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SUPERVISION AS MODEL OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL WORKERS

Abstract

If we take in consideration the complex social problems conditioned by traditional political, economic and social relations in our society in the immediate work with people, there is an evident need for competent professionals, social workers. They should respond to the requests and needs of the current social developments that cannot be treated as traditional, bureaucratic actions in the social work. The social workers are required to follow the complex changes in the society and in the same time to fulfill their function of unchangingness in the social system.

The actual context of reforms in the system for social protection in the Republic of Macedonia, and the introduction of numerous innovations and standards in the structural and functional aspects require development of models for intervention.

Changes are needed to meet such expectations of the experts, in terms of development of practice based on theory and scientific facts. The contemporary social work requires development and directing competencies, skills, opinions and resolving problems, team work and cooperation focused on the assistance provider. The need for supervision

is evident in all systems that work in the area of provision of support to people and development of their potentials, activation and using knowledge, and application of skills in practice.

The integrative-developmental supervision is a model which improves professional competencies, creates job satisfaction, prevents professional burnout syndrome and enhances professional efficacy through the process of integration of theory and practice.

Key words: supervision, supervisor and supervisee.

Defining the concept and the importance of supervision

The term supervision has origins in the word super (meaning "over") and *videre (meaning "to see")* and literally it means excellent perception (Petljk Jakunić, 2008). The oxford dictionary defines supervision on basis of the origin of the word as: "to be in charge of somebody/something and make sure that everything is done correctly, safely" (Oxford Learner's Dictionary. In the Latin language the word supervision (supervidēre), means oversight and supervisor is the person who supervises (Bokulić, 2003b). In time the term supervision changed its meaning to finally obtain the current meaning – method for development of professional competence, cooperation but not oversight (Bokulić, 2003a).

Supervision is the model which improves professional competencies, creates job satisfaction, prevents professional burnout syndrome and enhances professional efficacy. It represents application of standards, implementation of tasks and activities through professional support and learning, where the social worker develops knowledge, skills, competencies and possibilities to undertake responsibility for his/her actions which would enable improvement of the quality of protection for the beneficiaries. The supervision improves the quality of work, personal growth and development of professional skills, raising interest, assistance for resolving more challenging cases, promotion of communication in

social institutions, reducing impact of professional stress and professional isolation.

Historical development of supervision

Supervision as a method of acquiring professional knowledge and professional development emerged in USA at the end of the 19th century. Supervision is linked with the work of Mary Richmond who was the first person to use the term "supervision" in her attempt to organize efficient social work. The initial functions of the supervision were focused on oversight and organizational implementation of social work. Kadushin (1995) emphasizes that the first book on supervision is "Supervision and education in Charity", Brackett, J. R. (1904), which elaborates the tasks and functions of supervision (oversight, organizational functions and responsibilities). The first education in the area of supervision in the USA was conducted in 1911, and Virginia Robinson wrote the book "Supervision in Social Casework" in 1936.

In Europe, supervision was introduced in the 50s of the 20th century as part of the Marshall Plan for assistance after the Second World War (Van Kessel, 1997). The supervision in European Union countries has professional standards and represents a professional obligation for people that work with people. Key organizations for European supervision are the Association of National Organizations for Supervision in Europe (ANSE) and the European Association for Supervision (EAS).

In order to become proficient to do advisory work, the supervisors need to go through specific extensive three-year training in compliance with the European standards of authorized institutes (EAG-FPI Jahresprogramm 1999) or postgraduate specialist studies in the area of supervision (in accordance with Statutu ANSE).

Supervision is present for a longer period of time in several European countries (Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Croatia). The first school for supervision in

Croatia was opened in 1977 and the studies for supervisors in the area of psycho-social work started in 1998.

The occupation of supervisor is recognized as separate profession, and a good example for that is Hungary where the occupation of supervisor is registered in the official nomenclature of occupations (Bokulić, 2003b). The need for defined policy for supervision indicates the seriousness and the importance of supervision. The New Zealand Association of Social Works (ANZASW), 1998 developed a policy for introducing supervision with detailed elaboration of the objectives and principles of supervision (Morison, 1999).

In 2013, the National Association for Social Work (NASW) developed and adopted Best Practice Standards in Social Work supervision: Context in Supervision, Legal and Regulatory Issues, Conduct of Supervision, Ethical Issues and Technology.

Each country must have legislation which requires social workers to have license to work. One important part of the legislation regulates the supervision of the social workers conducted by licensed social workers, before they obtain their licenses. In some of the countries the social worker must perform the practical work under supervision of social worker with clinical license, in a period of two years, before obtaining license for clinical social work. During this two-year period, the social worker must do 4.000 hours of general counseling out of which 1.000 hours must be psycho-therapy, and must pass two exams for license, and to have 100 hours of supervision face to face.

