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Relationship Between Meaning in Life, Psychological Resilience and Burnout in Social Workers from the Czech Republic

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Abstract:

This master's thesis examines the relationship between meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout syndrome within social workers from the Czech Republic. The main focus was on answering the hypothesis that resilience will significantly negatively mediate the relationship between presence of meaning and burnout. Broad social work literature suggests that burnout syndrome is a phenomenon that is commonly experienced by social workers. This warranted further exploration of the topic, with the focus on the mitigation of burnout within social work. A variety of theoretical and empirical literature suggests that meaning in life and psychological resilience can act as protective factors against burnout. Furthermore, the explored literature showed a possibility of a relationship between meaning in life and burnout that is mediated by psychological resilience. To test the hypothesis of this study, a sample of 98 social workers from the Czech Republic was gathered, with each participant filling out a questionnaire that measured each of the variables of interest. The variables were measured by Meaning in Life Questionnaire, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 and Burnout Assessment Inventory 12. Hierarchical regression and mediation analysis were used to statistically analyze the collected data. A correlational matrix was also created. The results showed that psychological resilience was a partial mediator of the relationship between meaning in life and burnout. The strengths, limitations and implications of this study were discussed and ideas for future research and interventions were suggested.

Key words: Social Work, Burnout Syndrome, Meaning in Life, Psychological Resilience, Czech Social Workers

Abstrakt:

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá vztah mezi smyslem života, psychologickou odolností a syndromem vyhoření u sociálních pracovníků v České republice. Hlavním cílem bylo ověření hypotézy, že odolnost bude významným negativním zprostředkovatelem vztahu mezi přítomností smyslu a vyhořením. Široká literatura o sociální práci naznačuje, že syndrom vyhoření je jev, který sociální pracovníci běžně zažívají. To vedlo k dalšímu zkoumání tohoto tématu, se zaměřením na zmírnění vyhoření v oblasti sociální práce. Různá teoretická i empirická literatura naznačuje, že smysl života a psychologická odolnost mohou působit jako ochranné faktory proti vyhoření. Dále zkoumaná literatura ukázala možnost existence vztahu mezi smyslem života a vyhořením, který je zprostředkován psychologickou odolností. K otestování hypotézy této studie byl shromážděn vzorek 98 sociálních pracovníků z České republiky, přičemž každý účastník vyplnil dotazník měřící jednotlivé proměnné zájmu. Proměnné byly měřeny pomocí Dotazníku smyslu života (Meaning in Life Questionnaire), Škály odolnosti Connor-Davidson 10 (Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10) a Inventáře hodnocení vyhoření 12 (Burnout Assessment Inventory 12). Ke statistické analýze sesbíraných dat byly použity hierarchická regresní analýza a analýza mediace. Byla také vytvořena korelační matice. Výsledky ukázaly, že psychologická odolnost byla částečným zprostředkovatelem vztahu mezi smyslem života a vyhořením. Byly diskutovány silné stránky, omezení a dopady této studie a navrženy možnosti pro budoucí výzkum a intervence.

Klíčová slova: Sociální Práce, Syndrom Vyhoření, Smysl Života, Psychologická Odolnost, Sociální Pracovníci v České Republice

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Introduction

Social work is arguably a highly rewarding profession in terms of its work content. A variety of literature points out that social workers receive contentment and job satisfaction from feeling and believing that they are making a positive difference in other people's lives (Mcfadden et al., 2014; Collins, 2007). This is understandable given that the core of the profession is built on a historically long tradition of social solidarity (Matoušek, 2012) and aims to fulfill values such as social justice or religious ideals of „loving thy neighbor“ (Matoušek, 2003). Bisman (2004) explains that workers of a given profession enact the social ends that the profession serves for, meaning that for social workers, it is the enactment of the moral values and ideas which social work is built on.

Despite its virtuous and rewarding nature, social work is also a difficult and taxing profession. The area of human service professions, which social work is a part of, is known to work with the population of vulnerable people who commonly express characteristics of traumatic recollections, emotional pain or psychological distress, which in turn creates a lot of stress and difficult interactions for the workers (Harker et al., 2016). There are also other characteristics that make the client-worker relationship more stressful. Matoušek (2003) explains that in non-professional helping relationships between people, one person usually helps a single other person while also having the option to regulate contact with that person according to the needs of the helping person. However, social work professionals have a consistent helping relationship with a larger number of people, who all have different expectations and demands, sometimes even unrealistic ones. Furthermore, there is little flexibility and control over what clients the social worker sees and what the nature and length of their contact will be (Dillon, 1990; as cited in Lloyd et al., 2002). It is also argued that there tends to be confusion and conflict regarding the nature of the role of social workers (Lloyd et al., 2002; Söderfeldt et al., 1995) and that they are sometimes met with misunderstanding regarding their position and skillset (Lloyd et al., 2002). Other work difficulties and stress-inducing factors are the high demands of the profession, such as long working hours or excessive paperwork (Anderson, 2000; as cited in Mcfadden et al., 2014), as well as unclear evaluation criteria of the work (Söderfeldt et al., 1995).

Breadth of literature (Matoušek, 2003; Lloyd et al., 2002; Söderfeldt et al., 1995) identified that altogether, the stress causing difficulty and high demands of social work as a profession commonly lead to a phenomenon called the burnout syndrome. In a very broad sense, burnout can be understood as a form of physical and psychological work-related exhaustion (Mcfadden et al., 2014) that changes one's approach and perception of their work in a negative way (Matoušek, 2003; Söderfeldt et al., 1995). Matoušek (2003) explains that due to the nature of social work, burnout syndrome is a ever-present threat for social workers and is therefore an important topic to highlight. The topic of burnout in the social work profession will be one of the main focuses of this paper and it will be defined in greater detail in later chapters.

Over the course of developing the literature on the phenomenon of burnout, many factors and variables have been identified as being related to it. For example, variables that come from the work environment, such as low work autonomy and control, low salary, role ambiguity, high degree of work pressure, lack of challenge on the job (Söderfeldt et al., 1995), extent of positive relationships and effective communication in the work setting or the extent of support from management teams (Frieiro Padín et al., 2021) have been identified. Söderfeldt et al. (1995) mention variables related to clients that may contribute to worker burnout, such as having personal involvement in the client's problems, being deeply invested in the client-worker relationship or having a negative impression of the client. Further variables that were identified are, for example, personality factors such as neuroticism or extraversion (Velando-Soriano, 2022), psychological resilience (Collins, 2016; Harker et al., 2016; Akgemci et al., 2013), or meaning in life (Krok, 2016; Collins, 2007). However, relationships do not necessarily mean causation; therefore, many of these variables may involve unidentified mechanisms through which they are tied to or potentially cause burnout in workers.

It is evident that the topic of burnout and its mechanisms is fairly complex and vast. To tie it back to the topic of social work, some articles, although older, suggest that the literature examining the phenomenon of burnout within social work is scarce (Lloyd et al., 2002; Söderfeldt et al., 1995). Whether or not this fact holds true today, it is nonetheless beneficial to widen the empirical knowledge regarding burnout within social work. However, to better understand such a complex phenomenon, smaller parts of it need to be studied in greater detail. For this research paper, the scope will be focused on the

variables of meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout. The main aim will be to elucidate the nature of the relationship between these variables in the context of social work.

The phenomenon of burnout (syndrome)

Defining burnout

From the wide existing literature, it is evident that burnout is conceptualized and defined in various ways. Despite obvious overlaps between definitions, Söderfeldt et al. (1995) note that there are tens of definitions for this concept. Akgemci et al. (2013, p. 123) suggest that a formal definition of burnout is „a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding“. They further explain that continuous experiencing of work-life stressors and struggles is the reason for a burnout state, however, mainly under the circumstances, when people do not feel adequate reward, value and meaning from their difficult performance or support throughout their struggles. Akgemci et al. (2013) also explain that stress by itself does not cause burnout, as many individuals have a tendency to flourish from struggle if they feel appreciated, valued and view their effort and endeavor as significant or meaningful. That is why the aforementioned negative context is crucial for the onset of burnout and therefore should be highlighted when defining the concept.

In terms of the historical evolution of the concept of burnout, Herbert Freudenberger is credited as being the first one to give a more stable shape to the concept and apply it (Akgemci et al., 2013; Söderfeldt et al., 1995). Formerly observed in drug addicted people, who gave up on everything except drug usage, Freudenberger used this phenomenon and applied it to a broader sense, to describe people who felt a state of fatigue from devotion to a cause that did not bring the expected results (Akgemci et al., 2013). At that point, the idea that an undesired outcome, which was brought about despite a significant effort, had already become a major part of the definition of burnout. Later theorists of the burnout concept examined its various components, such as Christina Maslach. Maslach et al. (2001) write that through empirical examination and analysis,

three components of the burnout syndrome were determined. Those are the exhaustion component (mainly emotional exhaustion), depersonalization component and the component of reduced feeling of personal accomplishment within work. These three components are also interrelated, and their relationships show how the emergence of one of them (exhaustion mainly emerging first) stimulates the likely emergence of the other components (Maslach et al., 2001). The components will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

How burnout manifests in social work

A variety of literature suggests that burnout is a phenomenon widely common in human services settings such as social work (Akgemci et al., 2013; Matoušek, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001; Söderfeldt et al., 1995). In fact, Maslach et al. (2001) note that the initial articles about job burnout, which were written by Freudenberger and by Maslach during the mid-1970s in the United States, were burnout testimonies of human service workers as well as health care workers. Therefore, social work was among the first professional areas where the phenomenon of burnout was observed and subsequently studied. As Maslach et al. (2001) write:

> Burnout research had its roots in care-giving and service occupations, in which the core of the job was the relationship between provider and recipient. This interpersonal context of the job meant that, from the beginning, burnout was studied not so much as an individual stress response, but in terms of an individual's relational transactions in the workplace. Moreover, this interpersonal context focused attention on the individual's emotions and on the motives and values underlying his or her work with recipients. (p. 400)

This means that the characteristics of social work and other human service professions were vital parts of the genesis of the burnout concept. This is also evident in the component structure of the concept, as identified by Maslach et al. (2001). According to the authors, exhaustion is seen as the central component of burnout syndrome and points to the highly demanding and involving nature of the social work and care environment. Maslach et al. (2001) explain that being emotionally exhausted from the high demand and

involvement within the job is what most workers usually reference when speaking about being burned out. As they point out, it is the stress component of burnout. The authors further explain that emotional exhaustion may give rise to new ways in which workers relate to their job, which are encompassed in the next two components. Maslach et al. (2001) determined the component of depersonalization to be a way of coping with work stress and overwhelming emotional exhaustion resulting from it. The authors explain that a worker uses depersonalization to distances themselves from the concerns of clients. This is done when the worker makes „an attempt to put distance between oneself and service recipients by actively ignoring the qualities that make them unique and engaging individuals“ (Maslach et al., 2001). The authors continue to explain that this „cognitive distancing“ makes demands of clients more emotionally manageable, but may also result in the worker being less empathic and caring towards their clients. The third component of burnout, reduced sense of personal accomplishment, naturally arises when the worker is emotionally exhausted and therefore working ineffectively through the coping method of depersonalization. However, Maslach et al. (2001) also note that the burnout components can also rise parallelly rather than sequentially, as exhaustion and depersonalization is a matter of being overwhelmed by work, and decreased efficacy is a matter of not having relevant resources for dealing with difficulties. Overall, the burnout model of Maslach et al. (2001) shows a spectrum of burnout reactions and behaviors within the context of social work.

