

The Role of Social Security and Appreciative Inquiry in the Work of a Social Service Manager

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Abstract

The article focuses on the importance of social security and appreciative inquiry in the work of social service managers, with particular emphasis on the role of social workers. The first part of the article contains a theoretical section describing issues related to social security and presenting the basic assumptions of appreciative inquiry. The second part is devoted to the presentation of the methodological assumptions of the study, while the third part discusses the research findings and conclusions from a quantitative study conducted among employees of the Social Services Centre in Tarnów in 2024. The aim of the article is to examine the relationship between the role of social service managers and the use of appreciative inquiry as a tool to support work efficiency and social security. The research results indicate that the appreciative approach supports managers in effectively managing teams and implementing changes. The study has identified that the most significant roles of appreciative inquiry in the work of social service managers include boosting self-esteem by focusing on an individual's strengths, determining steps that the individual can take to achieve their set goals, and developing coping skills to deal with obstacles that may arise during the implementation of these goals. The article presents the concept of appreciative inquiry as a management tool and a means of creating positive change in the context of social services. It highlights the role of social service managers in shaping organisational reality through dialogue and collaboration, as well as the importance of positive emotions and visions of the future in the organisational transformation of the social services sector. The results of the study have practical implications and can contribute to the improvement of social service quality, ultimately raising the standard of living in various social contexts. The article also presents recommendations for implementing a monitoring and evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of actions taken by social service managers to enhance social security.

Key words

management, social security, appreciative inquiry, appreciative discourse, social work, social policy.

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Introduction

The article analyzes two key issues related to management in social services: the importance of social security and the application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This topic is crucial because ensuring social security and effectively managing staff support societal development and the effectiveness of social assistance. The article is based on a literature review and describes the theory of Appreciative Inquiry, with particular emphasis on its application in team management and organizational transformation in the social services sector. To achieve this goal, the 4-D model and key principles of the method are presented and discussed. The article also discusses definitional aspects related to social security which include ensuring basic living conditions, protection from social exclusion, and risks such as unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. The paper emphasizes that ensuring social security is closely related to the tasks of social workers as managers, who manage staff and motivate them to work effectively.

The main research question presented in the article is how social security and appreciative dialogue play a role in the work of social service managers. In this context, social security is understood as a state free from threats, and Appreciative Inquiry is seen as a perspective that allows the identification of strengths, the development of vision, and the implementation of positive changes in the work of social service managers.

The research gap identified in the article concerns the lack of empirical analysis on the role of Appreciative Inquiry in the work of social service managers. Key aspects of this research gap include: the lack of detailed studies on the application of Appreciative Inquiry in social service management, the shortage of empirical data on the impact of the appreciative approach on employee engagement, and limited knowledge about the specific needs of local communities in the context of social service management.

The authors focused on addressing the above-mentioned gap by conducting research in a local context (Tarnow), considering the specific challenges faced by social service managers. The article presents, among other things, the research findings concerning the relationship between the use of Appreciative Inquiry and the self-esteem and motivation of social service employees.

The studies presented emphasize that they were conducted only in Tarnow, which limits the generalizability of the results to other cities or regions. The local social, economic, and cultural context may significantly influence respondents' answers, meaning there is a need for similar studies and analyses in other locations. Therefore, the research presented in the article can serve as a basis for future analyses regarding the implementation of Appreciative Inquiry in the social services sector.

The structure of the article includes a literature review and theoretical presentation regarding the Appreciative Inquiry and social security, presentation of methodological assumptions, presentation of research results, presentation of discussions and conclusions with recommendations.

1. Literature Review

1.1. *The Role of Social Security in the Work of Social Service Managers*

The primary factor for individuals in need of help and support, especially in life-threatening situations, is ensuring their social security (Goryń, 2020). According to Domański (2017), social security refers to “the protection of the existential foundations of people's lives, ensuring the ability to meet individual material and spiritual needs, the realization of life aspirations by creating conditions for work and education, health protection, and retirement guarantees.” The *PWN Encyclopedia* defines it as “real guarantees for meeting the social needs of individuals and families, a state of freedom from scarcity or a lowered standard of living caused mainly by so-called social risks (e.g., loss of the ability to earn, illness, disability, old age, increased family burdens, helplessness) or other random events” (Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN, 2005,). Meanwhile, Rysz-Kowalczyk (2002) states it is “a state of freedom from threats, the consequence of which is the lack or insufficiency of means of livelihood”.

In this understanding, social security appears to be strongly correlated with various types of threats (Gierszewski, 2018). This is because its goal is to ensure survival, well-being, and sustainable development within society, as well as to provide a proper standard of living for individuals, families, and social groups, and to safeguard against social exclusion (Oliwkiewicz, 2023). It is achievable in areas such as unemployment, lack of resources to maintain housing, poverty, homelessness, and addiction (Łubiński, 2018). For this reason, social security is a state of freedom from threats that condition the lack of means of subsistence and housing in various life circumstances.

Ensuring social security, which is associated with the role of the social worker in managing staff, requires effective use of Appreciative Inquiry. In this context, it becomes important to define the connection between the social worker's role as a manager and the need for conducting appreciative dialogue to ensure the aforementioned social security. In other words, for the social worker to effectively manage the staff and support those in need, it becomes crucial to skillfully appreciate—i.e., an appreciative dialogue that helps social workers engage more effectively in their work and better support their clients. Without this, appropriate management and the implementation of social tasks might be less effective. The appreciative inquiry in management is becoming increasingly popular because it allows building on positive experiences and engaging employees in transformational processes.

