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ORGANIZATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE IN CENTERS FOR SOCIAL WORK: CASE STUDY - CITY CENTER FOR SOCIAL WORK BELGRADE

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Abstract: *The original concept of the social work institution has justified its name not only through providing direct social services to users and their families, but also through initiating and organizing various activities in local communities. This affirmative role of the centers for social work has contributed to quicker adoption of legal recommendations. Further development and organization of professional work in the centers for social work have been crucial in the realization of the stipulated functions. Since 1981, these centers have assumed the entire mediation process between spouses, and recently they have also included working with refugees and their families. Having in mind the pronounced crisis, it is necessary to introduce new methods and processes of work for the social service to function more efficiently. The centers for social work are increasingly becoming key institutions that provide support not only in the resolution of traditional social problems, but also in facing new challenges such as digital inequality, mental health, family violence and other forms of social crises. Such extension of activities also requires continued improvement of social workers' capacities, adjustment of the work methodology and establishment of cooperation with other relevant institutions in order to respond adequately to increasingly complex needs of the users of social work services.*

The paper elaborates the fact that the centers for social work, due to technical, technological, economic, migrant and other changes, show that changes in the organization and functioning of their services are also justified. Apart from individual work with users and their families, it is also necessary to protect more individual users of social protection and to determine common reasons, besides personal ones, which have led to the need for protection and the application of social action at the level of local and broader communities. Moreover, it is necessary to affect the causes leading to a certain social issue and to prevent its further expansion. The analysis points to the need for strengthening professional and organizational capacities in the centers for social work, taking into account the increasing number of users and the scope of work. This includes a larger number of professional workers (social workers, psychologists, pedagogues), having in mind the newly-introduced authorities and increased complexity of jobs. There is an evident staff turnover in the centers for social work, partly due to the natural fluctuation caused by retirement, but also due to other reasons, which aggravates timely action and task performance within the legally prescribed deadline.

Keywords: organization, management, social work, community care, social problems.

1. ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTERS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The methodological-methodic concept of social work in the first centers for social work has justified its name because they have become the centers not only for achieving the direct social protection of the users and their families, but also the initiators and organizers of various activities in the municipalities. The affirmative activity of the first centers for social work accelerated the provision of the recommendation of the Federal Assembly which supported the establishment of the centers as professional services where social protection is achieved by applying social, psychological and pedagogical work (Milovanović, Krgović, 1998, p. 5).

The activity of the centers for social work has directed professional workers towards the application of social work in organizing the community and advisory work. Legal jobs were still performed by the management bodies responsible for social protection jobs. Such situation prevailed until 1968, when a legal possibility was stipulated for these centers to take over the application of the administrative procedure, to decide about citizens' rights in obtaining social protection. At that time, all theoreticians and practitioners believed that the unification of the legal method with social, psychological and pedagogical work would ensure a new view of the professional work development in the centers (Bernard, 2021).

A question arises regarding the organization of professional work in the centers for social work. The realization of certain legally stipulated functions and the application of all the functions and methods of social, psychological, pedagogical, legal and sociological work depend on the organization of professional work (Russell, 2017, pp. 137-144).

The main conditions for the functional organization of professional work in the centers are (Milosavljević, 1984):

- a) adequate presence of professional workers of all profiles by the established criteria. The minimum condition is that there is a social worker, a legal expert, a psychologist and a pedagogue in every center. Their number increases proportionally to the number of inhabitants in a specific municipality, the pronounced presence of social problems, demographic characteristics of the population and the size of the region.
- b) Each of the legally stipulated functions of the center is realized in a certain organizational form of professional work.
- c) Organizational form of professional work are expert groups, expert teams, expert committees, the expert council and the expert panel.
- d) The criteria for forming expert groups are the center's functions and the classification of the users by age into children, youth, adults and elderly persons.
- e) The criteria for forming expert teams are categorial (by types of problems) and the territorial approach.
- f) Coordinators are appointed for expert groups and expert teams, whose responsibility is to make their work efficient for users.
- g) In the developed countries, triage is introduced in the centers.
- h) In the realization of social protection, the family is the unit of the service.
- i) Organization of professional work should enable uniform application of individual social work, group social work and social work in organizing the community within the center.

