



Original article



Competences of social assistance, its role in family functioning and in the formation of the community

Competencias del trabajador social, su rol en el funcionamiento familiar y la formación comunitaria

Competências do assistente social, seu papel no funcionamento familiar e na formação da comunidade

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ABSTRACT

Social workers assess family dynamics, mediate conflicts, and promote resilience. This article explores the essential competencies of social workers for strengthening family functioning and building resilient communities. Community training emerges as a key link, where social workers foster participation, identify collective needs, and design support programs. The objective was to uncover the necessary competencies in social work and its role within families. The main methods used were content analysis, scientific observation, theoretical methods (systemic-structural, functional, and historical-logical), and empirical methods (observation and document analysis, primarily to establish or define criteria), in addition to methodological triangulation. The results reveal that continuing education and ethical commitment empower families and communities, building more

inclusive and just societies adapted to social challenges. The conclusions focus on establishing the competencies of social workers as determinants of the required profile for the professional field. It is necessary to work on them, update them and strengthen them, giving importance to the social worker as an agent of change who acts at multiple levels to improve people's lives and strengthen communities by promoting equity, justice and general well-being in society.

Keywords: skills; family; social work; community.

RESUMEN

El trabajador social evalúa dinámicas familiares, media en conflictos y promueve la resiliencia. En el presente artículo se exploran las competencias esenciales del trabajador social para fortalecer el funcionamiento familiar y construir comunidades resilientes. La formación comunitaria emerge como un eslabón clave, donde el trabajador social fomenta la participación, identifica necesidades colectivas y diseña programas de apoyo. El objetivo estuvo encaminado a develar las competencias necesarias en el trabajo social y su rol en la familia. Como principales métodos se utilizaron el análisis de contenido, la observación científica, métodos teóricos (sistémico-estructural funcional e histórico-lógico) y métodos empíricos (observación y análisis documental, fundamentalmente para conformar o definir criterios), además de la triangulación metodológica. Como resultados, se revela que la formación continua y el compromiso ético permiten empoderar a familias y comunidades, construyendo sociedades más inclusivas y justas, adaptadas a los desafíos sociales. Las conclusiones se centraron en el establecimiento de las competencias del trabajador social como determinantes en el perfil requerido para el campo laboral. Es necesario trabajar en ellas, actualizarlas y potenciarlas, otorgando importancia al trabajador social como agente de cambio que actúa en múltiples niveles para mejorar la vida de las personas y fortalecer las comunidades desde la promoción de la equidad, la justicia y el bienestar general en la sociedad.

Palabras clave: competencias; familia; trabajo social; comunidad.

RESUMO

O assistente social avalia dinâmicas familiares, media conflitos e promove a resiliência. Este artigo explora as competências essenciais do assistente social para fortalecer o funcionamento familiar e

construir comunidades resilientes. A formação comunitária surge como elo fundamental, onde o assistente social incentiva a participação, identifica necessidades coletivas e elabora programas de apoio. O objetivo foi revelar as competências necessárias no trabalho social e seu papel na família. Os principais métodos utilizados foram análise de conteúdo, observação científica, métodos teóricos (sistêmico-estrutural funcional e histórico-lógico) e métodos empíricos (observação, análise documental, principalmente para estabelecer ou definir critérios), além da triangulação metodológica. Os resultados revelam a importância da formação contínua e do compromisso ético, que permitem empoderar famílias e comunidades, contribuindo para sociedades mais inclusivas e justas, capazes de se adaptar aos desafios sociais. As conclusões centraram-se no estabelecimento das competências do assistente social como determinantes do perfil profissional exigido no campo laboral. É necessário trabalhar essas competências, atualizá-las e fortalecê-las, reconhecendo o assistente social como agente de mudança que atua em múltiplos níveis para melhorar a vida das pessoas e fortalecer as comunidades, promovendo equidade, justiça e bem-estar geral na sociedade.

Palavras-chave: competências; família; trabalho social; comunidade.

INTRODUCTION

The family is the "basic unit of society" because, in addition to biological reproduction, it is within the family that people's heritage, possessions, values, norms, and cultural patterns are transmitted from generation to generation. It is the first contact with society; it is the source of the first teachings and learning.

It is within this sphere that character begins to be forged and where ways of acting and thinking are instilled that will later become habits or customs. The family is the first school of human and social virtues that all societies need; through the family, individuals are introduced to civil society. For this reason, it is necessary for parents to consider the importance of the family in the formation of future citizens (Vásquez & Ferragut, 2024).

