Towards a Model of Supervision in Social Work Institutions in the N-E Region of Romania

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Abstract: Supervision in social work is an activity that contributes to the continuing professional development of practitioners, helping them to improve the reflection on their own practice. Research aims to identify the particularities of the social construction of supervision in the N - E area of Romania. As far as the professionalization of supervision is concerned, two broad directions coexist: the first and most widespread is the introduction of supervision in the professional body of social work, being an integral part of the profession, and the second direction leading to a specific professionalization, distinct of the supervisor, starting from initial training and experience in social assistance, to which, however, specific distinct training of a trans-disciplinary bill must be added. There is a partial confusion between the supervisor's functions and those of the manager, given by the overlap of roles. There were power disparities between the two, given the nature of the supervisor's administrative role.

Keywords: *supervision; social work; managerial position; administrative supervision; supportive supervision..*

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Introduction

Supervision is found in the practice of all social-work professions, such as psychotherapy, coaching, personal development, counselling, etc., being considered an almost compulsory stage for professional training of specialists.

The term *supervision* in social work is understood as an activity to contribute to the continuous professional development of social practitioners, helping practitioners to improve their "reflection skills" and translate the social theory (Ponea, 2009) in effective care practice. Bernard and Goodyear (1998) also consider supervising as an intervention provided by a person with more professional experience, aiming at transferring knowledge to a less experienced person (Unguru & Sandu, 2017). This paper aims to identify the social construction's particularities (Sandu & Unguru, 2017) of social services supervision. The research context refers to the particularities of the practice of supervision in public / private child protection institutions in the N - E area of Romania.

Literature review

The purpose of supervision is correlated with institutional practice, but it also includes the need to ensure the quality of social services (Nistor, 2018).

A first approach places the supervised's personal and professional development (skills, knowledge) under the responsibility of the supervisor (Frunză, 2011, 2017, 2018). The supervisor's work tasks include assessing training needs of the supervised person, directing the practice to areas of success, building the interest and professional motivation of the supervised person (Marc, Makai-Dimeny, & Oşvat, 2014), assessing the signs of professional stress dissatisfaction, including the burn-out syndrome (Division of Behavioral Health Services, 2008).

Within the tasks related to the supervised' professional training, the supervisor has the task of appreciating and assessing the supervised person's professional competences and to create a strategy to streamline his / her practice. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to identify those aspects of the practice that need to be improved by the supervised person and to direct it through the appropriate steps to remedy them (Austin & Hopkins, 2004). In this capacity, the supervisor carries out the evaluation of the professional competences, the process of self-awareness of the supervised person and his

support in the construction of his / her own autonomy (Hair, 2013; Hung, Ng, & Fung, 2010; Unguru & Sandu, 2018).

In an extensive literature review by O'Donoghue and Tsui (2015), it appears that up to the level of 2010, there was a relatively small number of researches (36) dealing with the issue of supervising social services, including extensive theoretical analyses by Bogo and McKnight (2005), Harkness and Poertner (1989) and Tsui (1997a, 1997b, 2004), all of which show the lack of specialized literature.

The results of Turner-Daly and Jack's (2017) research show that despite the existence of well-established policies on the supervision of social services, effective practice differs greatly, being influenced by the personality of the supervisors and the specifics of the organizations. Supervision sessions are mainly conducted with reference to case management, eluding other educational functions and supportive supervisors (Muntean, 2007). These issues are what makes a large number of supervised social assistants declare themselves unhappy with the practice of supervision, and only a quarter of those questioned declare themselves to be content (Unguru & Sandu, 2017).

In the literature, a special emphasis is on the supervisor's special role in improving the supervised's professional practice (Berger & Mizrahi, 2001; Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Vito, 2015), in addressing supervised cases - especially difficult ones - and facilitating professional reflections on identified solutions, building a set of good practice standards, and monitoring / self-monitoring tools for their implementation (Unguru & Sandu, 2018).

Within the administrative-managerial dimension, supervision practice includes the facilitation of members' adherence to the organization's internal values and its accreditation standards and requirements (Frunză, 2017). It is up to supervisors to monitor the adequacy of the practitioners' practice to the expectations of the organization and to facilitate their understanding of the essential concepts underpinning professional practice (O'Donoghue, Ju, & Tsui, 2018; Unguru & Sandu, 2018).

The supervision of respecting professional ethics includes the monitoring of the legal, ethical and cultural aspects that define the specifics of the intervention (Caras & Sandu, 2014; Frunză, 2017; Sandu et al., 2010). Supervisors are called upon to ensure compliance with the organization's legal and ethical requirements of cultural values as well as any other constitutive or operational values appearing in the organizational culture of the service provider for whom the social worker is working (Noble & Irwin, 2009; Unguru & Sandu, 2018).

The supervisor is usually a member of the administrative staff of the organization, delegated to supervise, coordinate and assess the workplace performance of the social workers (Bourn & Hafford-Letchfield, 2014).

The Functions of Supervision

Starting from Kadushin (2014), three main functions of supervision can be identified: support, administrative and educational. Supportive supervision aims at increasing work satisfaction for professionals, creating and maintaining harmonious employment relationships (Kadushin, 2014), the administrative one aims at implementing the organization's policies and procedures, the compliance of practices with pre-established standards and the provision of social services, and the educational one is centered on increasing the competences and abilities (Kadushin, 2014), and the internalization by the social workers of the values of the organization (Frunză, 2017; Unguru & Sandu, 2017, 2018).

Habermas (2015) introduces a special form of action, distinct from the social one, namely the communicative action. If social action is result-oriented, communicative action is oriented towards normative construction by ensuring consensus. The practice of social assistance, through its purpose, can be considered a social action (Smarandache & Vlăduțescu, 2014). As the social integration of beneficiaries and their proper social functioning are being pursued, supervision is a form of communicative action because it seeks to strike a balance in practice between the interests of the social work beneficiary, the agency offering services and the social system the beneficiary is a part of, by directing the intervention so that these interests are harmonized.

