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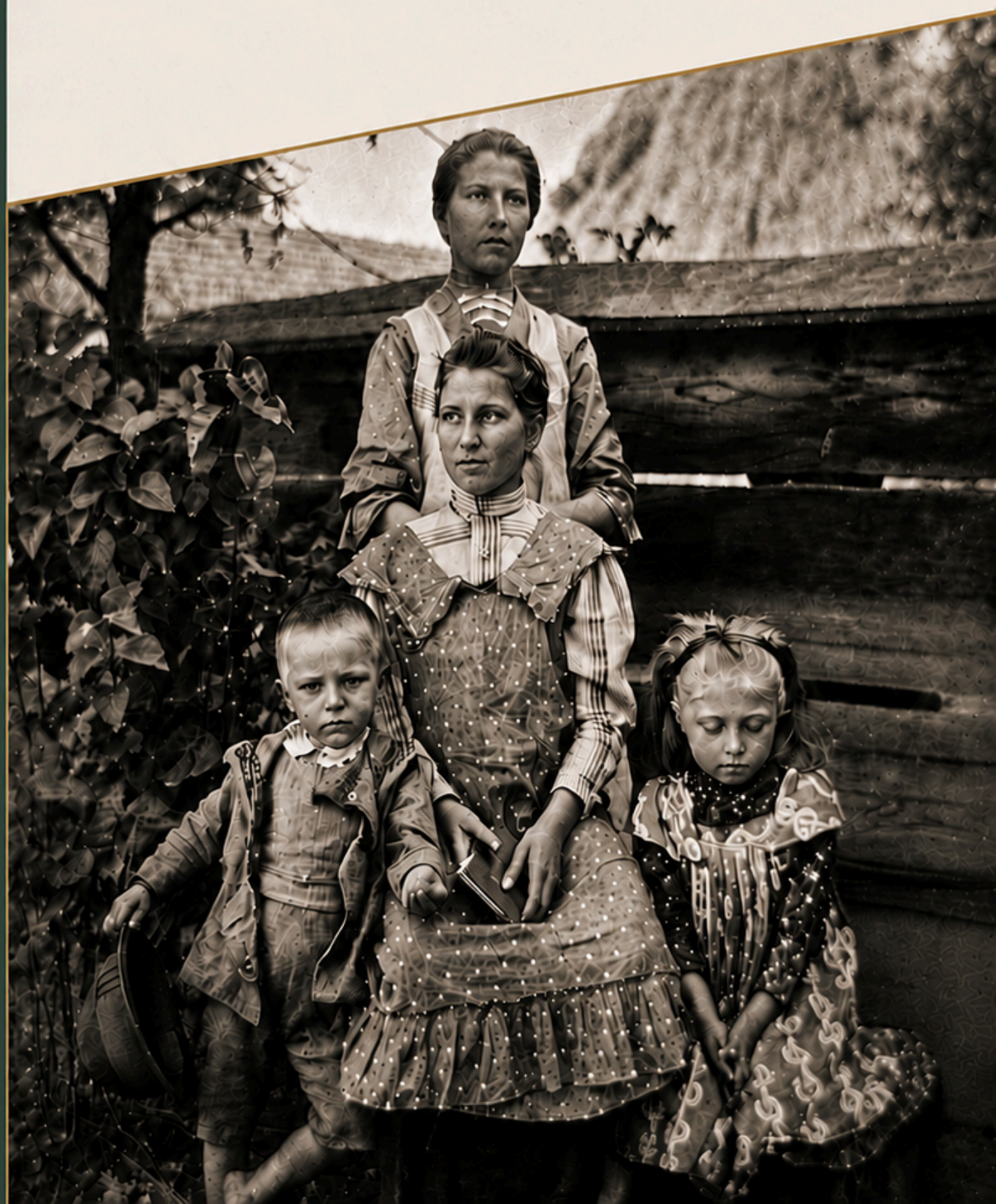

ACTA MISSIOLOGICA

Peer-reviewed academic journal

Our mission is to create an international platform for experts engaged in Christian mission and missiology, charitable and social area and humanitarian development at the theoretical, research, and practical levels.

The journal provides a forum for interdisciplinary dialogue and research across these fields, fostering the development of new knowledge, innovative perspectives, and meaningful interconnections. Its aim is to strengthen collaboration among scholars and practitioners, broaden its international reach, and stimulate greater interest within the global academic and professional community.

A distinctive area of interest is international public law, which has a unique and significant connection to international missionary work. The journal also explores other relevant disciplines that intersect with its primary focus, encouraging interdisciplinary research and discussion.

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Among these priorities are the promotion of family values and the support of the family as a fundamental social institution, the protection and promotion of human dignity, and interdisciplinary reflection on issues of social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and religion. The journal also seeks to encourage informed and constructive discussion on topics such as non-radicalized Islam, fostering mutual understanding and contributing to dialogue between different religious and cultural communities, including within the Christian context.

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THE ECHO OF THE GOSPEL IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract
Background: The issue of the evangelization of families in large urban districts has not frequently been the subject of research. This study examines the evangelization of families in the urban environment of the Bratislava district of Petržalka, reflecting on the theological, sociological, and pastoral dimensions of this issue. The research aims to identify key factors influencing the evangelization of families.
Methods: The research is based on a quantitative analysis of data obtained through a questionnaire survey (n = 345). The data were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics.
Results: The research identified key factors in the evangelization of families: specific activities of pastoral centers, the role of small communities, the need for spiritual accompaniment, and the importance of intra-family transmission of faith.
Conclusion: The evangelization of families is a complex process requiring the integration of spiritual and social dimensions. The findings point to the need for the development of community-based forms of pastoral care and systematic support for families.
Keywords: evangelization, family, pastoral care, small communities, urban environment, missiology

Introduction

The research interest in the presented study arises from the fact that the family constitutes the primary setting for the transmission of faith and values across generations. At the same time, the family constitutes the environment of the initial inculturation of the Gospel. Parishes, pastoral and formation centers play a supportive, accompanying, and initiatory role in this process. In Slovakia, this remains a relatively under-researched area, particularly with regard to analyses reflecting concrete pastoral realities.

The study presents research on the evangelization of families in Catholic parishes and pastoral centers in the Bratislava district of Petržalka as a contribution to the discussion on the pastoral care of families in an urban context. The study is grounded in empirical research aimed at identifying forms of family evangelization and analyzing factors that support or limit this process in the specific environment of a large urban housing estate. The intention is not only to present empirical findings but also to offer analytically grounded insights for reflecting on the pastoral care of families in urban settings and to provide impulses for its further development.

Family in the City

The family constitutes the primary environment in which a person's identity, value system, and capacity for relationships are formed. The Second Vatican Council describes the family as the "domestic Church," in which faith is not only received but also lived and transmitted (Lumen gentium, 1993). According to Christian belief, the family is built upon the relationship of spouses, their mutual love, and self-gift.

In contemporary society, the family faces significant changes that fundamentally affect its structure, stability, and social functioning. Processes of urbanization, individualization, and secularization lead to the weakening of traditional bonds, the fragmentation of family life, and a decline in the importance of spiritual practices in everyday family reality. Cities are becoming places of intense cultural exchange, social contrasts, and value diversity, which places new demands on evangelization. These changes are particularly evident in large cities and housing estates, where families often find themselves in an anonymous and pluralistic context without the natural support of a wider community.

Families are threatened by the weakening of marital and parental bonds, rising divorce rates, the spread of cohabitation, declining birth rates, and an increasing number of children born outside marriage (Matulník, 2011; Eurostat, 2020). These phenomena result from transformations in reproductive and family behavior as well as a value shift towards individualism and secularization (Lesthaeghe, 2014). The urban environment further intensifies this situation, as it is characterized by a higher degree of anonymity and weakened community ties. From a pastoral perspective, social factors such as family isolation, lack of preparation for marriage, economic difficulties, and the presence of pathological phenomena (such as addictions, violence) also pose challenges. Nevertheless, spiritual life has a positive impact on family stability, the quality of relationships, and overall life satisfaction, as indicated by various studies (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Evangelization

Evangelization is the sharing of the Gospel with others. According to the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, evangelization means bringing the Good News of salvation to all people, transforming individuals from within, and forming a new humanity (Paul VI., 1992). Pope Francis emphasizes the existential dimension of evangelization: inner knowledge, experience, joy, and witness (Evangelii gaudium. 2014). Evangelization is therefore not merely the transmission of information but encompasses a complex process of relationships, values, and participation. It mediates an experience with transformative potential.

In practice, the evangelization of families is carried out through various pastoral activities reflecting the specific conditions of a given environment. These include:

- formational activities – aimed at systematic preparation and growth in faith (courses, catechesis, spiritual retreats);
- relational activities – emphasizing the building of relationships and community that enable the sharing of faith and life (small communities, informal gatherings);
- liturgical activities – centered on liturgical celebrations and the sacraments;
- experiential activities – focused on shared events (pilgrimages, camps, shared outings).

These activities often overlap and complement one another. Their common denominator is the effort to reach the family through its members and to integrate it into the life of the community.

Religious communities and missionary congregations make a particular contribution by bringing specific charisms and experience in working with families. Their activity often leads to the formation of vibrant and dynamic communities capable of responding effectively to the needs of contemporary families (Zimmer, Sellman, 2024).

The evangelization of families is not reduced to one-time activities but has the character of a long-term process focused on building relationships and creating space for the sharing of faith. Small family communities play a significant role here, enabling a deeper experience of faith at the personal, family, and broader social levels. The family thus becomes not only the recipient of evangelization but also its potential agent when appropriately accompanied and supported.

The importance of the family as the primary context for the transmission of faith is confirmed by empirical research. For example, international European research conducted in Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Canada demonstrates, on the basis of comparative studies, that religious beliefs, practices, and values are predominantly transmitted within the family across generations. By combining quantitative data with qualitative interviews, the research highlights that everyday interactions, parental example, and intergenerational relationships play a decisive role in shaping long-term religiosity. The findings consistently show that the lived witness of faith within the family is more influential than institutional forms of religious education, thus confirming the family's central role as an agent of internal evangelization (Gärtner et al., 2025). Similar findings have been reported in research conducted in the United States (Gemar, 2023).

Another relevant factor is the role of children as mediators of evangelization. Children may initiate family participation in religious activities, thereby creating a dynamic process of feedback between generations. Research suggests that the intergenerational transmission of religiosity is not unidirectional but has the character of dynamic reciprocity (Min et al., 2018).

Petržalka

Petržalka, today the largest borough of Bratislava, represents a dynamically evolving urban environment shaped by a rich historical experience of migration, social transformation, and cultural diversity. From an originally borderland agricultural and fishing village, it gradually developed into an industrial and later a large housing estate with rapid population growth and a changing national and confessional structure. The Roman Catholic population has maintained a dominant position, with a significant presence of members of the Lutheran Church as well.

The construction of an extensive housing estate in the second half of the 20th century created an environment characterized by high mobility, social diversity, and weakened community ties, which is also reflected in the spiritual needs of its inhabitants. In this context, the evangelization of families appears both as a challenge and an opportunity: the plurality of the environment, the availability of resources, and the presence of ecclesial and community initiatives create space for the development of diverse forms of pastoral care and for the sensitive accompaniment of families in their concrete life situations.

Research Methods

The research focuses on the analysis of the evangelization of families within Catholic pastoral centers in the Bratislava district of Petržalka. It builds on previous qualitative findings, which are further developed through quantitative investigation. The aim of the research was to identify factors that condition and influence the evangelization of families in an urban environment. This aim was operationalized into three partial objectives: analysis of respondents' participation in pastoral activities; identification of the impact of pastoral centers on family life and analysis of needs; and examination of relationships between selected variables influencing the evangelization of families.

The research was conducted in five pastoral centers: three parishes, one pastoral center administered by the Salesians, and one center administered by the Verbists (SVD). The target population consisted of family members involved in the life of these centers, estimated at between five and eight thousand individuals. The sample was obtained through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, complemented by snowball sampling. Respondents were approached through pastoral workers and existing databases. The research sample comprised 345 respondents, with the largest representation coming from the Salesian center in Petržalka.

The research is designed as a quantitative empirical study based on data collection through a questionnaire. The analysis included both descriptive statistics and inferential procedures. To examine relationships between variables, Pearson's chi-square test of independence was used, allowing the identification of statistically significant associations between the observed phenomena.

Results

The research sample showed a significant predominance of women (70%) over men. The age structure indicates the dominance of the economically active generation, with the largest group consisting of respondents aged 31–40 (41%). The spatial distribution reveals strong localization, with more than 90% of respondents residing directly in Petržalka.

Participation in Activities, Events, and Services

A frequency analysis of attendance at pastoral centers shows that, within the category "once a week," the most frequent activity is participation in Holy Mass (72%). This is followed by participation in children's Mass (21%), adoration (17%), mothers'/fathers' prayer groups (13%), family gatherings (11%), youth meetings (7%), and practical assistance to the centers (6%).

Within the category "once a month," the highest frequency is observed in participation in adoration (44%), followed by marriage preparation (10%) and family gatherings (9%).

The analysis of participation in occasional events throughout the year revealed that activities with a community-oriented and informal character achieve the highest levels of engagement. Slightly more than half of respondents (51%) participated in social or recreational events, 41% in open days, and 38% in volunteer work activities. Approximately one-third of respondents engage in sports events, spiritual retreats, or attend lectures. These data suggest that family involvement does not occur solely within strictly spiritual activities, but that social and community forms of engagement also play a significant role.

Involvement of Children and Youth

An important indicator of evangelization is the involvement of children and youth. Nearly 40% of respondents' children participate in small communities, 24% are involved in sports activities, more than one-fifth serve in the liturgy, and 18% engage in practical assistance to the center through volunteer work. On the other hand, almost 18% of children are not involved at all.

These findings point to a relatively high level of integration of the younger generation into the life of the Church community, with the greatest potential lying in the form of small groups. At the same time, leadership of such groups by young people remains a minority activity (6%), which may indicate reserves in the area of leadership formation.

Impact on Spiritual and Family Life

Respondents perceived pastoral centers as a significant factor influencing their spiritual life. The strongest impact was observed in the deepening of trust in God, with 90% of respondents expressing a positive effect. A significant influence was also reported in regular reception of the sacrament of reconciliation (76%), the ability to forgive (75%), as well as a reduction in existential uncertainty and fear of the future (66%).

A positive impact was also identified in family life: the majority of respondents confirmed engaging in family prayer (62%) and experiencing support in cultivating patience in the upbringing of children (68%). A weaker impact was observed in the reading of Sacred Scripture (52%) and in sharing the Gospel with others (51%).

Needs and Satisfaction

For most of the observed activities, respondents reported that they did not perceive them as lacking, indicating a relatively high level of satisfaction with the centers' offerings, although this does not allow for an unambiguous assessment of their actual availability.

A more detailed analysis showed that the activities most often perceived as lacking include shared outings and spiritual accompaniment, whereas more frequent confession was considered the least lacking. The need for community life and adoration lies between these extremes. Responses also pointed to additional needs, such as increasing the number of Church-affiliated kindergartens and schools, keeping churches open during the day, and organizing spiritual retreats for families with children.

Differences between individual pastoral centers are not substantial; however, certain specific tendencies can be observed in some cases. Overall, it can be concluded that although most activities are not perceived as lacking, there remain particular areas—especially spiritual accompaniment and community-formational activities—that represent space for further development of pastoral offerings.

Relationships Between Variables

A partial objective was also to identify relationships influencing the evangelization of families. The formulated hypotheses were tested using Pearson's chi-square test of independence.

The first hypothesis confirmed a statistically significant relationship between attendance at family or youth group meetings and the level of involvement in assisting the pastoral center – respondents who participated in such meetings demonstrated a higher willingness to engage.

The second hypothesis examined differences between respondents attending religious-order pastoral centers and those attending diocesan parishes in terms of evangelization activity. Despite the assumption of a higher missionary orientation in religious-order centers, no statistically significant relationship was confirmed.

Discussion

The research findings point to several aspects that are crucial for understanding the evangelization of families in the contemporary urban environment of the Central - East European context. In this section, selected significant findings are discussed.