For a social worker as a manager of social services, appreciative dialogue is also connected to motivational interviewing, which appears as the primary and most determining tool of action. In social work, it is interpreted as "an innovative approach (...) promoting a model of using social assistance that strengthens the client's internal motivation to act and repeat efforts to find a way out of difficult situations" (Jaraczewska & Krasiejko, 2012, p. 39). The understanding of motivational dialogue in social work takes on at least three meanings: "a collaborative style of conversation aimed at strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change" (Miller & Rollnick, 2014, p. 32), "a person-centered way of helping in relation to the common problem of ambivalence towards change" (Miller & Rollnick, 2014, p. 44), and "a collaborative, goal-oriented way of communication, focusing particularly on the language of change" (Miller & Rollnick, 2014, p. 54).

Managing a team of employees requires proper appreciation of each professional group. Effective motivation translates into a positive attitude toward work, which ensures that employees perform their duties diligently and carefully (Kowalczyk & Białas, 2020). Every manager should develop a method of motivating employees so that they treat their work not only as a source of livelihood but also find satisfaction in it. Proper handling of the team helps unlock their potential, enabling them to demonstrate creativity, innovation, and commitment to the tasks at hand. It is, therefore, the task of the manager, leader, or director of an institution to create conditions based on their knowledge that will effectively motivate the team to work (Mazur, 2013, p. 156).

1.1. The importance and application of Appreciative Inquiry in the work of a social service manager

Appreciative discourse plays a central role in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology, which was developed in the 1980s by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva. In understanding this concept, it is crucial to recognize two meanings. First, Appreciative understood as the act of recognizing the best in people or the surrounding world, finding confirmation of past and present strengths, bringing out successes and potentials. Second, Inquiry identified with exploration, discovery, asking questions, being open to seeing potentials and opportunities (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, pp. 156-182). Thus, AI can be considered a kind of methodological stance based on a specific approach to studying and changing organizations, going far beyond the technique or tool itself, and representing a set of beliefs and practices focusing on the positive aspects, opportunities and strengths of organizations.

In simple terms, an appreciative approach can be described as "a method of researching and reflecting on change in social systems (groups, organizations, communities) that advocates collective insights into what works best in order to envision how things could be, in order to collectively design

a desired future state that proves so irresistible that no encouragement, coercion or persuasion is needed for the planned changes to occur” (Bushe, 2013, pp. 41-44).

The way to positively channel an organization's energy to meet new challenges is to build on recognition and celebration of its key strengths and capabilities. Appreciative Inquiry is a unique approach that views “the glass as half full, not half empty” (Lewis & Van Tiem, 2004).

A key element of AI is an organization's “positive core” (Positive Core), which consists of, among other things, future and current achievements, strategic capabilities, technical and financial assets, breakthrough innovations, elevated thoughts, the collective wisdom of people, best business practices, leadership capabilities, cultivated values and traditions, relational resources, collective community spirit, positive emotions, social capital and visions of a positive future, and even customer loyalty and business partnerships (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, pp. 8-9).

Positive transformation within AI is based on the 4-D model, which describes the process of making organizational changes based on the positive aspects and strengths of the organization. The cycle consists of the following phases:

- Discovery- the first step is to mobilize the entire organizational system and involve all members of the organization in identifying the best experiences, successes and strengths. At this stage, participants in the process discover what works well and what constitutes the positive core of their organization;
- Dream- participants spin a vision about the organization's ideal future, imagining how the discovered potential (the discovery occurred in the Discovery phase) can lead to the development of the organization's strengths and its growth;
- Design- concrete action plans are created that will make it possible to transform the vision (created in the Dream phase) into reality. At this stage, work takes place on designing new organizational systems and structures that will make possible what has so far been in the realm of dreams;
- Destiny- the final step of the process is the realization of the vision, i.e. the implementation of the designed changes, their consolidation and the creation of a new dimension of the organization based on them, which is open to development and the achievement of positive results (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16).

The positive core of an organization is thus constructed through all phases of the 4-D cycle. In the Discovery phase, it is Discovered, Dream- Enlisted, Design- Designed, Destiny- Implemented (Cooperrider & Whitney & Stavros, 2008, pp. 34-35).

At the core of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) philosophy are five key principles that are designed to help an organization and its leaders achieve lasting, sustainable and positive change. Through these tenets, an organization has the opportunity to transform, increase employee engagement and create a positive and effective work culture (Cooperrider & Whitney & Stavros, 2008, p. 8).

The first principle of constructivism (The Constructionist Principle) assumes that social and organizational realities are interconnected and created through interaction and conversation. How we speak about an organization impacts its reality, meaning that positive conversations construct a positive future. Being a leader of good change is inherently linked to the art of analyzing the organization and understanding it as a living, human construct (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 8). This principle relates to the social constructivism theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, which explains how social reality is constructed through continuous exchange of interactions, communication, and the shared meanings individuals assign to their experiences. According to this theory, reality does not exist objectively and independently of humans, but is created through social and cultural processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 43-61). According to this principle, a social services manager becomes, in a sense, a leader of good change, who, by engaging in dialogue with the team and stakeholders, shapes the organization's reality. Thus, it is created through the process of interaction, which positively impacts support for those in need.

The second principle, the Principle of Simultaneity, states that change begins with a question, which serves as the foundation for what we learn. The question plays a key role in Appreciative Inquiry (AI), as it leads to contemplation and reflection, which drive change. The process of asking questions is, therefore, part of the change process (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 9). In the context of a social services manager's work, the process of asking questions is particularly important. Properly asked questions increase the chances of extracting more information, leading to a deeper diagnosis and ultimately resulting in change.

