

Marta Czechowska-Bieluga

## THE SOCIAL WORKERS' READINESS TO CHANGE

Gotowość pracowników socjalnych do zmian

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3560-2629> E-mail: [marta.czechowska-bieluga@mail.umcs.pl](mailto:marta.czechowska-bieluga@mail.umcs.pl)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62266/PK.1898-3685.2023.32.06>

### Introduction

The origins of the profession of social worker in Poland can be traced to 1966, when the state decided to hand over social care activities to persons educated in the subject-matter. In present times, to be a social worker one is required to have received a tertiary education with a major in social work or in a related field involving training for the profession of social workers or to hold a diploma of graduation from a post-graduate school of social workers. In Poland, social workers provide social assistance which, in particular, consists in granting and paying of statutory benefits, performing social work, maintaining and developing the necessary social infrastructure, analysing and assessing the phenomena leading to social exclusion, performing the tasks necessitated by the known social needs, and developing new forms of social assistance and self-help<sup>1</sup>. Today the profession of a social worker in Poland is legitimised and recognised.

Social workers have long been considered key constituents of social work<sup>2</sup>. Scholars identify some universal features of the profession, such as low esteem, high levels of professional burnout and stress or poor earnings<sup>3</sup>. However, it is also stressed that professional activities of social workers are indispensable for maintaining the balance in the society, that social work is multi-dimensional, complex, and affected by changing social situations, including occupational ones<sup>4</sup>. In the said activities, creativity directed at facilitating changes and conditioned by readiness to face those changes has always been valuable but nowadays it has become even more important<sup>5</sup>. As regards the analysed profession, change is one of the dominant categories<sup>6</sup>, as social workers not only have to react to changes but they also have to see a need to make changes. Furthermore, they have to make those changes despite being unsure about the strategies they adopt or the results of their actions, due to enormous changeability and complexity of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 r. o pomocy społecznej [Act of March 12, 2004 on social welfare], Dziennik Ustaw 2004 nr 64 poz. 593.

<sup>2</sup> M. Sheppard, M. Charles, *Personality in those entering social work training in England: comparing women and men*, European Journal of Social Work, 2017, no 20(2), p. 288-296. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1185700.

<sup>3</sup> V. L. Allen, *Learned Optimism: A Balm for Social Worker Stress*, Social Work & Christianity, 2017, no 44(4), p. 83-91; J. Ruškus, A. Kiaunytė, *Facing conflict: patterns of relationships amongst Lithuanian social workers in the workplace and the role of supervision*, European Journal of Social Work, 2013, no 16(5), p. 671-688. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2012.724386; P. Vrgović, *Job stressors and interpersonal conflict resolution strategies of social workers in Serbia: Comparison with other public institutions*, International Social Work, 2019, no 62(5), p. 1444-1451. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818775495>; S. Stanley, G. M. Buvanewari, M. Arumugam, *Resilience as a moderator of stress and burnout: A study of women social workers in India*, International Social Work, 2021, no 64(1), p. 40-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818804298>.

<sup>4</sup> J. Ruškus, A. Kiaunytė, *Facing conflict: patterns of relationships amongst Lithuanian social workers in the workplace and the role of supervision*, European Journal of Social Work, 2013, no 16(5), p. 671-688. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2012.724386.

<sup>5</sup> D. J. Williams, *The Future of Effective Social Work Practice: Broadening Multidisciplinary Collaboration and Increasing Flexibility*, Social Work, 2016, no 61(4), p. 363-365. doi: 10.1093/sw/sww054.

<sup>6</sup> A. Backer Groeningsaeter, R. Kiik, *My work is exciting' – social workers in Estonia compared to Norway*, European Journal of Social Work, 2009, no 12(1), p. 25-39. DOI: 10.1080/13691450802220941.

the society. Moreover, coping with social changes often requires specialised knowledge in various fields<sup>7</sup>.

The aspect of change also appears in the social worker-service user relations. The meeting between social workers and service users is emotional since it focuses on changes in the service users' lives<sup>8</sup>. Then, for those involved, a change can be a source of positive emotional reactions and the stimulus for development. However, the desired professional relationships are those based on equality, openness, and participation because such relationships can create positive energy even in situations of change<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, social workers who lack professional identity in situations of change experience critical reactions, and social work becomes too heavy an emotional burden for them<sup>10</sup>.

Taking into consideration positive aspects of social work, including positive contexts of change, one may wonder why so little attention has been devoted to this subject-matter to date<sup>11</sup>. As yet social workers have not been studied as change-makers. Little attention has also been devoted to the differences, including the differences in the level of education and the length of service that differentiate social workers into those who are able to cope with the requirements and to find job satisfaction, and those who are not<sup>12</sup>. There is a kind of refinement of professional traits, the longer one works in the profession<sup>13</sup>. Processes of change are related to social workers' educational and professional experiences, including their education and length of service<sup>14</sup>. Those experiences facilitate dynamic changes in relations and processes in a work place,

---

<sup>7</sup> R. M. Varma, A. Baveja, *Social Change, Social Reform and Professional Social Work*, Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development, 1997, no 7(2), p. 5-14. DOI: 10.1080/21650993.1997.9755761.

<sup>8</sup> C. K. Moesby-Jensen, H. S. Nielsen, *Emotional labor in social workers' practice*. European Journal of Social Work, 2015, no 18(5), p. 690-702. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2014.981148.

<sup>9</sup> J. Ruškus, A. Kiaunytė, *Facing conflict: patterns of relationships amongst Lithuanian social workers in the workplace and the role of supervision*, European Journal of Social Work, 2013, no 16(5), p. 671-688. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2012.724386.