The Family as an Agent of Evangelization

One of the key findings is that while families are actively present in the life of pastoral centers, their involvement is predominantly participatory rather than initiatory. Participation in liturgical and community activities is dominant, whereas active forms of evangelization—such as leading

communities or engaging in service to the pastoral center or the wider community—remain less developed (Mahoney, 2010).

In this regard, the Salesian center demonstrates the most developed structure, where leaders of children's and youth communities are systematically formed from among families attending the center. The findings confirm that the process of transmitting faith and the Gospel outward from the family is not yet fully internalized. Families do receive spiritual stimuli; however, they transform them into active missionary engagement only to a limited extent.

Pastoral Centers as Spaces of Spiritual and Social Support

Pastoral centers are perceived by respondents as sources of encouragement, spiritual strengthening, and spaces for experiencing community. Alongside formal spiritual activities, informal events also play an important role in fostering relationships. These activities create a favorable environment for indirect evangelization.

Evangelization in this context is not primarily realized through explicit proclamation but rather through the experience of acceptance, belonging, and the authentic living of faith. This finding corresponds with theoretical frameworks that understand evangelization as extending beyond liturgical acts to include the social dimension of believers' lives (Paul VI., 1992; Evangelii Gaudium*,* 2014). Similar conclusions are supported by studies emphasizing the importance of the communal dimension of faith and the development of social capital within church communities (Maselko et al., 2011).

The research highlights a positive impact of pastoral centers on both the spiritual and social lives of respondents. This is most evident in the development of trust in God and the capacity to forgive. On the other hand, the weaker influence on active proclamation of faith and Bible reading points to a certain imbalance between the internal and external dimensions of evangelization (Worthington, 2014).

The ability to forgive represents a significant indicator of social development. As noted in the literature, forgiveness has not only a spiritual but also psychological, social, and even health-related dimension, as it contributes to the restoration and stabilization of relationships and thus to the overall quality of life (Skalski-Bednarz et al., 2025; Toussain et al., 2015). Pope Francis emphasizes that in order to forgive others, one must first undergo the liberating experience of understanding and forgiving oneself (Amoris laetitia, 2016).

According to the research findings, a significant proportion of respondents expressed a need for spiritual guidance, community, and adoration, indicating a continuing desire for personal accompaniment and deeper spirituality. Notably, the need for adoration was higher among younger respondents. Studies suggest a growing importance of "quiet forms of spirituality," such as meditation and contemplation, particularly among younger generations seeking authenticity and inner peace (Ellis, 2024).

The Importance of Small Communities

Closely related to the evangelization of families is the theme of small Gospel communities, which in Slovakia during the 1970s and 1980s represented a significant expression of the underground Church and a means of evangelization under the communist totalitarian regime.

The research findings confirm the importance of small communities as a key instrument of evangelization. Although participation in youth groups was lower due to the age structure of respondents, their evaluation was predominantly positive. Family-based small groups emerged as a natural environment for most respondents, corresponding to their life situation. These communities provide space for sharing faith, mutual support, and practical accompaniment in marital and family life. This finding aligns with global trends, as small communities are considered one of the most effective tools of the new evangelization. Recent studies show that deeper internalization of faith and the formation of stable relational bonds occur particularly within small groups, supporting long-term commitment to faith (Postell Sullivan, 2023).

Intra-Family Evangelization

One of the most important findings of the research is the significance of intra-family transmission of faith. Respondents who received the sacraments at a later age identified family members as the primary influence. In Slovakia, the transmission of faith occurs predominantly within families, as the

majority of those attending churches and spiritual centers still come from Christian family backgrounds. This reality corresponds with the concept of the family as the domestic Church.

Pope Francis repeatedly highlights the irreplaceable role of parents in transmitting faith, especially through everyday life and personal witness (Amoris laetitia, 2016).

Experience and international research confirm that the family is the primary factor in the spiritual grounding of children. The persistence of faith in society depends to a significant extent on intra-family transmission, particularly between parents and children (Lim, 2019). Empirical studies also demonstrate that religious socialization within the family is one of the strongest predictors of religiosity in adulthood (Bengtson, 2013).

Thus, the family appears not only as an object of evangelization but above all as its subject—an active bearer of the Gospel. However, a key challenge remains evangelization *ad extra*, that is, moving beyond the family environment toward other individuals and families within the housing estate (Petts, 2015).

Although this was not directly visible in the quantitative data, testimonies from pastoral actors in the Salesian center indicate cases where children became mediators of evangelization for their parents. Boys initially came to the center for sports activities, gradually became involved in formation programs, and some later became leaders of children's small groups. Their parents subsequently began attending the center and participating in both liturgical and community activities (Grech, 2017).

Research Limits

As with any research, the present study has its limitations. Uneven representation among the centers and the dominance of respondents from the Salesian center constitute methodological constraints. Due to limited capacity, the research did not include non-Catholic pastoral centers or smaller spiritual-social centers in Petržalka.

Despite these limitations, the study can be considered a unique and valuable contribution to the exploration of family evangelization in an urban environment in Slovakia.

Factors of Family Evangelization

Based on a synthesis of the findings, several key factors of family evangelization in the Bratislava - Petržalka district can be identified:

- The creation of *space for families* within pastoral centers is fundamental. These centers provide a safe and stimulating environment for children, youth, and the elderly, fostering intergenerational relationships and the formation of new families. Young people gain experience in relationships, community, and faith, which may also be understood as preparation for marriage and family life.
- The *internal dimension of the family* is equally important. The family itself is a bearer of evangelization, both through its unique contribution and as the primary setting for the transmission of faith. It brings its own experiences, needs, and challenges, thereby shaping pastoral responses and services.
- A key element is *spiritual ministry* and accompaniment, forming the foundation of all activities. These include liturgy, sacraments, spiritual retreats, prayer, and counselling, creating space for deepening and sharing faith within families.
- *Small communities* play a significant role by providing an environment of acceptance, trust, and growth. They enable the sharing of faith and life experience and support relational maturity. The formation of animators and leaders from among the laity (both adolescents and adults) is essential.
- The *diversity of activities* – spiritual, cultural, and sports-related—contributes to building relationships within communities and engaging families in service. These activities foster cooperation between priests, religious, and laity, encourage intergenerational interaction, and provide opportunities for the development of individual talents.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to analyze the evangelization of families through pastoral centers in the urban environment of Bratislava - Petržalka and to identify its key determinants. The research has shown that the evangelization of families is a complex process encompassing spiritual, social, and community

dimensions of life. It is not primarily a matter of programs but rather an ecosystem of relationships, formation, participation, and initiation.

Significant findings include: a high level of family participation in liturgical and community activities; a strong positive impact of pastoral centers on spiritual life; the persistent predominance of passive participation over active engagement; and an underdeveloped missionary dimension of faith in everyday life. These findings point to the need for systematic support of families not only as recipients of pastoral care but above all as its active agents. Key elements of such support include:

- building a strong community environment as a point of entry;
- formation focused on personal experience of faith and discipleship;
- fostering small communities as spaces for growth and sharing;
- systematically guiding families toward active participation;
- developing leadership competencies among young people;
- integrating the spiritual dimension with missionary activity.

At the same time, it is necessary to respect the specific characteristics of different pastoral contexts. The evangelization of families is a long-term process of accompaniment requiring patience, creativity, and openness to the action of the Holy Spirit.

The research findings may serve as an impetus for further empirical investigation as well as for practical pastoral work that seeks to respond to the challenges of contemporary society and to renew the missionary dimension of the Church's life through the family.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors hereby declare to be authors of this work and have approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors de clare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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THE MISSIONARY MESSAGE IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC WORK OF BÉLA PETRIK

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Abstract

Background: The study introduces the photographic work of Béla Petrik as a distinctive model of visual missionary practice and inculturation within the local context of the Medzibodrožie region during the 1930s and 1940s. At that time, the region formed part of Southern Zemplín and, following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, became part of the former Czechoslovakia; today, it belongs to the Archdiocese of Košice in the Slovak Republic. Petrik's work also emphasizes the interconnection between social photography and a theological-anthropological understanding of the human person and human existence.

Methods: The study examines the social documentary dimension of Petrik's photographic work and explores the ethical aspect of photography as a tool of solidarity and critical reflection on social conditions.

Results: Béla Petrik integrated photography into pastoral practice as an inculturative medium, enabling an empathetic approach to the community of believers. His visual archive represents a "Divine Archive" – a concept of preserving memory, identity, and the continuity of cultural and religious heritage. Petrik's work oscillates between personal experiences of faith, the social reality of poverty, and a universal visual and communicative language. Family and community photography play a significant role as models of relationality and theological interpretations of coexistence.

Conclusion: Petrik's work constitutes a complex religio-visual system that transcends the boundaries of art and offers a missiological and philosophical interpretation of the world. His photographs may be understood as a synergy between spiritual grounding in ontological "perfection" and, conversely, the "imperfection" inherent in the technical limitations of photographic representations of everyday reality.

Keywords: Social photography – documentary photography – religious heritage – missionary activity – theological anthropology.

Introduction

Béla Petrik was born on April 29, 1888, in the village of Malé Trakany (Kistárkány), located in the Zemplín County on the northeastern border of Hungary (today the Tisza River border region at the junction of Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine). In 1907, he began his theological studies at the Roman Catholic University of Theology in Košice, where he studied until 1911. It was within the cultured environment of Košice that he likely developed his lifelong passion for photography. On June 23, 1911, he was ordained to the priesthood in the bishop's chapel by the Bishop of Košice, Augustín Fischer-Colbrie. The end of 1919 marked the beginning of his long pastoral ministry in several parishes of the Zemplín region, most notably in the parish of Rad, where he served for 37 years. His ministry was closely connected with the Hungarian Catholic community, to which he remained devoted even in the aftermath of the dramatic political transformations that reshaped Central Europe following the First and Second World Wars. Béla Petrik died on June 23, 1971, at the age of 83 in Malé Trakany. He is buried in the local cemetery, and his family house still stands in the village (Sedlák, 2023, pp. 160–165).

Béla Petrik's interest in preserving and documenting, through photography, the history of the Hungarian population of the Medzibodrožie region during the 1920s and 1930s was expressed through traditional photographic genres such as portraiture, family portraiture, sacred architecture, social documentary photography, vedutas, and landscape photography. His photographs are particularly significant because of their contemporary missionary and inculturational interpretation of the past. The photographs presented in this study contribute to our understanding of the "period eye" and the visual perception characteristic of a specific historical era (Kesner, 2005). The ontology of Petrik's photographic work is grounded in the tension between the "perfect" and the "imperfect." The former refers to a theological-anthropological approach to depicting the human person, personality, and interpersonal relationships, while the latter reflects the technical limitations of the photographic medium

and its place within an evolving technological society. From an anthropological—and more precisely theological-anthropological—perspective, the interpretation of the human person is based on the assumption that, through the photographic medium, the artist can symbolically express and discover the nature of his own existence and gain insight into the mystery of being itself (Hojda & Pavienský, 2012).

Methods

The aim of the study is to explore the historical context of Béla Petrik's photographic work and the development of period visual aesthetics in relation to religious and social elements, understood as an interpretative method of visual missiology. The study combines historical analysis with comparative approaches, examining processes of signification through insights derived from theological-anthropological perspectives, theories of photography, and sociocultural studies.

Results

Image within an image

From the perspective of photographic theory, Petrik's photographs may be understood as a *Biblia Pauperum* of photography's social and missionary openness within local communities. More broadly, however, they also represent a universal visual language capable of inculturation in any part of the world through the communicative power of signs, metaphors, and nonverbal expression. From a missiological perspective, photography may therefore be regarded as a medium of inculturation. Béla Petrik integrated photography into his pastoral ministry alongside his priestly vocation, using it as a sensitive and empathetic means of engaging with his parishioners in Rad, where he served for 37 years, as well as with the wider population of the Medzibodrožie region (Figure 1). As Professor L. Bučko observes: "The fundamental and primary media of Christianity are Sacred Scripture and the tradition of faith. Christian life is built upon them, and Christian teaching proceeds from them. Inculturation as a method of missionary practice likewise has Scripture and tradition as its foundation. At the same time, however, it wisely employs local symbols and media, especially those that exert the greatest influence within a particular community. These may include various ceremonies and rituals, literary genres, music, and the visual arts, including the medium of photography [...]" (Bučko, 2003, pp. 376–377).



Figure 1 Petrik, Béla: Self-portrait in the mirror with a Koilos camera, circa 1911 – 1915

Just as the history of photography was shaped at its moment of discovery by technically talented people with a sense of "imagination" and "fine art", Petrik's personality represents all the necessary "mental" expectations of the time in which he lived and he was active: faith and uncertainty. He himself wrote down his doubts in the parish chronicle: "I did not glue in (here) my photographs which I took and developed, but I drew them in. I was only thinking of the distant future" (Petrik, 1936, 1 - 2).

At the end of the chronicle, he also explained his basic motive for recording this information: "Old historical events have remained forgotten, the books and magazines describing them were destroyed in the last war (1942-1945) which did not leave Medzibodrožie unscathed either. […] This modest archive holds a very large amount of information which required considerable effort to compile over several decades. As a result, this work deserves to be archived in different places in the interests of preserving history" (Petrik, 1936, 1 – 2).

From the viewpoint of art history, Petrik's depository of pictures is a fragile vessel, but an easily readable concept of branch missionary theology in visual terms, symbolically perceived as God's archive. In his photography, Petrik connected several worlds: the world of a priest's mission (the Church, the liturgy of Holy Mass, services of God's word, performing the sacraments), the world of a legitimate family relationship (family portraits), and the world of profane events, seen and experienced in person (post-apocalyptic shots of flooding, dilapidated houses and poor families). Each preserved record on glass became God's laboratory for Petrik, with its own historical root and interpretation which circle from true reality to an even truer one. Empirically, it became the horizon of the transcendental touch in man's time and world, observed through the social *habitus* of a rural community. In Petrik's visual thinking, one can explicitly trace the reflection of a priestly mode of thought, in which the vertical, ontologically constitutive image of the human being is more perceptible—an image that orients and shapes man's relation to the supernatural.

In his photographs, Petrik asks questions, not only as a theologian but mainly as an anthropologist, related to the "culturalness of the journey" as a missionary path, which accepted as a moral obligation the presence of a piece of technology: a camera. As a deeply intellectual theologian and sympathiser with Christian political opinions, perhaps over a long period he did not find a satisfying response in the very left-wing parishioners of Rad, whom he was supposed to lift up both in spirit and as people. On his arrival in Rad, Béla Petrik wrote a stark comment in his priest's diary: "The village itself made a very good impression on me, as a teacher from within the walls of Košice - […] but the people steeped in Communism, their heart-rending welcome as for a stepmother, or the problems around the farm left me no peace"(Petrik, 1936). His brief summary is the essential attitude of a priest and missionary, but also a lucid analysis of the environment which he was supposed to become part of. The contrasts between these two attitudes symbolically refer to the perception of the move from the symbol of priesthood (the spiritual army in the front line), to the significance of the question as to where I want to live "here and now". It was certainly one of the Petrik's earliest recognitions that his profession as a priest moved him closer to the painful task of a priest's search for identity and also to the photographer's vocation to reflect the present: "[…] to show attention for something, an endearment for something […]*"* (Barthes 1994, 27). There was thus a surprising match between the task of a priest and that of photography. From a Christian perspective, a person typically cannot be fulfilled in themselves. This is why the consciousness which a person forms is important: "[…] what imagination he possesses, what desires drive him and what hopes for the future he holds" (Ryšková 2020, 186). A person is able to understand this unfulfillment only in the image of himself. This is an expression of the power of the spirit in a person's spontaneity associated with nature, as well as the power which opens up in the religious relationship between a person and a deity, or God. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar these tendencies of something unfinished, unfulfilled have an application only in a real transformation into a path of love. In its power, true strength and the power of Christianity are multiplied. It resides in God's action for man, an action which he proposes and explains to man (Balthasar 2009, 20).