The entire reconciliation procedure of spouses was transferred onto the centers for social work in 1981. In the past years, the centers also included working with refugees and families which accepted refugees. In the periods of extreme crises, it is necessary to introduce new measures of work and to create new business processes in the functioning of the social service (Stepanović, 2023).

In studying social policy in the conditions of the society transition (and the social policy itself), it is impossible to avoid an exceptionally significant segment which will constitute the link between economic and social policies and which will test in the best way the validity of the theoretical-empirical model of social policy, i.e., market economy within which social policy will find its full meaning and justification. It is well-known that social policy and market economy are mutually exclusive because they are based on diametrically opposite principles and relations. That is why the role of social policy is extremely important not only from the perspective of amortization, alleviation of social problems generated by market economy (protective function of social policy), but also because of ensuring social development and progress (developmental and organizational function of social policy) (Beresford, 2019). The crucial question regarding social policy that should be explored at the beginning of the 21st century is the manner of reconciling seemingly irreconcilable opposites, what methods, means and instruments to use for harmonizing the protective and developmental functions of social policy in the market economy conditions (Babović, 2010).

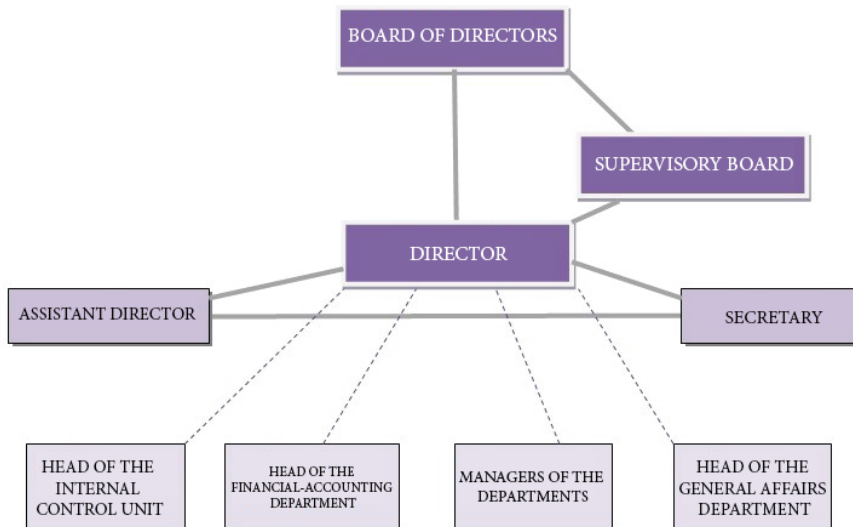
2. CITY CENTER FOR SOCIAL WORK BELGRADE (model of organizing and functioning)

The City Center for Social Work in Belgrade is one of the institutions within the social protection system whose role is to provide help and support (legal, social, material, psychological-advisory, mediational and psycho-therapeutic) to families and individuals in overcoming and resolving problems.

The activity of the City Centre is social protection, social work and family-legal protection, while its performance is regulated by the Law on Social Protection, the Family Law, the Criminal Code, the Law on the Law on Juvenile Criminal Offenders and Criminal Protection of Juveniles, the Law on Mediation, the Law on Misdemeanours, the Law on Financial Support for Families with Children, the Decision on the Rights in Social Protection of Belgrade and the bylaw entitled “Intervention Protection Measures for the Most Disadvantaged Citizens of Belgrade”.