The third principle, the Poetic Principle, refers to the metaphor of the organization as an "open book." The relationship between poetry and the organization is based on the possibility of continuous reinterpretation and rediscovery, with the present and future serving as sources of inexhaustible knowledge and inspiration. The founders of the principles state that in this case, the perspective is broad and can focus on the nature of alienation or the joy of being part of a community within the organization (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 9). Thanks to this principle, a social services manager can create an organization open to change, support an atmosphere of free development, and strengthen a sense of belonging and community.

The fourth principle, the Anticipatory Principle, acknowledges that actions are shaped by images of the future, and if these images are positive, they motivate achieving the desired outcomes. Organizations exist because the people who lead and maintain them share a common vision of what the organization is, how it will function, what it will achieve, and what it will become (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 9). In the work of a social services manager, this principle also finds reflection, as visions of the organization's future help shape strategic goals in the social care sector. Guided by a positive vision of the future, the manager inspires the team, supports them in realizing ambitious goals, and ultimately contributes to improving the quality of life in the community.

The fifth principle, the Positive Principle, considered the most concrete, emphasizes that positive emotions and engagement are the "driving force" behind long-lasting and effective changes. Focusing on positive aspects, such as hope, inspiration, and joy, leads to greater creativity and effectiveness in achieving intended goals (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, pp. 9-10). In the work of a social services manager, applying this principle also seems obvious. By promoting a culture based on positive emotions, the manager can inspire employees to innovate and achieve better results in working with those in need.

These principles were expanded upon in the book *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom. The authors introduced three additional principles that, in their view, help better understand AI and the potential application of this approach in various contexts and communities. The principles highlighted by the researchers are outlined below.

The Wholeness Principle, which encompasses the "experience of wholeness," focusing holistically on the system and emphasizing the importance of collaboration and integration of all members of the organizational community in the change process (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 66). In the work of a social services manager, having a comprehensive view of the situation and ensuring the coherence of actions is crucial. A leader, guided by this principle, ensures that each team member feels like an integral part of the organization and has an influence on its development. This also translates into achieving the shared goals of the organization and complementary actions aimed at improving social services.

The Enactment Principle, according to which change occurs by living in the present through the vision of what we desire in the future. The authors refer to M. Gandhi's statement: "Be the change you wish to see." In other words, change begins when members of the organization start acting in alignment with the new vision or values they wish to implement (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 68). A social services manager implementing a new organizational vision should not only set goals but also take actions aligned with the values they want to make central in their work.

The Free-Choice Principle, which asserts that organizations develop when their members have broad freedom of choice. Creating a democratic work environment involves treating people as

volunteers, as voluntary participation and the freedom to choose the mode of action lead to increased responsibility and individual engagement (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 71). In the context of a social services manager's work, this principle can be applied when the leader allows employees to choose their methods of work. The awareness of this choice increases initiative, strengthens engagement, and supports the effectiveness of social support efforts.

These principles can be applied in various organizations, not only in business but also in healthcare, public administration, the social services sector (as proposed above), and education. One example in the education field is the use of AI as a pedagogical tool to support development and change in the context of business schools (Grandy & Holton, 2010). Another example, from a more niche application of AI principles, can be found in the work of researcher and practitioner Maureen Sullivan, who focuses on implementing Appreciative Inquiry principles to create a positive organizational culture in library environments (Sullivan, 2004). To adapt the philosophy of AI to the specific context of libraries, M. Sullivan identified and described eight principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to adjust D. Cooperrider's assumptions to her research contexts (Sullivan, 2004).

Another example could be the use of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a tool for conducting interviews in field research, carried out by Sarah Michael, which focused on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa. According to the researcher, interview participants, who were NGO directors, were more likely to provide detailed and valuable information about organizational activities and their own work when the appreciative approach was applied (Michael, 2005).

Another example of using the appreciative approach comes from studies conducted by Italian researchers, including those at the University of Padua. Their work examined the application of AI among employees of care homes. The research revealed that the appreciative approach had a positive impact on work well-being, task management, and interpersonal relationships. As a result, healthcare services were improved, and the quality of services provided was enhanced, including in a social dimension (Dal Corso et al., 2021). In this article, the authors refer to the assertions made by Chris Laszlo and colleagues (Dal Corso et al., 2021), emphasizing that global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, can be catalysts for positive transformation within organizations. By implementing positive appreciation, organizations can not only overcome crises and strengthen their market position but also shift towards more sustainable and socially responsible practices (Laszlo, Cooperrider, & Fry, 2020).

Social security and appreciative discourse are closely linked in the work of a social services manager. Social security refers to providing stable working conditions and support to employees, which is crucial for their well-being. In contrast, appreciative inquiry promotes a positive management approach, focusing on team strengths. A manager applying AI strengthens employee engagement and motivation, which, combined with social security, creates an environment conducive to effectiveness and job satisfaction. Integrating these two approaches helps build trust, improve relationships, and foster a positive organizational culture, which is essential in the social services sector.

Appreciative discourse is grounded in positive psychology, especially in the context of organizational change management. This subdiscipline was developed by Martin Seligman, who formulated its key principles in the late 1990s. "Positive psychology studies subjective experiences (such as happiness, pleasure, gratification, fulfillment, well-being), positive individual traits (such as character, talent, interests, values), and positive institutions (such as family, school, business, community, society), which enable the existence of positive traits and experiences" (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). Instead of focusing solely on treating disorders and negative emotions, positive psychology examines what makes individuals and communities thrive and grow. As a result, positive psychology addresses areas directly related to appreciation and recognition, such as research on positive emotions, character strengths, positive deviations, and positive social relationships (Lewis et al., 2016). Positive emotions, which form the foundation of positive psychology, also impact resilience and effective functioning (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2016). In the context of social services

management, where supporting vulnerable groups is often a priority, an approach based on triggering positive emotions can lead to better outcomes in providing social support. This is also an important aspect of skillfully appreciating positive deviations—behaviors that deviate from widely accepted social norms, leading to better results when working with individuals in need of support.

