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REVIEW ARTICLE

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL POWER PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Non-governmental organizations are actors who are concerned with social problems and are becoming increasingly important in current societies. They are a regulatory tool in the participatory processes based on legal framework in the institutional arrangements of the society carried out by other than the state. They are also defined as organized structures that develop relationships with the society other than the state. Social service provides "aid and support" to the groups with special requirements in these social structures with service works. Social workers increase the life quality of the individuals by empowering them with the aid and support provided. Factors such as workload, organizational pressure or low income and wage problems of the social workers affect their personal and professional power perceptions. Therefore, it is important to present the power perceptions of the social workers trying to empower the people that they provide support to. The aim of this study is to present the personal and professional power perceptions of the social workers employed in non-governmental organizations. "Personal and Professional Power Perceptions of Social Workers" scale adapted by Kırhoğlu and Karakuş (2019) was used. Surveys were sent to 107 social workers employed in non-governmental organizations by convenience sampling method. In conclusion, having previously worked in a non-governmental organization does not affect the personal and professional power perception.

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INTRODUCTION

Many important problems arise in the social policy fields in Turkey. Social policy models, which are insufficient for adapting to economic and social changes, cannot provide solutions to these problems. The insufficiency of solutions provided in the fields of social policy makes the provision of social services even more important. Social services are sometimes needed for certain age periods such as childhood, old age, or natural reasons that arise if the individual is insufficient to survive due to some reason such as disability. And other times it is needed due to social reasons that express social problems such as poverty, unemployment and violence caused by social life (Tepav, 2010: 3-49). Social services shape in accordance with existing social problems of the society and social policies. The solution focus of social problems can be expressed as increasing social welfare by solving social problems. Social workers take their powers from the law within the framework of the official policies (Danış, 2007: 52).

In this sense, social service contributes to the creation of social policies that affect the individuals, groups or societies by providing strategies and programs for the solution of the social policies (Denney, 1998: 37). For instance, what social workers can do for the children in need of protection is defined by the social policies (Ashman and Hull, 1999: 18). Tomanbay (1999: 237) defines social service as "it is the systematic, regular and continuous activities developed for the solution of individual and social problems that cannot be solved without help, with formal, semi-formal and voluntary activities, since the maintenance and protection of special needs groups are the responsibility and duty of the society. In light of this definition, the service and intent works of the social service are "aid and support" activities. The intervention of social work also includes organized efforts to solve the obstructions that arise in order to increase the welfare level of the society and to help the individuals on subjects such as health, development and integration with the society. Empowerment and freedom concept of social service has features that almost define the profession. Social change and development of social service includes applications that increases social commitment and empowers and frees people. Therefore, social workers have an important duty to empower the other people. The people empowered by social workers are defined as "clients". The term petitioner is used in the meaning of "applicant".

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In Turkey, the people which are the essence of the social service profession are called as "clients" (Özdemir, 2019: 37-38). The concepts of power and empowerment in the social service literature are generally examined from the perspective of the clients that social workers serve (Kırlioğlu, 2019: 656). It is thought that this study will contribute to the literature since it examines the concept of power from the perspective of social workers.

Aim and importance of the study: The aim of this study is to determine the personal and professional power perceptions of the social workers. This study is important in terms of presenting power perceptions of social workers who have to practice social work with client groups, rather than the client perspective which is associated with the concepts of power and empowerment. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations, which have the role of affecting the state as non-state organizations, provide social services to groups under risk in issues such as education, health and social aid. In this sense, examining the power perceptions of social workers employed in non-governmental organizations is important.

METHODS

Population and Sample: Social workers employed in non-governmental organizations in Turkey constitute the population of the study. Convenience sampling method is used when costs and time limitations are considered. In this context, the sample of the study consists of 107 social workers employed in non-governmental organizations that can be reached with convenience sampling. The surveys were sent to the social workers via mail. Surveys of the 107 social workers who answered between 15 March and 15 May 2020 were analyzed.

Data Collection Tool: Personal and Professional Power Perception of Social Workers Scale was used as a data collection tool in the study. The "Personal and Professional Power Perceptions of Social Workers" scale adapted by Kırlioğlu and Karakuş (2019) from the "The Social Work Empowerment Scale" created by Frans (1993) in order to determine the strengths of social workers. The scale, whose validity and reliability study was conducted by Kırlioğlu and Karakuş (2019), has a five-factor structure that explains 55.8% of the total variance. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of the scale is 0.89. The scale consists of 34 questions and 5 sub-dimensions including collective identity, knowledge and skill, self-concept, critical awareness and propensity to act. The scale, which is a 5 point Likert type scale, ranges from 1 to 5, indicating that the participants strongly disagree or strongly agree and there are no inverse statements in the scale.

