

SKILLS IN FAMILY SUPPORT: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS' WEBSITES

MARIANA BUCIUCEANU-VRABIE

NINA MEŠL

NEVENKA ZEGARAC

TADEJA KODELE

The study is part of a comprehensive research project launched within the framework of COST Action "The pan-European Family Support Network: A bottom-up, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach" (EurofamNet, code CA18123). In this project, an exercise of mapping international organizations on skills qualification in family support has been developed. The aim of this study was to examine the profile of organizations and analyze their web-provided content to identify, describe and catalogue available data on basic professional skills, promoted, developed, and applied in family support work. The final sample includes 88 international and European organizations working with families with children and youth in various fields (psychology, social work, health, law, etc.) identified by the snowball technique. Using the method of web-content analysis three interconnected maps of bodies in the field were developed, highlighting a general profile of the organizations, and a wide range of important professional skills of family support workforce were specified and ranked. Frequency analyses and contingency tables were carried out. The results show that most of the organizations in the field do not present a plain definition of skills framework listed generally or in a separate document; multidisciplinary approaches to family support skills are not yet common practice; and evaluations of skills or references to a standard framework are limited.

***Keywords:** family support; skills; family support workforce; standards; content analysis.*

Address of the corresponding authors: Mariana BUCIUCEANU-VRABIE, National Institute for Economic Research, Chisinau, Moldova; Ion Creanga 45 str., 2064 Chişinău, Moldova; e-mail: buciuceanuvrabie@gmail.com (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7743-7206>); Nina MEŠL, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work, Topniška 31, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; e-mail: nina.mesl@fsd.uni-lj.si (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0814-8686>); Nevenka ZEGARAC, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, Jove Ilića 165, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia; e-mail: nelazegarac@gmail.com (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1862-9985>); Tadeja KODELE, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work, Topniška 31, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; e-mail: tadeja.Kodele@fsd.uni-lj.si (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3917-3633>).

INTRODUCTION

In the context of rapid socio-demographic and economic changes, family protection needs to be multidimensional, including through quality services and highly professional skills in supporting families and children during their life course (Canavan *et al.* 2016; Munro 2011; Price *et al.* 2000). The importance of integrative and family-oriented models of care (UNICEF 2019; World Health Organization 2016), multidisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration (Carter *et al.* 2007; Chambers *et al.* 2021), and partnership with families and communities (Axford *et al.* 2012; Bryan and Henry 2012; Evangelou *et al.* 2013) is emphasized across disciplines and social sectors.

As a concept, family support is broadly recognized internationally in public, policy, and academic discourse (Pinkerton *et al.* 2019), and as a child welfare measure and social policy priority, by government bodies across Europe (Hidalgo *et al.* 2018). It is considered a set of services and practices, as well as an organizational framework for social and public policy, which supports families to ensure the well-being of children. Furthermore, it is perceived as child-centered, strength-based, inclusive, partnership-based style of practice, and an inclusive concept which, within a set of services to families with children, includes child protection interventions as a universal approach (Daro 2019; McGregor *et al.* 2020; McGregor and Devaney 2020). In addition, family support is reimagined as a fundamental right of the child, since it is a specific, theoretically grounded, and empirically tested practical approach to exercising and protecting the rights of the child (Dolan *et al.* 2020).

Across the world, family support services and programs are differently represented, conceptualized, and interpreted. Recently, they have been recognized as a transdisciplinary field and a social practice built on knowledge and practice from different approaches, theories and disciplines (Canavan *et al.* 2016; Herrera-Pastor *et al.* 2020). This field and sphere of practice has a unique value basis, as it relies on the empowering perspective, on inclusion, it is prevention-based, prioritizes children's agency and participation, partnership, parental and community engagement (Daly *et al.* 2015; Devaney *et al.* 2021; Zegarac 2019).

This article strives to contribute to the knowledge base of the skills to support families with children used by practitioners from different professions, and by paraprofessionals in several practice contexts, by analyzing written content on websites of organizations that work with families with children and youth, and provide an overview and description of the family support skills which are presented, to offer a basis for further cataloging the fundamental competences of family support workforce. These efforts are linked to the objectives of the COST Action Project "The pan-European Family Support Network: A bottom-up, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach". EurofamNet is a novel initiative involving collaboration among key actors in family support from across Europe, aimed at providing evidence-informed responses at the European level (EurofamNet 2020). Within this context, one of the key targets for research specifically developing a standardization

framework on skills for the family support workforce to ensure quality service delivery for families, is the responsibility of EurofamNet Working Group 4, and one of the actions carried out has been to develop a map of international organizations on family support workforce skills standards (EurofamNet 2022). The present study was conducted as part of this action.

FAMILY SUPPORT SKILLS FROM A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

Identifying the skills that are characteristic of family support is a complex task due to several circumstances. Besides a general recognizability, growing knowledge base and interests, there is no generally accepted concept of what family support as practice, policy, and theoretical construct is, or what it could be. In addition, different theoretical approaches, professional contexts, and models of practice with families highlight a variety of skills that are inconsistently defined and categorized (Carpetis 2018; Cohen *et al.* 2020; Trevithick 2012). Making a distinction between family support and other skills used in helping contexts is a demanding and provocative task, as it is necessary to consider what are the core and (prospectively) specific skills that are applicable in different disciplines and contexts of supportive work with families. This further raises the dilemma as to how to systematize them to ensure their acknowledgement as part of common practice, training, and performance evaluation of the workforce involved in family support activities.

