9 subcategories and three categories with negative connotations were created: burnout - burnout syndrome, aversion and lethargy.

Table 5. Social curators' perception of administration

Code name	Subcategory	Category
-----------	-------------	----------

Elimination of written paperwork	Prioritisation	Removing administrative burdens
Use of electronic records		
Elimination of administrative burden		
Critical assessment of priorities	Critical thinking	
Critical Thinking in the Context of Creativity		
Critical Thinking in the Context of Application		
Unification of records	Simplified record keeping	
Unification of data in registers		
Strengthening direct work with clients	Changing the ratio of direct and indirect client work with the client	Work with the client
Reducing the number of clients		
Reducing indirect client work		
Increase in the number of core staff	Core staff	Staff and competency alignment
Reduction of administrative duties		
Clear definition of competencies	Project staff	
Increased accountability		

Source: own elaboration

The last specific research question focused on finding out the perceptions of social curators on effective administration and effective performance of the administrative role. In the focus groups, 15 codes were identified from which 6 sub-categories and three categories were specified. The categories presented summarized suggestions that would help social curators remove administrative burdens, strengthen direct client work, and staff-competency alignment between

core and project staff.

Discussion

In the secondary interpretation phase of the qualitative data, we proceeded from a descriptive to a narrative mode, i.e., we interpreted what the data tell us about and why the described phenomena occur. According to several authors (Strauss, Corbinova, 1999; Svaříček et al., 2014; Hendl, 2024), axial coding is a technique that aims to establish relationships between emergent categories and subcategories from open coding. A *paradigm model* is a useful tool for systematically considering data and relating them to each other in different ways.

Table 6. Paradigmatic model

Causal conditions	- increasing paperwork, both written and electronic; - duplication - overlapping application software - stagnating number of core curators
The phenomenon	- social curator administration
Context	- competencies, rights and duties of the social worker
Intervening conditions	- unification of records - strengthening the competencies of project workers
Strategies of action and interaction	- reducing duplication of records - increasing the number of core staff - increasing competencies and responsibilities for project workers - introduction of regular supervision meetings to eliminate burnout syndrome

Consequences	- elimination of administrative burden - strengthening direct work with the client and reducing indirect work by the curator - well-being
--------------	---

Source: own elaboration

Increasing administration, often manifested in duplication of tasks and understaffing of social curation by core staff, can lead to stress and gradual manifestations of burnout syndrome. Several authors have stated (Maddock, 2024; Stanley, Sebastine, 2023; Slastan et al., 2024) that stress and burnout syndrome can have several negative effects on the work performance of individual social workers, as well as on their mental health and well-being. Zenelaga et al. (2024) emphasize that creating a positive workplace climate can bring social well-being and overall well-being.

An option for eliminating burnout and gaining well-being is the use of supervision (Ivzhenko, 2020; Mack, 2022), as the supervision space and its sharing provide emotional support and conversations about personal and private topics related to ordinary and extraordinary events in the helping professional's life Brunero, Stein Parbury, 2008; Singer et al., 2020).

Conclusions

The role of the social curator as an administrative worker, although it may not be dominant, is exercised by the curator daily due to the high administrative burden. This is related not only to the stage of social registry but also to the overall necessity to cover every working step that the social curator carries out when working with a client. The state of high administrative burden has persisted for quite a long period, which is related to the expansion of the curator's agenda and at the same time to the failure to increase the number of social curators within the labour, social affairs and family offices. In today's world, it is essential for a social curator to develop critical thinking skills in an administrative role. It is a skill that needs to be developed on a daily basis.

The paper presented the results of a qualitative analysis of social probation problems, focusing on administration. The findings presented are not representative, but they do point to a serious problem of the administrative role

and its performance in social curator intervention. The results of the qualitative analysis research pointed to the most frequently presented problem of social work and social worker intervention, which is administration, which is perceived by social curators as a strong bureaucratic apparatus, but also as a burden, loss and threat to the social worker. In terms of emotions experienced in the context of administration, participants declared strong negative emotions. Participants see the way out of the unflattering situation in the reduction of administrative tasks, the elimination of duplication of records but also in the strengthening of work teams, preferably with core staff.

The paper was created as part of the solution of the scientific research task of the KEGA project No. 017KU-4/2025 „*Critical thinking and its implementation in the curriculum of the social work study program*“.

References

- Bajan, D. et al., Developing moral competencies in the training of social workers. *Acta Missiologica*, 17 (1), 144–150 (2023).
- Belik, V., Svoboda Hoferková, S., Kraus, B., Antl, M., Herynková, M., *Sociální patologie - vybraná ohrožení pedagogů* (Social pathology - selected threats to teachers), 1.ed. Pavel Mervart, Červený Kostelec (2022).
- Berrondo, V., Gambaro, A., Innovation in Focus Group Research. *American Journal of Food Science and Technology*, 11 (2) 44–48 (2023).
- Binetti, M. J. et al., Same and other: from Plato to Kierkegaard: from Plato to Kierkegaard. A reading of a metaphysical thesis in an existential key. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 12 (1)15–31 (2021).
- Brintzenhofeszoc, K., Guan, T., Middleton, A., Otis-green, S., Schapmire, T., Rayton, M. et al., Delineation of core roles of oncology social workers in inpatient settings: a secondary data analysis. *Social Work in Health Care*, 63 (6–7) 473–488 (2024).
- Brunero, S., Stein Parbury, J., The effectiveness of clinical supervision in nursing : an evidenced based literature review. *The Australian journal of advanced nursing: a quarterly publication of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation*, 25 (3) 86–94 (2008).
- Čulenová, M., Mačkinová M., Oláh M., A Child with a Parent Serving a Prison