Collection of the Data: The study was designed as a quantitative research. In the study, the questions about the demographic properties and a survey including the Personal and Professional Power Perception of Social Workers Scale was used as a data collection tool. There were (6) questions regarding the demographic information and 34 questions associated with the scale were asked in the second section of the survey.

Analysis of the Data: The analysis of the data was conducted in computer environment and SPSS Statistics 22.0 program was used for the analyses. First, reliability analysis was conducted on the scale.

The data were evaluated with their analysis using figures, percentages and frequencies, and the relationship between some demographic elements and the personal and professional power perceptions of social workers participating in the study was tried to be explained. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of the Scale was found as 0.75; collective identity, knowledge and skill, self-concept, critical awareness and propensity to act sub-dimensions was found as 0.80; 0.82; 0.75; 0.70; 0.74, respectively. It is within the limitations accepted as highly reliable in social sciences. The scale is accepted as highly reliable in social sciences if $60 \leq \alpha < .80$.

FINDINGS

107 social workers employed in various non-governmental organizations participated in the study. Demographic properties of the social workers that participated in the study are shown in Table 1. Out of 107 social workers participating in the research, 63.6 percent are women and 36.4 percent are men. 60.7 percent of the participants are married and 30.8 percent are single. The participants are mostly social workers who are at the beginning of the profession. 64.5 percent have seniority between 1-5 years, 26.2 percent have seniority between 5-10 years. The proportion of the participants between the ages of 25-50 is 83.1 percent. Nearly half of the participants have bachelor's degree, 19.6 percent have social service associate degree and 28 percent have postgraduate degree. When the general properties of the participants are examined, there are more married female social workers and social workers who have a bachelor's degree with seniority between 1-5 years.

The statements of the survey that the social workers answered regarding their personal and professional power perceptions are shown in Table 2. There are 34 expressions aimed at measuring the personal and professional power perceptions of the social workers participating in the study. Almost half of the participants (48.6 percent) enjoy spending time with other people in their profession. 53.3 percent of the participants think that it is helpful to join with other to solve problems. 59.8 percent of the participants disagree with the statement that the workers in their agency all have a common purpose. Only 36.4 percent of the participants state that they have frequent contact with other specialists in their field. When the fact that the professional seniority of the participants varies between 1-5 years is considered, it can be better understood why the percentage of those who are uncertain (64.5) on the statement of knowing what response to take to the situations arising at work. 74.8 percent of the participants think that their education prepared them for their job. On the other hand, social workers state that they have adequate information resources to solve most professional problems (66.3 percent) and they are aware of all the pertinent issues related to their field of practice (85 percent) despite their low seniority levels. This can be evaluated that social workers have high level of self-confidence.

The rate of participants feeling pretty sure of themselves even when people disagree with them is only 17.8 percent. The ratio of those who feel self-assured around their superiors is 45.8 percent. The rate of social workers who think that they serve a valuable role in their professional capacity is 90.6 percent. The ratio of those who think that they are usually able to think through all the relevant issues is 18.7 percent.

Table 1. Demographic Information Table

		Frequency	Percentage			Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Woman	68	63.6	Whether she worked in an NGO before	Yes, I have	65	60.7
	Male	39	36.4		No, I have not	42	39.3
Marital Status	Married	65	60.7	Educational Status	Associate Degree	21	19.6
	Single	33	30.8		Undergraduate	52	48.6
	Divorced	6	5.6		Postgraduate	30	28
	Spouse is deceased	3	2.8		Doctoral	4	3.7
Seniority	1-5 Years	69	64.5	Age	18-25	15	14
	5-10 Years	28	26.2		25-35	39	36.4
	10-20 Years	7	6.5		35-50	50	46.7
	20 Years and Above	3	2.8		50 and above	3	2.8

Table 2. The Frequency of the Statements on the Personal and Professional Power Perception of Social Workers