<sup>10</sup> M. Czechowska-Bieluga, *Poczucie zadowolenia z życia pracowników socjalnych w socjopedagogicznej perspektywie uwarunkowań pełnionej roli zawodowej* [Satisfaction with life of social workers in the sociopedagogical perspective of determinants of professional role], UMCS, Lublin 2013; J. Ruškus, A. Kiaunytė, *Facing conflict: patterns of relationships amongst Lithuanian social workers in the workplace and the role of supervision*, European Journal of Social Work, 2013, no 16(5), p. 671-688. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2012.724386.

<sup>11</sup> S. Collins, *Statutory social workers: stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support and individual differences*, The British Journal of Social Work, 2008, no 38(6), p. 1173-1193. doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcm047; M. Czechowska-Bieluga, *Poczucie zadowolenia z życia pracowników socjalnych w socjopedagogicznej perspektywie uwarunkowań pełnionej roli zawodowej* [Satisfaction with life of social workers in the sociopedagogical perspective of determinants of professional role], UMCS, Lublin 2013; V.L. Allen, *Learned Optimism: A Balm for Social Worker Stress*, Social Work & Christianity, 2017, no 44(4), p. 83-91.

<sup>12</sup> S. Collins, *Statutory social workers: stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support and individual differences*, The British Journal of Social Work, 2008, no 38(6), p. 1173-1193. doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcm047; J. Ruškus, A. Kiaunytė, *Facing conflict: patterns of relationships amongst Lithuanian social workers in the workplace and the role of supervision*, European Journal of Social Work, 2013, no 16(5), p. 671-688. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2012.724386.; S. K. Nireekshan Singh Gowgi, S. R. Guruprasad Rao, *Level of optimism and its related issues among students of master of social work of Mysore University*, Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal, 2013, no 2(2), p. 79-84; G. Wilson, *Preparing social workers for practice: Re-evaluating student learning needs*, Social Work Education, 2013, no 32(5), p. 590-606. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2012.702206; Q. An, M. V. Chapman, *The Early Professional Experience of a New Social Worker in China*, Journal of Social Work Education, 2014, no 50(2), p. 322-333; M. Sheppard, M. Charles, *Personality in those entering social work training in England: comparing women and men*, European Journal of Social Work, 2017, no 20(2), p. 288-296. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1185700.

<sup>13</sup> S. Stanley, G. M. Buvanewari, M. Arumugam, *Resilience as a moderator of stress and burnout: A study of women social workers in India*, International Social Work, 2021, no 64(1), p. 40-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818804298>.

<sup>14</sup> J. Ruškus, A. Kiaunytė, *Facing conflict: patterns of relationships amongst Lithuanian social workers in the workplace and the role of supervision*, European Journal of Social Work, 2013, no 16(5), p. 671-688. DOI:

thus they can differentiate significant dimensions of the level of professional functioning, including the level of the readiness to change<sup>15</sup>.

### Materials and methods

The aim of the study was to assess social workers' readiness to change in their lives and to verify whether there are any differences in this regard between social workers holding an academic degree and those with secondary education<sup>16</sup> as well as whether there are any differences depending on the social workers' length of service.

Readiness to change was understood as a subjective perception of the requirements of the environment, accompanied by specific emotional states, cognitive processes, and behavioural determinants that were the results of the interpretation of an objective reality<sup>17</sup>. An person is ready for change when they made a conscious decision to take action<sup>18</sup>.

The Readiness to Change Questionnaire by Kriegel and Brandt in the Polish adaptation by Paszkowska-Rogacz and Tarkowska was used<sup>19</sup>. The questionnaire makes it possible to assess seven traits understood as the characteristics of the readiness to change: resourcefulness, drive, confidence, optimism, adventurousness, adaptability, and tolerance for ambiguity. It consists of 35 test items, with 5 items in each of the sub-scales. Using a six-grade scale respondents choose answers that most accurately describe their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours regarding various situations in their lives. In the original method the optimal level of the readiness to change is indicated by the results within the range of 22 to 2 points. The analysis of the material obtained in standardisation studies conducted on a group of 125 Polish employees<sup>20</sup> demonstrated that the optimal result is hard to achieve. Then, the reliability of the Questionnaire was calculated. The Tau-equivalent reliability value ( $\alpha = 0.54$ ) is not particularly high. The weakest

---

10.1080/13691457.2012.724386; S. K. Nireekshan Singh Gowgi, S. R. Guruprasad Rao, *Level of optimism and its related issues among students of master of social work of Mysore University*, Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal, 2013, no 2(2), p. 79-84; S. Stanley, G. M. Buvanewari, M. Arumugam, *Resilience as a moderator of stress and burnout: A study of women social workers in India*, International Social Work, 2021, no 64(1), p. 40-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818804298>; A. P. Sansfaçon, M. Brown, *Social work education in action: How studying for the profession facilitates the adaptation of internationally educated social workers in Canada*, International Social Work, 2021, no 64(1), p. 114-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818818660>.

<sup>15</sup> G. Nowak-Starz, B. Kozak, K. Zdziebło, *Wpływ stresu związanego z pracą zawodową na występowanie zespołu wypalenia zawodowego u pielęgniarek pracujących w oddziałach zabiegowych i zachowawczych* [The influence of stress connected with professional work on the occurrence of burnout syndrome in nurses working in surgical and medical treatment wards], *Studia Medyczne*, 2013, no 29(1), p. 7-13; M. Czechowska-Bieluga, *Poczucie zadowolenia z życia pracowników socjalnych w socjopedagogicznej perspektywie uwarunkowań pełnionej roli zawodowej* [Satisfaction with life of social workers in the sociopedagogical perspective of determinants of professional role], UMCS, Lublin 2013.

<sup>16</sup> R. Simon, *Perceived quality of education: A comparative study of undergraduate and postgraduate social work students at BSSS Bhopal*, International Social Work, 2019, no 62(6), p. 1482-1492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872819858750>.

