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## Subjective experiences of Social Work and Nursing students with refugees from Ukraine at the Vyšné Nemecké border and at the Hot spot in Michalovce

St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work, Bratislava, Institute of bl. M. D. Trčka, Michalovce, Slovakia

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## Суб'єктивний досвід роботи студентів соціальної роботи та медсестринства з біженцями з України на кордоні

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### Introduction

From the moment the war broke out in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, people who wanted to help mobilized throughout Slovakia. After the outbreak of the war, Institute of bl. M.D. Trčka in Michalovce, Department of the University of Health and Social Work of St. Elizabeth in Bratislava, became involved in helping refugees from Ukraine in the following areas:

1. Establishment of humanitarian aid at school
2. Establishment of temporary beds for refugees from Ukraine
3. Provision of accommodation for civil protection workers and volunteers
4. Cooperation of social work and nursing students of the University of Health and Social Work of St. Elizabeth with the Order of Malta in Slovakia on the Vyšné Nemecké border
5. Ensuring nursing care in hotspot in Michalovce [4].

In our research, we focused on nursing and social work students who, as part of professional practice, voluntarily provided services to refugees at the Vyšné Nemecké border and in the Hotspot in Michalovce.

Our students at the Vyšné Nemecké border, in cooperation with the Order of Malta in Slovakia, provided non-stop assistance services for emigrants from Ukraine (e.g. providing refreshments, help with registration, ensuring transport, issuing SIM cards, etc.) [1].

In the Hot spot in Michalovce, nursing students provided nursing care in cooperation with doctors. Emigrants from Ukraine came with health problems, e.g. headache, stomachache, blood pressure, breathing problem, diabetes, minor injuries and others [1].

In connection with our topic, we are convinced that the situations experienced by students at the Vyšné Nemecké border and in the hotspot in Michalovce had a strong influence on the formation of their personality and the building of a social feeling [3].

Kardinál Špidlík compares a social worker to a passenger who is at the station and has a light suitcase with him. His task is to help those who cannot carry their luggage

get on the train. Fleeing from one's homeland before war, illness, pain or an unfavorable social situation is a very heavy baggage [2].

The aim of the research was to find out:

1. How many day and night services did students perform at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing or at the Hot spot in Michalovce
2. What activities did they perform at the border and in the Hot spot
3. What was their experience with people who fled the war.

### Research questions

Based on the formulation of the objectives, we formulated the following research questions:

**Research question no. 1** How many day and night services did students of nursing and social work perform during practice at the border and in Hot spot in MI?

**Research question no. 2** Is there a difference between the activities performed by students of nursing and social work?

**Research question no. 3** Is there a difference in the degree of experience from direct interaction within practice among students of nursing and social work?

### Research methods

The selection group consisted of a total of 108 students of nursing and social work.

The table no. 1 shows that 108 students participated in the research. Of these, 51 social work students make 13.3% of the total number of social work students at the Institute of bl. M. D. Trčka in Michalovce. Of the total number of students from the Department of Nursing in Prešov, Košice, Michalovce, 57 students participated, which is 24.8%.

### Data collection methods

The self-constructed questionnaire consisted of 12 questions. The first three questions were focused on the

descriptive characteristics of the research group in terms of age, gender, field and level of study. Question No. 4 was devoted to the frequency of the student's services at the border both during the day and at night. Question No. 5 was devoted to the activities that the students performed. Items 13-19 were formulated in such a way as to approximate the students' experiences with expatriates from Ukraine as much as possible.

**Statistics.** Statistical processing was carried out in the SPSS 28.0 program. We used descriptive statistics (number, arithmetic mean and standard deviation) for the characteristics of the set as well as the description of individual questionnaire items. To verify individual hypotheses, we used non-parametric statistics, the Mann Whitney test for two independent samples.