It is usually considered that different disciplines that work with children, apart from the explicit mandate of their service or sector, the specifics of their roles, and their original training, can and need to incorporate a family support approach into their practice (Canavan *et al.* 2016; Dunst *et al.* 2007; Whittaker *et al.* 2016). At the same time, the diversity of workforce in family support programs, in terms of the educational and professional background of the practitioners, is well recognized, due to varying working conditions, contexts, and qualifications of practitioners (Whittaker *et al.* 2016; Zegarac *et al.* 2021). Due to diverse professional backgrounds, job titles, qualifications, and functions, data on the characteristics and qualifications of practitioners are limited and unspecified (Boddy and Statham 2009; Cohen *et al.* 2020), even though the crucial role of practitioners in the success of these programs has been recognized (Canavan *et al.* 2016; Churchill and Sen 2016).

In addition to professionals from different disciplines, paraprofessionals are an important part of family support workforce, in (health-related) prevention and health promotion activities (Acevedo-Polakovich *et al.* 2013), mental health (Barnett *et al.* 2018), early intervention and education (Walter and Petr 2006), child and youth care, and community development work (Global Social Service Workforce Alliance 2017). Paraprofessionals typically work next to, or support the work of a professional in the same field. They have different job titles in various human services and nations (*e.g.*, paraeducators, pedagogic assistants, health mediators, therapeutic assistants, social work assistants, outreach or community workers, cultural mediators, etc.). Also, they are individuals who have not received any

formal training, degrees, or professional credits in their respective fields (Linsk *et al.* 2010; Walter & Petr 2006). They can be paid or unpaid, and can work within government structures and civil society organizations, and are usually engaged in outreach and bridging professional services and families. In this sense, paraprofessionals facilitate the use of not only formal, but also semi-formal and informal support to families.

Since the core principle of a family support orientation is working collaboratively with families in every single aspect and to the greatest extent possible, skills used in family support become an essential part of identity building in defining this cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary field. In this paper, we intend to identify skills as the ability and expertness of practitioners, which come from training and practice, to use knowledge effectively in the execution or performance of specific tasks, in a practical situation (Trevithick 2012). Skills that imply specific strategies and routines in the performance of abilities are an integral part of a broader concept of competences, which also combine knowledge, abilities, motivational and volitional aspects, and values and beliefs (Cedefop 2014; Commission of the European Communities 2007). We believe that identifying skills that are specific for family support in different disciplines and practice settings constitutes an important stage in defining the framework for competences in this field. Despite the fact that the importance of skilled and competent practitioners is recognized, this area has not been sufficiently explored (Canavan *et al.* 2016; Tunstill *et al.* 2008).

Cohen *et al.* (2020) have described the competences of family support practitioners from the perspective of financiers, providers, practitioners, and participants across three cases of family and parenting support programs, in Germany and the Netherlands. Identified competences are referred to as high motivation, knowledge (didactical, pedagogical, tacit, content, and program knowledge), beliefs based on openness and respect towards diverse family lives, adaptability, self-regulation, cooperation, and reflection skills. Skills that are marked there include adaptability, self-regulation skills, cooperation skills, and reflection skills. Zegarac *et al.* (2021) used PRISMA guidelines to conduct a systematic review including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies on skills in the practice of family support. Workforce skills described in this review were the qualities of the professionals, technical skills, and specific knowledge, but most of the included studies did not define the specific skills of practitioners. Antunes *et al.* (2022) conducted a literature review of books and handbooks, as a continuum to a previous systematic review to systematize the skills used in the family support field. This analysis showed that family support professional skills appear aggregated in some intervention domains, such as mental health, psychology, and social work, and not as a domain itself, and showed also a deficiency of standardized guidelines for family support workforce skills.

In commissioning the study, we intend to highlight the importance of cross-sectoral skills standards that need to be integrated, developed, and promoted in the activity of the workforce that supports parents and children as crucial in ensuring

positive outcomes for the human capital. At the same time, the paper comes to inform a broad range of stakeholders including family and social support policymakers, managers in the field, and the public about skills promoted in family support activities, the presence or absence of a mandatory formal professional framework of skills within the family support system. With the pressing changes at the demographical, socio-economical, security and technological level, there is an evident need for research that identifies interventions that can improve the skills and knowledge of family support workforce, to promote safe, effective, and responsive targeted family support.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework used in the present study is defined based on the theory specific to the field studied, and operationalized according to the meaning assigned in the present research. The central concepts around which this paper is organized are family support workforce, skills, and conjugated family support workforce skills.

