

## SOCIAL WORK IN FINLAND: AN INTEGRATED AND INDIVIDUAL APPROACH TO THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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### Abstract

The subject of the study is social work as a profession and its traditional applications in contemporary Finnish society as part of the Nordic Welfare Model. The main purpose of the research is to describe the forms of application and impact of Finnish social work on personality development, individual case decision, based on research decision making, incorporating it into the community and the overall social network. The main assumption is that the extended functions of social worker encourage the development of the personality as a significant factor for the progress of the society from a cardinal hierarchical structure in a network three-dimensional structure. Individual social work is implemented simultaneously with group inclusion to overcome disintegration. The study uses an analytical method and a comparative data from four consecutive European Quality of Life Surveys (2003-2016) and 10 significant Finnish researches strength to the topic (2018-2019). The main findings refer to the functions of the social worker in individual assistance for decision-making, community-based social services, home-based counselling and mobile social activities and its main contribution to high level of quality of life.

**Key words:** *Social work, Quality of life, Family centred model, Nordic welfare model*

### Actuality of the problem

The social work model in Finland is strongly connected with principles of fundamental human rights. The quality of life of individuals and families is the responsibility of the person, the family environment, and the government's social policy acting. This relationship is very characteristic of the social systems of the Northern Welfare Model. But in Finland have been established principles of the natural connection between people and the principle of balance of interests.

In the European Quality of Life Surveys from 2003 to 2016, it was found that Finland's social policy covers the main criteria for assessment in terms of quality of life, quality of public services and the quality of society (Eurofound 2003, 2009, 2012, and 2017). The Finnish individual support system increases the levels of sustainability of the individual solution to the social problem. The longitudinal research of Eurofound has found well-developed research activities in the social protection system since the Millennium has so far contributed significantly to improving community life. The definition used in satiety is based on the socio-cultural model of the term "quality of life" and includes psychological, physical, material and social well-being without pain, anxiety, disease-causing environment (Morris, D., 1980).

The last one survey Quality of Life in Europe (Fourth EQLS), was published in 2016 and included 28 Member states and five candidate countries: Albania, (ex) FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. The survey shows a very high risk of inequality between old members of states, Nordic countries, the new members of states, and the countries – candidates. This data leads to a very important conclusion: individual problems can be solved only if the approach to the vulnerable person is individualized. The general social problems are individual's problems actually. The community (or group) decisions have covered up fully just a small number of community members. The individual interest could be covered if it fully coincides to the community's interests. If apply the classification of Geert Hofstede we can make the conclusion that welfare model in Finland is in an individualistic dimension of the cultural spectrum of values as follow:

- Affectivity (need gratification);
- Self-orientation;

- Universalism (applying general standards);
- Achievement (judging them by what they do);
- Specificity (limiting relations to others to specific spheres).

The individualistic cultural model also addresses individual development, which in turn depends on the support that the person likes to develop its potential. Individuals and their potential are the capital of socially oriented policy.

Contrary to the above, in the mid-1980s till Millennium the universal cultural values in the new members of EU and in the countries - candidates were put on movement from collectivism to individualism. Although the country's social policy is self-contained and is formed on the basis of national statistics and data from regional and local studies on the needs of society, the Member States join the European Union by means of agreements on the convergence of policy principles in the different sectors. Finland has been an EU member country since 1 January 1995, but at that moment there are not profound differences in social policy approach between Finland and the social policy principles in the EU. In the same time, the social policy acting stayed focus individualizing the cares. At the same time, the Member States, and the states-candidates in a different stage of negotiations are subjects to the cohesion policy of the European Union. This implies certain common impetus of social responsibility of state bodies to the population.

One of the best examples of cohesion policy in the EU is the Finnish one. In addition: the individualized social services were included in legislative acts in Finland. A principle of Finnish social policy is to enabling citizens to develop a balance between family life, personal commitments and working time has become central to the social policy debate. The traditional functions of the social workers in Finland are prevention, reduction and removal of individual's and communities' welfare and social problems. After Millennium the policy development strongly include the aspects and criteria of quality of life, and the main focus is the ration between family life conditions and professional development.

On this basis, we assume that the verbiage between the individualization of social work and the quality of life is straightforward.