<sup>17</sup> E. Brzezińska, A. Paszkowska-Rogacz, *Kształtowanie relacji pracowniczych* [Formation of working relations], *Polsko-Amerykańskie Centrum Zarządzania*, Łódź 2000, p. 183-184; R. Kriegel, D. Brandt, *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers. Developing Change-ready People and Organizations*, Warner Books, New York 1996, p. 279-287.

<sup>18</sup> J. O. Prochaska, C.C. DiClemente, J. C. Norcross, *In search of how people change applications to addictive Behaviors*. *American Psychologist*, 1992, no 47(9), p. 1102-1114.

<sup>19</sup> A. Paszkowska-Rogacz, M. Tarkowska, *Metody pracy z grupą w poradnictwie zawodowym* [Group work methods in vocational guidance], KOWEZiU, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>20</sup> R. Krzemińska, *Osobowościowe i poznawcze wyznaczniki gotowości jednostki do organizacyjnej zmiany* (nieopublikowana praca magisterska) [Personality and cognitive determinants of individual readiness for organizational change], Uniwersytet Łódzki, Instytut Psychologii 2002.

correlations exist for the scales of Drive and Tolerance to ambiguity, the removal of which would increase the coefficient alpha value to approx. 0.60<sup>21</sup>.

Resourcefulness, as the first of the trait examined, is understood as the ability to utilize whatever resources are available to achieve one's goals and to do "something from nothing". Optimism is the second trait examined in the Questionnaire. People in whom this trait is strong are characterised by positive or even enthusiastic attitude towards new things. Adventurousness – persons with strong trait of adventurousness see their lives as an adventure. Drive, as another trait, is a kind of potential which reinforces all other traits. Adaptability, the fifth trait analysed by means of the Readiness to Change Questionnaire, is composed of two components: flexibility, which allows for an easy adaptation to the changing environmental requirements, and resilience, thanks to which people do not get overcome by adversity, but rather learn from mistakes. Confidence, the penultimate trait, characterises people who trust their own capabilities and abilities. The final trait, tolerance to ambiguity is characteristic of persons who believe that nothing is certain<sup>22</sup>.

The studies were conducted in social service institutions (In case of Poland these are Social Welfare Centres). It was assumed that the sample would comprise employees who had completed tertiary or secondary education, because in Poland the profession of social worker can be practised by graduates of higher education institutions as well as by those who have completed secondary education<sup>23</sup>. In total there were 103 respondents. The mean age of the respondents was 38 years. The youngest respondent was 21, while the oldest was 60 years old (SD=8.66). The group was predominantly made up of women (87.38%) with men constituting only 12.62%, which reflects the gender imbalance on an international scale<sup>24</sup>.

The respondents' length of service most frequently ranged from 5 to 15 years (46.60%). Most respondents held a master's degree (67.96%), while the groups of those with higher vocational (6.80%) or general secondary education (2.91%) were the least numerous ones. Every tenth respondent had completed secondary vocational education (10.68%). Slightly more respondents had completed post-secondary education (11.65%). Most respondents had completed academic programmes in pedagogy, social work, or sociology, but the study group also comprised the respondents who had completed programmes in economy, law, administration, agriculture, homeland security, archaeology, English studies, psychology, and international relations<sup>25</sup>.

## Results

The respondents were mainly characterised by low levels of all the traits analysed (the levels were calculated in accordance with the Questionnaire instruction). Most respondents were characterised by low tolerance to ambiguity (95%), low level of adventurousness (88.35%), and low level of adaptability (82.52%), As many as 76.70% of the respondents were

---

<sup>21</sup> A. Paszkowska-Rogacz, M. Tarkowska, *Metody pracy z grupą w poradnictwie zawodowym* [Group work methods in vocational guidance], KOWEZiU, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 209-2015.

<sup>23</sup> J. Krzyszkowski, *Analiza struktury zatrudnienia w jednostkach organizacyjnych pomocy społecznej z terenu województwa wraz z badaniem potrzeb kształcenia i zatrudnienia* [Analysis of the structure of employment in social welfare organisational units in the voivodeship together with the study of education and employment needs], Regionalne Centrum Polityki Społecznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2011.

<sup>24</sup> M. Sheppard, M. Charles, *Personality in those entering social work training in England: comparing women and men*, *European Journal of Social Work*, 2017, no 20(2), p. 288-296. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1185700.

<sup>25</sup> J. Krzyszkowski, *Analiza struktury zatrudnienia w jednostkach organizacyjnych pomocy społecznej z terenu województwa wraz z badaniem potrzeb kształcenia i zatrudnienia* [Analysis of the structure of employment in social welfare organisational units in the voivodeship together with the study of education and employment needs], Regionalne Centrum Polityki Społecznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2011.

characterised by a low level of drive. As regards optimism, confidence, and drive, slightly fewer respondents fell into the low-level groups, but those groups were, again, much more numerous than the average- and high-level groups. Equal-size groups of 66.99 respondents each were composed of people characterised by a low level of optimism and low level of confidence. On the other hand, just over half of the respondents (58.25%) fell into the group of those with low level of resourcefulness (Chart 1).

