

ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTING COMMUNITY-LEVEL CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Preliminary Note

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Summary

Reasons for writing and research problem: The purpose of this paper is to show the situation of child protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina most objectively.

Aims of the paper (scientific and/or social): The paper is articulated around specific area of interest which includes the systems in place for the delivery of child protection services, related policies and frameworks, child protection education and resources management; data from research of the child protection workforce key skills, knowledge, and interests.

Methodology / Design: We were used: semi-structured and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Field research was done in the period from July to October 2015 in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar in total, 3 focus groups were organized (1 with students of social work at MA level, 1 with managers/ trainers and 1 with child protection practitioners).

Research / paper limitation: Three limitations have been identified in terms of this study. The first limitation is related to the complexity of the system as it is set up in B&H. In addition, the collected data were not collected in an adequate, representative sample. Data were collected during one round of interviews and focus groups with respondents who take up different positions in the system

Results / Findings: Findings from the paper will provide a basic analysis of the education and training context in which child protection practices are delivered in Bosnia and Herzegovina and try to identify needs and opportunities for further professional development, training, and/or capacity building to strengthen the child protection workforce in the Bosnia and Herzegovina

General conclusion: The results may provide significant insight into processes related to development of the child protection systems in the Bosnia and Herzegovina standardisation of services and quality control mechanisms in terms of human resources development.

Research / paper validity: The results should allow a critical analysis of the needs and gaps to be addressed in order to offer appropriate support to professionals from different fields and disciplines in improving the quality of child protection interventions and response.

Keywords

child protection, practice, community oriented, expert providers

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show the analysis of the situation of child protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). Authors used it to work in details the system of service provision of child protection, measures, services and rights that children realize in the child protection system, the expert providers of child protection system, education of experts, education of service providers of child protection and their perfecting, the conditions in which the services are provided. Research in this paper aims to provide an overview of the existing professional, paraprofessional, and community-level child protection practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results should allow a critical analysis of the needs and gaps to be addressed in order to offer appropriate support to professionals from different fields and disciplines in improving the quality of child protection interventions and response. A review encompasses many relevant formal and informal documents, reports and analyses dealing with social inclusion, status of children and families and analyses of the functioning of centres for social welfare and other institutions and services in the social welfare system.

Findings from the paper will provide a basic analysis of the education and training context in which child protection practices are delivered in Bosnia and Herzegovina and try to identify needs and opportunities for further professional development, training, and/or capacity building to strengthen the child protection workforce in the Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In this paper, we were used semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The focus groups and interviews were created based on the protocol identified by the national researcher (Đurić., 2007). All respondents filled out a uniform questionnaire with demographic data, while questions from specific areas were specifically designed for the respondents, as well as interpersonal and group dynamic. The questions asked included general issues related to social work and child protection, issues related to curricula for acquiring formal and informal professional education, issues related to practical work, research and policy, as well as knowledge and skills related to use of information technologies (IT) in learning.

The data were collected by authors. The respondents were happy to take part in the research, showed an interest in the researched topic and the need to have their voice heard. All respondents received full information on the purpose of the research, as evidence that they had been informed and accepted to take part in the research. For the purpose of further analysis, transcripts of focus group discussions and interviews were produced.

Field research was done in the period from July to October 2015 in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar. These are three major cities located in different parts of B&H. In total, 3 focus groups were organized (1 with students of social work at MA level, 1 with managers/ trainers and 1 with child protection practitioners). Two of the focus groups had 7 participants, while one had 5 participants. All focus groups also took part in an effort to reach group consensus regarding knowledge and skills needed for the experts working in the area of child protection (Đurić., 2007). Participants were instructed to list each of them 3 to 5 items under knowledge or skills which they believe are required for work in the area of child protection.

Their responses were collated, sorted during the group discussion and followed by a debate on ten most important qualities. After reaching agreement regarding ten (10) of the most important qualities, the participants discussed the order of importance of these qualities until reaching consensus. This was followed by 8 interviews: 2 with academics/ trainers, 2 with managers of the child protection services and 4 with child protection practitioners/professionals.

The interviews also included a case study (as a practical example that the social worker had in his/ her work experience). To protect the privacy of the respondents, their names were crypted by allocating letters FG (for each focus group participant) or/and for an interview, followed by letter M or F as a marker (mark their sex), Pr (for practitioners), EDU for trainers/managers, St (for social work students), and P for professionals working on child protection (in that case, numbers 1 to 4 were assigned marking the number of the working group) followed by number of respondent.

The participants were selected from the three selected cities, based on their position in the child protection system. The selection was started based on the initial insight into their work and experience, which was carried out by national researcher.