The Games of Supervision

Starting from Berne's transactional analysis (2003, 2016), Alfred Kadushin (1968) and Lillian Hawthorne (1975) developed "supervisory games", examining various situations that may occur between the supervisor and the supervised, depending on the states of the Ego and the balance of symbolic power that appears between the two. In general, supervisors tend to act in the supervision process as they themselves in turn have received supervision, if it was constructive or placed on an opposite communicational model (Manole, 2018), if the supervisory process in which they themselves were involved was ineffective or considered a professional stress generator (Delano & Shah, 2011).

Supervisory games start from transactions that occur in the supervisor and supervised relationships when either party wishes to impose its point of view using various power or seduction strategies. Power Strategies aim to create and deepen the power asymmetry based on hierarchical position, experience, age, etc., respectively rejecting power disparity by statements such as: Person X can not be a supervisor, because I have a greater experience in the organization; I do not accept a supervisor who does not have the same religious beliefs as myself.

The seductive strategies aim at transforming the supervisor into a close friend of the supervised person, regardless of the party initiating this approach, replacing the supervision relationship with a protective mentoring, and generally abandoning at least one of the supervisory functions, so that side of the process that suits both parties, ensuring the convenience of communication, to be partly explored.

For Kadushin (1968), supervisory games are initiated by the supervised person, targeting the supervisor, aiming to make him feel undermined by authority, give up his own authority in favor of better communication, and stimulate his desire to be liked.

Among Kadushin's (1968) supervisory games we exemplify:

- *Carpet Bombing* - this "game", called by us *the repositioning*, places the supervisor in a position to deal with inappropriate practices or errors in the procedures on which the activity is carried out, being either obliged to repair the situation or to follow a sinuous learning-sanction route to the social assistant, which defends itself based on the lack of procedures, or lack of knowledge on the procedures;

- *The Safety was just a Mirage* - the game called by us *Atmosphere Creation*: In this "game", the supervisor is drawn into the trap of constantly creating a comfortable working atmosphere for the supervised person, thus avoiding consistent discussions on possible errors or the need to improve practice or certain services;

- *The Million Dollar Idea* - called by us *the focus on the idea*: This game aims to move the focus of the discourse from potential inefficiencies to the successful elements and achievements, shaking the weak points of the organization (Kadushin, 1968).

Supervision in Social Work in Romania

The national supervisory standards established by Order no. 288/2006 of the Ministry of Labour stipulate the obligation for the provider of services in the sphere of family and child protection to permanently

dispose of an efficient system of human resources supervision, which should result in the fact that the managers and the case managers will always benefit from the supervision provided by trained and experienced specialists, which allows the legislator to see the optimal functioning of social services (Unguru & Sandu, 2017). A limitation of these standards can be considered as a frequent confusion of organizational control with supervision, which leads to the oversimplification of the administrative and supervisory function of supervising to the detriment of educational and support and a relative rejection of supervision by professionals (Unguru & Sandu, 2017).

In parallel with the acquisition of the theoretical and methodological knowledge necessary for professional supervision, supervisors must also learn a series of practical skills, including: the ability to establish the expected objectives and results, to ensure the necessary conditions for conducting supervision, to build the supervision relationship, to apply the ethical norms specific to the individual and group supervision relationship, to negotiate relations with the representatives of the partner organizations in accordance with the ethical norms of the supervision, to draft supervision contracts, observing the ethical norms of the individual and group supervision, analyse, establish and evaluate the generators and dynamics of a conflict, select the right technique for each situation, etc. (FONPC, 2017; Unguru & Sandu, 2018).

An analysis by Patricia-Luciana Runcan, Cosmin Goian and Laurențiu Țîru in 2012, starting from the perceptions of the social assistants on supervision, highlights four dimensions of the supervision process, the professional one in which it is seen as part of the integration process and professional development, supportive, formative and last but not least, control. According to the results obtained by the authors at the level of 2012, the most accepted side of the supervision was the educational one, while the control side was the least appreciated. A total of 94.5% of respondents understood the importance of supervision in professional development, which is consistent with the opinion expressed in the literature (Voicu, 2018). More than 50% of respondents see the supervisor as a trainer (Runcan, Goian, & Țîru, 2012).

Another research conducted by Adriana Florentina Călăuz and Patricia Luciana Runcan in 2011 focuses on the educational function of supervision and the formative role of the supervisor. The formative function is to facilitate the learning process and to create the learning climate in the organization (Călăuz & Runcan, 2011).

Two-component ethics supervision: the ethics of the supervision process itself and the supervision of ethics in the organization. Ethics

supervision in organizations includes an analysis of how various ethical dilemmas, such as the beneficiary's right to privacy, are balanced with the importance of transparency in the provision of social services (Frunză & Sandu, 2018; Huidu, 2018a).

Methodological design

The objectives pursued in the research are:

O1. Identifying the meanings that professionals - supervisors perform to their own activities, as well as the meanings assigned to supervision by the supervised social workers.

O2. Elaborating a theoretical model regarding the contexts and processes of social construction of supervision practice in public / private child protection institutions in the N - E area of Romania.

This research is based on the Grounded Theory method, which is a process of progressive identification and generation of the semantic categories resulting from the direct analysis of field data, as well as the process of aggregating them into a theory. The purpose of the data-based theory is to generate an interpretative model on a social phenomenon, analyzing the interpretative adrift of the main concepts (Huidu, 2018b), such as leadership, mentoring and communication.

Data Collection & Coding

The open coding stage is performed simultaneously with the data collection (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans & Blinkhorn, 2011). The data collection was simultaneous with the transcription of semi-structured interviews and their primary analysis, identifying the predominant orientations of the interviewees' discourses by applying a series of "labels" to the different fragments of the respective speeches, followed by a first grouping of the labels according to the module in which the analysed fragments converge discursively. The initial encoding process is a line-by-line reading of interview transcripts, accompanied by annotations in the form of memos (Gibbs, 2013). This line-by-line reading of interview transcripts provided gaining familiarity with the respondent's discursive universe.

In the open encoding stage, situated still at an empirical level, being in the phase of generating ideas with a high degree of generality, it was sought the identification of concepts and connections between them, which do not come directly from the collected data, being the results of the generalizations of the constructive processes identified (Sandu, 2018).