In the context of social work, Matoušek (2003) similarly views burnout syndrome through the emotional and behavioral changes in workers. He lays out a few points, each highlighting a negative change in the worker as burnout syndrome takes hold. Similarly to the depersonalization component defined by Maslach et al. (2001), Matoušek (2003) points out that a burned-out social worker has a less engaged or even avoidant relationship towards clients. Furthermore, he writes that the worker stops sensing the needs of the client, starts getting into conflicts with them, views them as a case rather than an individual and in more extreme cases abuses them. Matoušek (2003) also explains that burned-out social workers tend to work with clients in less creative ways, use more rigid and standardized interventions and procedures, and sometimes even prefer administrative work over working with clients. Additionally, he points out that during burnout, the worker stops communicating with their team, gives minimal energy towards the job, and

tends to take more work vacations or sick days. Lastly, he explains that being in the burnout state for a prolonged time usually results in the worker quitting the job.

Matoušek (2003) also states that preceding burnout is a period of high professional drive, during which a usually newly employed social worker tries to achieve the best results with clients. This idea coincides with the beginning stage of a five-stage burnout model by Edelwich and Brodsky (1980). They explain that in the human service professions, burnout occurs in the stages of enthusiasm, stagnation, frustration, apathy and burnout itself. According to them, the stage of enthusiasm is characterized by unrealistically high expectations regarding the profession. These expectations fuel an excitement and drive towards the enactment of the work. This excitement and drive may even reach a point where the new social worker overidentifies with the profession at the expense of their personal life and free time. The second stage that the authors postulate, stagnation, is characterized by a more realistic perception of the profession and realization by the worker that not all expectations and ideals will be able to be fulfilled. During the second stage, the former overidentification with the profession begins to cease, and the worker gives more emphasis on their life outside of work. Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) explain that the third stage, frustration, starts to take place when the worker experiences the downsides of the profession, such as uncooperative clients, conflicts with other workers or superiors, or technical and bureaucratic obstacles. According to the authors, the fourth stage, apathy, which comes after a prolonged period of frustration, is characterized by another shift in the perception of the work. During the stage of apathy, the worker lacks the former excitement and drive towards the work and views it only as a source of income and something that needs to be done rather than something that they want to do. At this stage, the clients may start to irritate the worker, and no energy is put into further professional development and growth. The fifth and last stage, burnout, is described by the authors similarly to what was written by Maslach. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization and full loss of meaning in the work. Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) also note that these stages have a very linear and smooth progression, which may obstruct the worker's ability to notice their transition into burnout.

It is apparent that a breadth of authors has written about how the phenomenon of burnout manifests in social work. With respect to minor differences or varying levels of

detailed description, the way that the authors write about the phenomenon is quite unified. It may be concluded that the phenomenology of burnout in social work is understood in a fairly straightforward way.

What contributes to burnout in social work?

As was mentioned in the introduction section, many factors have been found to be related to burnout, both in increasing its magnitude and also in decreasing it. This section will focus on summarizing the known contributors that may increase the burnout magnitude in social workers.

Many studies found that a common cluster of factors that contribute to burnout are characteristics of the work environment of social workers (Frieiro Padín et al., 2021; Mcfadden et al., 2014; Matoušek, 2003; Söderfeldt et al., 1995). Matoušek (2003) offers a list of such work environment characteristics that, in many regards, encompasses what other studies have noted. For example, he explains that a work environment where the experienced workers do not train the novices or do not give advice regarding how to approach difficult situations during work contributes to the development of burnout in novice workers. Furthermore, lack of supervision, lack of support from the other workers within the environment, or even rivalry and hostility among workers are other contributors. Lastly, the author also notes that a work environment with too many bureaucratic control systems and too little emphasis on workers' needs may also contribute to higher burnout. Besides work environment factors, Matoušek (2003) also writes about personality characteristics, such as having a disposition for lower tolerance of social situations, or personal attitudes like high job expectations, as other factors contributing to burnout among workers.

It has also been established in the introduction section that the nature of social work with clients is often demanding and stressful due to various client characteristics. These can be mental health problems, complex demands and expectations, or working with multiple difficult clients. Various studies offer a closer look at how working with clients can contribute to burnout. For example, Acker (1999) explains that social work with clients who have severe mental illness is significantly more difficult for the worker than working with clients with milder psychological issues or problems with life

adjustment. This is attributed to the idea that social work with clients who have severe mental illnesses may show slower progress and improvement, while the cooperation with such clients is more difficult (Acker, 1999). Their study showed that social workers who worked with clients who had severe mental illnesses had higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Interestingly enough, while having these higher burnout dimensions, the social workers still showed job satisfaction, which, as Acker (1999) theorizes, may be due to good coping and working strategies of such social workers.

Kopasz et al. (2024) examined how working with socioeconomically poorer clients can also contribute to burnout in social workers. The study operates with the idea that being exposed to children and families in extreme poverty „requires social workers to perform a particularly large amount of emotional labor“ (Kopasz et al., 2024, p. 11), which may contribute to burnout. Interestingly, the results of the study did not show higher depersonalization or emotional exhaustion in social workers who worked with poor clients, but nonetheless showed a lower sense of personal accomplishment among those workers. Therefore, the client characteristic of poverty does, in some way, contribute to burnout in social workers who deal with this group.

Smullens (n.d.) writes about further contributors to burnout in social workers who work with clients who psychologically suffer. They explain that social workers commonly use empathy as a tool for working with clients. However, an overuse of empathy with working with clients who suffer, or additionally are not even getting better throughout the work, results in a phenomenon that the author calls compassion fatigue. This type of emotional exhaustion may contribute to burnout. What Smullens (n.d.) also adds to this is that social workers are prone to an irrational overuse of empathy sometimes by default. The author writes that social workers, as well as other professionals from human services, usually experienced various types of emotional pain themselves during their life's development. For example, „that women working in the mental health professions were more frequently traumatized as children by physical abuse, alcoholism, emotional and sexual abuse, and familial conflict than were women working in other fields“ (Elliot & Guy, 1993; as cited in Smullens, n.d., p.1). As the author theorizes, these past experiences of social workers often fuel a current need to help others in order to avoid a similar context, which drives the worker to be overly compassionate and empathic. This may

sometimes be to the detriment of the social worker. Furthermore, Smullens (n.d.) also writes about the threat of being retraumatized that social workers face, due to their own difficult histories. The author explains that this phenomenon, called vicarious trauma, occurs when the exposure to a client's traumatic experiences triggers the re-experiencing of the worker's own traumatic past. As Smullens (n.d.) points out, the aforementioned phenomena, or compassion fatigue, improper boundaries when providing empathy, and experience of vicarious trauma, can all contribute to burnout in social workers who work with psychologically suffering clients.

Prevalence of burnout in social work

As has been pointed out by multiple authors in the previous sections, burnout syndrome is a phenomenon that is, in some sense, interwoven into the nature of social work, or at least is thought to be a common occurrence. However, it is important to look at what the numbers realistically say about how common burnout syndrome is.

A study by McFadden (2015) measuring burnout in a sample of 1359 social workers from the UK using the Maslach Burnout Inventory found various results. The study did not look at a general burnout index, but rather measured burnout on all three of the Maslach burnout dimensions. The results showed that 91% of the sample scored either a moderate or high number on the emotional exhaustion dimension, and 61% scored either a moderate or high number on the depersonalization dimension. Interestingly enough, 91% of the participants still scored a high number on the dimension related to personal accomplishment, therefore showing feelings of competence and success when working with clients, despite the high scores of the previous two dimensions. The majority of the social workers from the sample worked in some capacity with children, older people, or on child protection services, with lower amounts working with clients who suffered learning or physical disabilities, or in mental health services. As supported by the results, McFadden (2015) highlights the positive message that the majority of the social workers feel that their influence on clients is contributing to desired changes. However, the author also explains that the high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are alarming and should not be taken lightly.

The next study examined burnout in social workers within the Czech Republic, which is a context that is of great interest for this current paper. Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Elichova et al. (2016) examined burnout levels across all three Maslach burnout dimensions in a sample of 178 social workers from the Czech Republic. Their results showed that 51% of the sample showed a high level of burnout in at least one of the Maslach burnout dimensions. Of the 51%, 18% showed high levels of burnout in two of the Maslach burnout dimensions, and 2% showed high levels of burnout in all three dimensions. Another interesting finding is that the burnout dimension that had the highest scores the most times was depersonalization, with 37% of the sample scoring high on this dimension. In comparison, only 26% of the sample scored high on emotional exhaustion, and 12% scored high on the performance dimension. Elichova et al. (2016) also note that according to the respondents' answers, the most stressful aspect of social work and therefore most likely contributing to burnout levels, was field work or working in the client's natural environment.

Given that social work within the Czech Republic is of interest for the purposes of this paper, it would be beneficial to have more data on the prevalence of Burnout in Czech social workers. However, the literature on this subject seems to be scarce at this point. Vňuková et al. (2023) examined the trend of burnout in the Czech Republic; however, they looked at burnout across professions, rather than only within social work. Still, their research showed some interesting conclusions, mainly that across 2014, 2017 and 2020, the trend of burnout in the Czech Republic is decreasing. They theorize that this hopeful trend is also related to people in professions having more knowledge regarding burnout syndrome nowadays, which may translate to better preparedness and preventive coping. Despite these positive results, it cannot be concluded that burnout in Czech social workers is on a significant decreasing trend due to the study not looking at the profession in isolation. Therefore, the point still stands that more data needs to be gathered regarding burnout prevalence in Czech social workers to draw better conclusions and evaluations.

Preventing burnout and further implications for this paper

Up to this point, the phenomenon of burnout syndrome has been discussed in fair depth. As various authors such as Maslach et al. (2001) or Matoušek (2003) have pointed out, burnout syndrome is a legitimate threat to the well-being and job stability of social workers, and the phenomenon in itself is even intertwined with the nature of social work. While the data on the prevalence of burnout in social work do show significant numbers, caution needs to be taken when drawing conclusions about the scale of the threat of burnout syndrome. Nonetheless, enough evidence exists to warrant a motivation towards understanding how exactly burnout works and how to better prevent this threat that social work employees face. Much literature has dealt with the exploration of the inner workings of burnout, and some literature has even examined burnout prevention. For example, Matoušek (2003) writes a list of preventive measures against burnout syndrome. These measures mostly relate to the work environment and work preparedness. For example, he writes that it is important that social workers receive quality training and experience with the target clientele before they start to officially work in a given social service. Furthermore, he highlights the importance of a clearly defined purpose of the organization, which houses a given social service, and clearly defined roles and work methods within that social service. Other measures also include having the option of work counseling, having an environment that supports and helps workers who struggle during their cases with clients, and regular supervision. Lastly, Matoušek (2003) also recommends that workers should have a limited client capacity to not get overwhelmed and should also have a limited administrative workload related to clients.

Further literature discusses other measures that are more related to personal responsibility for utilizing various tools rather than relying on the preventive structure of the work environment. Ratcliff (2024) highlights the importance of utilizing self-care practices that enhance personal well-being through creating peace of mind and rejuvenation of the body. The author writes about the self-care practice of mindfulness, a meditative practice focusing on working with awareness, which provides the ability of being present in the moment, filtering unnecessary stimuli and thoughts and deepening groundedness. Furthermore, the author also writes about the usefulness of yoga, a mind and body intervention that has been proven to alleviate stress and help with achieving

spiritual connectedness. Ratcliff (2024, p. 29) also writes that „the tools presented may not be effective for many social workers; however, it is the responsibility of the worker to ensure that they are mindful of their effectiveness and adequately monitor whether they are deteriorating because of the services that they are providing.“

So far, the factors contributing to burnout prevention that were listed, such as work environment systems or self-care practices, are mainly external in their nature. However, there are factors with a more internal nature that are also known for contributing to burnout prevention. To be more precise, these internal factors refer to phenomena such as personality characteristics, behavioral tendencies, or personal values and perceptions regarding the outside world. It is these internal factors and their relationship to burnout that this paper is interested in. More specifically, two of these internal factors are of interest and those are psychological resilience (a personality characteristic and behavioral tendency) and meaning in life (an internal stance and perception). Within existing literature, meaning in life has been found to be a buffer of burnout (Krok, 2016; Singer et al., 2019) and so has been psychological resilience (Akgemci et al., 2013; McFadden et al., 2014; Stanley et al., 2018). The reason why this paper is interested in these internal factors and their relationship to burnout is that, arguably, this area is still only scarcely explored within the context of social work. To fully understand burnout syndrome and its prevention within social work, the aspects of this topic need to be thoroughly explored.