Thus, through respondent driven sampling, i.e. chain sampling method, adequate sample was created reflecting the diversity of positions in the B&H system of child protection. A total of 19 respondents participated in the focus groups (9 women and 10 men), while the interviewed respondents included 6 women and 2 men. The age groups of respondents had relatively equal distribution, which was to be expected in view of the fact that they were selected for the research based on their positions and experience. At times it was difficult to identify their roles, since a number of them who are currently in management positions also perceive themselves and also work as trainers.

Majority of respondents identified themselves as social workers (13 or 48% with 7 social work undergraduate students, which is a total of 20 or 74%), psychologists (5 or 18 %), with lawyers and economists equally represented (1 or 4 %). In terms of the respondents' organisations, the largest number them came from the Centres for social work (13 or 48%), while 12 respondents (44%) came from academic/research institutions.

Accordingly, respondents hold the following positions in the system: case workers (10 or 37%), managers (6 or 22%), and academics and students (11 or 41%). Looking at the work experience of the respondents, case workers' years of service range from 3 to 25 (12.6 in average), among the trainers (academic and non-academic) it ranges from 6 to 23 (12.5 in average).

Thematic sections (Đurić, 2007) for interviews and focus groups were organised around the following areas: A. Overview of the social work in BH by public in general, clients and other professionals; B. Understanding child protection; C. Training of professionals in child protection; D. Knowledge about research and impact; E. Knowledge about policy and impact F. Types of skill and key skills required for practical work in child protection

In the process of data analysis, the following themes were identified: Understanding the social work and child protection; Training, training needs and licensing of professionals in the area of

child protection; Knowledge about research and impact; Types of skill and practical key skills; Obstacles to high-quality practice in the area of child protection

2. Understanding the social work and child protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Majority of respondents, participants in the focus groups and interviews have stressed that perception of general public (citizens) regarding social work is mostly negative and based on incomplete and incorrect information and assumptions. General public is not adequately informed on the situation in the social protection system, nor sufficiently sensitised regarding issues tackled by the social protection system. It also lacks information on the activities undertaken in the area of social protection and social work.

The social protection and Centres for social work in B&H, as well as social protection institutions with public authorisations, are perceived as institutions engaged in payment of social benefits, which disregards the area of family, legal and child protection as well as many other services provided to beneficiaries in the area of social protection .

FG EDU - F1: “General public does not understand that social work is a very demanding and responsible profession. I think that majority of population does not even know that getting your rights and protection of the most children from so-called risk groups, e.g. children without parent care or adequate parent care, children who are victims of domestic violence, children with developmental difficulties, and so on.”

Unfortunately, the general public currently do not view social work as a responsible, humane calling, but for the most part view it as something negative, as a profession which is equal to any civil servant job, bureaucratic and insensitive of client's needs. The public perception regarding social work is not proportionate to the quality of this profession and one can freely say that public perception degrades the social work perception and diminishes its importance. The centres for social work in B&H do not have sufficient numbers of expert – professional staff. This is primarily reflected in such a way that majority of professions, such as logopedists, psychologists and pedagogists are little represented in the centres for social work. The exception to this are the bigger centres such as the ones in Sarajevo, Mostar, Trebinje, Dobož and Banja Luka, but these centres do not have staff levels sufficient to respond, in line with the law, to the real needs of the beneficiaries. In general, the community does not recognise the importance of the social work and as is obvious from the situation in the field, in terms of certain organisations such as enterprises, public institutions, schools and institutions, these have no or have insufficient number of social workers, because they do not recognise all the issues that professionals from this field are able to tackle..

FGPr-M2: Social work as profession and career is not popular in B&H. Other professions do not respect the social work profession. The public also does not respect the social work, because of the permeating opinion that social work is something that anyone can do, that it is rather a humanitarian activity than a profession. The importance of social work is almost not existent at all in the government framework. Social work as a scientific

discipline is not suitably developed and there is no sufficient investment into scientific work in the area of social work, to contribute to development of science and enable improved service provision to final beneficiaries, i.e. the citizens. Strong social policy is a reflection of a strong state. Investing into social policy and development of its instruments, such as social work, is a way to build a stable state.

FG EDU – F4: “Social work as an expert profile, in general, in B&H has been marginalised and is perceived as such by both general public and other expert profiles, and society at large”.