In the elaboration of the present paper, a number of 29 semi-structured interviews were applied, out of which 13 interviews were applied to the supervisors and 16 to the supervised persons, the interviews being applied until the saturation of the model was achieved.

As new interviews were coded, the supervision model was outlined as a paradigm of social assistance supervision in the N-E area of Romania (Suceava, Botosani, Bacau, Neamt, Iasi, Vaslui). The 13 supervisors and the 16 supervised persons interviewed are people working in public institutions (the Community Assistance Directorate, the General Directorate for Social Work and Child Protection), as well as within three private organizations. They have an experience of between 10 and 25 years as social assistants and between 3 and 10 years as supervisors, respectively. Supervised people have an experience of between 1 and 22 years as social assistants.

The Interview Guide for supervisors contains 49 items with open or semi-open questions that address the following constructive dimensions of supervision: *Thematic Axis 1*: Experience as a supervisor. Description of professional practice / specific of practice; *Thematic axis 2*: The significance of the subject of his / her professional practice; *Thematic axis 3*: Relationship with supervised social workers; *Thematic axis 4*: Relationship between the supervisor and the institutions involved in the social assistance system; *Thematic axis 5*: Significance of responsibility and autonomy.

The Interview Guide for supervised persons contains 40 items with open or semi-open questions, that address the following constructive dimensions of supervision: *Thematic Axis 1*: Experience as Supervisor; *Thematic axis 2*: Meaning given by the supervised person to his / her relationship with the supervisor; *Thematic axis 3*: Relationship with the supervisor; *Thematic axis 4*: The importance of supervision in the case management.

Results analysis

Open coding process. Primary Data Analysis

In the open encoding process, the following discursive categories were identified:

Category I - Operational definition of the supervision term

As an operational definition, interviewees consider supervision as a process in which a range of mutual assistance activities between professionals takes place, based on professional equality and collegiality. The supervising process has the role of increasing the professional resources of

the social worker, especially the beginner (SR01). Another operational definition of supervision is: the process by which two professionals in the field of social assistance evolve, through communication based on sincerity and trust, referring to the professional situations that appear in the supervised activity, usually a person with less experience than the supervisor (SR03). Last but not least, supervision is understood as an art that combines management elements with professional and formative ones. Supervision depends on the personal and professional quality of the supervisor, his willingness to share with colleagues his or her own experience (SR04).

Category II - Functions of Supervision

The interviewees identify two functions of supervision, support and education, later on introducing the administrative function in the speech. These three functions are covariant with those described in the literature (Cojocaru, 2005; Kadushin, 2014). As regards the motivation of the functional classification of supervision, this is given - in terms of the support function – by the need for human support that the supervised person feels, and which allows him to improve his/her professional development. The educational function is understood in a paternalistic manner, as the transfer of competences through a lead-and-mentoring process (nn), from a professional with experience to a new professional, a rich volume of theoretical knowledge, but very few practical skills and abilities. The management function is correlated with the free practice of the social assistant profession and can be extrapolated because the references are made to the administrative side of the functioning of social services (SR01) (by SR we mean *supervisor*; by ST we mean *social worker under supervision*).

The formative dimension of supervision also includes the professional competence assessor side, which the supervisor assumes, as well as of personal and professional development counsellor (SR01). Another important function of supervision is professional counselling, based on the sharing of expertise to which experienced social workers have reached (Frunză & Sandu, 2018). The professional autonomy experienced by experienced social workers has come to be discussed, which allows them to practice their profession without having to use the suggestions of another professional who plays the role of supervisor, and which puts them in a position of themselves providing such advice to early-stage social workers or organizations that request it (SR02). Starting from the interviewees' answers, we have regrouped the functions of supervision into two general axes, namely the administrative management and control dimension, and the educational-supportive dimension. As regards the mentor function as a

component part of the educational function, it consists in the integration of the new employees in the organization when trained on the mission, vision, and ethical functioning code of the organization (SR03).

MEMO: *The training of new employees on mission, values, ethical code, etc., is indeed the educational-formative function of supervision, but is not convergent with the current definition of mentoring, which seeks long-lasting collaboration between the young and the experienced professional.*

A particular emphasis is placed on the mentor dimension, which is based on the development of an informal relationship, with common competences being used to develop the services provided, including by developing collaborative creativity in working out new working methods (SR01). This mentor function is specific to the context of supervision in the studied region, being the result of a game of supervising normalization of the relationship of power between the supervisor manager and the subordinated supervised.

Category III - Types of supervision

There are two types of supervision, internal and external, each with its advantages and disadvantages. For internal supervision, the identified benefits are related to the on-going collaboration between the supervisor and the supervised, while specialized supervision is provided in external supervision, depending on the organizational issues (SR01, SR02, SR06).

As for the difference between internal and external supervision, this is seen as a vision, as one person in the organization proves a higher degree of empathy towards colleagues, while an external supervisor may have a different perspective, precisely because of the emotional distance from the problem. Both internal and external supervisions are seen as complementary rather than disjoint (SR03).

MEMO: *Unfortunately, the interviewed person, although being a social worker with more than 15 years of experience in the field, supports - in our opinion - the support activities provided to some social work institutions with the actual supervision ones. The fact that it mentions the carrying out of social investigations and the subsequent elaboration of the respective social surveys based on the model, represents an interpenetration between the social worker's professional activity, which provides expertise in the elaboration of documents, social surveys, etc., and the supervisor who, together with the social worker, analyses certain issues from its relationship with the beneficiary ("and punctually, he asks me how to highlight*

certain aspects" (SR01)). Practically, from the analysed answer, we notice the cumulating of supervision with other services, either directly to the beneficiaries on behalf of the institution, or with services consultancy and expertise in institutional development.

External supervision is considered desirable in order to avoid the interference from the management of the organization, and to establish a balance of power between the supervisor and the supervised. The supervisor-supervised relationship is when the internal supervisor overlaps with the manager (SR02), the preference for external supervision being a game of supervision aimed at eliminating the power disparity in the organization by outsourcing supervision.

