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## SUPERVISION IN FOSTER CARE

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### ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to show the process of supervision as a purposeful, and comprehensive social work in a social service "Foster care". Supervision in foster care is in the process of development in Bulgaria in terms of its legal and institutional framework, models and practices for implementation. The area of investigation are models of supervision in foster care in Bulgaria and other countries. This research draws upon mostly primary sources including review of scientific publications in the study area, analysis of documents from the professional field of social work in foster care, information of social service providers. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with social work providers of "Foster Care" social service. Moreover an electronic questionnaire was developed and was conducted a survey of participants in the process of supervision in foster care, such as supervisors, social workers and clients. As a result of the study were prepared conclusions and recommendations regarding the process of supervision in the providing of social service foster care.

**Key words:** supervisor, supervising, supervision models, professional supervision, supervisor license, standards for supervision

### INTRODUCTION

This report has been written because supervision in social service foster care is a key factor for the successful implementation of the process.

Development of foster care in Bulgaria is an important procedure of strategic planning in social services and is essential for the children welfare [3].

Supervision in foster care is a multilayered process that involves a number of different roles and responsibilities. Key players in this system are supervisors, social workers and clients. Their interactions are determined by the roles they perform, as well as the social and institutional contexts, time frames and physical environment. The general purpose of supervision in foster care is to provide supportive activity that helps better implementation of foster care.

Knowledge and use of modern supervision models in the dynamic system of social affairs is an important prerequisite, not only for the use of variety of methods and integrated approaches, but also for the quality and effectiveness of social services. Modern supervision models can also work on professional development of social workers and their satisfaction of performed professional activity. [2]

Important and extremely difficult task of supervision in foster care is to balance the roles of foster parents and social workers in terms of rights, obligations and empowered positions. The process of foster care defines precisely and distinctly in nature and functionality the roles of foster parents and social workers. However, the majority of foster parents of different nationalities state the necessity for greater equality in the work of social services. The professional approach to foster parenting and mandatory training programs for specific groups of children (with disabilities, challenging behaviour, school problems, addictions, etc.) explains the demand of foster parents for greater

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equality in joint activities with social services. It is noticeable the necessity of existing national and regional database, presenting quantitative and qualitative indicators of the process of supervision in foster care. Following the global and the local trends and taking into consideration social policies, strategies and projects will improve considerably both the process of supervision in foster care and the provision of foster care services.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study originated from a need to underline the significant of supervision in foster care. In the present study were analysed models of supervision in foster care in Bulgaria and other countries. In addition, an electronic questionnaire was developed and conducted a survey of participants in the process of supervision in foster care, such as supervisors, social workers and clients.

In the study were interviewed twelve social workers who received supervision, four social workers and two psychologists who serve as supervisors and six foster families who received supervision.

Social workers and supervisors were interviewed, and all with foster parents completed the electronic survey.

## RESULTS

The current state of social work system in Bulgaria shows that there is no authority to license supervisors in the professional field. On the other hand the legal framework in the country indicates that in most cases social service provider bare responsibility for supervision of foster families. Analysis of the legal framework indicates regulations, ordinances, regulations for implementation and special methods whose purpose is to regulate the entire process of foster care and in particular the commitment under supervision of foster families. According to the methodology of foster care, social service providers, can be representatives of state institutions for social work, also non-governmental organizations, individuals and legal persons registered under the relevant law. Compared to western models indicates that in Bulgaria there are not national minimum standards for supervision in foster care. Experience shows that a few organizations possess such licenses under international partnerships. Supervisor licenses that they issue are an insufficient number and cannot cover

most need of supervision in social activities and in particular foster care. Also lacks public participation by ministries, agencies, departments, which in the process of certification of supervisors, insurance policies, legislation, strategies and project initiatives for international cooperation, to identify supervisory practices as one of the priorities of the welfare state policy and social work practice.

The analysis of the literature, outlined the following points of supervision in foster care:

- Under the definition of supervision in foster care, we came across the view that, this is a process of a formal agreement for meetings between foster caregiver and their allocated support/social worker, in which foster caregivers practice is constructively evaluated and reviewed so that appropriate support can be provided and personal development and learning can take place [5].
- Supervision is a two-way process, involving rights and responsibilities for both supervisors and those they supervise;
- Foster caregiver have a right to regular developmental and monitoring visits (supervision), from a named, allocated supervising support worker, who is appropriately trained and qualified;
- Also, supervision should be planned in advance and promote quality and safe care for the children Who are being looked after, and ensure the necessary safeguards are in place to protect foster parents and their families.
- In addition, main objectives of supervision were marked:
  - To ensure foster carers understand how they contribute to the services objectives for looked after Children. Are they clear about their role and responsibilities and are meeting the standards set for the foster care service? Carers should be encouraged to contribute to the planning for children and young people for whom they are caring, and be given the appropriate support and feedback on their work;
  - To support foster caregiver by providing information and ideas, and developing a suitable climate for exploring new ways of working, thereby enabling carers to cope with difficulties as they arise. If appropriate, to link carers with colleagues or agencies in providing the

widest pool of appropriate knowledge and skills in living with, and working with children's distress;