Béla Petrik was aware of its potential artistic power and also of the experimental potential of photography as pastoral material (PETRIK 1936, 44). We can see these principles of a visual and mission-led background in the self-portraits and photographs of his closest family (mother, father, sisters, uncle Albert, nephews and other relations), but also immediately in his records of the community of parishioners, the nature and the surroundings of the southern Zemplín region. The images are a metaphorical search for the unconditional beauty of truth, dignity, solidarity between people: the level of the "I-you-us" relationship for the present search of self-identification and creative autonomy (Böőr

2016). Petrik balances between the very personal, "direct" certainty of the disappearing world of his ancestors (religiosity, history, culture, politics) and the "crooked" certainty of future generations "not understanding" today's world. So in his photographs, he has created a "visual certification of presence": an authentication of the place, things and beings which had their own title, name and life story (Barthes 1994, 77). In the process of reflecting "memory", his work became a concept of communicating vessels, an awaited visual message for the present-day which carries on with continuity, and not an opposite of uprooted identity. If we imagine seeing Petrik's work exclusively from the position of contemporary photographic theory, then the principle of "subsidiarity" is important, i.e. the acceptation from both sides – history and present, and above all the theological aspect.

"The process of external inculturation (ad extra), which constitutes the domain of inculturation for the entire spectrum of human culture. Indeed, the encounter between the Gospel and culture takes place across the full breadth of life: in the family, in upbringing and education, at work, in liturgical celebration, during leisure and recreation, in healthcare, within the legal system, and in economic, political, and social life, as well as in the arts. Every culture contributes to the formation of humanity's spiritual heritage, in which the 'seeds' of God's Word are present" (Bučko 2003, 376).

God's archive is a personal creed (confession), and also a personalised "meta-image" also seen as an anti-argument to the (post-modern) dissolution of the personal ("depersonalisation") and the absence of a symbolic relation to God, people and the world (RUSNÁK 2007, 580-589). It could have become a "fragile mimosa" – a picture sensitive to being touched by an experienced truth which Petrik tried to interpret directly through its ideals, to see and engage one's neighbor through the image — through photography. Béla Petrik did not use photography merely as a means of artistic expression; this is further explained by his personality as a priest with a missionary vocation, who served for thirty-seven years in the same location among parishioners on the periphery of the world, representing a paradigm of poverty, human misery, and the recurrent threat of natural disasters.

The expression of life in a picture became Petrik's mode of thinking, as well as the Saint-Augustinian principle *Intellige ut credas et crede ut intelligas* ("discover to believe, and believe to understand"). It became the shaping of faith and man, seeing reality even where it is hidden, in the sense of Derida's grammatology, lines as a movement, a trace, when: "[…] every (visible) line is a trace of the invisible (spiritual, missionary) line" (Petříček 2009, 118, 119). In searching for the contemporary Béla Petrik, every photograph of his has a pictorial *punctum* – Barthes' mystery – a substance connecting the past with the present, and also a form of complementarity: the spiritual and the secular, the intuitive and the technical: "[…] when one part cannot be understood separately from the other, and vice versa. […] but it is rather an epistemological frame of thought of a mutual conditioning of understanding and existence." (Encyklopaedia Beliana 2022).

Explaining the immanence of Petrik's intellectual world concerning a verified idea remains, despite the surviving negatives, an ongoing challenge. According to Benedict XVI: "[…] the supernatural impulse does not spring only from man's imagination but comes truly from the supernature, […] the impulse enters the subject and receives the expression that the person can give it. […] it is defined by their historical and personal givens and their character" (Opus Dei, 2010). Through his use of the medium of photography, Petrik overstepped the traditional boundaries of pastoral care; in phenomenological terms, we can call this connection a religious-pictorial mission: a "sacral analogue of the image of the world" (Mrázková 1991, 17).

Family album

The photographs of his family and close relatives express the nature of humans as a collective being ("being oneself" means "being from – another – for another – together with them") (Hojda, Pavienský 2012, 83). Pope Benedict XVI also reacted to the meanings of self-identification: "[…] a person's place and aim is unconditionally to do the work of history and thus to believe in the future of the world, not only in the future of oneself; this future is more than he can do himself, […] there exists a sense which cannot be destroyed […], that progress goes forward, and not in a circle, […] that history is not a Penelope's shroud, which is woven over and over again in order to be unpicked once more. [...] because a Christian knows that the meaning of the world does exist, which is why it can and must act out history with joy and without procrastination, even though from his own limited viewpoint he will always have the feeling that it will be a Sisyphean task and the boulder of human fate will be heaved up again and again from generation to generation, only to roll back down, and all the effort put in will be wasted.

Whoever believes, knows that progress goes forward and not in a circle. Whoever believes, knows that history is not Penelope's shroud which is woven again and again only to be unpicked once more. Perhaps even a Christian has dark dreams filled with fear of futility, showing that the pre-Christian world created moving images of fear of the fruitlessness of human acts. But the voice of reality breaks into the bad dream like a rescuer: 'Take heart, I have conquered the world' (John 16:33). The new world in which the idea of the image of the Bible's final Jerusalem ends is not a utopia but a certainty in which we move on with faith. There is salvation for the world: it is the hope carried by Christians [...]" (Ratzinger 1978, 251).



Figure 2 Petrik, Béla: Familly portrait of the Petrik siblings Regina, Mária, Pavol and Gizella, Malé Trakany, circa 1907

The photographs of his family thus express the scale of a close family relationship against the wider church community (parish family) (Figure 2). The category of words with meanings such as "mother, father, brother, sister, home, family solidarity" in a certain sense programmed Béla Petrik (presumably for his whole life) and gave a "pneumatological" basis to his experience by experiencing both variables: the secular and the biblical: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mark, 3:35). However, from the point of view of a priest, the anthropological expectation of the family opened the way to a transcendental explanation with a theological starting-point: "[…] the mystery of the threefold love […] of the eternal self-giving of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father in the Trinity of the Godhead […] which expresses the fundamental dialogue of love in the inner life of the Holy Trinity" (Hojda & Pavienský 2012, 94). Ján Hojda perceives this experience as family solidarity: "[…] perichoretic solidarity in which people determine themselves through their relations of mutual self-sharing, and thus overlap as beings. […] family love is fulfilled when the individual "I" is about

"you" and vice versa; "I" and "you" are then about "us" in the sphere of mutual love and fidelity, which it is then impossible in effect to leave entirely […]" (Hojda & Pavienský 2012, 95).

The mysticism of space

Metaphorically, Petrik saw the space of the church as an extended sacral or social reality connected to human beings. The essence of Petrik's conception of the symbolism of space was described later by Ladislav Hanus, according to whom the spaces of churches (and cathedrals) incorporated: "[…] gardens, orchards, hedges, forests and rocks and all the fruit which grow around a country cottage, all the tales of poor wretches, even the smallest experiences, just the same as the most celebrated events in life." (Hanus 1995). The purpose of a person in a church is God's presence, as a blinding flash of Baudelaire-like merging with eternity, as well as the fleeting moment of the discovered secret of truth. Petrik considers the spiritual dimension of the church as the "House of the Lord" for people. His thoughts are in an immanent connection with those of Ladislas Hanus, as he formulated them in his great book "The Church as a Symbol": "[…] history is most manifest in the history of a church. […] A church is the mirror of the world, […] it is a sign of anthropomorphism, […] so that not only the gathering can bear the name of "*ecclesia*", but for the building itself to bear that name, […] so that it can be a shrine within itself" (Hanus 1995, pp. 157 - 163).

Petrik's programme for photographing church and man, however, relates to his understanding the essence of the sacral space as a vessel of time: the vertical space where the story of the ontology of the church's existence is being played out. Comparing the church to a vessel also has the hermeneutic dimension of a "visual reliquary", recording and preserving deep down human events and objects which affect the concept of the Church's inheritance: "[…] outside the experience of inheritance, the concept of responsibility has no meaning whatsoever" (Petříček 2009, 184).

In documenting sacred spaces, Petrik perceived history and mysticism as inseparably interconnected dimensions of human experience, united through a vertical orientation toward transcendence. His photographs of sacred architecture may therefore be understood as a personal cultural code—a visual repository of intellectual, ideological, social, and religious meanings, shaped by local traditions and dominant cultural values (Rusinová & Kralovič, 2020, p. 17).

The photograph of the monumental Gothic church interior in Svätuše (Figure 3), with its striking interplay of light and the solitary figure of a woman absorbed in contemplation, may be interpreted as a philosophical reflection on the "place for the other." The viewer is invited to participate in the space and to encounter it as a lived present. The atmosphere created by the diffused sunlight is reinforced by a carefully considered composition: the layered arrangement of the church pews in the foreground and the gradual progression of light toward the figure of the woman. Through these elements, the viewer perceives the spatial depth of the interior, the verticality of the Gothic windows, and the enduring stability of the sacred structure.

Petrik employed a similar compositional approach in his photograph of kneeling children in the Church of St. Emeric in Bačka (1926) (Figure 4). The modulated side lighting creates a sculptural effect, giving form and depth to the children's figures, some of which appear slightly blurred due to the long exposure time. Their silent expressions evoke a sense of the sacred that emerges within the sphere of interpretation while remaining open to continual rediscovery. Petrik condensed his visual mission into a language of simplicity and restraint, reflecting the austere character of this ancient Romanesque church. The monumentality of the triumphal arch, the motif of children kneeling in two rows, and the presence of their parents were all integrated into a single moment of exposure, creating an intimate visual testimony to humility and faith—qualities that remain central to the Christian tradition.



Figure 3 Village of Svätuše reformed



Figure 4 Village of Bačka (Bacska), Church of St Emeric, 1926.

Self-portraits

Petrik identified himself as a defender of a Christian social position which preferred the path of bringing together man and the reality in which we live, but did not exclude the illusion of the beauty of reality: "Because illusion does not oppose reality" (Petříček 2009, 144) (Figure 5). When taking photographs, Petrik the priest probably thought about how to capture and encompass God's imprint in the picture of a person. Karl Rahner also saw the approach of faith to life in a similar way, when he wrote: '[…] we cannot be surprised or express displeasure when the life of a spirit makes a move before it was planned […], we live at a time when it is simply necessary to move bravely towards something new and untried, all the way to the very edge" (Pawlowsky 1999, 34).

The French philosopher Jean Guitton in his book of dialogues with Pope Paul VI writes about the "concentric circles" of the search for dialogue (Guitton 1969, 192 – 198). According to this concept, any decision to orientate a dialogue towards other people is subject to a system of equal circles: different areas of agreement, starting with the personal "I" in the middle. This circle is followed by the closest family, the wider family in faith, the village, the town, the state, and the circle of all people: the global world and vice versa. Self-portraits are projects for capturing one's own truth; they can decode the deepest layers through which we express our past "I", our oppressed "I", desiring "I", secrets, illnesses, moral attitudes, intellectual interests or ideas about us being someone completely different. It can be a world of escape which we try to keep under control, but it is also the world of uncertainty and "fear of truth, the desire for truth when we have the freedom to "be whomever we have decided to be" (Carbon 2017, 3).

In his later self-portraits, Petrik communicated through the message of a priest's theology. In his visual sociology, he was for himself the prophet and deliverer Moses; he did not enter the promised land immediately. With his pictorial archives, he prepared a world which he could not see as complexly as we do. He also asked questions, but even answered and explained them. The photographs are just a visual paraphrase of the stream of ideas of "Augustine's two place": the place of division, anxiety, denial of God, egoism, destruction, and the place of God, in which the borders of hate are lost, where love attains the dimension of God. In his programme of humanist photography, Petrik showed both worlds of the town: the human and the godly.


Figure 5 Petrik, Béla: Village of Bačka (Bacska), Church of St Emeric, 1926

Social document

The issue of interpretation was the basis for Béla Petrik's social sensibility. It did not end with a renunciation of "direct photography": the stylised monumentalisation and heroisation of man and landscape. What was essential to Petrik, formed the hierarchy of his life's journey and where his documentation became ontological, was his always unfeigned, sometimes hard, "truthfulness". Put expressively, it was mixing together God's image with the image of humankind's poverty. Jozef Ratzinger described a similar image as: "[…] a continuation of Jesus eating at a table together with sinners. […] He does not appear in an unholy sacrament against the human expectation of purity, […] he is present in the dignified distance from untouchable purity which mixes with the dirt of the world, […] this can mean that one carries the burden of the other…." (Ratzinger 1978, 238, 239, 242.) Despite the fact that "pictures of man, pictures of God and pictures of the future" (Ratzinger 1978, 243) appeared in different ways depending on the situation photographed, each of these images was in its basic understanding an attempt at a "total" understanding of the questions of human existence. Photography was Petrik's thinking, because "[…] all human dignity is in thinking" (Palenčár 2018, 202). In the words of Blaise Pascal, he was also "[…] a model who has to do little things as though they were great things, and great things as though they were little" (Palenčár 2018, 202). At the core, his social imagery became constitutive, forming a gnoseology which cannot be separated. The joint photographs of Petrik with farmers working in the field express this principle of solidarityrom solidarity with one's neighbours. The joint photographs of Petrik with farmers working in the field express this principle of solidarity. In the large group portraits, he stood in the middle or at the edge of the photograph. The limitations of the large-format camera meant that Petrik was not able to record the dynamics of work, the details of a face, the gesture of hands as in contact reporting (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Petrik, Béla: I'm farming! P.B., harvest on the parish land, village of Rad, 1935

His approach was based on creating compositional units (scenes) reminiscent of the Barbizon school of French realist painting at the end of the 19th century. Petrik had a painter's sense of stylisation, placing the horizon in the lower third of the image and always situating the main motif of working people (farmers, machines, mowers, threshers) in the middle ground.



Figure 7 Petrik, Béla: Village of Veľký Kamenec, street "Under the Catholic church" known as Chicken row, circa 1912

A socio-critical moment is evident in the group portraits of families posing in front of their ramshackle houses or collapsed thatched roofs (Figure 7). For a contemporary viewer, it is a study of the social situation which the created work was reflecting, and which the work presents in a contemporary social mood. With the distance of time, the layers of romanticism ("the beauty of poverty"), the humanising tribute to the man of the past who exudes self-respect and simple happiness

(God's blessing) are sublimated in the pictorial layers of social uncertainty. In the critical, existentialist periods of human history, the camera lens, as was defined by the theoreticians of the time, identified with morals (ethics) and had an activating and purifying meaning. The photographs which also include Petrik himself, are not only a symbol of a joint "social economy" but a poetic document of a "parish family" which Petrik respected and drew in colour in the parish chronicle. Béla Petrik remained a strict parish priest in the memory of his parishioners but not an asocial person. With each new photograph, he focused on the future one, because the aim of Petrik's visual self-expression "[…] was in the contact between two worlds to activate the third world" (Sedlák, Hajdučík 2019, 9) a more social and humane world.

The Elements of Time

Béla Petrik's interest in documenting the anomalies of the weather in the southern Zemplín region was the result of the immediate threat to the presbytery located near the branches of the river Tisa (Old Tisa) in the village of Rad (Böőr 2016, 256). He photographed the extreme snowfall in 1926 and 1928. The pictures of the collapsed roofs on houses and the school are the direct consequence of the destructive flooding. Petrik noted in his chronicle in relation to the extreme snowfall: "The snow drifts in 1926 and 1928 were so high that when they wanted to call me to the upper end of the village to perform a spiritual service, they had to climb so high up the snowdrift that they could see into the chimneys of the houses; and they didn't dig out the frozen dogs from under the snow until the spring" (Petrik 1936, 298). The photograph of the flooded space of the parish church in Rad following the floods of 1940 is a testimony through its strict symmetry and perfect reflection of the church space (Figure 8). The mirroring effect which should instil anxiety in the viewer, supports and expands the aesthetic situation of the interior, mainly of the main altar which we can see as a self-reference to two different conditions of perception. The flooding of the sacral space seems to break up its closure, while enabling us to find another sense of openness – the symbolism of water as a force of threat, yet also as the sacramental sign of baptism and purification (Petrik 1936, 262).