Researchers in the field (Zegarac *et al.* 2021, 401) state that *family support workforce* comprise a broad range of professionals and paraprofessionals from both government and non-government organizations, who are integrated into the relevant social systems. They use their resources to provide concrete, emotional advice, as well as esteem support. Thus, developmental, compensatory, or protective support to families as a whole and their members is provided, to ensure subsistence, productive development, and integration of the family into the community. Drawing on the professional frameworks of social work, psychology, pedagogy, medicine, and law, various professions, in collaboration with paraprofessionals, organize, provide and advocate for services, in the context of human and children's rights, supporting different aspects of family functioning, while incorporating family support approach into their practice.

As *family support workers* can be found in multidisciplinary teams, working with families affected by various problems (Cohen *et al.* 2020; Whittaker *et al.* 2016; Tunstill *et al.* 2008), in terms of this study we agree that *family support workers* work in a range of job roles within the children, youth, family sectors workforce, and occasionally outside it. In order to embrace the diversity of tasks and responsibilities for the professionals dealing with family services, conventionally has been established the professional framework which includes professions, occupations, and paraprofessionals that should be considered as family support workers (workforce). Thus, our attention was focused on five main professional domains from different but interconnected fields in providing family and child support: psychology, social assistance, pedagogy, health, and law. Twenty-two occupations and fifteen paraprofessionals were identified connected to these professions. The professional framework is presented in detail in the *Table no. 1* below.

Table no. 1

Professional framework and occupations of family support workforce

Professions	Occupations	Paraprofessionals
Psychologist	Family Therapy	
	Forensic Psychologist	
	Child and Family Psychologist	
	School Psychologist	
Social Worker	Social Worker	Social Work Assistant Family Resource Centre Worker Family Outreach Officer Parenting Support Worker
	Child Protection Worker	Auxiliary Child and Youth Care Worker
	Probation Officer	
	Mediator	Cultural Mediator
	Community Worker	Community Development Paraprofessional Worker
	Youth (Care) Worker	
Pedagogy	Social Pedagogy/Education	School Mediator Education Welfare Officer Paraeducator Pedagogic Assistant Parent Educators
	Speech Therapy/Logopedic	
	Special Education	
Health	Physiotherapy	
	Pediatrician/Family Doctor	Health Mediator
	Midwives	
	Nursing	Community Health Worker
	Mental Health/Psychiatry	Therapeutic Assistant
	Occupational Therapist	
Law	Judge	
	Prosecutor	
	Lawyer/Barrister	

Source: Compiled by authors.

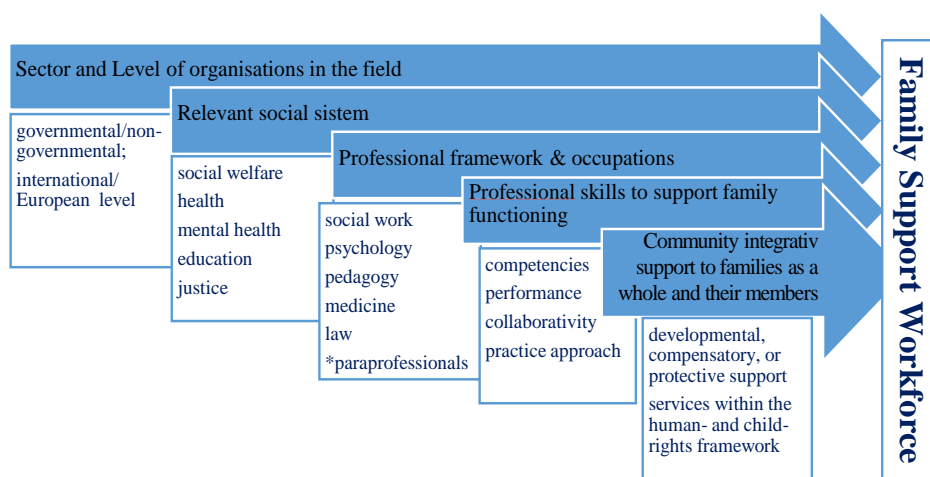
The working definition of *skills* in the current paper is an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carry out complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills).

Family support workforce skills are considered to be learned ability to work collaboratively and competently supporting various aspects of family functioning, and effectively apply knowledge in enhancing the performance of serving families using holistic, strengths- and relationship-based practice approaches (Zegarac *et al.* 2021, 402).

Therefore, in the terms of the present study, *Figure 1* shows the adopted framework of the family support workforce, referring to the professional staff of organizations at the governmental and non-governmental sectors at the international or European level; from a relevant social system and with a specific professional framework and competitive skills to give family support in various situations and integrative way.

Figure 1

Adopted framework of the family support workforce



Source: developed by authors, adapted from Zegarac, *et al.* 2021, Cohen *et al.* 2020.

DATA AND METHODS

The present research is analytical and descriptive, following the general trends of informative presentation of specific family support worker skills by various international institutions in the online environment (websites), in an attempt to detect some methodological provisions, standardization criteria, documents conducted and emphasized in the development, application and promotion of skills needed by workers in the field of family and child support.