As regards external supervision, this is also seen as an apprenticeship process, the interviewee proudly showing that three of the previously supervised young social assistants have joined other agencies, where they have been performing competence with positive assessments from the employer (SR01).

Also within the formative skills, there are emphasized the abilities of trainer and mentor. A significant emphasis is placed on the subjective perception of the supervised - supervisor relationship, if the emphasis falls on the formative and support function and the managerial and control function, respectively. In order to develop the supervision relationship on the mentoring dimension, the supervisor must understand the benefits of participating in the supervision process. The relationship created between the supervisor and the supervised, when the supervisory process is maximally effective and based on an informal relationship of collaboration, can turn into professional friendship and can last long after the formal relationship has ceased (SR01, SR02, SR06). The persons interviewed as supervisors are seen as team leader (SR03).

Category IV - Need for supervision

The quality of the social work act is directly correlated with that of the supervision of the social worker (SR02). Attention is drawn to a process of decentralization and contracting of social worker's services, which the interviewee sees as generating the need for changes in the social workers' teams involved in childcare, the role of the supervisor being that of team leader, around which the team of specialists (SR04) is organized.

MEMO: *The leadership role of a team of professionals, of team-leader, has not been identified in our documentation as described in the literature. This could be a contribution to redefining the functions of supervision.*

A good supervision is considered a prerequisite for the success of the practice of social work. The fact that the supervisor has benefited from good supervision is considered a professional achievement, being a starting point in his / her own efforts, finding the optimal solution for the clients' problems, possible conflicts, etc. (SR02).

Category V - Duties of the supervisor

The supervisor - experienced social worker - performs a transfer of competencies to less-experienced social worker colleagues in identifying the problem situation, observing and referring the case to the institutions involved, and the risk factors on the beneficiary's situation. The formative dimension is considered central by the interviewee, being somewhat understood as synonymous with the very concept of supervision. Learning is seen as a transfer of experience and skills that are being developed to enhance the quality of social services provided (SR01, SR02, SR03, SR04, SR08).

MEMO: *We again notice the interference between the expertise provided by the interviewee as a social assistant with his experience and role as external supervisor for social workers in a rural community.*

The supervisor carries out a series of documents necessary for the accreditation of the service, from the rules of internal order to intervention procedures, etc. In our opinion, the role of the supervisor would be to review these documents together with the social worker, but as stated above, the service contract includes both direct, consultancy or supervisory services (SR02; SR03 SR04; SR08). The supervisor's duties are seen in the spectrum of coordination, guidance and control, being practically a management-level function. However, in the description of the supervisor's team-sheet, the interviewee indicates that he / she actually carries out social work activities, such as meeting with clients, home visits, including unscheduled ones, and drafting current materials in the activity of social workers (SR02).

MEMO: *There is a bureaucratic side of supervision, which we deduce from the care of organizing the supervision session in terms of time, location, subjects, etc.*

Another task the supervisors interviewed illustrate is the coordination of the assessment of training needs of social workers in public or private institutions (SR04).

The interviewee shows that he attaches particular importance to supervision because, according to national case management standards, service plans also mention the supervisor with whom the case manager collaborates. The importance of the supervisor is correlated with the need for a multidisciplinary team (SR01).

The paternalist side of his vision is emphasized, on the duties he has as a supervisor, comparing it with the situation where a child remains without a legal representative and it is necessary to attribute parental responsibility to a third person. Although traditionally the apprenticeship relationship is seen in a paternalistic manner as a professional fellowship, modern education systems emphasize the development of the professional autonomy of the professional in training (SR01).

MEMO: *The formative dimension of supervision is convergent with the literature that describes the professional training function of supervising (Kadushin, 2014; O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2015; O'Donoghue, Ju, & Tsui, 2018).*

The activity of supervision is described by the evaluation-administrative dimension, the supervisor analysing the fulfilment of the proposed performance indicators as well as the projective indicator, the supervisor setting new indicators and planning new professional activities based on the performed evaluation (SR04).

Category VI - The Institutional Dimension of Supervision Practice

As for institutional collaboration, it should be based on un-tensioned relationships or amicable resolution of any tensions that may arise. The facilitation of the professional relationship of social workers in an agency with those of other agencies or even other officials is a task of the supervisor, which he can exercise for the benefit of both the supervised person and the beneficiary, but also the social services agency (SR01; SR03; SR04; SR10). As a center supervisor, the person interviewed is the one responsible for the relationship with the other institutions, being at the same time a contact person and a person in charge of the Center's activity (SR03).

MEMO: *We identify a formal overlapping of managerial and supervisory skills, including by transferring the tasks of representing the organization to the supervisor.*

"I have a good relationship with the institutions, with the private ones, with the NGOs and with the public institutions in the field of social assistance. We have a collaborative relationship with the training centres of civil servants, with the DAC when they need training and when we need training. In the same way with employees from the private system, from NGOs, they come to us in terms of monthly training, social workers, psychologists, and at the same time they respond to our invitations "(SR04).

Category VII - Ethical Values in the Practice of Supervision

The relationship of supervision is of mutual trust, based on emotional support and appreciation of the supervisor's positive outcomes (SR01). Trust is built over time by respecting the responsibilities of both the supervisor and the supervised, through respect and consideration that professionals address each other (SR01; SR02; SR03; SR06; SR13).

A particular mention refers to the professional autonomy of the social worker, which is dependent on the knowledge of the legislation and the intervention methodology, as well as the professional competencies and limits (SR03).

Category VIII – The working day of a supervisor

In terms of day-to-day activities, these are described as being related to teamwork, with the supervisor operating as a team leader. The activity starts with a working session, during which the results of the activity are analysed and documents elaborated to certify the activity performed and / or to prepare the work to be carried out (SR04, SR09).

MEMO: *While document preparation seems to be common to supervisors interviewed, it is more specific to professional team management than to professional supervision of social work.*

"In the morning we have a working session, and then, including when we are doing classes, I greet my colleagues, we open an official course, we issue diplomas, documents for the courses that have taken place. We prepare the necessity papers as to what we need as a centre, sign diplomas, sign them, bring them, record them, archive them "(SR04).

