

## MOTIVATING FACTORS IN THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK IN LATVIA

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**Abstract.** The issues of social change and development, social cohesion and empowerment, elimination of inequality have been relevant and important in all societies at all times, and Latvia is no exception. An important prerequisite for their successful addressing is a well-developed social work profession and a sufficient number of qualified social work specialists. Despite the topicality of social work, its practical implementation in Latvia faces a number of problems, among them the country still lacks a significant part of the necessary specialists. This paper aims to analyse the factors that motivate people working in the demanding profession of social work in Latvia, revealing the main factors that should be addressed as a priority in solving the problem of insufficient number of employees. Empirical data was collected by survey method, n=145. The study is based on A. Maslow's needs theory and F. Herzberg's two-factor motivation model. It is analysed how social workers evaluate the importance of and the satisfaction with motivating factors; the attention is also paid to the factors that have a greater influence on the willingness to work to work in the field of social work. The research concludes that there is a difference in the opinions of social workers about the importance and satisfaction: more important factors have lower satisfaction scores, especially reward-related issues. This is one of the most important aspects that needs to be addressed, because the issues of pay, workload, working conditions are the ones that reduce the willingness to work in the social work profession.

**Key words:** social work profession, motivating factors, Maslow's needs theory, Herzberg's two-factor motivation model.

**JEL code:** J24

### Introduction

The provision of social support including social work has been essential from the beginning of the formation of modern society. International Federation of Social workers (2014) gives a following definition of the profession "*Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work*". In order to fulfil the tasks assigned to it, and to address needs, moral and ethical norms of society, legal obligations, and to promote the implementation of the defined principles, a sufficient number of professional and highly qualified social workers is a necessary prerequisite. However, despite the importance of social work, its practical implementation in Latvia faces several problems. One of them is a lack of professional staff. There can be several reasons for this, including the fact that in Latvia it has not yet been understood and accepted that a social worker is as necessary as a doctor in a modern society. Also, there are no serious studies of the dynamics of social problems, so there is no plan for how many social workers the country needs or will need in five or ten years.

Although the situation is improving with every year, the country still lacks a significant part of the necessary specialists. Only about 70% of social services provide the statutory norm: one social work specialist per 1000 inhabitants (Labklajibas ministrija, 2022). The lack of employees is also indicated by V. Anstrate (2019) "*... there is a crisis of shortage of workers in the industry. The variety of social problems is increasing, but the work is emotionally heavy, relatively low-paid. In addition, several years of study are required. ... Social workers are getting old, there are not enough new ones.*" The role of social work in Latvian society is essential, however, analysing the current situation in the industry, a problem can be seen with recruiting and attracting employees to the profession.

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The aim of the paper is to analyse the factors motivating people to work in the social work profession in Latvia. The tasks are: to give a theoretical insight into motivating factors; characterise the general motivation policy, and analyse different motivating factors emphasizing their importance and satisfaction with them in the social work profession.

The study is based on A. Maslow's needs theory and F. Herzberg's two-factor motivation model, which includes motivators (beneficially affecting job satisfaction) and hygiene factors (preventing employee dissatisfaction). The hypothesis that motivators and corresponding motivating factors of Maslow's theory are more important in the profession of social work than hygiene factors, despite that the latter correspond to the basic levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, will be tested.

## **Research results and discussion**

### **1. Theoretical framework of motivating factors**

Understanding and interpretations of motivation and related concepts, such as needs, motives, drives, desire, are very diverse and depend on the theoretical position of the authors. Sociological insight into issues of work motivation from different perspectives is provided by several sub-fields, of which sociology of organizations, sociology of work and career counselling theories address this issue most directly. From the organization theories of motivation that define specific motivating factors and characterize their influence, the most popular and widely used are Abraham Maslow's and Frederick Herzberg's theories.

According to Maslow, human decision-making is determined by a hierarchy of needs. He proposed five main needs forming the basis of human behavioural motivation, and grouped needs into five levels and arranged them in a hierarchical order:

1<sup>st</sup> - Physiological - basic issues of survival such as nutrition, housing, health etc. Organizations usually respond to them with salary, health insurance and stable employment;

