

**Theses of a university doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

**Recruitment and professional socialization in  
regional comparison**

**Value and career orientation of students of  
paramedic specialization**

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## **1. The aim of the dissertation and description of the topic**

One of the nuclear tasks of the process of becoming adult, that takes place in adolescence, is choosing a career. The choice of career of an individual can really be understood through the interpretation of the economic, personality shaping and cultural transmitting function (whose important parts are competences) of the educational system. The functions of the educational system are integrated at the level of the individual, institution and system. The educational system, however, is able to influence the development of the individual's knowledge partially and indirectly. Therefore, in order to understand the processes of the educational system, it is very important to distinguish the moments at the level of the individual, institution and system. The choice of a career and later success in career or failure in career are affected by different factors. One of the most important factors is the influence by the family, the world and complexity of the profession, the training opportunities, social public feeling, the prestige of the profession and the career socializing effect of the training institution. The factors that affect through the personality of the young, such as abilities, talents, wishes, approach to work, knowledge of the profession and self-knowledge are also important.

One of the spectacular elements of the educational system's alteration is that choice of career takes places in an older age, general training is more and more long and new institution types appeared (ISCED 3). Therewith, in addition to the expansion of the functions of higher education (general training, vocational training, professional training, scientific training) changes took place also in content and structure. In the multitudinous higher education vocational trainings are located between ISCED 4-6. Choice of career is the task and topic of this level of school system. From the decision on the choice of a career we can draw conclusions about the student's commitment to the career. In our piece we revealed the individual, institutional and social factors that most affected the choice of a special profession, paramedical profession, helping thereby the process of career adaptation in the course of the professional socialization in higher education. Since the development of the values is based in the phase of adolescence, we also attempted to characterize two segments of the value system of the paramedic students: the system of general preferences and the labour values.

In the last decade such procedures took place in higher education as a result of which the sector's institutional system significantly altered. The aims of higher education include not only the creation of the behaviour sample with competence but also shaping the intention to

do work important to society. As a result of the horizontal and vertical expansion of the institutional system, the change of the training structure, the increased social demand for higher education the students' population changed. The previous source of derivation of the institutions changed and, in comparison with the last half decade, students of lower status get into higher education, to which the acceptance of the academic values and norms related to the institutional system of higher education may mean a difficulty. All these changes justify the examination of value preferences of young people learning in higher education. In our empiric analysis we searched for an answer to the question whether there is any relationship between the value orientation of the paramedic students connected to their academic studies and their intention to take a job. The process of acquiring the professional roles appears in the representation of the collective opinion of the given profession, based on the procedures and traditions as the most important mediating factors of vocational training. Its effectiveness is increased when professional socialization of the future graduate people happens in an institutional atmosphere inspiring on modern workmanship. The value bases of the professional identities are also formed then, in which teachers play a prominent part. In relation to higher education the requirement of employability, determination of the requirements' level is less unequivocal than at other levels of education. One of the determinants of the participation and success on the labour market is meeting the demand. The third segment of our analysis is the characterization of the employers' requirements, which the graduate paramedic students face with and, on the other hand, they include the requirements worded by the employers towards the higher educational training system as well.

Changes that affect health care have always been in the full glare of publicity but the scientific examinations have focused mainly on the doctors' profession. Paramedical professions came to the fore of the examinations only in the recent years but these covered mainly nurse, health visitor and social worker students. Our research examines the after-growth of a special health profession, the paramedics, whose prestige within the health institutional system is high and its social estimation is also positive.