Category IX - Supervisory Meeting. Methodological Aspects

Regarding the supervisory meeting, it is regularly held in the form of a formal meeting, established long before - one year for the SR03 and SR04 interviewees -, but urgent, informal, unplanned meetings may also arise, whose agenda can be discussed on that day, these unannounced meetings being usually correlated with normative or functional changes, the need to organize events, the occurrence of additional activities, etc. (SR01; SR03; SR05; SR08; SR10).

Attention is drawn to the fact that in certain situations, which he personally experienced during his career as social worker, the supervisory session can turn into one of assessment and control, especially when the managerial function overlaps with the one of supervisor. This situation can inoculate fear to the supervised social worker, this state being considered unnecessary and even detrimental to the relationship of supervision. On the contrary, it insists on the role of psychological support the supervisor has to give to the supervised person (SR01). The role of psychological support assigned to the supervisor is to normalize the power relationship between the two parties in the sense that the supervisor tries to take the supervisor as an ally, and he feels comfortable in the position of strong ally.

Category X - Subjective meaning given to practice

The supervisor experience is considered a challenge and at the same time a duty of an experienced social worker to form and support younger colleagues (SR01). The interviewee emphasizes the educational side of the supervision process, seen as a professional relationship between an experienced social worker and a debutant social worker, which excludes, in our opinion, the entire area of competence of the supervisor. The interviewee considers that personal success for a supervisor is the professional position of the supervisor. It also emphasizes the role of continuous communication between supervisor and supervised who, even after the end of professional supervision, can continue in the form of a professional fellowship and collegiality (SR02, SR03, SR07).

As far as a case solved is concerned, it is defined as a situation in which the beneficiary overcomes his existential condition - it reaches a higher stage of his existence - but also the social assistant progresses through the effort he endures in working with the beneficiary. The evolution of both parties, the social worker and the beneficiary are the premises of a successfully resolved case (SR03).

The supervisors are perceived as being loaded with responsibility due to the expectations of the supervised people, which makes them refine themselves in finding creative solutions and, ultimately, in professional development (SR03).

"First of all, it is a great responsibility, because generally, when you are a supervisor, the others' expectations are very high, and then I force myself somehow to be constantly informing myself, to perfect myself in always finding solutions, so somehow this role forces me to evolve. At the same time, as a supervisor, I think it also means being a balanced man, so in turn to inspire balance" (SR03).

The supervisor is aware of the overlap of roles between manager and supervisor, trying to distinguish between them, explaining that as a manager, he is required to be more rigid and strict, while as a supervisor he expects a closer, supportive attitude to the supervised person. The interviewee shows that supervisors understand the requirements of both roles and accept their double quality (SR03).

Category XI - Meaning of the term "professional"

The term professional is linked to the person's involvement and dedication towards the profession. The good professional is the one who knows how to react - professionally - in every situation. Professionalism means self-giving just when the person needs, dedication and empathy, especially in crisis situations (SR01).

Responsibility is the central element of the definition of *good professional*. In the understanding of professionalism, the values and the legislation in force, as well as the harmonization of the interests of the beneficiaries with those of the institution (SR01, SR02, SR04, SR09), are considered.

Professionalism is defined as a mix of qualities that brings together professional skills with experience, but it exceeds them by adhering to the general human values beyond the professional ethical values. Human quality is a component part of the professional value, the interviewee considering that the two cannot be separated because the first one puts its mark on the practice through the collaboration that the individual carries out with the beneficiaries and the other professionals (SR03, SR04).

Category XII – The Supervisor – Supervised Relationship

The supervisor is considered to be permanently at the disposal of the supervised person when he/she needs to solve a case. The interviewee

emphasizes his willingness to work with the supervisor at any time, including off-hours, and professional availability is an indispensable component of the supervisor's professional profile in social work (SR01; SR03; SR10).

As regards the supervised - supervisor relationship, it is considered effective when it is matched by a personal human relationship, when a trust relationship is built up, which extends until the supervised shares the problems he faces in the field (SR01). Personalizing the relationship as a "game of supervision" transfers the emphasis from the analysis of the social worker's activity to the camaraderie between the supervisor and the supervised, which secures the two against the disagreements arising in the professional relations.

MEMO: *The exposition of the supervised's problems that arise in its social practice is the central element of any supervisory relationship, since the role of the supervisor, as seen in the literature mentioned in the theoretical exposition of this paper, is precisely to facilitate the professional reflection of the social worker to their own cases. Through the human dimension, the interviewee evokes precisely the empathic nature of the supervision relationship.*

Supervision does not only concern the professional development, but also the supervisor's personal one. The interviewee focuses on creating opportunities for the supervisor to benefit from his personal and professional development (SR01; ST01).

The relationship of supervision is one of professional co-operation, in order to fulfil the tasks of the team (SR04). An interesting aspect concerns the type of supervised professionals, they may be social assistants, but also psychologists, sociologists or members of other professions, but who have tasks in the sphere of social work (SR03). In practice, it is not the initial training of the supervised professional that matters, but the professional duties assigned to him in the performance of his duties. This is in contradiction with other models of supervision, such as those in New Zealand (Morrison, 1993; Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2016), Canada (Bourque et al., 2010), UK (GSCC, 2008; BASW, 2011), United States of America (NASW, 2013), Singapore (Ang, 1987) and South Africa (Republic of South Africa Government, 1978).

The expectations that supervisors have are to be involved in an effective communication relationship, based on the balancing of the chief-subordinate symbolic power, when this relationship arises, with a relationship of collegiality, friendship and confidentiality, in order to be able

to consult and guide. Most often, supervision is seen as a hierarchical sub-master relationship but is based on an efficient collaboration (ST02; ST03; ST04; ST05; ST06; ST07; ST10; ST11; ST12; ST13; ST14; ST15; ST16).

Supervisor support is important from the point of view of professional solidarity and the construction of the social worker identity, the confirmation of the performance and efficiency of the practice that the social worker carries out (ST02, ST03, ST06, ST09).