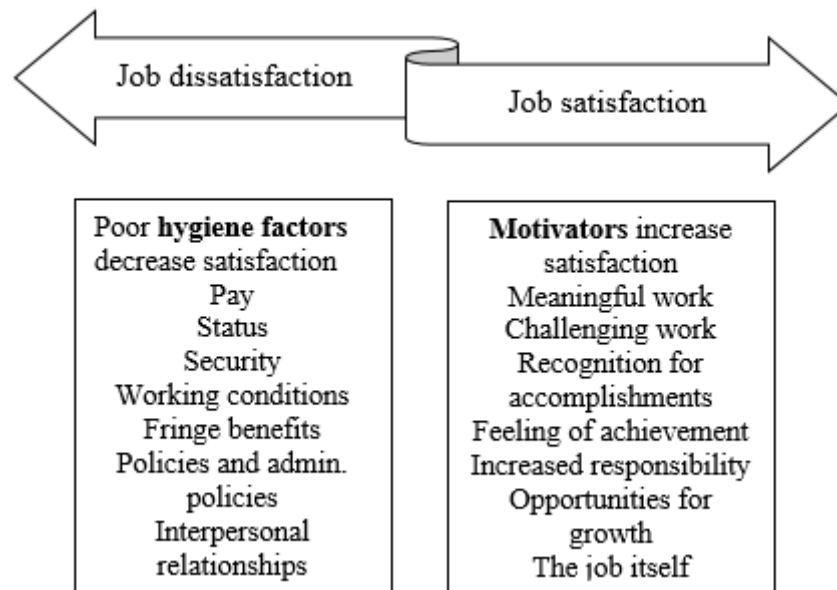
2<sup>nd</sup> - Security - stable physical and emotional environment issues such as benefits, pension, safe work environment, and fair work practices;

3<sup>rd</sup> - Belongingness or social needs - social acceptance issues such as friendship or cooperation on the job. In organizations, they are usually manifested by the formation of informal groups of employees, but on the part of organizations, to satisfy them, they tend to hold joint events, promote teamwork, provide opportunities for contact etc.;

4<sup>th</sup> - Esteem - positive self-image, respect, reputation and recognition issues such as job titles, nice workspaces, and prestigious job assignments, tend to use various reward systems for success, from simple praise to promotion, information about successes and evaluation of their importance etc.;

5<sup>th</sup> - Self-Actualization - achievement issues such as workplace autonomy, challenging work, and subject matter expert status on the job. Organizations address them by providing employees with new challenges, independence and responsibility, and opportunities for growth (Tanner, 2022; Laegaard, Bindslev, 2006).

Based on the findings of Maslow, Herzberg came up with his so-called the two-factor theory of motivation, which is still one of the most influential and discussed theories in the field of motivation. He concluded that satisfaction and dissatisfaction could not be measured reliably on the same continuum (Nickerson, 2021). Herzberg added a new dimension to Maslow's theory by dividing the motivation factors of employees not only into separate groups but also assigning them a movement from unsatisfied to a neutral and satisfied state within certain limits. According to Herzberg, it is important to divide all influencing factors in only two groups - motivators and hygiene factors.



Source: Authors' created based on Kurt, 2021; Nickerson, 2021

Fig. 1. Herzberg's motivators and hygiene factors

Hygiene factors are responsible for preventing the feeling of dissatisfaction but they cannot create satisfaction. They only prevent discomfort, which would otherwise interfere with the full performance of one's work duties. On the other hand, motivators are responsible for creating a feeling of satisfaction. Their absence does not cause dissatisfaction, but allows to perform duties without special motivation, however, in order to stimulate employees to work with greater pleasure, dedication and efficiency, this is exactly the group of factors that should be paid attention to. "In such a model, there is even a possibility that the employee is both satisfied and dissatisfied at the same time - "I love my job, but I hate the salary" situation" (Rice University, 2019).

It can be assumed that by nature hygiene factors correspond to the first three basic levels of Maslow's pyramid of needs while motivators correspond to two highest levels of the pyramid. The main novelty of the theory is the conclusion about the ability of these factors to influence the employee's sense of satisfaction, and the two groups of factors do not overlap in their influence but work in complementarity. Hygiene factors and motivators are distinct. These two separate continua support the possibility that someone can be content with certain aspects of their jobs but discontent with others.

## 2. Motivation policy

Motivating factors and their practical use in an entire industry is determined by the existence of a unified employee motivation system and recruitment policy. Already in the state's strategic planning documents, as in the long-term conceptual document "A growth model for Latvia: People first", the person, the resident of Latvia, is put in the foreground, prioritizing the interests, wishes and actions of the individual. The model is based on a people-centred approach and foresees nationally coordinated actions to address employment, availability of human resources etc. issues (A growth model ..., 2005). In "Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030", among the priority directions of action, it is envisaged to increase labour force participation and make maximum use of all available human capital, as well as to develop the availability of social services by developing the care economy (Sustainable Development Strategy..., 2010). Likewise, in the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027, the direction of action "Social inclusion" has been determined emphasizing the importance of social work, aiming to improve the motivation and remuneration system, and professional competence of social workers and social service providers, as well

as to strengthen social policy planning, monitoring and evaluation systems (Latvian National Development..., 2020). The Ministry of Welfare has developed a policy planning document "Social protection and labour policy guidelines for 2021-2027", which foresees several goals, directions of action and tasks in solving problems related to social work (Socialas aizsardzibas un..., 2021).