Table 1. Number of monitored characteristics of the research set

		Social work (n=51)	Nursing (n=57)
Sex	Man	17	8
	Woman	34	49
Age	From 25 years	12	16
	26–30 years	6	5
	31–35 years	10	7
	36–40 years	9	13
	41–45 years	11	9
	46–50 years	2	4
	More than 50 years	1	3
Form of study	Bc daily form of study	27	57
	Bc external form of study	2	0
	Mgr daily form of study	11	0
	Mgr external form of study	11	0

Source: Own research.

## Results

**Research question no. 1** How many day and night services did students of nursing and social work perform during practice at the border and in Hot spot in MI?

We verified the research question based on question no. 4 from the questionnaire.

The table no. 2 shows the number of day and night services of social work and nursing students. One student of social work worked the most day services at 31, and the nursing student worked the most night services at 24. From table no. 2 we note that there were students who did not perform a single night and day service.

Table 2. Frequency of direct performance among students of nursing and social work

Number of services	Day service social work students	Night service social work students	Day service nursing students	Night service nursing students
31	1	0	0	0
30	0	0	1	0
24	0	0	1	1
15	0	0	0	1
12	0	0	1	1
9	0	0	2	1
8	0	0	1	1
7	1	1	1	2
6	1	0	0	0
5	3	1	2	2
4	1	0	3	2
3	6	1	9	2
2	9	8	9	9
1	17	11	19	13
0	12	29	9	22

Source: Own research.

In order to verify the research question, we compared students of nursing and social work in the degree of direct performance during day and night services at border crossing in Vyšné Nemecké and in the Hot spot in Michalovce.

There is a significant difference between the frequency of night services for students of nursing and social work, while students of nursing had significantly more services.

**Research question no. 2** Is there a difference in the activities performed by students of nursing and social work?

**Table 3. Differences in the level of direct performance between students of nursing and social work determined by the Mann Whitney test for two independent samples (MW: value of Mann Whitney test; Z: critical value of MW test; sig.: value of significance)**

	MW	Z	sig.
Daily service	1253,5	-1,100	0,271
Night service	1083,5	-2,270	<b>0,023</b>

**Table 4. Activities performed by students of nursing and social work during practice (question no. 5)**

Students experiences	Social work students		Nursing students	
	yes	no	yes	no
A. I made the first contact with the refugees	31	20	33	24
B. I helped with registration	10	41	11	46
C. I helped with the distribution of food	30	21	22	35
D. I helped in the provision of humanitarian aid (clothing, food, children's nutritional supplements)	28	23	29	28
E. I helped in finding accommodation and transport	9	42	7	50
F. I helped with the interpretation	10	41	7	50
G. I performed nursing tasks	0	51	34	23
H. I helped the doctor during treatment	0	51	22	35

Source: Own research.

**Table 5. Differences in the performed activities between students of nursing and social work determined by the Mann Whitney test for two independent samples (MW: value of Mann Whitney test; Z: critical value of MW test; sig.: value of significance)**

	MW	Z	sig.
5A	1395,0	-0,222	0,826
5B	1415,0	-0,091	0,928
5C	1120,0	-2,200	<b>0,028</b>
5D	1352,0	-0,527	0,598
5E	1343,5	-0,824	0,410
5F	1315,0	-1,085	0,278
5G	575,0	-6,581	<b>0,000</b>
5H	625,0	-6,299	<b>0,000</b>

Source: Own research.

Significant differences were found in three items: 5C, 5G, 5H. In item 5C, there were significantly more answers that they performed it among students of social work. In items 5G and 5H, significantly more answers that they were carried out were marked by students of nursing.

**Research question no. 3** Is there a difference in the degree of experience from direct interaction within practice among students of nursing and social work?

The average raw score of students of social work for items 13-19 in the questionnaire is 26.59 (SD 4.67).

The average raw score of students of nursing for items 13-19 in the questionnaire is 26.16 (SD 4.72).

There are no significant differences in the experience of direct interaction with refugees between students of nursing and social work.