### Method of analysis

The data were used in this research were specially selected by the four of the reported European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) from 2003 until 2016. The data of Finnish social work and its connection with quality of life were analyzed as following criteria: income/living standards, deprivation/subjective well-being, health/psychological wellbeing, access to social services/subjective evaluation of social services. In the contingent of the research were included the findings of 12 scientific and popular-scientific research which described the categories "quality of life" and "social work services". One of the methods of the research is content analysis in which were included texts and data from researches and analysis in period 2003 - 2018. The second method is the functional-value analysis with the following aim and tasks:

- The two research objects - social work and quality of life in Finland, are seen as a complex of interrelated functions
- Examples of an optimal solution for performing functions at the lowest possible cost (efficacy)
- Alternative options are proposed for a solution in the other EU Member States or candidate countries
- Indicate and analyze examples and causes of inefficiency in solving problems.

The criterions which were used during collecting data are: income per capita, employment, number of family members in employment, general levels of life satisfaction and happiness, work-life balance, satisfaction of family life, education and health.

## Results of the Research

### A) Income, living standards and deprivation

*Table 1: Comparison between Finland and EU by criterion Household Income per Capita\**

Criterion				Finland		EU members 25	
<i>Household Income per Capita</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Average (euro)</i>		2003	2016	2003	2016
				1147	2104	911	1558

\*The data were extracted from <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/> and [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_di04&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_di04&lang=en) [24/05/2019]

For fifteen years, the Finnish economy not only managed to emerge from the deep crisis in 2008-2011 but managed to reap the recession. Finnish society improved its position on the European market and developed good contacts with Asian countries. Of course, the well-trained staffs are sure to contribute to this. The Finnish education system is one of the most adequate in terms of the future. But the most specific is that educational services are very closely linked to social services through the Social Welfare Act and the Act on the Support of the Functional Capacity of the Older Population and on Social and Health Services for Older Persons. The unemployed in Finland receive state support that provides them with a decent existence, but also social work through which discouraged job seekers can restore their working habits and participate in creative and group activities.

*Table 2: Number of household members employed with payment\**

Number of employed member of household	Percentage	
	2003	2016
<i>None</i>	26	20
<i>One</i>	39	43
<i>Two</i>	33	35
<i>Three and more</i>	3	3

\*The data were collected from Eurofound' fourth Quality of life survey, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys> [24/05/2019]

\*In the EQLS was included average 1060 Finnish citizen per each research

Unemployed people in Finland for 2018 who are registered in employment offices are 8.8% under average for the European Union. If no one works in the family, social services take action to prevent the risk of developing depressive states and a state of despondency and discouragement. The actions of social workers are also related to the prevention of the risk of poverty and deprivation. Poverty in a welfare state like Finland is understood to be relative poverty, mainly as a result of absolute poverty in developing countries. Absolute poverty refers to malnutrition, hunger, and disability in meeting basic biological needs. Again, relative poverty is defined as an impossibility to achieve a common standard of living or a decent standard of living in society due to lack of economic resources. What is considered a minimum standard required for a decent pension varies between different societies and at different times. The minimum standard of living usually follows the average standard of living in society.

Table 3 Average level of living standards in Finland\*

Standard of living	Percentage of high estimation	
	2003 year	2016 year
<i>Health and health cares</i>	73	76
<i>Education and skills</i>	79	83
<i>Employment and working conditions</i>	75	78
<i>Work-life balance</i>	79	83
<i>Deprivation</i>	3	3

\* The data were collected from Eurofound' fourth Quality of life survey, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys> [24/05/2019]

\*In the EQLS was included average 1060 Finnish citizen per each research

There are factors that cause a return to obsolete approaches in the economy. Such a factor is the age change in the structure of the population in Finland. On the other hand, globalization of the economy and technological development change the sphere of social security and cause older citizens to adapt their qualities to the demanding social environment. Global economic development is hard to predict. The social environment is multidimensional and the importance of national borders is diminishing. European integration is deepening and expanding, people's mobility across borders is growing and multiculturalism is growing. The impacts cover the entire society of Finland. To keep the social model in Finland, social and health services, pensions and other social security should be able to offer all the good conditions even if the pressure on public finances is increased.

#### B) Subjective Well-Being

According to the principles of Finnish social policy, a socially sustainable society must treat all members of society fairly and equally, strengthen inclusion and community, support health and ability to function. Resilience of individuals ensures the necessary security of society. In Finnish society, resilience is a cultural and social value. Fair equity, mental and material well-being, gender equality and economic, social and environmental sustainability contribute to a balanced development of society. Social sustainability requires effective social protection, which also enables people to cope with risky situations in life. Everyone has the right to social well-being, participation and the best possible health. Economic development creates the prerequisites for the functioning of social society, and social security, on the other hand, strengthens the balance between society and the economy. Properly assessed social security is the power of society. Lifestyle satisfaction correlates with levels of satisfaction with public services. As can be seen from the table, the average satisfaction of Finns with public services is almost 73%, and satisfaction with private and family life is 77%.

