

STANDARDS FOR SKILLS IN FAMILY SUPPORT: MAPPING THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. *Preliminary results of the analytical study conducted to identify the international agencies on skills' qualification are presented in the paper. The resented study is part of a comprehensive research project launched in the framework COST Action CA18123 - The European Family Support Network, and aims to map the international organizations working in the field and to identify, describe and catalogue available evidence on basic professional competencies of family support workforces.*

Cuvinte cheie: *family support, skills, standards, international organizations*

JEL Classification: *I20, J28*

The objectives of the study focus on: identifying relevant professional organizations at international, European or regional level that work with families and children; providing an overview of the listed professional skills promoted by the organizations in their work on family support; describing and cataloguing available evidence of basic professional competencies of family support workforces; to find appropriate documents regarding standards for family support skills.

Family support workers can be found in multi-disciplinary teams, working with families affected by various problems (Jane Tunstill et.al., 2008). In the present study we agree that family support workers work in a range of job roles and sectors within the children', youths, families' workforce and occasionally outside it.

The content analysis method was used to analyse the website resources of over 100 organizations identified using the snowball technique. Among them are the organizations / agencies / associations / foundations at international, European and regional level, and well as some of the most important agencies from the USA, Canada and Australia, all of which focus on families with children and youth in various fields (psychology, social work, health, law, etc.).

On the basis of identifying elements such as organizational level, role of the organization, sector, target beneficiaries, three interconnected maps have been developed: the map of family/children support international organizations/agencies (46 organizations); the map related to family therapy, occupational therapy, family educators and family support paraprofessionals (12 organizations) and the map related to youth support work (30 organizations).

The received information, data, and materials has been evaluated (1) from the perspective of activities and provided services related to family with children, (2) from the perspective of the professionals dealing with family services, (3) from the perspective of professional skills the institutions apply and promote in the family support work.

The results of the content analyses showed that there are five roles that are most frequently encountered and assumed by evaluated organizations in their activity (Figure 1), but the educational role is the most common, over a third of the organizations indicate it.

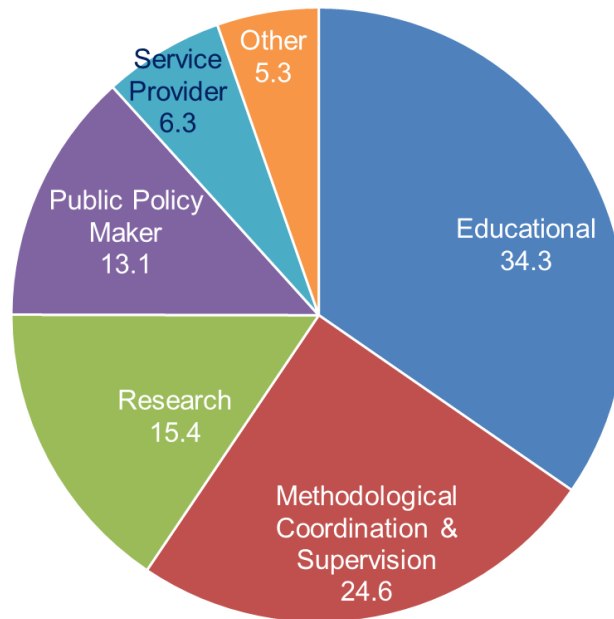


Figure 1. Share of organizations according to the role described on the website, %
Source: authors' calculation

Most of the organizations evaluated come from the non-governmental sector (about 70%), almost 1/3 from the public sector and only 1% from the private sector. Other features that stood out were that more governmental / public organizations are concentrated in the youth sector and the public policy maker role is more specific to organizations focused on youth and children / families with children.

In terms of our aim related to professional skills of the family support workforce mentioned on the organization's website or in the resources found on the website (literature, documents, methodological support etc.) we have delimited a wider range of skills, but in the top five, the most common are the following:

- Communication skills (verbal, nonverbal; at the individual and community level; interpretation skills; nonjudgmental communication skills; cross-cultural communication)
- Counselling skills (knowledge, education, mental and health counselling)
- Training skills and support
- Advocacy skills
- Management skills

In general, more than one third of the web resources of organizations in the field evaluated in the analyses do not provide a clear definition of competency/skills framework listed in general or in a separate document. For one of the four organizations (1/4) on the web site, some competencies can be delimited, which are usually presented partially and indirectly. Most organizations present limited descriptions of skills or references to a standard frame on their website. Some information are limited to the job description. It was rarely possible to identify some job descriptions that clearly indicate the attributions, the skills needed in the support activity with families with children.

The survey started on organizations' websites highlighted some gaps related to acknowledgement and broad representation of skills used in family support work:

- The information and data on the websites are sometimes very general, professional overview, the working principles and skills are rarely presented;
- multidisciplinary approaches to family support skills are not yet common practice;
- international professional standards in the field are difficult to identify on the web sources of the listed organizations.

To conclude, in the context of rapid socio-demographic and economic changes, the family needs to be protected multidimensional, including through quality services and high professional skills in supporting families and children during their life course. Results of the content analysis shows that further efforts are required in terms of: promoting and disseminating a framework for standardizing the professional skills for the workforce in family support, including family-friendly services and policies; developing a network support at the regional and international level, focused on professional competences' standards of the workforce involved in activities and support services for families and children; useful methodological guides, documents, sources, positive practices and researches in the field are needed; international organizations and agencies focused on family and children support should develop a comprehensive and collaborative approach between all actors involved at public, civil and community level, adapted to the diversity of family problems, as well as to develop multi-disciplinary approaches to improve professional skills of family support workforce.

Bibliography

1. Jane Tunstill, Sukey Tarr, June Thoburn. Cross Sector Scoping Study of Family Support Workers in the Children's Workforce. Children's Workforce Development Council, 2008.