

Opportunities and Challenges in Addressing Child Abuse in the Albanian School Setting

Izela Tahsini, PhD

University of Tirana, Albania
Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Social Work and Social Policy
E-mail:izelat@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This research aims to explore the opportunities and obstacles of the school social worker, as part of the multidisciplinary team, in addressing child abuse and to make evident the Albanian practice of treatment and prevention of child abuse in the school setting. The study uses a multidisciplinary approach in addressing the problem, where the role of the school social worker is seen as interrelated with those of the other actors of the multidisciplinary team. The qualitative method is used, including secondary data review, such as existing literature on international practices and secondary data on Albania, and also primary data gathering, through semistructured interviews of the employees of the existing school service and the focusgroup interview, conducted with professionals of nongovernmental organisations which work on child protection issues, in collaboration with the school system. The main findings inform the field professionals of the opportunities and challenges of the school social worker, in addressing child abuse, the potential of the specialist of child protection in the school and the limitations of this position in the present.*

Keywords: *child abuse, school social work, educational multidisciplinary team, child protection worker, child protection system*

Introduction

By various authors and professionals, the school has been considered the logical locus of the services that target the problematic of child abuse (Blyth & Huxtable, 2002, p.6). Studies have also shown that the multidisciplinary educational team (composed of teachers, heads of schools, and the other professionals that offer services for the children, such as the school social workers, the school doctor/nurse, the school psychologist) is a vital link in the intervention process. As a result of constant contact with the children, this professionals are more likely to discover abuse, to offer valuable input during the treatment process and to participate in prevention programs for adults and children (Crosson-Tower, 2005, p.69). Other studies show that home conditions influence the ability of the child to benefit from school. Most of studies in this field have been correlational and retrospective (Leiter dhe Johnsen, 1997). According to Allen-Meares et al., 2000, social work services that target ecology and especially the family environment, can alterate the academic results for these children (p.6). In Albania, the findings of the two latest studies (Save the Children, 2007; UNICEF, 2006b) which confirm the obvious existence of teacher child abuse, besides parental child abuse, make the school a place of double importance in offering protection services. Also, in many countries in transition, such as Albania, it is noticed that as reaction to the high level of school violence, school discontent, and authoritarian models of teachers, these countries are oriented towards the development of school social services (Blythe & Huxtable, 2002, p.330). As a result, there is a need to study school services according to a multidisciplinary approach, which includes the school social worker as part of the team.

There are only a few existing studies on child abuse and relevant services in Albania, so far. Studies on school services are especially lacking, besides an evaluation of the existing school services, initiated by the Ministry of Education (Tamo, A., Kamani, V., Tahsini, I, Agolli, I, 2007), which remains an internal one. Even the last evaluation of the system of child protection in Albania, is not focused on the progress of the existing school service, in relation to prevention and treatment of child abuse, according a multidisciplinary approach (Malgajlic, R. & Muça, M. 2007). This service, new to Albania, started five years ago, with a narrow psychological focus on learning disorders and lately the first steps are taken for it to become a link in the child protection system.

Child protection services in Albania and schools

One of the main concerns raised by UNICEF, in the report "The state of the world's children' (2006c) is that millions of children, especially in the developing countries, will continue to be disregarded, even if the millenium development goals will be fulfilled. The abused children are included in the four main categories of children in need. This sad picture of the children's situation doesn't get any easier for Albania. The report with the same focus, prepared for Albania, emphasizes

that children suffer from social exclusion, not necessarily because of poverty, but among others, because of abuse (UNICEF, 2006a).