Table 4: Satisfaction of the education\*

Criterion		Finland		EU members	
<i>Satisfaction of the education system</i>	Year	2003	2016	2003	2016
	%	70	79	63	67

\*The data were collected from Eurofound 2017 – EQLS'2016, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys> [24/05/2019]

\*In the EQLS was included average 1060 Finnish citizen per each research

Table 5: Satisfaction of the personal health and cares\*

Criterion		Finland		EU members	
<i>Satisfaction of the personal health and cares</i>	Year	2003	2016	2003	2016
	%	76	78	61	58

\* The data were collected from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) <https://www.oecd.org/statistics/Better-Life-Initiative-country-note-Finland.pdf> [24/05/2019]

Table 6 Satisfaction of family life, friendship, thrust in people\*

Criterion		Finland		EU members	
<i>Satisfaction of the family life</i>	Year	2003	2016	2003	2016
	%	76	78	61	58
<i>Friendship</i>	%	72	74	58	54
<i>Thrust in people</i>		71	73	58	52

\*The data were collected from Eurofound 2003 EQLS and Eurofound 2016 EQL, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys> [24/05/2019]

In Finland, the reconciliation and balance between time spent on work and family and social life commitments is the subject of family law and affects the activities of public services such as day care and public health. The research quoted in the study establishes links between measures of free expression at work and labour productivity, and hence of job satisfaction. On the other hand, well-paid employees who remain engaged in the same workplace contribute to saving the employer's ongoing staff turnover and the need to replace the workforce. Employers honour their engaged and loyal employees by providing them with conditions of freedom and creative spirit. Improving reconciliation between work and life can be achieved, for example, as part of a wider program of well-being, diversity or work capacity development. Attitudes towards work and social life as part of employee welfare care bring satisfaction and a sense of success. The balance between work and life creates in man a sense of complete existence and usefulness.

Therefore, respect for privacy contributes to the job and profitability of the workplace thanks to the well-being of its employees. Social and psychological work in the workplace supports these employers' measures.

#### C) Quality of social and health services

Table 7 Quality of social and health services\*

Subjective assessment by criteria (percentage distribution of good and very good level satisfaction estimates)	2003	2016
<i>Health services</i>	73	74
<i>Social services</i>	68	70
<i>Satisfaction of contact with social worker</i>	81	74
<i>Subjective feeling of Happiness</i>	81	74
<i>optimistic feelings for the future</i>	44	80
<i>Thrust in representatives of public services</i>	71	73
<i>Childcare services</i>	76	79
<i>Long-term cares</i>	67	67
<i>Social housing</i>	69	71
<i>State pension system</i>	70	71

\*The data were collected from Eurofound 2003; 2016 - EQLS 2003 and EQLS 2016

Good quality of social care means that the client gets the right service at the right time and in the right place. Good quality of service is based on the best available information or evidence that generates wealth for citizens and seeks to maximize health and well-being and minimize risks. Quality is good, within the limits of its financial resources, according to requirements and expectations. Key elements in the quality of social and health care are as follow. Customer-orientation: means respect for the individual and the right to self-determination as a point of departure for the provision of services. Customer's position has entered into force (the 1992 Patients' Rights Act, the Status and Rights of the Customer for Social Assistance Act 2000). Accessibility and accessibility of services: means that the citizen receives services within a reasonable time, regardless of the place of residence, socio-economic

status, gender or ethnic origin. Fairness means that customers in a similar situation get equal treatment or service. Emergency care and services should be provided to all without undue delay. High level of expertise: Professional competence includes the skills needed for self-service, human encounter skills, values and ethics.

*Table 8 Household status by gender in age 18-34 and use of social services\**

Types of family status	Male	Female
<i>Living alone</i>	39	29
<i>Member of couple</i>	26	25
<i>Member of couple with children</i>	18	26
<i>Lone parent</i>	3	19
<i>Living with parents without partner</i>	2	2
<i>Group home / Fostering</i>	3	3

\*The data were collected from Statistics in Finland, <https://www.stat.fi> [24/05/2019]

\*The data were extracted from 1552 responded Finnish citizen  
[https://www.stat.fi/keruu/haastattelijat\\_en.html#?open](https://www.stat.fi/keruu/haastattelijat_en.html#?open)

Social work in Finland is aimed not only at families with children but also on young people who live alone and experience loneliness or are in a state of depression and social phobia. Contributing to social work are also youths who raise their children alone. Support for parents who raise their own children is aimed at preventing the risk of poverty or disturbing the balance between the workplace and the care of the home and children. All citizens in social housing or family-type groupings are the subject of social work. The main objectives are prevention of risky behavior, assistance in seeking a suitable occupation, workplace and taking care of the home.