- To ensure that foster caregiver and their families are able to develop their skills and knowledge by assessing their training needs, and identifying opportunities at regular intervals.

On the other hand, the foster parents have the following rights to supervision:

- Be treated in an anti-discriminatory way;
- Clear supervision arrangements and a supervisor who is well prepared and negotiate a supervisory contact;
- Supervision from a named, appropriately trained and qualified social worker/support worker;
- Know what is expected of them and to whom they are accountable;
- Be informed of sources of information and advice, which relates to their work;
- Be clear about the role and responsibilities of their supervising social worker;
- Know who will offer consultation and advice in the supervisor's absence;
- Have experience and contribution acknowledged;
- See and agree their record of supervision, and be given a copy;
- Be briefed about agency changes;
- Be informed of sources and support for foster caregiver and availability when experiencing stress or difficulties;
- Participate in problem solving, not just be told what to do;
- The acknowledgment that sometimes the work they are involved in is of a very difficult nature, and when this is the case and there are organizational and resource constraints, inadequate service delivery is not a personal failure;
- Be given honest feedback, including recognition of good work and where there needs to be some improvement in practice, some suggestions and methods of achieving this;
- Have the stressful nature of their role acknowledged;
- Well thought support for all members of their family;
- Support for personal development, training and networking;
- Acknowledgment and action when necessary, where race, class, sexual

orientation, gender and other differences affect the supervisory relationship and the power differences which come from these;

- Expect that the Fostering Service will monitor and regularly audit all supervision practice.

Supervision in foster care monitor and ensure the rights of foster parents. Implements this function it the following parameters:

- Attend regularly and come prepared with an agenda reflecting their own needs for supervision;
- Accept the mandate to be supervised;
- Ensure adequate time is allocated to meetings and interruptions are kept to a minimum;
- Observe any agreed practical arrangements;
- Be open to all opportunities for learning;
- Understand their respective roles within the department's setting;
- Promote the best interests of the child or young person they are caring for;
- Seek and use guidance and knowledge;
- Aim to meet agency, legal, ethical and professional standards;
- Be open and share information;
- Be clear and honest in seeking assistance;
- Give honest feedback to the supervisor, both positive and negative about work related issues and own performance regarding the child or young person they are looking after;
- Raise experiences of oppressive behaviour directed towards themselves, child in placement or others, and seek ways of addressing any difficulties.

Supervisors' rights in relation to supervision. Supervisors have a right to:

- Receive regular high quality supervision themselves to ensure that consistency between the work of the foster caregiver and the goals of the organization are met;
- Have the appropriate training and support to enable them to offer good quality supervision;
- Be treated in an anti-discriminatory manner;
- Have experience and contribution acknowledged;
- Advice and support in the event of there being difficulties in meeting foster caregivers' rights to supervision.

Supervisors have a responsibility to:

- Ensure that supervision promotes anti-discriminatory practice;
- Prepare well for supervision meetings, with a clear agenda;
- Ensure supervision is based on a negotiated agreement that both supervisors and foster caregivers have a copy; Give adequate time to supervision, and only cancel agreed appointments when really necessary;
- Promote competent, accountable, and empowered practice within the supervisory relationship;
- Have a clear understanding of how adults learn;
- Identify learning needs and agree together how these will be met; Discuss personal issues where these may impact on the tasks involved in being a foster caregiver;
- Monitor and be aware of stress levels the foster caregiver is signalling;
- Record each supervision meeting with foster caregivers on the service's supervision preform, and ensure foster caregiver agree with their comments, and receive their own copy prior to their next supervision meeting.

The analysis showed that the supervision in foster care has parameters associated mainly with the rights, duties and positions of the actors involved, namely supervisors and supervised foster parents.