All of us may need services of the center for social work in a certain period of our lives. Professional workers – social workers, psychologists, pedagogues, special pedagogues, legal experts, sociologists and andragogues – are legally obliged to assist all the citizens who need help and support: children, youth, adults and elderly persons, persons with disabilities, persons with problems in family relations and with family violence, and materially disadvantaged persons (Reamer, 2013, pp. 163–172). The City Center for Social Work in Belgrade is a trustworthy institution whose professional employees in resolving diverse life problems start from the necessity of respecting fundamental human rights, as well as specific needs of each family and individual. In its work, the City Centre cooperates with other state institutions (courts, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, schools, healthcare institutions etc., as well as with non-governmental and humanitarian organizations (City Center for Social Work Belgrade, <http://gcsrbg.org/o-nama/>).

In our paper we will present the organizational structure of the City Center for Social Work Belgrade (see Chart 1) (City Center for Social Work Belgrade, http://gcsrbg.org/pdf/INFORMATOR_O_RADU%202017.pdf).

Chart 1. Organizational scheme of the City Center for Social Work in Belgrade

(source: <http://gcsrbg.org/o-nama/>)

Until the establishment of the City Center for Social Work, this social function was performed by the municipal centers for social work. The first municipal center for social work in the territory of Belgrade was established in the Municipality of Palilula in 1956, with the main task of following the development of social problems in the territory of the municipality, the family-child relations and to help them in resolving personal and family problems. By the early 1960s, the centers for social work were established in all the municipalities of the City of Belgrade, and in all the suburban municipalities during the period 1969-1976.

The City Center for Social Work included all the municipal centers for social work, the Marriage and Family Counseling Center (established in 1985) and the Institute for the Study of Social Problems, which ever since its establishment (in 1958) has had the status of the developmental-research institution within the social protection system of Belgrade (City Center for Social Work Belgrade, <http://gcsrbg.org/o-nama/istori-at/>).

3. CASE STUDY: ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL RESOURCES IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

In our paper we will use the results of the research of human resources management in the centers for social work in the Republic of Serbia, in order to get a better insight into the management of the centers for social work. The aim of this research is to obtain the best possible picture of the functioning of the centers for social work.

The existing organization and management system is analyzed so as to use this comprehensive and in-depth analysis for drawing concrete conclusions and suggestions for the improvement and functioning of the centers for social work.

The study has been conducted on the representative sample of the employees (professional workers and managers) in the centers for social work in the Republic of Serbia.

The key analytical activities performed within the preparation of this study are:

- Analysis of work place systematization in the centers for social work,
- Analysis of the process of filling the vacancies in the centers for social work,
- Analysis of work processes in the centers for social work.
- Analysis of decision-making in the centers for social work,
- Analysis of the work of the centers for social work in relation to the population.

The Questionnaire for professional workers contains 61 close-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions, while the Questionnaire for managers contains 59 close-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions.

Apart from socio-demographic data, the questionnaires also contain items which examine different segments of the center's functioning, such as working conditions, work organization, organizational climate, delegation system, decision-making and education of employees. The questionnaire of the interviewers' assessment of the conditions and work processes was completed by the employees during the visit to the center for the purpose of obtaining the best possible insight into the general conditions of work and technical and material equipment, as well as into the cooperativeness of professional workers and managers.

In order to get a uniform and standardized procedure of collecting relevant data, a network was formed of additionally trained and experienced interviewers, permanent associates of the Center for Applied Psychology. The interviewers' task was to visit all available centers for social work and to take the completed questionnaires which will be subsequently processed in detail through the use of standardized statistical methods ((Human and social resources management in the centers for social work in the Republic of Serbia, with the presentation of the applied research methods and results of the conducted analyses of the current state, 2019, p. 4).

It may be concluded that the employees in the centers for social work were quite cooperative, communicative and willing to participate in the research. The research sample included 569 respondents of both genders, of different age structure, with a broad range of their working tenure in the center for social work, as well as with a different level of hierarchical positions they hold. The research covered the centers for social work in the whole territory of the Republic of Serbia.