#### D) Functions of social services and social work

The data used in this sector were collected from twelve researches and analysis focused exactly over functions of the Finnish social services and social workers - Antikainen, M., Hämäläinen, J., & Pölkki, P. (2007); Anttonen, A., J. Sipilä (1996); Kalland, M.; J. Sinkkonen (2001); Anttonen, A., J. Baldock, J. Sipilä (Ed.) (2003); Kröger, T. (2011); Gellin, M. (2018); Huybrechts, B.(2012); Silvasti T., J. Karjalainen (2014); Närhi, K., A.L. Matthiesk (2018); Tapola-Haapala, M., S. Karvinen-Niinikoski (2018); Nummela O., S. Juujärvi, T. Sinervo (2019); Timonen-Kallio, E., J. Hämäläinen (2019), Eurofund (2017) – EQLS, National institute for health and welfare/ Center for gender equality information (2019). The social services for child protection and all other function are Municipalities' responsibility. Types of social services under the Social Welfare Act in Finland include: social work and social guidance, social rehabilitation, family work, home services and home care, Informal care support, housing services, services in institutions, services supporting mobility, mental health and substance abuse services, child guidance and family counselling, supervision of contact sessions between parents and children.

Municipal social services provided on the basis of special legislation include social services for people with disabilities, long-term care for people with mental retardation and mental illness, risk prevention, child protection from neglect and abandonment, therapeutic support activities, mediation in relation to detention of children and access rights, family counseling and support for care taken by relatives.



*Table 9 Functions and duties of social workers in social services in Finland\**

Functions	Approximately time in monthly work schedule (hours)
<i>Support people in coping with everyday life</i>	32
<i>Prevent social exclusion and to promote inclusion</i>	24
<i>Safeguard the balanced development and wellbeing of children</i>	18
<i>Respond to need for support in acute crises</i>	17
<i>Respond to need for support caused by interpersonal and domestic violence or other forms of violence and abuse</i>	16
<i>Provide housing-related support</i>	15
<i>Give financial support</i>	15
<i>Support family and friends of those in need for support</i>	13
<i>Respond to other need for support relating to physical, psychological, social or cognitive functional capacity</i>	10
<i>Respond to need for support caused by alcohol or drug abuse, mental problems or other illness or disability or ageing</i>	8
Duties	Approximately time in monthly work schedule (hours)
<i>Individual support to the client (consultation, encourage, help with decision making and others)</i>	73
<i>Visits to the client's home/work place/voluntary place</i>	52
<i>Creating, documenting by case</i>	21
<i>Group social work</i>	12
<i>Cooperation with other specialists</i>	10

\* N=168 working hours per month (The Working Hours Act in Finland)

*Table 10 Daily hours in caring for children (women \*)*

Woman status	2003 year	2006 year
<i>Woman with employment with payment</i>	4	3
<i>Women without employment with payment</i>	12	12

\* Social workers are usually women in 80% of working places in social protection for children and 70 % in other social work occupation: <https://thl.fi/en/web/gender-equality/gender-equality-in-finland/work> [24/05/2019]

*Table 11 Support by family/social worker (other specialist)\**

Type of case need support	Family support	Social worker	Nobody
<i>Case with depress and low feeling</i>	40	57	3
<i>Case of emergency</i>	58	37	5

\*The data were collected from Eurofound, 2017- EQLS'2016.

The social system in Finland is based on the responsibility of government to citizens and their individual problems. The social system is closely linked to educational and healthcare systems. The future of social policy is based on the traditional interpersonal and family-oriented approach reflected in the document "Socially Sustainable Finland 2020". The Sustainable Society Strategy describes the vision and course for achieving a socially sustainable society that equitably treats all members of society. It is necessary to strengthen the participation and the sense of community as well as support for health and functional capacity and security. The Parliament in Finland bears all responsibility for the legislation. Local authorities are responsible for organizing health and social services for all residents of municipalities. There are three types of unemployment benefits: income support, basic help and support to the labor market. Most employees are covered by the unemployment fund and have the right to income allowance. The work places in social services deal with elderly home cares, children's home

cares, nursery cares, health care at school, hospital and substance abuse rehabilitation center. The clients of social services can be in all ages, families and individuals who need help with disease, unemployment, family circumstances, and temporary problems. The roles of the social worker are to identify of the client's problem to judge the client's independent coping, and to organize the support action. The responsibility of the client's support plan is to planning to implement and to assess.