**Table 6. Differences in the experience of direct interaction with refugees between students of nursing and social work determined by the Mann Whitney test for two independent samples (MW: value of Mann Whitney test; Z: critical value of MW test; sig.: value of significance)**

The experience of students of nursing and social work with emigrants from Ukraine at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing and at the Hot spot in Michalovce	MW	Z	sig.
I met very scared, modest and brave people who were running away from the war	1370,0	-0,355	0,722
I let them know that their fate is not indifferent to me...	1399,5	-0,172	0,863
I was interested in the refugees and their fates and where they were going, whether they had anyone to go to	1376,0	-0,324	0,746
the Ukrainian language didn't cause me big problems when I concentrated, I understood the essentials	1194,0	-1,534	0,125

The experience of students of nursing and social work with emigrants from Ukraine at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing and at the Hot spot in Michalovce	MW	Z	sig.
I had no problem making contact with people who came with their mothers from Ukraine during my internship with emigrants from Ukraine at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing and at the Hot spot in Michalovce, I discovered an unsuspected level of compassion and solidarity in myself	1400,0	-0,170	0,865
when I hear the word refugee or outcast, the person of the refugee ceases to be just an "object" or a "number"	1376,0	-0,327	0,744
	1406,0	-0,132	0,895

Source: Own research.

### Discussion

Since the beginning of Russia's military operation in Ukraine (on February 24, 2022), a great wave of solidarity with refugees from Ukraine has risen in the Slovak public. University of Health and Social Work St. Elizabeth in Bratislava since the beginning of the war conflict through the founder prof. Krčméry and rector prof. Benča organized voluntary and humanitarian aid. Our students of social work and nursing willingly participated in the voluntary assistance, and with this service, professional experience within the field of study and the program was also counted.

As part of our research, we formulated 3 research questions. The first research question concerned the number of day and night services performed by students at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing or at the Hot spot in Michalovce. Services were 12 hours (day and night). The table no. 2 follows that the most daytime services were performed by one student in the number of 31 and night services also by one student in the number of 24. In the last line of table no. 2 is zero number of services and there are numbers for students of social work 12 and 29 and for students of nursing 9 and 22. This means that these students did not participate in voluntary assistance. When evaluating the questionnaire, several students wrote that they did not remember at all how many services they had completed – statistically, we evaluated this answer negatively. It is one reason for the zero number of services. This fact is also confirmed on its website by the Order of Malta in Slovakia, where it states under the name Maltese Aid for Ukraine: "Our volunteers have been providing a 24-hour service to refugees since Saturday morning 26/02/2022 and in coordination with other organizations operating on the Slovak side of the border crossing with Ukraine they provide: refreshments, hot drinks and water, the possibility of treatment, administration of basic medicines and a place to rest in cooperation with the University of St. Elizabeth in Bratislava." [5].

In the second research question, we found out what kind of activities the students performed and whether there is a difference in the performance of the activities of students of nursing and social work. The question was structured and we listed a total of 8 activities starting from establishing the first contact to nursing actions. The research shows that nursing actions and cooperation with the doctor were performed exclusively by nursing students. On March 14, 2022, the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic states on its website that it has established a large-capacity center in Michalovce, where refugees will have the opportunity to apply for temporary shelter. The state has also established support services for the aforementioned service. "With the help of its

own forces, as well as volunteers, it will provide the necessary humanitarian aid, including health care and psychological care, the necessary information, mediate transportation to places of accommodation, meals and possibly even temporary emergency accommodation." [4]. The students of social work performed significantly more service activities such as e.g. issuing food and clothing.

In the third research question, we investigated what experiences students have from direct interaction with refugees. Questions 13-19 were structured and they had the option to answer each statement from completely agree to completely disagree. It is clear from the answers that the Ukrainian language was the most problematic for the students. The problem with the language was in the early days after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, when there was a huge influx of refugees and there were no interpreters at the border crossing.