Earlier data on the existence of all forms of child abuse in Albania (Refleksione, 1997; QTMPKF, 2000) were supported more strongly by two later studies (Save the Children, 2007; UNICEF, 2006b). The studies reinforce the fact that almost nothing has change in the culture of violence in our society, along more than a decade. The culture of violence is widely accepted in the society, also physical and psychological abuse continue to be main tools to ensure discipline at home and school. These two studies got for the first time the attention of professionals and policy-makers in fron of a long neglected truth, because of other more 'immediate' problems of family and school. Even though the first report on the state of children's rights in Albania should have been prepared and presented by the Albanian government in 1994, in the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva, it actually happened only in 2004¹. Meanwhile, based on the Albanian Constitution, the child enjoys equal legal rights, as every citizen. Also, the ratification of various international documents puts the state in front of the responsibility to translate the ratified rights in relevant legislation on child protection, and further on, in policies, strategies and services. Even though the Albanian government has worked in the last years on the creation of the legislation on child rights, there has been a long standing vacuum, especially related to child abuse at home. This vacuum wasn't filled by the new Family Code, (2003), and not even by the Law 'on measures toward violence in family relations' (2006). Even though this law creates a definition of violence and domestic violence (which includes child abuse) and enables the creation of a network of services on domestic violence, it is not a specific law on children. This happened only a year ago, with the approval of the Framework Law 'For the protection of the rights of the child' (2010). The law defines the mechanism for the protection of children at local, regional and national level, however, it should be emphasized that the law is not yet completed with the necessarily sublegal acts which will ensure the implementation of the mechanism in practice. In addition, the Ministry of Education is recently discussing the new law on preuniversity education. The law has several provisions on the aspect of child protection in schools, where school psychologists will serve as a focal point for identification and support to cases².

The long legal vacuum has brought also a lack of addressing the issue on the existing policies. Also, at local level, there is still a lack of state mechanisms to apply the existing obligations of the policies. Still, an important step at this direction is the opening of child protection units at local level, which started at 2005. The model is supported by different organizations and is considered as a "grassroot" model where the NGO's have supported the establishment of the CPU as part of social services at the municipality and commune level. After several years of piloting, the model was considered as a positive model by the Government of Albania and recently it was adopted and integrated within the Law on Child Rights. The law specifically mentions that each municipality and comune will open a Child Protection Service as part of social services departments. Now, as per 2012, there are in total 27 Child Protection Units in municipalities and communes, which are supported by the state and a group of nonprofit organisations working in the area of child protection.

This presentation of the situation makes clear that the state social services on child protection are few and still not well coordinated. Even the services offered by nonprofit organisations lack coordination, standardized definitions, procedures and protocols and full legal package to exercise their influence in prevention and treatment of child abuse. Another challenge is the geographic coverage with specialized social services and with the child protection units. From 365 administrative units, there are only 27 Child Protection units or around 12% of the territory is covered. In conclusion, even today, if a child is abused, the government of Albania is not able to fulfill its obligations to offer meaningful support and remove the child from this situation.

Another step that could help the creation of a needed link in these services was the creation of the psychological school service at preuniversity levels, since 2004 from the Ministry of Education, by a minister order (2004). The service was piloted for 4 years and it became permanent in 2008, by another minister order (2008). In reality, until then, child protection was almost out of focus for this service. Only recently, there are some first concrete steps, for a more active involvement in child protection issues, as a result of the cooperation of the Ministry of Education with a nonprofit organisation (Terres des Hommes, Albania), aiming to created a new position in the schools, that of the child protection specialist at school. This process is at is beginning, but in its longterm vision for the services, the Ministry pretends to aims gradually toward a multidisciplinary approach and a psycho-social service on child protection, though this is not

¹ Sheshi, E. member of Committee for Equal Opportunities, Albania, personal interview, December 2007.

² Bregu, E. Terres des Hommes, Albania, personal interview, November 2011.

reflected in any written documents so far.³

In this context, this research focuses on the field of child protection, to explore how the schools services can contribute to it, through a multidisciplinary approach, based on best models of practice, according to which, the social worker is considered as a vital part of the team; also based on the experience of the existing professionals in schools and on that of the workers of partner organisations in this field.

