

The Role of School Social Workers in Bullying Interventions

A Logotherapy-Based Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

The study examines the role of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action as protective factors in the management of school bullying in focus groups of school social workers (n = 32). The research used a mixed methods approach: quantitative data collection was carried out using three psychological measurement tools (Meaning of Life Questionnaire – MLQ; Hope Scale – AHS; Satisfaction with Life Scale – SWLS), while the qualitative phase consisted of focus group interviews. Participants took part in the research on a voluntary basis and after receiving prior information. The results show that helpers rely on value-based hope and existential meaning as internal resources that support them in maintaining their professional identity and preventing burnout. A logotherapeutic thematic analysis of the qualitative data shows that many interpret their work in a self-transcendent way, as a “service.” The research confirms that meaning and hope reinforce each other in a spiral, while the potential for meaningful action helps helpers to respond to the challenges of bullying in a value-oriented way. The study contributes new empirical data to the practical applicability of logotherapy in the field of school social work.

Keywords: hope; meaning; potential for meaningful action; bullying; logotherapy; school social work

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1. Theoretical background

1.1 Definition and research of bullying

Bullying is a repetitive, intentional form of aggressive behavior in which the perpetrator abuses a power imbalance to cause injury, pain, or humiliation to the victim. According to research conducted over the past three decades, bullying can be understood not only in terms of individual dynamics, but also in terms of group and systemic dynamics (Olweus 2000; Espelage & Swearer 2003; Salmivalli 2010). According to the latest definition by UNESCO (2024), bullying is a harmful social process that can be sustained by institutional and societal norms and causes emotional, social, or physical harm to the individuals and communities involved. Bullying is not just an individual conflict, but also a reflection of school culture and community functioning (Smith 2000).

1.2 The importance of school social work

School social workers are social professionals who work at the intersection of educational institutions and child protection, with the aim of preventing children from becoming at risk and supporting their well-being. Their tasks include individual, group, and community social work, with a particular focus on the integration of students, family problems, and difficulties arising in the school environment, such as bullying. They work in a systematic manner with actors in the social, educational, and health sectors with the aim of representing the interests of children, ensuring a preventive presence, and adequately managing crisis situations (Methodological guidelines, 2022; 2/2018. 1/18 EMMI decree).

1.3 Meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action from a logotherapy perspective

According to Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy and existential analysis, the fundamental motivation of human beings is the search for meaning in life (Frankl 1997). The experience of meaning becomes particularly significant when facing suffering: according to logotherapy, people are capable of responding to life's challenges, even if they are unavoidable. The search for meaning can act as a protective factor on both a psychological and spiritual level, especially in the helping professions, where value-based functioning is essential for preventing burnout (Lukas 2019; Batthyány 2021).

According to Snyder's theory of hope (2002), the two main components of hope are agency and the ability to recognize pathways to solutions. In a helping context, hope is often manifested not in controlled outcomes, but in the value of presence, in maintaining relationships, and in seeing the other person. In the context of logotherapy, this hope can be interpreted as a form of self-transcendence: it is present even when there are no certain solutions, when it is impossible to know whether someone can be saved – yet we are still there.

Thirdly, the concept of potential for meaningful action appears in our study: it refers to an internal moral decision-making ability based on meaning and hope, which enables the helper to act even when success is not guaranteed. This approach is particularly important in preventing burnout in the helping professions, maintaining identity, and ensuring the presence of in traumatic situations. The triad of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action may be particularly relevant in crisis situations involving helpers.

2. Research objectives and hypotheses

The aim of the study is to explore whether meaning and hope function as psychological protective factors in the support work of school social workers, particularly in the treatment of bullying. The research examined how these internal resources

can help prevent burnout, maintain hope, and develop effective professional responses.

Research question: How are meaning, hope, and life satisfaction related to helping behavior, and how do these dimensions manifest themselves at the qualitative and quantitative levels in the bullying interventions of school social workers?