The literature review of this paper will now take the direction of defining and exploring the factors of meaning in life and psychological resilience as well as their relationship to burnout syndrome within social work.

Meaning in life

The context of existentialism

To fully understand the concept of meaning in life, a brief dive into the tradition of existential thought is needed. There is a long line of writers dealing with existential philosophy and psychology. The tradition of existential thought spans from writers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger or Sartre, who are more rooted in a philosophical background,

to ones such as May, Binswanger or Frankl, who are more rooted in a psychological background. Irvin Yalom, whose book existential psychotherapy (1980) can be viewed in some regards as a synthesis of many existential thoughts produced by the aforementioned writers, writes that there are phenomena universal to all humans, called the givens of existence. These givens of existence are an inseparable part of every human's being and are the basic structures of human being that remain when human existence is stripped of all the other structures of everyday life (Yalom, 1980). Yalom (1980) further explains that core human existence has four givens, which are death, freedom, existential isolation and meaning in life (or its absence). Consciously facing and dealing with these givens of existence, according to Yalom (1980), is what makes a person's life more integrated and freer of psychopathology. This process is what Yalom (1980) calls existential psychodynamics.

Defining meaning in life

Now that it is established that the phenomenon of meaning in life is a core structure of existence, universal to every human being, it is important to examine its definition and the perspectives from existential literature that inform it. Steger et al. (2006) explain that the definition of meaning in life highly varies between authors who write about it; however, some overarching characteristics of the concept are a sense of coherence, directedness, purposefulness, or ontological significance within one's life. Steger et al. (2006, p. 81) also composed a specific definition, stating that meaning in life is „the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence." Additionally, Aliche et al. (2019, p. 3) offer another fairly easy to comprehend definition, explaining that meaning in life is the „people's comprehension of their lives and the possession of a purpose and goals in life to pursue."

Theoretical and empirical frameworks regarding meaning in life

Given that meaning in life is a complex concept, **its** prominent theoretical and empirical frameworks can further inform the understanding and definition of the phenomenon. The earlier-mentioned writer and psychotherapist Irvin Yalom wrote extensively about the subject of meaning in life. A unique characteristic of his writing is how much he synthesizes existing perspectives on existentialist topics, creating thorough

explanations of these phenomena. Yalom (1980) uses the examples of Leo Tolstoy and Albert Camus to illustrate what the realization of meaninglessness in life encompasses. He explains that both writers faced the existential dread that comes with questioning what meaning life bears, which even resulted in suicidal ideation. Yalom (1980) subsequently draws on preexisting empirical research and clinical experiences to state how widespread the crisis of meaning in the modern world is and how commonly manifestations of mental health problems are at their core issues of meaninglessness in life. Yalom (1980) proposes a clear stance, which is that having meaning in life and, by extension, stable ideals or some form of absolute truth is crucial for the psychological well-being of humans.

Yalom (1980) distinguishes between cosmic and terrestrial meaning. He views cosmic meaning in life as essentially rooted in religious traditions that presuppose a transcendental plan or pattern to everything in being. While cosmic being is all-encompassing and universally predetermined by a deity, terrestrial being is much more subjective and personal. Yalom (1980) explains that those believing in cosmic meaning also have their terrestrial meaning. He views terrestrial meaning as being possible even within secular foundations, as it is the result of what one chooses their meaning in life to be. Most of Yalom's writings on meaning in life revolve around the idea of terrestrial meaning.

Perhaps the most famous theorist from the West who wrote about meaning in life is Viktor Frankl. Yalom (1980) refers to Frankl many times when writing about the concept. However, Yalom's primary framework regarding meaning in life contrasts with that of Frankl in various ways. Yalom's view (the focus on terrestrial meaning) is closer to those of existential thinkers who viewed life as essentially meaningless, and therefore the creative burden of meaning fell on the person living the life. However, Frankl (1986) views meaning as being already preexisting within life situations and circumstances that a person finds themselves in. This notion is in some ways close to Yalom's aforementioned cosmic meaning; however, Frankl's framework is more complex. According to Frankl (1986), a person has to discover this preexisting meaning that is awaiting them, hidden within life's situations and circumstances. Frankl (1986) writes that meaning in life is intersubjective, which means that the life of each person has its own subjective meaning related to that person, but universally, every person has some kind of meaning in life that they may potentially discover. This discovery of hidden

meaning in each person's life stands in contrast to the idea commonly proposed by Yalom (1980) that people create their own meaning in life from scratch. Frankl (1986) also proposes a way to better decipher the hidden meaning within life's situations. He explains that there exist three value categories of meaning, the creative value (which one embodies through utilizing their unique skills and competences within work or other creative fields), the experiential or aesthetic value (which one embodies through relationships, deep and meaningful connections with others or artistic experiences) and lastly the attitudinal value (which one embodies through assuming a stance or attitude mainly, but not only, towards suffering). Through aiming at the expression of these values within life's situations and circumstances, Frankl (1986) argues that we can discover meaning.

Frankl (1986) views our quest for finding meaning in life as a continuous dialogue between us and life, where life „throws" circumstances at us (or „tasks us") and we reply to it by finding meaning in those circumstances through expressing the aforementioned values. He explains that when we reply to life's tasking with a meaning-driven answer (acting out a value category), we are fulfilling the hidden meaning within that life circumstance. Frankl (1986) views this as saying „yes" to life. On the other hand, Frankl (1986) also paints a picture of what happens when we stop engaging in the dialogue with life (essentially saying „no" to it). He explains that the meaninglessness that comes from not engaging in the dialogue with life manifests itself as apathy towards life, emptiness (soothed by constant pleasure seeking), or suicidality.

Another perspective on the concept, offered by Steger et al. (2006), utilized empirical research methods to define the properties of meaning in life and examine the concept as a psychometric construct. They found that meaning in life has two stable psychometric components that are important to distinguish when psychometrically measuring the concept within individuals. According to them, meaning in life is composed of the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. While these two components mean exactly what they imply, Steger et al. (2006) argue that they do not have to be mutually exclusive, stating that individuals who attained a presence of meaning within their lives can still strive to search for further or greater meaningfulness. Steger et al. (2006) give the examples of famous individuals such as Gandhi, Bonhoeffer or Malcolm X, who did not stop the search for a greater understanding of their lives' purpose despite already living deeply meaningful lives. Furthermore, Steger et al. (2008) found

that within some cultures, such as the Japanese culture, the meaningfulness of one's life tends to be greatly related to the process of searching for meaning. In other words, the search for meaning itself can be a source of the sense of meaningfulness within life. This, however, is a very important finding, as it raises the question of whether the experience and perception of meaning in life differ between cultures. Steger et al. (2008) explain this clearly as their research points to cultural differences in the way individuals experience and perceive meaning in life. In their study, they found out that individualistic cultures (e.g., USA) show a higher prevalence of presence of meaning whereas collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan) tend to show a higher prevalence of search for meaning. They explain that due to various cultural differences, people from individualistic cultures will show a higher presence of meaning component when measuring high levels of meaning in life, whereas people from collectivistic cultures will show a higher search for meaning when measuring high levels of meaning in life. Steger et al. (2008) explain that people from individualistic cultures place a higher value on self-enhancement and maintaining positive feelings about themselves. Due to this, having a presence of meaning in life is more emphasized by people from individualistic cultures as it plays into the strategies for maintaining a positive self-image. On the other hand, as Steger et al. (2008) explain, people from collectivistic cultures place a higher value on self-improvement and therefore a process is more important than an outcome in their cultural perspective. As a result, people from collectivistic cultures would put higher emphasis on search for meaning, given that it aligns more with the continual process of self-improvement. This cultural difference will be strictly taken into account within this current research paper as it aims to work with participants (social workers) from the Czech Republic, which is an individualistic culture. Due to the cultural restrictions of this current research paper, the meaning in life component of presence of meaning is far more relevant than the component of search for meaning.

The presented theoretical and empirical frameworks in this section show how the phenomenon of meaning in life can manifest in people's lives. Due to the fact that the concept is largely abstract and philosophical in nature, there might not be one truly correct way to understand it. However, as was explained, current empirical practice also presents frameworks in which the concept of meaning in life can be grasped in more evidence-based and measurable ways. It has also been established that the experience and

perception of meaning in life can differ between cultures, which will be taken into consideration throughout this current research paper. The next section will attempt to position the concept of meaning in life into the context of social work and burnout, to bring it back to the primary topic of this paper.

Meaning in life, burnout and social work

Within the area of research, there is little literature empirically examining the relationship between meaning in life and burnout in the context of social work. Such observation is also expressed by Singer et al. (2019). In their study, they examined the relationship between meaning in life (referring to it by purpose in life, but staying true to the concept) and burnout, secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma on a sample of 292 social workers. As mentioned in the previous section relating to burnout, secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma are risk factors found in social work practice that may contribute to burnout. Singer et al. (2019) decided to examine the relationship between meaning in life and each of the aforementioned outcome variables separately. They also echo the sentiment that social workers are at great risk of experiencing these negative states (burnout, secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma) as a result of practice with clients, further reinforcing that which has been argued in previous sections of this research paper. Singer et al. (2019) found that meaning in life was significantly negatively related to all three of the outcome variables. Their study is also exemplary in the fact that in their statistical analysis, they have controlled for covariates such as participants' years of experience, hours worked per week, or ethnicity, further validating the legitimacy of the discovered relationships. Unfortunately, their study is a rarity in the examination of the topic of meaning in life, burnout and social work.

The study by Krok (2016) also examined the relationship between meaning in life and burnout, but not within the context of social work. Nonetheless, it will still be mentioned in this section to further demonstrate the validity of the relationship between the variables. Krok (2016) examined the relationship in a sample of 189 firefighters and also found significant results. An interesting detail worth mentioning is that Krok (2016) used the Maslach Burnout Inventory for burnout assessment and found that higher meaning in life scores were related to lower scores on all three of the Maslach burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lowered sense of personal

accomplishment). While these studies by Singer et al. (2019) and Krok (2016) suggest the legitimacy of the relationship between meaning in life and burnout (In Singer et al. (2019) within the context of social work), more research is needed to expand this legitimacy. Unfortunately, existential themes are not commonly empirically tested, which is a trend that ought to change. The present study intends to contribute to that, while also bridging the realms of existential thought and social work.

Now that the concept of meaning in life has been thoroughly explored and positioned into the context of social work and burnout, the last variable of interest for this research paper will be examined.

Psychological resilience

Defining psychological resilience

The concept of psychological resilience is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. As it is sometimes common for broad phenomena within psychology, giving a precise, exhaustive, and somewhat straightforward definition for a concept like psychological resilience is difficult. Hu et al. (2015) note that the definition for psychological resilience can vary between authors and therefore lacks a singular, uniform definition. However, similar to the concept of meaning in life, definitions of psychological resilience have overarching characteristics. In a broad sense, psychological resilience can be defined as the capacity or ability of an individual to adapt to or cope with adverse life events and overcome them (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Gheshlagh et al., 2017; Mortazavi & Yarohali, 2015; Wu et al., 2020). Agaibi & Wilson (2005) examine the linguistic use of the word resilience to elucidate the understanding of resilience as a psychological factor. They explain that the word refers to „an ability of an object to restore its original structural form, despite being temporarily altered by external forces that would 'bend' or 'compress' its shape“ (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005, p. 196). The linguistic use of the word mirrors the way psychological resilience appears in human functioning. In the most straightforward sense, psychological resilience helps individuals to overcome the negative consequences of adverse events. The spectrum of adverse events that

resilience literature talks about ranges from highly impactful traumatic events (e.g., exposure to abuse or death of a close person) to lesser stressors like daily hassles or common interpersonal inconveniences (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Gheshlagh et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2020).