- Sentence and its Impact on the School Environment. *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*, 15 (4) 6–13 (2024).
- Dima, G., Mesesan Schmitz, L., Simon, M.-C., Job Stress and Burnout among Social Workers in the VUCA World of COVID-19 *Pandemic. Sustainability*, 13 (13) 7109 (2021).
- Fila, M. et al., Influence of External and Internal Factors on Human Direction. *Acta Missiologica*, 18 (2) 231–241 (2024).
- Hamarová, M. et al., Social (Pastoral) Services and its Impact on the Citizens of the Czech Republic. *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*, 15 (4) 25–33 (2024).
- Hendl, J., *Kvalitativní výzkum: Základní metody a aplikace* (Qualitative research: basic methods and applications), Portál, Praha (2024).
- Huang, CH., Xie, X., Cheung, S. P., Zhou, Y., Ying, G., Job Demands, Resources, and Burnout in Social Workers in China: Mediation Effect of Mindfulness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18 (19) 10526 (2021).
- Ivzhenko, I., Supervision as a tool for preventing emotional burnout of social workers. *Zeszyty naukowe Wyższej szkoły technicznej w Katowicach*, (12) (2020).
- Králik, R., Máhrik, T., Interpersonal Relationship as the Basis of Student Moral Formation. Paper presented at the *ICERI 2019 Proceedings: 12th Annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation*, 8898 (2019).
- Laan, G., *Otázky legitimity sociální práce* (Pomoc není zboží) (Issues of legitimization of social work. Aid is not a commodity) 1. ed. Zdravotně sociální fakulta Ostravské univerzity, Ostrava (1998).
- Lešková, L., *Základné teoretické východiská sociálnej práce* (Basic theoretical background of social work), Verbum, Košice (2023).
- Lešková, A., Yochanna, M. Values and Education for Values of Today's Youth. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 15 (2) 35–42 (2024).
- Mack, K. Y., Rhineberger-Dunn, G., Burnout among Community Corrections Officers: Do Supervisor and Coworker Support Matter? *Corrections*, 6 (2) 107–123 (2021).
- Mack, B. M., Addressing Social Workers' Stress, Burnout, and Resiliency: A Qualitative Study with Supervisors. *Social Work Research*, 46 (1) 17–28

(2022).

Maddock, A., The Relationships between Stress, Burnout, Mental Health and Well-Being in Social Workers. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 54 (2) 668–686 (2024).

Parker, A, Tritter, J. Focus group method and methodology: current practice and recent debate. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 29 (1) 23–37 (2006).

Pavliková, M. et al. Social Interventions in the Family in the Post-COVID Pandemic Period. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 14 (1) 106–123 (2023).

Presi, O. et al., Perspectives of a Sustainable Intercultural and Inclusive Education to Shape Life-Changers of Tomorrow. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 15 (2) 153–168 (2024).

Singer, J., Cummings, C., Moody, S. A., Benuto, L. T. Reducing burnout, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress through investigating purpose in life in social workers. *Journal of Social Work*, 20 (5) 620–638 (2020).

Slastan, M., Lesnakova, A., Zamkova, V., Planka, T., Oláh, M., The impact of the Syndrome Burnout of professional Workers in facilities social Services. *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*, 15 (4) 116–128 (2024).

Stanley, S., Sebastine, A. J., Work-life balance, social support, and burnout: A quantitative study of social workers. *Journal of Social Work*, 23 (6) 1135–1155 (2023).

Strauss, A. L., Corbinova, J., *Základy kvalitativního výzkumu* (Basics of qualitative research) Albert, Boskovic (1999).

Svaříček, R., Šedová, K., Janik, T., Kascak, O., Mikova, M., Nedbalkova, K., Zounek, J., *Qualitative research in pedagogical sciences*. Portal, Prague (2014).

Svoboda Hoferková, S., Kraus, B, Belik, V., *Aktuální otázky sociální patologie a sociální pedagogiky 1* (Current Issues in Social Pathology and Social Pedagogy 1). Gaudeamus, Hradec Králové (2022).

Tarshish, N., The Administrative Burden Framework: A New Horizon for Research and Practice in Social Work? *Social Work*, 69 (1), 86–94, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swad037> (2024).

Tkáčová, H. et al., Oversharing of content online by children during the holidays and parental control. *Acta Missiologica*, 17 (2) 60–74 (2023).

- Tu, B., Huang, CH., Sitar, S., Yang, M., Mindfulness Practice and Burnout: Evidence From Chinese Social Workers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13 (821899) 1–9 (2022).
- Warham, J., *An Introduction to Administration for Social Workers*, Taylor & Francis, New York (2024)
- Wong, L. P., Focus group discussion: a tool for health and medical research. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 49 (3) 256–260 (2008).
- Zákon č. 400/2009 Z. z. o štátnej službe a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov (Act No 400/2009 Coll. on the Civil Service and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts) (2009).
- Zákon č. 305/2005 Z. z. o sociálnoprávnej ochrane detí a o sociálnej kuratele a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov (Act No. 305/2005 Coll. on Social Legal Protection of Children and Social Guardianship and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts) (2005).
- Zenelaga, B. et al., Inclusive Universities. Exploring the well-being of university students with special needs in Albania. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 15 (2) 373–386 (2024).