The students at the Institute for Social Work and Social Policy study supervision theoretically within their curriculum. Supervision comes as a necessity for improvement of the quality of the education and it is a requirement for those that accepted the concept of lifelong learning (Article 129 law on Social protection), PI Institute for social work, education, promotion – social protection).

However, supervision which is required for the social workers before their employment and after commencement of their employment must become integral part of their continuous education. Actually many social workers believe that supervision is very important for the growth

and development of relations, knowledge and skills which would improve the quality of the social services.

The role of supervision

The supervision plays key role for developing competence, and learning and it represents a process in the professional development of the self-esteem on basis of its own formed personal and professional identity (Poljak, 2003). The supervision offers support for thinking and passing decisions in regard to professional issues, challenges and demands, explanation of tasks, functions and roles, support and management of change processes, innovative solutions for new challenges, prophylactic measures for avoiding psychic *mobbing* (according to: Association of National Organizations for Supervision in Europe).

The work with people that have problems, involves the emotional component which frequently results with appearance of burnout syndrome among social workers (Kusturin, 2007). The reaction to the extremely emotional work has negative impact on the physical, emotional, cognitive and social life of the professional.

By integrating different aspects of the professional situation, the supervisee creates presumption to work as a professionally competent person. With this the supervision ensures quality psycho-social work with beneficiaries. (Ajduković and Cajvert, 2004 according Kusturin 2007:40).

The integrative-developmental supervision model is focused on development positive changes at the professional, in case when he/she strives to better understand the relations between the people, and the reasons for appearing of a specific problem. The supervisee in cooperation with the supervisor learns from his/her own experience, incorporates more efficient action in the process of stress management, perception of the situation of the client and his/her resources, thoughts, feelings and the relations with the beneficiary seen from different perspectives. By integrating different aspects of the professional situation, the supervisee creates presumption to work as a professionally competent person (Ajdukovic and Cajvat, 2004). The expert that has to be subjected to positive changes is in the focus of change.

Supervision helps the professional to use his/her knowledge and skills to fulfill the working tasks in effective and quality manner. Supervision is focused on activation and utilization of knowledge and application of skills in practice, continuous professional capacity building and resolving problems and better understanding the beneficiaries and colleagues.

The integrative-developmental supervision is creative space for integration of theory and practice, development and growth of professional competencies, protection of the mental health of the helpers and improvement of the quality of psycho-social work, which consequently has impact on the improvement of the services for the beneficiaries. The experts and the process of work are in the focus, and the quality of services for the beneficiaries is indirect result. The focus is on enhancing the capacities and competencies of the expert for work with the clients.

Participants in the supervision

The supervised person is supervisee. The objective of successful supervision is the supervisee to become his/her own supervisor, namely to train himself/herself to observe himself/herself as observed by a stranger (Bokulic, 2003b), so called "metalook", for ensuring continuous professional development. The supervisor and supervisee through interactive process provide help for overcoming obstacles for successful functioning. The supervision is a meeting of professionals where the supervisees are experts in their own profession while the supervisor is a professional in supervision (Ajdukovic and Cajvert, 2001: 12).

The supervisor plays the role of provider of support, encouragement, announcement of information, listening to the social worker, particularly if he/she is new and inexperienced. The supervisors indicate if there is a lack of knowledge and skills, and help the social workers to remain impartial. They provide psychological support by reducing anxiety and raising new interests and by promoting understanding. They are the professional role model for new workers, and

represent a bridge towards the institution especially if they lack experience in the area of social work.

The supervisor does not impose personal standards, values and methods for provision of assistance. He encourages, provides information, and offers advices. The supervisor is in agreement with. Nothing is as sacred as the integrity of our opinion". The position of the supervisor enjoys status and respect in the public and private institutions. Well-qualified and competent supervisor is a key person in the development of the professional resources.

The relationship of the social worker and the supervisor represents the main dynamic in the learning process. It is based on the extensive knowledge of the supervisor, his/her respect towards the social worker, the will and preparedness to share the capacities with the social worker. The positive learning is happening through the positive attitude of the supervisor who strongly believes in the capacities and values of the social worker.

The supervision enables development of the strengths of the social worker, and it emphasizes the qualities that contribute for improvement of the competencies and the efficiency in the operation. The supervisor freely presents the superiority of the worker, in those situations in which it is demonstrated. The sincerity and integrity characterize the attitude and the objective of the institution, that is, to serve the beneficiaries. The supervisor perceives his/her expertize and the one of the supervisee who might have different perceptions, values, standpoints, expectations, wishes and needs, what he/she wants and what he/she really needs.

The relationship between the supervisor and the beginner-supervisee is based on mutual respect and confidence, and the value is increased through: (1) the knowledge of the supervisor that is shared with the supervisee (2) the considerate attitude of the supervisor, and (3) the fact that the supervisor is available if the supervisee requires assistance.