The multifacetedness of psychological resilience is discussed in various literature. For example, Agaibi & Wilson (2005) explain that research on psychological resilience focuses on determining the characteristics of resilient people, exploring factors that give rise to psychological resilience in individuals, and identifying the tools (for example, cognitive mechanisms) that individuals utilize for resilient adaptations. All of these areas make up the complexity of the concept. In terms of attaining resilience, Agaibi & Wilson (2005) write that it is associated with many factors such as neurobiology, genetics, development in childhood, exposure to and experiences with trauma and stress, social support, cognitive styles, or various personality factors. All of the aforementioned factors can contribute to the degree of resilience that a person possesses. Similarly, Gheshlagh et al. (2017) explain that resilient people utilize various protective factors, such as a sense of self-efficacy, asking for help, focusing on things that they can control, stress management, positive social orientation and social support. From existing literature, it is evident that the complexity of psychological resilience comes from its many determining factors and plethora of tools and circumstances that are potentially available for utilization.

Gheshlagh et al. (2017) explain that psychological resilience is one of the significant reasons why people in difficult social and existential circumstances are able to preserve good mental health and the absence of psychological disorders. In various studies, higher psychological resilience was found to be related to better overall mental health (Gheshlagh et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2015) and lower frequency of psychopathology like depression or emotional problems (Ziaian et al., 2012; as cited in Gheshlagh et al., 2017). Furthermore, Agaibi & Wilson (2005) view resilience as a factor that aids recovery from traumatic experience and therefore protects against the lingering after-effects of trauma. They explain that a wide repertoire of various behavioral tendencies makes up the resilience that protects against trauma. Among these tendencies are a variety of personality traits (e.g., extraversion, high self-esteem, assertiveness, or hardiness) and other behaviors such as usage of humor, flexibility, transcendent detachment, or high

capacity for affect regulation (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005). According to the authors, these behavioral tendencies aid recovery from PTSD and strengthen immunity against the onset of psychopathology after experiencing trauma.

A takeaway from this section that needs to be highlighted is that resilience is a patchwork concept. Even though various quantitative studies, including this current paper, measure resilience as a singular variable, it is still a variable that encompasses a plethora of behaviors and personal dispositions that themselves can be treated as separate variables and concepts. This current research paper will treat psychological resilience as a singular variable, as examining all the aspects of resilience in relation to the rest of the research variables would be beyond the scope of this paper.

Psychological resilience, social work and burnout

Similar to literature regarding meaning in life and social work, literature regarding resilience and social work is scarce. Additionally, not all research literature that deals with the topic of resilience within social work uses a singular measurable variable of resilience, but rather utilizes the patchwork nature of the concept and therefore works with behaviors or contexts that relate to resilience.

A literature review by McFadden et al. (2014) examines how individual and organizational themes within the social work context contribute to burnout among social workers in child protection services. The authors touch upon the patchwork nature of resilience and state that resilience within social workers from child protection services is something that can be built from utilizing various protective contexts and strategic behaviors. The premise of the literature review is that utilizing these contexts and behaviors to build resilience is necessary for this group of social workers, as the nature of child service work may be difficult and harsh. From organizational themes, McFadden et al. (2014) identified that factors such as supportive organizational climate (support from management and supervisors, trust between colleagues, adequate help resources, etc.), workers' positive attachment towards their supervisor, and reasonable workload demands contributed to higher job satisfaction and, therefore better resilience against burnout and subsequent job exit. Already, these findings show a parallel with the section of this current research paper regarding what contributes to burnout within social work.

In terms of individual themes, McFadden et al. (2014) identified various factors that may contribute to resilience. They write about job satisfaction, specifically as being in touch with one's positive emotions regarding their profession, as a positive indicator of retaining the work position and being able to make difficult social work decisions. Furthermore, the authors highlight the dangers of the previous trauma history of the worker and the potential for vicarious traumatization and countertransference during work with clients. This is in line with the writing by Smullens (n.d.). McFadden et al. (2014) theorize that a less history of trauma may contribute to higher resilience within child protection social workers; however, they state that the validity of such a claim rests on further research. Lastly, the authors stress the importance of utilizing various coping mechanisms to reinforce the resilience of the workers. They list various coping strategies such as embracing risks and challenges, expecting the unexpected, keeping realistic expectations, maintaining work-life balance, utilizing interpersonal skills, and finding meaning and purpose. The mention of finding meaning and purpose as an important coping strategy that supports resilience and mitigates burnout is to be highlighted, as it draws parallels with this current research paper.

There are also a couple of quantitative studies that examine the relationship between resilience and burnout within social workers. A study by Harker et al. (2016) examined the relationship between resilience and burnout, among other included variables, such as mindfulness, vicarious trauma, age, and psychological distress. Their study was conducted on a sample of 133 participants working in social service professions. Unfortunately, not all the participants were specifically social workers, as some were also psychologists, counselors, or foster care workers. However, given the scarcity of research papers that deal with the aforementioned variables purely in the context of social work, the research conclusions of this study need to be taken into account, despite the participant limitations. Harker et al. (2016) found that higher resilience and mindfulness predicted lower levels of burnout. This study also measured resilience as a singular variable using the Resilience Factor Inventory and therefore shows a parallel with how resilience is conceptualized and measured in this current research paper. However, a case can also be made that the authors still worked with the patchwork nature of resilience to a slight degree, since they included mindfulness practice as a predictor variable, and that can be considered a resilience behavior strategy. Another

quantitative study was done by Stanley et al. (2018), who examined the relationship between resilience and burnout, among other variables, in a sample of 120 female social workers from India. Their study also measured resilience as a singular variable through the Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (25 items). The results of their study were unexpected in terms of the commonly hypothesized relationship between resilience and burnout. Stanley et al. (2018) found that there was a positive correlation between resilience and burnout scores, meaning that higher resilience was correlated with higher burnout. However, this has to be interpreted in light of the rest of their data analysis, as their study worked with many variables, which might explain this unexpected phenomenon. Stanley et al. (2018, p. 13) also found that „the effect of stress on burnout is moderated by the resilience scores“ and therefore concluded that resilience is a buffer of the negative impact of work stress. This finding is in line with what was discussed in this section so far. The study does not offer a simplistic explanation for the initial positive relationship between resilience and burnout, but rather a complex interpretation of the many findings from the many variables used. Discussing it in detail would be beyond the scope of this current research paper.

The studies mentioned in these sections show that despite resilience being a patchwork concept, it is also a common practice to measure the concept as a singular variable. The reason why this is pointed out is that it provides legitimacy for aspects of the chosen research method for this current research paper. Nonetheless, the scarcity of existing studies regarding resilience and burnout among social workers calls for further research on this topic. This is unfortunately, a common theme among the chosen variables of this current research paper.

Psychological resilience and meaning in life

The relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience has a strong theoretical and empirical foundation. Using the idea of psychological resilience as an individual's capacity to overcome/withstand difficult circumstances or bounce back after hardships, Viktor Frankl has written extensively about how meaning in life can aid that capacity. Frankl is known to have survived one of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II. His book Man's Search for Meaning, written in 1946, is a testament to those events and has become his most-read book. However, his theoretical framework

regarding meaning in life is better explained in his book The Doctor and the Soul from 1986. Going back to the value categories of meaning that were previously mentioned, Frankl (1986) explains that aiming towards expressing the attitudinal value within our life gives us meaning and resilience to withstand tragic circumstances and suffering. As he further explains, expressing the attitudinal value requires us to utilize our existential freedom and assume a stance or specific attitude towards life and its context. As Frankl (1986) argues, when people find themselves in tragic life circumstances, where it is impossible to find meaning through expressing creative or experiential values (perhaps because all opportunities for work, relationships or aesthetic beauty no longer exist in that tragic context), we can still assume a stance/attitude towards those circumstances. He also argued that the freedom to choose how we approach life (whether we say „yes“ to life) is an inseparable part of being human and therefore always available to us. In his view, saying „yes“ to life in tragic circumstances or embracing life despite suffering equates to finding meaning and therefore being resilient. In Frankl's framework, resilience comes from our existential freedom and freely choosing to embrace or withstand suffering (as part of our quest to continually find meaning). In Man's Search for Meaning, Frankl (1946) illustrates this idea of resilience through various examples from his observations of other prisoners in the concentration camp. For example, he explains that some prisoners clearly found meaning and embraced the tragic circumstances as they remained hopeful, took care of themselves, and helped others. On the other hand, Frankl (1946) notes that the prisoners who expressed apathy and self-destructive behaviors (such as using the little resources they had to get cigarettes instead of food) were most likely those who failed to find meaning and therefore the resilience to push through the unfortunate circumstances.

Besides Frankl's framework, a variety of empirical literature has been written regarding the phenomenon that having meaning in life is positively related to higher resilience against life's stressors. For example, Mohseni et al. (2019) examined the relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience in a sample of 300 older adults. Their results showed that the variables were positively related. Additionally, they also found that meaning in life was negatively related to depression and loneliness, which further reinforces the idea that meaning in life has a protective nature for the human psyche. Another study that supports this claim was done by Ostafin & Proulx (2020), who conducted three separate tests with a total of 273 participants. Although the authors

focused on the relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience, they did not measure the resilience variable directly, but focused on psychological variables of stressor-related distress and meaning-repetitive negative thinking. Arguably, high scores on these two psychological variables could be understood as characteristics of low psychological resilience. Ostafin & Proulx (2020) found that meaning in life was negatively related to stressor-related distress and meaning-repetitive negative thinking. The theory behind their testing was that meaning violations (in the form of adverse situations that shake the foundational beliefs and goals of a person) lead to psychological distress, which in turn elicits meaning-repetitive negative thoughts (a maladaptive form of meaning restoration) if a stable/strong sense of meaning in life is lacking. The results of this study support the claim that „strong life meaning should promote psychological resilience through inhibiting uncertainty and concomitant distress“ (Ostafin & Proulx, 2020, p. 2).

Final remarks

This section concludes the exploration of all the variables of interest, their relevant contexts, and possible relationships between each other. Reiterating the main idea of this research paper, the aim is to quantitatively better understand the phenomenon of burnout syndrome within social work, mainly its relationship to the two theorized protective factors of meaning in life and psychological resilience. As was explained in the earlier sections, burnout syndrome is a known threat to the well-being and professional efficacy of social workers, and therefore, the pursuit to understand its prevention is important. In the next sections, this research paper will try to contribute to that pursuit by qualitatively examining the relationship between burnout syndrome and the protective factors of meaning in life and psychological resilience. Better empirical understanding of such a relationship may positively contribute to the overall knowledge regarding burnout prevention in social work and potentially even spark new avenues for further exploration.

Formulating hypothesis

To better understand the nature of the relationship between meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout within the context of social workers, this paper proposes a mediation relationship hypothesis. The literature regarding these variables of interest suggests a possibility for a mediation relationship, which warrants a testing of its existence. During the analysis of data and testing of the hypothesis, the variable of meaning in life will be referred to as Presence of Meaning, the variable of psychological resilience will be referred to as Resilience and the variable of burnout will be referred to as Burnout. The proposed hypothesis:

H_1: Resilience will significantly negatively mediate the relationship between Presence of meaning and Burnout

H_0: Resilience will not be a significant negative mediator of the relationship between Presence of meaning and Burnout

Methods

Procedures

To test the aforementioned hypothesis, a Google Forms questionnaire was created and distributed to participants for data gathering. Given that participants for this study had to be only social workers, the data gathering questionnaire was distributed to relevant environments via a hyperlink through the internet. The environments for participant collection were a Czech Facebook page called Sociálni Pracovníci, an NGO organisation Fokus-Praha, and a class of social work students at Pražská vysoká škola psychosociálních studií. During the distribution of the questionnaire, it was strictly emphasized that all participants must be social workers who are currently working in the profession. The distributed questionnaire contained three scales, measuring the three variables of interest (meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout). The types of scales used will be discussed in the instrumentation section. The questionnaire further contained an informed consent page, a demographics data gathering page and

a debriefing page. After filling out the three scales on the questionnaire, participants were informed about the full extent of the research through the debriefing page. No reward or compensation was given to the participants for their time invested in participating. The data collected through the Google Forms questionnaire were subsequently statistically analyzed. The full extent of statistical analysis used will be described in the data analysis section.

