

Impact of Supervision on Burnout Syndrome in Workers of social and legal Protection of Children and social Guardianship

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Original Article

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Abstract:

Objective: The aim of this research is to compare the level of burnout in workers of social and legal protection of children and social guardianship with regard to their perception of supervision effectiveness.

Design: Comparative and quantitative research.

Participants: The sample consisted of 317 workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship departments.

Methods: The level of burnout syndrome was determined and subsequent comparison was carried out using the MBI questionnaire by Christina Maslach & Susan E. Jackson.

Results: The results of the research confirmed that workers of

the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be effective show a lower level of depersonalization than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be ineffective. It has also been confirmed that workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be effective report higher levels of personal satisfaction than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be ineffective.

Conclusion: The results of the research point to the importance of effective supervision, which has a significant impact on the level of burnout syndrome among workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship.

Introduction

The research on burnout syndrome in social workers shows that child welfare social workers are among those most at risk of burnout. Decisions made by social workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship department can affect the lives of children and their families, either positively or negatively, for the rest of their lives. From the clients' perspective, it is important that they have as little contact as possible with social workers experiencing burnout.

In terms of burnout prevention, experts cite a number of effective prevention options, which clearly include supervision. Supervision is the main form of support for social workers. Social workers often turn to supervisors for help with cases or for assistance with further skills development (1). Supervision can be defined as a method of continuously improving the professional competence of a social worker, which leads the worker to practice the profession independently and protects the client from incompetent and iatropathogenic interventions (2). Undergoing supervision under the expert supervision of a certified supervisor who seeks to detect the onset of burnout syndrome also protects the status of the profession (3). The results of another research also show that emotional support from both supervisors and co-workers is associated with lower levels of burnout, job stress, and mental health problems (4).

The aim of the research is to determine the perception of supervision effectiveness by workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship and to compare the level

of burnout of workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship with respect to their perception of supervision effectiveness.

Methodology and results

Research sample

The research sample consisted of a total of 317 workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship from various parts of Slovakia. Workers of social and legal protection of children and social guardianship were unevenly represented by gender. In total, we received 32 completed questionnaires (10.1%) from men and 285 completed questionnaires (89.9%) from women. Workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship were aged from 23 to 61 years. The mean age was 38.72 years (SD = 10.26). The length of experience of social workers ranged from 0 to 46 years. The mean length of experience was 8.68 years (SD = 9.86).

We also surveyed the number of cases (files, families) per year among the workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship. Overall, 78 workers (24.6%) reported 0 to 30 cases per year; 61 workers (19.2%) reported 30 to 60 cases per year; 50 workers (15.8%) reported 60 to 90 cases per year; finally 128 workers (40.4%) reported 90 or more cases per year.

Research methods

Burnout syndrome in workers of the social and legal protection of children and social

guardianship was detected using the MBI questionnaire (Maslach Burnout Inventory) by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson for helping professions, which is based on three factors: emotional exhaustion; personal satisfaction; depersonalization (5). Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are considered negative and personal job satisfaction is considered positive. The questionnaire contains a total of 22 items and respondents comment on the frequency of experiencing the given feelings using a 7-point scale: 0 - never, 1 - several times a year, 2 - monthly, 3 - several times a month, 4 - weekly, 6 - several times a week, 6 - daily. Supervision effectiveness was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely ineffective) to 5 (completely effective).

Statistical analysis

Data were summarized and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 22. In the statistical analysis, we used the variable description through basic measures: arithmetic mean; median; mode; standard deviation; minimum; maximum; as well as absolute frequencies (frequencies) and relative frequencies (percentages). Given the size of our dataset or the size of the subsets analyzed, we decided to compare variables using parametric tests. With a large enough dataset (> 30 or 40), even rejecting the assumption of normality of the data distribution need not cause a serious problem, allowing us to use parametric methods even when the data are not normally distributed (6). For two groups, we used the Student's t-test for two independent groups.

Results

Workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship rated the effectiveness of supervision on a 5-point scale from 1 (completely ineffective) to 5 (completely effective). A total of 34 workers (10.7%) assigned a value of 1; 46 workers (14.5%) assigned a value of 2; 117 workers (36.9%) assigned a value of 3; 73 workers (23%) assigned a value of 4; 47 workers (14.8%) assigned a value of 5 to supervision effectiveness.

Hypothesis 1: We hypothesize that workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to

be effective show lower levels of emotional exhaustion than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be ineffective. Workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision ineffective ($n = 80$) had a mean value of emotional exhaustion equal to 21.9 ($SD = 12.52$) and workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision effective ($n = 120$) had a mean value of emotional exhaustion equal to 19.09 ($SD = 12.11$). We compared workers who considered supervision ineffective and those who considered it effective using the Student's t-test for two independent groups (Tab. 1) and found that there was no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion between them ($t(198) = 1.585$, $p = 0.115$). Practical significance is low ($d = 0.228$).