In the open question of the questionnaire, we gave students the opportunity to share their personal experience. The students expressed themselves as follows regarding their mastery of the Ukrainian language:

"I was afraid, or I was experiencing stress, that I would not be able to help the refugees, because of the language, but some could speak English",

"My experience was that the woman I offered coffee and water to was sitting at the table and I saw uncertainty in her eyes. She was a young woman, she was constantly on the phone, but I had a bad feeling about her, as I only know German and Hungarian, I couldn't talk to her, but I saw her looking at one place more than once, she was completely pensive and it was on her it can be seen that she does not know what awaits her".

### Conclusions

Several facts emerge from our research, which we would like to summarize in the following points:

- the students who decided to help were intrinsically motivated to want to help, this also follows from the overall social structure of Slovakia, which willingly accepts refugees from Ukraine,
- twelve-hour services for students were demanding and exhausting and not every student tolerated it equally,
- the meeting of our students with refugees helped them to see the fate of many people and especially their peers,
- Ukrainian language was cited as a barrier by 20% of students from the total number of respondents.

The above-mentioned facts are a challenge for our University of Health and Social Work St. Elisabeth in

Bratislava, to motivate students to serve refugees, as the war in Ukraine continues and the wave of migration may repeat itself at any time. In the practical distribution of services, care must be taken to select students who have at least basic knowledge

of the Ukrainian language or another language. The students' informal answers show that after a certain number of services, it would be good for them to meet with a psychologist or a supervisor, where they could also present their inner feelings.

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**The purpose** of the research was to find out how students of nursing and social work subjectively experienced the services they provided at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing and in the Hot spot in Michalovce with refugees from Ukraine.

**Methods.** Statistical processing was carried out in the SPSS 28.0 program. We used descriptive statistics (number, arithmetic mean and standard deviation) for the characteristics of the set as well as the description of individual questionnaire items. To verify individual hypotheses, we used non-parametric statistics, the Mann Whitney test for two independent samples.

**Results.** The results of this research show that students worked a total of 157 day and night services in the months of March–June 2022. Students performed activities that correspond to their study program. The students' experience with expatriates from Ukraine is positive, the only barrier was language.

**Conclusions.** The results of this research showed that the students were internally motivated to help, the service to refugees helped them to see the fate of people who fled from the war. The results of the research showed that the twelve-hour services were difficult for them and about 20% of the students had a problem understanding the refugees.

**Key words:** leaver, subjective experience, student, refugee.

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**Мета** дослідження полягала в тому, щоб з'ясувати, як студенти медсестринства та соціальної роботи суб'єктивно перенесли досвід послуг, які вони надавали на прикордонному пункті Вишне Німецьке та в гарячій точці в Міхаловці біженцям з України.

**Методи.** Статистичну обробку проводили в програмі SPSS 28.0. Ми використовували описову статистику (число, середнє арифметичне та стандартне відхилення) для характеристики набору, а також для опису окремих пунктів анкети. Для перевірки окремих гіпотез ми використовували непараметричну статистику — тест Манна Вітні для двох незалежних вибірок.

**Результати.** Результати цього дослідження показують, що загалом у березні – червні 2022 року студенти відпрацювали 157 денних та нічних змін надання послуг. Студенти виконували діяльність, яка відповідає їхній програмі навчання. Досвід спілкування студентів з емігрантами з України позитивний, єдиним бар'єром була мова.

**Висновки.** Результати цього дослідження показали, що студенти були внутрішньо мотивовані допомагати, служіння біженцям допомогло їм побачити долю людей, які втікали від війни. Результати дослідження показали, що дванадцятигодинні служби були для них важкими, і близько 20% студентів мали проблеми з розумінням біженців.

**Ключові слова:** випускник, суб'єктивний досвід, студент, біженець.

**Конфлікт інтересів:** відсутній.  
**Conflicts of interest:** absent.

#### **Відомості про авторів**

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