It has to be noted that the informed consent utilized a slight form of psychological deception regarding the aim of the research, in order to mitigate the effect of demand characteristics. McCambridge et al. (2012, p. 1) explain that the concept of demand characteristics „refers to participants being aware of what the researcher is trying to investigate, or anticipates finding, and what this implies for how participants are expected to behave“. This means that knowing the full extent of the research aim, participants could have altered the way they answered items on the included scales. Although participant deception in research is known to be ethically questionable, under the right circumstances, it can be utilized to counter the methodology limitation of the demand characteristics effect. Deception in research is permitted when „1) no other nondeceptive method exists to study the phenomenon of interest; 2) the study makes significant contributions to scientific knowledge; 3) the deception is not expected to cause significant harm or severe emotional distress to research participants; and 4) the deception is explained to participants as soon as the study protocol permits“ (American Psychological Association, 2012; as cited in Boynton et al., 2013, p. 1). It can be argued that in this current research paper, the third and fourth conditions were fully met, and the first and second conditions were met in part or also fully. The exact form of deception utilized in the current research paper was altering the aim of the study description to not fully disclose all the studied variables. Instead of saying that this research will study the relationship between meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout in social workers from the Czech Republic, it was stated that the research will study how meaning in life relates to psychological factors in social workers from the Czech Republic. The full informed consent page is included in Appendix A.

The demographics page contained a question regarding participants' age, gender and specific area of social work that they work in within the Czech system. The debriefing

page contained a brief annotation of the current research and some of the cited literature. Both the demographics page and the informed consent page are included in Appendix A.

Participants

In total, 98 participants completed the Google Forms questionnaire. Due to this research paper being a master's thesis paper, the resources for utilizing a robust research methodology were limited, and therefore, simpler methods for participant gathering and inclusion were used. Convenience sampling was used to gather the participants. The selection criteria for inclusion of participants were also non-discriminative, as social workers from any area of social work within the Czech Republic could fill out the questionnaire. It is taken into account that both the participant gathering method and selection criteria represent serious limitations in terms of the robustness and validity of the research method used. These limitations will, of course, be discussed in the discussion and limitations section of this research paper. The demographics of the participants were as follows.

The age of participants ranged from 22 to 62, with the mean being $M = 37.47$ and the standard deviation being $SD = 9.88$. In terms of gender, 93 (94.9%) participants identified as female, 5 (5.1%) participants identified as male and 0 participants identified as other. The specific area of social work where the participants worked was as follows. 45 (45.9%) participants worked in social prevention services (služby sociální prevence), 25 (25.5%) participants worked in social care services (služby sociální péče), 6 (6.1%) participants worked in social counseling services (Poradenství a hlavně odborné poradenství), 12 (12.2%) participants worked in child protection services of the Czech Republic (OSPOD a subjekty pověřené výkonem SPOD) and 10 (10.2%) participants worked in other types of social services or areas of social work (Jiné).

Instrumentation

To measure the variable of meaning in life within participants, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire 10-item (MLQ) was used. The developers of this scale are Steger et al. (2006), and the scale is used to measure the extent to which participants perceive their life as meaningful and the extent to which they continually seek meaning in their life. As

was mentioned in the section regarding theoretical and empirical frameworks for meaning in life, Steger et al. (2006) view the concept of meaning in life as being composed of two properties, which as the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. This is because, as was explained earlier, the search for meaning itself can be perceived as meaningful by some individuals. The current research paper worked with only the presence of meaning subscale score and did not work with the search for meaning subscale score, nor the overall score of both subscales combined. This is because the current research paper works with a sample of participants who are strictly from the Czech Republic. Taking into account the study by Steger et al. (2008), presence of meaning subscale is better suited to show meaningfulness in the lives of people from individualistic cultures, which the Czech Republic is.

In terms of psychometric properties of MLQ, the scale has a high internal consistency (alpha coefficients above 0.8), good test-retest reliability, strong and stable factor structure, and better discriminant validity than various other scales that aim to measure meaning in life (such as PIL or LRI) (Halama et al., 2024). These psychometric properties warranted the use of MLQ rather than other scales to measure the variable of meaning. Given that the participants of this current research study are Czech social workers, a Czech version of the MLQ 10-item was used. This official Czech version is freely available on the website of Michael F. Steger, www.michaelfsteger.com. The 10 items of MLQ are measured on a 7-point Likert scale; however, in this current research, the Likert scale was reduced to 5 points. This was done to make the answers more straightforward and with two additional scales, keep the questionnaire as short as possible to avoid participant fatigue. Although wider Likert scales are known to capture more nuance in the answers, it can be argued that a 5-point Likert scale is still a fair compromise between simplicity and precision. The final scores are calculated by the summation of the item scores; however, item number nine is reverse-scored. The full scale can be found in Appendix B.

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC-10) was used to measure the variable of psychological resilience. This scale is a 10-item version of the original 25-item CD-RISC scale developed by Connor and Davidson (2003). A review of resilience scales by Salisu & Hashim (2017) discussed that before CD-RISC, existing resilience scales lacked wider applicability and acceptability, and therefore, the creation of CD-

RISC aimed to remedy the shortcomings of the previous scales. Salisu & Hashim (2017) also show that CD-RISC had tens of studies validating the psychometric properties of the scale and finding better reliability and validity results than the previous resilience scales. This made the CD-RISC the golden standard. However, Salisu & Hashim (2017) explain that later studies found the 5-factor structure of CD-RISC to not be as stable as originally thought. In response to that, Campbell-Sills & Stein (2007) shortened and validated the scale into a unidimensional CD-RISC-10. Retaining the high-quality psychometric properties and having a more stable and simple factor structure, it can be argued that CD-RISC-10 is now the highest standard. This justified its use in the current research paper as opposed to the 25-item CD-RISC. Furthermore, keeping the 10-item version also allowed for the retention of simplicity and shortness of the overall questionnaire used for this research paper. However, it proved to be difficult to find an official Czech translation of CD-RISC-10, and therefore it had to be translated manually as part of this research paper. Not having a validity and reliability testing of the Czech translation (as it would be beyond the scope of this paper) is a limitation that will be acknowledged. The items of CD-RISC-10 are measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The final participant scores are calculated by the summation of the item scores. The full scale can be found in Appendix B.

Burnout Assessment Tool 12 item (BAT) was used to measure the variable of burnout. BAT12 is also a shortened version of its original 23-item version that was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2020). The authors explain that although the golden standard for burnout measurement used to be Maslach Burnout Inventory, the scale has apparent shortcomings that were identified only later. Schaufeli et al. (2020) explain that MBI has various psychometric shortcomings, limited applicability, and does not account for some characteristics of burnout related to psychopathology. Burnout Assessment Tool was developed to remedy these shortcomings. BAT showed to have a stable factor structure, high internal consistency, and good discriminant and convergent validity (Schaufeli et al., 2020). The shortened 12-item version was developed by Hadžibajramović et al. (2022) and likewise retains good reliability and validity. The short version of BAT was used to allow for a simpler and shorter questionnaire, an idea that was taken into account when choosing all the used scales. Although BAT has a four-factor structure (exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment and emotional impairment),

the current research paper worked only with the overall score. The items on BAT 10-item are measured on a 5-point Likert Scale. The final scores are calculated by the summation of the item scores. The full scale can be found in Appendix B.

Data analysis

A software called Jamovi was used to statistically analyze the collected data. First, a collection of tests of assumptions was run, which included assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, multicollinearity and outliers. Afterwards, a hierarchical regression was run as a prerequisite to run mediation analysis. The variable of meaning in life was treated as a predictor variable, burnout was treated as an outcome variable, and psychological resilience was treated as a covariate. Subsequently, to test the hypothesis that psychological resilience will be a significant negative mediator in the relationship between meaning in life and burnout, a mediation analysis was run. A descriptive analysis to explore wider properties of the data (primarily the demographic data) was also run in addition to the testing of the hypothesis. The results section of this current research paper will discuss the results of the aforementioned statistical tests as well as show their respective tables and figures, where all of the statistical information can be seen.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics regarding the main variables. The mean Presence of meaning score was $M = 19.61$, with a minimum score being 10, a maximum score being 25, and a standard deviation being $SD = 3.59$. According to Shapiro-Wilk´s test of normality, the Presence of meaning scores were not normally distributed, $p < .001$. The mean Resilience score was $M = 27.66$, with a minimum score being 14, a maximum score being 38, and a standard deviation being $SD = 4.98$. According to Shapiro-Wilk´s test of normality, the Resilience scores were normally distributed, $p = .268$. The mean Burnout score was $M = 29.59$, with the minimum score being 16 and the maximum score being 44, and the standard deviation being $SD = 5.88$. According to Shapiro-Wilk´s test of normality, the Burnout scores were normally distributed, $p = .787$.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Regarding the Main Variables

	Resilience	Burnout	Presence of Meaning
N	98	98	98
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	27.66	29.59	19.61
Median	27.50	30.00	20.00
Standard deviation	4.98	5.88	3.59
Minimum	14	16	10
Maximum	38	44	25
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.98	0.99	0.95
Shapiro-Wilk p	.268	.787	< .001

Tests of assumptions

Tables 2-5 and Figure 1 show the tests of assumptions that were run in order to run the subsequent tests of hierarchical regression and mediation analysis. These tests evaluate if the collected data on the chosen variables of Presence of Meaning, Resilience and Burnout meet various requirements for the subsequent statistical tests. Table 2 shows that there was no multicollinearity, and Table 3 shows that there was no outlier. Furthermore, Tables 4 and 5 show that the assumptions of normality, independence of errors were not violated, and Figure 1 shows that linearity and homoscedasticity were also not violated. The data from the measured variable met all the requirements tested by the tests of assumptions, and therefore, hierarchical regression and mediation analysis can be run.

Table 2

Collinearity Statistics for Presence of Meaning and resilience

	VIF	Tolerance
Presence of Meaning	1.27	0.79
Resilience	1.27	0.79

Table 3

Cook's Distance for the Presence of Outliers

			Range	
Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
0.01	0.00	0.02	3.50e-7	0.08

Table 4

Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

Statistic	p
0.99	.837

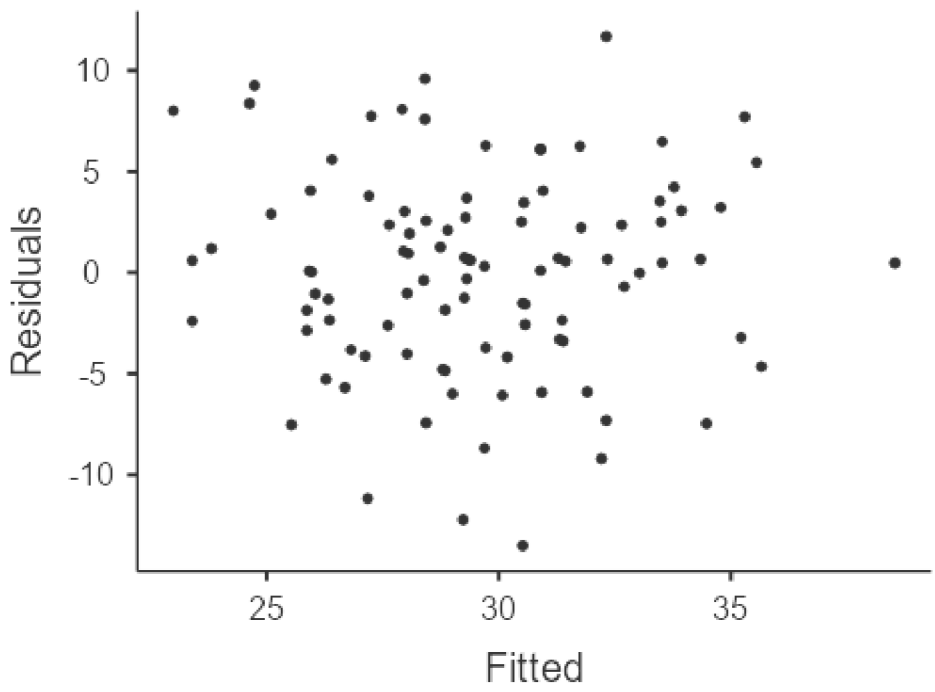
Table 5

Durbin–Watson Test for Autocorrelation (Independence of Errors)

