THE ROLE OF SUPERVISORY SUPPORT IN STRESS MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION OF OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT OF PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN SOCIAL PROTECTION. CASE STUDY: MONTENEGRO

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ABSTRACT

Supervisory support is recognised as a significant mechanism for identifying factors that contribute to stress and potentially generate conditions that are conducive to occupational burnout of professionals who work in the area of social protection. In Montenegro, the practice of implementation of supervisory support does not have notable continuity; rather, it is a consequence of reforms of the social and child protection system that have taken place over the past ten years. Supervisory support is implemented in social work centres in line with the Western European supervision model. The history of implementation of the supervision process has been marked by a strong emphasis on

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the administrative function over the supporting and educational functions. Such an approach has resulted in a number of dilemmas, contradictions and different professional views among key actors in the supervision process. This paper examines the implications of having applied such a form of supervisory support system in the field of stress management and prevention of burnout among professionals. Simultaneously, organisational solutions that have emerged as a result of the selected model of supervision are questioned. By indicating systemic deficiencies, we draw attention to the challenges of stress and burnout faced by social work professionals and supervisors. Emphasis on the role of supervision in the reduction of stress and occupational burnout enables profiling the idea of modifying supervisory support in the social protection system of Montenegro.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social work is not exclusively focused on providing accommodation, material support, legal assistance or ensuring physical security of clients, as is often informally believed by the lay public. On the contrary, it is a complex process aimed at enabling the growth and development of an individual or family, which involves approaching the individual in interaction with the environment. Simultaneously, this process involves motivating the individual to activate their own resources in overcoming the difficulties they face. This type of approach includes two complementary levels that are present in contemporary social work. The first level involves the application of a systemic-ecological perspective in understanding people and approaches to working with them, while the second involves proactively promoting the potential and personal responsibility that people have for their own lives. The nature and demands of modern social work require a high level of commitment by social work professionals, as well as the development of the ability to resist stress, challenges and pressures caused by both organisational and individual factors. An important element in the prevention and reduction of stress levels, as well as in the prevention of burnout, is the strategically and organisationally framed supervisory process that corresponds to the specifics of a particular social protection system.

Approaches to supervision in social work have changed alongside changes in the practice of social work. Supervision in the 21st century has evolved under the influence of changes in the organisational, professional, and social environment and has evolved beyond the traditional hierarchical model towards new models and approaches (O'Donoghue, 2015:141.). Notwithstanding, the basic elements of supervision, which represent the traditional form of supervision and include the administrative function have been a consistent feature of the supervision process from its inception until present day. Contemporary trends have resulted in a number of controversies regarding the existence and nature of administrative functions,

both among researchers and practitioners. Consequently, there are different practices, different understandings, and different models of implementation of supervision. In countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and South Africa, supervision involves an administrative function (Western European model).[3] In contrast, the examples of Sweden and the Netherlands, which emphasise support (Sweden) and learning (the Netherlands), show that the administrative function in these countries is perceived as directly countering the supervision process. In FR Germany and other German-speaking areas, supervision stands out as a profession that is applied in other spheres as well: economics, the service industry, administration and sports (Belardi, 2002). Supervision in Montenegro predominantly exists in centres for social work, mainly through the implementation and promotion of its administrative function, which largely overlaps with the function of the head of professional services.[4] It was introduced as part of the reform of the social and child protection system, which has been taking place with variable dynamics since 2008, and has been developing in various directions. The previous period was, among other things, marked by minimal activism in the field of stress management and prevention of occupational burnout, as well as numerous controversies and a number of recorded difficulties regarding the implementation of supervisory support.

In this paper, which consists of three parts, we consider the current theoretical frameworks and observations on the relationship between supervision and stress, as well as supervision and occupational burnout. In the first part, we analyse the usefulness and applicability of the existing model of supervisory support in Montenegro. The second part of the paper is dedicated to the occurrence of stress among professionals, and particular emphasis is placed on the assumption that the application of the administrative function of supervisory support limits the prevention and reduction of stress levels among professional social workers in Montenegro. The characteristics of occupational burnout, the lack of treatment of this issue in Montenegro, and the inefficiency of the administrative function of supervision are discussed in the third part of the paper.

In the theoretical analysis, we want to provide an answer to the following question: can the process of supervisory support with a strong administrative function be helpful to professional social workers in the social protection system of Montenegro, in an attempt to overcome stress and burnout?