Since we are in a digital era, web content analysis has already settled as a type of classic content analysis (Herring 2009; Kim and Kuljis 2010), and researching documents such as websites became a recognizable area in social research. In the current analysis, websites of the organizations in the field, including their virtual documents, are secondary data, and thus subject to both quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

Linked to an evidence-based approach in the context of the COST European Family Support Network, for this study we deliberately focused on international and European organizations in the field of family support, considering as representative including agency, association, foundation, working with families with children and youth in various fields (psychology, social work, health, law, etc.), according to framework presented in *Figure 1*. A partially directed sampling method was applied, based on accessibility and selection unit. To identify organizations in the field, the snowball technique was used.

The collection data stage was from September 2019 to March 2020 which included the selection of organizations, the assessment of their eligibility for further analysis, the exploration of the content of the web pages of relevant selected unites, and the analysis of the resources placed in the online circuit.

The final sample constituted 88 website profiles. In the preliminary searches, were excluded organizations related to religious communities, those with poor information about the role, activity implication, and target group, those referring to national level. Consequently, the sample analyzed in this paper does not include all international or European organizations that are oriented to support families, but it does reflect the diversity of their activity and professional support.

The following research questions were proposed: what is the profile of organizations in the field of family support? Are professional skills mentioned on the website of the organization/agency in the field? What professional skills do international organizations in the field of family support presented on the websites? Are any standardization frameworks or methodological guides indicated?

Information about family support organizations was compiled using a Data Collection Sheet (editable Excel) structured on the necessary items for the analysis of the organizations' profile, the following being considered important: organization name, organization level (international; European), sector (public, non-profit), organization role (service provider, educational, legislative actor, methodological coordination and supervision, public policymaker, research, other), target beneficiaries (families with children, parents, youth, professionals working in the field), listed professional skills (if listed: quote from a document or summarized content about skills definitions, classifications, levels, training requirements, etc.), contact details (city, country, link), additional information (if applicable), and different sources references (reports, studies, articles, methodological guides) placed on the organizations' website.

Subsequently, based on systematized information, three interconnected maps of organizations have been developed: a map of family/ children support organizations/agencies (46 organizations); a map related to family therapy, occupational therapy, family educators and family support paraprofessionals (12 organizations); a map related to youth support organizations (30 organizations).

To analyze the content on the website profiles and identify skills-related references, our search criteria were based on keywords as follows: 'family support workforce', 'skills standards for family support workforce', 'competence',

‘knowledge’, ‘learning objective/ outcomes’, ‘professional principles’, ‘practice’, ‘guidelines for supporting families’.

About 85 different reports, studies, articles, methodological guides, etc. were selected, and their content was analyzed, including through the lens of keywords mentioned above. The data obtained from the information collected were subjected to quantitative analysis, in which the focus was on the descriptive indicators of family support workforce professional skills.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The collected information, data, and materials have been evaluated from the perspective of:

- activities and provided services related to families with children;
- professionals and paraprofessional helpers dealing with family services;
- professional skills applied and promoted by international/European institutions in family support work.

The web content analysis highlights a *general profile of the international organizations in the field of family support workforce* and some specific features. So, most of the organizations evaluated come from the non-governmental sector, about three-quarters. Representative bodies from the public sector constitute almost 1/3.

At the same time, public organizations show a special interest in the youth sector, where more than half of those evaluated are concentrated. This could be explained by the increased attention of the Council of Europe, and therefore of the national policies in European countries on youth in the formation of human capital, the transitional period from school to work, as well as the specifics of age and the problems they face, and which are on the agenda of different policies and strategies of support and sustainable development.

It stood out that five roles are most frequently encountered and assumed by evaluated organizations in their activity: *educational* (the most common role, over 34% in the total of those indicated), *methodological coordination and supervision* (about 25%), *research* (15.4%), *public policymaker* (13%), and *service provider* (over 6%). However, more than a half of the organizations evaluated combine several roles in their activity, while others focus on a single role, most often the educational role. In the category ‘*other roles*’, *networking* is often found.

The analysis based on the differences that occur depending on the target beneficiaries and particularities of activity, found that the *public policymaker role* is more specific to organizations related to youth support workers, and to those focused on family/children support. Methodological coordination and supervision roles are more frequently present on the websites of the organizations related to family or occupational therapy, family educators, family support paraprofessionals, and youth support (*Table no.2*).

Table no.2

Share of organizations' roles described on their websites, by field of activity of organization, %

	Family with children support organizations	Youth support organizations	Family therapy, occupational therapy, family educators	TOTAL (88 organizations)
Educational	37.1	24.2	50.0	34.3
Methodological Coordination and Supervision	14.6	35.5	33.3	24.6
Research	15.7	16.1	12.5	15.4
Public Policy Maker	13.5	17.7		13.1
Service Provider	12.4			6.3
Other	6.7	6.5	4.2	6.3

Source: Calculated by authors based on the results of the web content analysis.

The mapping of international organizations in the field highlights both the target groups for each of the three categories of organizations covered, and the common beneficiaries for all categories (Table no.3).