The social protection system is viewed through the prism of social assistance – focus is placed on the material benefits provided to socially vulnerable citizens in our society. (Feldman, 2010), (Gilbert et al, 2011). There are often such views which deem that the social work profession is to be held accountable for certain difficult cases covered widely by the media (McArthur and Thomson, 2012). Opinions are formed even before the entire background and details of a case are known. In terms of serious cases of domestic violence and other problems, centres for social work are most frequently identified in public for failing to respond to a case, which is not the case with police, judiciary and other institutions. The number of citizens per social worker is several times greater than what is prescribed by the EU standards. This means that staff in the centres for social work in B&H are overburdened and cannot adequately respond to daily requirements of their jobs. In addition to regular, primary set of tasks, the staff often also has to carry out other expert and professional tasks which are under the scope of other professions and administration; at the same time, in some centres for social work, there are too many people employed on administrative and logistical posts (secretaries, drivers, cleaners, typists/administration and others) if compared to the number of employed experts. Social workers are responsible for such situation, since they are not doing enough to affirm their profession, protect their expert profiles and promote quality and reputation of their profession. There is no association of social workers at the national or entity level, which could among other things contribute to protecting and strengthening this profession and raise its profile, as part of an overall effort to bring about some improvements in this regard.

FG EDU – M1: “The public, both the expert public in the area of humanities and general public, deem that social work is a profession which deals only with social benefits and welfare.”

The social work profession is not sufficiently popularised. For the most part, younger part of the population is more familiar with this profession than the older citizens. Centres for social work are still viewed by citizens as “social” institutions and the institution itself is stigmatised or it is perceived that ‘to have a problem’ is even a bigger problem and that one is better not to talk about it, rather than to seek help. In addition, due to the lack of knowledge about the social work, there is also widespread view among the general public that social work is a privileged type of profession. Views of the young people who might be interested in this profession are unfortunately shaped by the US movies, so that a large number of them are unaware of the importance, complexity and beauty of the social work in practice.

FG EDU – M2: “Looking at the social card in B&H for a long number of years, we can say that we are at the very end of the line of countries in the region, and wider, in terms of the social protection in general.”

Unfortunately, the general public in B&H does not understand how demanding and responsible the social worker profession is. Majority of population appears not to know that the rights and protection of the majority of children from so-called risk groups, such as for example children with parenting care, depend on the expertise and knowledge of the social workers, in particular those working in the social protection institutions. Majority of the users are not satisfied with the social work services they receive, not due to lack of expertise on the part of the social workers but rather due to the lack of finances available to the social protection institutions; majority of the users is mostly after different types of financial aid. Child protection in B&H is not in line with international legal standards. Geographical discrimination is present throughout B&H in terms of protection of families with children, especially in FB&H where this type of protection is regulated at the cantonal and often at municipal level. Particularly vulnerable are children without adequate care, children victims of domestic and social violence, children with invalidity and children from minority groups, such as Roma

If certain population categories receive certain material benefits, it is more likely that they will be satisfied, despite the fact that benefits are quite low and not sufficient to provide for a normal life. The opinions of other population categories also depend on the assistance they have received. In general, we are an unsatisfied society, very often we hear and listen only to criticism in the area of social work profession, whereby the citizens are expressing their frustrations with regards to the assistance available... but the real question is whether this is real dissatisfaction, i.e. are the social workers doing their job badly and provide little services to the citizens?

Maybe it is not possible to solve the problems easily and those who expect others to solve their problems, without them doing themselves.

One is under impression that B&H society is chronically depressed and unsatisfied. Very often we hear only criticism about the social work profession. Citizens often express their frustrations regarding the assistance they receive, but the question is whether this is the real dissatisfaction? Are the social workers really bad in their job, do they provide a small number of services to citizens, are the real problems of citizens that difficult and impossible to solve or the citizens expect others to resolve their problems without doing anything themselves?

FG EDU – M2: “There are different views among the beneficiaries. Some of the beneficiaries do not make a distinction between the government and state social service and nongovernmental organisations providing free social services. Some beneficiaries have clear perception but are forced to beneficiaries of the services for clear and well known reasons. Mostly they are thinking that the situation in the country is very bad and they blame the previous authorities and current economic situation for their current problems.” In terms of the most vulnerable group, i.e. children, it is thought that in B&H they are left to the “merciless streets”.

FG EDU – M2: “I have been an activist at the „Budućnost“ youth centre since 1996, and I am well familiar with the post war situation we had at that time and where we stand at the moment in terms of child protection. Many laws and charters have been adopted, but that is useless if it is not implemented, if we do not all uphold it in our struggle for children’s rights and protection. Many institutions are set up only on paper, some are used only to employ supporters of political parties and give them salaries. There are very few institutions that are operating in a fair way in B&H and try to achieve a better standard and protection of child rights.”