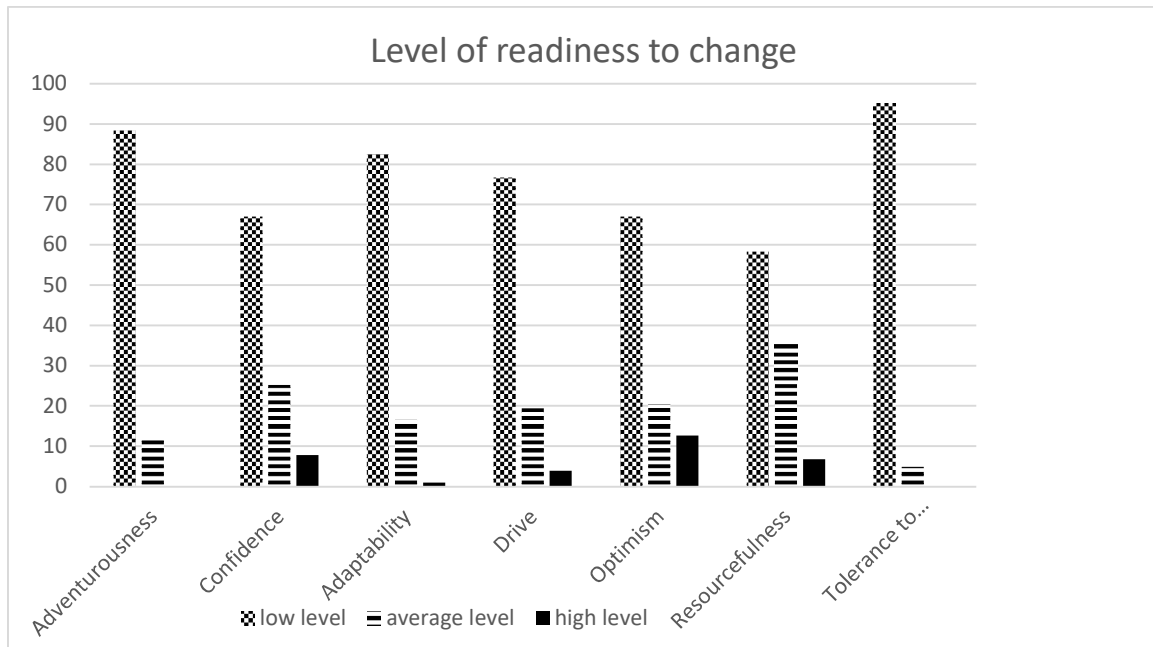


Chart 1. Level of saturation of specific aspects of the social workers' readiness to change  
Source: own research

Taking into account the saturation of the selected traits, the highest level was obtained for resourcefulness ( $M=20.71$ ) understood as the ability to find the appropriate sources and resources that make it possible to fulfil one's plans. The respondents placed at an average level believe that problems can be solved while perceiving obstacles as value per se. They are also able to notice various tactics of action, and approach stereotypical issues with creativity. High level (over 26 points) obtained by few respondents may indicate that the respondents do not notice simple and obvious solutions, thus they cause themselves more work than necessary.

Slightly lower mean, indicating that a trait is slightly less marked in the context of other analysed qualities, was obtained for optimism ( $M=19.67$ ). It is a trait of people who do not focus on difficulties, but rather see various possibilities. Moreover, they believe that passage of time is beneficial for them and they interpret the reality as beneficial as well. A high level (over 26 points) on this scale, obtained by a few social workers may indicate that they do not possess critical thinking skills. The respondents also obtained a markedly high result for confidence ( $M=19.37$ ). A high level obtained on this scale indicates persons who have high self-esteem and believe that they are in control of their lives. If it is not possible to change the surrounding reality, they try to make the best of it as it is. Moreover, they believe that mastery cannot be achieved without defeats, so they learn from mistakes. A high level on this scale (over 26 points), obtained by a small percentage of the respondents, may indicate conceitedness, presumption and rejection of others' opinions about self.

Passion ( $M=17.80$ ) and adaptability ( $M=17.63$ ) were found to be at an average level compared to other traits. People with a strong drive are less likely to get tired, but a very high score may be related to a respondent being unreasonably persistent and prone to a quick professional

burnout. The respondents experience enthusiasm and fear with comparable frequency and they perform their tasks with moderate energy. However, a very high result achieved by a little percentage of the respondents may indicate that they tend to be unreasonably persistent and prone to a quick professional burnout. On the other hand, adaptability, which manifests itself mainly in flexibility, allows a person, to a moderate extent, to avoid disappointments and frustration and, if needed, to modify plans, taking into account options prepared in advance. Flexible persons set themselves realistic goals. Resilience, the second component of adaptability, was found to be at an average level in the study group. The average level of the said component shows that the respondents attach significance to their own status and functions and that they live for today but also in the past and for the future<sup>26</sup>.

The lowest level of saturation was observed in respect of adventurousness (M=15.76) and tolerance to ambiguity (M=13.38). Based on the results, it can be presumed that being always on the move and restlessness are the traits that characterise the respondents to a small extent. Rather, they prefer the sense of security and stagnation. They prefer repetitive and routine activities instead of challenging ones. Usually they are not initiators of change, acting with little efficiency in a stimulating environment. Those persons do not want to be surprised. They are not patient and tend to jump to make snap judgements as they expect quick and simple solutions. None of the respondents was characterised by a high level of adventurousness, which indicates that they do not tend to be foolhardy or reckless. Furthermore, the study revealed that none of the respondents was characterised by a high level of tolerance to ambiguity which may indicate that it is not hard for the respondents to complete their tasks and to make final decisions (Chart 2).

---

<sup>26</sup> A. Paszkowska-Rogacz, M. Tarkowska, *Metody pracy z grupą w poradnictwie zawodowym* [Group work methods in vocational guidance], KOWEZiU, Warszawa 2004, p. 209-215, p. 209-215.