Figure 8 Petrik, Béla: Village of Rad, parish Church of the Holy Trinity, flooded main nave, flood of 1940

The photographs primarily touch on human dignity and in their sensitive social message they are related to the encyclical of Leo XIII on the Church's social teaching (Šmidová 2015, 4 – 6). For Béla Petrik the priest, it was an experience "in the front line" which he lived through in his missionary pastoral care. As a photographer, he was aware of the visual wealth of the social situations, and probably verified empirically the basis of the *Rerum Novarum* encyclical which firmly rejected Communism and unbridled capitalism or collectivisation. As a representative of Christian and social politics, he firmly rejected the solution proposed by socialism, because he was convinced that it harmed the very people it was supposed to help.

Conclusion

The life and work of the priest, photographer, and chronicler Béla Petrik, devoted to photography, are particularly significant for their contemporary perspective on the past. The presented photographs contribute to the understanding and partial elucidation of period modes of visual perception, thus constituting a coherent synthesis of the author's creative visual interpretation, historically tested religious faith, and the burdened social reality. Through these dimensions, the medium of photography emerges not only as a mediator of historical testimony, but also as an instrument of missionary engagement. Petrik's interest in preserving and systematizing, through photography, the history of the Hungarian population of the Medzibodrožie region in the 1920s and 1930s was closely linked to traditional genres of living photography. The medium of photography opened up within Petrik multiple horizons of inquiry—not only in terms of technology and the methods of archiving images of the parish community, but also in revealing unexpected and new aspects of pastoral activity: mission through image.

The genre diversity of Petrik's focus on impoverished people, natural catastrophes, agricultural labor, sacred architecture, and portraits of his closest family members transcends the framework of mere causal or archival record; instead, it articulates a theologically grounded vision of human dignity, questions of relationality within the family and community, and the manifestation of transcendence in everyday life. Petrik's 'divine archive' systematically interweaves personal experience with collective memory, while preserving the cultural and spiritual identity of the Hungarian community in the Medzibodrožie region. Ultimately, Petrik's oeuvre represents a comprehensive visual archive of memory and faith, bridging historical and spiritual tensions and offering a lasting contribution to the theory of photography as well as to missiological discourse.

Author contribution

Author conceived the study, conducted the literature review, developed the theoretical framework, analyzed the photographic material, and wrote the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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IMPACT OF FAMILY HISTORY AND THE PARENTING ON THE ALCOHOL ABUSE AND LIVES OF WOMEN OVER 40

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Abstract

Introduction: Alcoholism is a serious health, social and family problem that significantly affects the quality of life of individuals and their loved ones. In women over 40 years of age, the development of addiction can be associated with several risk factors, including adverse family experiences, partner problems, psychological stress and socio-economic difficulties. The aim of the research was to determine the incidence of alcoholism in women over 40 years of age and to identify selected factors related to its occurrence and consequences.

Methods: The research was carried out using a quantitative method using a questionnaire survey aimed at three dimensions – family background, alcohol abuse and need of professional help. The research group consisted of 128 women over 40 years of age. We processed and evaluated data using descriptive statistics. The research was approved by ethical committee.

Results: 68% of the respondents reported experience with alcoholism in their parents, which indicates a significant intergenerational transmission of the problem. Alcoholism occurred in the past in 72% of the respondents, with the father's alcoholism being the most common (53%). This pattern was also repeated in the current families of 36% of respondents. 45% of women currently lived in a household with a person who abuses alcohol. As many as 66% of respondents rated their partner relationship as bad or very bad, with problems in the partner relationship being identified as the most common trigger for addiction. In 37% of families, violent behavior was connected with alcohol. 53% of respondents reported overall life dissatisfaction. 82% of respondents admitted to financial problems caused by alcohol, and 70.5% stated that excessive alcohol consumption by family members worsens their current financial situation. More than 65% of respondents faced the restrictions in social life and disruption of relationships with extended family. Despite this, 87% of respondents tried to maintain good relationships with their children, with 63% confirmed that alcoholism in the family had a negative impact on children to a large extent. The research also revealed a significant gap between the need for help and its actual abuse.

Conclusion: The results confirmed the high prevalence of alcoholism and its negative consequences in women over 40 years of age. Alcoholism was closely linked to adverse family experiences, partner problems, economic limits and reduced quality of life. The findings emphasized the need for early prevention, mental health support and accessible intervention programs aimed at middle-aged and older women.

Keywords: alcoholism, women over 40 years of age, risk factors, generational transmission.

Introduction

Alcoholism is one of the most widespread addictions today and is one of the serious health, psychological and social problems of modern society. Excessive alcohol consumption negatively affects the physical and mental health of an individual, disrupts their social relationships, work functioning and overall quality of life. However, the consequences of alcoholism do not only affect the consumer themselves, but also significantly affect their family, partner relationships and the wider social environment.

Alcohol addiction can be divided into psychological and physical. In physical addiction, alcohol becomes part of the body's metabolic processes as a result of long-term and regular use. Its sudden cessation leads to withdrawal symptoms, which can manifest as tremors, sweating, anxiety, insomnia or more serious health complications. Psychological addiction is manifested by a strong need to consume alcohol in order to achieve a certain psychological state or alleviate unpleasant emotions. After stopping drinking, psychological problems such as irritability, restlessness, anxiety or depressive experiences appear (Dočkal, 2000).

Alcohol addiction develops gradually and is accompanied by a number of physical, psychological and behavioral symptoms. The most significant symptoms include loss of control over drinking, when

the individual is unable to regulate the amount of alcohol consumed and repeatedly fails in attempts to limit it or completely abstain. Another characteristic symptom is craving, i.e. an irresistible desire for alcohol, which leads to constant thinking about the possibilities of obtaining and consuming it. A person addicted to alcohol gradually subordinates drinking to other life activities and continues to consume despite the obvious negative consequences for their health, family relationships or work functioning (Okruhlica, 2010).

Excessive alcohol consumption cannot be understood only as increased consumption of alcoholic beverages. In many individuals, it develops into an alcohol dependence syndrome, which is characterized by a strong need to drink alcohol, loss of control over its use and continued drinking despite negative consequences. Such a condition significantly affects all areas of a person's life - from physical health, through psychological well-being and work performance to the quality of interpersonal relationships (Pavlovicova et al., 2025).

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the issue of alcoholism in women, especially in the age group over 40. This period of life is often associated with significant biological, psychological and social changes that can increase vulnerability to the development of addictive behavior. Risk factors include long-term stress, partner problems, loneliness, psychological stress, menopause and adverse family experiences.

Alcoholism is one of the most serious forms of addiction and represents a significant health, psychological and social problem. Its consequences are not limited to the consumer alone, but affect the entire family, work environment and wider social relationships. According to expert knowledge, alcohol dependence arises from the complex interaction of biological, psychological and social factors. Genetic predispositions, personality characteristics, traumatic life events, chronic stress, depressive and anxiety disorders, as well as family and social environment play a significant role (King et al., 2009; Anda et al., 2002).

Slovakia has long been among European countries with high alcohol consumption. 26% consume alcohol several times a month, 37% occasionally and 23% do not consume alcohol at all (NCZI, 2025). At the same time, according to data from the World Health Organization, Slovakia is among countries with high alcohol consumption, with annual consumption exceeding 10 liters of pure alcohol per capita aged 15 years and over (WHO, 2024).

Contemporary society places high demands on work performance, social adaptation and coping with stressful situations. Many individuals therefore use alcohol as a means of short-term relief from psychological tension or emotional problems. However, long-term alcohol use can lead to the development of addiction and subsequently to serious health, psychological and social consequences.

The alcoholism is often referred to as a “disease of the whole family”. Its negative impact is manifested in the deterioration of partner relationships, loss of trust between family members, economic instability and increased incidence of conflicts or domestic violence. Families burdened by alcoholism often face social isolation, financial problems and impaired communication between individual household members (Kendler et al., 2018).

An important aspect of alcoholism is its transgenerational transmission. A comparative study by Slutske et al. (2008), conducted on children of alcoholics using a genetically informed design, demonstrated that the risk of developing alcohol use disorder in offspring is not determined only by genetic factors, but is also significantly influenced by growing up in an environment marked by parental alcoholism. Similar results were obtained by a large Swedish national study by Kendler et al. (2018), which followed more than 685,000 people and confirmed the stable transmission of alcohol dependence across three generations. The risk of developing alcohol use disorder was significantly higher in individuals whose parents or grandparents suffered from alcoholism.

The most vulnerable group affected by the consequences of alcoholism are children. Long-term exposure to conflict, uncertainty and unpredictable behavior of parents creates an environment of chronic stress that can negatively affect the emotional, social and psychological development of the child. A study by Hill et al. (2008) found that children from families with alcohol dependence are at higher risk of developing mental disorders, behavioral disorders, and their own addictions during adolescence and adulthood.

Other comparative studies have shown a link between parental alcoholism, family breakdown, and the subsequent development of addictions in offspring. Krueger et al. (2002) demonstrated that the

combination of parental alcohol problems and parental divorce significantly increases the likelihood of alcohol dependence in children in adulthood.

In recent years, attention has been paid to the issue of alcoholism in women. Research suggests that women often begin to consume alcohol excessively as a result of psychological stress, partner problems, loneliness, traumatic experiences, or long-term stress. In addition, specific factors may be added for women over 40, such as menopause, children leaving the home, caring for aging parents, or changes in partner life. These circumstances may increase the risk of developing or worsening alcohol dependence.

Methods

The presented research therefore focused on the occurrence of alcoholism in women over 40 years of age, its connection with the family environment, partner relationships and transgenerational transmission of addiction, as well as on identifying the consequences of this disease on the lives of women after completing anti-alcohol treatment and a self-help group. The sample consisted of 128 women who had/have experience with excessive alcohol consumption, completed anti-alcohol treatment and support services within a self-help group. The data were collected in cooperation with 3 resocialization centres, 3 self-help groups and 2 community centres during October-December 2025. The participants gave us agreement to participate in the research.

Sample selection criteria:

- Age 40-55 years.
- Anti-alcohol resocialization programme lasting minimum 6 months.
- Participation in a self-help group.
- West Slovakian region – Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra.
- Married life before treatment in resocialization centre.

Hypothesis

H1 Women suffering from excessive alcohol consumption experience different psychological consequences based on the degree of addiction.

H2 Women suffering from excessive alcohol consumption experience different physical consequences based on the degree of addiction.

H3 There is a statistically significant relationship between the incidence of alcoholism in the parents of the respondents and the incidence of alcoholism in their current family.

H4 Women with experience of alcoholism in the family are more likely to seek or feel the need for professional help than women without this experience.

The sample

The sample consisted of 128 women, of which the most numerous were respondents aged 40 to 45 (39% of the sample). The age group from 46 to 50 years made up 35% of the respondents. The age group under 55 years made up 16%. 89% were women who lived in a married relationship before developing an addiction.

Most respondents identified themselves as “heavy drinkers”: Almost half of the sample (45%) drinks alcohol daily. This is the most common form of consumption in our society. 17% of respondents openly admitted to drinking regularly. The remaining 85% of the sample have personal experience with alcohol in varying degrees of intensity, which led them to seek treatment.

In the question, we asked respondents whether they had previously lived in a family with someone who used alcohol excessively. 43% of respondents stated that they had lived with an alcoholic in the family. 57% stated that they had encountered alcoholism in their social environment. Almost 55% had one recidivism during the treatment process, 33% confirmed two recidivism and the rest managed to succeed in the resocialization programme.

Among the women in the study, 9% had completed only primary school education, 37% had finished secondary school, and 54% had attained higher education at university level. Statistical analysis showed no significant association between educational attainment and alcohol abuse in women ($p = 0.141$), indicating that alcohol abuse did not differ meaningfully across education levels.

The research examined which family members in the respondents’ original or previous family environment was affected by alcoholism. The most frequently identified person was the father, reported

by 43% of respondents. Alcoholism was reported in the husband by 18% of respondents and in the partner by 26%. Smaller proportions identified the mother (7%) or a sibling (3%) as the alcoholic family member. Only 3% of respondents stated that no one in their previous family had alcohol-related problems. The analysis revealed a statistically significant correlation between the studied variables, as the p-value was $p = 0.013 < 0.05$.

The study focused on identifying the family member most frequently reported as having alcohol problems in respondents' previous family environment. The findings showed that the most often identified alcohol-dependent person was the father, reported by 73% of respondents. In 61% of cases, the alcohol-dependent individual was the spouse, while 34% indicated a partner. The mother was identified in 7% of cases, and a sibling in 3%. Only 3% of respondents reported that no member of their previous family was affected by alcohol dependence.

In addition, the study examined the occurrence of communication and emotional patterns in families affected by alcoholism (Table 1, N = 128). The results indicate a high prevalence of negative emotional experiences. Fear was reported by 79% of respondents, followed by control (62%) and frequent arguments (57%). Some respondents also reported silence within the family (43%) and verbal or physical fights (71%). More than half of the respondents experienced anger (56%), humiliation (54%), and blame or imposition (50%).

Less frequently, but still notably present, were denials of the problem (45%) and minimization of alcohol-related issues (38%). A notable proportion of respondents indicated uncertainty in their responses, particularly in relation to anger (21%), minimization (20%), and denial of the problem (16%). Overall, the findings demonstrate that families affected by alcohol dependence are characterized by a high level of emotional tension, disrupted communication patterns, and a combination of overt and covert dysfunctional behaviors.

Table 1. Occurrence of communication and emotional manifestations in families with an alcoholic

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	I do not know (%)
Fear	79,0	10,0	1,0
Control	62,0	23,0	15,0
Frequent arguments	57,0	24,0	19,0
Silence	43,0	35,0	12,0
Fights	71,0	36,0	13,0
Anger	56,0	23,0	21,0
Humiliation	54,0	46,0	0,0
Blame/Imposition	50,0	50,0	0,0
Denial of the problem	45,0	39,0	16,0
Minorization	38,0	42,0	20,0

The results indicate a significant presence of negative emotional and communication manifestations in families with alcoholism. The most common responses were fear (89%), control (82%) and frequent arguments (77%). More than half of the respondents also reported silence (63%), reproach (61%), anger (56%) and humiliation (54%). Half of the respondents identified blaming or imposing opinions (50%). Denial of the problem (45%) and trivialization of the situation (38%) were less common. The highest proportion of uncertain responses was recorded for expressions of anger (21%), exaggeration (20%) and denial of the problem (16%), which may indicate their less unambiguous recognition in the family environment. Overall, the results confirm that alcoholism significantly disrupts family communication and creates an environment characterized by a high level of emotional tension.

The standardized Family Member Impact Questionnaire (FMI) was used for data collection
From Orford et al, (2005), which was supplemented by transgenerational transmission of alcohol drinking in women from childhood in the period December 2025 to January 2026.
The Family Member Impact Questionnaire (FMIQ-16) was developed by Orford and colleagues in 1992 and updated in 2005 as part of a set of standardized instruments designed to assess the impact of

addictions on family members of people addicted to alcohol, drugs, or gambling. The questionnaire contains 16 items and is aimed at measuring the burden and negative consequences that the addiction of a family member causes to other members of the household.
Psychometric validation of the questionnaire demonstrated good to very good properties. Research confirmed high content validity, as individual items were created on the basis of extensive qualitative research examining the experiences of family members of people with addiction. Construct validity was confirmed by factor analysis, which identified two basic dimensions of the instrument: Active Disturbance and Worrying Behaviour. These dimensions represent two distinct but interrelated areas of family stress.
The reliability of the questionnaire was verified by an internal consistency indicator (Cronbach's α), with the total score exceeding 0.85, indicating high reliability of the instrument. Test-retest reliability also demonstrated the stability of the results over time, there were no significant changes in the behavior of the dependent family member or in the family environment.

Results

H1 Women suffering from excessive alcohol consumption exhibit different psychological consequences depending on the level of dependence.

The results indicate that most observed differences between low–moderate and medium–high levels of alcohol dependence are not statistically significant at the conventional $\alpha = 0.05$ level. Specifically, mood swings, irritability ($p = 0.089$), loss of social contacts ($p = 0.132$), and manifestations of domestic violence ($p = 0.085$) do not reach statistical significance, suggesting that differences between groups may be due to random variation rather than a systematic effect of dependence level.