If you look at the legislation, which says that unemployed mothers have the right to financial compensation, and in some parts of the country they do not receive it, despite the difficult images we see in the streets daily, begging or work and failure to implement protection measures for years, then you can with certainty describe child protection situation in B&H, in particular if you add to that a large number of unregistered children who are unable to exercise even their basic human rights (health protection, education).

FG EDU – F3: “Institutional and systematic protection of children in B&H is almost non-existent. There is no clear child protection policy in B&H, no adequate legal framework that would guarantee for each child equal access to exercising the basic child rights throughout B&H and their protection. Institutions in charge of child protection are not adequately equipped in terms of staff, resources and equipment. When creating and allocating budget funds, child protection is an imaginary category, something which is seen as a cost, not an investment.”

The child protection system is reduced to individual interventions of its participants – there is no competent body which would (at local or higher level) bring together representatives of public institutions and nongovernmental organisations engaged in child protection (health care centres, centres for care of children/ schools, universities, centres for social work, ministries of health, labour and social policy, NGOs focused on supporting children, law enforcement bodies and media). The existence of such body(ies) would mean that social protection system is in place. Although, in theory we have the rights in line with the Convention on the rights of child and government legislation, child protection is insufficient, incomprehensive, participation of children almost non-existent, and if it is there then it is only formal – in particular when it comes to divorce which fail to pay sufficient attention to the interest of children. Children are almost never given a chance to address the competent authorities with regards to questions which are important to them or to appeal against what is happening to them. Due to all of the above, almost all children’s rights are currently being violated and the protection is often reduced do good (or ill) will of individuals in position to either resolve a certain problem or make decisions on the child’s best interest. Child protection concept is often not perceived as protection and exercising of the right, but only for the purpose of providing physical protection which disregards all other aspects also important for child development.

FG EDU – F5: “I think that children are not sufficiently protected in our society. Violence is considered as a legitimate upbringing tool and this has been transferred from genera-

tion to generation. We need to work more on strengthening the capacities of parents and providing systematic support and assistance to parents to raise their children. We do not have sufficient number of upbringing institutions for children.”

Finally, we can conclude that findings from focus groups and interviews indicate a very low level of child protection and children’s rights in B&H. General attitude in terms of child protection is very poor. The law requires each child to receive social benefits, in Sarajevo this amounts to 30 - 38 KM to increased benefits paid to children which ranges approximately from 49 or 50 KM, whereby in Livno it does not exist nor in the Western Herzegovina Canton and in Zenica-Doboj Canton it amounts to 10 KM. What kind of right protection is that and how can someone with 10 KM per month, take care of a child in particular in a situation where people with several children are unemployed and have 5-6 children and live off the children benefit payments, i.e. off 60, 120 or 200 KM.

3. Training, training needs and licensing experts in child protection

Majority of respondents noted that their bachelor studies have provided a good basis for their further progress and learning. According to respondents, practical skills and techniques have become stressed during the practical work. Majority of respondents believes that all persons in public sector do have formal education acquired through their studies at the undergraduate level. In addition, majority of experts are actively engaged in training and additional learning programmes. There is an increase in number of experts specialising and training in advisory services or therapy.

Prior to starting to work, each expert has to acquire university diploma – the undergraduate studies. Social workers are educated at the Faculty of Political Science, Department for Social Work. University graduates in pedagogy, psychology, etc. come from the Faculty of Philosophy.

FG EDU – F5: I think that faculties should be more innovative in their work and apply interactive approach in courses and teaching, focus more on research and development of creativity in future experts. Professionals are educated in public and private universities, at graduate and postgraduate level of studies. This is by large theoretical type of training and learning, with little or no opportunities to test it in practice during the studies. NGOs also provide different types of training, majority of which is specialised for modern topics or schools for therapists, which professionals could attend, provided they pay tuition.

EDU – F1: Curricula for social work studies in B&H, the same as in other countries of the region, is designed by Faculties. That means that if the social work department is a part of the Law School then law is given advantage over the so-called expert courses. Key problem in education is inadequate practical education and unresolved issues between the Faculties and institutions where students obtain practical education. However, I think that at the end the students are provided with a very solid basis, and continuous, life-long education, is an integral part of any good profession.

Challenges related to education of professionals are related to three issues: scarce and at times outdated information on the latest approaches and methodologies related to child protection; lack of motivation for additional learning, in particular after getting a “permanent” job; lack of good practices which would increase motivation and serve as an example different from the usual practice.