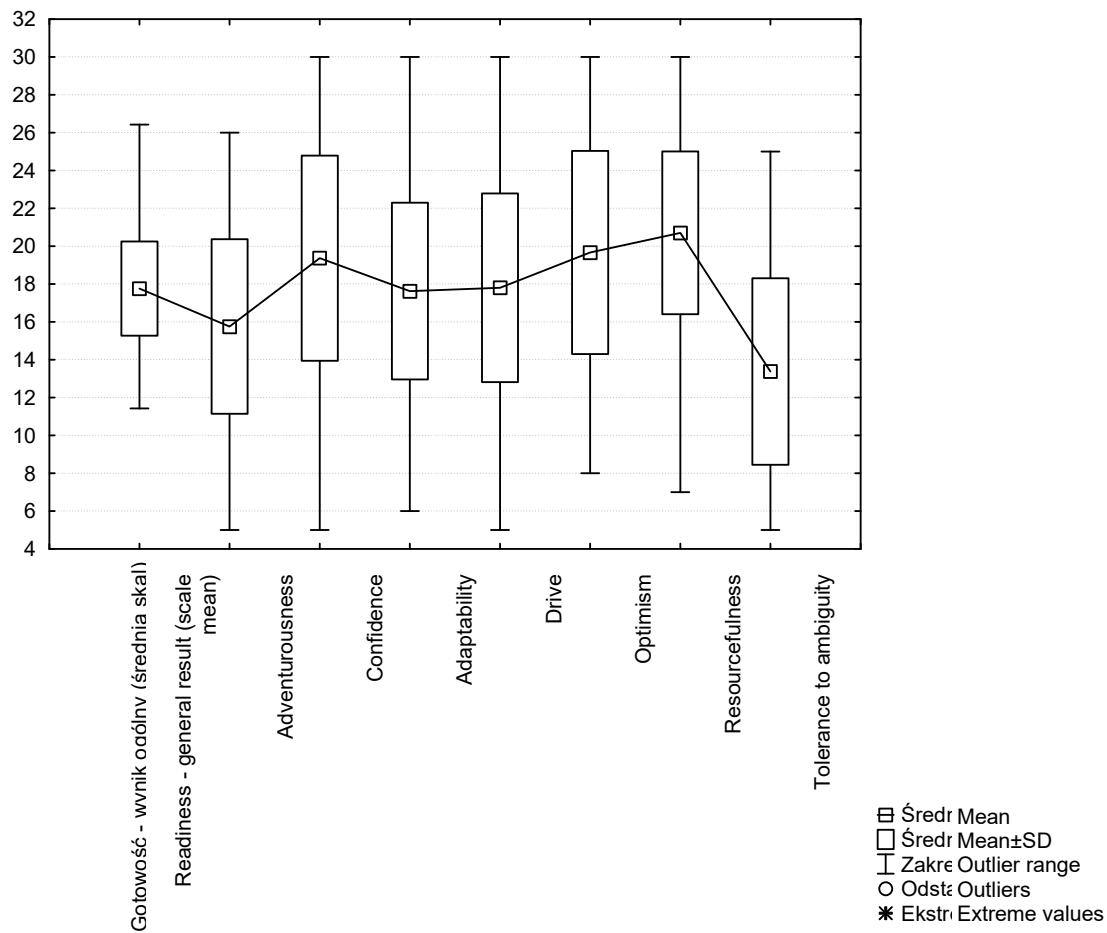


Chart 2. Comparison of mean values of the analysed aspects of readiness to change  
Source: own research

Then, using the Mann–Whitney U test, a level of the readiness to change in persons with an academic degree was compared to that in persons with lower levels of education (post-secondary, vocational secondary, general secondary). As can be seen in Table 1 there are no statistically significant differences in the level of the readiness to change between the respondents with tertiary education and those with secondary education.

Table 1. Comparison of the level of the readiness to change of persons with an academic degree and those with secondary education

Variable	Academic degree		Secondary education		Z	p
	M	sd	M	sd		
Readiness in general	17.73	2.69	17.84	1.83	-0.395	0.692
Adventurousness	15.82	4.71	15.58	4.41	0.293	0.769
Confidence	18.95	5.66	20.61	4.52	-1.374	0.169
Adaptability	17.71	4.76	17.38	4.45	0.510	0.610
Drive (passion)	17.91	4.97	17.50	5.12	-0.267	0.790
Optimism	19.91	5.41	18.96	5.26	0.876	0.381
Resourcefulness	20.66	4.35	20.85	4.25	0.149	0.882
Tolerance to ambiguity	13.17	4.99	14.00	4.77	-0.792	0.428

Source: own research

The level of the readiness to change was successively compared among persons with various lengths of service, broken down into three intervals: the shortest interval of up to 5 years of service, the medium interval of 5 to 15 years of service, and the longest interval of over 15 years of service. The respondents with fewest years of service were found to have obtained statistically significantly higher results for the readiness to change (general result) than the respondents with most years of service ( $p < 0.05$ ). On the other hand, no significant differences were revealed in respect of the analysed specific aspects of the readiness to change (table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of the level of readiness for transition depending on the years of service

Variable	Up to 5 years of service		5 to 15 years of service		Over 15 years of service		F	p
	M	sd	M	sd	M	sd		
Readiness in general	16.79	2.54	17.57	2.25	18.41	2.19	3.374	0.038*
Adventurousness	15.73	4.77	15.73	4.48	15.82	4.83	0.004	0.996
Confidence	19.00	4.89	18.77	5.89	20.48	5.01	1.042	0.356
Adaptability	16.23	4.10	18.19	4.83	17.76	4.72	1.358	0.262
Drive	17.57	4.26	17.94	5.08	18.91	3.80	0.660	0.519
Optimism	18.23	5.38	20.12	5.05	19.97	5.79	1.020	0.364
Resourcefulness	20.05	3.78	20.81	4.35	21.42	3.97	0.745	0.477
Tolerance to ambiguity	12.45	5.50	13.02	4.54	14.51	5.02	1.400	0.251

Source: own research

### Conclusion

Rapid social development and advances in technology bring new social problems, foster alternative identities and hitherto unknown life styles as well as complicating the issues of social justice. Therefore, there is high demand for a greater professional readiness to cope with changes, the readiness seen as creativity and flexibility (Williams, 2016). Unfortunately the study reveals the picture of social workers characterised by a low level of the readiness to change and low levels of the traits described. Their ability to generate and successfully utilise ideas is low or average, while their attitude to the surrounding reality is much more frequently negative than positive. Furthermore, they rather see obstacles than chances, are unwilling to take up challenges, are reluctant to the new and uncertain, do not have energy resources required to take action, are unaware of their own talents and skills, and exhibit poor adaptability to the changing environment.