The work of a social services manager is also linked to Appreciative Leadership, defined as "the relational ability to mobilize creativity and potential and the skill to translate this into positive energy that strengthens trust, brings energy, enthusiasm, and enhances performance" (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Rader, 2010). This definition assumes the existence of four key ideas: first, appreciative leadership practices are relational; second, they are positive and affirm life; third, such leadership has the ability to transform potential into positive results; and fourth, it contributes to change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2016). Referring to this, it can be stated that appreciative leadership also plays an important role in the work of a social services manager, who leads teams in challenging conditions, often dealing with limited human resources and emotional burdens. This makes it essential for social services managers to focus on appreciating employees' strengths and building on them to achieve success in the social sector.

In creating positive change, the strength of the entire organization working together towards sustainable solutions in the face of global challenges is essential (Sulkowski, Kolasinska-Morawska, Morawski & Seliga, 2021). "The best qualities of human systems are most naturally revealed... when people collectively experience the whole of their system, when strength amplifies strength, in configurations of appropriate and engaged stakeholders—both internal and external" (Cooperrider & McQuaid, 2012). In this context, the social services manager plays a key role, as in addition to coordinating actions within the organization, they must also ensure social security, which forms the foundation of the entire system's stability. Only when employees and stakeholders have guaranteed basic social needs, such as job security and healthcare, can full engagement and effective collaboration toward sustainable solutions be achieved.

2. Methodology

The results presented in this article pertain to research conducted among the employees of the Social Services Centre (CUS) in Tarnow. The main goal (CG) of the research was to determine the role of social security and appreciative discourse in the work of social services managers. To achieve this goal, several specific objectives were set. These included: determining the role of appreciative discourse in the work of social services managers (CS1), identifying the most frequently practiced tasks of social services managers in their daily work (CS2), defining the goals of the social security being implemented (CS3), and identifying areas that pose a threat to the implementation of social security measures (CS4).

To achieve the stated objectives, a main research question and detailed research questions were formulated. Main Question (PG): What role does social security and appreciative discourse play in the work of social services managers? Detailed Questions (PS): What role does motivational dialogue play in the work of social services managers (PS1)? What are the most frequently practiced tasks of social services managers in their daily work (PS2)? What is the most important goal of the implemented social security (PS3)? Which areas pose a threat to the implementation of social security measures (PS4)?

The research used quantitative methods to determine the scale of the phenomenon under study. The technique employed was a survey, with the research tool being a self-designed questionnaire, conducted using the CAWI technique (data collection using an online questionnaire). This enabled quick access to the study group. The questionnaire was anonymous, consisting of 11 closed-ended questions (single and multiple-choice), and concluded with a demographic section. The sample selection was purposive and exhaustive, as all CUS employees in Tarnow participated in the study, totaling 52 social services managers.

Analyzing the profile of the participants, most were women (94.2%), aged up to 35 years (38.5%), with higher education, and had been working as social workers for up to 5 years (38.5%). Most were married (65.4%), generally expressed satisfaction with their work as social workers (42.3%), and would rather recommend working at CUS in Tarnow to their family/friends if necessary (34.6%). Detailed breakdowns are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile of Respondents (data in numbers and %).

Respondent Profile		n	%	Respondent Profile		n	%	n
Gender	Female	49.00	94.20	Job Satisfaction as a Social Worker	Definitely dissatisfied	3.000		5.800
	Male	3.000	5.800		Rather dissatisfied	4.000		7.700
Age	Up to 35 years	20.00	38.50		Hard to say	14.00		26.90
	36-45 years	17.00	32.70		Rather satisfied	22.00		42.30
	Over 45 years	15.00	28.80		Definitely satisfied	9.000		17.30
Education	Secondary	9.000	17.30	Recommendation of the job in the Social Services Center in Tarnow to family/friends	Definitely not	4.000		7.7000
	Higher	43.00	82.70		Rather not	10.00		19.20
Work Experience	Up to 5 years	20.00	38.50		Hard to say	13.00		25.00
Marital Status	6-20 years	19.00	36.50		Rather yes	18.00		34.60
	Over 20 years	13.00	25.00		Definitely yes	7.000		13.50
Marital Status	Married	34.00	65.40			Total	52.00	100.00
	Unmarried	18.00	34.60					

Source: Authors' own work.

Statistical calculations were performed using the SPSS Statistics software, while the application of Pearson's Chi-square test of independence, Pearson's correlation r , Student's t -test, and ANOVA analysis allowed for the identification of statistically significant relationships between different groups of variables.

3. Research results

In the initial stage of the research, employees of the Social Services Center in Tarnow were asked to identify the most important roles that, in their opinion, Appreciative Inquiry discourse plays in the work of a social services manager. The frequency analysis revealed that respondents most often pointed to boosting self-esteem by focusing on an individual's strengths, skills, and past achievements, with 57.7% of responses indicating this role. Over half of the respondents also highlighted the importance of determining the steps an individual can take to achieve their set goals and developing skills to cope with challenges or difficulties that may arise during goal realization, with 55.8% and 51.9% respectively. On the other hand, respondents less frequently identified roles such as stimulating individual reflection by considering personal goals, values, and priorities (25% of responses), as well as creating commitments to specific actions, which are crucial for maintaining engagement and appreciation in action (15.4% of responses). Detailed breakdowns are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. The Most Important Roles of Appreciative Inquiry in the Work of a Social Services Manager According to Respondents (data in %).