FGPr-M2: I believe that these are Faculties of Humanities, primarily Faculties of social work, social pedagogy and psychology. Faculty curricula are not aligned with the practice, i.e. the real needs of these professions. The curricula are full of traditional learning and knowledge checks are based on theory, there is no in-depth learning, problem solving nor practical tests. I think that candidates who complete the studies in line with such curricula are not competent to apply theory and practice.

In addition, personal financial situation is sometimes an obstacle for investing into knowledge and increasing of personal expert competencies: majority of organisations rarely cover these costs and professionals have to pay these things on their own and use personal vacation for professional development purposes. Ultimately, the overwhelming attitude is that individuals who complete the undergraduate studies have very modest skills for working with children. Many of them, aware of the curricula shortcomings, get engaged in different specialised trainings to build upon their knowledge and competencies.

INTERVIEW 3: Manager: People come unprepared, and they are not able to do their job right. I have been really unpleasantly surprised, I am referring now to the social workers, with the competencies that these children have on arriving here, with MA degree. They are illiterate, absolutely illiterate. I want to stress that what happens at the Universities and with the competencies that these children have on arrival, is really concerning.

All professionals are involved in training and education organised by the Ministry, and other governmental and non-governmental organisations. Ministries of health and social protection organise regular training for all staff of the centres for social work, while NGOs continuously organise training for staff working with children in the centres for social work. The education of social workers in FB&H is provided by three Faculties: at the University of Sarajevo, University of Mostar and University of Tuzla. The education process is organised in line with the Bologna principles 3+2 and 4+1 in Tuzla. At the social work studies, at the Faculty of Political Science in Tuzla, or at the social work studies at the Faculty of political science in Mostar, one can obtain an MA diploma in social policy or social work. So far, based on the Bologna process, only the Faculty of political science in Sarajevo has been providing multidisciplinary doctoral studies related to social work. The University of Mostar provides an opportunity of further education in social work, as part of the satellite courses in Orasje. The accreditation process by Agency for High Education has been completed for the University of Sarajevo, while the process is ongoing in terms of Universities of Mostar and Tuzla. In RS, Department for social work was set up in 2000 at the University of Banja Luka. The establishment of the Department was envisaged by practitioners gathered around the Association of professionals for social and child protection, and supported by several professors who recognised the need for education of the social work-

ers in RS. The prevailing three reasons included: a) lack of social and child protection workers, b) poor age structure of staff in the social and child protection system, and c) an increased level of social issues and emergence of new ones. In the relevant region, education of social workers for a long time consisted of two and three yearlong studies, with a possibility to continue postgraduate studies, MA level, specialisation and MA in social work. After adopting unique principles for the reform of the University education in Europe (Bologna), all social work programmes set up a scale consisting of the undergraduate, master and specialised professional and academic studies, up to PhD studies. The establishment of the single basis for education of social workers was also supported by the Association of the social work schools (IFSW) that has been advocating for adoption of the Global standards for education and training in social work (2004). The study programme of social work at the Faculty of Banja Luka (as of 2009) has been a long standing member of this international association.

5. Research and impact of knowledge about policies

Respondents did not have divided opinion on importance of practical applicability of knowledge on research method in child protection practices. Majority of respondents found it extremely important that programme includes practical training as well. Also, majority believes that in the existing educational system and with the curricula for all basic studies students do not gain needed knowledge on research methodology.

FG EDU – F4: I believe that in B&H, research, in general, is rarely taking place and it is rarer than it is necessary. One of the reasons for no research taking place is lack of knowledge on research methodology and research in general.

Students of undergraduate and post-graduate social work studies believe that they have gained theoretical knowledge on research methodology, but they are not sure that they are ready to apply it practically.

FGSt-M1: I still do not feel too able or capable in the sense of direct work with children, but I believe that with experienced mentor and practices, I can significantly improve my skills. In regard to research methods, legislature and research, I believe that am absolutely qualified and capable.

FGSt-F5: I cannot say that I feel equipped with knowledge on research in child protection once I start working, but I believe that one has to learn and improve all the time since learning shouldn't stop after graduation, moreover, it is necessary to continue gaining practical knowledge in order to provide best response to the needs of clients, especially children.

Students find this topic to be a huge disadvantage in the social workers education system in B&H. It is, therefore, necessary to resolve this issue in the future. Professionals see the significance of research in the sense of evaluation of their practical work, opportunity to face results of own work and a method for getting a feedback from the beneficiaries:

FGPr-F1: I believe that communication skills combined with empathy skills are of extreme importance for all of those who want to dedicate their professional life to people. Having that in mind, I believe that it is very important that communication, as a skill that can be learned, is a subject that is present throughout entire education process (from primary school onwards).