Goal of study and research questions

This research aims to highlight the Albanian practice of prevention and treatment of child abuse in schools (obligatory education level) and to explore the barriers and opportunities of the school social worker, as part of the multidisciplinary team, in this direction. The research questions are:

1. Which are the models of multidisciplinary practice in schools in facing the phenomena of child abuse? Which is the existing Albanian model? Which are the roles and advantages of the school social worker as part of the team?
2. Which are the attitudes, knowledge and behaviors of the professionals of the existing school service in addressing the phenomena?
3. Which are the barriers and advantages of the existing school service in addressing the phenomena?

Definition of key terms and their use

Child abuse is closely linked with historical values and perspectives. This concept has been defined and redefined through history. The society is gradually developing from considering children as property, to at least, the acceptance of the fact that they may have their own rights. Each historical, political period and each culture has a concept of how to treat children. Besides variations from country to country, most definitions include eight aspects of abuse (Kirst-Ashman & Zastrow, 2003). Similarly, The Practical Guide on Child Protection (2009), prepared especially for Albania, emphasizes that it is difficult to define child abuse as a world phenomena, because of the wide cultural, religious, social/political, legal and economic differences experienced by children. What may seem abusive in a state, can be acceptable in another one. Most of studies on child abuse have been conducted by developed countries, so it is not clear how valuable they are also for these children, whose lives are very different. To summarize, it can be said that child abuse definitions may vary according to author, legislation and context of use.

In Albania, the existing definitions used by workers at each link of the child protection system, legal or theoretical, are firstly lacking, and secondly, there is no agreement on use of terms. For these reasons, even The Practical Guide on Child Protection, for Albania (2009), decides to refer to the definition of WHO (1999) of child abuse. This definition treats all the abovementioned aspect, but the difference seems to be on the not-so-detailed definition of each type of abuse. For these reasons, this research will refer to WHO's definition of child abuse.

The child protection team at micro level (at school level) is named as the educational team and it is composed of pupil service professionals, such as the school social worker, the school doctor/nurse, the school psychologist, etc, and also teachers and heads of school (Crosson-Tower, 2005, p.69). In the Albanian schools (obligatory level), the only service which currently tries to address child abuse is the psychological school service, which will be referred, for the purposes of this study as 'the existing school service', or 'the existing service'.

There are various definitions of school social work, which change according to the country, the locus of the school social worker, the directing authorities, etc. School social work can be implemented inside or outside the school area, depending on several elements which define its locus, in a community, or in a specific country (Blyth & Huxtable, 2002, p.236-238). As a consequence, for the purposes of this study, it will be agreed that the school social worker is the professional which performs several roles in child protection, such a identification, treatment and referral, reporting and documentation, and prevention, when its directing authority is the school or other organisations outside it (such as the municipality, government agencies, nonprofit organisations with state funding or mixed funding). Also, on regard the the school psychologist, we will use the term 'existing school service professional' or 'professional', which refers to all the workers currently employed by the Ministry of Education, in the psychological school service in Albania.

³ Malaj, N. vice-minister in the Ministry of Education, personal interview, November 2010.

Toseland, Palmer-Ganeles, & Chapman (1986) define the multidisciplinary team in the school context as a group of members of the school community, where each of them owns specific knowledge and skills, that come together to share expertise, for a common goal. A similar term, which aims to focus on cooperation and interaction of members, is that of the interdisciplinary team, according to Alexander (1993) dhe Johnson (1993). The team can include professionals which are employed inside and outside the school. For the purposes of this research, in the term 'multidisciplinary team' will be included each cooperation between the existing professional inside the school and other professionals, inside and outside of it, in relation to child abuse. Also, the term 'professionals of partner organisations' will be used, which will include the professional of Albanian organisations which cooperate with schools in addressing the issue of child abuse.