Related hypotheses:

H1: In the case of school social workers, experiencing meaning in life is positively related to the level of hope.

H2: The level of meaning and hope is positively related to life satisfaction.

H3: In qualitative interviews, experiencing meaning and hope emerges as an important component of social workers' practice, especially when dealing with bullying situations.

H4: The presence of helpers is a means of conveying hope to children who have experienced bullying.

These hypotheses fit the mixed methods approach used in the research: H1 and H2 examine quantitative correlations, while H3 and H4 are grounded in qualitative analyses. They are informed by logotherapeutic assumptions and psychological models of hope theory (Snyder, 2002). The combination of structured questionnaires and thematic analysis allows for a joint interpretation of the expected and actual experiences of helpers.

3. Methodology

The research used a mixed methods approach, based on the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. The aim of the study was to explore the logotherapeutic interpretation of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action not only through measuring instruments but also through subjective experiences. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire, while the qualitative part was based on focus group interviews. The analysis used a reflexive, phenomenological-logotherapeutic interpretative framework, which enabled an understanding of personal experiences of existential meaning. The two levels reinforce each other and reveal, in dialogue, how hope and meaning become protective factors in school bullying situations.

3.1 Data – descriptive statistics

Qualitative data collection took place in the form of focus groups at three different locations (one institution in Budapest and two in rural areas). Thirty-two school social workers with a homogeneous professional background participated in the three discussions. The size of the groups varied (5, 9, and 18 participants).

Focus group size and demographic data			
	Group	Group	Group
number (N =)	5	9	18

male	1	2	0
female	4	7	1
age (from - to)	23 - 45	26 - 58	23 - 63
age (average)	35	41	45.66

Table 1: Number of focus group participants and demographic data

Following the face-to-face group discussions, the social workers also completed three standardized psychological questionnaires. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed in a coordinated manner (Creswell & Plano Clark 2018).

3.2 Quantitative tools – AHS, MLQ, and SWLS questionnaires

Three internationally validated measurement tools were used for quantitative data collection: the Hope Scale (Snyder et al. 1991), the Meaning of Life Questionnaire (Steger et al. 2006) and the Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al. 1985).

Questionnaires	Subscales	Likert scale	Number of questions	Point range
Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)	1. Present	1-7	3	3
	2. Past	1-7	2	2
The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)	1. Experienced meaning	1-7	5	5
	2. Search for meaning	1-7	5	5
Hope Scale (Adult Hope Scale – AHS)	1. Personal influence	1-8	4	4
	2. Solution possibilities	1-8	4	4

Table 2: Characteristics of the three questionnaires used

The three instruments form a coherent system in terms of both content and theory: the two subscales of the MLQ measure the level of currently experienced meaning and meaning-seeking, the AHS maps the two main components of hope – agency and path – while the SWLS is one of the most commonly used indicators of subjective well-being. The questionnaires were completed by all participants, i.e. the 32 school assistants. This allowed us to link the analysis of qualitative data to preliminary psychometric levels and to ground deductive coding in a quantitative background.

3.3 Qualitative analysis – focus groups

The focus group discussions, together with the questionnaires, lasted two hours and were based on semi-structured questions. The questions were linked to the

concepts of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action based on bullying and Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy and existential analysis, as well as to the questionnaires already described. The discussions followed the funnel technique, allowing us to gradually move from a broader context to deeper personal experiences (Vicsek 2006, 177–178). This resulted in three main thematic groups of questions:

It mapped professional experiences and the context of school social work, with a particular focus on the occurrence and handling of bullying situations.

It focused on the practical experience of meaning and hope, including personal motivations, sense of vocation, and any spiritual or philosophical support.

It asked about ways of supporting children who have experienced bullying, particularly signs of hopelessness and helpful responses.