Roles of Appreciative Inquiry in the Work of a Social Services Manager	Indicate	
	Yes	No
Enhancing self-esteem by focusing on an individual's strengths, skills, and past achievements.	57.70	42.30
Defining the action steps that an individual can take to achieve their set goals.	55.80	44.20
Developing skills to cope with challenges and difficulties that may arise during goal realization.	51.90	48.10
Creating awareness of goals, helping to understand what objectives one aims to achieve.	48.10	51.90
Building relationships and an atmosphere of support between the social services manager and the individual.	30.80	69.20
Stimulating individual reflection by considering personal goals, values, and priorities	25.00	75.00
Creating commitments to specific actions, which is essential for maintaining engagement and appreciation in action.	15.40	84.60

Note: N = 52.

Source: Authors' own work.

When examining the relationship between the key roles of Appreciative Inquiry in the work of social services managers and the respondents' profiles, only one statistically significant correlation was found. It appears that the more respondents were willing to recommend working at the Center for Social Services (CUS) in Tarnow to family or friends, the more likely they were to agree that a key role of AI is enhancing self-esteem by focusing on an individual's strengths, skills, and past achievements (r -Pearson = 0.439, p = 0.001).

In the next part of the survey, respondents were asked to rate the frequency of various tasks performed by social services managers in their daily work on a five-point Likert scale. A rating of "1" indicated a frequency of once a year or less, while "5" indicated once a week or more. Among the tasks assessed, respondents most frequently cited promoting healthy lifestyles, independence, and social skills—average rating of 2.35. Other frequently performed tasks included actions aimed at eliminating social inequalities and coordinating efforts during crises or emergency social situations—average ratings of 2.06 and 2.04, respectively. On the other hand, tasks like recruiting, training, and managing social workers and other social services specialists (average rating of 1.65), creating new social programs in response to changing community needs (average rating of 1.65), and implementing innovative projects to improve effectiveness (average rating of 1.63) were rated as much less frequent. Detailed data can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of Practicing Social Services Manager Tasks in Daily Work According to Respondents' Opinions (data in %).

Frequency of Practicing Social Services Manager Tasks in Daily Work	1	2	3	4	5	Aver.
Promoting a healthy lifestyle, independence, and social skills	32.70	28.80	21.20	5.800	11.50	2.350
Taking actions to eliminate social inequalities	50.00	21.20	13.50	3.800	11.50	2.060
Coordinating actions in the event of crises or emergency social events	50.00	19.20	15.40	7.700	7.700	2.040
Building and maintaining partnerships with non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and the private sector	46.20	25.00	17.30	5.800	5.800	2.000
Preparing reports on activities, results, and funding of social services	59.60	15.40	7.700	5.800	11.50	1.940
Ensuring effective coordination of various teams and social services within the organization	50.00	25.00	17.30	3.800	3.800	1.870
Conducting regular evaluations and analyses of the effectiveness of delivered social services	55.80	19.20	15.40	1.900	7.700	1.870
Analyzing and identifying social problems in the community and developing strategies to solve them	59.60	15.40	15.40	1.900	7.700	1.830
Organizing educational programs for the community to raise awareness about available social services	63.50	11.50	17.30	3.800	3.800	1.730
Developing and managing the budget for social services	63.50	15.40	13.50	1.900	5.800	1.710
Assessing staff performance and adjusting tasks to individual skills	61.50	19.20	13.50	1.900	3.800	1.670
Developing long-term strategies and action plans for social services	61.50	19.20	13.50	1.900	3.800	1.670
Recruiting, training, and managing social workers and other social service specialists	67.30	13.50	11.50	1.900	5.800	1.650
Creating new social programs in response to the changing needs of the community	65.40	15.40	13.50	0.000	5.800	1.650
Implementing innovative projects for better effectiveness of actions	63.50	21.20	9.600	0.000	5.800	1.630

Note: N = 52; 1 – once a year or less often; 2 – several times a year; 3 – several times a month; 4 – several times a week once; 5 – a week or more frequently; Aver. – average.

Source: Authors' own work.

When making between-group comparisons regarding the frequency of practicing individual tasks of a social services manager in their daily work, it can be observed that male respondents significantly more often indicated the preparation of reports on actions, results, and funding of social services (mean = 3.67 compared to 1.84 for women, t -Student = -2.276, p = 0.027), as well as the coordination of actions in the event of crisis situations or urgent social events (mean = 3.67 compared to 1.94 for women, t -Student = -2.334, p = 0.024).

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from comparing the two previous questions. The Pearson correlation showed that the more often respondents indicated that the most important role of appreciative discourse in the work of a social services manager is to develop skills in coping with adversity and difficulties that may arise during the achievement of set goals, the less frequently they practiced in their daily work ensuring effective coordination of various teams and social services in the organization ($r\text{-Pearson} = -0.300$, $p = 0.031$), conducting regular assessments and analyses of the effectiveness of delivered social services ($r\text{-Pearson} = -0.330$, $p = 0.017$), building and maintaining partnerships with non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and the private sector ($r\text{-Pearson} = -0.360$, $p = 0.009$), and promoting a healthy lifestyle, independence, and social skills ($r\text{-Pearson} = -0.277$, $p = 0.047$).

