INTRODUCING PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION INTO SOCIAL SERVICES OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ITALY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY.

The Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy funded the implementation of national supervision for all social workers employed by local authorities or non-profit organisations providing public services in terms of:

- Group supervision for social workers;
- Individual supervision for social workers;
- Multidisciplinary group supervision for multiprofessional teams.

Who is the supervisor?
Social worker with specialised supervision training and at least 5 years experience in the field

What is the purpose?
To prevent and address burnout, help social workers critically reflect on their practice, and provide a public service that is more responsive to the needs of the population.

Italian Ministry funded research to assess the impact of supervision.

The mixed methods research included:

I) One pre- and one post-questionnaires for all Italian social workers to assess their previous experiences with supervision and measure their professional wellbeing (approximately 19.000 respondents);
II) 21 qualitative interviews with managers responsible for implementing supervision in social services. Managers were randomly selected, with one from each Italian region;
III) 21 focus groups with social workers participating in supervision sessions.

Findings from the interviews:

Both managers and social workers welcomed supervision.

"It is an essential opportunity for professional reflection" (I21)

"I believe that supervision can give the profession a great sense of strength, unity and teamwork" (I7)

"Supervision helps improve professional practice and makes it less exhausting" (I16)

Managers from no-social work backgrounds, while acknowledging the value of supervision, appeared more critical of its organisation and the need for social workers to dedicate time to this activity.

"It is easier in services where there has been supervision before" (I10)

Some challenges in organising supervision sessions were highlighted, such as:

-Finding the right supervisor, since there are few trained and competent social workers available.

"There was a problem finding supervisors" (I1)
"Few supervisors are organised enough to respond to such a large number of requests" (I2)

-Scheduling meetings considering the workload of social workers.

"It is a challenge for social workers to attend supervision meetings. They need organise themselves to be able to dedicate the three or four hours of their work time to supervision, given their workload" (I13)

What we have learned

Supervision is both an obligation for employers and a right/duty for social workers.
Italian social workers must continue to promote the "culture of supervision" so that both front-line workers and their managers view it as a legitimate and essential professional activity.

Valentina Calcaterra, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, valentina.calcaterra@unicatt.it
Maddalena Floriana Grassi, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, maddalena.grassi@uniba.it
Mara Sanfelici, Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca, mara.anfelici@unimib.it