The focus groups also provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own thoughts and find meaning together through the sharing of their professional experiences, creating a kind of collective reflection. The advantage of this method, as Barbour (2007) emphasizes, is that group dynamics are not only a distorting factor but can also be a valuable source of data, as they allow individual and collective interpretations to be compared and complemented. During the discussions, it was observed that participants often deepened their own thoughts by reflecting on each other's narratives. Thus, the focus group interviews functioned not only as a data collection tool but also as a reflective space based on the participants' feedback. Several participants said that the discussions helped them reinterpret their role as helpers and confirmed that their work is meaningful even if the institutional system often hinders effective intervention. The importance of reflective spaces is also highlighted in the literature on focus group methodology (Kvale 1996; Krueger & Casey 2015). According to the literature, these opportunities for sharing not only serve to collect data, but can also facilitate the reshaping of participants' identities. This can be particularly important in the prevention of burnout, where joint meaning-making can give new meaning to professional challenges.

We processed the qualitative data according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches within a mixed methods framework. During the thematic analysis, methodological consistency was ensured through researcher collaboration. As a first step in the analysis, we listened to the recorded material several times and then refined the written transcripts so that the interviews could be analyzed verbatim. We kept a research log of recurring themes and key phrases. Coding was first performed deductively, based on meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action (see section 4.1). As researchers with training in child protection and logotherapy, we were able to ensure a nuanced interpretation of the content. This allowed us to focus on inductively emerging themes that went beyond the preliminary deductive questions (see 4.2). Finally, we approached the dimension in which the *ars poetica* of the helpers, the self-transcendent or ethical dimension, appeared (see 4.3).

4. Results and discussion

The following section presents an interpretative account of how qualitative and quantitative elements appear not separately but embedded in a logotherapeutic theoretical framework. As Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 93–94) emphasize: “Thematic analysis [...] is not just a collection of themes, but rather a coherent and insightful account of the data, supported by examples and embedded in a narrative that illustrates the relationships between the themes.”

4.1 Quantitative results

The structured questionnaire enabled a quantitative investigation of the psychological dimensions of meaning, hope, and life satisfaction based on a sample of 32 individuals. The analyses support hypotheses H1 and H2, which suggest that these resources reinforce each other as protective factors in helping work. These correlations suggest that, in our sample of 32, meaning and hope are not merely theoretical constructs, but psychological protective factors that can be experienced and measured in helping practice. Spearman's rank correlation tests revealed the following correlations:

Life satisfaction showed a significant positive correlation **with the „agency” dimension of hope** ($r \approx 0.70$), i.e., helpers who had a stronger belief in their own agency reported greater life satisfaction.

The correlation between **currently experienced meaning** (MLQ-Presence) and **life satisfaction** ($r \approx 0.71$) confirmed that experiencing meaning in life plays a key role in maintaining psychological well-being.

A positive correlation was also found between the experience of meaning and the level of hope ($r \approx 0.62$ – 0.66), which supports hypothesis H1: the experience of meaning and the focus on hope are closely related.

The quantitative correlations showed that the presence of meaning and hope as psychological protective factors is measurable and quantifiable. The aim of the qualitative analysis is to explore the deeper, personal layers of this: how helpers experience meaning, how they maintain hope, and what inner potential for meaningful action unfolds in them amid everyday challenges. In the following, these internal structures are unfolded using deductive and then inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006).

4.2. Qualitative results of deductive thematic analysis

Through manual processing of the interview material from the three focus groups and the identification of key statements, thematic analysis made it possible to explore deeper layers of the attitudes of the support staff. The analysis revealed that these school support staff are able to maintain, reproduce, and pass on hope and a sense of meaning, often despite systemic obstacles. The structure of the conversations was based on the three key concepts of logotherapy – meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action – while the openness of the semi-structured

interview format allowed participants to reflect freely. The introductory questions served to set the tone and establish context, for example, regarding professional background, the frequency of bullying situations, and how they were handled.