The respondents much less frequently achieved high levels or did not achieve them at all. This may suggest that they notice simple solutions, are capable of critical thinking, and do not tend to be reckless or unreasonably persistent. Moreover, they are characterised by commitment to what they do, which, in turn may be conducive to professional burnout. They are not conceited, accept other's opinions about themselves, and are successful in completing their tasks. The phenomenon termed *reactivity* in women was observed as a characteristic appropriate for social work<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> M. Sheppard, M. Charles., *Personality in those entering social work training in England: comparing women and men*, European Journal of Social Work, 2017, no 20(2), p. 288-296. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1185700.

Social workers accompany people with their worst and most dire situations in their lives. Being the helpers, they can be directly exposed to the worst of human behaviours and experience stress that can undermine or weaken their optimism and resilience<sup>28</sup>. Optimism is an important personality trait and plays a significant role in care activities conducted by social workers<sup>29</sup>. Detailed results show that most respondents had low level of optimism. These results become particularly significant when one takes into account that the said trait affects all aspects of a persons' life, and low level of optimism contributes to a persons' poor functioning<sup>30</sup>.

However, one can hazard a statement that the social workers subjected to the study have some potential to become experts on changes, regardless of their level of education. It turns out that there are no differences in the level of the readiness to change between social workers with an academic degree and those with secondary education. On the other hand, the more years served as social worker, the higher the level of the readiness to change. The literature suggests that work experience is associated with greater emotional competence<sup>31</sup>. Such results may be associated with the lack of self-confidence found by the researchers in social workers with few years of service. The sense of unpreparedness, unorganised or even "chaotic" perception of the work place and even the uncertainty about the future are the issues particularly frequently appearing among practitioners newly-employed in social services. The above findings illustrate the importance of onboarding newly-employed practitioners and providing them with support in their new professional roles. The enormous importance of on-the-job training for social work students has been described around the world. It is students themselves who demand more on-the-job training<sup>32</sup>. Based on the results obtained, activities aimed at stimulating the openness to the new and reducing the resistance to change are worth being included in the planning of professional development of social workers with few years of service, especially those applying for or already holding posts requiring a high level of the readiness to change.

In respect of the low results obtained, an analysis of the curricula may also prove helpful<sup>33</sup>. The absence of differences regarding the readiness to change between persons with an academic degree and those with secondary education may be associated with relatively similar scope of curriculum in Polish social worker training institutions, regardless of the level of education. The identification of issues, both theoretical and those related to internship or on-the-

---

<sup>28</sup> V. L. Allen, *Learned Optimism: A Balm for Social Worker Stress*, Social Work & Christianity, 2017, no 44(4), p. 83-91; Bonoanno A., Westphal M. and Mancini A.D., *Resilience to loss and potential trauma*, Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 2011, no 7(5), p. 11-35. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032210-104526.

<sup>29</sup> S. Collins, *Statutory social workers: stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support and individual differences*, The British Journal of Social Work, 2008, no 38(6), p. 1173-1193. doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcm047.

<sup>30</sup> V. L. Allen, *Learned Optimism: A Balm for Social Worker Stress*, Social Work & Christianity, 2017, no 44(4), p. 83-91; S. K. Nireekshan Singh Gowgi, S. R. Guruprasad Rao, *Level of optimism and its related issues among students of master of social work of Mysore University*, Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal, 2013, no 2(2), p. 79-84.

<sup>31</sup> N. Humpel, P. Caputi, *Exploring the relationship between work stress, years of experience and emotional competency using a sample of Australian mental health nurses*, Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 2001, no 8(5), p. 399-403; S. Stanley, G. M. Buvanewari, M. Arumugam, *Resilience as a moderator of stress and burnout: A study of women social workers in India*, International Social Work, 2021, no 64(1), p. 40-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818804298>.

<sup>32</sup> G. Wilson, *Preparing social workers for practice: Re-evaluating student learning needs*, Social Work Education, 2013, no 32(5), p. 590-606. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2012.702206; P. Tham, D. Lynch, *Lost in transition? - Newly educated social workers' reflections on their first months in practice*, European Journal of Social Work, 2019, no 22(3), p. 400-411. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2017.1364701; K. Healy, P. Tham, D. Lynch, *Who sets the standards? A comparison of the social work education in Australia, Ireland and Sweden*, Paper presented at AASW conference, Adelaide 2012, September.

<sup>33</sup> R. Simon, *Perceived quality of education: A comparative study of undergraduate and postgraduate social work students at BSSS Bhopal*, International Social Work, 2019, no 62(6), p. 1482-1492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872819858750>.

job training, helpful in creating the openness to change in the course of social worker education, would make it possible to develop methodological guidelines for instructors and those responsible for the process of social worker training.

Knowledge drawn from the presented studies can be also used by persons who provide support to social workers, by supervisors and psychotherapists. Work on overcoming resistance to change may prove to be beneficial especially for newly-employed social work practitioners. Moreover, no need to differentiate the said work depending on the level of education has been demonstrated.

On the other hand, those who employ social workers should be aware of the lack of correlation between the readiness to change and the level of education and the existence of the correlation between the readiness to change and the length of service, as such an awareness may be a useful instrument in organisational and training processes. HR departments should consider offering educational activities, including training for employees with an academic degree and those with secondary education, aimed at improving their levels of the readiness to change, as well as a possible intensification of activities in this regard offered to newly-employed practitioners.

Summing up, the main aim of social work is to assist clients in reaching self-reliance or to improve the quality of lives of those who, for various reasons, cannot reach full self-reliance. The changing world drives the need to make change in social work. Each change may be compared to a crisis as it requires previous practices be at least partly abandoned, and new solutions be considered<sup>34</sup>. As shown by the studies, the level of education alone does not play a role in one's coping with the above-defined crisis. Instead, factors that affect coping should be looked for in the length of service and in other areas that decrease the resistance to change such as, for example, those related to social workers' background<sup>35</sup>.

