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## THE ROLE OF SUPERVISION IN PROMOTING QUALITY SERVICES IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK

*Stela MILICENCO*

*Moldova State University*

Supervision in the field of social work represents a relatively new activity in the Republic of Moldova and signifies a modality of professional support offered to the staff in order to ensure the quality of the services provided, as well as to prevent the professional exhaustion of social workers. The concept of supervision is focused on the idea of continuous training, which promotes the professionalization of specialists in the field of social work.

**Keywords:** *supervision, social work, professionalization, qualitative change, volunteering, beneficiary, appreciative methods.*

### ROLUL SUPERVIZĂRII ÎN PROMOVAREA SERVICIILOR DE CALITATE ÎN DOMENIUL ASISTENȚEI SOCIALE

Supervizarea în domeniul asistenței sociale reprezintă o activitate relativ nouă în Republica Moldova și semnifică o modalitate de suport profesional oferit personalului în scopul asigurării calității serviciilor prestate, precum și prevenirii epuizării profesionale a asistenților sociali. Concepția supervizării se axează pe ideea de formare continuă, prin care se promovează profesionalizarea specialiștilor în domeniul asistenței sociale.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *supervizare, asistență socială, profesionalizare, schimbare calitativă, voluntariat, beneficiar, metode apreciative.*

#### Introduction

The history of supervision starts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when in the USA, so-called "friendly visitors" and "paid agents" offered support to charitable organizations in performing services and allocating financial resources. Throughout, the supervision activity has evolved and is currently part of the continuous professional training, on the one hand, and of the control over the practice by the social workers, on the other hand.

The expectations of contemporary society towards the results of the work of the social workers are quite high; however, the high volume of work and the innovations in the system determine the opportunity of professional support, which can be achieved through the supervision activities. In this sense, supervision contributes to the awareness of the objectives of the work carried out, to the extension of the area of professional competences and working methods, to the creation of an innovative dynamic for determining the social workers to raise awareness of their own limits, to offering a greater safety regarding the quality of the social activity. **The purpose** of the present article is to analyze the role of supervision in streamlining social work services in contemporary society.

#### Results and discussions

In the specialized literature several meanings of the term "supervision" are presented. *Generally speaking*, supervision is designated as **an activity that transfers knowledge, skills and attitudes from an experienced person to a less experienced one**. For example, V.Robinson in the paper "*The Dynamics of Supervision under Functional Controls*" (1949) defined supervision as an educational process, whereby a person with skills and knowledge assumes the responsibility of guiding a less skilled person. *With regard to the social work system* we will mention that supervision is considered as **a method of professional support offered to the personnel employed in the social work system, in order to increase its working abilities with the beneficiaries, to ensure the quality and efficiency of the activity and to prevent the professional exhaustion**. For the first time the concept of supervision is used in relation to social work in 1904 by Jeffrey R.Bracket in the work "*Supervision and Education in Charity Work*". As a result of the publication of the work in 1911, the supervision acquired an educational purpose, being offered the first supervisory course by M.Richmond in the USA [1, p.324-336].

Depending on the reference points, three different models of supervision are highlighted:

- **educational supervision**, carried out with the purpose that supervised persons to increase their professional competences;
- **methodological supervision**, oriented towards the beneficiary and aimed at improving the ways of managing a case;
- **managerial supervision**, carried out with the purpose of improving the decision-making skills.

However, regardless of the models mentioned, supervision refers to the analysis process carried out by a supervisor on the practice of a supervised beneficiary, and the objective pursued in this process is greater autonomy of the supervisor in an activity of unquestionable quality. Supervision stimulates professional and personal development and determines the supervisor to reflect on his attitudes, words, perceptions, emotions and actions. It also helps in establishing an appropriate distance to the cases and, therefore, in the more appropriate management of complex situations, favors the integration of experience and theoretical material [2, p.110-114].