Another feature of the relationship between supervised and supervisor is its continuity (ST08).

Category XIII - Access to the profession of supervisor

In terms of access to the profession, this is based on the accumulated professional experience, being seen as a career advancement (SR01, SR03, SR04). Professional training in social work is a necessity for the access to the profession of supervisor, but continuing vocational training through other levels of specialization (masters, doctorates, postdoctoral studies) can be an advantage for good practice in the field of supervision. It shows the importance of experience in accessing the supervisor's attributions, showing that the social work studies he has carried out have been matched by outstanding professional experience and expertise (SR04).

MEMO: *The majority of interviewees show the importance of experience in becoming a supervisor, which is convergent with the literature specifically consulted in the Australian, Canadian, British, and so on, standards of supervision.*

Category XIV - Quality of Supervision

As regards the quality of supervision, this is linked to the existence of rigorous standards and the precise objectives that social workers assume in practice. Practice standards facilitate the supervision process, which can focus precisely on clear, accurate objectives and the identification of practical solutions for every situation that social workers can face in practice. Mutual respect between the supervisor and the supervised is also underpinned by quality supervision practice (SR02, SR03, SR09, SR12).

An anti-theoretical approach can be observed in the interviewees' discourse, saying they pay maximum attention to social practice, and supervision is seen as a very practical field. Nevertheless, the interviewee formulates questions about the significance of the quality of practice, trying to set quality standards according to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries (SR03).

MEMO: *Although it is an indisputable relationship between the satisfaction of the beneficiaries and the perception of the quality of the practice, in the field of social services the satisfaction of the beneficiaries cannot be the only measure of the quality of the social services or of the professional supervision, since due to the vulnerability of the majority of the beneficiaries, they might not value the work of the social worker in terms of social services, the beneficiary preferring to receive benefits in the form of income, allowances etc.*

The quality of the services is linked to the timely identification of problems, both with supervised colleagues and the supervisor itself, the solution being able to allocate additional time to supervised persons, leading to team welding. The interviewed supervisor reports that it took time - for supervising sessions, not only individual but also group ones - in which to analyse the positive and negative aspects of the professional activity. The interviewee mentions the use of personal development techniques that, although not strictly related to problem solving, have contributed to changing the organizational climate and ultimately to the success of supervisory work (SR03).

Category XVI - Experience as supervised

Supervisors have benefited from supervision / are still supervised. One of the supervised persons regrets that the period of external supervision was relatively short, but considers it to be of highly professional and personal development at all levels (SR02, SR05).

Category XVIII - Supervision as an act of communication

As a communicative action, supervision seeks to achieve consensus on the meaning of assistive practice and on the concrete ways of exercising social action in favour of the beneficiaries. It turns out that the supervision process helps the supervisor gain confidence in his / her own skills, and then, when he has encountered similar cases, he knew how to handle those situations. In our opinion, balancing the report between the supervisor and the supervised can be translated through a "I am not ok, you're ok" supervisor game - the supervisor as a mentor. This game integrates into the educational function of supervision, and the normalization of the power relationship is achieved through a process of *empowerment* and transfer of competences from supervisor to the supervised. The game is positive, making the supervision relationship effective and lasting (SR08).

It appears that a good relationship between the supervisor and the supervised person leads to the accuracy of the information, since a friendly

relationship is preferable to an authority. As a game of supervision, we identify a relation of the type of authority transfer through a non-formal relationship that can turn into a deviation from the supervision process and focus on task. The focus on tasks is replaced by focusing on the relationship, in the context of transforming the relationship into a friendly one. When this game is initiated by the supervisor, it has the role of reducing the pressure that social workers can be subjected to during supervision sessions, due to the role asymmetry from the supervisor (SR06).

"It is more than indicated to have a good relationship with those you supervise, for the accuracy of the relationship information. It is one thing to talk about a problem like a buddy, and another is when you speak at the level of boss or authority "(SR06).

MEMO: *There is a concern about humanizing and personalizing the supervision relationship.*

For the smooth running of a supervision meeting, the supervisor prepares the topics beforehand, and allocates the time needed for the discussion of cases. The term *supervision* is considered inappropriate, since communication takes place in a unitary group, which is considered to be "of friends". Again, this is a power game that tends to replace the professional power relationships that are specific to supervision with those of peer-friendship, being a "I'm not ok, you're okay" type of transaction. Transforming supervision into a peer group meeting may be important in terms of reducing power gaps and professional stress, as long as it remains within the limits of group supervision, the roles of supervisor and supervisor remain clear and obvious. Managing these roles through status confusion can lead to process inefficiency when both focus on the supervisor's personal problems, and not on the supervised cases (SR06).

"First of all I'm preparing my topics, what I want to talk about. For us, in general terms, supervision is improper because we have a very close relationship within the team and these things, and the information I need, I collect in time. Usually Friday we don't work with the public, parents, beneficiaries, just because there is a huge volume of documents that we have to do, and we also have to discuss some cases, or more complicated cases, and so we make a brainstorming." (SR06).

MEMO: *Considering the term supervision to be improper when working in united collectives, we can assume that it is attributed to a sense of power relationship with a connotation of authority.*

MEMO: *The need to formalize supervision in social work is expressed.*

Regarding the actual performance of the individual supervision process, it is preceded by an analysis of the social worker's activity, including by observing his behaviour in the case. The effective establishment of the time of the supervision session is carried out by mutual agreement between the supervisor and the supervised, in such a way that the supervision relationship is not confused by any party with a strict assessment and control, even if these dimensions are present in the supervision process (SR13).

Some interviewees consider the supervision process to be a punitive measure. Controls performed by Social Inspectorates or other control units aimed at sanctioning social workers or social service providers, rather than external supervision, ending with guidance and training actions (SR06; SR13). In order to create working conditions favourable to the development of the teams, emphasis is placed on the specifics of the communication, which must be assertive and constructive and that increase the mutual trust. In the process of confinement, it is considered essential to maintain confidentiality and transparency in the supervised-supervisor relationship. Mistrust and ineffective communication are disturbing factors of communication in the supervision process (SR07, SR08, SR10, SR12).