Respondents often stated that they are not sufficiently informed on research results and that (neither domestic nor world-wide) researchers are not available in any manner that would be considered useful.

FGPr-F2: I believe that we only insist on laws in order to have a clean way to make decisions. It is all taken down to pure form.

Students listed examples of research methodology usage in different subject during studies, but at the same time they emphasised that numerous data, provided in the obligatory literature, are obsolete and disconnected from the real context.

FGSt-F2: I believe that the main reason for that is that theory and practice are heavily divided. One thing is what one learns at the university, and as soon as one starts with practical work, state and situation are completely different. I believe that curriculum should include more practical learning, real-life cases, situations where students could learn “in practice” how to find the best solution and gain knowledge on how to behave and handle situations. That would prepare them better for the labour market and everything that awaits us. It seems that professionals do not have enough time to follow the research results in the available forms (monograph, reports, and academic articles) but that they would find it useful to have presentation of relevant research results in a form of summary that is adapted and simplified for the consumer.

FGPr-M2: Practical work is not integrated in the training programme, and everything is being done just to meet the formalities. During one year of internship, one learns more about practical work than in 4 years of studies.

They admit that some accredited programmes contain relevant research results. All interviewed educators stated that during the preparation and development of curricula they use research results and that they always look for new data. According to majority of surveyed professionals, competent B&H institutions have done nothing in regard to educational programmes, training programmes and “additional training” for carrying out specific tasks in social work centres. They, partially, recognize the NGO sector because what NGOs manage to provide is what the SWC employees manage to get. They made a comparison with pre-war situation in former Yugoslavia, since they had a chance to work in that period, as well as in the post-war period. According to majority, before the war social workers were asked about adoption of novelties in that field, especially in the legislation field. Before the war the situation was that social workers had to go through serious and continuous training before the law or bylaw would enter force, and prepare for application of the law “article by article”, provision by provision, all in form of organised learning. According to them, nowadays they simply receive a decision

and they are told that the law has changed. They have often mentioned the Law on Protection and Treatment of Children and Juveniles in the criminal procedure. No one was working on this issue even though it is one of the most complicated and most sensitive laws in B&H. Majority of respondents believe that competent ministries do not know that the law entered force, or, as they said, it seems like that in practice. Knowledge of current regulations in the field of child protection is considered an integral and inevitable part of education of professionals. This is subject of formal education (studying social work) but also an integral part of the introduction of trainees and new employees to the job. Capacities and opportunities to influence legislative changes are seen as modest. Respondents most often state that they do not have sufficient knowledge in this field and they feel that they cannot fight neither for themselves nor for the users. In particular, a major problem is actually a lack of policy in this area, that policies and programmes are not made on the basis of data and that there are no valid strategic documents or adequate strategic planning.

6. Types of skills and basic practical skills

During the analysis of skills, our respondents talked about quality of everything that should follow the everyday work of a social worker. Even though during focus groups there was no mention of knowledge or skills needed for child protection, the discussion spontaneously turned that way several times. Employment opportunities exist in both public and private institutions that directly or indirectly treat issues of social welfare of socially most endangered categories. Upon completion of master studies in the field of social work, students become highly educated professionals. Also, they will be enabled to independently manage and organize private and public institutions and manage far-reaching and complex interdisciplinary projects in the fields of social work, social policy and social management. In this analysis we see that perception of the skills that students have differs relatively from the perception of professionals and educators. Stances of interviewees can be categorised in several categories of skills and knowledge that professionals do not have in sufficient amount and for which there is no appropriate training.

- Focus on field of social welfare. Today professionals believe that social workers are “experts for everything”, which is a huge problem in practice.
- Communication with different users that are difficult to communicate with (offenders, victims of violence, communication with parents of children that are in risk of neglect or abuse, communication with other services in the community, in writing and skills of record keeping).
- Direct work with children, decision-making in the best interest of the child, method of child participation, child identity problem, communication skills with different groups of children, work with traumatised children, child counselling skills, intervention approach in work with different, vulnerable groups of children, especially with victims of sexual violence and children with anti-social behaviour and behavioural disorders.