Our research conducted among the paramedic students can be deemed novel from several aspects. On the one hand, among the research's subjects no empiric analysis relying on a comprehensive conception and sample has been made yet. On the other hand, the research's interpretation frame is constituted by the theories of choice of career, professional socialization taking place in the years spent in higher education, professionalization and value theories, placed in educational sociological aspect. The education political line of the analysis

gives an insight into the segment of vocational trainings that get into higher education next to the scientific training, preparation for intellectual profession and general higher education, as a result of the functional differentiation of higher education. The full-time training of paramedics has been present in the Hungarian higher educational system only for 15 years, while paramedical specialization in the surrounding countries is not included in the higher educational system or it has been included in it only since the recent years. A profession's retaining force and the issue of abandonment of profession is an important research topic in case of an aiding or civil service profession that requires higher qualification. This empiric research examines the question whether the attitudes that force a student to leave the profession can be changed during the training and whether the preferences of the labour values essential for staying in the profession can be strengthened.

## **2. The applied methods**

We conducted the survey on those faculties of health sciences where full-time paramedical training is carried out: Faculty of Health Sciences of the Semmelweis University in Budapest, Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of Debrecen in Nyíregyháza and Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of Pécs in Pécs. For the inquiry we planned a complete survey (the examination of every full-time paramedic student), thus we did not have to expect any sampling error. We supplemented the used questionnaire – which previously was applied by Ágnes Kovácsné Tóth (2005) in her comparative research conducted with nurses and teachers – with Super's labour value survey and the Rokeach value survey.

Since in Hungary no research has been carried out among the paramedics, we conducted a research that primarily applied a descriptive and quantitative method (survey-type), whose population was made by three key institutions of higher education that train the after-growth of this profession. We supplemented the results of the survey with semi-structured qualitative interviews.

The primary aim of our examination is to analyse who and why choose paramedical profession nowadays. We undertook to describe the following research dimensions:

I. *Socio-cultural characteristics.* By which social and cultural characteristics can the students learning in paramedical specialization be described?

II. *Motivations of students choosing paramedical specialization.* Why do they choose this profession? What motivations play role in their choice of specialization and school? How successful they feel their choice of career?

III. *Scale of values.* What general and labour value preferences show up in case of the paramedical students?

IV. *View of profession.* What does the students' vision look like? What idea do they have about work? Which factors affect their plans?

IV.1. *Judgement of professional hierarchy.* In the students' opinion what society and the other health workers think about their profession? Where do they place the profession of paramedics in the hierarchy of other professions?

IV.2. *Prestige of paramedical profession.* How students see the prestige and social judgement of their chosen profession?

We supplemented the results of the survey with semi-structured qualitative interviews. In the exploration of the opinion and experiences of the regional medical directors related to the values expected from the paramedic students we preferred data collection by an interview because it gives an opportunity to the more detailed, shaded and complex knowledge of the topic and the aspects revealed through them represent the employers' opinion based on the following dimensions (employment possibilities of the paramedic students graduated on full-time course, their willingness to mobility, value judgement and approach to work as well as the professional standard of the training and of the graduate students).

In the data analysis we applied single-variable and multivariable methods, mainly cross tabulation analysis and variance analysis. Among several groups of the variables we made patterns by factor analysis, while we tested causal explanation models by linear regression analysis.<sup>1</sup> The applied statistical trials 1. Independent Samples T test, 2. One-Way ANOVA; 3. Pearson's correlation as per the definition serve for the estimation of the chance in the course of probability sampling and not in the sampling covering the whole population, thus the published significant results have a quasi informative role: on the one hand, they answer the hypothetic question "which correlation would be significant if our sampling was not comprehensive" and, on the other hand, it promotes the complex interpretation of the research's data by a kind of selection of the inevitably great number of the results of statistical analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> In the publication of the results of the statistical analyses the \* ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) and \*\* ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) denotations apply to the following statistical tests: 1. Independent Samples T test, 2. One-Way ANOVA; 3. Pearson's correlation. The tables containing the results of the linear regression models made by the Stepwise method always contain significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) beta (Standardized Beta Coefficients) values.

### **3. The results of the research**

The date of the choice of career may determine success in higher education and later remaining in the profession. According to the time of decision three stages were separated. The group of students deciding early included those that decided to become a paramedic before their secondary school years, only 6 per cent of the respondents belonged here. Most students chose the profession during their secondary school studies (62 per cent) and the students that chose the profession relatively late decided to become paramedics after finishing the secondary school (32 per cent). Based on our results we can conclude that the students that decided to choose paramedical profession after the school-leaving examination chose this profession after an unsuccessful entrance examination to medical school. Early commitment, however, evidences that the choice and the general value orientation, views related to the labour values early constituted a consistent unit.