From the policy planning documents, it follows that the general state policy foresees a unified, strategic approach, goals and tasks for the development and implementation of policies related to social work, recruiting and motivating employees, increasing the quality of work and remuneration, as well as solving problems related to the working environment such as work safety, gender inequality and disbalance, access to the latest technologies etc. However, planning documents are essentially only plans or wishes that employers consider necessary to provide to potential and existing employees, but the success of the implementation of these plans, which would characterize the actual situation, may be different.

The conducted studies (Safege Baltija, 2012; Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2020; 2021) show that, although the general planning documents define the need and specific tasks for a unified approach to the recruitment of employees and motivation system in the public sector, in practice, the results of the implementation of such plans in the social work sector are not noticeable. The understanding of the mentioned issues depends on the individual situation and opportunities. The situation in the industry has not significantly improved at least in the last ten years, and all the expected positive effects have remained only at the planning stage This significantly reduces confidence in the possibility of achieving the set goals and the effectiveness of the planned actions. thus, affecting the attractiveness of the social worker profession in the eyes of potential and existing employees, as well as the entire society.

### **3. Methodology and sample**

A quantitative approach - a survey method - was used to collect empirical data. The survey took place from February 24 to March 7, 2022. The convenience or availability method of sampling was applied. The survey questionnaire was created and distributed using the online survey tool Google Forms, and a link was sent to the social services of all municipalities with a request to forward it to all their social workers. 145 responses were received from 1304 social workers (Labklajibas ministrija, 2020). The margin of error is 7.27%. Respondents were offered to evaluate various statements that cover all groups of needs and express various characteristics of the profession. A 5-point scale was used to measure the importance of motivating factors and satisfaction with them, where 1 corresponds to the lowest rating and 5 to the highest. Mean values were used for further analysis.

A fairly even distribution of respondents was obtained across Latvia: 21% from Riga, 8% from other national cities of Latvia, 23% from Latgale, 21% Vidzeme, 21% from Kurzeme, and 6% from Zemgale. Among all respondents, only 1 was a man, that confirms that social work is a so-called "female profession", therefore data analysis by gender is practically impossible. The average age of the respondents is 45.5 years; the sample mode is 52 years, which indicates that mostly older people are employed in social work; 13% of the respondents are aged 60+, which is very close to or over the retirement age.

### **4. Importance of motivating factors**

The analysis of the situation in the social work profession indicates that such aspects related to motivating factors as educational opportunities, job stability, support, development opportunities and general social needs can be evaluated positively, while negatively - the high demands placed on employees, relatively low wages, work environment risks, workload, use of technology, gender disproportion,

employees' evaluation system, prestige of the profession and opportunities for career growth (Baltic Institute of..., 2020; 2021; Labklajibas ministrija, 2020; 2022).

The survey data shows that in general the respondents have recognized practically all motivating factors as important or very important. This means that one specific factor, which should be given the greatest attention in the motivation of social workers, cannot be singled out but practically all groups of factors must be addressed at the same time.

Table 1

**Importance of motivating factors**

Factors	Mean	Maslow's theory		Herzberg's theory	
		Factors	Mean	Factors	Mean
Social status, prestige	3.78	Self-Actualization	4.18	Motivators	4.23
Success at work	4.18				
Acknowledgement of success	4.28				
Overall performance of the organization	4.48				
Career opportunities	3.80	Esteem	4.28		
Professional growth	4.41				
Degree of responsibility	4.42				
The work process itself	4.50	Belonging-ness	4.59		
Relations with subordinates	4.41				
Relations with colleagues	4.60				
The attitude of the superior	4.76	Security	4.61	Hygiene factors	4.60
Job retention guarantee	4.48				
Working conditions	4.68				
Safe working environment	4.68				
Work - personal life reconciliation	4.51	Physiological	4.58		
The amount of the salary	4.64				