In different cultures and societies, the concept of family may vary, but its importance as the basic unit of society is universal. Family structure has undergone significant changes in the 21st century, driven by social, cultural, economic, and technological factors, and it is precise here that the role of the social worker is becoming increasingly relevant.

Social work is a discipline focused on human well-being and social justice. Its goal is to help individuals, families, groups, and communities face and overcome problems and challenges through intervention and support in various social issues (García & Martínez, 2021).

According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW, 2014), social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. The principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are central to social work.

Netto (1999) points out that social work is a profession that is inserted into the social division of labor and that has as its object of intervention social question, understood as the expressions of social inequalities that affect large sectors of the population considered vulnerable.

Social workers play a fundamental role in the cohesion and well-being of communities. Their skills include the ability to assess needs, design interventions, manage conflicts, and promote social change. In the family setting, their role is key to strengthening healthy dynamics, providing support in crisis situations, and facilitating access to essential resources. In community development, they are responsible for energizing participatory processes, fostering social integration, and developing communication strategies to strengthen the community fabric.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to reveal the necessary skills in social work and its role in the family, highlighting community training as a key link in the context of the social worker.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article presents the results of research conducted in 2024, which, from a mixed-methods approach, examines the essence of the process under study. It considers the context, and the results obtained through the use of various data collection techniques.

Theoretical methods (systemic-structural functional and historical-logical) and empirical methods (observation and documentary analysis, fundamentally to form or define criteria) were used, which allowed working with the general and specific bibliography.

All of this made it possible to establish the conceptual, contextual, and theoretical framework, as well as to determine the main manifestations of the object of study and the relationships and components that influence it. Furthermore, it allowed for inferences to be drawn and theoretical positions to be adopted based on the findings.

Methodological triangulation made it possible to verify the shortcomings derived from the methods applied and to establish regularities as part of the results, highlighting the role of the social worker in the families, which reveals the competencies that identify them.

RESULTS

The result obtained with the application of the methods indicated is subdivided into different moments, in order to achieve greater concreteness, organicity and coherence in the research.

The social worker and their role in the family

One of the first stages in the intervention process is the evaluation; that is, a social diagnosis that allows the social worker to understand and assess the subject's situation in depth.

Social workers design and implement social policies that address inequalities. They also promote social participation, work in interdisciplinary teams, and maintain active listening with clients throughout the intervention process, as well as respect for diversity and multiculturalism, in order to provide unbiased and objective intervention.

Some of the aspects that a social worker develops include:

- To advise and guide individuals, families, and communities in adverse situations.
- To assess and evaluate situations of risk and social need.
- Formulate and implement social intervention plans at the individual and collective levels.

The 21st century presents a series of challenges and opportunities for families, shaped by dynamics such as globalization, population aging, the diversification of family structures, and technological advances. Likewise, changes in family dynamics, such as the increase in single-parent and multicultural households, demand an inclusive and human rights-based perspective from social workers.

Families face challenges such as job insecurity, economic and structural inequalities, domestic violence, and the effects of climate change. The diversity in family structures requires a comprehensive and adaptive approach. Furthermore, the role of the social worker is expanding to include the use of digital technologies to address issues such as domestic violence and unequal access to basic services (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Key aspects of social workers

Social workers face a complex and constantly changing environment in the 21st century, characterized by economic, social, and technological transformations that directly affect families.

These professionals act as facilitators in building resilience, strengthening families' internal capacities, and promoting equitable access to resources and services.

In this context, the social worker not only faces challenges, but also has the opportunity to lead processes of social change, generating innovative strategies that empower families to overcome adversity and achieve sustainable development.

Monitoring a problematic family situation requires a comprehensive understanding of it that allows one to:

- Establish achievable goals based on the mobilization of own, social and service resources.
- Determine how the treatment will be carried out and what technical means and resources will likely need to be used.
- Deciding which aspects are priorities and which will be addressed secondarily, given their lower urgency, or because they will be addressed in parallel with the priority ones, or because the latter are a condition for addressing the former.

Support for the family begins when the social worker establishes initial contact with the family and the situation they will be addressing. The process starts where the family is, involving them in identifying and locating their difficulties and resources.

When intervening with families, the social worker must apply basic ethical principles such as service, social justice, the value and dignity of the person, integrity and competence, among others, to promote values such as respect, love, communication, solidarity, responsibility and cohesion among family members (Figure 2).

