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## Summary

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The book entitled *Social Work Supervision*, edited by Mirosław Grewiński and Bohdan Skrzypczak, is a result of the work by experts of Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Janusza Korczaka (Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University) in Warsaw and the CAL Association (Stowarzyszenie Centrum Aktywności Lokalnej CAL) within the execution of the project: “*Improving Professional Qualifications of Social Assistance and Social Integration Workers*” conducted for the Centre for Human Resources Development (Centrum Rozwoju Zasobów Ludzkich). This compilation contains highly informative articles by Polish and foreign specialists, and it also presents the model of social work supervision standard which is proposed by the expert circles in the context of implementing systemic solutions into social assistance and social work in Poland.

Both the authors and the editors of the publication have been pursuing the objective promoted by the EU for many years – to demonstrate best practices and proven foreign experiences in solutions to social policy in its broad sense, including social work. Thus, the first section of the compilation contains an account on foreign experiences by presenting solutions concerning supervision in nine countries of the world, as well as considering the EU *acquis* in this area. The selection of the countries has not been random – the supervision experiences in countries of substantial *acquis* in this matter have been presented – the USA, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Italy, and Portugal, indicating intellectual and organizational pluralism in the approach to supervision. Also, there is an account on the achievements of our eastern neighbour – Ukraine, which has just begun the discussion on supervision in social work. In the publication, it has been highlighted that although Poland has undoubtedly gained certain *acquis* concerning social work supervision, we are still far from being able to compare ourselves with the well-developed western countries.

The second part of the compilation contains a description of the national experiences showing the condition of the Polish school of social work supervision. Here, the results of the national, representative study of social workers and social assistance institutions directors concerning supervision and standardization of the process, conducted for the project, have been presented. The publication offers an original model of social work supervision standard which has been presented in details in part three. The model has been developed as a result of a series of meetings and discussions of over 30 experts – both theoreticians and practitioners.

The conclusions drawn from the content of the book is that, in many countries, social work supervision is a highly important instrument of supporting social assistance workers, including, especially, social workers who need continuous professional improvement, development and reflective feedback. In Poland, it is also becoming an important supportive and educational instrument, even more so that within the social assistance reform planned for 2015 it is assumed that supervision will be introduced systemically as the third level specialization in social workers education. What is pursued here is to first educate the elite of specialists who would be able to be social work supervisors, and more broadly, of social assistance as well. In spite of the fact that, if compared to the *acquis* of the western European countries and the USA, supervision in Poland is in the preliminary phase of development, we already have at least dozen or so examples of institutions which have been contributing to the development of supervision for at least a decade, having gained their first experiences in this domain. These are mainly positive ones, but it has to be stressed that there are also impediments and limitations to the execution of supervision. Also, the conclusions of the national study, the results of which are presented in this publication, show that apart from the affirmation of supervision, there are many concerns connected with its systemic implementation, and that science reveals numerous critical arguments on its counter-effectiveness.

The many dilemmas regarding supervision, which have been discussed in this publication in its subsequent chapters, may be summarised in several most important points, listed below, which have been linked with the most crucial recommendations for Poland:

1. There is no one model of social work supervision in the world, hence it is difficult to find one specific benchmark for the standardization of social work supervision in Poland in individual countries, even more so that in most EU countries and the USA the service of social work supervision is not standardized. This means that if in Poland there appears a strong desire to implement a standard of social work supervision, then we should

develop it ourselves, drawing only on the selected experiences of particular countries who have been developing supervision far longer than we have.