Autocorrelation	DW Statistic	p
-0.00	2.01	.998

Figure 1

Scatterplot of Fitted Predictors and Residuals (Linearity and Homoscedasticity)



Test of hypothesis

Hierarchical regression was run as a prerequisite for mediation analysis, required to answer the hypothesis. In Table 6 we can see that the results showed that model 1 was significant, $F_1(1,96) = 21.24$, $p < .001$, and model 2 was also significant $F_2(2, 95) = 18.18$, $p < .001$, and the variables in model 2 explained the variability of Burnout by 28% ($R_2^2 = .28$). The results in Table 7 also showed that in model 1, Presence of Meaning significantly predicted Burnout, $p < .001$. In Table 8, we can see that after controlling for Resilience in model 2, Presence of Meaning still significantly predicted Burnout, $p = .008$, while Resilience showed significance, $p < .001$. The result from Table 8 means that Resilience is potentially not a covariate that is enabling the relationship between Presence of Meaning and Burnout. Normally, this would not be the desired result for the subsequent running of mediation analysis. However, given that hierarchical regression is not an absolute prerequisite for running mediation analysis, the analysis will still be run to explore whether the hypothesis is confirmed or not confirmed, or at least partially confirmed.

Table 6

Model Fit Measures

			Overall Model Test			
Model	R	R^2	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.43	0.18	21.24	1	96	< .001
2	0.53	0.28	18.18	2	95	< .001

Table 7

Model Coefficients of Burnout for Presence of Meaning (Model 1)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	43.28	3.02	14.34	< .001
Presence of meaning	-0.70	0.15	-4.61	< .001

Table 8

Model Coefficients of Burnout for Presence of Meaning While Controlling for Resilience (Model 2)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	49.52	3.35	14.78	< .001
Presence of meaning	-0.44	0.16	-2.71	.008
Resilience	-0.41	0.12	-3.54	< .001

To answer the hypothesis whether resilience will significantly negatively mediate the relationship between Presence of Meaning and Burnout, a mediation analysis was run. In Table 9, we can see that the analysis showed a significant (p = .003) indirect effect (path a x b) with a 37.42% mediation effect. Furthermore, in Table 9, we can see that there was also a significant (p = .006) direct effect (path c) with a 62.58% mediation effect. In Table 10, we can see that Presence of Meaning significantly (p < .001) predicted Resilience (path a) and Resilience significantly (p < .001) predicted Burnout (path b); however, when controlling for Resilience, Presence of Meaning still significantly (p = .006) predicted Burnout (path c). Therefore, the hypothesis was only partially confirmed. With the results from the hierarchical regression, this was a likely outcome. The meaning of the results from the mediation analysis will be discussed in the discussion section.

Table 9

Mediation Estimates

Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	a × b	-0.26	0.09	-2.94	.003	37.42
Direct	c	-0.44	0.16	-2.76	.006	62.58
Total	c + a × b	-0.70	0.15	-4.66	< .001	100.00

Table 10

Path Estimates

			Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Presence of meaning	→	Resilience	a	0.64	0.12	5.10	< .001
Resilience	→	Burnout	b	-0.41	0.11	-3.60	< .001
Presence of meaning	→	Burnout	c	-0.44	0.16	-2.76	.006

Additionally, a correlation matrix was created to show whether the relationships are positive or negative in a clear way. In Table 11, we can see that Presence of Meaning was positively significantly related to resilience (r = .46, p < .001) and negatively significantly related to Burnout (r = -.43, p < .001). Furthermore, in Table 11, we can also see that Resilience was negatively significantly related to Burnout (r = -.47, p < .001). All of the correlations are above 0.4, which can be considered a value that borders on the high end of weak correlations and the low end of medium strong correlations. The results of the correlation matrix will also be discussed further in the discussion section.

Table 11

Correlation Matrix

		Resilience	Burnout	Presence of meaning
Resilience	Pearson's r	—		
	p-value	—		
	N	—		
Burnout	Pearson's r	-0.47	—	
	p-value	< .001	—	
	N	98	—	
Presence of meaning	Pearson's r	0.46	-0.43	—
	p-value	< .001	< .001	—
	N	98	98	—

Discussion

The hypothesis that resilience will significantly negatively mediate the relationship between Presence of Meaning and Burnout was only partially confirmed because, at best, there was only a partial mediation. This is because while the indirect effect (Presence of Meaning predicting Resilience and Resilience predicting Burnout) was significant, the direct effect (Presence of Meaning predicting Burnout while controlling for Resilience) was also significant. According to McLeod (2025), his phenomenon is called partial mediation and refers to the mediator not explaining all of the relationship between the independent and dependent variable, but only some of it, while other unexplored factors (variables) are at play in the relationship. In the cale of this current research paper, if the direct effect (Presence of Meaning predicting Burnout while controlling for Resilience) was not significant, but the indirect effect (Presence of Meaning predicting Resilience and Resilience predicting Burnout) was significant, that would mean that the mediator (Resilience) fully explained the relationship between independent (Presence of Meaning) and dependent (Burnout) variables. However, given that both the direct and indirect effects are significant, the mediator only partially explains the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, while other factors (variables) explain the rest of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This means that besides psychological resilience, there are other variables that act as mediators in the relationship between meaning in life and burnout. However, it can be argued that this was an expected outcome for the hypothesis of this current research paper, because partial mediations are quite common. Maxwell et al. (2011, p. 818) explain that "in most psychological research, complete mediation is rare because of the difficulty of identifying all possible mediators of complex psychological relations. In reality, any given variable M likely only partially mediates the relation between X and Y". Therefore, even though the hypothesis of this current research paper was only partially confirmed, the results are still relevant and potentially important.

Additionally, the correlation matrix revealed a positive relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience, a negative relationship between meaning in life and burnout, and a negative relationship between psychological resilience and burnout. This is in line with most of the literature mentioned in the earlier sections. What

this essentially means is that within the sample of Czech social workers of this research paper, higher meaning in life is related to higher psychological resilience and higher meaning in life, as well as higher psychological resilience is related to lower burnout. Of course, causality between the variables cannot be concluded as these were only correlational relationships. However, some unexplored mechanisms are at play that account for the way these variables behave in relation to one another. The earlier sections explored the literature that suggested that meaning in life and psychological resilience are buffers of burnout within social workers (Singer et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2018), which means that meaning in life and psychological resilience in some way contribute to the mitigation of burnout presence and its negative effects. The results of this current research paper reinforce that idea.

Furthermore, this current research paper also elucidated the nature of these relationships through the mediation hypothesis. In the simplest terms, it may be plausible that one of the reasons why meaning in life and psychological resilience buffer burnout in social workers is that the more meaning in life the social workers have, the higher psychological resilience they have, and as a result, they are less likely to experience burnout during their profession. Psychological resilience was established to be one of the existing mediators in this relationship. Given that there was only partial mediation, other variables besides psychological resilience account for the buffering/mitigation of burnout. However, this simplistic explanation uses causal language. Further research would have to prove that these variables really causally influence each other in the way that was suggested. Arguably, such research would be difficult to conduct. Furthermore, the way the variables of meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout were operationalized in this current research is potentially vague and unfit for the purposes of experimental research or other types of research that would attempt to explore how these variables affect each other. Besides this, there may be a plethora of other complications for establishing research that would explore the validity of this causality. At the very least, it can be theorized and speculated how such causality could look, but the validity of this theorizing and speculation would remain in question.

In theory, the mechanisms at play may be various. I will try to illustrate a hypothetical example of one of the possible mechanisms, using terminology and theory from the literature that was discussed in the earlier sections. As was mentioned, social

workers who work with clients who have difficult pasts may experience vicarious trauma (due to having a similar history as their clients), which may contribute to a higher level of burnout (Smullens, n.d.). However, higher resilience is known to be a protective factor against the after-effects of traumatic experiences, through various behavioral mechanisms such as higher capacity for affect regulation (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005). Higher meaning in life could potentially contribute to a higher capacity for affect regulation in accordance with Frankl's (1987) view on finding meaning in difficult life situations. A reframing of the vicarious trauma experienced by the social worker into something meaningful could contribute to better affect regulation (of the negative emotions that arise during vicarious trauma) and therefore higher resilience. This psychological resilience, aided by strong life meaning, would therefore protect the social worker from a rise in burnout due to the vicarious trauma that appeared during their work with a traumatized client. This mechanism would also be in line with the study by Singer et al. (2019), who found that higher meaning in life is related to lower vicarious trauma and burnout.

How might such reframing of vicarious trauma to something meaningful look? Once again, the return to Frankl's (1987) idea of aiming towards the enactment of attitudinal value may provide a possible path. As was explained earlier, Frankl (1987) views the aim towards enacting the attitudinal value as a way to help us withstand suffering and difficult life situations by utilizing the freedom of the self (the one aspect that is truly inalienable from human beings in any limiting life circumstance) and choose to walk forward in life (saying "yes" to life) despite the negative circumstances. In simpler terms, when we enact the attitudinal value, we find meaning through refusing to give up in circumstances where giving up would seem intuitive. The experiencing of vicarious trauma by a social worker during their work with a client is also an example of such a negative and difficult circumstance. Frankl (1987) writes about the psychology of concentration camps, where choosing to find meaning through enacting attitudinal value was one of the most empowering factors for the prisoners. However, he also writes that in order to be able to more successfully stand our ground in tragic circumstances, we need to utilize focusing on the future. The future that Frankl (1987) writes about is a future where something waits for us. In his book, Frankl (1987) gives the examples of 2 prisoners whom he had known during his time in the concentration camp. One prisoner had a series of unpublished geographical books, and the other prisoner had a daughter in

a foreign country. Frankl (1987) observed that when these prisoners shifted their focus to these futures that were waiting for them, they were able to find meaning in the tragic present circumstances and refuse to give up. Going back to the topic of social work, there are also purpose-giving futures that are embedded in the nature of the profession. In one of their publications, Department of Health (2017) writes that social work is a value-based profession. Department of Health (2017) specifically writes that:

> While social workers work in different sectors and settings and in a variety of job roles, they share a common purpose which is to improve and safeguard the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Social workers do this by empowering people to manage their own lives; promoting people's independence; supporting people's social inclusion and participation in society; and helping people to keep safe and well. (p. 2)

These values have the potential to create a purpose-driven future for any social worker. Going back to the example of a social worker that experiences vicarious trauma, a possible way of reframing such a circumstance to something meaningful would be to shift the focus towards the future where the social worker fulfills these humanitarian values, which would in turn strengthen the refusal to give up in the situation here and now. Returning to the rest of the example, this stronger meaning in life could subsequently support higher psychological resilience and therefore mitigate potential burnout.

Although the illustration of this lengthy example of potential mechanisms that may take place in the relationship between meaning in life, psychological resilience, and burnout within social workers is only theoretical and speculative, it is beneficial to create such theoretical models. Nonetheless, proving direct causality in the mechanisms of such theoretical models may not be within the possibilities of current scientific methods. Therefore, illustrating how concrete models of the relationship between meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout within social workers could work will most likely stay in the realm of theorizing and speculation.