Table no. 3

Target group delimitation on the website of family support organizations

Type of mapped organizations	Main-target beneficiaries	Common beneficiaries
Family/children support international organizations/agencies	Families with multiple challenges Families with children with disabilities Families with children with special education needs Adoptive parents and families Family support workers Family judges and magistrates Family mediators Family doctors Pediatricians Child and Family Social Workers	Central and local public authorities Teachers Social Workers Psychologists Volunteers Stakeholders
Youth support organizations	Youth/young people Youth Workers or Social Workers School Social Workers Various type of youth work practitioners Young Leaders Stakeholders	Caregivers Interested professionals Community Civil society Trainers Researchers
Organizations related to family therapy, occupational therapy, family educators and family support paraprofessionals	Family and systemic Therapists, Supervisors Couple and Family Therapists Family Educators Public health workers Counsellors	Interested persons

Source: Compiled by authors based on the web content analysis of the organization in the field.

The current study confirms that the range of activity that takes place within the overall context of family support is extensive and diverse.

An overview of the results, in terms of the set aim to catalogue and describe available evidence on basic professional skills in the frame of family support, mentioned on the organizations' websites, and there posted resources, has highlighted the following:

- more than one-third of the web resources of organizations in the field do not provide a clear definition of skills framework listed in a general or a separate document;
- at one of four organizations' websites some professional skills were specified, usually partially presented, and in an indirect way;
- most organizations present limited descriptions of skills or references to a standard frame on their websites;
- some information is limited to the job description; however, it was rarely possible to identify some job descriptions that indicate the attributes, the skills needed to support families with children;
- websites of European-level organizations, describe better the skills and professional abilities required in family support with references to approved standards defined by key actors/ relevant institutions.

However, as a result of the web content analysis, a wide range of important skills in the frame of family support was specified. Below we have compiled a list of the most frequently mentioned skills selected from the website and references of the organizations included in the analysis (*Table no.4*). We ranked the skills based on accumulating the number of organizations that indicated this ability, after which the share in the total reported skills was calculated.

Table no.4

The most common professional skills of the family support workforce found on the organizations' websites and sources

Skills	Share in the total reported skills, %
Communication skills (verbal, nonverbal; at the individual and community level; interpretation skills; non-judgmental communication skills; cross-cultural communication)	21.1
Counselling skills (knowledge, education, psychosocial, mental health and health counselling), counselling assistance; guidance (in access to services)	11.8
Training skills	9.7
Advocacy skills	6.8
Conscious use of self-skills (self-discipline, time management, self-confidence, self-determination, self-reflexivity, self-awareness)	6.8
Management skills	6.3

Table no. 4 (continued)

Learning and lifelong learning skills	5.9
Teamwork skills (multidisciplinary environment; team leaders' skills; cross-system collaboration skills)	5.9
Leadership skills	5.1
Learning support	4.2
Conflict resolution skills, negotiation skills	4.2
Supervision and mentoring skills ('live' supervised practice)	3.8
Critical thinking skills	3.4
Monitoring skills	1.3
Practical skills	1.3
Theoretical skills	1.3
Coordination skills (projects, activities, services, etc.)	1.3

Source: Calculated by authors based on the web content analysis.

The top five most common professional skills were delimited: communication skills, counselling skills, training skills, advocacy skills, conscious use of self-skills and management skills. It stands out that communication skills are fundamental in the family support work, completed with cognitive, personal, social and technological performant skills.

The information gained from the content-analysis of the organizations' websites highlighted some gaps related to recognition and broad representation of skills used in family support work. It is noticeable that information and data on the websites are mostly very general, and that professional overview and the working principles of particular skills are rarely presented. Also, there are limited evaluations of skills or references to a standard frame, and multidisciplinary approaches to family support skills is exceptional rather than common practice.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Family support workforce skills are still a future challenge to conceptualize, and perhaps even a bigger challenge is then to use the developed knowledge in everyday practice (Mešl and Kodele 2016; Zegarac *et al.* 2021). Since family support workers can be found in multidisciplinary teams, working with families affected by various problems (Tunstall *et al.* 2008) we believe some consensus about general, actually foundational skills, which are needed to ensure competent help or support to family members, is necessary. Even though (or because of this) support is provided by a range of different job roles and workforce in the children, youth, family sectors, some common basic family support knowledge and skills are crucial to develop and use in everyday practice as multidisciplinary knowledge in different settings.

The content analysis of professional skills in family support work based on international organizations' websites showed that more than 1/3 of the evaluated web resources of organizations in the field included in the analysis do not present

an available plain definition of skills as a basis for competence framework listed in a general or in a separate document. This could mean a lack of understanding about the subject, connected with lack of scientific, educational and professional interest in skills definition and development (Carepetis 2018; Munro 2011). It also reflects a need for further development of a knowledge model in which family support workforce skills will be identified, described, systematized, classified, and compared with distinctive supportive skills.

On the website of one of four organizations (1/4), some competences were specified, usually presented partially and in an indirect way, and these findings support the reality on the field that family support embraces a wide diversity of interventions and human resources (Cohen *et al.* 2020; McGregor and Devaney 2020), which makes it more difficult to identify a unique or single set of core professional skills and competences.

Most organizations present a limited description of skills on their websites or references to a standard frame, rarely, some information is formulated as a job description, a specific job that is expected to be performed in a particular family support area. The job description usually includes skills descriptions, among other recruitment requirements and summary of responsibilities (Stybel 2010), to a limited extent, and these skills are, usually, not precisely defined.