The three institutions included in the examination can be characterized differently based on the time of the decision on the choice of career. Among the students of the University of Debrecen those students prevail that elected paramedical profession at the earliest time, before the secondary school and among the students of the University of Pécs those students prevail that elected it at the latest, after the school-leaving examination. Based on our results we can state that there is a significant difference between the institutions and the time of the choice of career ( $p \leq 0,013$ ).

In addition to the date of the choice of career in our research we examined other factors affecting the decision on the choice of career. We tried to discover the factors that played determinative role in choosing paramedical profession. We examined the issue according to ten items. Based on factor analysis we identified four decision types: 1. safety-career, 2. pedagogical-motivation, 3. influence by family and friends, 4. caritative decision types.

The decision mechanism of 43 per cent of the paramedic students was influenced by caritative, of 12 per cent by safety-career, of 28 per cent by pedagogical motivations and of 17 per cent by aspects influenced by family and friends. A There were significant differences between the training institutions also in this aspect.

### **3.1 Base of recruitment for the training**

One of the dissertation's aims is to characterize the social, cultural and economic background of the paramedic students. According to the parents' qualification 45 per cent of the paramedic students will not be first-generation intellectuals after graduation. In our research we examined the qualification and profession of the students' parents and we created a family status variable. According to the distribution of the clusters related to the qualification and profession of the students' parents 52 per cent of the paramedic students come from families of high or medium cultural status. In case of almost half of the students coming from families characterized by high cultural status both parents has academic qualification and in case of more than half of them at least one parent has a university diploma or a diploma with bachelor degree. In case of two fifth of the students coming from families indentified as ones belonging to medium cultural status one of the parents has academic qualification. In case of the majority of the students coming from families of low status neither of the parents has academic qualification and in case of tenth of the students one parent completed academic studies. According to the examination of the existential background of the paramedic students three-quarter of the students, according to their judgement, have had less financial difficulties and only 17 per cent stated that they had financial difficulties every day. An interesting outcome of our research is that - similarly to the medical students - three-quarter of the paramedic students come from long families. In relation to this we examined the relationship of the family, existential background and the number of siblings of the paramedic students. According to our data there is a significant difference between the families' existential background and the number of the children. In more than half of the families in good financial position paramedic students have one or two siblings. In case of the paramedic students of long families only 37 per cent has bad financial background. A considerable result of our research is that 27 per cent of the paramedic students living in comfortable circumstances live in long families. Results show that the proportion of the "singletons" is smaller (14 per cent) as compared to the students coming from long families. In this aspect there were not significant differences between the training institutions. Thus we stated that those coming from long families of more favourable cultural and economic status dominate among the examined students.

### **3.2 Working attitudes**

An important observation of our research is that among the examined students the employment ideas have a connection with the motivations of the choice of career. In the course of the research we examined the relationship between the willingness to mobility and remaining in the profession as well as the regional difference and the plans of paramedic students for the period after graduation. Through the factor analysis we could distinguish four types of the strategies for future: 1. potential career abandoner - entrepreneur 2. loyal - insistent 3. doubtful - pessimist 4. family bond.

According to our results, the members of the potential career abandoner-entrepreneur type remain in the chosen profession on the condition that they got into leading position. Their plans include starting up some venture, which is either within the specialization or belongs to a completely different field. It is characteristic to this type that they receive no support from home, neither materially nor in social capital thus income also affects remaining in the profession. The other group is the loyal-insistent whose members remain in the chosen profession in any case, irrespective of the income. Income and career possibilities do not affect employment either. The third group is the circle of the doubtful-pessimists that are afraid of not finding a suitable job after graduation. Their schooling means a burden to their parents and they can expect no help from them in finding a job either. Under the shadow of the risk of the employment difficulties and of low income they deem abandonment of the chosen profession imaginable. The fourth group can be characterized by family bond, they would like to find a job near their residence and family in any case. They rely on the relations system of their parents, relatives, acquaintances, where there are persons having health diploma as well.