**Source: created based on the authors' calculations**

Theoretical sources most often highlight women's pursuit of stability and security, accepting lower pay or worse working conditions (Giddens, 2006). The data from this study shows a slightly different picture. Although safety and stability aspects are recognized as most important in theory, the factor of job retention guarantee, which is a direct measure of job stability, is only in the 8th place in terms of importance. However, it should be noted that there is a small difference between the ratings of all factors. So, although the stability factor is not among the first in terms of ranking, it is not far behind the most important factors in terms of mean value. Therefore, no significant inconsistency with the theory can be found here. On the other hand, remuneration and working conditions take the 3rd and 4th place in terms of importance, so it can be concluded that even if such theoretically-marked reconciliation actually takes place, it happens reluctantly, and the factors of remuneration and working conditions still have high importance in the so-called 'female professions', including social work.

The hierarchy of groups of motivating factors in social work in Latvia does not fully correspond to Maslow's theory. The study shows that the factors related to security and stability are slightly more important than physiological needs factor, which satisfaction depends on the salary. The physiological needs have fallen from the 1st to the 3rd place, which coincides with the findings of the sociology of work on the specifics of the choice of the career in 'female professions'.

Regarding Herzberg's theory, hygiene factors are the most important as it follows from the survey data. In a territorial section, the importance of hygiene factors over motivators is most pronounced by social workers in Latgale and Latvia's national cities, except for Riga but least pronounced in Riga and Kurzeme.

In general, it can be concluded that the factors associated with the lowest levels of the hierarchy of needs according to Maslow's theory and the hygiene factors which by themselves do not cause job satisfaction according to Herzberg's theory, are more important for social workers. Such situation in the profession probably exists due to the many still unresolved problems.

## 5. Satisfaction with motivating factors

The study also focused on how satisfied social workers are with the actual situation of motivating factors in their workplace. Respondents were offered to evaluate several statements about each of the factor groups of Maslow's and Herzberg's theories, respectively. In general, the data shows that social workers are more satisfied than dissatisfied. When analysed by territorial section, a lower rating than the average was shown in Riga and other national cities of Latvia but it was higher in the regions.

Table 2

**Satisfaction with motivating factors**

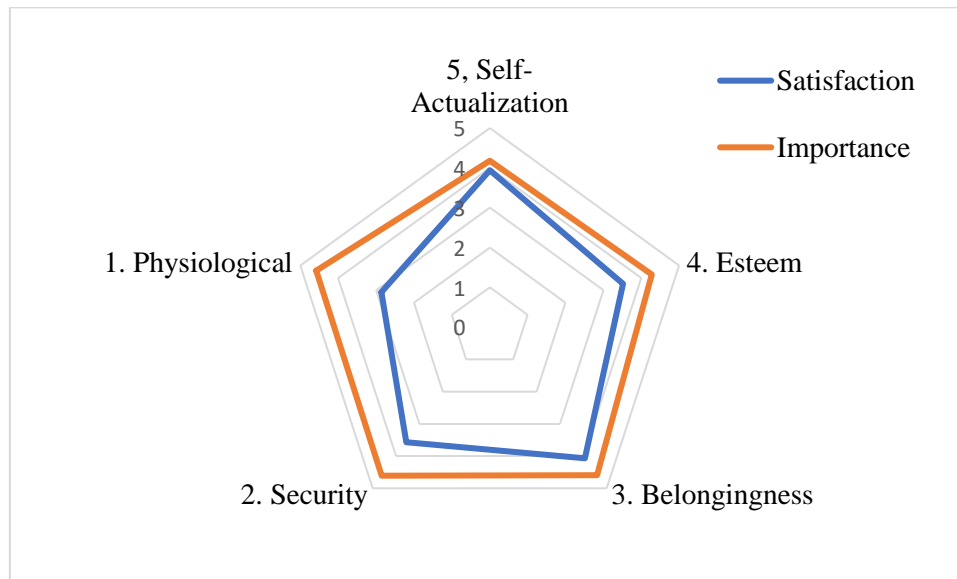
Maslow's theory		Herzberg's theory	
Factors	Mean	Factors	Mean
Self-Actualization	3.94	Motivators	3.72
Esteem	3.52		
Belongingness	4.07	Hygiene factors	3.64
Security	3.57		
Physiological	2.86		

**Source: created based on the authors' calculations**

Of all the motivating factors, the statements related to the group of physiological needs factors received the lowest ratings, especially those related to remuneration (mean values 2.59 - 2.99), and the prestige of social work profession (2.41). At the same time, the statements related to social needs factors got the highest ratings - cooperation with colleagues (4.31 - 4.53), with managers (4.14). The opportunities for professional self-actualization were highly assessed, especially, the professional skills and abilities they already possess. Social workers also are relatively satisfied with job stability and the importance of the profession in the society (mean vary from 4.04 to 4.24).