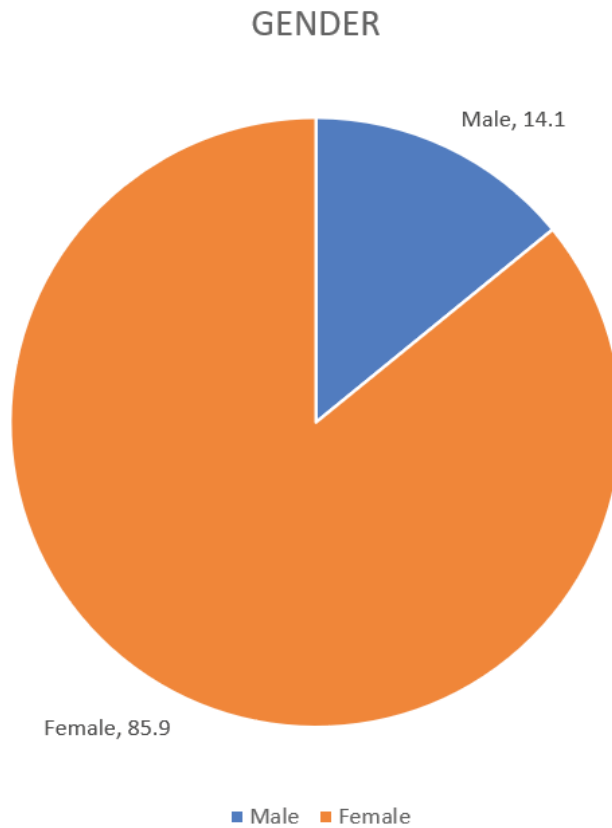
As far as the number of the employees is concerned, 4 categories of the centers for social work were distinguished in the research (Human and social resources management in the centers for social work in the Republic of Serbia, with the presentation of the applied research methods and results of the conducted analyses of the current state, 2019, p. 4):

- 1) large centers with more than 25 employees accounting for 21% in the sample;

- 2) medium-large centers with 16-25 employees, accounting for 10% in the sample;
- 3) medium-size centers with 6-15 employees, which are the most represented in the sample (43%); and
- 4) small centers with up to 5 employees, accounting for 26% in the sample (Chart 2).

It can be concluded from the research that there is a large gender inequality among the employees.

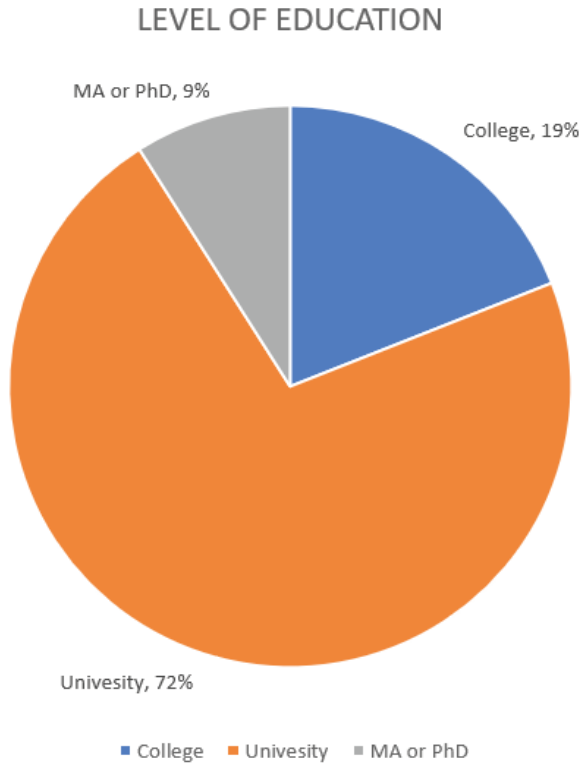
Chart 2. Gender structure of the employees in the social institutions in the Republic of Serbia.



(source: https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/arhiva-internet-prezentacije-2019/files/upravljanje_ljudskim_i_socijalnim_resursima_u_centrima_za_socijalni_rad_u_republici_srbiji.pdf)

Furthermore, what can be found in the research is that there is a high level of the educated staff. We can see that the employees with a university degree account for 83%, those with a college degree account for about 7%, while 10% of the employees in the centers for social work have a master, MA or PhD degree (See Chart 3).