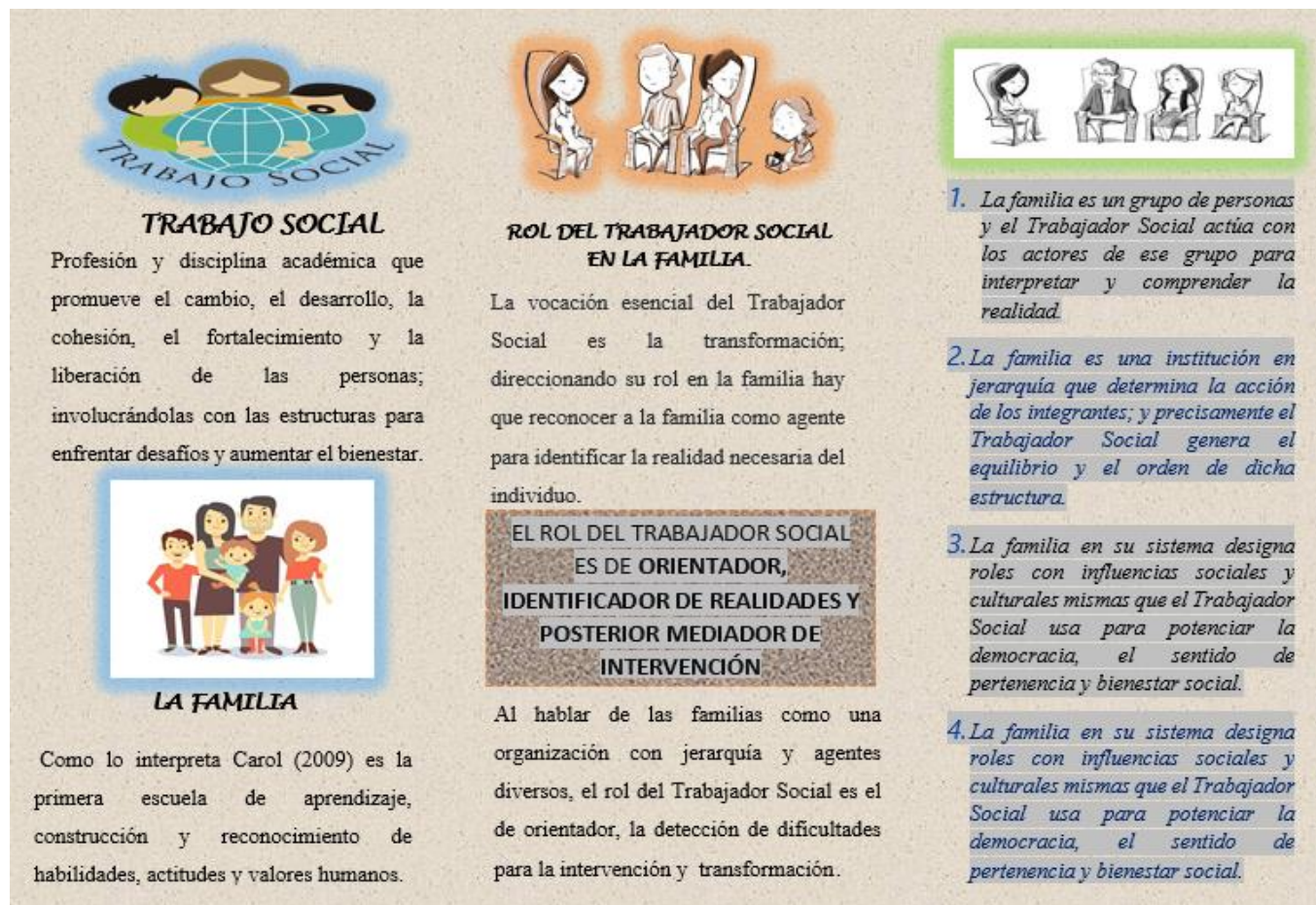


Figure 2. Distinctions of the social worker

DISCUSSION

The results obtained confirm the need to establish the competencies of the social worker and their imprint from community and family training.

Competencies of the social worker

To uphold ethical principles, professionals must develop skills such as empathy, communication skills, and self-awareness and self-care. All of this is aimed at fostering the harmonious development of families and, consequently, of Panamanian society.

Without a doubt, social work is one of the professions with the most career paths, given its diverse areas of intervention, such as primary social care, human resource management, childhood, adolescence, the elderly, and mental health, among others. Therefore, this professional must develop the competencies of a social worker.

To meet the demands of this role, professionals in this field must not only be academically prepared but also possess the skills, abilities, and competencies of a social worker. These include critical and self-critical thinking, the ability to work in teams at different levels and with diverse stakeholders, research skills, creativity, and innovation, which are crucial to the functions of their job.