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3   British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2011) provided a thorough description of the "basic purpose" of supervision as a support mechanism for social workers in good-quality service provision (Manthorpe et al., 2013:2)

4   There are 13 centres for social work and 12 regional units, covering the territory of 24 municipalities in Montenegro. There is a total of 9 experts employed as supervisors in all of the centres for social work.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPERVISION SUPPORT IN MONTENEGRO

In general, supervision in social work is primarily conceived as an administrative function with a role in providing oversight of professional social workers to ensure efficient and responsible service delivery to users (Bogo and McKnight, 2013.:50). The importance of supervision for social work practice is probably one of the most widely accepted tenets of the profession (Wilkins, Forrester and Grant, 2017.:942). However, over time, the substance and nature of supervisory support have changed. Belardi cites some alternative labels for supervision that can be found in English and German-speaking areas, such as "collegial counselling", "expert counselling", "institutional counselling", social-management or care management (Žganec, 1995.: 166). Simultaneously, there is a rich literature in the field of psychology and other counselling professions that supports the thesis of the key role that supervisory relationships play in the development of supervisees (Bradley and Gould, 2001.; Muse-Burke, Ladanyand Deck, 2001.; Ramos-Sanchez et al., 2002.., according to Bennett and Holtz Deal 2009.:102). Today, supervision has to be reconsidered as a humanistic supportive approach enabling social workers to work more effectively and to practice social work values (Yuen-han Moet al. 2021.:193).

In Montenegro, supervisory support for professionals in social work centres[5] has been formally introduced by the Law on Social and Child Protection (2013.), which has undergone several amendments. Three years into the adoption of the law, the Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms, Standards and Manner of Work of Centres for Social Work (Official Gazette of Montenegro 17/16 from 11/03/2016) introduced supervision in centres for social work as an internal form of professional social work support, while external supervision was implemented by professionals engaged at the Institute for Social and Child Protection (Zavod za socijalnu i dječju zaštitu, ZSDZ). The initial period of implementation of supervision support was marked by formal shortcomings and a deficit of professional staff available in the centres. The Rulebook prescribes that supervision is to be provided by one supervisor for seven professional workers. Analysis of the functioning of supervision in centres for social work (2018) identified that some centres did not have the necessary number of professionals available for the provision of supervisory support. The situation was overcome by hiring external supervisors for internal supervision. However, such a solution resulted in a number of challenges that inhibited the pro-

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5   In the system of social and child protection of Montenegro, provision of professional services is done by professional workers, professional associates and associates. According to the Law on Social and Child Protection, "Professional worker is a social worker, psychologist, pedagogue, adult-education specialist, special pedagogue, lawyer, sociologist, special education teacher, special educator, rehabilitator and doctor of medicine. Professional associates are persons of other professions with higher education degrees who perform operations with service provider" (Law on Social and Child Protection of Montenegro, 2013/16/17).

cess of supervisory support, and the capacity to provide services to users (Janković and Miletić, 2017. :19). Over time, conditions have been created for the implementation of internal supervision support through the engagement of additional staff in centres for social work. However, difficulties in implementing supervisory support have prevailed.

The integrative model of supervision is applied in the Republic of Serbia and it includes all three functions of supervision: administrative, supportive and educational (Polić and Hrnčić, 2019.). The supervisory process takes place through a continuous process of monitoring the work process and includes providing support in overcoming the problems encountered by professional workers (Branković, 2015.). Supervisors are employed in centres for social work and, in addition to the work of supervisors, they can also perform the work of case managers. By following the example of the Republic of Serbia, Montenegro has seen an increase in control of the quality of work of professional workers, but also a neglect of the educational and developmental component of supervision.

In the current environment, professional workers are subject to control and supervision on several different levels. Directors, heads of professional services and supervisors exercise supervision from the domain of their position in the hierarchy of centres for social work. The Social Inspectorate, as an external body, controls the legality of work and the implementation of entrusted tasks. Additionally, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is in charge of performing professional supervision over the quality of the work of centres for social work, and, thereby, professional workers. Such an organisation of the control system results in overlapping supervision of individuals and the administrative function of supervision seems superfluous. In addition, there are multiple overlaps of responsibilities between heads of professional services and supervisors, which is often confusing for all the actors involved in the supervision process.