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Collective Identity										
I enjoy spending time with other people in my profession.	8	7.5	52	48.6	27	25.2	13	12.1	7	6.5
It is helpful to join with others to solve problems.	23	21.5	57	53.3	11	10.3	15	14	1	0.9
The workers in my agency all have a common purpose.	16	15	27	25.2	38	35.5	22	20.6	4	3.7
I identify strongly with my profession.	6	5.6	17	15.9	39	36.4	35	32.7	10	9.3
I consider myself a joiner.	23	21.5	46	43	19	17.8	16	15	3	2.8
I enjoy using a team approach.	11	10.3	47	43.9	35	32.7	8	7.5	6	5.6
I have frequent contact with other specialists in my field.	7	6.5	39	36.4	15	14	40	37.4	6	5.6
Knowledge and Skills										
I usually know what response to take to situations that arise at work.	5	4.7	11	10.3	69	64.5	19	17.8	3	2.8
My education prepared me for my job.	23	21.5	57	53.3	18	16.8	4	3.7	5	4.7
I have adequate information resources to solve most professional problems.	12	11.2	59	55.1	12	11.2	21	19.6	3	2.8
I am aware of all the pertinent issues related to my field of practice.	64	59.8	27	25.2	8	7.5	5	4.7	3	2.8
I rarely run into unfamiliar problems at work anymore.	7	6.5	7	6.5	34	31.8	54	50.5	5	4.7
I often read professional/academic journals.	3	2.8	22	20.6	52	48.6	26	24.3	4	3.7
I frequently attend conferences and training sessions to improve my skills.	51	47.7	33	30.8	11	10.3	12	11.2	-	-
If I do not have the answer to a question, I always know where to find it.	5	4.7	21	19.6	36	33.6	39	36.4	6	5.6
I am frequently told that I am a very knowledgeable worker.	5	4.7	28	26.2	61	57	8	7.5	5	4.7
Self-Concept										
I feel that I am important to the people I work with.	29	27.1	70	65.4	5	4.7	2	1.9	1	0.9
I feel as competent as anyone else I work with.	56	52.3	26	24.3	17	15.9	26	24.3	56	52.3
I feel pretty sure of myself, even when people disagree with me.	3	2.8	16	15	31	29	44	41.1	13	12.1
I think I serve a valuable role in my professional capacity.	9	8.4	88	82.2	6	5.6	3	2.8	1	0.9
I generally make a good impression with others.	35	32.7	55	51.4	8	7.5	6	5.6	3	2.8
I feel self-assured around my superiors.	12	11.2	37	34.6	36	33.6	7	6.5	15	14
I do not doubt my self-worth even when I think others do.	60	56.1	24	22.4	18	16.8	3	2.8	2	1.9

Continue

Critical Awareness										
I am usually able to think through all the relevant issues.	8	7.5	12	11.2	58	54.2	25	23.4	4	3.7
I always know who has the power in different situations.	18	16.8	21	19.6	27	25.2	23	21.5	18	16.8
My place in the world is always very clear to me.	29	27.1	72	67.3	2	1.9	3	2.8	1	0.9
I usually know exactly where to stand.	14	13.1	78	72.9	10	9.3	3	2.8	2	1.9
My intuitions and hunches prove to be right most of my time.	29	27.1	42	39.3	14	13.1	20	18.7	2	1.9
Propensity to Act										
I volunteer to take on extra work in areas of concern or interest to me.	16	15	87	81.3	2	1.9	1	0.9	1	0.9
When I become aware of activities to address a problem of interest, I try to find out how to get involved.	18	16.8	48	44.9	20	18.7	13	12.1	8	7.5
I am often the one to initiate responses to problems.	13	12.1	14	13.1	24	22.4	50	46.7	6	5.6
I have organized co-workers or others to offer new programs or interventions.	3	2.8	16	15	22	20.6	63	58.9	3	2.8
One of the things I like in a job is to have multiple involvements in different areas of interest.	51	47.7	30	28	11	10.3	11	10.3	4	3.7
I would rather take action than to trust that things will work out.	12	11.2	49	45.8	18	16.8	13	12.1	15	14

Table 3. T-Test Table of Personal and Professional Power Perceptions of Social Workers According to Whether They Have Previously Worked in an NGO

	Status of Previously Worked in an NGO	\bar{x}	SS	F	P*
General Average	Previously Worked Not Previously Worked	3.38 3.44	.261 .205	3.698	.193
Collective Identity	Previously Worked Not Previously Worked	3.21 3.52	.846 .323	50.345	.010
Knowledge and Skills	Previously Worked Not Previously Worked	3.38 3.34	.228 .374	9.041	.505
Self-Concept	Previously Worked Not Previously Worked	3.39 3.48	.264 .271	2.287	0.99
Critical Awareness	Previously Worked Not Previously Worked	3.45 3.69	.182 .385	24.084	.001
Propensity to Act	Previously Worked Not Previously Worked	3.48 3.22	.262 .348	5.954	.000