The findings of the analysis reflect the circumstances in the field of family support workforce skills, presented in systemic review studies (Antunes *et al.* 2022; Zegarac *et al.* 2021), hence like peer-reviewed literature, on websites of different organizations dealing with family support:

- same names are used for different skills and different skills are covered by similar names;
- the term “skills” is often used interchangeably with concepts, such as “competences”, “interventions” and techniques”;
- workforce skills described included the qualities of professionals, technical skills, and specific knowledge;
- there is no definition of specific skills on the majority of the websites.

The way the study was conducted opens many challenging questions. What image do organizations project about workforce skills to the public and the users, when they present family support in this way? Can families recognize such skills as supportive, and focused on their real needs? How are the professionals equipped to reflect on the skills used in practice? What is the correlation between their espoused skills and their skills-in-use, if we paraphrase on what Argyris and Schön (1974) call espoused theories and theories-in-use, the implicit knowledge forming family support workers’ behavioral world. We believe organizations are conducting various important support for families, which is not evident enough in the representations of their work on the website. That certainly depends on their capacity to communicate about their work, but also on the way they understand or implying the skills and specifics of family support. It would be recommendable to support organizations to reflect on the skills they use in practice, and to present

them to a wider population. We find this important for many reasons, but mostly to enable other professionals to learn from good practices, to evaluate the skills used, to make their work transparent to service users.

LIMITATIONS

Some considerations and limitations we faced during the analysis that might affect the results are as follows:

- continuous changes in the websites' content could lead to potential problems with data collection.
- the time frame of data collection was immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic (September 2019–March 2020), thus excluding possible updates, reorientations, adjustments and needs for skills accentuated during the pandemic.
- when searching for the description of professional skills in family support work, listed on the websites of the organization, we defined some criteria for the search (e.g., skill, competence, knowledge, learning outcome, professional, learning goal, principle, practice). On the one hand, this helped us cover a wider range of organizations, but on the other hand, we probably excluded some criteria, and consequently omitted some organizations.
- limited (robust) assessments of skills and lack of concrete information about relevant skills or competences of professionals/ staff in the field is another limitation. The websites of the listed organizations very rarely include documents or information or clear sources that would indicate competences, or are quite generic. This can be explained by the fact that these are mainly internal documents, while organizations consider that it is neither necessary, nor obligatory to present them.
- directed by the aim of the study, broader evaluations, such as the communication capacity of these organizations, are not carried out.
- another limitation may be that the search only looked at organizations that have websites in English, which does not provide access to all organizations (some organizations do not have an English translation on their website and were therefore not included in this search). However, this only partially limits the sample, as a large number of organizations also have a website in English.
- organizations were from different fields and disciplines (e.g., social work, psychology, family therapy, medicine), and employed different professionals (social workers, psychologists, family therapists, pediatricians, pedagogues, etc.) therefore, skills described were conditioned by those professional groups, and expected outcomes related to their professions. Multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches are not yet common practice.

One way to circumvent the above limitations would be to conduct an online study by distributing a link to a short questionnaire on our topic to organizations. Organizations may be more receptive to a study, and the benefits of an online study are greater (data are directly visible, can be considered and analyzed more quickly).

CONCLUSIONS

This content analysis shows that further efforts are required in terms of:

- promoting and disseminating a framework for standardizing professional skills for the workforce in family support, including family-friendly services and policies;
- developing a support network at the European and international levels, focused on the standards of professional competences of the workforce involved in activities and support services for families and children, useful methodological guides, documents, sources, positive practices and research in the field;
- It is a challenge for international organizations and agencies focused on family and children support to develop a comprehensive and collaborative approach between all actors involved at the public, civil, and community levels, adapted to the diversity of family problems, as well as to develop multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches to improve professional skills standards of support for families, children, and youth.

The presented study is one piece of a comprehensive research work started within the EurofamNet Action contributing to further development of the pan-European family support network in which useful sources, programs, policies, and useful information from the field are concentrated (EurofamNet 2020).

Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank our colleagues from the WG4 team of the COST Action EurofamNet involved in the web content analysis process.

Funding:

This article is based upon work from COST Action CA18123 European Family Support Network, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) www.cost.eu.

REFERENCES

- Acevedo-Polakovich, I. David, Niec, N. Larissa, Barnett, L. Miya, and Katrina M. Bell. 2013. "Incorporating Natural Helpers to Address Service Disparities for Young Children with Conduct Problems." *Children and youth services review* 35, no. 9 (September): 1463–1467. <https://doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.childyouth.2013.06.003>