A particular challenge with such a concept is the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. The quality of the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee depends on the following four conditions: trust, intimacy of the process, independence of the supervisor, and equality (Branković, Šarac and Živanić, 2018.:33). The implemented model of supervisory support in Montenegro implies an unequal distribution of power, whereby the supervisor is in a dominant position over the supervisee. Supervisors' activities are aimed at "creating" an environment in which supervisees follow and respect professional standards and adhere to good principles of professional practice. Such a framework calls into question the feasibility of key conditions that determine the quality of relationships between the relevant actors. The relationship of trust between supervisors and supervisees is particularly questionable, as it is actually the framework in which supervisory support takes place, according to some authors (Bernard and Goodyear, 2004.; Queensland Health, 2008.). Additionally, trust is a means of involving the supervi-

see in supervision and achieving development goals (Holloway, 1997.). Fulfilment of conditions for intimacy and equality enables the supervisory process to take place in an atmosphere of trust and reciprocal communication. Numerous analyses of the effects of supervision (Bennett and Holtz Deal, 2009.; Carpenter et al. 2012.) indicate that the independence of supervisors and the absence of their superiority in relation to supervisees contribute to understanding and resolving issues and problems. In addition, the position of supervisors in the applied model does not reflect the essential nature of supervision. Caras and Sandu (2014.) argue that the role of the supervisor in social work is to manage and support social workers. Simultaneously, supervisors do not provide direct services to clients; rather, they coordinate the activities of the organisation (Caras and Sandu, 2014.: 77). However, in Montenegro, due to the shortage of professional staff, and poor redistribution of work, supervisors often perform the duties of case managers. Consequently, the question arises as to who supervises the work of the supervisors? Equally, where is the space for support and education in such a process?

Insight into how characteristics of supervisory support vary from one state to another is probably best gained through analysing how characteristics of supervision are perceived by professionals (Bradley and Hoejer, 2009.: 72). Thus, the Analysis of the Work of Centres for Social Work (IDEAS, UNICEF, ZSDZ, 2019.), which aimed to determine the real situation in terms of existing capacities and needs of centres for social work, registered several important features of the existing system of supervision in Montenegro. According to the views of experts, as reported in the aforementioned analysis, supervisory support is largely reduced to the administrative function, while the educational and support components are less represented. Such a supervisory process results in the distancing of professional workers from service users and additional bureaucratisation of professional work. Professionals mainly see the following elements as illustrative of the importance of supervision: support for planning the development of competencies; direct support and participation of supervisors in complex cases; opportunities for reflection, exchange of views and opinions; relief from the shared responsibility of supervisors and case managers (IDEAS, UNICEF, ZSDZ, 2019.). While some case managers believe that supervision contributes to their responsibilities by improving their competencies and job security, others believe that supervision reduces the responsibility of case managers because the supervisor oversees the case manager's work and can draw attention to any potential mistakes (IDEAS, UNICEF, ZSDZ, 2019.).

At present, supervision in interprofessional settings is quite diverse and shaped according to unique factors in agencies and organisations, as well as the characteristics of the workforce (Sweifach, 2017.:3). Nevertheless, Carpenter et al. (2012.) suggest in their findings that supervision works best where equal attention is paid to the task of social work and social and emotional support (Hafford-Letchfield and Huss, 2018.: 2). In other words, efficient and responsible customer service is not

feasible without proactive organisational support in all developmental aspects of the supervisory process. Such a format of supervisory support can be used in stress management and prevention of "burnout" of professionals.

We note the attempts to resolve the evident shortcomings of the supervision process in centres for social work through the organisation of professional training for supervisors and case managers. For example, the Institute for Social and Child Protection, with the support of UNICEF, conducted training for seven professionals to improve their capacity to provide external supervision. During the training period, the provision of external supervisory support to professionals in centres for social work and experts employed by service providers began. These were the first steps in the process of implementing the integrative development model, which is modelled by the framework of supervisory support implemented in the Republic of Croatia. However, the effects of such a supervisory program have not yet been systematically investigated. At the very beginning, several potential challenges were identified, including the following: a small number of trained experts, confusion in performing assigned roles (the role of employees of the Institute, on the one hand, and the role of supervisor, on the other), inability to support all employees, insufficient knowledge of the model of supervision by decision-makers, challenges with availability of professionals to participate in training, etc.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND SUPERVISION OF PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN SOCIAL PROTECTION OF MONTENEGRO