When analyzing the text, we found that the professionals working as assistants had a specific structure of meaning and hope that transcended themselves in a self-transcendent way. According to the participants' reports, they feel their work is most meaningful when they can fulfill themselves in actions that serve the children's best interests – even if the limitations of the system do not support this. According to Frankl (1997), the search for meaning is the primary motivation of human beings; this idea is reinforced by quotes that speak of the inner convictions and commitment of helpers and their willingness to stand up to institutional obstacles. In Elekes's (2015) interpretation, self-transcendence is not an abstract theoretical concept, but a psychologically operationalizable construct, especially in the helping professions. The presence of the helper often gains meaning in transcending the boundaries of the self and taking responsibility for the other. In this interpretation, self-transcendence is not only a protective factor in supporting clients in vulnerable life situations but also contributes to the psychological well-being and identity development of the helper. According to Elekes, „the helper may feel that they are a tool in the service of some greater purpose” (2015, p. 107), and this professional experience can be key in preventing burnout.

During the thematic analysis, three closely intertwined key themes emerged: meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action. Experiences of meaning were primarily rooted in direct contact with children, the presence of supportive figures who upheld values, and a deepening professional identity. Hope was evident in the professionals' conviction that their presence could bring about change, even if the process was slow or the results were not immediately visible. Potential for meaningful action manifested itself as an internal, moral decision-making ability: value-based responses shaped by an awareness of the limits of competence and a “nevertheless” attitude. In the following subsections, we present the emergence of these three concepts in the helpers' narratives, reconstructing the layers of the helper attitude based on the quotations.

Focus group excerpts are marked in italics and indented, with only the group number indicated to ensure anonymity. In accordance with research ethics, only details taken from the verbatim transcripts of the three focus group recordings have been included, with omissions within sentences also indicated.

4.2.1 The emergence of meaning in the work of school social workers

And I feel (...) I really feel that (...) I have to do this, and it also moves me forward. (...) if I was able to help a child, then it made sense. [1, 59]

The first sentence *explicitly expresses* meaning. According to Frankl, meaning always manifests itself in a concrete situation, in this case in the success experienced in helping work. The helper experiences the “fulfillment of meaning” in the actions taken for the benefit of the child, which is a self-transcendent behavior. The quote can be used as a key phrase for the presence of meaning in the identity of the helper.

...which helps me a lot to think that there are children who really have no one else who would want to or be able to try to do something for them. [1, 58]

The second sentence *implicitly* conveys meaning: the quote shows an *inner moral motivation*, a willingness to face responsibility. The helper feels that *they are the last link in the chain*, the one who helps, who keeps hope alive in the child. After all, they pay attention to children who would otherwise remain “neglected.” This ties in with the third key sentence, which is that the meaning of helping work () is seen *in small steps forward* and in the fact that positive change can be initiated. The meaning that helpers derive from their work often stems from their direct contact with the children and their conviction that their presence can bring about positive change, even if this is not immediately measurable.

We are not psychologists, we do not go into depth psychology, but this (school social work) also initiates change. [3, 239]

This value-based, self-transcendent mode of operation resonates not only with the human image of logotherapy, but also with one of Elisabeth Lukas's fundamental ideas, which captures a deep, essential feature of the helper's attitude: „everything we do for the good has meaning” (Lukas 2018, 46). Thus, **the inner driving force and professional experience** of helpers also become a source of meaningful action:

This work is very valuable, and I have realized that I could not do anything that is not valuable. [3, 238]

We have a calling and a mission in this. [1, 59]

To leave something behind. [3, 238]

4.2.2 The hopes of school social workers

The hope of school social workers is closely linked to the belief that their work is not only meaningful but also capable of bringing about real change. The following quotes highlight how hope manifests itself in the practice of social workers and how it is linked to meaningful presence.