Employees of the Social Services Center in Tarnow who participated in the study were also asked whether there are areas where they need additional support or training. In this case, nearly a quarter of respondents (23.1%) answered affirmatively. Among them, training on working with people with mental disorders, cooperation with non-governmental organizations, agreements and protocols, and working with people with mental illnesses were mentioned. On the other hand, one in five respondents disagreed, stating they did not need such support or training (19.2%). Furthermore, more than half of the respondents (57.7%) had difficulty providing a clear answer in this area. Detailed breakdowns are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The Need for the Introduction of Areas Requiring Additional Support or Training in the Work of a Social Services Manager, According to Respondents (data in %).

The Need for the Introduction of Areas Requiring Additional Support or Training in the Work of a Social Services Manager	n	%
Yes	12.00	23.10
No	10.00	19.20
Difficult to say	30.00	57.70
Total	52.00	100.00

Note: N = 52.

Source: Authors' own work.

When comparing the issue of the need for additional support or training with the variables defining the respondent profile, no statistically significant relationships were found ($p > 0.05$).

In the open-ended question, respondents were asked to provide answers to the question: What challenges related to social services management do they see in their workplace from the perspective of a social worker? The most frequently mentioned challenges included: lack of continuous contact with social service providers, insufficient internal team communication, too few places for people seeking social services, lack of an adequate system for gathering information, lack of financial resources, adapting social services to the changing needs of clients, motivating people to cooperate, challenges related to disabilities, and limited cooperation between social workers and the coordinator of individual social service plans.

An important element of the study was also determining the most important goals related to the implementation of social security. The frequency analysis revealed that the most frequently mentioned response was ensuring access to basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, and healthcare (67.3% of responses). About one in three respondents also pointed to creating conditions for full social integration for marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, migrants, and the homeless (34.6%), reducing social inequalities by eliminating economic and social barriers (32.7%), poverty reduction and elimination through social programs (32.7%), and ensuring access to healthcare and preventive measures (32.7%). The least frequently mentioned goal of social security was ensuring equal access to high-quality education for all, regardless of economic or social status, which received 13.5% of responses. Detailed breakdowns are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The Most Important Goals in the Area of Social Security in the Opinion of Respondents (data in %).

Goals in the Area of Social Security	Yes	No
Ensuring access to basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, and healthcare	67.30	32.70
Creating conditions for full social integration for marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, migrants, or homeless individuals	34.60	65.40
Striving to reduce social inequalities by eliminating economic and social barriers	32.70	67.30
Reducing and eliminating poverty through the introduction of social programs	32.70	67.30
Guaranteeing access to healthcare and preventive measures	32.70	67.30
Ensuring safe and decent working conditions, protecting workers' rights, and providing support for individuals affected by unemployment	25.00	75.00
Striving to eliminate all forms of discrimination and social injustice to ensure equal opportunities and rights for everyone	23.10	76.90
Enabling a dignified pension for the elderly to ensure stable living conditions after the end of their professional career	21.20	78.80
Ensuring equal access to high-quality education for all, regardless of economic or social status	13.50	86.50

Note: N = 52.

Source: Authors' own work.

Upon reviewing the detailed summaries regarding the most important goals related to social security, it appears that individuals with higher education more frequently indicated the provision of access to basic needs, such as food, housing, clothing, and healthcare (74.4% vs. 33.3% among individuals with secondary education, chi-square=5.709, $p=0.017$). On the other hand, those with secondary education were more inclined to focus on reducing and eliminating poverty through the introduction of social programs (77.8% vs. 22.3% among individuals with higher education, chi-square=10.054, $p=0.002$). Furthermore, individuals who were not married more frequently stated that the goal of social security was to ensure equal access to high-quality education for all, regardless of economic or social status (27.8% vs. 5.9% among married individuals, chi-square=4.843, $p=0.028$). The more often respondents were willing to recommend working at the CUS in Tarnow to family and friends, the more likely they were to agree that a goal of their work was to create conditions for the full social integration of marginalized individuals, such as those with disabilities, migrants, or the homeless (r -Pearson=0.288, $p=0.039$).

Finally, it is worth reviewing the respondents' answers related to areas that pose a threat to the implementation of social security actions on a national and international scale from the perspective of a social worker. Once again, respondents were asked to express their opinions on a five-point Likert scale, where a rating of 1 indicated a very small threat, and a rating of 5 indicated a very large threat. The analysis showed that the most frequently indicated threat was the aging of society and demographic changes that could increase the burden on pension and healthcare systems, with an average rating of 4.29. Respondents also frequently indicated the growing threat posed by an increase in the number of migrants and the need for social integration, which may present challenges for social systems, with an average rating of 3.94. In contrast, respondents were less likely to identify threats such as the automation and restructuring of the labor market, which could lead to cost savings and increased unemployment, and weather phenomena related to climate change, which could increase the risk of poverty and food insecurity, with average ratings of 3.52 and 3.31, respectively. Detailed summaries are presented in Table 6.

When comparing the groups regarding areas that pose a threat to the implementation of social security actions on a national and international scale from the perspective of a social worker, it was observed that individuals with higher education more frequently indicated changes in political directions regarding public expenditure cuts (average 3.91 vs. 3.11 among those with secondary education, t -Student=-2.541, $p=0.011$), weather phenomena related to climate change that may increase the risk of poverty and food security (3.49 vs. 2.44 among those with secondary education, t -Student=-2.538, $p=0.014$), as well as pandemics and health crises that may increase the need for social

support and require adjustments to social programs in response to changing health conditions (3.91 vs. 2.67 among those with secondary education, $t\text{-Student}=-3.048$, $p=0.004$).