Initially, the notion of stress was defined as a physiological reaction to threatening events (Selye, 1956.), and then as a reaction to an external, either positive or negative event (Holmes and Rahe, 1967., according to Aronson, Wilson and Akert, 2005.), because both categories of events require a greater or lesser degree of adjustment. This definition of stress omits the important fact that people interpret and react to changes in the environment in their own, subjective way. The definition was supplemented by Lazarus and Folkman (1984.) who defined stress as a person's special relationship with the environment in which the person estimates that new circumstances exceed the possibilities of successful coping with the situation. Subjective assessment is actually critical in determining the degree of stressor severity and stress response (Lazarus, 1993., 2000.).

According to Ajduković and Ajduković (1996.), occupational stress entails a mismatch between the demands of the workplace and the environment on the one hand, and our capabilities on the other, as well as the desire and expectations to meet these demands. With these views in mind, stress does not occur because of

high demands, but because of the assessment that we do not have the resources to respond to such demands. If the demands are high, and our perception indicates that we can meet them, there will be no stress.

Three distinct phases can be identified in the experience of stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984.). In the first phase, the assessment, some type of threat is perceived, followed by the process of becoming aware of all possible reactions to the threat, and then the reaction, i.e. confrontation. Coping can take two forms: coping with a focus on the problem, that is, focusing on solving the problem and taking action to change the source of stress in order to prevent it or bring it under control; or coping with a focus on emotions, i.e. a focus on emotion management (Lazarus and Folkman 198.). It usually entails a focus on reducing unpleasant emotions associated with stress. The first form of coping is dominant in situations where the individual estimates that something constructive can be done, while the second form prevails in situations where a stressful situation is something that simply has to be endured.
When stress occurs, people often consciously or unconsciously resist admitting they have a problem, which mostly stems from the expectations they have of themselves. It can also happen that a person recognises that something is wrong, but does not know what it is. The response to stress can occur so gradually that it is sometimes very difficult to spot and recognise it (Munson, 2001.). When a person exhausts coping mechanisms, they continue to function, but without achieving results, with a lack of commitment, and without a sense of satisfaction in doing the job.

Cooper and Marshall (Cooper and Marshall 1976., according to Družić Ljubotina and Friščić, 2014.) argue that the occupational stress model consists of five sources of stress that lead to a negative-stress outcome. These include: 1) internal factors of the organisation, including inadequate physical working conditions, work overload or time pressure; 2) role in the organisation, including role ambiguity or conflict of roles; 3) career development, including lack of job security; 4) workplace relationships, including poor relationships with bosses or colleagues, and some extreme components (such as workplace violence); 5) organisational structure and climate, including a lack of ability to participate in decision-making, as well as work organisation policy.

To date, research on occupational stress has shown that professionals involved in helping activities and professions are most exposed to stress, which especially applies to social workers (Travers and Cooper, 1993.; Kahn, 1993.; according to Družić Ljubotina and Friščić, 2014.). The reason for this is the exceptional commitment to emotional involvement in working with people who need help and support and involvement in a wide range of their problems and situations. Such circumstances are fertile ground for increased exposure to the challenges of occupational stress. Social workers are at risk of experiencing burnout and secondary traumatic stress (STS) as a result of the nature of their work and the contexts within which they work

(Wagaman et al., 2015.). Studies (Craig and Sprang, 2010.; Ray et al., 2013.; Wagaman et al., 2015.; Shepherd and Newell, 2020.) show that social workers experience secondary traumatic stress, professional burnout, and compassion fatigue. Social workers with higher secondary traumatic stress scores have been shown to report higher levels of burnout and lower levels of compassion satisfaction (Shepherd and. Newell, 2020). The Shepherd and Newell (2020.) study also confirmed the implications of previous research suggesting that experiencing secondary trauma leads not only to leaving the current workplace, but also to leaving the profession altogether. In the research conducted by Branković (2015.) in the Republic of Serbia, it has been confirmed that there is a significant phenomenon of professional burnout among case managers in the centres for social work. The most accented dimensions are emotional exhaustion and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, while the level of depersonalization is relatively low. It has been shown that 52% of case managers are having increased risk of burnout, with 10% having a higher level of depersonalization.