Semi-structured interview questions were focused in the areas of knowledge and skills to conduct supervision. About knowledge, social workers responded to questions such as: "Do you understand the purpose of supervision ?"; "Are you well grounded in the limitations of supervision ?"; "Do you know the elements of management, training and support?"; "Do you know the different types of supervisor contracts?"; "Regarding the skills of conducting supervision are asked questions like: "Can you explain the purpose of supervising supervision ?"; "Can you reach a mutually acceptable , coherent, clear contract to supervise?"; "Can you establish and maintain boundaries in relationships in the process of supervision?"; "Can you keep a balance between leadership , training and support functions of supervision?"; "Can you bring to the end and purpose to run the sessions?"

The results show that all social workers are aware of the purpose of supervision. With regard to restrictions on supervising, most respondents

support this principle, a small part of the opinion of the need for greater flexibility in supervising. Most of the respondents are informed for the element of support in supervision, while a small part recognize the elements of training and management. These elements associated more with the structure of social service in which they work. For most participants is missing an information of the different types of contracts supervisor.

In the area of skills for supervising the following responses were received.

More respondents believe that they have the ability to explain the purposes of supervision. With respect to the correctness of negotiation, most respondents believed they managed to fulfil this purpose. A small part share slight fluctuations, which attach to the specifics of the cases. Most respondents are able to maintain professional boundaries, and successfully completed sessions. Availability of information for the element of support for supervision, and lack of information about element management and training, clearly directed to answer that ability to balance between these three elements is missing.

In summary it can be said that there is a need for more information to supervisors of the various elements of supervision and supervisor types of contracts.

Electronic survey with social workers, supervisors and clients was a main issue, namely the necessary and the benefits of supervision.

All participants agreed that the process of supervision is needed and brings great contributions for all participants in the process of social work. The replies indicate trends in the establishment of supervision as part of a system of social activities and in particular foster care. This determines the need of development and updating of supervision in foster care.

## DISCUSSION

The main concern of the paper was to show the effectiveness of supervision of social workers depend on compliance with certain fundamental requirements. A set of principles of supervision are to ensure its optimal functioning. They mainly affect the technological side of the supervision and offer certain rules of procedure. For example, the organization of the process of supervision related principles of contractual approach, system, order, regularity of supervision sessions, observations, reports.

Another set of principles governing the relationship between supervisors and social workers. Some principles in supervision affect its content and quality and thus are directed to transfer the results of its implementation in practical activities of people who are supervised [1].

Posts that foster parents expressed for supervision in foster care. Those who have been in the past year on our yearly meeting of foster families, noted with pleasure that the emotional reserves obtained on the supervisory meetings in 2012 lasted for a long time. Therefore, they are looking forward to 2013 meeting of foster families.

Why the supervisory meeting? Why not training? The difference is that no one is supervision trains and teaches. Here, each using the capabilities and resources of the group and supervisors - professional psychologists, get help, advice, and support. And yet, supervision - help in understanding their resources of their own strengths, opening up new opportunities [8].

## CONCLUSION

From the research that has been done, it is possible to conclude that:

- Supervised process should pay particular attention to promoting the rights of children in foster care. Practice shows that often parents are given more rights at the expense of children;
- Approach to administrative supervision should increase its sensitivity, promote, facilitation and mediation of the competent authorities, whose main function is to compile documented and clearly defines the rights and responsibilities of children in foster care, foster parents and their families, as well as biological the child's family;
- Moreover, particular attention should be given to the approach to the planning, preparation and execution of the placement of children in foster care, and their return to their biological families or other forms of care;
- Another important task of supervision in foster care is to support the process of evaluation of the child and the foster parents and referencing the characteristics and needs of the child and its potential sets of parents, the accommodation must prepare and carry out a detailed and thorough; The aim is to minimize unsuccessful placements and frequent crossings of child care from

one type to another or from one foster family to another, which will lead to a reduction in adverse effects on children's development;

- Supervision in foster care must monitor and guide to the placement of the child / children as much as possible close to their family, to facilitate contact with the child's family and maintaining a social network child;
- Every child in foster care must have their own individual plan accounts for changes in response to the specific needs of that child. In addition to professionals (case management teams and institutions / departments) the process of creating an individual plan should include the child (taking into account his age and ability to understand the circumstances), as well as the child's parents (advocates, foster parents, other members of the host family), others support the child, and other professionals in the provision of specialized services;
- It is important to monitor and take into account the nature and quality of contact with the biological family foster child and his foster parents. In order to prepare the child to return to the birth family is required simultaneously with his or her foster families and biological child;
- It is required a systematic work to promote / encourage foster care and providing supportive" infrastructure "throughout the country, including urban and rural areas in order to provide regional coverage and opportunities for foster parents and children from different regions in terms contact with family (they often have low incomes and are unable to cover travel costs to visit the host family).

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