2. As for the fact that there are various models of social work supervision, our recommendation would be that supervision in Poland be drawing more on the Scandinavian and continental model rather than the Anglo-Saxon one. The difference is that in the Scandinavian and continental (European) model the educational and supportive functions of supervision are highlighted, while in the Anglo-Saxon model, the focus is put on the administrative, supervisory and managerial functions.
3. Although in the title and the content of the book we focus on social work supervision, we believe that supervision should also cover much broader groups of social services workers, including the employees of the entire social assistance system, social rehabilitation, labour market policy and education policy, as well as the professions of care, including some services within the health care system (hospices, long-term care). Basically, the ultimate aim would be that all professions of “social assistants” should be provided the supervisory service in order to ensure their more professional operation and prevent employees burn-out. Limiting supervision to the profession of social worker may be perceived as fragmentation of services supporting the sector of social services and inspire criticism of selectiveness and inequality in the access by other “assisting” professions.
4. The supervision standard presented in this book, and developed by a team of 30 experts – theoreticians and practitioners, is a general standard that defines the framework for the application of this instrument of social workers support. This is a model rather than a detailed standard since we have assumed that developing an over-regulated instrument would be counter-effective and would trigger opposition of those who may use it in practice. We believe that the process of social and welfare services standardization in Poland should generally be broad due to the present level of social policy development, including care and social inclusion policy.
5. In spite of the fact that preparing this publication for issuing we have conducted a representative, large-scale national study of social workers employed in social assistance centres, poviats family support centres and other social assistance organisational units, alongside interviewing the directors of these institutions, and we have gained considerable knowledge on the respondents’ views on supervision, we would recommend conducting further research in this field, with a view to identifying the needs in the area of supervision, more so that the workers and direc-

tors articulate numerous concerns and risks connected with introducing supervision into the systemic solutions.

6. A separate dilemma which we have attempted to address in this publication is the question who would be in charge of supervision in the future. Would it be psychologists who are trying to occupy the areas of coaching and supervision, or rather the social workers themselves who have proper qualifications and practical experience in executing social work? The draft regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on social work supervision is in line with our recommendations that it should be highly experienced social assistance workers, the elite who would know social work both in theory and in practice. We would prefer not to limit, under any circumstances, the role of the supervisor to the profession of psychologist or, even more so, therapist.
7. Social work supervision (more broadly of social services) must be perceived in the context of the overall reform of social assistance system in Poland, necessary for at least a decade. We claim that its implementation without making any necessary changes to the system will fail to bring the desired results, and it may even be counter-effective. Therefore, we stress the need to make a multi-aspect alteration to the system of social assistance, among other things, towards developing social services, broadening the scope of social assistance responsibilities delegated onto non-governmental organisations, different financing of social assistance, and standardization of social services and responsibilities.
8. If supervision is to be the third education level of social workers professional specialization, there is a need to move it up onto the level of higher education within post-graduate studies, as it is the case in many countries of the EU. Moreover, there is a need to correlate the improvement of social workers educational level with their professional upward mobility and remuneration. There is still a lack of it in Poland and, unfortunately, the elite of supervisors cannot be built without improving the social and occupational prestige and status of the profession of social worker.
9. Apart from supervision, the systemic implementation of coaching for social services workers should seriously be taken into consideration. Coaching, as opposed to supervision, does not imply many concerns and negative emotions, but it is a very effective instrument of supporting the coached. Perhaps coaching could become a less expensive though equally effective method of supporting and educating social assistance system workers.
10. Supervision in Poland is facing a crucial challenge in form of the path of its further professionalization. It should not rely solely on top-down

specialization procedures. It would be significant to develop a bottom-up, community movement which would develop social regulations to support the quality of supervision and the autonomy of this professional group. Thus, the call for the community of supervisors to self-organize and ensure a prominent voice in decision-making on the development of this profession seems to be important.

To conclude, it has to be stressed that nowadays Poland is facing a great opportunity and challenge pertaining to supervision implementation into the social assistance system, and perhaps also into other social policy systems. A lot depends on systemic solutions whose final shape will be determined by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and policy-makers, but also a lot depends on regional and local institutions which will execute the supervision process. Whether social work supervision in Poland will prove effective and gain acceptance depends on many internal and external factors, but most of all, it depends on whether we will be willing to treat supervision as a method of providing support and education to social assistance services (which has been the subject matter of this book), or as an instrument of control and surveillance in the process of managing and administering social policy institutions.

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