Table 1 Comparison of emotional exhaustion with respect to supervision effectiveness (t-test)

	t-test value	degrees of freedom	significance
ineffective vs. effective supervision	1.585	198	0.115

Hypothesis 2: We hypothesize that workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be effective show lower levels of depersonalization than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be ineffective. Workers who considered supervision ineffective ($n = 80$) had a mean depersonalization value equal to 6.83 ($SD = 5.77$) and workers who considered supervision effective ($n = 120$) had a mean depersonalization value equal to 4.57 ($SD = 4.14$). We compared the level of depersonalization in workers who considered supervision effective and ineffective using the Student's t-test (Tab. 2) and we found that there was a statistically significant difference between them ($t(198) = 3.221$, $p = 0.001$). Workers who perceived supervision to be ineffective had higher levels of depersonalization than those who perceived it to be effective. Practical significance is medium ($d = 0.45$).

Table 2 Comparison of depersonalization with respect to supervision effectiveness (t-test)

	t-test value	degrees of freedom	significance
ineffective vs. effective supervision	3.221	198	0.001

Hypothesis 3: We hypothesize that workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be effective report higher levels of personal satisfaction than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who consider supervision to be ineffective. Workers who considered supervision ineffective ($n = 80$) had a mean value of personal satisfaction equal to 30.61 ($SD = 6.95$) and workers who considered supervision effective ($n = 120$) had a mean value of personal satisfaction equal to 33.79 ($SD = 6.21$). We compared the level of personal satisfaction for workers who considered supervision effective and ineffective using the Student's t-test (Tab. 3) and we found that there was a statistically significant difference between them ($t(198) = 3.38, p = 0.001$). Workers who considered supervision ineffective had lower levels of personal satisfaction than those who considered it effective. Practical significance is medium ($d = 0.483$).

Table 3 Comparison of personal satisfaction with respect to supervision effectiveness (t-test)

	t-test value	degrees of freedom	significance
ineffective vs. effective supervision	3.38	198	0.001

Discussion

Burnout in workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship was compared with respect to supervision effectiveness. In Hypothesis 1, we hypothesized that *workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who perceive supervision to be effective will report lower levels*

of emotional exhaustion than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who perceive supervision to be ineffective.

The differences between workers in terms of perceived supervision effectiveness were not confirmed by statistical testing, and therefore we reject hypothesis H1 and claim that there is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion between workers who perceive supervision to be ineffective and those who perceive it to be effective (Table 1). The results of McFadden's research do find differences. Ineffective supervision has been shown to increase the risk of emotional exhaustion among social workers. High levels of emotional exhaustion were reported by 60% of social workers who had effective supervision and up to 86% of social workers who had ineffective supervision (7).

The second hypothesis hypothesized that *workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who perceive supervision to be effective will show lower levels of depersonalization than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who perceive supervision to be ineffective (H2).*

The differences between workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship in the area of depersonalization were also confirmed in the perception of supervision effectiveness, therefore we accept hypothesis H2 and claim that workers who consider supervision ineffective had a higher level of depersonalization than those who consider it effective (Table 2).

Our findings are confirmed by the research that suggests that the risk of depersonalization is increased by ineffective (inefficient) supervision. Here, 24% of social workers who had received effective supervision showed high levels of depersonalization, and depersonalization rose to 35% in social workers who considered supervision ineffective. Supervision protects not only the client from unprofessional, incompetent interventions that a social worker may carry out as a result of burnout, but also the social worker himself, who verifies the correctness of working procedures, finds out that he is not alone in his "problems", and can share his experience with other colleagues as part of the supervision.

In the last hypothesis, we hypothesized that *workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who perceive supervision to be effective will report higher levels of personal satisfaction than workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship who perceive supervision to be ineffective (H3)*.

To test this hypothesis, we examined the level of personal satisfaction for workers who perceive supervision to be effective and ineffective and found that there is a statistically significant difference between the two (Tab. 3). Therefore, we accept hypothesis H3 and claim that workers who find supervision ineffective have lower levels of personal satisfaction than those who find it effective. The importance of supervision in social work practice was again confirmed. Of course, we are talking about supervision, which is perceived as meaningful, high quality and rewarding by the social workers. The supportive, helping nature of supervision, the aim of which is to help gain perspective, can be achieved through a supervisor with whom the social worker can talk to whom the social worker can turn for help; as the role of the supervisor is to help not to control. This claim has also been confirmed by experts who have found in their research that social workers who perceive their supervisor as supportive have less potential for burnout (8). Act No. 305/2005 Coll. on Social and Legal Protection of Children a Social Guardianship does regulate who can carry out supervision and under what conditions, but the results of our research show that it is necessary on the part of the employer to pay attention to selecting a good supervisor who can have a positive impact on the prevention of burnout of workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship (9).

Conclusion

The results of our research have clearly demonstrated that effective supervision leads to a lower rate of burnout syndrome among workers of the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship. It is therefore necessary to focus attention on the quality of the supervision provided and choose knowledgeable supervisors. In conclusion, effective supervision is one of the important factors in the prevention of burnout syndrome.

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