With the examination of the labour value preferences of paramedic students we can characterize the students' professional identity, which is an important element of the process of professionalization. In the order of value preferences of paramedic students in connection with work the first one is altruism and the second one is variety. An expectation of the students about work is to be eventful and the performance of the activity should give pleasure and this is in harmony with the nature of the job, since in paramedical profession every case is different, in which they have to act in different ways. Variety that appears as a factor in the choice of career later contributes to deeming remaining in the profession probable to a great extent. The absence or refusal of this value, however, may mean a difficulty after graduation



at the time of entrance into the profession or may even forecast abandonment of the profession. Based on our results it can be stated that almost half of the students (41 per cent) would like to take a job at the National Ambulance Service in any case and for this they would go to work to any part of the country. One third of the students (33 per cent) would like to work as a paramedic officer within their own county or in their own town. Altogether more than two thirds of the students would like to become a paramedic officer, undertaking even commutation or change of residence. There were significant differences between the training institutions also in this respect.

### **3.3 Value dimensions related to employment**

One of the conditions of the successful career adaptation is the development of the realistic view of profession in the process of career socialization. In the course of value examination we considered important to reveal what values the students deem important for working as a paramedic officer. Students consider selfless aid and empathic skills the most important values but workmanship and independent work are also important values for working as a paramedic officer. The judgement of the value of paramedical profession by the students is affected by the nature of the job and the values accepted by them. In this respect we revealed significant differences between the training institutions. The students of the PTE-EK evaluate the values of paramedical profession the lowest. The background of this can be constituted by the differences in the previous results and conditions of application. Based on their previous educational achievements among the students of the PTE-EK the proportion of those that applied to medical school is greater and they did not manage to gain admission even after trying it several times. They evaluate paramedical profession lower than medical profession. The DE students coming from the north-eastern region of the country attach self value to paramedical profession that is more favourable than the average. These results coincide with the conclusions of the regional examination of those preparing for other aiding professions (pedagogue, social worker).

The value dimensions affecting the value of paramedical profession developed very variously with the involvement of independent variables. When examining the value dimensions of Super's test capacity, prestige, intellectual encouragement, independence and safety related to work appeared as significant determinants. Material resources as a value

appeared as a value dimension of opposite effect contrary to prestige. Appreciation and importance of paramedical profession as vocation also shows a reverse connection to the judgement of material value. It is a considerable observation that in case of the students for that prestige, professionalism, the value of the profession are important, the importance of material value is devaluated. We received variable results also in the examination of the Rokeach aim and means values. Social democratic, ideological, traditional, ethic-stoic, Christian aims appeared as determinants. In the examination of the means value pragmatic, Christian-common, intellectual-pragmatic and ethic-stoic appeared as significant explanatory value dimension. The hedonist means value (such as jauntiness) is devaluated by those students that consider the pragmatic means value (effectiveness, freedom from prejudice) important. As regards the values that significantly affect their choice of career, the paramedic students of the three educational institutions consider completely different things important. In the judgement of the paramedical profession the students of the PTE-EK consider the achievement they can gain by their work and the favourable position of the paramedical profession on the labour market important values. The students of the DE-EK consider the high prestige of the paramedical profession important, which requires responsible and disciplined individual work. The paramedic students of the SE-EK esteem independence, free and independent thinking, disciplined and responsible work as the values of paramedical profession. An interesting outcome of our research is that the students of the three educational institutions represent three different value types in the judgment of paramedical profession. The educational institutions are located in three regions of the country and the cultural image of the regions' society affects value judgements sharply. In the judgement of the values of paramedical profession students in their first year consider the work's independent character, free decision-making in work and fellow-feeling valuable and important and they would like to do all these effectively, free from prejudice and helpfully. Paramedic students in their first year at the beginning of the training look at paramedical profession slightly idealistically. In the judgement of paramedical profession students in their fourth year appreciate the activity itself, capacity and "rescue" in case of this profession. Paramedic students before graduation could already learnt the advantages and possible disadvantages (physical and mental strain, material possibilities) of paramedical profession and they could become entrants that look at the profession realistically. The initial naive idea of the paramedic students about paramedical profession is changed by a realistic view of profession, together with which helpfulness and commitment to the profession remain. There were significant differences between the educational institutions also in this respect.