In order to validate the theoretical aspects, we conducted five interviews with social workers, who activate in profile institutions. The interviewees have a different stage of professional activity - between 5 and 14 years. Referring to the **perception of the interviewees regarding the significance of supervision in their professional activity**, they mentioned the following: "*Supervision is an absolutely special form of professional intervention*" [I\_AS\_ work stage 7 years]; "*The supervision activity is guided by its own logic*" [I\_AS\_ work stage 14 years]; "*... represents an addition to the already existing forms and well... it does not pretend to be a cure-all*" [I\_AS\_ work stage 5 years].

Since the activities of social workers are extremely varied and complicated, it is necessary for them to possess a special training, a scientific outlook, practical skills to apply the care methodology and be accompanied by a professional supervisor. In the specialized literature (for example: B. Lucaciu and M. Minulescu from Romania), two distinct views are invoked most frequently in terms of supervisory activity:

- *the "pragmatic" vision*, which is based on communication theories and implies an open relationship, in the sense that it concerns observable or aware professional activities by the person who is supervised and supervisor. It starts from several empirical premises, of which we summarize some: the personal development of the employees is interdependent with the development of their professional efficiency; the process of increasing and maintaining professional efficiency is a personalized one; solving the problems within the institution depends on the efficiency in communication, which in turn is related to the private life of the members of the institution; the transmission of professional skills, in particular those of overcoming specific difficulties, has an affective modeling character rather than the transmission of information in a formal context. This approach explains the term of supervision in a broad sense, referring to those who deal with the development of beginner workers. This vision can be effective in situations where the presence of the supervisor does not disrupt the professional process, actions or functions of the supervised person;

- *the "romantic" vision* – represents a concept about a predominantly individual relationship, totally different from its academic aspect. It comes from the religious field and was developed in psychotherapy, especially through its psychodynamic forms in the studies of Sigmund Freud. This involves revealing some "closed" or unconscious aspects of the supervised persons and supervisor's life and even their relationship.

Obviously, for the supervision in the field of social work the "pragmatic" vision is specified.

When we analyze the supervision process, we find that it is a sequence of characteristics that determines **an attitude of the supervisor and the supervised person**. I discussed with the interviewees and obtained the following opinions:

- **Attitude of the supervisor:** "A focus on the process of supervised person" [I\_AS\_ work stage 7 years]; "Openness to everything that is important for the supervised person" [I\_AS\_ work stage 5 years]; "Receptivity and empathy towards the supervised person" [I\_AS\_ work stage 11 years]; "Sympathy, but not compassion" [I\_AS\_ work stage 6 years];

- **Attitude from the supervised person:** "Willingness to reflect on oneself, on the reasons, feelings, actions and positions" [I\_AS\_ work stage 7 years]; "The availability to ask questions" [I\_AS\_ work stage 5 years]; "Courage and desire to go on new paths and to experience them" [I\_AS\_ work stage 6 years].

Not less important are the characteristics of supervision, which are inspired by the **principles** of appreciative social work. Analyzing these principles, we have adapted them to the specifics of the supervision process, as follows:

- *Focusing on experience*: the learning process starts from the experiences of the supervisors and supervised persons about themselves and the world, and the beneficiaries of social services are considered potential sources and creators of knowledge, starting from their experiences in their personal life;
- *Focusing on success*: supervision focuses on ensuring the moments of maximum success and pride from the experience of the supervised persons, considering them as inspiration for future successes, and past successes are made aware, amplified and anticipated in designing future successes;
- *Focusing on the connection between the positive vision and the positive action*: the role of supervision is to create the positive vision (about people, institutions, community, beneficiaries, etc.), or, these are energy resources and at the same time an engine for positive action;
- *Creating a partnership relationship between supervised persons in this process*: this type of relationship stimulates the interaction, participation and positive attitude towards the other participants in the group supervisions, towards the beneficiaries of the services offered by the social workers and towards the supervisor, who is seen as a resource and as a guide that can contribute to maximizing the confidence of the supervised persons in their own experience by creating conditions for enhancing this experience by the other participants in the group;
- *The constructivist principle in supervision* states that in social practice supervision is a construction of all the actors that enter into interaction, being dependent on their knowledge, beliefs, values and ideas;
- *The poetic principle* refers to the permanent constitution and reconstitution of the social practice and the definitions applied to the intervention environment, just as a poem can be interpreted and reinterpreted permanently, so that in each interpretation it offers new meanings. Thus, the intervention environment (and implicitly the style of social practice) changes as the interpretations of this environment change;
- *The principle of anticipation* finds that the images, ideas, hopes of the people about the future guide their behaviors and actions, which lead to the emergence of this future. Positive images related to the future lead to positive actions, and negative images lead to actions, negative, reactive behaviors. Thomas formulates this principle, also known as *creative self-prophecy*: "If people define a situation as real, then this situation *is real* through the consequences of defining it as real";
- *The principle of social projectionism* refers to the fact that reality manifests itself in the form of an *overturned determinism*, that is, there is no cause-effect relationship, but vice versa. Thus, the setting of objectives by the supervisors determines, in fact, the causes that can produce those expected effects; if the supervised person wishes to develop positive behaviors for the beneficiary, then he looks for those causes that can produce the expected effects, involving the beneficiary in the construction and development of that vision [3, p.210-215].

The models and principles of supervision have remained approximately the same from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The supervisor had in his supervision a few supervised persons, the supervision process consisting of periodic individual meetings, the group meetings being applied with certain reservations. C.E. Munson states that the structure of supervision during the course has not changed significantly, only its content has evolved and changed according to the welfare practices [4, p.51-53].

The implementation of the supervision concept in the Republic of Moldova is regulated by the "*Supervision mechanism in social work*", approved by the Order of the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child No.99 from December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008 (*the current name of the Ministry is as follows: Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection*) being envisaged for the Community Social Service Work and for the Home Social Care Service. Nowadays, supervision is performed by the social worker empowered with the responsibility of supervisor and by the head of the respective service, as well as by the head of the home care service. As beneficiaries of the supervision are the integrated community social workers who work within the SASC and the social workers in the SISD, who carry out their activity in accordance with the procedures established by the Supervisory Mechanism. The main elements that define the activity of supervision in the two types of services are related to the establishment and distribution of professional responsibilities in working with the beneficiaries, the systematic monitoring and review of the activity of the supervised persons, evaluating the achievements of supervised persons, providing support in identifying needs and developing staff through training, internal communication within the service and external communication within the administrative territorial structure and community, managing aspects regarding the integrity of the group and reporting of superiors on the concerns of the supervised personnel, management of administrative tasks, as well as ensuring the records of the supervisory meetings and the preparation of reports.

### Conclusions

The research carried out based on the interviews with the social workers and presented in the present article shows that they are aware of the basic idea of supervision: *to offer the opportunity and the possibility of professional development through the autonomous answer to the questions*. Of course, supervision and the way in which it is carried out substantially influences both the supervised person and his entire professional activity. A well-supervised professional as well as a professional supervisor can guide the supervised person in his work and support him in achieving performance.

We will highlight the opinion of the interviewees, who noted that when they need to find solutions to increase the quality of their professional activity, they hope to be able to use periodic information or supervision to help them better understand how to be efficient in carrying out their work tasks in an efficient way for assisted persons. Through these types of supervision, support is provided to reduce stress and increase motivation, to develop effective intervention strategies and to manage resources efficiently.

As long as the need for employee development is taken into account within the organization, the concern for providing quality services to the beneficiaries will also increase. If there is not yet a tradition in the field of supervision in the Republic of Moldova, it is important to promote the following: the supervisor must be a well-trained specialist in the theoretical and practical aspect, as only by combining theory with practice, the ability to navigate the complexity and uniqueness of each supervised case is ensured.

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### Date despre autor:

**Stela MILICENCO**, doctor în sociologie, conferențiar universitar, Facultatea de Psihologie și Științe ale Educației, Sociologie și Asistență Socială, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova.

**E-mail:** s\_milicenco@yahoo.com

**ORCID:** 0000-0001-6996-1182

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