*p<0,05

Table 4. T-Test Table of Personal and Professional Power Perceptions of Social Workers According to Gender

	According to Gender	\bar{x}	SS	F	P*
General Average	Woman	3.41	.237	.102	.488
	Male	3.38	.252		
Collective Identity	Woman	3.25	.826	30.473	.059
	Male	3.47	.382		
Knowledge and Skills	Woman	3.41	.215	16.733	.091
	Male	3.29	.387		
Self-Concept	Woman	3.46	.225	7.677	0.122
	Male	3.37	.327		
Critical Awareness	Woman	3.50	.190	19.100	.117
	Male	3.62	.425		
Propensity to Act	Woman	3.48	.225	17.726	.000
	Male	3.20	.391		

*p<0,05

The point that draws attention is that 54.2 percent of the participants remain uncertain on thinking through all the relevant issues. 81.3 percent of the social workers participating in the study agree with the idea of volunteering to take on extra work in areas of concern or interest to them. 61.7 percent of them state that they have made an effort to get involved in activities that address a problem of interest. However, 58.9 percent disagree with organizing co-workers or others to offer new programs or interventions. Table 3 shows the averages of personal and professional power perceptions of social workers according to whether they have worked in any NGO before and whether this situation changes the averages. According to this, when the personal and professional power perceptions of social workers, who have previously worked and have not previously worked in non-governmental organizations, and the factors related to this perception are compared, the average of the general scale is \bar{x} =3.44 for those who have not previously worked and \bar{x} =3.38 for those who have previously worked. Personal and professional power perception of social workers does not significantly differ according to having previously worked in any non-governmental organization or not. Collective identity of the social worker significantly differs according to having previously worked in any non-governmental organization or not. Accordingly, collective identity of social worker who have not previously worked in a

non-governmental organization is higher (\bar{x} =3,52) than the ones that have previously worked (\bar{x} =3,21). On the other hand, knowledge and skills and self-concept do not significantly differ according to having previously worked in any non-governmental organization or not. There is a difference on the critical awareness and propensity to act levels of the social worker working in non-governmental organization in terms of having previously worked in any non-governmental organization or not. Accordingly, critical awareness level of social workers that have not previously worked in any non-governmental organization is higher (\bar{x} =3,69) than those who have previously worked (\bar{x} =3,45). On the other hand, propensity to act level of social workers that have previously worked in any non-governmental organization is higher (\bar{x} =3,48) than those who have not previously worked (\bar{x} =3,22). It was evaluated whether the personal and professional power perceptions of social workers significantly differed according to having previously worked in any non-governmental organization or not. Accordingly, the perception of personal and professional power does not significantly differ according to having previously worked in any non-governmental organization or not in terms of overall scale. Similarly, there is no difference in knowledge and skill and self-concept levels. However, collective identity, critical awareness and propensity to act levels significantly differ according to having previously

worked in any non-governmental organization or not. Collective identity level is higher in those who have not previously worked. According to this, social workers that have not been employed in any non-governmental organization, spend more time with other people in their profession, have frequent contact with other specialists in their field, enjoy using a team approach and consider themselves as a joiner. In terms of critical awareness, social workers that have not previously worked in any non-governmental organization are aware of all the pertinent issues and have a perspective to stay strong during different situations. Those who have previously worked usually know where they stand and they are right about their intuitions and hunches most of the time. This can be explained by the experience of working. In terms of propensity to act, those who have previously worked in a non-governmental organization are more interested and try to get involved in activities in which they are interested. It is seen that the perceptions of male and female social workers do not differ significantly from each other after the t test conducted to compare the personal and professional power perceptions of social workers employed in non-governmental organizations by gender. However, the propensity to act levels of female social workers are higher ($\bar{x}=3,48$) than male social workers ($\bar{x}=3,20$).

Conclusion

Personal and professional power perceptions of social workers do not differ according to having previously worked in any non-governmental organization or not. Only the "propensity to act" levels of specialists who have previously worked in a non-governmental organization are higher. Social workers that have previously worked in non-governmental organizations are more willing to take on extra work. They get involved with activities that they are interested in and they are not afraid of initiating. Furthermore, they are more active in propensity to act in terms of organizing co-workers and having multiple involvements in different areas of interest.

Collective identity and critical awareness of social workers who have not previously worked in a non-governmental organization, but are currently working for the first time. On the other hand, it is seen that the average of propensity to act levels of women are higher than men. It is possible to say that the reason for this is the effect of the high number of female social workers (63.6%) participating in the study. It is recommended to conduct the study with a larger sample and to use different variables.

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