With the finding that meaning in life is a positive predictor of psychological resilience and a negative predictor of burnout for social workers, it is important to discuss the range of sources from which meaning in life can be derived. As was mentioned in the theoretical model that was suggested in previous paragraphs, the values of social work

themselves can be a source from which social workers can derive meaning in life. However, there are many other sources of meaning that are suggested by both theoretical and empirical literature. When dealing with theoretical literature, the writings by Frankl (1987) and Yalom (1980) can once again be examined. From the three value categories that Frankl (1987) views as the main sources of meaning in life, the attitudinal value category has been discussed at length. The two other categories are the creative value category and the experiential or aesthetic value category. The category of creative value is explained by Frankl (1987) as deriving meaning from the work we do. In his view, this is done specifically by doing our work conscientiously and by using the creative forces within us to enrich the work we do. In the context of social work, the enrichment of what we do by creative forces within us could potentially be understood as utilizing the personal strengths of empathy, creative problem solving, or relationship creation that social workers usually have in their personal disposition. However, this value category once again deals with deriving meaning from how social workers do their work. The experiential or aesthetic value category provides a more unique source of meaning that goes outside the bounds of work life. Frankl (1987) explains the experiential/aesthetic value category as finding meaning in experiencing that which is beautiful and pleasant in the world. He specifically gives emphasis on simply "experiencing" the aesthetic phenomena around us. Frankl (1987) argues that deriving meaning from experiential/aesthetic values means experiencing the beauty embedded in culture, such as quality literature, music and other forms of art, as well as experiencing and appreciating the beauty of nature and the world around us. He even goes as far as saying that experiencing these forms of aestheticism can provide us with peak experiences or moments that fill us with deep bliss and joy. Furthermore, Frankl (1987) also extends this value category into the realm of relationships. He argues that deep relationships and love is also a domain that falls within the experiential value category. This, as he explains, is because love is tied to our experience of the uniqueness and unrepeatability of other people. These characteristics that people possess, simply by existing and being themselves, are what can ignite meaning and love.

Yalom (1980) offers his two unique categories of meaning in life, which were mentioned earlier in this paper. What he calls cosmic meaning is the belief or stance that people are part of a greater or transcendental design, where every person has their unique

purpose. As he also explains, cosmic meaning is what religious people usually possess, or, in other words, a meaning given to us through religious beliefs. In Yalom's (1980) view, religion gives us cosmic meaning mainly by providing us with a task, which is to fulfill God's will, revealed to us through religious scripture. He also argues, however, that in those cases where people believe that humans are unable to fully grasp God's intentions and will, simply having faith can also bring cosmic meaning in life. Other literature also deals with religion as a potent source of meaning. Hood et al. (2009) explain that religion as a source of meaning in life is potent because it also satisfies various domains that are important for a fulfilling life. They explain that religion gives us a framework through which to understand and interpret the world around us. Furthermore, they write that religion provides individuals with behavioral guidance, which may satisfy the need for a clear code of conduct within life. Lastly, Hood et al. (2009) explain that religion is also a source of community and social connectedness, which is another important factor for creating meaning within one's life. Yalom (1980), however, offers another domain that can be a source for meaning in life, which he calls secular meaning. Unlike cosmic meaning that revolves around religious and spiritual sources for meaning in life, secular meaning offers sources for meaning in life that are not exclusively tied to religious practice and lifestyle, but may nonetheless coexist alongside one. Yalom (1980) writes that secular meaning is tied to sources of meaning in life, such as altruism, self-actualization, self-transcendence, creativity, dedication to a cause or even hedonism. Discussing each of these sources of meaning in detail would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, it can be argued that some of them are even tied to previous ideas that were listed, such as pleasurable experiences, values of the social work profession or manifesting the unique potential within us through work.

As for empirical literature, various studies examined what sources of meaning in life exist. For example, Sørensen et al., (2019) identified multiple domains that act as sources of meaning, each encompassing various values or ideas. These are the domains of well-being and relatedness (which encompasses love, fun or community), liberality (which encompasses individualism, creativity or freedom), order (which encompasses morality, reason or tradition), accomplishment (which encompasses power, achievement or development) or religion and spirituality (Sørensen et al., 2019). Grouden & Jose (2014) also identified a list of sources for meaning in life. From their study, the most

commonly cited source of meaning was family, with other sources being interpersonal relations, personal growth, work, leisure/free time, spirituality/religion, health, standard of living, community/society, life in general and education. It can be argued that these empirical findings only reinforce the ideas from theoretical literature. In the context of this current research paper, it means that social workers can utilize a plethora of sources to strengthen their sense of meaning in life.

Because higher psychological resilience by itself was also found to be a significant predictor of lower burnout in social workers, it is relevant to discuss how resilience can be cultivated outside the context of meaning in life. In their book called The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strengths and Overcoming Life's Hurdles, Reivich & Shatté (2002) deal with the idea of building resilience. The suggestions of the book can likewise be applicable to social workers. The authors explain that various components of psychological resilience can be learned and highlight several resilience factors that can be attained through deliberate practice. These components or skills include maintenance of optimism, impulse control, identification of what causes certain problems, regulation of emotions, maintaining a sense of self-efficacy or being able to reach out to others. Throughout all of these skills, Reivich & Shatté (2002) put an emphasis on cognition, meaning that it is important to understand what we are thinking and work with our thoughts. For example, being able to assess how accurate our personal beliefs are or being able to maintain realistic perspectives on challenges are some of the common mechanisms that underline the components mentioned in the book. In the context of social work, this can be applied in various ways. Once again, I will try to illustrate hypothetical examples. For example, if a social worker holds negative beliefs about how a client or a coworker views them, they can assess the accuracy of these assumptions. The same can go for their assumptions regarding their professional skills. Furthermore, with regard to maintaining realistic perspectives on challenges, social workers can do thorough evaluations of what goals they can attain with specific clients, to set realistic expectations and not fall into feeling that they are not reaching a desired but unrealistic progress. Reivich & Shatté (2002) also write about working with thoughts in relation to emotions. When they write about the emotional regulation component of resilience, they explain that negative emotions can have underlying thoughts and deeply held beliefs that may be fairly unconscious (The authors call them icebergs). Identifying them may provide

understanding regarding the current emotions that are felt and an opportunity to manage them. In the context of social work, this may, for example, mean that when intense emotions arise during work with clients, it may not necessarily be due to the client doing something out of line or inappropriate, but due to the social worker's reaction stemming from their deeply held beliefs. These are only some of the possible illustrations, how social workers can practice cultivating psychological resilience. However, discussing all the possible avenues would be beyond the scope of this current research paper.

Now that the results of this current research paper have been discussed in depth and tied to various theoretical frameworks and implications, the last sections of this paper will comment on the limitations and strengths of this study, as well as offer some practical implications for the area of social work.

Limitations of this study

It is important to emphasize that the results of this current research paper cannot be generalized, as the methodological requirements for generalization of study results were not met. This study has used only a convenience sampling method and not a random sampling method, which is needed for generalization. Furthermore, due to limited time and resources, this current study has a low sample size of only 98 participants. According to ČSÚ (2025), there were roughly 9653 social workers and 47306 workers in social services as of the year 2023. The statistics were not updated for the year 2025; however, it is reasonable to assume that the numbers would be roughly the same or slightly higher, as there is a growth trend regarding the number of social workers and workers in social services between the years 2016 and 2023 (ČSÚ, 2025). The sample size of this current research paper works with only a tiny fraction of the overall number of potential participants. This was, however, an expected limitation, because utilizing a random sampling method on a truly representative size of participants was highly beyond the scope of this current research paper. That is why this current research paper can at best be seen as only a pilot study to inspire future research that would utilize a more methodologically robust approach.

Another limitation, which was only partially expected, was the gender ratio of the participants in this current study. It is well known that social work is a female-dominated

profession. The statistics for various countries show 70% to 80% or higher of the overall social worker population consists of female workers (Khunou et al., 2012). In this regard, it could be argued that a significantly lower number of male social work participants was to be expected. However, of the overall 98 participants in this current research paper, only 5 participants identified as male. This ratio is noticeably lower than the common trend. There are two implications from this. The first implication is that this further lowers the representability of the participant sample. The second implication is that this highly imbalanced gender ratio within the sample of this current study might have been a factor that potentially skewed the statistical results for the relationship between the chosen variables of meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout. Of course, it is expected that any relationship between variables will have many covariates. However, given that this current research paper did not examine the relationship between the chosen variables in an exclusively female sample of social workers, more male social workers should have been included to make the results more reliable. Alternatively, gender could have been conceptualized as a controlled variable in the relationship. This limitation does not discredit the statistical results, but nonetheless needs to be highlighted as a serious shortcoming of this current research paper.

Although this current study utilized high-quality instruments for the measurement of the chosen variables, the methodological decision to manually translate two of these instruments into the Czech language can be seen as another limitation. This is because ideally, some validity and reliability testing of the translated instrument needs to be done. That would also be beyond the scope of this current research paper. I was unable to find official Czech translations of BAT 12 item and CD-RISC-10, and therefore, the items were manually translated from English to the Czech language. Given that the participants of this current study were Czech social workers, it was methodologically more appropriate to make the chosen scales and their items as easily understandable to the participants as possible. Although the English items of BAT 12-item and CD-RISC-10 were carefully translated into the Czech language to retain their original meaning and wording, there is no absolute certainty that the translation was perfect. Such certainty would be possible with additional validity and reliability testing of the translated versions. Although it is unlikely that some translated items were understood differently from their original versions, the possibility of it needs to be mentioned.

Strengths and benefits of this study

A methodological strength of this current research paper was the utilization of high-quality instruments of measurement for the chosen variables. All the scales used were viewed as golden standards (or near golden standards) for the measurement of their respective variables. Furthermore, for the measurement of the meaning in life variable, this current research paper utilized a subscale of the meaning in life questionnaire that was culturally appropriate based on existing literature. Given that this current research paper used a participant sample from a single culture, the Czech culture, measuring the overall meaning in life score that would also include the search for meaning subscale, could have been a methodological limitation. One of the main benefits of this current research paper is its contribution to a scarce body of literature. This contribution can be viewed on various levels. First of all, as was mentioned in the early sections of this paper, there is little quantitative literature that deals with variables of meaning in life, psychological resilience and burnout within the context of social work. Some quantitative studies, such as those by Harker et al. (2016), Singer et al. (2019) or Stanley et al. (2018), examine the relationship between the aforementioned variables within the context of social work, but not all three of the variables together. Although the literature review of this current research paper did not embark on an exhaustive search to find all existing studies that would include all three variables of interest within the context of social work, it is fair to assume that such studies are rare to find. The further specific characteristics of this current research paper, such as using a sample of participants that were exclusively from the Czech Republic, is another thing that makes it unique. Quantitative research examining the context of social work specifically in the Czech Republic is also quite scarce, and therefore this current research paper adds more relevant information to this domain. This current research paper also supports a more empirical understanding of existential topics such as meaning in life. As was stated in the earlier sections, existential topics are highly philosophical in nature, and the empirical understanding regarding existential topics is likewise scarce. Studies like this current research paper could strengthen the interest in bringing existential topics, such as meaning in life, into the realm of scientific examination and turn philosophical theories of how such phenomena work into empirically valid models.

Potentially, this current research paper may also serve as an inspiration for others to conduct more quantitative studies regarding phenomena of meaning in life, resilience and burnout in the field of Czech social work. This would be a welcome direction, given that more research of this nature could help create positive or even needed changes within the domain of Czech social work. For example, Skills for Care (2025) is a British initiative that helps the domain of adult social care in the UK to increase its effectiveness. On their main website, they provide freely accessible booklets that deal with increasing the resilience of individual social workers or how to incorporate the support of resilience within an organization that provides social services. This current research paper and potential future studies with a similar research aim could support the initiative to create more easily accessible literature and resources that would deal with increasing psychological resilience for the Czech social work context. Additionally, there are existing courses for Czech social workers that deal with the topic of resilience, such as the MPSV (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí) accredited course by Diakonická Akademie (2025) that focuses on increasing psychological resilience in people who work within social services. More research that shows how important building psychological resilience is within social workers could create a bigger interest among social workers to undergo such resilience-oriented training. It has to be emphasized that all of the initiatives highlighting the increase of resilience would have a preventive nature, given the negative relationship between psychological resilience and burnout within social work. As for meaning in life, it was difficult to find any initiatives or resources that would highlight its importance for social workers as a protective factor. If there are, in fact, few resources that deal with this topic within social work, it may be a sign of the importance of creating new resources and initiatives that would bring this topic to the awareness of social workers and Czech social workers specifically. However, there always needs to be a valid reason for the creation of new resources and initiatives for the support of social workers. That is where additional research plays a vital role. Future research regarding the importance of psychological resilience or meaning in life within Czech social work should still create an empirically supported case regarding why these factors are important for social workers, such as the protective potential against burnout, as was the case in this current research paper.