Chart 3. The employees' level of education in the centers for social work.



(Source: https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/arhiva-internet-prezentacije-2019/files/upravljanje_ljudskim_i_socijalnim_resursima_u_centrima_za_socijalni_rad_u_republici_srbiji.pdf)

Considering rather extensive legal regulations, and for the purpose of perceiving the actual situation taking into account the legal framework and competences, available resources and needs of end users, i.e., the situation in the field, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, documents were collected which unified certain segments of activities and competences of the centers for social work. Therefore, the following documents have been processed for the purpose of the harmonization with the needs and potential modifications:

- Review of competences and characteristic jobs of the centers for social work (internal document important for the assessment of the actual situation and the existing capacities by the established needs);
- Norms for the professional workers of the centers for social work in the period 2012-2017;

- Work place systematization in the centers for social work;
- List of regulations referring to the functioning of the centers for social work.

By examining the submitted documentation in this stage, the subjects of work were identified in the subsequent stages regarding the organization of human and social resources in the centers for social work.

The focus is placed on the following aspects:

- Rather extensive and complex list of authorities of the centers for social work in relation to the existing resources (primarily human resources, which was concluded on the basis of the obtained norms for the employees);
- Inadequate work place systematization because the obtained documentation does not contain either the organizational structure or subordination, which limited the analysis of relations and systems of decision-making;
- Absence of a service for human resources that would deal with these resources in line with the principles of good practice and standards, as well as their implementation and application (Human and social resources management in the centers for social work in the Republic of Serbia, with the presentation of the applied research methods and results of the conducted analyses of the current state, 2019, p. 11).

CONCLUSION

A conclusion is drawn that it is necessary to strengthen professional and organizational capacities in the centers for social work. This primarily refers to increasing the number of professional employees (university degree, educational profile: social worker, psychologist, pedagogue), having in mind that an increased number of clients and larger scope of work have been recorded within the relevant competences.

Moreover, according to the data obtained from the employees in the centers for social work, work is becoming more complex also because some of the jobs that were until recently within the authority of other institutions, have now been transferred into the authority of the centers for social work, while, at the same time, the structure and the number of the employees in the centers for social work have remained the same.

Concurrently, there is an outflow of the staff from the centers for social work based on several reasons (natural fluctuation due to retirement, leaving the centers for social work for other reasons...), which continually aggravates timely acting and realization of the stipulated jobs within the legally stipulated deadline.

At the same time, no significant activities have been recorded at the level of the realization of job advertisement procedures for the receipt of new employees. Namely, the data base of the Human Resource Management Service of the Government of the Republic of Serbia has not recorded a single job advertisement for the needs of the centers for social work ever since 2013 (Human and social resources management in the centers for social work in the Republic of Serbia, with the presentation of the applied research methods and results of the conducted analyses of the current state, 2019, p. 13).

In the organizational framework of the centers for social work it is necessary to strengthen professional capacities. In addition, there is increasing complexity of the work and new phenomena, such as migration at the moment, while the structure and number of the employees remain the same.

For several decades, industrially developed countries have attracted the workforce from underdeveloped countries. After the Second World War, many people migrated to the developed countries of Europe because of being unable to find employment in their own countries.

During the past decade, new migration centers for migration were established, while international migration included part of the population affected by numerous changes in the world geopolitical order.

It was the disintegration of national states that particularly resulted in significant population mobility. Therefore, the conflict accompanying the breakup of some countries led to evident and substantial flows of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons, which put migration problems to the very top of the UN agenda. However, this situation demands better monitoring systems in order to quantify international migration (Čekerevac, 1999, 334).

In conclusion, we will distinguish several groups of problems: complex administration, scope of work increased on a large scale (the number of clients is constantly on the rise, while the number of employees is not changed; a large number of difficult clients; poor working conditions; poor material situation; insufficient technical equipment).

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