Table 6. Areas Threatening the Implementation of Social Security Actions on a National and International Scale from the Perspective of Social Workers, According to Respondents (data in %)

Areas Threatening the Implementation of Social Security Actions on a National and International Scale from the Perspective of Social Workers	1	2	3	4	5	Aver.
Aging of the population and demographic changes that could increase the burden on pension and healthcare systems	1.900	3.800	5.800	40.40	48.10	4.290
Increase in the number of migrants and the need for social integration, which may pose challenges for social systems	1.900	1.900	26.90	38.50	30.80	3.940
Lack of sufficient financial resources to effectively implement social programs	9.600	1.900	17.30	34.60	36.50	3.870
Economic crises and instability in financial markets that could affect countries' ability to fund social programs and provide financial support to those in need	1.900	1.900	28.80	44.20	23.10	3.850
Changes in political directions regarding public spending limitations	1.900	5.800	25.00	48.10	19.20	3.770
Increase in social inequalities that could threaten the effectiveness of social actions	1.900	7.700	30.80	36.50	23.10	3.710
Pandemics and health crises that could increase the need for social support and require adjustments to social programs to changing health conditions	5.800	9.600	26.90	25.00	32.70	3.690
Technological progress that carries the risk of social exclusion for people who cannot access modern technologies	1.900	9.600	32.70	30.80	25.00	3.670
Automation and restructuring of the labor market, which could lead to cost savings in labor and an increase in unemployment	3.800	9.600	36.50	30.80	19.20	3.520
Weather phenomena related to climate change that could increase the risk of poverty and food security	7.700	13.50	40.40	17.30	21.20	3.31

Note: N = 52; 1 – very small threat; 2 – small threat; 3 – hard to say; 4 – large threat; 5 – very large threat; Aver. – Average

Source: Authors' own work.

Additionally, an increase in social inequalities that may threaten the effectiveness of social actions was more frequently indicated by individuals with less than 5 years of experience at the CUS (average 4.20 compared to 3.32 among those with 6-20 years of experience, $\text{ANOVA}=4.918$, $p=0.00411$). Meanwhile, individuals who were not married more often pointed to weather phenomena related to climate change that could increase the risk of poverty and food insecurity (3.83 vs. 3.03 among married individuals, $t\text{-Student}=-2.448$, $p=0.018$).

Interesting conclusions were drawn by comparing the most important goals related to social security and areas that pose a threat to the implementation of social security actions on a national and international scale from the perspective of a social worker. It appears that the more frequently respondents considered providing a decent pension for the elderly to ensure stable living conditions after career completion as an important goal, the less the threat posed by aging societies and demographic changes that could increase the burden on pension and healthcare systems ($r\text{-Pearson}=-0.275$, $p=0.048$), an increase in social inequalities threatening the effectiveness of social actions ($r\text{-Pearson}=-0.478$, $p=0.000$), and technological progress posing a risk of social exclusion for those unable to use modern technologies ($r\text{-Pearson}=-0.390$, $p=0.004$). On the other hand, the more respondents considered eliminating all forms of discrimination and social injustice to be an important goal of social security, the greater the threat posed by insufficient financial resources for the effective implementation of social programs ($r\text{-Pearson}=0.287$, $p=0.039$), an increase in the number of migrants and the need for social integration, which may pose challenges to social systems ($r\text{-Pearson}=0.286$, $p=0.040$), and weather phenomena related to climate change that may increase the risk of poverty and food insecurity ($r\text{-Pearson}=0.285$, $p=0.040$).

4. Discussion

It is important to emphasize that the conducted research indicates the existence of several areas where improvements can be made in the work of social services managers. Training programs for social workers should be strengthened (Dacko-Pikiewicz & Walancik, 2016), focusing on appreciative discourse. Investing in workshops to develop interpersonal and technical skills could bring measurable benefits. Additionally, in the context of promoting a healthy lifestyle, educational activities and social campaigns supporting independence and social skills among social service clients should be introduced.

Referring to the area of social security and motivational dialogue, Lesniak-Berek (2020) points out that a key aspect of direct social work is dialogue, whose important elements are openness and attentiveness toward the individual. These qualities enable a deeper understanding of the personal meanings behind the difficulties experienced by clients. Moreover, motivational dialogue, focused on fostering internal motivation for change, is a fundamental element of modern active social policy. In this model, the client is no longer treated as a passive recipient of material support; instead, greater emphasis is placed on working on internal motivation. This approach bridges the gap in client interaction, enabling more effective assistance in pursuing change.

Social security systems are the foundation for combating poverty, inequality and social exclusion. The topic of the pandemic, such as COVID-19, is also part of this (Kulikowski, Przytuła & Sułkowski, 2022). It also creates many challenges, as exemplified by e-learning (Kulikowski, Przytuła & Sułkowski 2021). Social service managers have a key role in translating public policies into practice, which means not only complying with regulations, but also tailoring activities to the individual needs of beneficiaries. Effective management requires building partnerships with public institutions, NGOs and local communities to ensure that social security benefits reach those most in need (Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

In addition, the ability to effectively manage social security systems helps managers cope with resource pressures and financial constraints, which is referred to in the literature as “managing in times of scarcity” (Van de Walle & Lahat, 2021). In-depth knowledge of social security systems enables better defense of the interests of both customers and employees of the organization, leading to improved overall performance.