However, disturbed communication shows a statistically significant difference between groups ($p = 0.041$). This indicates that the level of alcohol dependence is significantly associated with communication problems, with higher dependence linked to more frequent disturbances in interpersonal communication.
Overall, the findings partially support H1, as only one of the measured psychological consequences demonstrates a statistically significant relationship with the severity of alcohol dependence.

Table 2 Impacts and manifestations of alcohol addiction

Statement	Low-moderate	Medium to high	P
Mood swings, moodiness, irritability	21%	79%	0.092
Disturbed communication	33%	67%	0.041
Loss of social contacts	28%	72%	0.132
Manifestations of domestic violence	39%	61%	0.085

H2 Women suffering from excessive alcohol consumption experience different physical consequences based on the degree of alcohol adiction.

The results indicate a differentiated relationship between the level of alcohol dependence and selected financial as well as domestic violence–related consequences. Overall, individuals with medium to high levels of alcohol dependence reported a higher prevalence of negative outcomes compared to those with low to moderate dependence; however, not all observed differences reached statistical significance.
A statistically significant association was identified in three key areas. First, debts, loans, and problematic spending of money were significantly more frequent among individuals with higher levels of dependence ($p = 0.040$). Second, an adverse financial situation was also significantly associated with higher alcohol dependence ($p = 0.046$), indicating that increased severity of alcohol use is linked to worsening overall financial stability. Third, verbal aggression, including verbal attacks, threats, swearing, and arguments, showed a statistically significant relationship with higher levels of dependence ($p = 0.025$), suggesting that psychological and verbal conflict is more prevalent in households affected by more severe alcohol use.

In contrast, several indicators did not demonstrate statistically significant differences between the two groups. These findings included inability to meet financial obligations ($p = 0.104$), general manifestations of domestic violence ($p = 0.088$), and physical aggression such as attacks, violence, and fights ($p = 0.088$). Although these variables showed higher percentages in the medium to high dependence group, the differences were not strong enough to confirm statistical significance at the conventional alpha level of 0.05.

Table 3 Different physical consequences based on the degree of alcohol adiction

Statement	Low-moderate	Medium to high	P
Debts, loans, spending money	17%	83%	0.040
Adverse financial situation	25%	75%	0.046
Inability to meet financial obligations	30%	70%	0.104
Manifestations of domestic violence	36%	64%	0.088
Verbal attacks, threats, swearing, arguments	19%	81%	0.025
Physical attacks, violence, fights	37%	63%	0.088

The highest reported differences were observed in avoiding social contacts and surroundings (76% vs. 24%; $p = 0.081$) and excluding family from visits due to risky behaviour and alcohol use (74% vs. 26%; $p = 0.078$). Similarly, loss of contact with immediate family (65% vs. 35%; $p = 0.087$), neglecting family responsibilities and absence of joint family activities (69% vs. 31%; $p = 0.085$), and non-participation or avoidance of family interactions (70% vs. 30%; $p = 0.084$) all showed a consistent trend toward more negative outcomes in the higher dependence group. No significance confirmed in the statements below.

Table 4 Correlation in the social dimension and impact of alcohol adiction

Statement	Low-moderate	Medium to high	P
Excluding family from visits due to risky behavior and alcohol	26%	74%	0.078
Loss of contact with immediate family	35%	65%	0.087
Avoiding social contacts and surroundings	24%	76%	0.081
Neglecting family responsibilities, absence of joint family activities	31%	69%	0.085
Non-participation and avoidance of family and common activities	30%	70%	0.084

Statistically significant differences were observed in three key areas. Irresponsible behavior and broken promises were significantly more frequent among individuals with higher alcohol dependence ($p = 0.027$), indicating a strong association between severity of alcohol use and reduced reliability in everyday functioning. Inability to perform work duties was also significantly associated with higher dependence ($p = 0.039$), suggesting a negative impact of alcohol dependence on occupational functioning and productivity. The strongest significant association was observed in the area of damaged mental and psychological health ($p = 0.035$), where a markedly higher proportion of individuals in the medium to high dependence group reported psychological deterioration.

In contrast, two indicators did not reach statistical significance at the 0.05 level. Neglect of personal care, hygiene, and appearance ($p = 0.081$) and associated health problems including impaired physical health ($p = 0.081$) showed higher prevalence in the medium to high dependence group; however, the differences were not statistically confirmed.

Overall, the findings suggest that higher levels of alcohol dependence are significantly associated with behavioral irresponsibility, impaired work functioning, and deterioration of mental health, while

associations with self-care neglect and physical health problems, although present, were not statistically significant in this sample.

Table 5 Testing Hypothesis 2

Statement	Low-moderate	Medium to high	P
Irresponsible behavior, broken promises	16%	84%	0.027
Inability to perform work	25%	75%	0.039
Neglect of personal care, hygiene, appearance	24%	76%	0.081
Damaged mental and psychological health	11%	89%	0.035
Associated health problems and damaged physical health	24%	76%	0.081

H3 There is a statistically significant relationship between the incidence of alcoholism in the parents of the respondents and the incidence of alcoholism in their current family.

A statistically significant difference was found in all examined statements. The presence of excessive alcohol consumption in a parent during childhood was significantly more often attributed to the father than the mother (85% vs. 15%; p = 0.028). Similarly, reports of past alcohol-related problems in the family were significantly associated with paternal alcohol dependence (84% vs. 16%; p = 0.029).
Respondents also significantly more often reported that growing up in a family affected by alcoholism was a difficult experience when the father was the affected parent (80% vs. 20%; p = 0.036). Furthermore, alcoholism in the family was significantly associated with the quality or choice of partner relationships (68% vs. 22%; p = 0.044), indicating a possible long-term impact on relational patterns in adulthood. A significant association was also observed in the perception of transgenerational recurrence of alcohol-related problems in families (67% vs. 23%; p = 0.047).
Overall, the findings demonstrate a consistent and statistically significant pattern in which paternal alcoholism is more frequently reported and more strongly associated with negative childhood and adult relational outcomes compared to maternal alcoholism. These results suggest the importance of family history, particularly paternal alcohol dependence, as a relevant factor in the intergenerational transmission of alcohol-related problems.

Table 6 Testing Hypothesis 3

Statement	Father addicted to alcohol	Mother addicted to alcohol	P
In childhood, there was a problem with excessive alcohol consumption in a parent.	85%	15%	0.028
There was a problem with excessive alcohol consumption in the past.	84%	16%	0.029
I grew up in a family with alcoholism, it was difficult for me.	80%	20%	0.036
Alcoholism affected the choice or quality of my partner relationship.	68%	22%	0.044
I have experience that alcohol problems often recur in families from generation to generation.	67%	23%	0.047

H4 Women with experience of alcoholism in the family are more likely to seek or feel the need for professional help than women without this experience.

A statistically significant relationship was found in four out of five statements. Respondents significantly more often reported knowing where to find help for alcohol abuse in the medium to high dependence group (89% vs. 11%; p = 0.025). Similarly, being pushed to attend a Rehabilitation and

reintegration programme was significantly more common among individuals with higher dependence (84% vs. 16%; p = 0.029). Trust in a social worker as a source of help also showed a statistically significant association (86% vs. 14%; p = 0.022). Furthermore, having sufficient information about available services for addicted individuals was significantly more frequent in the medium to high dependence group (p = 0.025).
In contrast, the item "I looked for help with addiction" did not reach statistical significance (p = 0.154), indicating no statistically confirmed difference between low–moderate and medium–high dependence groups in active help-seeking behavior. Hypothesis was not confirmed.

Table 7 Testing Hypothesis 4

Statement	Yes	No	P
I looked for the help with the adiction.	44%	46%	0.154
I knew where to find the help with the alcohol abuse.	11%	89%	0.025
I was pushed to go to resocialisation programme.	84%	16%	0.029
I trust to social worker to get help.	14%	86%	0.022
I had enough information about services for addicted people.	11%	89%	0.025

Discussion

The family represents the basic social environment in which the personality of an individual, his or her value orientation, the way of coping with stressful situations and relationship patterns are formed. According to Tomanek (2015), the family fulfills an irreplaceable socialization function and significantly influences the psychological, emotional and social development of its members. If alcohol addiction occurs in the family, its basic functions are disrupted, which can have long-term consequences for all household members. Alcoholism in the family is not a problem only for the addicted person, also affects the entire family system. Škrlova (2011) points out that living with an alcoholic is often accompanied by uncertainty, stress, feelings of shame, fear and helplessness. Family members gradually adapt to the behavior of the addicted family member, while often neglecting their own needs and psychological health. Long-term exposure to such an environment can lead to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, depressive symptoms and problems in interpersonal relationships.

The impact of parental alcoholism on children is particularly significant. Experiences gained in childhood are carried over into adulthood and can influence the choice of partner, the way of resolving conflicts or coping with stressful situations. Women who grew up in families marked by alcoholism may have an increased risk of repeating similar patterns of behavior in their own partner and family life. This phenomenon is often referred to as the transgenerational transmission of problem behavior and represents a significant risk factor for the development of addictions in subsequent generations (Tomanek, 2015). For women over 40, a family history of alcoholism may be of particular importance. Various stress factors often accumulate during this period of life, such as partner problems, children leaving the household, health complications or caring for aging parents. If a negative experience with alcoholism in the family of origin is added to these circumstances, the psychological burden and the quality of life may increase.

The results of the research showed that in 128 women, psychological problems were the most common reasons for the development of alcohol addiction. Psychological factors are among the most significant causes of the development of addiction, which was confirmed by 44%. Alcohol was often used by women over 40 as a means of coping with psychological tension in connection with bad partner relationships, in second place were feelings of inferiority, long-term stress and inner unrest (30%) and a set of negative emotions linked to an unsuccessful attempt to cope with internal conflicts, life losses, feelings of unfulfillment, which was expressed by 26% of women. 65% of women admitted that they had a negative experience with their parents' alcoholism.

A study by Kendler et al. (2018) confirmed that both men and women with alcohol use disorder (AUD) pass on the risk of alcoholism to their offspring to the same extent. In other words, it does not matter whether the mother or father is an alcoholic – the risk to the children is comparable.

Kendler et al. (2018) confirmed a significant transgenerational transmission of alcoholism. The risk of alcohol use disorder is transmitted equally from the mother and father, with stronger transmission being observed among same-sex relatives. This means that alcoholism is more often transmitted from

father to son and from mother to daughter than among opposite-sex relatives. This phenomenon may be related not only to genetic factors, but also to learning behavior and the child's identification with the same-sex parent. The study did not find evidence of a significant influence of the X chromosome on the inheritance of alcoholism. This means that the risk of developing alcoholism is not primarily linked to genes located on the X chromosome, but rather to a broader set of genetic and environmental factors. The researchers also found a consistent decrease in risk with the degree of kinship. The more distant the relative with alcoholism, the lower the risk for the offspring. The correlation of risk decreased by about half when moving from first-degree relatives (parents) to second-degree relatives (grandparents, siblings of parents) and then to third-degree relatives (great-uncles, great-aunts). This pattern is typical of genetically determined diseases.

The results also showed that parental alcoholism has the greatest influence on the development of alcoholism in women. If alcoholism is present in the mother or father, the risk of developing alcoholism in children increases significantly. Nevertheless, parental alcoholism was also shown to be an independent risk factor, even in case of parental alcoholism. This supports the theory of multigenerational transmission of alcoholism.

Up to 75% of respondents reported alcoholism in their previous family. Such a high number indicates that many respondents encountered alcoholism in their childhood with their parents or in previous partnerships. This explains their deep interest in this topic. Previous experience with alcohol in the original family (in 43% it was the father) is a key determinant of the respondents' current quality of life. Only 7% of respondents reported the mother, which confirms the statistics that alcoholism is perceived and present in families primarily in men. The majority of respondents therefore grew up in a dysfunctional environment where a stable male role model was missing, which has a fundamental impact on their psychological development. 66% of respondents confirm that a past with an alcoholic fundamentally influences their current experiences. In 40%, there is a direct transmission of pathology - situations from childhood are repeated in their current households. 63% of women under 55 expressed negative experiences, which correlates with unresolved trauma from the family of origin. This is also confirmed by the data that more than half of the respondents (51%) had experience with alcohol in their spouse. High percentages in both fathers and husbands indicate a possible pattern – people who grew up with an alcoholic father often (unconsciously) choose partners with a similar problem. In psychology, this phenomenon is called the reproduction of dysfunctional patterns. Children of alcoholics often unconsciously choose partners with a similar tendency to alcohol addiction become consumers themselves because they grew up in this environment and it is "familiar" to them. These data confirm that alcoholism is not just a short-term problem, but a phenomenon that leaves long-term traces in families (emotional scars, behavioral patterns) that people carry from the past to the present. These findings are consistent with research demonstrating the intergenerational transmission of alcohol use disorders and the significant influence of both genetic and environmental factors on offspring outcomes (Slutske et al., 2008).

The results showed that women with higher levels of addiction more often show moodiness, impaired communication and social contact disorders. A statistically significant relationship was confirmed especially at the impaired communication ($p = 0.041$). These findings are in line with the professional literature, which states that long-term alcohol use negatively affects emotional regulation and social functioning of the individual (Okruhlica, 2010). Alcohol also disrupts cognitive processes and the ability to adequately interact, which leads to a deterioration in interpersonal relationships. In the view of the perspective of social work practice, financial instability is frequently recognized as one of the major secondary consequences of addiction that contributes to social exclusion and family dysfunction (Slovak, 2023).

The research confirmed a statistically significant connection between a higher level of addiction and financial problems, especially debts and a deteriorated financial situation ($p = 0.040$; $p = 0.046$). These findings support the claims that alcoholism has a significant economic impact on the household, as it leads to reduced work performance and irrational financial management (Schavel et al., 2010).

Interestingly, although domestic violence and physical assaults were not statistically significant, verbal assaults were significantly higher with higher levels of addiction ($p = 0.025$). This result corresponds to the literature, which indicates that psychological and verbal forms of aggression occur more frequently than physical violence in families with alcoholism (Škrlova, 2011).

In the area of work functioning, a statistically significant relationship was demonstrated between addiction and inability to perform work ($p = 0.039$), as well as impaired mental health ($p = 0.035$). These findings confirm that alcohol addiction has a direct impact on the productivity and psychological stability of the individual (Ondrejkovič, 2008). The results also support clinical knowledge about the comorbidity of alcoholism with depressive and anxiety disorders. The observed trends correspond with the findings of Orford et al. (2005), who demonstrated that family members of individuals with alcohol, drug, and gambling problems experience elevated levels of stress, psychological strain, disrupted family functioning, and social isolation.

Hypothesis H2, which assumed differences in social and family consequences according to the degree of addiction, was not statistically confirmed. However, consistent trend differences were noted in the areas of social isolation, family contact restrictions, and family avoidance. These findings suggest that although the differences are not statistically significant, there is a clear direction of the relationship that could be confirmed in a larger sample.

Similar results are reported by Orford et al. (2010), who point out that family members of people with addiction often experience social isolation, stress, and disrupted family ties.

The most striking results were noted in family history. Female respondents were significantly more likely to report alcoholism in their father than in their mother, and they also confirmed transgenerational transmission of alcohol problems ($p < 0.05$ for all items). These findings are consistent with a large population study by Kendler et al. (2018), which confirmed that the risk of alcohol use disorder is transmitted across generations and is strongly influenced by the family environment.

At the same time, the results support social-psychological theories of learning, according to which addiction patterns can be transmitted through observation and internalization of family functional models (Tomanek, 2015).

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be proposed for practice, prevention, and further professional intervention in the field of alcohol addiction among women.

First, it is necessary to strengthen preventive programs focused on women, especially those coming from families where alcoholism was present. The research confirmed a significant relationship between alcoholism in the original family and the occurrence of alcohol problems in adulthood, which highlights the importance of early prevention and support for children growing up in dysfunctional family environments.