### Discussion of the results

#### A) Individual problems – individual solutions

In the social work system, a client who experiences a mental, psychological, or social problem is required to be helped to take action. Adequate actions are characterized by two attributes - simple solving of the problem and taking action to prevent recurrence. Everyone needs the means to survive. In the economy of monetarism, all activities are carried out by using money (monetary resources), meaning that the citizen needs money (money resources) to buy the goods that are needed to satisfy his basic needs.

The main problem of well-being occurs when individuals cannot keep their income in the future. The Finnish social system overcomes and maintains its sustainability. Of course, the possibilities of preserving income and social benefits must be balanced between work and social life. The need for "storage" will depend on the probability of not having enough income, goods or services to meet the needs of individual citizens in the future. This "storage" problem in Finland is solved in many different ways, including simply storing goods or money (saving), extending contracts to provide a product sought, opening up the labor market, or promoting business initiatives within the family or through the use of capital market instruments, including insurance and investment.

People facing the challenge of meeting their basic food and shelter needs now and in the future can meet their needs through market activities (product market, labor market and capital market) or relying on their families (or other social networks). Thus, Finland's social system has prevented massive shocks related to the risk of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion.

Much of the distribution of well-being in developed European economies occurs in families - outside the market and, accordingly, without a cash intermediary. In Finland, the family-type business, which is based in international markets, is widely distributed, but is run by families, and the state regulates it.

In this sense, the understanding of the role of public authorities in developing and implementing social policy is shaped by a family-based approach, but taking into account the opportunities that individuals have. This means that whatever combination of social policies is chosen, it is obliged to interfere and interact with these basic opportunities for people. In Finnish society, the support model is entirely based on family and personality.

#### B) The Family Approach of Social work in Finland (2015-2020)

The Finnish social development approach aims to help people acquire knowledge and skills that lead to sustainable work and effective support for job preservation. On the other hand, the goal of the approach is to maintain a balance between the time spent on the profession and the time spent on family, friends and side activities (hobbies, sports, recreation). The goal of this type of social policy is to achieve:

- Simple, flexible and efficient system to meet individual needs;
- More beneficiaries switch to sustainable paid work;
- Fewer families and households, where no family member is paid;
- More beneficiaries receive income from part-time work and more beneficiaries increase the amount they can earn;
- Every family is able to satisfy their basic needs;
- People have the opportunity to participate more actively in their communities.



Finnish social work is organized to ensure that social services and support are sufficient to cover basic needs (material, but also mental and social), while providing a springboard for the future development of the citizen in the profession he has chosen. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health works with the local administration to identify people's strengths and needs, adapt services such as internships and individual courses, and help people move to work with constant help. The system is simpler and more responsive than most EU member states, so people get what they need. Communities work more closely with groups in their communities and regions to develop opportunities and jobs.

C) Problems with the existing quality of life inequality in European Union, which challenge the social work in Finland

Child poverty still is a significant problem. In 2018, "Pelastakaa Lapset ry" reports that 14.7% of children are at risk of poverty and deprivation. The weakest and most endangered are single-parent households, which currently receive 75% of their income compared to income in families with two parents. Other serious complex problem is addiction on substances - the 15 to 17 age group are the most vulnerable, with many non-Finnish families in this category. The poverty can be described as a problem of ethnic minorities, according to "Terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus" (THL) data from 2018. Gambling addiction diffused among the poorer sections of the society (single men and women over the age of 60) are increasingly dependent on gambling. Methamphetamine addiction among youth is part of the problem.

Loneliness among older people over 65 is a serious problem to be solved. One of Milka Abot-Okelo's "Loneliness Among Elderly People in Finnish Health Care Institutions" (2014), which analyses over 400 other studies on the same theme in various aspects, suggests that loneliness is also leading to poor functional limitations, depression, illness, lack of contact with family members / significant others, and death.

### Conclusions

1. Social work professionals have made a significant contribution to transforming society from a cardinal hierarchical structure into a network, flexible, information-savvy structure - more adaptable, fairer, and self-regulating.
2. The extended functions of social workers and their participation in social work innovation teams are a very important factor in the implementation, evaluation and sustainability of the projects that civil organizations work on. Social workers drive for the innovation of the sector of social services.
3. As social workers develop their problem solving plans together with their clients, the results are sustainable.
4. The family-oriented model supports family resilience and plays a role in preventing family breakdown.
5. The individual approach to the customer's problem ensures the quality of life of the clients their families. It gives them an opportunity to participate in social and professional life.

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