On several occasions, it was mentioned that professionals have a problem to implement operationally, in practice, their knowledge on needs of children and are often faced with discomfort and feeling of incompetence, and are even “afraid to talk to children” :

FGPr-M2: I do not know, I think I am not sufficiently prepared for practical work

FG EDU – F5: I think that child protection is not sufficiently covered with curriculum

Knowledge and skills of professionals who work on child protection were discussed during the working group activity of building consensus in focus groups. Participants were instructed to independently write 5 to 7 skills that are needed for work in child protection. Answers were gathered, sorted during group discussion and followed by a debate on ten most important qualities (Đurić., 2007). After full adaptation of the list with all ten qualities, participants discussed the order of importance, until they reached consensus. Consensus building had its specificities in different focus groups. Two groups of professionals insisted on several occasion that it was an artificial and unnatural selection so the moderators had to invest additional effort to motivate them. Professionals in other two groups articulated the problem of selection and initial stance that all skills and knowledge are equally important. However, these two groups have, in their own opinion, reached consensus and harmonised the final list surprisingly fast.

Final list of responses: 1. Social and communication skills; 2. Sensibility in working with children; 3. Organisational skills; 4. Problem solving skills; 5. Altruism. Complete analysis shows that three groups have utilized three different ways to reach consensus on the needs of social workers. 1. Capability; 2. Dedication to social welfare; 3. Continuity in education; 4. Focus on one area; 1. Social and communication skills; 2. Sensibility in working with children; 3. Organisational skills; 4. Problem solving skills; 5. Altruism. 1. Capability; 2. Dedication; 3. Social and political activity in the community. Based on this we can conclude that the three main components recognized as essential for efficiency of social workers in B&H are capability, organisational skills and sensibility.

7. Strengths and obstacles for high-quality child protection practice

The practice of child protection is very poorly covered in B&H. This claim can be corroborated by a great number of facts. In terms of the status of the social workers in B&H, in particular those working in the centres for social work, their numbers are by far lesser than the numbers stipulated by the law. Such division cannot result in adequate and good professionals, highly specialised for one or two areas/issues. Taking into consideration the complexity of issues faced by B&H citizens today, as well as the fact that the issues are more complex, serious and difficult, as such they should be resolved. Unfortunately, there are no organised mechanisms of protection, action plans or any concrete cooperation among the institutions. Centres for social work are expected to do a lot, while the opportunities to respond are limited to the moment when situations get alarming and when social workers get the role of the firemen trying to take the fire out at the time when it is too late and situation gets utmost serious. Despite huge bureaucratic tasks and duties of the centres which are not necessarily a part of the professional

engagement of the social workers, the fact is that they do not have sufficient space and time for expertise and jobs for which they actually trained and educated. In addition, the issue is what kind of possibilities and needs there are in terms of the professional training, what type of professional support is needed for the experts in the centres, and whether they have the supervision as professional support; ultimately, the question is also how well paid are they for the work they do? The respondents deem that the fact that professionals are overworked as the principal obstacle to good quality practice of child protection. There is general agreement that case workers and advisors for foster families are in charge of a great many number of cases, which disrupts their ability to give adequate attention to cases:

FG EDU – M2: There are different views among the beneficiaries. Some beneficiaries do not differentiate between the government, social protection representatives and nongovernmental organisations providing free social services. Some beneficiaries have a clear vision, but are forced, from well-known reasons, to become beneficiaries of the services. Mostly they feel that situation in the country is very bad, and they blame the government for, in addition to current economic situation, for their current problems.

There are also numerous objections that poor organisational solutions have contributed to staff being overworked (inadequate delegation of tasks, frequent changes to case assignments in some units, lack of cooperation and synchronisation with other services). In B&H, regardless of political difficulties, it would be very difficult to centralise the social protection system. How functional this system is depends on the partnerships. In terms of professional exchange, experiences of professionals in different segments of the system, can be very useful and desirable in different contexts. The problem of child protection is a very important topic which would not only be discussed but measures for child protection should be implemented in all aspects of work, in each area where children are present (all levels of education, health, social protection). Responsibility is particularly important, as well as responsibility for non-action, in terms of actions needed for child protection. Raising awareness among general public and sensitising professionals, increasing the level of knowledge and skills, as well as work with families, are all the things that have to happen.

There are opinions that professionals working on child protection are engaged in increasingly complex problems and phenomena, and that level of violence in society is very high and that there is an ever increasing need for complex and urgent interventions. Predominant poverty and high unemployment rate create additional pressure on social protection services, which undoubtedly have less available resources. The fact is that one can conclude that services do not have equal geographic distribution. Mostly they are available for children in large cities. Large cities, such as Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Mostar, have developed public services, as well as nongovernmental sector. There are some well known situations when someone could not or did not want to address the professional, where nonprofessional staff does the job which requires expertise (see answer to previous question).