Conclusion

It can be argued that social workers engage in highly virtuous actions that provide invaluable service to society and those most vulnerable within it. Given that burnout syndrome is a fairly prominent threat to professionals within social work, it deserves much attention and interest to combat it. This point of view was echoed throughout this current research paper, while also being the initial motivation for its writing. The goal was to contribute to the understanding of how burnout syndrome can be mitigated in social workers and, therefore, help them retain their strength and passion to continue doing their valuable work. However, the exploration of protective factors such as meaning in life and psychological resilience is only a small part of what research within human sciences can do to contribute towards the mitigation of burnout syndrome within social work. Therefore, the conclusion of this current paper is a call for further action. There is still much that can be explored regarding burnout syndrome within social work. Further quantitative research on this topic is highly suggested due to its current scarcity. Arguably, helping social workers prevent their potential burnout is what the field of human sciences can do to show gratitude towards the valuable service that social work provides.

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Appendix A

Formulár informovaného súhlasu (Informed consent form)

1. Zhrnutie: Tento výskum sa pozerá na to, ako zmysel v živote súvisí so psychologickými faktory u sociálnych pracovníkov. Ak súhlasíte s účasťou, budete požiadaní vyplniť otázky z troch škál a demografické otázky.

2. Právo nepokračovať v dotazníku: V akomkoľvek bode máte právo nepokračovať v dotazníku. Ak sa takto rozhodnete, prosím neodosielajte nevyplnený dotazník.

3. Dodatočné informácie o výskume: Po dokončení dotazníku vám budú uvedené dodatočné informácie objasňujúce výskum pre diplomovú prácu.

4. Časový záväzok: Ak sa rozhodnete dotazník vyplniť, zaberie vám to zhruba 10-15 minút.

5. Záruka ochrany súkromných informácii: Všetky dáta z dotazníkov budú výskumníkom chránene pred zneužitím a iba výskumník ich bude mať k dispozícii. Nikoho individuálne odpovede nebudú vo výskume zverejňované. Vo výskume budú zverejnené iba štatisticky spracované odpovede účastníkov dokopy.

6. Kontaktné informácie výskumníka: Výskumný dotazník je robený Oliverom Borárošom pre diplomovú prácu na magisterskom programe Sociálnej práce so zameraním na komunikáciu a aplikovanú psychoterapiu na Pražskej vysokej škole psychosociálnych studií. Akékoľvek otázky posielajte na emailovú adresu boraros.oliver@fokus-praha.cz

7. Riziká: Tento výskum a výskumný dotazník je koncipovaný tak, aby minimalizoval/eliminoval možné riziká nepriaznivého efektu na účastníkov. Pre akékoľvek pripomienky alebo spätnú väzbu z hľadiska rizík kontaktujte emailovú adresu boraros.oliver@fokus-praha.cz

8. Výsledky výskumu: Výsledky výskumu budu zverejnené so zverejnením diplomovej práce.

9. So zaškrtnutím políčka "súhlasím" potvrdzujete, že máte aspoň 18 rokov.

10. So zaškrtnutím políčka "súhlasím" potvrdzujete, že sa dobrovoľne chcete zúčastniť vyplnenia výskumného dotazníku

Demografické údaje (Demographics page)

Vek:

_____

Pohlavie:

- Muž
- Žena
- Iné

Pracujem ako sociálny pracovník v:

- Službách sociální péče (Osobní asistence, Pečovatelská služba, Tísňová péče, Průvodcovské a předčitatelské služby, Podpora samostatného bydlení, Odlehčovací služby, Centra denních služeb, Denní stacionáře, Týdenní stacionáře, Domovy pro osoby se zdravotním postižením, Domovy pro seniory, Domovy se zvláštním režimem, Chráněné bydlení, Sociální služby poskytované ve zdravotnických zařízeních lůžkové péče)
- Službách sociální prevence (Raná péče, Telefonická krizová pomoc, Tlumočnické služby, Azylové domy, Domy na půl cesty, Kontaktní centra, Krizová pomoc, Intervenční centra, Nízkoprahová denní centra, Nízkoprahová zařízení pro děti a mládež, Noclehárny, Služby následné péče, Sociálně aktivizační služby pro rodiny s dětmi, Sociálně aktivizační služby pro seniory a osoby se zdravotním postižením, Sociálně terapeutické dílny, Terapeutické komunity, Terénní programy, Sociální rehabilitace, Centrum duševního zdraví)
- Poradenství (hlavně odborné poradenství)
- OSPOD a subjekty pověřené výkonem SPOD (ZDVOP, DD, DDŠ, SVP, Poradenská a diagnostická odborná zařízení, Neziskové org., etc.)
- Jiné

Zhrnutie a vysvetlenie výskumu (Debriefing form)

Ďakujem za vyplnenie dotazníku.

Tento výskum sa zameriava na kvantitatívnu analýzu vzťahu medzi zmyslom v živote, psychologickou odolnosťou a syndrómom vyhorenia u sociálnych pracovníkov v Českej Republike.

Syndróm vyhorenia je rôznymi teoretikmi vnímaný ako úzko spätý s pomáhajúcimi profesiami ako sociálna práca. Maslach et al. (2001) opisuje, že prvé empirické skúmanie syndrómu vyhorenia sa pojilo s pracovníkmi v sociálnych službách a

zdravotnými pracovníkmi v Spojených Štátoch. Matoušek (2003) taktiež opisuje, že syndróm vyhorenia je veľmi prevalentnou témou v sociálnej práci.

Syndrómom vyhorenia sa chápe fyzické, emočné a mentálne vyčerpanie pracovníkov ktorí sa často vo svojej práci nachádzajú v náročných situáciách a nepociťujú dostatočné ocenenie, pracovné napredovanie alebo úspech (Akgemci et al., 2013). Dôvody pre častý výskyt vyhorenia u sociálnych pracovníkov sú rôzne podľa rôznych teoretikov. Často sa píše o náročnosti priamej práce s klientami (Harker et al. 2016; Matoušek, 2003; Smullens, n.d.) alebo o negatívnych podmienkach v pracovnom prostredí (Matoušek, 2003).

Vzhľadom na to, akou veľkou témou je syndróm vyhorenia pre sociálnu prácu, je dôležitý výskum pre jeho hlbšie porozumenie. V momentálnom bode ale existuje málo kvantitatívneho výskumu na tému vyhorenia v sociálnej práci. Vo svojej diplomovej práci sa zameriavam na skúmanie obranných faktorov proti pracovnému vyhoreniu u sociálnych pracovníkov. Zaoberám sa dvomi takými faktormi a tými sú zmysel v živote a psychologická odolnosť. Existujúca literatúra naznačuje, že existuje negatívny vzťah medzi zmyslom v živote a vyhorením u sociálnych pracovníkov (Singer et al., 2019) a taktiež negatívny vzťah medzi odolnosťou v práci (koncept súvisiaci s psychologickou odolnosťou) a vyhorením u sociálnych pracovníkov (Ratzon et al., 2022). Daného výskumu je ale veľmi málo a žiaden sa doposiaľ nezaoberal vzťahom medzi všetkými tromi premennými dokopy.

Rada autorov (Frankl, 1986; Mohseni et al., 2019; Ostafin & Proulx, 2020) sa zaoberala tým, ako zmysel v živote prispieva k väčšej psychologickej odolnosti. Vzhľadom na to som sa rozhodol formulovať a otestovať nasledujúcu hypotézu. Domnievam sa, že zmysel v živote a vyhorenie u sociálnych pracovníkov bude v negatívnom vzťahu a psychologická odolnosť bude v roli mediátora v tomto vzťahu. Dáta dotazníku, ktorí ste vypĺňali budú použité na štatistickú analýzu, ktorá moju hypotézu otestuje.

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Appendix B

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Official Czech version)

Zamyslete se prosím nad tím, co je ve pro Vás v životě důležité a významné.

1. **Chápu smysl svého života**
2. **Hledám něco, co učiní můj život smysluplným**
3. **Vždy se snažím nalézt účel svého života**
4. **Můj život má jasný smysl**
5. **Mám cit pro to, co činí můj život smysluplným**
6. **Nalezl/a jsem uspokojivý smysl života**
7. **Stále hledám něco, co dá mému životu pocit důležitosti**
8. **Hledám ve svém životě účel nebo poslání**
9. **Můj život nemá žádný jasný účel (reversed item)**
10. **Hledám smysl svého života**

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC-10) (Original English version)

Please read the questions and instructions carefully and answer accordingly. Answer the following questions according to the scale below:
not true at all (0), rarely true (1), sometimes true (2), often true (3), and true nearly all of the time (4)

1. **I am able to adapt to change**
2. **I can deal with whatever comes**
3. **I try to see humorous side of problems**
4. **Coping with stress can strengthen me**
5. **I tend to bounce back after illness or hardship**
6. **I can achieve goals despite obstacles**
7. **I can stay focused under pressure**
8. **I am not easily discouraged by failure**
9. **I think of myself as strong person**
10. **I can handle unpleasant feelings**

Manually translated Czech version

(0) Vždy nepravdivé, (1) Zřídka pravdivé, (2) Občas pravdivé, (3) Často pravdivé, (4) Pravdivé téměř vždy

1. **Dokážu se přizpůsobit změnám.**
2. **Zvládnu, co mi život přinese.**
3. **Snažím se vidět humornou stránku problémů.**
4. **Vyrovnávání se se stresem mě může posílit.**
5. **Po nemoci nebo těžkostech se obvykle rychle zotavím.**
6. **I přes překážky dokážu dosáhnout svých cílů.**
7. **Umím zůstat soustředěný/soustředěná i pod tlakem.**

8. **Neúspěch mě snadno neodradí.**
9. **Vnímám se jako silná osobnost.**
10. **Dokážu zvládat nepříjemné pocity**

Burnout Assessment Tool –Short Version (Original English version)

The following statements are related to how you feel. Please state how often each statement applies to you.

(1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

1. **I feel mentally exhausted**
2. **At the end of the day, I find it hard to recover**
3. **I feel physically exhausted**
4. **I struggle to find any enthusiasm for my work**
5. **I feel a strong aversion towards my job**
6. **I'm cynical about what my work means to others**
7. **I have trouble staying focused**
8. **have trouble concentrating**
9. **I make mistakes because I have my mind on other things**
10. **I feel unable to control my emotions**
11. **I do not recognize myself in the way I react emotionally**
12. **I may overreact unintentionally**

Manually translated Czech version

(1) Nikdy, (2) Zřídka, (3) Někdy, (4) Často, (5) Vždy

1. **Cítím psychické vyčerpání**
2. **Na konci dne mám obtíže s regenerací.**
3. **Cítím fyzické vyčerpání**
4. **Mám problém najít nadšení pro svou práci.**
5. **Pociťuji silný odpor vůči své práci.**
6. **Vnímám cynizmus ohledně významu své práce pro ostatní.**

7. **Mám potíže udržet pozornost.**
8. **Mám problémy se soustředěním.**
9. **Dělám chyby, protože myslím na jiné věci.**
10. **Mám pocit, že nedokážu ovládat své emoce.**
11. **Nepoznávám se ve svých emočních reakcích.**
12. **Mám tendenci neúmyslně přehnaně reagovat.**