The role of social workers evolves as the need for their work constantly changes, intensifies, and redefines itself in the contemporary world. The conceptual framework of this study is an attempt at creating the foundations of theories concerning social workers' readiness to change in respect of the differentiating factors. This paper takes an exploratory rather than systematically comprehensive journey, across a range of discursive terrains, to open up the debate.

### **Streszczenie:**

#### *Gotowość do zmian pracowników socjalnych*

Pracownik socjalny uczy wspomaganą rodzinę jak być gotowym do zmiany, jak żyć we współczesnym świecie, w którym zmienność jest najbardziej stałym elementem otoczenia. Świat ten stawia przed pracownikami socjalnymi coraz większe wymagania i sprawia, że ich rola społeczna rozszerza się o coraz większy zakres zadań. Współczesne społeczeństwo jest bardzo niestabilne, co wymusza ciągłą ewolucję wszelkich systemów wsparcia. Dlatego też coraz więcej innowacyjnych rozwiązań trafia do systemu pomocy społecznej. Doświadczenie pokazuje jednak, że nie wdraża się wielu dobrych pomysłów. Jedną z przyczyn może być niechęć do nowości lub ograniczona otwartość na stosowanie nowych koncepcji. Celem badania była ocena gotowości pracowników socjalnych do wprowadzania zmian w swoim życiu. Badania przeprowadzono na próbie 103 pracowników socjalnych. Zastosowano Kwestionariusz Gotowości do Zmiany autorstwa R. Kriegel i D. Brandt w tłumaczeniu A. Paszkowskiej-Rogacz. Badanie obejmowało również analizę różnic w gotowości do zmian pomiędzy pracownikami

---

<sup>34</sup> S. A. Webb, *Social work in a risk society: Social and political perspectives*, Macmillan International Higher Education, Basingstoke and New York 2006.

<sup>35</sup> S. K. Nireekshan Singh Gowgi, S. R. Guruprasad Rao, *Level of optimism and its related issues among students of master of social work of Mysore University*, Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal, 2013, no 2(2), p. 79-84.

socjalnymi posiadającymi wykształcenie wyższe i średnie oraz analizę tych różnic w zależności od stażu pracy. Stwierdzono, że poziom gotowości do zmiany pracowników socjalnych we wszystkich analizowanych wymiarach jest najczęściej niski. Wykazano ponadto, że staż pracy, w przeciwieństwie do poziomu wykształcenia, różnicuje gotowość do zmiany. Wiedza ta może być wykorzystana przez osoby zarządzające, szkolące i wspierające pracowników socjalnych.

Badanie to stanowi pierwszą do tej pory kompleksową analizę mechanizmów zależności zachodzących pomiędzy gotowością do zmiany a stażem pracy i poziomem wykształcenia wśród pracowników socjalnych. Nie jest jednak jasne, czy wzorce obserwowane tutaj utrzymują się wraz z wprowadzonymi obecnie w Polsce zmianami w zakresie kształcenia do pracy socjalnej, czy też wraz ze zmianami zachodzącymi we współczesnym społeczeństwie, np. w miarę rozwoju czy zaniku pandemii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja, gotowość do zmiany, pracownik socjalny, zmiana,

### **Summary:**

#### *The social workers' readiness to change*

A social worker teaches his or her families how to be ready for changes, and how to live in the contemporary world in which changeability is the most constant element of the environment. This world places ever greater demands on social workers, and makes their social role expand to include ever increasing scope of tasks. The contemporary society is very unstable, which necessitates constant evolution of any support system. Therefore, an increasing number of innovative solutions make their way into the social care system. However, real-world experience shows that many good ideas are not implemented. One of the reasons may be reluctance to the new or limited openness to implementing new concepts. The aim of the study was to assess social workers' readiness to change in their lives. The study was conducted on a sample of 103 social workers. The questionnaire used was the Readiness for Change Questionnaire by R. Kriegel and D. Brandt translated by A. Paszkowska-Rogacz. The study also involved the analysis of the differences in the readiness to change between social workers holding an academic degree and those with secondary education as well as the analysis of the said differences depending on the social workers' length of service. It was found that the level of readiness to change of social workers in all analysed dimensions is mostly low. Only the length of service was found to differentiate the readiness to change. This knowledge can be used by those who manage, train, and support social workers.

This study represents the first comprehensive analysis to date of the mechanisms of the relationship between readiness to change and length of service and level of education among social workers. It is unclear, however, whether the patterns observed here will continue with the changes to social work education now being introduced in Poland, or with changes in contemporary society, such as pandemics develop or disappear.

**Keywords:** change, education, social worker, readiness to change,

### **References**

Allen V.L., Learned Optimism: A Balm for Social Worker Stress, *Social Work & Christianity*, 2017, no 44(4), p. 83-91.

An Q. and Chapman M.V., The Early Professional Experience of a New Social Worker in China, *Journal of Social Work Education*, 2014, no 50(2), p. 322-333.

Backer Groenningsaeter A. and Kiik R., My work is exciting? – social workers in Estonia compared to Norway, *European Journal of Social Work*, 2009, no 12(1), p. 25-39. DOI: 10.1080/13691450802220941.

Bonoanno A., Westphal M. and Mancini A.D., Resilience to loss and potential trauma, *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 2011, no 7(5), p. 11-35. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032210-104526.

Bridges W., *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 3rd edn, Da Capo Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 2009.

Brzezińska E. and Paszkowska-Rogacz A., *Kształtowanie relacji pracowniczych [Formation of working relations]*, Polsko-Amerykańskie Centrum Zarządzania, Łódź 2000.

Collins S., Statutory social workers: stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support and individual differences, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 2008, no 38(6), p. 1173–1193. doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcm047.