A second great dimension of communication is internal communication. In this dimension of communicative action, the supervisor is a *gatekeeper* (Frunză, 2017) between the client, the social worker and the organization (ST08). The particular form of supervision generated by the internal communication is internal supervision.

Category XXI - Content of the supervision

As regards the supervision relationship, it is planned annually concerning the supervisor and the content of the activity of supervision. The aim of supervision is to increase the efficiency of the social worker's activity, and in order to achieve this goal, monthly meetings are planned based on case-based supervision, but also discussing the problems and difficulties faced by the social worker, planning the training of social workers and informational and emotional support that social workers receive from the supervisor (SR01).

"In principle we have monthly meetings where we discuss the essential cases or those we encounter in daily work and, at the same time, we have training sessions that can lead us to make our work more efficient. So everything is planned

annually on supervision sessions, who is my supervisor, in which situations I can reach to him "(ST01).

Another specific dimension of supervision, which is related to the administrative function of supervision, is the monitoring (ST05; ST06; ST16) of the on-going cases.

In case supervision, the social worker reviews together with the supervisor the issues of working cases - poverty, abuse, violence etc. - identifying together the best methods of intervention, building together with the supervisor the short, medium and long term objectives and personalized service plan, which is then assumed by the social worker. A mention in this respect is that in the general theory of casework, when establishing the personalized service plan, the beneficiary should be involved wherever possible, which does not contradict the interviewer's assertion that the service plan should be discussed with the supervisor. In our opinion, the discussion with the supervisor should precede the proposal of the plan to the beneficiary, the latter being entitled to formulate an informed consent to its own social situation and the interventions that apply to it (ST08; ST09; ST10; ST11; ST12; ST14; ST15).

There are situations where social workers, without actually declaring themselves dissatisfied with the content of the supervision, treat it elusively, showing that in fact there are team meetings and that is, which makes us believe that the interviewees are not satisfied with the results of their activity supervision and / or a formal activity (ST03). The content of the supervision combines, in the opinion of the interviewees, the control with the scientific support and guidance, including through collaboration with external supervisors - experts in various areas of social work - emotional support and guidance in practice (ST08). The joint efforts between the social worker and the supervisor are emphasized for the correct observance of the case management stages, in this respect the supervisor has the competence to assess the observance of the methodology, as well as the training of the social assistants from the point of view of the legal norms in force in the field (ST02; ST13).

Category XXII - Good Practices in Supervision - Perspective of the Persons Supervised

The characteristics of an ideal supervisor, as seen by the supervised social worker, are empathy, experience, objectivity, realism, calm, but the supervisor also having the ability to express authority, being a reliable and

trustworthy person willing to provide support, the ability to be involved and engage and motivate employees (ST01).

A good supervisor is considered to have a vast professional experience, empathetic capacity, based on experience, but also on theoretical and practical knowledge, communication and active listening skills that show responsibility, self-control and involvement (ST02; ST03; ST04; ST05; ST06; ST07; ST08; ST09; ST10; ST11; ST12; ST13; ST14; ST15; ST16).

Axial coding

From the partial analysis of the responses made in the selective coding stage, starting from the constant presence in the interviewees' discourse, we identified a number of categories with axial value:

1) **Confusion of roles between supervision and management:** most interviewees overlap the managerial duties, of head of service, centre coordinator, free practice practitioner - consultant for public institutions - with supervision for subordinated social workers.

2) **Supervisor as a team leader:** although this is not a discursive constant, this category appears additional to the functions of supervision described in international literature, but converging with the functional overlap between supervision and management.

3) **The bureaucratic perspective on supervision:** supervision in Romania has a bureaucratic side, the supervisor having the role of completing documents both after the supervised sessions organized, also in a formal bureaucratic manner, and by co-opting the supervisor as an expert in the process of accrediting services and assessing the quality of social services.

4) **Expert supervisor:** Supervisors identify themselves as professional experts, generally with extensive professional experience and specialized studies, willing to transfer from their own experiences and skills to the training social workers.

5) **Paternalist supervision:** The interviewed supervisors have a master-apprentice relationship with supervised persons, showing a paternalistic attitude towards supervision.

6) **Supervision as a process or as a technique:** supervision is often seen as a formative technique of skills transfer, support or providing support, but in the discourse of the interviewees there is no reference to supervision as a process of co-building the professional becoming, both of the supervised person and the supervisor, both in their ultimate capacity as social workers.

7) **Supervisor as a mentor:** Among the duties assigned to the supervisor, there are those of being mentors for the young professionals and the newly formed teams.

8) **Supervision as an apprenticeship relationship:** Supervision is seen as necessary first and foremost for the profession and less experienced social workers. This approach runs counter to the supervision models described in the literature, as being applied in countries such as Singapore, USA, Australia, Great Britain, Canada. This approach may be due to the emphasis placed on the formative dimension of supervision, less correlated with supportive and ethical considerations.

9) **Supervision as a Relationship of Power:** There are two dominant positions of the supervisor in terms of power relations, that of the control exercising factor and the facilitator of the balance of power in the organization. In order to be a facilitator of the subjective power balance in an organization, the supervisor should be a person other than the manager, and act from a position of equality of power over him.

10) **Supervision of professional ethics:** it is neglected in professional practice, although it is present in the theoretical models, in the professional ones described in the literature of other countries, as well as in the occupational standard in Romania.

11) **Prevalence of Group and Individual Supervision:** Due to the administrative managerial nature of supervision, it is generally provided in the form of a group supervision meeting, which in fact is a meeting organized by the supervisor manager with the whole department or organization, where administrative issues or assessments of the progress of various cases are discussed.

12) **Internal and external supervision are complementary and not disjointed:** while the internal supervisor is more familiar with problems and more easily develops a relationship of empathy with the supervised persons, the external supervisor, due to emotional distancing, can look at the problematic situations that occurred in the organization from a different perspective, usually more efficient.