So, to pay extra attention, to really be there for them, so that they don't lose hope. Focus group. [1, 73]

...what we represent may have a slow effect (...), but I think it matters a lot how we are present there. [3, 241]

These statements reflect that hope is not merely an optimistic attitude, but a deep conviction that their presence and attention can bring about change in the child's life, even if it is not immediately visible. Frankl (1997) argues that there is an aspect of hope in the desire for meaning. According to Snyder (2002), the two main components of hope are personal agency and finding pathways to solutions. Wong (2011) adds that hope is not the denial of suffering, but its transcendence. The hope of the helpers in the can thus be interpreted as an internal resource that transcends problems and creates opportunities for connection.

You are not alone in this. [1, 77]

The quotations clearly show that hope stems from the presence of the helper – from the simple but powerful conviction that “you are not alone.” This sentence encapsulates the moral and spiritual act of giving hope. From the perspective of

logotherapy, this self-transcendent giving of hope is a confirmation of the other person's existence: the presence of the helper sends a message to the child that it is important to have someone to turn to. This presence-based hope is not fueled by the promise of success, but by the experience of being together. Helpers may not necessarily be able to solve the problem, but their presence can provide a safe space for the child.

But what remained in the child was that an adult had responsibly tried to do something... [1, 58]

The **community of helpers** also plays a key role in maintaining hope and meaning. Mutual support within the team of helpers emerges as a decisive resource

I came back to base, and then I'm going back out into the field. [1, 65]

There is a group where you feel a little bit at home, and then it's easier to go out into the field. [1, 65]

So it's really a very supportive environment. You can draw on it and hold on to each other. [2, 142]

We have been able to put together a team that is close to each other on a personal level. If someone is going through a difficult period, the others immediately help them and support them. [2, 139]

This community cohesion not only contributes to the psychological well-being of the helpers, but is also one of the most important areas for the collective regeneration of hope and meaning – a kind of base from which to start tackling difficult situations.

4.2.3 Potential for meaningful action

The potential for meaningful action (Farkas 2025) is an internal capacity belonging to the intellectual (noetic) dimension of the individual, which enables people to realize the meaning they recognize in life – even in uncertain, painful, or hopeless situations – through concrete actions. The concept suggests that the presence of reason and hope alone is not sufficient; an inner moral decision-making ability is also necessary to mobilize the individual to respond in a value-based manner.

In the focus group interviews, participants shared examples that clearly show that helping behavior occurs even when external circumstances – such as a lack of institutional support – do not make it easy. According to Frankl (1997), people are capable of taking responsibility even in circumstances where success is not guaranteed. This statement reflects well the moral stance that the helpers expressed in the interviews. The potential for meaningful action is therefore not merely a matter of competence or coping skills, but a decision based on internal values. The following dimensions emerged during the analysis:

Perseverance and responsibility in difficult situations

He does what he can. [2, 129]

We do things (...) and we are sure that (...) we put as much as we can into what we are facing... [2, 131]

So I have to let go of the part that is beyond me and beyond my control. What can I do today in this small situation, and I will do that. [1, 69]

Value-based, moral action

We must not let ourselves be influenced when people try to pull us down.
[2, 133]

Okay, if you don't give the signal, I'll do it [3, 214]

Community impact and emotional feedback

These quotes show that the emotional pattern of the helper's presence is often realized through community relationships, which can be interpreted as collective action potential.

We need to support the community to help change this situation... it's a long process. [2, 162]

We strive to give children lots of positive reinforcement, (...) which they often receive very little of. [3, 240]

Acting even when there is no immediate success

The helpers' accounts make it clear that the potential for meaningful action unfolds through authentic presence and value-based decisions, even if these do not lead to immediate success. According to logotherapy, this "nevertheless" action – that is, taking responsibility even when our environment does not support us – is one of the strongest manifestations of human freedom and moral autonomy. The potential for meaningful action does not only mean the possibility of actions or a shift towards meaning, but also those decisions that are made within the limits of a person's competence and prove to be morally right and responsible in a given situation. The following focus group excerpt clearly illustrates this:

...I have to tell him no. Because that's not part of my job, it's not within my competence. [2, 137]

I know where I stand, and I can say no, even if it makes me unpopular. [2, 141]

We can help solve the problem, but we cannot solve the problem (itself). [2, 133]

I don't have to solve everything here, and I won't be able to. [1, 60]

This kind of attitude does not **reflect** passivity, but rather responsible decision-making in line with reason. According to logotherapy, **as spiritual beings**, people **are capable of saying no** when a situation or the expectations of others differ from their true task. Knowing one's limits is therefore not a restriction on action, but one of its qualitative conditions – action undertaken in the spirit of "nevertheless."

The potential for meaningful action is therefore the internal mechanism that translates the experience of meaning and hope into action. The stories of helpers clearly show that this is not an idealized form of behavior, but a responsibility that takes shape in everyday moral decisions. This "nevertheless" in the logotherapeutic sense carries not only the individual but also the community, and thus becomes a real protective factor. This triple unity – recognizing meaning, maintaining hope, and activating the potential for meaningful action – enables helpers to preserve their professional identity and humanity even in the most difficult situations.

4.3 Inductively identified themes: spontaneous meaning-making structures

Although the qualitative analysis was predominantly deductive in approach, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology, inductive thematization also became important. The analysis organized around the concepts of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action revealed clear patterns, but the participants' spontaneous statements also revealed content that went beyond the preliminary conceptual framework. Based on re-readings and research diaries, several themes emerged that did not fit strictly into the pre-deductive analytical framework, but nevertheless opened up significant areas of meaning. These „emergent” themes not only revealed the personal experiences of the interviewees, but also pointed to hidden layers of the institutional and social context. In the next section, we present these spontaneously emerging contents, which also reveal freer, more personal aspects of the helper identity.

4.3.1 *Spiritual or worldview anchors*

Several participants reported that their presence as helpers was based on a deeper faith or philosophical conviction. Spirituality as a personal resource often reinforces the meaning of work.

I believe in good, (...) I am sure of it..., there is definitely hope [1, 61]

...leaving something of value behind (...) this work is very valuable [3, 238]

I know that what I give is important, and that they (the children) will take what they can from it and make it their own. And that later there will be a reward for this (...) it takes time. [3, 239]

I have just planted a seed, and it is very difficult. I think it is the belief that, okay, I may not see it, and I may not see anything while I am there, but I hope that something will come of it. [3, 238–239]

4.3.2 *Institutional barriers, systemic failures:*

Participants repeatedly mentioned the limitations of the institutional structure, which hinder the provision of effective assistance. Poor cooperation between members of the reporting system and a lack of professionals often contribute to a loss of meaning.

There are schools that are very, very closed and don't want any trouble... they'd rather sweep the (bullying) problem under the carpet. [1, 8-9]

A lot of schools don't have a school psychologist... so we're kind of left to our own devices. [1, 33]

Finding a psychologist or clinical psychologist for a child can take up to a year and a half [2, 42].

The school principal does not forward the report (about child abuse and neglect). So the teacher writes it, but (...) it does not leave the principal's desk. [3, 221]

4.3.3 *Children's feedback as a resource for helpers*

Feedback from children is important for personal reinforcement, and its emotional content emerged as a key resource in the helpers' reports.

...there is a child (...) who (...) when I see him, I hug him because (...) he likes it when he sees me (...) and he always gets a hug from me [3, 241]

Someone who listens to me, who pays attention to me, who cares about me: One of the children wrote in a bullying workshop that they felt that they (the students) were important to us (social workers). [3, 241]

A girl from that class came up to me (...) and said that it was so good (with me) and thanked me. [3, 238]

4.3.4 Value-based presence in hopeless situations

These inductively explored themes enrich the interpretative framework of the research and contribute to understanding that the helpers' experience of meaning and hope is not exclusively internal, but also shaped by interpersonal factors. The quotations clearly show how spontaneous expressions fit into the logotherapeutic approach, while also opening up new possibilities for a deeper understanding of the identity and functioning of helpers. Furthermore, helpers are not passive victims of the system, but active, morally committed actors. Within the interpretative framework of logotherapy, this spiritual dimension is present because people do not merely react, but respond on the basis of values, for the sake of others.