Another important recommendation is to improve the availability of psychological and social support services for women with alcohol dependence. Since the results demonstrated significant impacts on mental health, communication competences, and interpersonal relationships, treatment should not focus only on abstinence itself, but also on emotional regulation, social functioning, and rebuilding healthy family relationships and social functions.

The findings also indicate the need for multidisciplinary cooperation between healthcare professionals, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, and family therapists. Alcohol addiction has complex psychological, social, financial, and family consequences; therefore, effective intervention requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach.

Special attention should be given to financial counselling and employment support programs. Respondents with higher levels of addiction frequently experienced debt, financial instability, and inability to work. Providing professional assistance in financial management, employment reintegration, and social stabilization could significantly improve the quality of life of affected women and their families.

The research also points to the importance of addressing verbal aggression and family conflicts in households affected by alcoholism. Although physical violence was not statistically significant, verbal assaults occurred significantly more often among women with higher levels of addiction. Preventive interventions and family counselling should therefore include communication training, conflict resolution strategies, and support for healthy interpersonal relationships.

At the same time, it is important to increase awareness about available forms of help and reduce barriers to active help-seeking. Although many respondents expressed trust in social workers and awareness of support services, active utilization of professional help remained limited. Educational

campaigns, community outreach programs, and stigma reduction activities may encourage earlier intervention and treatment seeking.

According to Slovak et al. (2024), social workers are responsible for coordinating professional assistance, strengthening clients' coping capacities, and facilitating access to social resources. Moreover, managers of social service facilities should ensure adequate mental health support and supervision for professional staff, as working with clients affected by addiction and family dysfunction can be emotionally demanding. By promoting both client welfare and staff well-being, social services can provide more effective and sustainable interventions for individuals and families experiencing the consequences of alcohol dependence.

Research limits

The cross-sectional nature of the research also limits the ability to determine causal relationships. Although statistically significant associations were identified between the level of addiction and several psychological, social, financial, and family consequences, it cannot be concluded with certainty whether alcohol dependence directly caused these problems or whether some of the factors existed before the development of addiction.

A further limitation is that some examined variables did not reach statistical significance despite visible trend differences. This may have been influenced by the sample size or unequal representation of respondents across categories of addiction severity. Future research with a larger sample could confirm these trends more clearly, particularly in the areas of social isolation, family avoidance, and physical violence.

The research focused exclusively on women, which provides valuable insight into female alcohol dependence but does not allow comparison with male populations. Gender-specific factors may influence the experience and consequences of addiction differently, and future studies could benefit from comparative analyses between men and women.

In addition, the study did not examine certain potentially important factors in greater depth, such as socioeconomic status, duration of addiction, psychiatric comorbidities, childhood trauma, or the availability of social support systems. These variables may significantly influence both the development of alcohol dependence and its consequences.

Despite these limitations, the research contributes important knowledge about the multidimensional impacts of alcohol addiction in women and highlights the need for comprehensive prevention, treatment, and social support interventions.

Conclusion

The aim of the research was to analyse the incidence and consequences of alcohol dependence in women, focusing on psychological, social, financial and family impacts, as well as the connection between the level of dependence and the occurrence of negative phenomena in the family environment. At the same time, the aim was to identify factors influencing the transgenerational transmission of alcoholism and the level of awareness and use of available help.

The results of the research confirmed that alcohol dependence has a significantly multidimensional character. The strongest statistically significant relationships were demonstrated in the areas of mental health, work functioning, financial stability and verbal expressions of conflicts in the family. Respondents with a higher level of dependence more often reported impaired communication, worsened psychological state, incapacity for work, debt and worsened financial situation.

In the area of family relations, a significant connection was confirmed between the occurrence of alcoholism in the original family and its occurrence in the current family of the respondents, which points to the possible transgenerational transmission of risky behaviour. The findings also confirmed that alcoholism is significantly more often associated with the father than with the mother and has a long-term impact on partner relationships and family functioning.

On the contrary, no statistically significant differences were demonstrated in the area of social isolation and some forms of physical violence, although the results indicated a certain trend of increasing negative phenomena with higher levels of addiction. Similarly, no significant differences were confirmed in active help-seeking, which points to persistent barriers in the behaviour of addicted people.

The results also showed that although female respondents often have information about available help and show trust in social workers, active help-seeking itself remains limited. This discrepancy points to the need for more intensive education, early intervention and more accessible support services.

Overall, it can be concluded that alcohol addiction in women represents a serious health and social problem with a significant impact on the individual, the family and the wider social environment. Research findings highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to prevention and treatment that includes not only medical and psychological interventions, but also social work, family therapy, and strengthening the availability of support services.

Author Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study, acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data, drafted or critically revised the manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ACADEMIC SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

Introduction: Since 2022, generative AI has placed academic social work in a state of tension between technological progress and strict professional ethics. The aim of this study is to critically evaluate the impacts of AI integration on educational and research processes within this field.

Methods: The research utilizes a scoping review method along with a comparative analysis of secondary data (Scopus, Web of Science, UNESCO, OECD, EDUCAUSE) spanning the period from 2020 to 2026. The analysis included semantic filtering, indicator extraction, and thematic coding.

Results & Discussion: The data revealed a profound regulatory vacuum: while 62% of students routinely use AI, 45% of faculties lack established policies, causing technostress in 41% of educators. A conflict persists between the ethical skepticism of academics (78%) and labor market pressure for digital literacy (74%). However, properly implemented immersive AI simulations with virtual clients increase students' clinical self-efficacy by 30%. In research, AI accelerates semantic coding (a 68% increase in efficiency) but introduces risks of academic hallucinations, ideological unification, and the "black-box" problem. Furthermore, 55% of older adults face a new form of cognitive exclusion.

Conclusion: Blanket bans are ineffective; therefore, the solution lies in developing critical AI literacy to audit algorithms. The study proposes a four-pillar adaptation strategy: mandatory curricular reform in digital ethics, a shift in assessment from the textual product (essays) to the process of critical thinking, the establishment of secure university AI "sandboxes" for case studies, and ongoing institutional ethical monitoring.

Keywords: generative AI, academic social work, immersive simulations, digital exclusion

Introduction

Social work as a scientific discipline and an ethically conditioned profession is historically and epistemologically anchored in interpersonal interaction, empathy, direct client contact, and the advocacy of social justice. However, the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the mass diffusion of generative artificial intelligence after 2022 have presented the academic community with an unprecedented ontological challenge. Academic social work—encompassing the university preparation of future practitioners, the development of their competencies, and the execution of scientific research activities—has found itself caught in a tension between technological determinism and professional conservatism.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the emerging concept of Digital Social Work, which redefines traditional methods of social intervention and education within the context of digital exclusion and inclusion (Goldkind & Wolf, 2021). According to socio-technical theories, technology does not merely represent a neutral tool; rather, it becomes an active agent that reshapes social structures and institutional processes. The research problem lies in the fact that while technical and economic disciplines adopt AI systems with minimal value-based barriers, automation in social work encounters strict ethical codes (e.g., those of the International Federation of Social Workers - IFSW). The objective of this study is to identify, categorize, and critically evaluate the impacts of AI

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integration on educational and research processes in academic social work, based on global data collected between 2020 and 2026.

Methodology

Given the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, a scoping review methodology incorporating elements of comparative secondary data analysis was selected. The research sample consisted of relevant monographs, studies indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, and reports by international organizations (UNESCO, EDUCAUSE) published within the timeframe from January 1, 2020, to the first half of 2026.

The criteria for including studies into the analytical dataset were as follows:

1. Thematic focus on higher education within the helping professions, with an explicit emphasis on social work or closely related social sciences.
2. The presence of empirical data regarding the rate of technology adoption, the attitudes of academic staff, or ethical reflections.
3. Publication language in English, Slovak, or Czech within the designated time window.

The analysis proceeded in three distinct phases: first, a semantic filtering of the texts was conducted; subsequently, key quantitative indicators were extracted; and in the final phase, thematic coding was performed, focusing on ethical and curricular implications.

Results

The collected empirical data indicate a massive penetration of technologies into the academic environment, while revealing a profound discrepancy between student practice and institutional readiness.

Quantitative Indicators of AI Penetration

Based on a compilation of global overviews (e.g., *EDUCAUSE Horizon Report*, 2024; UNESCO, 2025) and partial research projects focused on faculties of social sciences (Hitchcock et al., 2023), the following macro-trends were identified:

Table 1: Monitored parameters versus impact on the academic environment

Monitored Parameter / Attitude / Quantitative Share	Primary Identification Source	Impact on Academic Environment	Impact (Implications for Practice and Curriculum)
Autonomous use of GenAI by students /62%	EDUCAUSE Horizon Report (2024)	Students integrate LLM models into their preparation independently of official curriculum guidelines.	The need to transform assessment methods; moving from essays written at home to oral defenses and continuous verification of critical thinking directly in the classroom.
Institutional regulatory vacuum /45%	Hitchcock et al. (2023)	Almost half of faculties lack internal guidelines defining the boundaries of ethical use of AI.	Legal and ethical uncertainty for teachers; inconsistent assessment of student work and the urgent need for a slow systemic integration of technology into teaching; the need for targeted education for educators in the areas of algorithmic bias and digital ethics.
Perception of ethical risks by academics /78%	Reamer (2023) / Panely 2025	Prevailing level of skepticism towards the objectivity of algorithms and	Legal and ethical uncertainty for teachers; inconsistent assessment of student work and the urgent need for a slow systemic integration of technology into teaching; the need for

		protection of the rights of marginalized groups.	targeted education for educators in the areas of algorithmic bias and digital ethics.
Increasing self-confidence through AI simulations / 30%	Empirical Studies (2024 – 2026)	Measurable increase in students' communication skills after completing training with AI avatars.	Possibility of mass deployment of personalized simulation trainers in fields requiring work with people (e.g. crisis intervention or counseling training).
Market demand for data literacy / 74%	Labor Market Analyses (2025)	Social service providers require digitally competent graduates to optimize reporting.	Pressure to innovate university curricula; introduction of interdisciplinary subjects that combine professional practice with modern data analytics and management.
Digital exclusion in the AI era / 55%	OECD Digital Economy Report (2025) / Bryant et al. (2024)	Vulnerable groups and older generations show low levels of confidence and skills when interacting with advanced AI interfaces.	Risk of deepening social inequalities; pressure on universities of the third age and social institutions to implement specific courses focused on inclusive AI literacy.
Technostress and teacher burnout / 41%	Miller & Davies (2025)	Academics experience increased mental strain associated with constant revision of assignments and detection of AI abuse by students.	The need to strengthen institutional psychological and technical support; automation of administration to free up teachers' capacities for direct mentoring. Significant shortening of the publication cycle, but also a higher risk of superficial analyses; the need to introduce strict methodological rules for the transparent introduction of AI tools in research.
Increasing the efficiency of academic research / 68%	Schmidt et al. (2024)	Researchers are actively using GenAI to speed up research phases, encode qualitative data, and proofread texts.	The need to strengthen institutional psychological and technical support; automation of administration to free up teachers' capacities for direct mentoring. Significant shortening of the publication cycle, but also a higher risk of superficial analyses; the need to introduce strict methodological rules for the transparent introduction of AI tools in research.

This table represents the empirical core of the whole issue and captures a fundamental socio-technological paradox: students and the technology market are advancing at lightning speed, while institutional rules and ethical reflections at universities are reacting with a significant delay.
In the monitored parameter / Attitude, we identify a specific phenomenon – whether it is the real behavior of students, the readiness of faculties, the opinions of experts or the requirements of practice. The quantitative share expresses the percentage strength of the given trend. It shows us that these are

not isolated opinions of individuals, but massive, statistically significant phenomena. The primary identification source lists a specific scientific study or global report (from 2020 to 2026) from which the data comes. The impact on the academic environment explains what exactly these percentages mean for everyday life at universities.

Thematic analysis

If we look at the table analytically, the rows together create three coherent pictures:

A) The gap between students and institutions (rows 1 and 2).

Here we see a clear disparity in the speed of adaptation. As many as 62% of students already use generative AI routinely (EDUCAUSE, 2024), but almost half of faculties (45%) have no rules defined at all (Hitchcock et al., 2023). The so-called "regulatory vacuum" is emerging. Students use the tools for writing or research regardless of whether it is allowed. Educators, however, do not have clear guidelines on how to distinguish legitimate assistance from technology from academic fraud.

B) Ethical skepticism vs. relentless market pressure (rows 3 and 5)

This block reveals a deep internal conflict within the helping professions. On the one hand, there is a high level of caution among academics – up to 78% express serious concerns about ethical risks (Reamer, 2023). They fear that AI will deepen systemic prejudices against vulnerable groups. On the other hand, there is a job market where up to 74% of employers in social services require digitally literate graduates due to the transition to automated reporting. Universities cannot simply ban AI from students for fear of ethical failures. If they did, their graduates would be disadvantaged in the job market.

C) The Way Out: AI as a Safe Trainer (Line 4)

This line brings a constructive solution to the whole dilemma. In quantitative terms, a 30% measurable increase in student confidence proves that if AI is handled correctly by educators (for example, to simulate conversations with virtual clients in a crisis), it becomes a top-notch teaching tool. Students practice empathy and de-escalation without actually harming anyone.

Artificial intelligence is not going to disappear from academia. The task of faculties is therefore not to fight the fact that 62% of students use it, but to transform the concerns of academics (78%) into guided learning with measurable results (30% benefit of simulations).

D) Digital exclusion in the AI era (55%)

The traditional "digital divide" once concerned who has and does not have access to a computer or the internet. Today, however, we are moving into a second, much more complex phase – cognitive exclusion. More than half of vulnerable people and seniors are losing ground with the advent of advanced conversational interfaces. AI systems are increasingly being integrated into customer service centers, banks, healthcare, and social services. If a person does not trust the algorithm or cannot formulate requests correctly (lacks prompt-literacy), they remain cut off from important information and services. In addition, many seniors encounter a barrier of uncertainty when they cannot distinguish reality from AI-generated content (e.g. deepfakes). Institutions cannot simply refer people to "virtual assistants". For organizations and universities of the third age, this means a radical change in curriculum. It is no longer enough to teach seniors how to write emails or work with a text editor; it is necessary to move to online critical thinking courses and the safe, practical use of AI tools for personal use.

E) Technostress and teacher burnout (41%)

Almost half of academics are experiencing a new wave of mental exhaustion, directly related to the advent of freely available generative models. Teachers have found themselves in the unenviable role of "detectives." Every homework assignment, essay, or term paper carries with it suspicions of whether it is a student's original work. Moreover, AI text detectors are notoriously unreliable, which creates enormous ethical tension – no one wants to falsely accuse a student, but at the same time no one wants to tolerate plagiarism. The second factor is time: reworking established curricula, topics, and testing methods so that AI cannot easily solve them requires dozens of hours of unpaid extra work. Teachers cannot be left alone in this. The solution lies not in bans, but in institutional support. Faculties need to

provide teachers with clear methodological guidelines, reduce their administrative burden, and open up a space for sharing proven practices (for example, how to use AI directly in lectures as a discussion partner, instead of turning it into an enemy behind closed doors).

F) Increasing the efficiency of academic research (68%)

On the other side of the barricade stands a huge leap in productivity. More than two-thirds of scientists and researchers have already integrated generative AI into their workflows, and the results are fascinating.

Today, AI functions as an extremely capable, alert assistant that never sleeps. It can go through hundreds of foreign studies in a matter of minutes, extract key data, help with coding qualitative interviews, or clean up stylistics and grammar in a foreign language. For authors from non-English-speaking countries, this is a huge leveling of the playing field in the global academic market. However, the risk is superficiality – if a researcher uncritically adopts a literature synthesis without verifying the primary sources, he risks spreading hallucinations (made-up facts and non-existent citations).

The publication cycle is accelerating significantly, which places enormous demands on reviewers in peer-review processes. Absolute transparency is coming to the fore. In the methodology of scientific papers, it is becoming standard to explicitly declare at which stage and in what way a specific AI model was used. In short, speed must not win over academic rigor and fact-checking.

