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Supportive Collaboration in Social Work Organizations: from Ideal to Practice?

This paper presents the results of the research which was organized by Vytautas Magnus, Klaipėda and Siauliai Universities. 81 social services providing institutions took part in the research in Lithuania on June - August, 2007. The main goal was to investigate possibilities and preconditions for the supervision as “tool” for constructing professional identity as well as self-management by analyzing the risk of stress and expectations of support on the basis of social workers’ professional experience.

The objectives of the present paper are: a) to discuss context’s demands for the social work profession required multidimensional solutions; b) to disclose the experience of painful events in the professional activity of social worker like a challenge to act or as a threat; c) to analyze social workers’ attitude to the expectations of support and the ability to use the supportive collaboration; d) to underline the tendencies and prospects of the application of supervision as a method, that stimulates reflection and provides a possibility to reconsider and identify complexity of professional situations as well as personal experience.

The paper is based on the theories of Bourdieu (), Coleman (2005), Dominelli (2004), Kavaliauskiene (2005), Kern (1996), Kolb (1984), Van Kessel (1993). The issue of complex character of social work as an intensively developing profession, which was re-established following the independence of Lithuania 1990 are analyzed. Supportive collaboration is core concept in the paper, different types of collaboration are emphasized. According to Walter, Petr (2000), transdisciplinary networks, cooperation, coordination and collaboration between agencies and professionals, is a “key strategy” in efforts to change fragmented human services into infrastructure that addresses multiple needs and issues of clients in a more comprehensive and efficient way.

Otherwise, there are no traditions of social work identity in society, also multidisciplinary communication, as possibility to solve issues in provision of social welfare (Eidukeviciute, Veckiene, 2004). Cooperation and collaboration within professionals becomes overburden by existence of different cultures of decision- making and intervention. Existing context of different contradictory intervention cultures challenges organization of social work. At the same time, processes, which appeared as consequences of becoming European Union

country increased intercultural, ethnic variety and changes in labour market, which illustrated new complexities in the activities of social workers and requirements for initiative and new intervention strategies.

The expansion of national and international cooperation, a rise in workforce mobility, deep polarization of society and crucial significance of social capital and community development in the process of building new type of welfare have increased pressure for social work and social services in Lithuania. The risk of professional stress and expectations of support are highlighted in this context. The experience of the ability to use help or support offered after experiencing stress in the personal or professional life is analysed.

To conclude it could be said, that the personal and professional experience are in permanent interaction by results of the research. General stress-causing factors are: working tasks-related factors, factors related to the role of the employee and communication, the structure and microclimate of organization. Supervision was conducive to the process, as it promoted reflection.

The research emphasized the expectation of an emotional or backing support, it was essentially determined by a managerial position in an organization and the specificity of professional activity when problems of the existential and multi-dimensional character were encountered. The need for the supervisor's enabling support tended to increase depending on one's education, however, it was less expressed than the need for the enabling support of the family. Those conclusions are significant in terms of the development of collaboration based on personal relationships and supervision