And I will try to help you, but I may not be able to. But I will still try. And I will try to be on your side. [1, 58]

In this situation, the helper recognizes the limits of the system and of helping, and promises to be present. This presence is not merely physical, but also an existential and moral stance. According to logotherapy, this is a self-transcendent response (Frankl, 1997): by turning toward the suffering of another person, we exercise the inner freedom of value-based action. The potential for meaningful action manifests itself precisely in this „nevertheless”: there is no sure solution, no success, yet we remain. This is where the hidden power of hope and meaning lies. This presence – if it is nourished by a genuine experience of meaning and hope – gives the helper inner stability and the child something to hold on to. This is in line with what we presented in the fourth subchapter of the inductive thematic analysis in connection with value-based presence.

The lessons of both deductive and inductive analysis show that for helpers, action is not merely the possibility or success of intervention, but the moral and human quality of presence. The realization of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action in logotherapy is not limited to specific acts, but also manifests itself in perseverance, moral choices, and the decision to remain true to oneself even when there are no results, only tasks.

5. Conclusion – lessons for practice and theory

The aim of the research was to empirically and theoretically verify the role of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action as existential protective factors in the work of helping professionals and in the processing of bullying trauma. The coordinated interpretation of the focus group discussions and the quantitative question-

naire survey enabled the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches and a complex presentation of the practical application of logotherapy. Based on the results, it can be stated that the triad of meaning, hope, and potential meaningful for action is not only a protective factor but also a formative and sustaining force in the professional work of helpers. The „service” experienced by the helpers – which, in Frankl’s logotherapy framework, is a form of self-transcendence – played a central role in the narratives. This value-driven attitude transcends individual interests and deeply permeates the identity of the helpers. The qualitative analysis confirmed that the activities of the helpers are not merely a professional presence, but morally grounded actions stemming from inner conviction. Hope, as a relational and moral conviction, and meaning, as an internal compass, together form the basis that makes helping action sustainable and meaningful even in difficult situations. The hope-giving presence of helpers and their standing by others appear in a self-transcendent interpretation, in line with the logotherapeutic interpretative framework. The potential for meaningful action is interpreted as an ontological decision: a value-based response to difficulties, especially when there is no guarantee of success or systemic support. The practical lesson of the research is that helping behavior in bullying situations can not only be a source of strength for the child, but also protect the helper from burnout and psychological strain. Further research should take a longitudinal approach and evaluate the impact of intervention programs in order to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological role of hope and meaning.

6. Answering the research question, evaluating the hypotheses, and limitations of the research

6.1 Limitations of the research

Like all research using qualitative or mixed methodologies, this study has its natural limitations. The first of these is the nature of the sample: 32 school social workers from three locations in Hungary with similar professional backgrounds participated in the focus group phase. This common ground of experience was conducive to deep, value-based statements – but at the same time, this homogeneity limits the generalizability of the results. The second limitation stems from the nature of qualitative methods. No matter how hard we tried to work from multiple perspectives and with theoretical anchors, the interpretation cannot be completely objective. The researcher is present in the process, not observing from the outside, but involved in the questions, the listening, and the layers of interpretation. As Braun and Clarke (2006) write, meaning is always co-created with the researcher – this is not a flaw, but a prerequisite for deep understanding. Finally, the questionnaires used in the quantitative phase, although well-validated tools, are based on self-reporting. They reveal something about levels of meaning, hope, and life satisfaction, but they cannot convey the complex human story behind each response. This is why it was important to build on the qualitative and quantitative strands to show a more

complete picture of the intertwined system of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action.