Czechowska-Bieluga M., *Poczucie zadowolenia z życia pracowników socjalnych w socjopedagogicznej perspektywie uwarunkowań pełnionej roli zawodowej [Satisfaction with life of social workers in the sociopedagogical perspective of determinants of professional role]*, UMCS, Lublin 2013.

Healy K., Tham P. and Lynch D., Who sets the standards? A comparison of the social work education in Australia, Ireland and Sweden, Paper presented at AASW conference, Adelaide 2012, September.

Humpel N. and Caputi P., Exploring the relationship between work stress, years of experience and emotional competency using a sample of Australian mental health nurses, *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 2001, no 8(5), p. 399-403.

Kriegel R. and Brandt D., *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers. Developing Change-ready People and Organizations*, Warner Books, New York 1996.

Krzemińska R., *Osobowościowe i poznawcze wyznaczniki gotowości jednostki do organizacyjnej zmiany (nieopublikowana praca magisterska) [Personality and cognitive determinants of individual readiness for organizational change]*, Uniwersytet Łódzki, Instytut Psychologii 2002.

Krzyszowski J., *Analiza struktury zatrudnienia w jednostkach organizacyjnych pomocy społecznej z terenu województwa wraz z badaniem potrzeb kształcenia i zatrudnienia [Analysis of the structure of employment in social welfare organisational units in the voivodeship together with the study of education and employment needs]*, Regionalne Centrum Polityki Społecznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2011.

Lubrańska A., *Gotowość do zmiany na przykładzie badań przedstawicieli kadry kierowniczej [Readiness for change on the example of executive research]*, *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Psychologica*, 2011, no 15, p. 3-16.

Moesby-Jensen C.K. and Nielsen H.S., Emotional labor in social workers' practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 2015, no 18(5), p. 690-702. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2014.981148.

Morrison T., Emotional intelligence, emotion and social work: context, characteristics, complications and contribution, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 2007, no 37(2), p. 245–263 doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl016.

Nireekshan Singh Gowgi S.K. and Guruprasad Rao S.R., Level of optimism and its related issues among students of master of social work of Mysore University, *Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2013, no 2(2), p. 79-84.

Nowak-Starz G., Kozak B. and Zdziebło K., *Wpływ stresu związanego z pracą zawodową na występowanie zespołu wypalenia zawodowego u pielęgniarek pracujących w oddziałach zabiegowych i zachowawczych [The influence of stress connected with professional work on the occurrence of burnout syndrome in nurses working in surgical and medical treatment wards]*, *Studia Medyczne*, 2013, no 29(1), p. 7–13.

Paszkowska-Rogacz A., Kulturowe i osobowościowe determinanty radzenia sobie pracowników banków ze zmianami organizacyjnymi [Cultural and personality determinants of bank employees' coping with organizational change], *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, 2004, no 47(4), p. 395-409.

Paszkowska-Rogacz A. and Tarkowska M., *Metody pracy z grupą w poradnictwie zawodowym* [Group work methods in vocational guidance], KOWEziU, Warszawa 2004.

Prochaska J.O., D'Clemente, C.C. and Norcross, J.C., In search of how people change applications to addictive Behaviors. *American Psychologist*, 1992, no 47(9), p. 1102-1114.

Ruškus J. and Kiaunytė A., Facing conflict: patterns of relationships amongst Lithuanian social workers in the workplace and the role of supervision, *European Journal of Social Work*, 2013, no 16(5), p. 671-688. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2012.724386.

Sansfaçon A.P. and Brown M., Social work education in action: How studying for the profession facilitates the adaptation of internationally educated social workers in Canada, *International Social Work*, 2021, no 64(1), p. 114-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818818660>.

Sheppard M. and Charles M., Personality in those entering social work training in England: comparing women and men, *European Journal of Social Work*, 2017, no 20(2), p. 288-296. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1185700.

Simon R., Perceived quality of education: A comparative study of undergraduate and postgraduate social work students at BSSS Bhopal, *International Social Work*, 2019, no 62(6), p. 1482–1492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872819858750>.

Stanley S., Buvanewari G.M. and Arumugam M., Resilience as a moderator of stress and burnout: A study of women social workers in India, *International Social Work*, 2021, no 64(1), p. 40-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818804298>.

Stewart C., Social workers resilience, positive emotions and optimism, *Practice*, 2007, no 19(4), p. 255-269. doi: 10.1080/09503150701728186.

Tham P. and Lynch D., Lost in transition? – Newly educated social workers' reflections on their first months in practice, *European Journal of Social Work*, 2019, no 22(3), p. 400-411. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2017.1364701.

Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 r. o pomocy społecznej [Act of March 12, 2004 on social welfare], *Dziennik Ustaw* 2004 nr 64 poz. 593.

Varma R.M. and Baveja A., Social Change, Social Reform and Professional Social Work, *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 1997, no 7(2), p. 5-14. DOI: 10.1080/21650993.1997.9755761.

Vrgović P., Job stressors and interpersonal conflict resolution strategies of social workers in Serbia: Comparison with other public institutions, *International Social Work*, 2019, no 62(5), p. 1444–1451. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818775495>.

Webb S.A., *Social work in a risk society: Social and political perspectives*, Macmillan International Higher Education, Basingstoke and New York 2006.

Williams D.J., The Future of Effective Social Work Practice: Broadening Multidisciplinary Collaboration and Increasing Flexibility, *Social Work*, 2016, no 61(4), p. 363-365. doi: 10.1093/sw/sww054.

Wilson G., Preparing social workers for practice: Re-evaluating student learning needs, *Social Work Education*, 2013, no 32(5), p. 590–606. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2012.702206.

**Marta Czechowska-Bieluga –**

Katedra Pedagogiki Społecznej  
Uniwersytet M. Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie  
Email: [marta.czechowska-bieluga@mail.umcs.pl](mailto:marta.czechowska-bieluga@mail.umcs.pl)  
Ul. Mieczykowa 11  
20-810 Lublin