- Antunes, Ana Pereira, Avirović Bundalevska, Irena, and Makedonka Radulović. 2022. "A review of books and handbooks related to the workforce skills in family support." EurofamNet. Accessed August 23, 2022. https://eurofamnet.eu/sites/default/files/toolbox/academicoutputs/WG4_Review_BooksHandbooks.pdf.
- Argyris, Chris, and Donald A Schön. 1974. *Theory in practice increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Axford, Nick, Lehtonen, Minna, Kaoukji, Dwan, Tobin, Kate, and Vashti Berry. 2012. "Engaging parents in parenting programs: Lessons from research and practice." *Children and Youth Services Review* 34, no. 10 (October): 2061–2071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.06.011>.
- Barnett, L. Miya; Gonzalez, Araceli, Miranda, Jeanne, Chavira, A. Denise, and Anna S. Lau. 2018. "Mobilizing Community Health Workers to Address Mental Health Disparities for Underserved Populations: A Systematic Review." *Administration and policy in mental health* 45, no. 2 (July): 195–211. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-017-0815-0>
- Boddy, Janet, and June Statham. 2009. *European perspectives on social work: Models of education and professional roles. A briefing paper*. London: Thomas Coram Research Unit.
- Bryan, Julia, and Lynette Henry. 2012. "A model for building school-family-community partnerships: Principles and process." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 90 (September): 408–420. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00052.x>.
- Canavan, John, Pinkerton John, and Patrick Dolan. 2016. *Understanding family support: Policy, practice and theory*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Cedefop. 2014. *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 130 key terms (2nd ed.)*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Chambers, E. Jaclyn, Roscoe, N. Joseph, and Doug Thompson. 2022. "Safely Increasing Connection to Community-Based Services: A Study of Multidisciplinary Team Decision Making for Child Welfare Referrals." *Child Maltreatment* 27, no. 3 (February): 434–443. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559521992127>
- Churchill, Harriet, and Robin Sen. 2016. "Introduction: Intensive Family Support Services: Politics, Policy and Practice Across Contexts." *Social Policy and Society* 15, no. 2 (March): 251–61. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746416000026>.
- Cohen, Franziska, Trauernicht, Mareike, Francot, Ryanne, Broekhuizen, Martine, and Yvonne Anders. 2020. "Professional competencies of practitioners in family and parenting support programmes. A German and Dutch case study." *Children and Youth Services Review* 116 (September). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105202>.
- Commission of the European Communities. 2007. *Key competences for lifelong learning: European reference framework*. Brussels: Directorate General Education and Culture. <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/285153>.
- Daly, Mary, Bruckhauf, Zlata, Byrne, Jasmina, Pecnik, Ninoslava, Samms-Vaughan, Maureen, Bray, Rachel and Alice Margaria. 2015. *Family and Parenting Support: Policy and Provision in a Global Context*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.
- Daro, Deborah. 2019. "A Shift in Perspective: A Universal Approach to Child Protection." *The Future of Children* 29, no. 1 (Spring): 17–40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2019.0002>.
- Devaney, Carmel, Christiansen, Øivin, Holzer, Julia, MacDonald, Mandi, Matias, Marisa, Piessens, An, and Eszter Salamon. 2021. "The conceptualization and delivery of family support in Europe: A review of academic literature. EurofamNet." Accessed August 20, 2022. https://eurofamnet.eu/system/files/the_conceptualisation_and_delivery_of_family_support_in_europe_2.pdf
- Dolan, Patrick, Zegarac, Nevenka, and Jelena Arsic. 2020. "Family Support As a Right of the Child". *Social Work and Social Sciences Review* 21, no. 2:8–26. <https://doi.org/10.1921/swssr.v21i2.1417>.
- Dunst, J. Carl, Trivette, M. Carol, and Deborah W. Hamby. 2007. "Meta-analysis of family-centered help giving practices research." *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 13, no. 4 (November): 370–378. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mrdd.20176>.