6.2. Results related to the hypotheses based on a sample of 32 respondents

H1 – The experience of meaning and the level of hope are positively correlated

The quantitative data showed a strong positive correlation between the **MLQ-Presence** scale measuring the experience of meaning and the “agency” component of hope ($r \approx 0.62\text{--}0.66$, $p \leq 0.01$). This correlation was also evident in the **qualitative focus group** interviews: helpers often reported that the inner experience of “I can still do something” gave them meaning in difficult situations. The two dimensions – meaning and mobilizing hope – mutually reinforce each other, especially in morally burdensome situations.

H2 – The level of meaning and hope is positively related to life satisfaction:

The level of life satisfaction (SWLS) showed a strong correlation with the experience of meaning ($r \approx 0.71$) and the “agency” component of hope ($r \approx 0.70$). Based on the focus group discussions, professional well-being was often linked to value-driven behavior, inner balance, and being a “good enough person.” These correlations can again be interpreted in the context of the sample studied, but they still provide a sensitive picture of the conditions that support the sustainability of helping.

H3 – Experiencing hope and meaning in helping is based on value-based, moral convictions:

According to the quantitative results, high levels of meaning and hope are not merely a mood, but the result of a deep inner orientation. The qualitative data confirm this: participants repeatedly spoke of an “inner compass,” “moral responsibility,” or the importance of “preserving humanity.” The attitude of helpers can thus be interpreted not as an instrumental tool but as an existential choice.

H4 – The presence of helpers is a means of conveying hope to children who have experienced bullying:

This thesis is primarily supported by qualitative focus group data. According to the helpers’ reports, the greatest source of hope was often not a concrete solution, but the fact that we did not leave the child alone. This presence if it is nourished by genuine meaning and hope gives the helper inner stability and the child something to hold on to. Following Frankl, we can say that hope does not arise from control, but from a value-based willingness to respond.

6.3. Answering the research question

In terms of the objectives of the research, one of the most important conclusions is that the internal unity of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action is the basis of helping behavior, especially in dealing with bullying situations. During the study, three interwoven dimensions emerged in the work of school social workers:

meaning as internal motivation and value system; hope as relational and interpersonal quality; and potential for meaningful action as responsibility taken in the spirit of “nevertheless.”

These three factors not only structure professional practice but **also act as protective factors**, especially in morally demanding and vulnerable situations such as bullying. Based on the results, helpers who experience inner meaning and agency report greater life satisfaction. Quantitative and qualitative data consistently show that the psychological protective role of meaning and hope is also significant in terms of helper responsiveness and mental health. One of the main contributions of the research is that it revealed how the triad of meaning, hope, and potential for meaningful action are intertwined in a credible, morally grounded helping presence, not only in a hypothesis-driven manner, but also by interpreting the spontaneous statements of the participants. This self-transcendent functioning not only provides a foothold for clients, but can also be a guarantee of the helper's own psychological resilience. Other researchers (e.g., Wong 2011; Batthyány 2021) have also pointed to the supportive role of meaning and hope in cases of trauma and stress. The new contribution of this study lies in its focus group examination of the experiences of school social workers in the context of bullying, **using a logotherapeutic and existential-analytical conceptual framework**. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it seeks the realization of these concepts not only on a theoretical level, but also in the reality of professional practice.

The research findings highlight that the presence of a helper is not merely a professional act, but a setting for experiencing meaning, maintaining hope, and unfolding potential for meaningful action. This triple unity – when realized in a value-based and self-identical manner – can be interpreted **as a self-transcendent act**: the helper transcends himself while remaining in this relational space. Presence, loyalty to values, and the spirit of „nevertheless” can create an inner order that not only supports the child's struggle but also maintains the helper's mental balance.

Our research group is open to international cooperation and further analysis of our data in order to slow down the spread of school violence with a scientific basis and practical application.

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Legislation and methodological guidelines

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