

Professional autonomy of social workers in Russia

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Background and purpose The report is aimed to present main results of the qualitative research of social workers in Russia. Social work was included in the registry of service employment in 1991 in Russia. It was faced with institutional difficulties - low-status of social workers, gender stereotypes, low wages and the lack of professional competence. The neo-Weberian approach (E. Freidson, J. Abbott, M. Saks) and theory of social work (M. Payne) forms the theoretical background of my research. The research goal lies in analyzing the social work as a profession in Russia within the professional autonomy. The research objectives are assigned as follows: 1) Describe socio-economic and professional features of social work as profession 2) Suggest the ways of professional autonomy of social workers in Russia. **Methods** The research is based on the original data collected in the form of in-depth interviews. The data includes 13 interviews with people who work in social service centers. During the research we managed to discover the main aspects of professionalization of social work and professional autonomy. **Results** First, development of professional standards of social work, new laws and regulations, increasing the number of high schools offering education of «social work» point to the institutionalization of the profession of social work. Second, in contemporary social work in Russia there is bureaucratization of work and routinization of labor. Third, specialists of social work are mediators between the government and customers. So they are faced with a choice between taking care about the client and the state control. **Conclusions and implications** The results of the research can be used to improve the professional standards of social workers in Russia, as well as to enhance the professional autonomy of social workers.

Keywords: social work, sociology of professions, professional autonomy.