Social workers are professionals in the humanities who focus on helping communities improve their quality of life. Specifically, they provide counseling to the community regarding issues such as abuse, psychological or psychiatric disorders, family conflicts, unemployment, or discrimination based on race, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation.

Likewise, the skills of the social worker allow him to provide advice to minors under the custody of family foster care systems, to adolescents and adults confined in penitentiary institutions or to elderly people interned in nursing homes or mental health institutes.

On the other hand, social workers also advise individuals or groups of people to help them overcome housing, health or environmental problems, providing them with a space that allows them to be cared for and develop to the point of no longer requiring the guidance and cooperation of the social worker.

This career offers the opportunity to consolidate and grow in different aspects: human, spiritual, and cognitive, becoming a well-rounded professional. To achieve this goal, it is necessary that the professional's training consider responsibility, commitment, ethics, and, above all, passion, as these factors are essential for the quality of a social worker. According to García et al. (2021), the social worker plays a crucial role as a mediator and facilitator in these changing contexts, promoting social inclusion and strengthening family networks. On the other hand, López and Martínez (2020) emphasize the need to adapt interventions to the specific needs of each family.

Pérez (2022) emphasizes the need for a proactive approach that enables families not only to overcome difficulties but also to seize opportunities for sustainable development and community resilience. To effectively carry out consulting, advisory, and support work with communities with

diverse needs, it is vital that social workers develop general and core competencies. According to Miley et al. (2013), a proper assessment helps identify needs, strengths, and available resources, which is fundamental for designing an effective intervention plan. Without an accurate assessment, interventions may fail to address the underlying problems, thus limiting their effectiveness.

In the workplace, competition arises due to needs that emerge in different countries, stemming from the contradiction between environmental changes, the conditions of economic relations, and the quality of educational outcomes (García, 2020). Competencies, therefore, must be understood as stemming from an increasingly close link between training, management, and work (García, Ortiz & González, 2013).

Fostering the development of personal attitudes and values, combined with individuals' skills and technical abilities, and aligning individual interests, promotes their adaptation to the social environment. Understanding how a worker can adapt to the demands of their environment is fundamental.

Based on the criteria of García, García, and Guzmán (2021), it is asserted that each person participating in a group brings their own experiences, feelings, attitudes, and frustrations. Everything that shapes their personality is present and can manifest itself; these forces have the capacity to influence, act upon, or make decisions within the group. The direction, style, and outcome of the collaborative work will depend on how these elements are expressed, combined, interacted, and predominate.

Generally, the social worker's skills are one of the key factors in their resume and allow them to showcase their roles, since companies require certain specific skills (Gómez & García, 2022).

Basic generic skills

- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Organizational and planning skills
- Analytical and synthesis skills
- Oral and written communication
- Information management capacity
- Computer skills related to the field of study
- Knowledge of foreign languages, in case of dealing with immigrant communities.

Job skills

- Ability to work and assess jointly with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities their needs and circumstances.
- Ability to plan, implement, review and evaluate social work practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities and with other professionals.
- Ability to support people in expressing their needs, views, and circumstances.
- Ability to act in the resolution of risk situations with people, as well as for oneself and for colleagues in the profession.
- The ability to manage and be responsible, with supervision and support, for one's own practice within the organization.
- Ability to demonstrate professional competence in the practice of social work.

Specific skills

- Establish professional relationships in order to identify the most appropriate form of intervention.
- To intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities to support them in making decisions based on their needs and circumstances.
- Assess the needs and possible options to guide an intervention strategy.
- Responding to crisis situations, assessing the priority of the situations and planning actions to address them.
- Interacting with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities to achieve change, promote development, and improve living conditions through various social work methods.
- Prepare, produce, implement and evaluate intervention plans with client or professional colleague assistance systems, negotiating with service authorities.

Professional skills

- Ability to apply knowledge in practice
- Research skills
- Achievement motivation
- Project design and management
- Ability to adapt to new situations

- Ability to learn
- Ability to generate creative ideas
- Knowledge of the cultures and customs of other countries
- Ability to work independently
- Ethical commitment

Social workers operate within the government, the private sector, and humanitarian organizations. They typically address situations of exclusion present in different social groups or strata.

In addition, this professional usually works in the development and career projection sector within NGOs or in any function oriented towards groups of people in vulnerable conditions.

Social work services are also provided to individuals within their homes who require intervention or have specific dependencies. In all these cases, the social worker must take a comprehensive approach to resolve conflicts and improve living conditions.