A significant mechanism in the development of stress resistance frameworks for professionals is continuous supervisory support. In Montenegro, there are no published studies on the occurrence of stress in professionals working in social protection. Unfortunately, there is very little scientific and research material on stress in other areas as well. In the field of social protection, the only relevant source of data are the reports from supervision and other occupational meetings conducted by the Institute for Social and Child Welfare of Montenegro (ZSDZ)[6]. A recent analysis of the need for training and support for professionals, which involved 100 experts from centres for social work and social welfare institutions, examined the perception of exposure to stress, where more than half of respondents (56%) said they faced high levels of stress in the workplace, and two thirds of them believed that they needed help in dealing with stress (ZSDZ, 2022). According to the research, which focused on the analysis of the needs of centres for social work, several shortcomings were identified that could potentially be the cause of stress exposure, including the following:
- lack of human resources in centres for social work to implement the case manager model;
- deficits in the internal organisation of centres for social work;
- changes in the level of the role of the centre for social work is not accompanied by the change in the level of the organisation of professional affairs;
- supervision is implemented in a limited capacity in relation to the planned model of supervision (IDEAS, UNICEF, ZSDZ, 2019.).

This research points to several significant details that make it difficult to perform occupational tasks. Supervisors and case managers are burdened with cases,

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external supervision is not visible in the field, case managers often do not participate in group supervision, the distribution of cases in some centres for social work is inadequate, there is a predominant focus on material benefits, as well as a large volume of cases per professional worker in larger centres for social work (IDEAS, UNICEF, ZSDZ, 2019.). Indirectly, and based on presented findings, it can be concluded that the supervisors themselves are exposed to the same stress conditions, perhaps to a greater extent than the supervisees, having in mind that they perform a dual role. In circumstances in which the social protection system in Montenegro exists, the effect of external factors must not be neglected. This primarily refers to the economic and political situation in the country, i.e. the instability of the executive branch, the crisis of the legislature, the high unemployment rate - 23.02% (Employment Agency of Montenegro, March 2022), the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, etc. In addition, media attention to the activities of professionals creates pressure and "fear" of error, which leads to doubts among professionals about the quality of their work and the range of their professional capacities.

Reform of the system in the last decade has led to the introduction of new standards and measurable indicators that testify to the commitment and activities undertaken in working with users. However, such a way of measuring results has created a basis for formalising work and focusing on the amount of work delivered, all at the expense of the processes that are being conducted by professionals, for the quality and legality of which they bear personal and professional responsibility. These allegations have been confirmed in several conducted interviews and focus groups with professionals (ZSDZ, 2018-2021.). In such circumstances, professionals, as well as supervisors who share the responsibility for working on individual cases, are at risk of perceiving job demands as too great. Findings from several studies support the claim that supervisors alleviate stress through the provision of support, education and administration, but also increase stress levels through increased work demands, if they are under stress themselves, if they experience high expectations from superiors, or if they are exposed to time constraints (Collings and Murray, 1996.; Collins, 2008.; Johnson,2014.). When they are unable to cope with the requirements of the workload, professionals need to be able to turn to a reliable source for support. In the imaginary organisational model of centres for social work in Montenegro, the supervisor should be the most appropriate resource to deal with such difficulties. Essentially, the characteristics and abilities of the supervisor are an important factor that determines the success of supervision in overcoming stress. It is important to enable experts to openly express their problems and feelings related to their work (Družić Ljubotina and Friščić, 2014.), and to ensure that supervision is a space in which "there is no condemnation, where it is safe to make mistakes, show lack of knowledge and try some new behaviour" (Kahn, 1979.:520).

OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AND THE ROLE OF SUPERVISION OF PROFESSIONALS IN THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM IN MONTENEGRO

Research on occupational burnout has emerged as a result of working on emotions, excitement, and the ways people deal with them (Maslach and Jackson, 1984.). Occupational burnout is most often defined through three dimensions, as follows: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and the perception of reduced personal achievement. Emotional exhaustion refers to a person's feeling that their emotional resources are weakened, resulting in energy loss and general weakness (Maslach et al., 1996.). Christina Maslach (1982.) believes that emotional exhaustion occurs due to long-term excessive work demands and that it drains a person's emotional resources. Depersonalisation refers to psychological distancing and loss of idealism in professional work, as well as indifference to clients, which can lead to rude and insensitive behaviour. Analogous to the previous example, depersonalisation provides such people with a type of emotional buffer between the person and the job requirements imposed on them. Finally, the perception of reduced personal achievement is the third dimension, which includes a reduced sense of competence and achievement at work, which can further develop into more pronounced feelings of incompetence and failure. As a result of such feelings, individuals experience a sense of inadequacy regarding their ability to connect with people and do their job. The end result of these chain processes can be a loss of self-esteem, and often a state of depression (Maslach et al., 1996.). At the heart of the presented three-component model of burnout is emotional exhaustion, which is traditionally considered a variable of stress. The second component, depersonalisation, is a new phenomenon, which has not appeared in the literature on stress, while feelings of personal achievement have been known, and self-evaluation has been shown as a critical element in the experience of stress (according to Cordes and Dougherty, 1993.). Although there is a high degree of consensus regarding the concept of burnout, the distinction between the concept of stress and burnout is still not entirely clear. Burnout is a specific form of stress syndrome that occurs as a result of a chronic pattern of emotional responses to stressful work conditions.

Burnout is not always gradual (Munson, 2001.), but rather appears in cyclical patterns in most professionals. People experience pressure differently, which indicates that personal factors play a significant role in the experience of stress. In addition, factors that determine the reaction to stress are the circumstances to which the person is exposed, i.e. the type of work they perform, as well as physical factors. This perspective on burnout can be helpful, as it creates opportunities for interventions at any time, regardless of whether signs of stress and anxiety are present or not.

Thus, stress-induced burnout is the result of the continuous depletion of an individual's resources, combined with a lack of adequate support. The causes of burnout are numerous and complex and can be observed and understood from three different levels: macro, mezzo and micro levels. The macro level encompasses the organisational structure in which individuals work, which regulates policy and provides procedures that require compliance with rules that may be explicit and implicit. Next, the mezzo level includes the positions of supervisors and middle managers who provide guidance, information, education and support to the social worker. Whether these structures and relationships within it will be a source of stress leading to burnout depends on the overlap between the roles of supervisor and supervisee, and the degree and type of support provided to a social worker. At the micro level, the characteristics of service users can also be a source of stress, which is determined by various factors: subjective assessment of the severity of difficulties and identified problems that the client brings into interaction, and objective burden, i.e. the number of cases required by the organisation.

An important topic in the international professional literature on supervision refers to the factors that affect the retention of the capacities of social workers and their overall professional well-being (Maidment and Beddoe, 2012.:165). However, activities in the field of prevention and overcoming occupational burnout in the social protection system of Montenegro are practically rare. There is no practice of applying measurement instruments or tests to assess individuals who have experienced burnout, such as the following: *Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS); Shirom - Melamed Burnout Measure - SMBM; or the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory*. Additionally, in the strategic documents and action plans created in the last ten years, attention has been paid to systemic and organisational changes, while the topic of the problematic position of professional workers and risks in the work of professionals has been rather neglected. Organised research related to the issue of occupational burnout has not been conducted, and through research of a different thematic nature, one can only sense the situation in which professional workers find themselves. For example, according to the aforementioned Analysis of the Work of Centres for Social Work (2019.), one case manager is in charge of 44 cases, on average. In centres where "internal" supervisors are engaged, there is no statistically significant difference between case managers and supervisors in terms of the caseload (IDEAS, UNICEF, ZSDZ, 2019.). There is also no difference in relation to whether the case manager is additionally engaged in the provision of material benefits, as well as in relation to the type of service in which professional workers are engaged (Žegarac, 2020.). Such a cross-section of the situation indicates that there is a potentially large space for the emergence and development of occupational burnout, which, depending on the situation, can manifest itself through all three of its dimensions (Maslach, 1996.). Previously discussed aspects of the application of supervisory support are another reason for making pessimistic assumptions regarding the positi-

ons of professionals. Ideally, supervisors should recognise the factors that lead to stress and provide timely support to activate protective factors and prevent burnout. However, in the context of the dominance of the administrative function, overlapping competencies, and lack of organisational support, we can hardly talk about supervisory support as a mechanism for combating occupational burnout.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Complexity of supervision in social work is often contained or formalised through the development of a supervisory agreement that specifies objectives / action plans and more formal supervisory arrangements (Carrolli Tholstrup, 2001.; Kadushin, 2002., according to Noble and Irwin, 2009.:347). However, its great importance in determining the presence of different levels of stress among professionals should not be ruled out. Additionally, supervisory support, among other things, should aim at increasing occupational resilience, which enables professionals to recover from work-related difficulties. Without in-depth studies on the difficulties encountered by practitioners, supervisors become "instant experts" with "instant advice," and when such quickly devised, simplified solutions do not work, practitioners may become even more upset (Munson, 2001.).