Pedagogical transformation and simulated learning

The traditional model of assessment in academic social work, oriented towards textual outputs (seminar papers, research papers), is undergoing a crisis of legitimacy, losing its informative value (Bearman et al., 2024). Large language models have demonstrated the ability to generate texts that successfully pass standard anti-plagiarism systems, which requires a shift in the focus of assessment from the final product to the cognitive process.

However, a positive finding is the development of specialized educational simulations. The application of closed, institutionally controlled LLMs allows the generation of interactive case studies. Students can thus conduct interviews with virtual clients in controlled conditions (e.g. a client in acute crisis, an involuntary client within the framework of social and legal protection of children). According to empirical analyses, this approach reduces the initial level of anxiety of students in the real field and allows safe failure without harming the real client.

If an algorithm can generate a comparison of social policies at a high academic level, the educational process must move from lower cognitive levels (knowledge, understanding) to higher levels according to Bloom's Taxonomy (O'Connor, 2023). In the critical evaluation process, students no longer primarily produce texts, but critically audit the AI outputs. They analyze where the model shows algorithmic bias or where it has generated factual hallucinations (Reamer, 2023). In the metacognitive reflection process, the student's ability to defend his or her own thought process and ethical decision-making in the face of alternatives proposed by the algorithm is assessed (UNESCO, 2025).

This approach represents a key shift in evaluation strategy, shifting academic assessment from product evaluation (the final text of an essay) to process evaluation (the student’s way of thinking critically, searching for evidence, and defending their decisions) (Bearman et al., 2024).

A significant constructive breakthrough is the implementation of AI in so-called immersive simulated education (Jennings et al., 2025). Unlike traditional role-playing (role-playing between two students), where simulation is limited by shyness or low persuasiveness of peers, AI can consistently and with high fidelity simulate complex psychological profiles of clients (Saban-Sharif et al., 2024).

This process is grounded in Kolb's experiential learning cycle and takes place within academic practice through a precisely structured sequence:

1. **Case Parameterization and Contextualization: The Preparatory Phase** The educator defines a specific AI persona within a closed university interface (Saban-Sharif et al., 2024). Demographic characteristics, case history, cooperation levels, and social pathology (e.g., a female client experiencing domestic violence) are configured. The student receives only a basic client file.

2. **Synchronous Guided Interaction: The Active Phase (15–20 minutes)** The student conducts a simulated interview with the AI assistant (Jennings et al., 2025). The model responds dynamically; if

the student employs an inappropriate, confrontational technique or violates the ethical code, the AI client reacts by withdrawing or becoming aggressive, thereby providing immediate behavioral feedback.

3. **Semantic Analysis and Error Extraction: The Analytical Phase** Upon completion of the interview, the algorithm analyzes the communication transcript (Hitchcock et al., 2023). It evaluates parameters such as the degree of empathy applied, the identification of the client's hidden needs, and respect for self-determination. The tool then generates a detailed report for the student, highlighting critical moments.

4. **Academic Debriefing: The Reflective Phase** This represents the most critical pedagogical step (Kolb, 1984; as cited in Jennings et al., 2025). Together with the instructor, the student analyzes the report from the AI simulation. The educator helps the student process the emotional dimension of the interview and translate the simulated experience into theoretical concepts.

Pedagogical Benefits and Psychological Aspects

Empirical research confirms that this transformation yields measurable results in two key areas.

The first area is the reduction of cognitive load and anxiety. Initial contact with a real client in crisis is often traumatizing for students (Sage et al., 2024). AI simulations function as a psychological buffer. Students can test challenging scenarios within a protected environment where their failure does not bring fatal consequences to a human being. According to evaluation studies, this leads to an increase in their initial professional self-efficacy by up to 30% (Jennings et al., 2025; Sage et al., 2024).

The second area is the standardization of assessment. While in traditional field placements a student's experience depends on the random cases a given facility happens to be managing at that time, AI simulations ensure that every student in a cohort undergoes an identical, methodologically calibrated crisis situation (Saban-Sharif et al., 2024). This guarantees equal conditions for both formative and summative assessments of clinical skills.

Consequently, pedagogical transformation through simulations redefines the role of the university educator. The instructor ceases to be the primary source of factual information and instead becomes a facilitator, an ethical mentor, and a guide who teaches students how to synthesize the technical efficiency of AI with authentic human empathy (UNESCO, 2025).

Implications for Scientific Research Activities

In the field of academic research, AI accelerates the data processing phases. In qualitative research (interview coding, narrative analysis), advanced algorithms can identify semantic nodes and latent themes in a fraction of the time (Devlieghere et al., 2022). However, limitations arise when writing systematic literature reviews, where a high risk of so-called academic hallucinations persists—namely, the generation of fictitious bibliographic references and legal precedents.

While this shift brings a significant acceleration of the scientific cycle, it simultaneously opens critical questions regarding the validity, originality, and ethical integrity of scientific inquiry (MacFadden, 2023).

The most pronounced methodological contribution of AI manifests in processing the extensive and unstructured datasets characteristic of social research.

- Qualitative Research and Advanced Semantic Coding: Traditional methods of qualitative analysis (e.g., thematic or narrative analysis of interviews) have historically been limited by the extreme time demands of manual coding. The integration of Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies allows researchers to analyze hundreds of hours of focus group transcripts or in-depth interviews in real time (Chan & Hu, 2024). Modern LLM models can identify latent semantic patterns, text emotional states (sentiment analysis), and metaphorical structures with high inter-coder reliability, significantly reducing subjective researcher bias (Amoeda et al., 2025).
- Quantitative Research and Predictive Modeling: In quantitative designs, machine learning algorithms allow for the processing of complex administrative big data from social insurance agencies, labor offices, or local governments. Researchers can model non-linear relationships and identify predictive factors of socio-pathological phenomena (e.g., the risk of intergenerational poverty or relapse in addicted individuals) with a level of precision that traditional linear regression models could not achieve (Mertens & Cho, 2025).

- Generative Tools for Academia: Specialized semantic search engines radically streamline the production of systematic reviews. Within seconds, they can map thousands of indexed articles, extract key methodological limitations of existing research, and propose a synthesis of theoretical frameworks (Boddy et al., 2024).

However, this benefit directly collides with two severe limitations:

1. The Phenomenon of Academic Hallucinations: Even the latest models exhibit a tendency to generate fabricated scientific facts, misinterpret statistical values from original studies, or create entirely invented bibliographic references with non-functional DOI codes (MacFadden, 2023). The uncritical adoption of these outputs leads to the devaluation of scientific work.
2. Epistemological Unification: Algorithms tend to favor and recommend the most frequently cited and mainstream theoretical concepts. For social work research, this poses a risk of marginalizing minority, critical, or local social theories, thereby rendering academic discourse ideologically homogeneous (Mertens & Cho, 2025).

The deepest debate within the scientific community concerns the transformation of the very concepts of scientific objectivity and authorship.

Many advanced AI models operate on the basis of neural networks whose internal decision-making processes and mathematical weights are opaque to the researcher. If a social work researcher utilizes such a model to categorize vulnerable population groups, they encounter a lack of methodological transparency. The scientific community cannot fully replicate or verify the procedure by which the algorithm arrived at its conclusions (Devlieghere et al., 2022). This effect is known as the "Black-Box Problem."

Furthermore, using AI to draft texts blurs the line between human authorial contribution and machine linguistic assistance. Since 2024, prestigious scientific databases and publishers have strictly refused to recognize AI models as co-authors of publications; instead, they demand absolute transparency and a detailed description of the exact stage of the research design and the manner in which the technology was applied (Boddy et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

From the perspective of research methodology in social work, it is therefore vital that AI does not replace the analytical thinking of the scientist. It must be rigidly controlled through data triangulation, cognitive auditing, and the strict application of ethical criteria, ensuring that technological efficiency is not bought at the price of losing scientific validity and social responsibility (Chan & Hu, 2024).

Discussion and Ethical Implications

The results of this study open a critical discussion regarding the value-based integrity of the profession. Professor Frederic Reamer (2023), a leading authority on ethics in social work, categorizes the ethical threats of AI into two primary domains that directly impact academic discourse:

1. Algorithmic Bias (Machine Bias): AI models are trained on historical data that reflect societal structural inequalities and socioeconomic prejudices. If academic staff or students utilize predictive models to analyze social risks (e.g., the probability of recidivism or child neglect) without a deep deconstruction of these models, automated replication of discrimination occurs. This directly contradicts the core pillar of social justice.
2. Breach of Confidentiality and Privacy: Utilizing commercial, cloud-hosted LLM models to anonymize or analyze real-world case studies from practice constitutes a severe violation of the principles of confidentiality (particularly within the context of GDPR legislation). Inputted data become part of the training sets of private corporations, thereby devaluing the ethical relationship between the institution and the client.

Consequently, the academic community cannot react restrictively. Blanket bans on AI tools at faculties are proving to be ineffective and counterproductive, given that field-based social practice (official government systems, predictive analytics in local governments) is already implementing these technologies. The task of academia is to overcome the institutional vacuum (Hitchcock et al., 2023) and transform the curriculum toward the development of Data and AI Literacy (Goldkind & Wolf, 2021). The social worker of the future does not need to be a programmer but must possess the competencies required to audit algorithmic outputs, thereby defending the client's human rights against technocratic automated decisions.

Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence into academic social work represents a profound paradigmatic shift that extends far beyond routine technical innovation. Research confirms that while AI offers revolutionary opportunities in simulated education and research efficiency, its uncritical application carries fatal ethical risks through algorithmic bias and the loss of control over confidential data.

For successful higher education adaptation, we propose a four-pillar strategy:

1. Curricular Reform: Mandatory introduction of modules focused on digital ethics and the critical analysis of data systems in social services.
2. Transformation of Assessment Rubrics: A shift from static written assignments toward oral defenses, reflective journals, and direct community-based projects.
3. Institutional "Sandboxes": Development of local, closed AI models hosted on university servers to ensure the secure processing of case studies.
4. Ongoing Ethical Monitoring: Establishment of interdisciplinary committees tasked with assessing the socio-technological impacts of academic research.

Artificial intelligence must remain exclusively a tool for augmenting human potential. Final decision-making, value reflection, and deep empathetic understanding must remain the autonomous domain of the human being—the educated and ethically formed social worker.

Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results, manuscript preparation, and approval of the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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CODE OF ETHICS AS A VALUE FRAMEWORK FOR HELPING PROFESSIONS

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Abstract

Background: Professional ethics constitutes a fundamental component of social work practice and significantly influences the quality of services provided in social service facilities. Adherence to ethical principles, professional values, and codes of ethics contributes to building trust between social workers and clients while ensuring respectful and dignified care. This study aims to examine seniors' attitudes and experiences regarding the observance of ethical principles by social workers in residential facilities for older adults and to explore the relationship between ethical professional conduct, client trust, and the perceived quality of social services.

Methods: The study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire administered to clients of residential social service facilities for older adults. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to identify relationships between selected variables.

Results: The findings indicate that seniors generally perceive ethical conduct as an essential aspect of professional social work. A statistically significant relationship was identified between the ethical behavior of social workers, the level of trust clients place in them, and the overall evaluation of the quality of services provided.

Conclusion: Ethical conduct represents a key determinant of high-quality social work practice. Promoting professional ethics and adherence to ethical standards strengthens client trust, enhances service quality, and contributes to improving the overall well-being of older adults receiving social services.

Keywords: professional ethics, social work, code of ethics, older adults, social services, quality of care, client trust.

Introduction

Quality of services, ethics and trust represent key pillars on which the subsequent satisfaction of the recipient of social services is based. The mutual connection of these three aspects plays a fundamental role in shaping the relationship between the client and the social worker, as well as in the perception of the institution or organization as a trustworthy and professional entity. Social work as a helping profession requires not only professional competence, but also deep ethical awareness and respect for human dignity, individuality and autonomy of the client. Trust is an inseparable element contributing to client satisfaction with the provided social services.

The code of ethics represents a key document of the helping professions, which guides professional behavior and at the same time reflects professional identity and social responsibility. In the context of modern professions, especially in helping professions, codes of ethics fulfill the role of a normative framework that guides the performance of the profession in accordance with the values, principles and expectations of society.

As Dirgová (2024) suggests, ethical codes exhibit a certain value unity, which could be considered a part of the theory of social work, forming the so-called philosophy of social work, which is the same regardless of the different socio-cultural or political situation. Currently, it is increasingly emphasized that the ethical code is not a static document,

but a dynamic tool that reflects changes in the social, cultural and technological environment. It thus becomes not only a protection of the profession, but also a means of building professional identity, i.e. awareness of belonging to the profession, its values, mission and specific culture, which emphasizes the necessity of updating ethical codes in line with new social challenges:

- digitalization and online communication - addressing issues of confidentiality, data protection, boundaries between private and professional life (Barsky, 2019),
- multicultural environment - the need to respect the diversity of clients and prevent discrimination (Banks, 2020),
- global challenges - climate crisis, migration, social inequalities, which require ethical engagement of professionals,

- pressure on performance and bureaucracy - the risk of reducing professional values to administrative requirements.

Ethics is the fundamental pillar of the performance of social work. It represents the basic system of values and moral principles that guide the actions of a social worker. In a professional context, this is all covered by the Code of Ethics for Social Workers, which sets out the principles of ethical behaviour, responsibility and integrity towards clients, society, oneself and the profession itself (Levická, 2014). The creation of a code of ethics is currently considered one of the main conditions of professionalism and is also one of the characteristic features of independent helping professions. According to Mátel and Mališková (2016), a code of ethics refers to a written summary of values, ethical principles and standards of behaviour that are binding for a specific profession, professional workers or organisations at a global, national or institutional level. Although codes of ethics cannot completely prevent unethical behaviour, they significantly contribute to the development of ethical sensitivity among professionals, strengthen the credibility of the profession and increase its social recognition. At the same time, although they do not represent a universal solution to all ethical problems, conflicts and dilemmas, they can serve as an important aid in responsible and ethically considered decision-making. However, the process of creating a meaningful and effective code of conduct is not always easy (Narayanan, 2025).

In real social work conditions, professional ethics are reflected in everyday activities, which can be, for example:

- working with the client - open communication, respect for his situation, clarification of rights and obligations,
- creating an individual plan - active involvement of the client, support for his autonomy and decision-making,
- teamwork - respect for the opinions of colleagues, sharing responsibility, supervision,
- resolving conflicts and dilemmas - the ability to make decisions based on ethical principles, not subjective feelings or pressure from the environment.

Ethical dilemmas arise, for example, in situations where a worker must choose between confidentiality and the obligation to report a serious threat, when their personal beliefs are not in line with the client's position, or when systemic obstacles prevent the client's needs from being met. Therefore, tools such as ethical reflection, an ethics committee, supervision, or ongoing education are important (Hricová et al., 2024).

Methods

The aim of the research was to confirm the importance of implementing a code of ethics in social work practice, to assess compliance with the code of ethics and its impact on the quality of life of seniors in social service facilities. The research was conducted in 2 selected facilities for seniors in Prešov and Košice (Náruč and VIA -LUX). It would be worthwhile to add the research instrument, namely how many items the questionnaire had, whether it was pilot-tested, which questions formed the individual variables.

We set 3 research hypotheses:
Hypothesis 1: Seniors who perceive the behavior of social workers as ethical evaluate their quality of life in social service facilities more positively.
Hypothesis 2: Compliance with ethical principles of social workers is associated with a higher level of satisfaction of seniors with services in the provision of social services.
Hypothesis 3: Ethical behavior of social workers positively affects the level of trust of seniors towards social workers.

The research sample consisted of a total of 106 respondents from social service facilities Náruč Prešov and VIA LUX - Social Service Home and Senior Care Facility Košice. 65 questionnaires were distributed, with 51 returned from Prešov and 55 from the senior care facility in Košice. The percentage of successful return of questionnaires is 81.5%, which can be considered a high return rate.

An anonymous questionnaire of our own design was used to collect data, which contained 22 questions and was intended for seniors in senior care facilities in Košice and Prešov.

Individual items were rated using a five-point Likert scale (1 - completely disagree to 5 - completely agree).