### **3.4 Characteristics of the employers' aspect**

During the research it helped us that the inquired physician directors work together with the paramedical officers in this profession and they have adequate idea about the motivations of choice of career of the paramedics and the factors of remaining in this profession. Majority of the pollees described personal experience, adventure as motivation in choice of career. The examination of the motivations of the students' choice of career shows results that are congruent with this. Among the determinants of the choice of career mainly (43 per cent) caritative aspects appeared where the influence of the personal example of the parents, friends and acquaintances is decisive.

Employers find graduate paramedic students mobile for employment. Students have regionally different employment opportunities at the national ambulance service. If they want to find a job with the organization, they can do it with smaller or bigger displacement, since there are vacancies within the organization. But they highlight also the possibility that if someone does not want to work in field attendance immediately, he/she can find a job on the emergency wards of hospitals in order to gain working experience, closely connecting thereby to their acquired qualification. Employers would consider the strengthening of the political attempt important according to which young employees should be employed in Hungary. They plead that higher education is too expensive to the state to qualify professionals to abroad and working abroad seems to be a forced decision also to the individual as paramedic students also gave financial reasons as the main reason.

Based on the comparison of quantitative and qualitative results we can state that paramedic students do not consider it a profession of prominently high appreciation but they do not think that the chosen profession is not useful to society. On the contrary, employers judge paramedical profession in a more positive way. They emphasize that the judgement of the profession is shaped also by paramedic officers themselves and health professionals working with them, through their work. In the judgement of the profession they consider the role of the media important too.

Theoretical and practical training necessarily has to cover changes that take place in the profession. In addition to knowing the new protocols, preparation for life-long learning becomes an important factor in higher education, which is a basic element of professional development and staying in the profession. The subjects of our interview unanimously think that decided manner and ability to make decisions and manage are necessary for paramedical

profession, in addition to sympathy to the patients, which is elemental in case of a health worker. They emphasize that acceptance of new learning and identification of new situations is necessary for this profession. According to our results the opinion of the employers and paramedic students is different as regards the judgement of the value of paramedical profession, since paramedic students esteem selfless aid, empathy and individual work as skills essential for paramedical profession.

In several issues we compared the students' opinion to the employers' requirements and we could state that students see the requirements of labour market realistically in this profession. The students' opinions reflect that they see the characteristics, skills necessary for the profession realistically, which is an important part of professional identification. Adaptation will mean resistance in preparation for the profession and in the actual professional activities, professional situations. In the professional socialization during the training the employers' opinions can help to strengthen the skills and competences that promote the successful entrance into the profession and identification with the profession.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Foreign language scientific articles in Hungarian journals (1)

1. **Szelesné Árokszállási, A.**: Indices of motivation background of choosing a career by ambulance officer students.  
*HERJ.* 5, 63-72, 2015. ISSN: 2062-9605.

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2. **Szelesné Árokszállási, A.**: A mentőtiszt hallgatók munkavállalási attitűdje.  
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### List of other publications

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4. Szerk. Ujváriné Siket, A., Heinrichné Kőszegi, K., Papp, K., Farkas, N., **Szelesné Árokszállási, A.**: Kórházi közmunkaprogram ápoló szakképesítések: gondozás gyakorló ápolók részére. Egészségügyi Szakképző és Továbbképző Intézet, Budapest, 172 p., 2009.

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The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

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