It should be noted that this profession has multiple specializations. Depending on the area in which you choose to train and enhance your skills, you may be hired by:

- Educational centers
- Government entities
- Penitentiary institutions
- Physical and mental health institutions
- Judicial institutions
- Family foster care agencies
- Nursing homes

In summary, a professional with the skills of a social worker significantly benefits the community with which they interact, promoting social well-being, resolving family conflicts, providing a space for the voices of children, adolescents, and adults who are victims of abuse or domestic violence, and transmitting knowledge to future generations.

The skills of a social worker are crucial to the profile required for the job market, making it necessary to develop, update, and enhance them.

Imprint from community formation and family adaptability

It is the family that teaches self-expression, provides a framework for thought and reasoning, and supports individuals in the face of challenges or problems. Following the criteria of Lazo, García, and Fernández (2017), it is essential to foster interpersonal relationships and coexistence in different settings, significantly influencing personal, social, and professional development through actions that consider individual needs and potential, as well as those of the group and the context.

The family not only satisfies basic needs but also plays a crucial role in the emotional, social, and cultural development of individuals. Its importance extends throughout life, providing a foundation upon which other relationships and experiences are built. The family environment significantly influences emotional and social development.

Family adaptability is the ability of a family to adjust to changes and challenges that arise in its environment. This ability is crucial for healthy family functioning, as circumstances can vary due to internal factors (such as child development or changes in family dynamics) and external factors (such as economic, social, or health changes) (Walsh, 2021).

Next, aspects of family adaptability, its importance, and strategies to promote it are explored (Silva-Cid, 2020).

Key aspects of family adaptability

- Flexibility: the ability to change roles, rules, and routines according to the needs of the moment. Flexible families can adjust their expectations and approaches in response to new situations.
- Resilience: the ability to recover from adversity. Resilient families face challenges with a positive attitude and seek solutions instead of getting stuck in the problem.
- Open communication: Maintaining clear and effective lines of communication so that all members feel heard and understood. This facilitates the identification of problems and the search for joint solutions.
- Mutual support: fostering an environment where members support each other during difficult times, whether emotional, practical, or financial.
- Continuous learning: a willingness to learn from past experiences and adapt to new realities. Families who see challenges as opportunities for growth tend to be more adaptable.

The functionality of family adaptability allows one to face challenges, overcome adversity, and adapt to new situations; and it is functional for:

- Stress management: Families that are able to adapt to each situation can cope with stressful situations while maintaining a harmonious family environment.
- Family growth: adaptability facilitates the joint evolution of the family, strengthening the bonds between members.
- Skills development: Children who grow up in adaptable environments learn important skills such as problem-solving and flexibility in the face of change.
- Improved relationships: The ability to adapt to the changing needs of each member fosters healthier and more satisfying relationships.

Strategies to promote family adaptability

1. Establish flexible rules based on circumstances: Allow family rules to be adjusted according to the circumstances. This helps members feel comfortable expressing their needs.
2. Encourage communication: create safe spaces to share thoughts and feelings. This can include regular family meetings or activities that promote dialogue.
3. Practice problem-solving: Involve all members in finding solutions to family challenges. This not only promotes collaboration but also teaches valuable skills.
4. Celebrate positive changes: Recognize and celebrate successful adjustments and family achievements, which reinforces the idea that change can be positive.
5. Stimulate learning and growth: and encourage members to learn from past experiences and see challenges as opportunities to improve.
6. Create a supportive environment: foster an environment where each member feels valued and supported, which increases the willingness to adapt and collaborate.

Family adaptability is essential for facing the challenges that arise in everyday life. By fostering a culture of flexibility, open communication, and mutual support, families can not only survive adversity but also thrive and grow together. This capacity not only benefits each member individually but also strengthens family bonds, creating a healthier and more resilient environment and positively impacting the community.

The social worker, therefore, employs key competencies for strengthening families and community cohesion, including empathy, social analysis, crisis intervention, and resource management. Their

role in family functioning involves assessing internal dynamics, mediating conflicts, providing parenting support, and promoting resilience.

In community-based training, social workers, in order to improve quality of life and build more just and inclusive societies, facilitate citizen participation, identify collective needs, design social intervention programs, and strengthen support networks, always based on ethical principles and respect for diversity, seeking to empower individuals, families, and communities. Ongoing professional development is essential to adapt to emerging social challenges and optimize their impact.

Therefore, social work is fundamental to the well-being and development of communities, performing essential functions of family support, where mastery of general skills is indispensable.

Social workers are agents of change who operate at multiple levels to improve people's lives and strengthen communities. Their work is vital to promoting equity, justice, and overall well-being in society.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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