Research indicates that Appreciative Inquiry supports the building of a positive organizational culture, increasing employee satisfaction and reducing turnover (Reed, 2006). For example, instead of focusing solely on the barriers faced by customers, Appreciative Inquiry encourages the identification of examples of success and perseverance that can inspire future action. This approach increases the sense of empowerment among both customers and employees.

Combining social security with Appreciative Inquiry in the practice of social service management brings tangible benefits. A manager who combines knowledge of social security systems with an appreciative Appreciative Inquiry approach is better able to deal with the challenges of resource allocation, employee motivation and client empowerment. Research by Watkins et al. (2011) indicates that organizations using Appreciative Inquiry I in their social benefit delivery process have seen an increase in customer satisfaction. These results confirm that a strengths-based approach increases the sense of dignity and autonomy in dealing with the social security system.

However, it is worth noting that the integration of social security and Appreciative Inquiry also faces some difficulties. Rigid bureaucratic frameworks can limit the flexibility needed to apply Appreciative Inquiry, and implementing this methodology in resource-limited environments requires significant time and effort for training (Grant & Humphries, 2006).

In the face of the growing number of migrants and the need for their integration, it is essential to develop programs that support multiculturalism and counteract discrimination. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations and local institutions can significantly contribute to better social integration.

Moreover, regular analyses of demographic structure and the aging society should be crucial for adapting social support systems. Pension and health programs must be developed to address demographic changes.

Social security and appreciative discourse share a common ground, which is improving the quality of life for individuals and supporting society as a whole. In this context, appreciative discourse addresses the increasing social challenges, such as migrant integration and an aging society, which require understanding the specific needs of social service recipients. Appreciative approaches, focusing on strengths rather than analyzing barriers and limitations, can lead to the development of a new strategy for integrating migrants, based on treating cultural differences as a social resource. Furthermore, the role of mutual support, understanding, and openness to innovation is practically significant, translating into the ability to cope with difficulties and social changes. In the long term, appreciative discourse can enhance the engagement of social services managers and strengthen the overall effectiveness of the social support sector.

An important step is also the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of actions taken by social services managers, which would allow evaluating their impact on social security. Regular assessments of program effectiveness will enable modifications in response to changing needs. Finally, promoting cooperation between the public, private, and non-profit sectors is essential for creating integrated support programs that will be more effective in responding to social security challenges.

Implementing these recommendations could significantly improve the quality of social services and the effectiveness of managers' actions, ultimately contributing to better support for those in need in various social contexts.

Conclusions

Summarizing the results of the conducted research, it should be emphasized that the most important roles of the appreciative discourse in the work of social services managers are: enhancing self-esteem by focusing on an individual's strengths, skills, and past achievements (57.7% affirmative responses), outlining actions that the individual can take to achieve their set goals (55.8%), and developing skills to cope with challenges and difficulties that may arise during goal realization (51.9%).

The most frequently practiced tasks in the daily work of a social services manager are promoting a healthy lifestyle, independence, and social skills (mean = 2.35), taking actions to eliminate social inequalities (mean = 2.06), and coordinating activities during crisis situations or sudden social events (mean = 2.04).

When identifying areas where additional support or training is felt to be necessary, almost one-quarter of the respondents (23.1%) expressed a need for it, while 19.2% disagreed, stating they did not require such support or training. Moreover, more than half of the respondents (57.7%) had difficulties providing a clear response to this question.

Regarding social security and the most important goals resulting from its implementation, respondents most often pointed to ensuring access to basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, and healthcare (67.3%).

The areas that, according to respondents, pose the greatest threats to the implementation of social security actions on both a national and international scale from a social worker's perspective include: the aging of society and demographic changes that may increase the burden on pension and healthcare systems (mean = 4.29), and the increase in the number of migrants and the need for social integration, which may pose challenges to social systems (mean = 3.94).

The fact that the research was conducted only in Tarnow has several important implications. First and foremost, the results of this study may be specific to the local social, economic, and cultural conditions. For example, the demographic structure, economic situation, and local social policies in Tarnow can significantly influence the responses of the participants. Therefore, it is difficult to

generalize the results to other cities or regions without conducting similar studies in different contexts. Nevertheless, these results may provide valuable insights for local policymakers and organizations involved in social welfare, reflecting the unique challenges and needs of the Tarnow community. It would therefore be important to extend the research to other regions in the future to gain a broader picture of the situation. For social services managers working in Tarnow, the results could serve as an invaluable source of knowledge about the specific needs of this community. However, managers in other cities should be cautious when applying these results to their local contexts without first analyzing the local conditions. Conducting research in one location could also serve as a starting point for future comparisons. If the study is repeated in other cities, it will be possible to identify differences and similarities in the approach to social security and appreciative discourse. Finally, limiting the research to Tarnow may affect the potential for collaboration with other institutions and organizations operating in different regions. Cooperation and knowledge exchange with other locations could significantly enrich practice and the effectiveness of actions. In conclusion, while the research in Tarnow provides valuable information, it is important to treat its results as contextual and highlight the need for further studies in various locations.

It is also worth noting that appreciative discourse represents a valuable dimension in research related to the management of social services. Given the work of social services managers, this approach can help in building employee engagement and contribute to improving team relationships. The role of appreciative discourse in designing innovative solutions to meet the growing social needs is also noteworthy. Examples of such solutions could be support in promoting a healthy lifestyle or minimizing social inequalities. Appreciative discourse significantly impacts work effectiveness and can also strengthen employee morale, influencing the development of an organizational culture based on support and interpersonal relationships, which appear to be key in the work of social services managers. In this context, it is important to underline that implementing appreciative discourse can also lead to better alignment of social support activities with the needs of local communities.

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