The supervisor points out to the social worker for possible lack of knowledge and skills for provision of assistance, and recommends measures for remaining impartial and for development of the strengths of the supervisee.

The social worker learns by using his personality, feelings and intellect. The supervisor emphasizes the qualities that contribute for the competence and the efficiency in the operation through the attitude which is characterized with sincerity and integrity.

Through supervision, the social worker promotes his/her personal, social and professional competencies, as follows:

1. ***The personal competencies*** *that are promoted are recognition and understanding of the feelings, thoughts, behavior and needs and their impact on the others; the self-assessment enables recognition of strengths and weaknesses; improvement of the own resource management; detection and changing contra-productive behavior; development of responsibilities for own actions and recognition of own and others limitations in terms of responsibilities and own representation with respect towards the others. Area of personal emotions, standpoints, values: ex. Feeling of helplessness (nothing can be changed, the problems are too complicated, no reason to go forward, lack of support from the colleagues, too much work and lack of time for oneself, etc.); professional stress (frequent sick leaves, headaches, loosing temper, anger, uncontrolled reactions, introversion, increased consumption of alcohol and tobacco, coffee, etc.).*

2. ***The social competencies*** *that are promoted are recognition and understanding of feelings, opinion sharing, behavior and needs of others and provision of appropriate support; promotion of communication skills; development of skills for receiving and sharing information and development of ability for adaptation to new circumstances.*

3. ***Development of professional competencies*** *such as perception, understanding and respecting different styles of learning, abilities and potentials; understanding group dynamics; development of skills for group management and*

valuation and appraisal of individual and group work; differentiation of actions and circumstances for reaching efficient decisions. ***Area of professional competencies: ex. Limited range of working methods and techniques*** *(how to calm down a beneficiary without threatening, raising the voice, skills for managing individual conversation, motivation of the parents for cooperation, etc.).* ***When the beneficiarywould raise the voice****, the interpretation involves presentation of opinion in front of big group, by representing the own opinion.*

4. <u>*Working conditions and characteristics of the working post – inadequate working conditions*</u>*(inadequate office hours, frequent travels, availability of the manager 24/7, small office space, lack of heating, no breaks) unreal deadlines, big number of beneficiaries, aggressive attitude of the beneficiaries towards the professionals, lack of education about problems encountered by the professionals.*

5. <u>*Human resource management – ex. Inappropriate relationship with the colleagues* </u>*(frequent accusations, quarrels, gossip, disrespecting competencies in front of beneficiaries); lack of person to have open discussion with (lack of understanding, lack of time for discussion with colleagues, lack of acknowledgements and awards).*

Supervision as a process

The process of supervision requires continuity in the implementation and small group of members that will participate in the implementation, comprised of not more than 10 persons. It is conducted once a month in a period of one year lasting four school classes. The access is on voluntary basis but with entering in the supervision group everybody gets group responsibilities. The first part of the meeting is used for personal competencies and the second one for professional competencies, by reviving the potentials and resources of the supervisees (Skelec, 2008). Confidence and cooperation are required.

The most frequent methods used in the work are: reflection, mini lectures, group dynamics, socio-drama, case presentation, modeling, drawing, methods of creative thinking, fantasy trips, unfinished stories, development of scenarios, role play, imitation, brainstorming, procedures, forced relations, the importance of questions, dividing questions in parts (Skelac, 2008: 170-171).

Each supervision meeting usually is comprised of the following elements:

1. Expected results from the meeting – Discussions in the beginning in terms of the expectations of the participants and how they feel about the topic.
2. Reflection of reflections – discussions about reflection from the previous meeting; before the meeting the supervisees send each other written reflections discussed on the meeting and they the read them.
3. Reading material – usually a material on some topic prepared in advance or there is a possibility for analysis – describing experiences (events) on a meeting and other different materials.
4. Analysis – describing experiences (events) on a meeting (Rupnik Vec, 2005).

However we have to be precautious – not to have too much supervision. Some leaders in the social work suggest that their supervision system makes them inexperienced workers as a result of being over dependent on administrators and senior workers. We must have in mind to avoid such situation. The basic aim in the supervision is to help the social worker to be independent in the planning process and in the implementation of the practical work.

Conclusion

Special contribution from introducing of the integrative developmental supervision in the social work is the enhancement of the social worker through reflection of his/her work and relations. In the supervision group, the supervisees recognize their work, exchange experiences and ideas, perceive the attitudes of the others, express their opinions, pass decisions, develop creativity and their communication skills and have the opportunity for personal and professional capacity building and development.

Although supervision is not implemented (only some theoretical knowledge) in our education system, in the practical work there is an evident need for introducing supervision as a process for ensuring personal development of the social worker, that is, supervised professional.

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