- EurofamNet: The European Family Support Network. 2020. "COST Association." Accessed August 20, 2022. <https://eurofamnet.eu/>
- EurofamNet: Family support workforce skills standards: information sources. 2022. <https://eurofamnet.eu/toolbox/agencies-skills-standards>
- Evangelou, Maria, Coxon, Kate, Sylva, Kathy, Smith, Sally, and Lydia L.S. Chan. 2013. "Seeking to engage 'hard-to-reach' families: Towards a transferable model of intervention." *Children & Society* 27, 127-138.
- Global Social Service Workforce Alliance. 2017. "Para professionals in the social service workforce: Guiding principles, functions and competencies, 2nd Edition. Interest group on paraprofessionals in the social service workforce." Accessed August 10, 2022. <https://ovcsupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Para-Professionals-in-the-Social-Service-Workforce-2ndedition.pdf>.
- Herrera-Pastor, David, Frost, Nick, and Carmel Devaney. 2020. "Understanding Contemporary Family Support: Reflections on Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks." *Social Work and Social Sciences Review* 21, no. 2: 27-45. <https://doi.org/10.1921/swssr.v21i2.1420>.
- Herring, C. Susan. 2009. "Web Content Analysis: Expanding the Paradigm." In: *International Handbook of Internet Research*, edited by Jeremy Hunsinger, Lisbeth Klastrup, and Matthew Allen, 233-251. Dordrecht: Springer,. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9789-8_14
- Hidalgo, Victoria, Pérez-Padilla, Javier, Sánchez, Jose, Ayala-Nunes, Lara, Maya, Jesús, Grimaldi, Víctor, and Susana Menéndez. 2018. "An analysis of different resources and programmes supporting at-risk families in Spain." *Early Child Development and Care* 188, no.11, 1528-1539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1491560>.
- Kim, Inhwa, and Jasna Kuljis. 2010. "Applying content analysis to web-based content." *Journal of Computing and Information Technology* 18, no. 4: 369-375. <https://doi.org/10.2498/cit.1001924>.
- Linsk, Nathan, Mabeyo, Zena, Omari, Leah, Petras, Donna, Lubin, Bonnie, Abate, Abebe Assefa, Steinitz, Lucy, Kaijage, Theresa, and Sally Mason. 2010. "Para-social work to address most vulnerable children in sub-Saharan Africa: A case example in Tanzania." *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, no. 7 (July):, 990-997. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2010.03.026>.
- McGregor, Caroline, and Carmel Devaney. 2020. "Protective support and supportive protection for families "in the middle": Learning from the Irish context." *Child and Family Social Work* 25, no. 2 (August): 277-285. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12683>.
- McGregor, Caroline, Canavan, John, and Saoirse N. Gabhainn. 2020. "A critical consideration of the relationship between professional and public understandings of family support: Towards greater public awareness and discursive coherence in concept and delivery." *Children and Youth Services Review* 113 (June). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.104952>.
- Mešl, Nina, and Kodele Tadeja, eds. 2016. Co-creating processes of help: collaboration with families in the community. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za socialno delo.
- Munro, Eileen. 2011. *The Munro review of child protection. Final report: A Child-centred system*. London: Department for Education.
- Pinkerton, John, Canavan, John, and Patrick Dolan. 2019. "Family support and social work practice in Munford." In: *New theories for social work practice: Ethical practice for working with individuals, families and communities*, edited by Robyn Munford, and Kieran O'Donoghue, 44-62. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing.
- Stybel, J. Laurence. 2010. "Managing the inner contradictions of job descriptions: A technique for use in recruitment." *The Psychologist-Manager Journal* 13, no. 2: 105-110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10887151003776554>.
- Tunstill, Jane, Tarr, Sukey, and June Thoburn. 2008. "Cross sector scoping study of family support workers in the children's workforce." Accessed August 1, 2022. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Cross-sector-scoping-study-of-family-support-in-the-Tunstill-Tarr/72d694153e32b6b11cd68de7fcb49ce48404998d>

- UNICEF. 2019. *UNICEF's Global social protection programme framework*. New York: UNICEF. Accessed July 31, 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-social-protection-programme-framework-2019>
- Walter, M. Uta, and Christopher G. Petr. 2006. "Lessons from the research on paraprofessionals for attendant care in children's mental health." *Community mental health journal* 42, no. 5 (July): 459-75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-006-9051-x>
- Whittaker, Anne, Williams, Nigel, Chandler, Amy, Cunningham-Burley, Sarah, McGorm, Kelly, and Gillian Mathews. 2016. "The burden of care: A focus group study of healthcare practitioners in Scotland talking about parental drug misuse." *Health & social care in the community* 24, no. 5 (May): 72-80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12249>.
- World Health Organization. 2016. *Framework on integrated people-centred health services. Sixty-ninth world health assembly*. WHO, 15 April 2016.
- Zegarac, Nevenka, Burgund Isakov, Anita, Nunes, Cristina, and Ana Pereira Antunes. (2021). Workforce skills in family support: A Systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice* 31, no. 4 (April): 400-409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315211006184>.
- Zegarac, Nevenka. 2019. "The best interests of the child in family support policies, services, and research." In: *Realising children's rights through supporting parents*, edited by Lisa Moran, and John Canavan, 5-24. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre.

Studiul face parte dintr-un proiect de cercetare de anvergură, lansat în cadrul acțiunii COST – „Rețeaua pan-Europeană de suport pentru familie,, (EurofamNet, cod 18123). În cadrul acestui proiect a fost dezvoltat un exercițiu de cartografiere a organizațiilor internaționale privind calificarea competențelor celor care activează în domeniul suportului familial. Scopul acestui studiu a fost de a examina profilul organizațiilor și de a analiza conținutul paginilor lor de web, pentru a identifica, descrie și cataloga datele disponibile despre competențele (skill-urile) profesionale de bază, promovate, dezvoltate și aplicate în cadrul muncii de suport pentru familie. Eșantionul final cuprinde 88 de organizații internaționale și europene ce lucrează cu familiile cu copii și tineri din diverse domenii (psihologie, asistență socială, sănătate, drept etc.), identificate prin tehnica bulgărelui de zăpadă. Folosind metoda analizei de conținut a paginilor de web au fost elaborate trei hărți interconectate a organizațiilor din domeniu, punând în evidență profilul lor general, precum și o gamă largă de skill-uri profesionale importante ale forței de muncă de suport familial a fost specificată și ierarhizată. Rezultatele arată că majoritatea organizațiilor din domeniu nu prezintă o definiție clară a unui cadru de competențe nici la modul general nici separat; abordarea multidisciplinară a competențelor profesionale (skill-uri) de suport familial nu sunt încă o practică comună; evaluările skill-urilor sau referința la un cadru standard sunt limitate.

Cuvinte-cheie: suport pentru familie; competențe (skill-uri); forța de muncă pentru suportul familiei; standarde; analiza de conținut.

Received: 02.11.2022

Accepted: 01.03.2023