Evaluating the survey data in the context of Herzberg's theory, it can be seen that both groups of factors are assessed very similarly, with a slight predominance of motivators over hygiene factors. However, differences in data dispersion between them should be noted. If within the group of hygiene factors there are both the highest and the lowest rated factors, that is, there is a high dispersion of data (standard deviation 0.59), then in the case of motivators all results are more similar (standard deviation 0.47).

Analysing the importance of motivating factors and the level of employees' satisfaction with them, it can be seen that social workers gave higher ratings to the importance (mean 4.18 - 4.61) than to satisfaction with them (2.86 - 4.07). The highest satisfaction rating is lower than the lowest factor importance rating, which leads to the conclusion that there is an imbalance between what is important to social workers (what they expect) in their work and the real situation in the profession.



Source: created based on the authors' calculations

Fig. 2. Satisfaction and importance of motivating factor groups

Social workers express a high level of satisfaction and low importance for the groups of self-actualization and esteem factors, which make up the entire group of motivators according to Herzberg's theory. On the other hand, all groups of factors corresponding to Herzberg's hygiene factors are of high importance but the level of satisfaction with them differs. The group of physiological needs factor should be noted here with the largest discrepancy between the two assessments. Therefore, this is the issue that requires the greatest and most urgent attention. Other hygiene factors – factors related to safety and social needs – are with a high level of importance and satisfaction. Although it can be concluded that there are no significant problems with them at the moment, however, considering that they greatly affect the motivation and satisfaction of social workers, it is necessary to monitor their condition so that the situation does not become worse in the future. Keeping in mind that not all factors in these groups are assessed equally high, the focus should be maintained on improving some potentially problematic aspects, such as communication issues between managers and subordinates or provision of all necessary resources.

The results of the survey also show that social workers are dissatisfied with the general state social policy and the results of its implementation, which in itself reduces the motivation to be a part of the relevant sector, however, at the same time, the workers are a little more optimistic about the implementation of the policy in their organization.

The conditions that would affect leaving the social work profession were focused on as well. The respondents in general are not strongly inclined to change their profession. The data show that 14% are determined to remain in their profession under any circumstances, and 71% are currently not thinking about the change, however certain factors can facilitate it, while 10% of respondents have already decided to leave social work. In a territorial section, social workers in Riga and other national cities of Latvia, as well as in Zemgale, are the least likely to think about changing their profession, but in the other regions, such plans appear relatively more often. The most problematic factors that could contribute to the change of profession are related to insufficient remuneration, workload, working conditions and the prestige of the profession (50 - 60% of social workers would consider leaving, if they were offered another job with higher salary, less workload or better working conditions). But the levels of responsibility, more challenging work and development opportunities have only a minor impact on that.

Overall, social workers are more satisfied than dissatisfied with most motivating factors and their situation in the industry. The average rating of all statements is 3.68 out of the maximum possible 5 points. This is also confirmed by the relatively high ratings for "I am satisfied with my choice of profession" (3.91) and "I am happy to go to work" (3.65). However, there is undeniably room for growth and improvement here.

## Conclusions

- 1) According to the theories of Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg, a person's motivation to do work is influenced by such factors as salary, working conditions, job security, social contacts with other employees, success, growth opportunities etc.
- 2) In Latvia, the general state policy foresees a unified strategic approach, goals and tasks for the implementation and development of policies related to social work, recruiting, attracting and motivating employees.
- 3) The research results show the difference in the opinions of social workers about the importance of various motivating factors and satisfaction with them. Social workers consider to be the most important those factors related to security, belongingness and physiological needs (lower levels of Maslow's pyramid), but they are more satisfied with belongingness and self-actualization (the 3rd level and the highest level of the pyramid, respectively). Similar results are shown by comparison between Herzberg's motivators (which correspond to the highest levels of Maslow's pyramid) and hygiene factors (three lowest levels): hygiene factors are more important to social workers, but motivators have higher satisfaction scores. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is not confirmed.
- 4) Serious problems are currently observed in the group of physiological needs factor including mainly reward-related issues. The factor is rated as one of the most important and at the same time received the lowest satisfaction ratings. Therefore, this is one of the most important aspects that needs to be addressed, as the issues of pay, workload, working conditions are the ones reducing the willingness to work in the social work profession but their successful solution could be motivating for employment in the social work profession.

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