Items focused on respect, dignity, professionalism, communication, confidentiality and responsibility were combined into a comprehensive index of ethical behavior of social workers, items related to the feeling of security and the possibility of contacting a social worker formed the trust index, and items assessing satisfaction and quality of life in the facility formed a separate quality of life index.

In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female - 69 women, which represents 65.1%, there were 37 men (34.9%).

The most numerous age group was seniors aged 81-90 years (49; 47.6%), followed by the group of 71-80 years (28; 27.2%), the age category of 61-70 years (14; 13.6%) and the least represented were respondents aged 91 years and over (12; 11.7%).

Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the relationships between variables measured by the Likert scale, since the summary score was considered an interval variable. Linear regression analysis was used to verify the predictive relationship between ethical behavior of social workers and trust of seniors.

Results

Reliability is reliability and refers to how consistently the questionnaire measures what it is supposed to measure. For the calculation, we used Cronbach's alpha, which expresses internal consistency and whether the individual items in the questionnaire are consistent with each other. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 - 1, where 0.9 is excellent reliability, while 0.8 - 0.9 is good reliability, 0.7-0.8 is acceptable reliability and <0.7 is low reliability. We got a result of 0.896, which is good reliability of the questionnaire items.

On the contrary, validity refers to whether the questionnaire measures what it is supposed to measure, i.e. the implementation of the code of ethics. Item analysis (correlation of items with the total) shows how well each question represents the overall concept. If a question correlates highly with the total score, it contributes to the validity of the instrument. Most questions have a correlation with the total in the range of 0.55 to 0.78, which is excellent. Factor analysis is an indication of structural validity – the first main factor explains approximately 38% of the total variance, i.e. the questionnaire is unidimensional and truly measures one strong main concept, which is the implementation of ethics.

Statistical verification of hypotheses will be performed using Pearson correlation analysis and linear regression analysis, with statistical significance assessed at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Hypothesis 1 Seniors who perceive the behavior of social workers as ethical evaluate their quality of life in a social service facility more positively.

In order to test the hypothesis using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r), we first need to create two summary indices, i.e. variables. The first variable is ethical behavior,

where we calculated the scores from questions 1 to 18, which directly related to the behavior of social workers and ethics. The next variable was satisfaction with the quality of life, where we used question 19, which in the questionnaire served as an indicator of satisfaction with the quality of life in the facility. The numerical representation is in Table 1.

Table 1 Pearson correlation : Behavior of social workers and ethics

Descriptive statistics	**Value**
Pearsonov coeficient (r)	0.762
Pearson value p	< 0.001
Total	106

In interpreting the results, we talk about the strength of the relationship, where the value indicates a strong direct dependence. In statistics, values above 0.7 are considered very significant. The correlation is positive, i.e. the more positively seniors perceive the ethical behavior of the staff, the higher they rate their overall satisfaction, i.e. the quality of life in the facility.

We tested statistical significance at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Given that

the calculated p-value ($p \leq 0.001$) is lower than the specified significance level, we conclude that the relationship between ethical behavior and quality of life is statistically significant.

Based on the analysis performed, we can conclude that hypothesis 1 was confirmed. There is a strong and statistically significant relationship between the perception of ethical behavior and the assessment of quality of life.

Hypothesis 2 Adherence to ethical principles of social workers is associated with a higher level of satisfaction of seniors with services in the provision of social services.

In this hypothesis, we have two variables, namely the index of ethical behavior and satisfaction with services. The independent variable – adherence to ethical principles of social workers – is obtained using items 2 to 16, which capture specific manifestations of ethical behavior (respect, respect, confidentiality, professionalism, communication, etc.). The dependent variable – the level of satisfaction of seniors with services – is obtained using items 17 and 18, which express overall satisfaction and perception of the quality of life in the facility. Item No. 1 has a complementary character (awareness of the code of ethics) and item 19 serves to identify suggestions for improving ethical behavior. The numerical representation is in Table No. 2.

Table 2 Pearson correlation

Descriptive statistics	**Value**
Pearson coeficient (r)	0.762
Pearson value p	< 0.001
Total	95 % ($\alpha = 0.05$)

In interpreting the results, we talk about the strength of the relationship, where the coefficient means a high degree of relationship tightness. Statistical significance is highly significant, i.e., that the probability that this result would arise by chance is practically zero. The data confirm that the more social workers adhere to ethical principles, such as respect, confidentiality, professionalism, the more seniors are satisfied with the overall provision of social services.

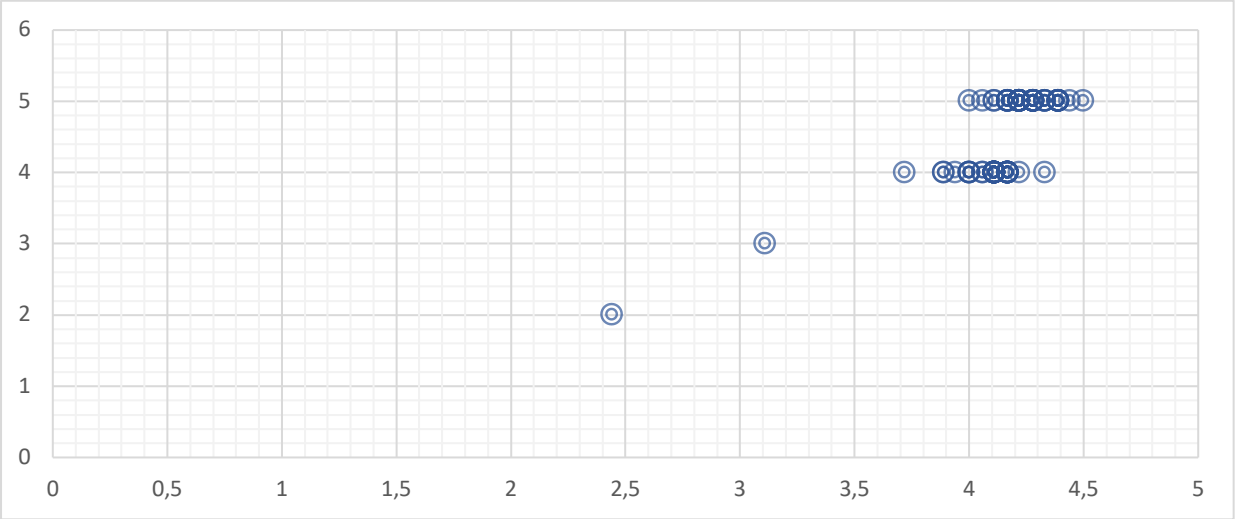
To verify the relationship between adherence to ethical principles and overall satisfaction of seniors with services, we chose the Pearson correlation coefficient. The independent variable - adherence to ethical principles of social workers - refers to specific manifestations of ethical behavior (respect, confidentiality, professionalism, communication, etc.). The dependent variable - the level of satisfaction of seniors with services, which expresses overall satisfaction and perception of the quality of life in the facility.

The calculated value of the Pearson coefficient ($r=0.762$) indicates a strong direct connection between the variables. Statistical testing was performed at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, whereas the achieved p-value ($p \leq 0.001$) confirmed the validity of the relationship with a high degree of reliability.

The results show that the level of satisfaction of seniors with services is closely related to how they perceive the ethical level of staff work. Based on the data obtained, hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

The graphical representation (scatter diagram) confirms a strong positive linear dependence between the variables. Most respondents are located in the upper right quadrant of the graph, which means that a high assessment of the ethical behavior of staff (4 - 5 points) is directly associated with a high assessment of overall satisfaction and quality of life (4 - 5 points). This trend is statistically significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

Figure 1 Scatter plot hypothese 1 a hypothese 2



The analysis of individual items (Fig. 1) shows that respondents rate respect and dignity the best (average 4.42). On the contrary, the lowest score was achieved by awareness of the existence of a code of ethics (3.58). This difference indicates that although workers behave ethically in practice, the formal familiarization of clients with the code is a weaker point of the facilities.

Although we also present hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 in the graph, the following applies. For hypothesis 1 (quality of life), we emphasize that the ethical approach of staff makes seniors' lives in facilities overall more beautiful and dignified. The scatter graph shows that without ethics, seniors do not perceive their quality of life positively. For hypothesis 2 (satisfaction with services), ethics is a key parameter of service quality. The graph proves that a satisfied client is one who is treated ethically.

Hypothesis 3 Ethical behavior of social workers positively affects the level of trust of seniors in social workers.

For hypothesis 3, we chose linear regression. Regression tells us to what extent one variable (ethics) can predict a change in the other variable (trust). For the calculation, we used the independent variable cause, i.e. the index of ethical behavior (average of questions 1-14) and the dependent variable (consequence) - question 15 (the behavior of social workers inspires a feeling of trust in me). The numerical representation is in table no. 3.

Table 3 Linear regression result for hypothesis 3

Statistical indicator	**Value**	**Interpretation**
Coefficient of determination (R2)	0.784	Etika vysvetľuje 78,4 % variability dôvery.
Regression coefficient (β)	0.885	Ak sa etika zvýši o 1 bod, dôvera vzrastie o 0,8 bodu.
Significance level (p)	< 0.001	Výsledok je vysoko štatisticky významný.
F-statistic	377.4	Model je správne nastavený a funkčný.

The value is considered extremely high in social sciences. This means that the trust of seniors almost entirely depends on how ethically the workers behave. Only about 21% of trust is influenced by other factors (e.g. the nature of the senior or previous experiences). The model confirmed that ethical behavior is a strong predictor of trust.

To verify the degree of influence of ethical behavior on the trust of seniors, we used linear regression analysis. The independent variable was the summary index of ethical behavior and the dependent

variable was the item focused on the feeling of security and trust. The regression model is statistically significant ($F(1,104) = 377, 4; p<0.001$). The value of the adjusted coefficient of determination $R2=0.782$ indicates that the model explains 78.2% of the variance of the dependent variable. The standardized coefficient $\beta=0.855$ confirms a strong positive influence. This means that with increasing perception of ethical behavior of staff, the level of trust among seniors increases significantly. Based on linear regression, we can say that hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

Discussion

In connection with our topic, we can compare our research with previous research by Dirgová and Ďurčanská (2024, p. 84), which focused on mapping the application of the code of ethics in the practice of social workers in selected social service facilities and also on the quality of life of social service recipients as a result of the application of the code of ethics. The aim of the aforementioned research was to confirm whether the code of ethics affects social workers in the performance of their profession, and at the same time whether it also affects the quality of life of social service recipients in selected facilities.

In the results of the work, we evaluated the research hypotheses, where the first hypothesis was devoted to whether seniors who perceive the behavior of social workers as ethical evaluate their quality of life and social service facilities more positively. In the interpretation of the results, we spoke about the strength of the relationship, where the value indicated a strong direct dependence. The correlation was positive, i.e., the more positively seniors perceived the ethical behavior of the staff, the greater they evaluated their overall satisfaction, i.e. quality of life in the facilities. Since we monitored two facilities, the results concerned both. The results showed a relationship between ethical behavior and quality of life. Based on this analysis, hypothesis 1 was confirmed, because there was a strong and statistically significant relationship between the perception of ethical behavior and the assessment of quality of life.

Hypothesis 2 examined whether compliance with ethical principles by social workers

is associated with a higher level of satisfaction of seniors with services in the provision of social services. As part of the interpretation of the results, we talked about the strength of the relationship and the data confirmed that the more social workers adhered to ethical principles (respect, confidentiality, professionalism), the more seniors were satisfied with the overall provision of social services. The results showed that the level of satisfaction of seniors with services was closely related to how they perceived the ethical level of the staff's work.

When compared with other research, we learn that ethical leadership in long-term care needs to be examined in response to the growth of the world's elderly population. Coelho and Etges (2023) conducted research on a sample of 277 caregivers and 277 seniors in long-term care in Brazil. The results identified a positive impact of ethical leadership on caregivers' attitudes and favored their orientation towards seniors. A pro-client-oriented caregiver applied ethical leadership that was beneficial to seniors and their family members. The impact of ethical leadership on senior-related outcomes may have an indirect impact,

since leadership plays a fundamental role in providing effective senior care, based mainly on professional care and a harmonious and healthy living environment (Robbins et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 2 is also compared with the research of authors Dirgová and Ďurčanská (2024), where the authors address the application of a code of ethics in the context of improving the quality of service recipients in selected social service facilities. Dirgová and Ďurčanská (2024) write that ethics is an essential part of the professional activities of social workers. Knowledge of the code of ethics of social workers is a basic prerequisite for the quality of social service provision. The authors found in their research that the application of a code of ethics improves the quality of life of seniors in the facility.

Hypothesis 3 stated that ethical behavior of social workers positively influences the level of trust of seniors towards social workers.

The research follows on from a previous study (Willis et al., 2022 In Perry et al. 2025), which highlighted the importance of a strong value and ethical foundation of social workers when working with older people, especially in the context of multidisciplinary teams. Key elements included the promotion of seniors' rights, the use of strengths-based approaches, an emphasis on relationship continuity, and the application of professional and therapeutic skills. These findings are consistent with our hypothesis 3, which assumed that ethical behavior of social workers positively influences the level of trust of seniors. Our quantitative results, confirmed by linear regression, demonstrated a strong

positive relationship between perceived ethical behavior and seniors' trust, thus confirming the hypothesis. While our research statistically verifies this relationship, the aforementioned study provides a deeper context and explanation of the mechanisms through which ethical and value-oriented behavior of social workers contributes to building trust and overall improvement of the quality of life of seniors

Based on the empirical findings, it can be clearly stated that the ethical behavior of social workers does not only represent a theoretical framework of their profession, but also has a direct and measurable impact on the quality of life, satisfaction and trust of recipients of social services. The assumption that ethical behavior has an impact on the quality of social service provision was fulfilled.

Research limits: The research conducted does not have the ambition to generalize the obtained results, also due to its regional nature - the findings come from only 2 social service facilities from regional towns in eastern Slovakia. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account a certain degree of subjectivity in the responses of seniors. This concerns, for example, the tendency to positively evaluate the social service facility and the fear of expressing oneself critically.

Recommendations for practice:

- Support of trust between seniors and staff - ethical behavior is a strong predictor of trust.
- Building a relationship based on trust, open communication and respect.
- Ensuring staff stability (frequent staff turnover reduces trust).
- Individual care according to the client's needs.
- Respecting the autonomy of seniors in decision-making.
- Involving seniors in planning and co-creating the services provided, thereby increasing their participation.
- Treating seniors as active partners, not as passive recipients of assistance.

Introduction of regular feedback from clients - feedback helps to identify areas where ethical behavior is not sufficiently fulfilled.

- Supporting clients' awareness of their rights and protection options in the event of unethical behavior by social workers.
- Informing clients about the existence of the code of ethics, as well as the possibilities of filing a complaint or a suggestion. Responding to suggestions with specific changes.

Conclusion

We consider the key contribution of the research to be the confirmation of strong statistical relationships between adherence to ethical principles and the subjective experience of seniors in social service facilities. The results show that ethics in practice is not an abstract concept, but a concrete tool that influences the daily functioning of clients. From a practical point of view, this means that the systematic application of the code of ethics can significantly contribute
to improving the quality of the services provided.

The results also point to the need for regular assessment of compliance with ethical standards in practice, not only by management, but also through feedback from the clients themselves.

An important contribution is also the identification of the importance of trust as a key element of the relationship between a social worker and a senior. Research has shown that ethical behavior significantly affects the level of trust, which subsequently has an impact on cooperation, client openness and the effectiveness of the assistance provided. In practice, this means that ethics should be perceived as a basic prerequisite for building a quality working relationship.

We consider the key contribution of the research to be the confirmation of strong statistical relationships between compliance with ethical principles and the subjective experience of seniors in social service facilities. The results point to the fact that ethics in practice is not an abstract concept, but a concrete tool that affects the daily functioning of clients. From a practical point of view, this means that the systematic application of the code of ethics can significantly contribute to increasing the quality of the services provided.

Author Contributions

All authors made significant intellectual contributions to this work, including the conception and design of the study, data acquisition, analysis and interpretation, manuscript drafting and revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and accept responsibility for its content.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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