FGSt-M1: In terms of protection of children who live with their parents, system is very unstable. In B&H, over the past five years, there were several children who died as a re-

sult of injuries sustained by family members. Domestic violence, which includes violence against children, is very wide spread and still most people do not see such behaviour as abuse. Due to lack of expert staff, lack of training for current staff, lack of funds and deep rooted traditional values to recognise and identify children at risk, adequate response by the centre for social work in most cases is not there. Improvement of coordination between the centres for social work, ministries of interior, schools, in terms of primary and curative prevention is of great importance. When we talk about protection of children without parenting care (institutionalised form), the conditions are not at a satisfactory level, but keeping in mind the socio-economic state of the society and destroyed political system, we can be happy that situation of children without parenting care is not alarming. The position of such children could significantly improve with small changes in terms of intensive investment into institutions such as an SOS village and changes to the Family law and adoption procedures.

FGSt-F1: I come from a small town and since high school I have worked as a volunteer and have had access to information and people related to social work. For that reason, I wanted to study this and introduce some changes, in particular in my town. That was my primary motive to study social work. I understood that this is something I want to do. I am proud of my profession and social work. Every day I see that social workers will be more and more needed in our society. At the moment, social workers are not getting enough attention, unlike other countries where they are respected and appreciated.

Child protection in B&H is not in line with international legal standards. There is geographical discrimination of children throughout B&H, which is in particular present in FB&H where protection is regulated by cantonal and often municipal legislation. Children without adequate care, children victims of violence in their families and society, children with disabilities and children from minority groups, such as for example Roma, are particularly vulnerable.

8. Conclusion

The research was done at the moment when B&H saw the first results following from changes introduced to regulation related to improvement of work quality for child protection staff. Each institution and organisation should have child protection policies, standards of work with children and similar documents (depending on the type of organisation), and this document should be a requirement to work. Thus, the results may contribute to further development and improvement of specific state and position. In addition, they may provide significant insight into processes related to development of the child protection systems in the region, standardisation of services and quality control mechanisms in terms of human resources development. Social workers and other professionals in the social protection sector are faced with new demands to respond to client and community needs and this could change the basic values and philosophy that served as the basis for setting up the social protection system in B&H after the 1992-1995 war. There is a change of paradigm in the child protection sector and introduction

of approach based on strengths at play; these changes will also bring about new theoretical approaches and models resulting from economic and social globalisation.

To overcome the social heritage of the huge institutions for accommodation, B&H has developed, through its entities, cantons and Brčko District, important policies and introduced special measures which should allow the beneficiaries to continue living in the families/communities, when ever and where ever possible. Such improvements require changes at different levels, including personal attitudes, practices, procedures and funding methods, as well as innovative solutions with different impact in terms of the child rights and professional behaviour of the social workers. Comprehensive efforts directed at child protection reform create tensions and opposed approaches in different aspects of the social work in practice:

- Compulsory employment of social workers in schools;
- Establishment of associations of social workers;
- Licensing;
- Testing for abilities of the professionals working in the social work sector;
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the social workers' work, especially in the centres for social work;
- Child protection must in no case be at an abstract level and it is necessary to discuss and subsequently act in this area;
- In terms of new regulations, majority of information is collected by the social workers and they have to be well familiar with all the regulations related to child and family protection, as well as protection of other vulnerable groups;
- Protectionism and "saving the child" models versus approach which involves participation and support of the family.
- Current training programmes are designed and aimed at linking theory and practice, but it is still necessary for students to attend practical education during each year of study.
- Prior to starting to work, students of psychology and social work during their studies have the opportunity to acquire practical knowledge through practical training at the services and other institutions of social protection.
- European model of social cohesion and neoliberal approach to provision of social services
- As part of their practical training, the students need to learn about child protection programmes, as well as about other areas of work which are part of the scope of work of services and other institutions of social protection
- It is worth commending the right to choose service, in comparison with a relatively small number of services available in the community
- Results indicate that child protection practice in B&H is lead by professionals who, in majority of cases, have adequate education background, which has enabled successful implementation of changes in the child protection system over the past decade. The findings indicate that professionals believe they are an integral part of the child protection system.

Over the past years significant steps were undertaken to strengthen capacities of the experts in B&H. It is important to continue with these efforts and bring about improvements at the level of university education and professional field work. The existing accredited programmes, publications and practical guidelines are significant resources for professionals in B&H and the region, which can result in reaching the wider group of beneficiaries. The identified gaps and weaknesses in terms of knowledge, skills and capacities of the staff could be overcome through the new strategies. Responding to these challenges requires the profession to launch advocacy efforts to mobilise the communities and civil society organisations with a clear aim of improving social cohesion, interdependencies, reciprocity, citizen awareness and social justice for children and families.

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