The current state of supervisory support in Montenegro is riddled with confusing situations and different perceptions about the role and importance of supervisory support by key actors in the social protection system. Thus, the *Assessment of the Functioning of Supervision in the Social and Child Protection System in Montenegro* contains the following: "Case managers are of the view that only the Institute attaches importance to supervisory support in the system. The Institute estimates that supervision did not provide the expected results, because it was "stuck" in the administrative function. Supervisors from centres for social work believe that the current functioning of supervision, despite all the challenges, has managed to respond to the challenge of introducing a large number of new, inexperienced professionals into the system. According to the relevant Ministry, supervision does not have an ideal position in the system. Although it is formally established, essentially, there is no supervision in Montenegro (Žegarac, 2020.:15).

Research (Collings and Murray, 1996., Munson, 2001.) on occupational stress has repeatedly shown that effective supervision is a powerful antidote to stress and a powerful protective mechanism against the risk of burnout. For this reason, the revival, modification and expansion of supervision in social work centres should be considered. Having in mind the situation in the social and child protection system in Montenegro, it can be concluded that basic conditions have been created for considering the exclusion of the administrative function from the process of provision of supervisory support in centres for social work. Supervision of the entire profes-

sional process, both procedural and occupational, is an important prerequisite for quality work with service users, but since this function is implemented through managerial roles, its sustained existence within the supervision process seems redundant. Managers in centres for social work are qualified to perform administrative and supervisory functions, both occupational and procedural, at least to the same degree as supervisors. This would leave more room for the development of educational and supportive forms of supervision, which provide the most opportunities for developing professional skills and a great extent of opportunities for more efficiently managed exposure to the challenges and risks of the job. Such a modification would also create conditions for the development of effective supervisory support in terms of stress management and prevention of occupational burnout.

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ULOGA SUPERVIZIJSKE PODRŠKE U UPRAVLJANJU STRESOM I PREVENCIJI PROFESIONALNOG SAGORIJAVANJA STRUČNJAKA ZAPOSLENIH U SOCIJALNOJ ZAŠTITI. STUDIJA SLUČAJA: CRNA GORA

Supervizijska podrška prepoznata je kao značajan mehanizam za prepoznavanje čimbenika koji pridonose stresu i potencijalno generiraju uvjete koji pogoduju profesionalnom sagorijevanju stručnjaka koji rade u području socijalne zaštite. U Crnoj Gori praksa provedbe supervizorske podrške nema zapažen kontinuitet već se uvodi kao posljedica reformi sustava socijalne i dječje zaštite koje su se odvijale u posljednjih deset godina. Supervizijska podrška provodi se u centrima za socijalni rad prema zapadnoeuropskom modelu supervizije. Povijest provedbe procesa supervizije obilježena je snažnim naglaskom na administrativnu funkciju u odnosu na funkcije podrške i edukacije. Takav pristup rezultirao je nizom dilema, proturječja i različitih stručnih stajališta među ključnim akterima u procesu supervizije. Ovaj rad ispituje implikacije primjene takvog oblika supervizijskog sustava podrške u području upravljanja stresom i prevencije sagorijevanja među stručnjacima. Istovremeno se propituju organizacijska rješenja koja su nastala kao rezultat odabranog modela supervizije. Ukazujući na sustavne nedostatke, skrećemo pozornost na izazove stresa i izgaranja s kojima se susreću stručnjaci i supervizori socijalnog rada. Naglasak na ulozi supervizije u smanjenju stresa i profesionalnog sagorijevanja omogućuje profiliranje ideje o modificiranju supervizijske podrške u sustavu socijalne zaštite Crne Gore.

Ključne riječi: supervizija; stres; profesionalno sagorijevanje; supervizor.