13) **The types of supervision:** administrative, managerial, formative and supportive, derive from supervision functions and the supervisor's role in the organization.

14) **Professional autonomy:** an autonomous professional is the one who knows when, where and up to where to act, how to act, why he/she should act or not, the limits of its action, and the persons or institutes to which it is required to practice his/her profession.

Selective coding. The model of supervision based on public management theory

In the selective coding stage we have retained key elements of the model, the operational definition of the supervision and, respectively, the supervision functions, along with the particularities of the model in the N-E of Romania.

The situations in which the social construction of the professional activity of social work supervision takes place are represented by the specific normative framework, the models of the assistance practice with which the social workers operate, and within which the supervision process takes place, the institutional pressure on the practice and its adaptation to the needs of the beneficiaries. Speeches on supervision practice are configured as a result of power balancing games, especially when overlapping roles between management and supervision. The specificity of social work in Romania lies in the fact that this profession reappeared after 1990, and it was non-existent during the communist period. In this context, social work has developed on two main directions, namely social benefits provided to people in difficulty in the form of pensions, subsidies, aids, minimum guaranteed income, etc. and specialized social or residential services (Law 292 / 2011).

Most of the work of social workers, at least those in rural areas, takes place in the field of social benefits. There is a shortage of qualified human resource (Buzducea, 2018), which sometimes causes the work of social workers to be overloaded and for this reason, bureaucratised. In the case of social services, the obligation to license them and the imposition of supervision as a licensing criterion makes it formally that all public or private organizations wishing to access public funds also carry out social service supervision. Licensing is not mandatory for those private organizations that do not want to access public funds, in most cases non-licensed organizations do not include professional supervision due to its costs.

Licensing standards and generally the regulatory framework in place impose the obligation on the manager to provide supervisors with social supervision, without the overlapping of manager-supervisor roles. The existence of a supervisor's special position involves a number of costs, which makes the majority of managers to assign themselves these tasks, or to reach to external supervisors that are more financially profitable than hiring an internal supervisor. Another specific aspect of the Romanian assistential practice is that it did not go through all stages of the development of social work from the medical one, based on the psychoanalytic model, going through the Rogersian humanist one, but it went directly to the specificity of

social work based on the model of total quality management (Dominelli, 1997) and that of the new public management (Androniceanu, 2007; Pollitt, 2007).

The public discourse on social work states that it is generally costly, and professionals in the field have a relatively uncertain professional status, but the prestige of the profession is growing. In this context, the supervision discourse will often place emphasis on quality management, but also on service efficiency, compliance with cost standards. If supervision as devised by Kadushin (1968) was based on the medical model of social work, discussing parallel processes in supervision, which itself was thought of as a symmetrical methodology and mirroring that of case-work counsellors, the approach identified both with supervisors and supervised, emphasizes the responsibility of the sponsor in the context of a "therapeutic" alliance with the supervisor for the benefit of the beneficiaries. From the discourse, references to the beneficiary as an agent of change are omitted, the role of agent of change being transferred to the social worker.

The process of symmetrisation of the relationship between the social worker and the supervisor makes him co-responsible for the success of case management. The Kadushin (1968) supervision games, derived from the medical model, aimed at avoiding transfer and counter-transfer, while the supervision games identified in interviewees aimed at diminishing power disparities between the supervisor and supervised by discursive drift from administrative to managerial dimension and of control, towards the supportive-formatting one also through transformation of the hierarchical relationship into a symmetrical relation of camaraderie and collegiality.

The operational definition of supervision: supervision is a professional relationship defined as a process of mutual aid between professionals, usually one with extensive professional experience, acting as supervisor and the other supervised - with less experience, usually in training, relationship based on equality, as well as mutual learning, mutual help, collegiality and respect, in which management, human resources, training (and mentoring), administrative and evaluative elements intervene.

The functions of supervision: these are the formative function, the administrative function, the supportive function and the managerial function, each generating a type of supervision. The model convergent with the international one complements the supervisor's team-leader function, distinct from the manager.

Supervision as a non-funded form: being substituted by the managerial, formative, administrative-bureaucratic, middle management or team-leading component, all - except for leadership - are in part dimensions

of supervision, but lacking consistency and functional unity makes supervision a distinct attribution of each of its components to include, but to distinguish itself in the work of the professional in social services.

Conclusions

The normative-institutional frameworks for the functioning of social work supervision are relatively uniform throughout the world, reflecting the evolution of the social worker profession. As far as the professionalization of supervision is concerned, two broad directions coexist: the first, the most widespread, is the introduction of supervision in the professional body of social work, being an integral part of the profession, and the second direction leading to a distinct professionalization of the supervisor, starting from initial training and experience in social work, to which, however, specific distinct training of a trans-disciplinary nature must be added.

The specific Romanian frameworks aim at a distinct professionalization of the supervisor as an expert with a wide range of competences, both professional, in the field of social work, as well as in related fields such as sociology, law and education sciences.

Regarding the particularities of the model, it is based on four supervisory functions: administrative, formative, supportive and managerial, which generates as many types of supervision. To these types, which are described in the literature, we add supervision as leadership, the supervisor also having the role of team-leader.

There is a partial confusion between the supervisor's functions and those of the manager, given by the overlapping of roles, although the operational definition of supervision includes in principle the functional equality between supervisor and supervised, discursive strategies being infused by power disparities between the two components of the supervision relationship, given the nature of the supervisor's administrative role and his/her extensive experience.

Practitioners in their turn generally perceive supervision as a component of managerial activity, either top or line. Managerial activity is partly overlapped with supervision, either for reasons of efficiency or cost, or the desire of some supervisors to maintain control over social workers' activities.

We further formulate a series of conclusions that can be taken as hypotheses for future confirmatory research: The supervision of social services in Romania is overlapped with the exercise of managerial and control function, managers being generally those who assume the role of

supervisor. The overlapping of roles between managerial and supervision generates a preponderance of the administrative and control function, from the formative and the support ones. Supervision is generally perceived by social workers to be important for the development of human resources in the field. In the supervision process, the relationship of power between supervisor and supervised is balanced by mutual trust.

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