Methodology

The methods use are the analysis of secondary data and the qualitative method of data collection. The analysis of secondary data was based on existing local and international literature, including studies, reports, evaluations, laws and strategies. This method was considered the most appropriate to answer to the first research question and partly to the two other ones, since currently there are no multidisciplinary teams in schools in Albania, no school social work service and there are few cooperations with outside services, in relation to child protection. The qualitative method of primary data gathering was used to answer to the two other research questions. It was based on informations coming partially from the professionals of the psychological service, since currently it is the only service inside schools in Albania. Other data were obtained from the experience of the the professionals of the partner organisations. The study was conducted during 2008-2009 and the primary data were collected in the first year⁴.

The target population is that of the professionals at school services which address the child abuse issue and of the professionals of the organisations outside school which cooperate with them. As a result, the sample of the study is composed by the professionals of the existing school service and those of the partner organisations. Since this is an exploratory research, the purposive sample was the most appropriate to achieve its goal.

At the time of the study, there were 140 professionals of the psychological school services in all the areas covered by this service, 40 of them working in the 4 main cities of Albania. 22 of these professionals work in obligatory education level and they were the interviewees which composed the sample of the study. All the professionals working outside the capital city (Tirana), besides one, didn't have a relevant degree, in psychology or social work. The subjects were selected through a categorization Tirana-other cities, in order to interview professionals with and without the relevant degrees, and the other cities, Shkodra, Vlova and Korca, were selected in order to explore potential variations in different geographic areas. The other part of the sample was composed by professionals in partner organisations with the schools. Since there are not many of them in Albania, a focusgroup with 9 participants was sufficient to include all the relevant professionals in nonprofit organisations, whose main focus is child protection and which have created the network of organisations piloting the child protection units and cooperating with the existing school service.

The individual interview consisted of three main axes of questions on attitudes, knowledge and behavior of the professionals of the existing service on the child abuse issue in their working environment. Both interview guides were semi-structured and they were piloted through interviewing three subjects. The individual interviews were conducted face to face and lasted 50-60 minutes. The focusgroup interview lasted 105 minutes and was supported by a co-facilitator. The collected data were manually coded and the codes were grouped in: 16 categories for the individual interviews, such as: concept clarity, case identification, teamwork, etc; 6 categories for the focusgroup, such as: unclear job description, confidentiality issues, etc. The categories were analysed through the method of constant comparison. There were also overlaps between categories. Peer checking and member checking strategies were used to ensure credibility of data.

Findings and Discussion

Based on worldwide experience, the work practice of the helping services linked with the school is characterized by an emphasis in interdisciplinary practice (AACD, ASCA, NASP, NASW, 1990). The school is being accepted more and

⁴ The first aim of this article was to publish the findings of the study conducted during 2008-2009. Anyway, since in the following period, a series of relevant changes have happened in terms of the child protection system, the author has tried to incorporate them through updating the literature review and a few personal interviews with key informants.

more as the logical locus to offer social work services to the children in need and school social work is developing continuously (Constable, R., Flynn, J.P., McDonald, Sh., 2000, p. 133). Its main contributions in the education area are related to the ecosystemic paradigm of the profession, the traditional role in the improvement of school attendance and working with families, the connection with the community and community organisations, and the appreciation of the strengths model from many other disciplines (Blyth & Huxtable, 2002, p.10; Openshaw, 2007). The school social worker is considered a vital part of the educational team in prevention and treatment of child abuse.

Definitions and knowledge on child abuse

In Albania, based on the findings of this study, the existing school service professionals can identify most types of abuse, but not those related to neglect. There is an unclarity of definitions and some confusion of neglect with other types of abuse, which is much higher : in the professionals without the relevant degrees; when they are requested to give a theoretical definition (it seems easier for them to clarify types of abuse by examples). This unclarity seems related to the professional skills of the interviewees, but also to the need for discussion and clarification of definitions by the professionals of the field.

The existing school service professionals consider their existing level of knowledge on child abuse as a barrier to the success of their work. In the case of professionals with relevant degrees, this expresses a need for trainings on the job, adapted to their specific requirements, but also a lack of work experience.

The need for on the job training and the lack of necessary qualifications

The existing school service professionals identify the need for learning and developing many important abilities and skills in prevention and treatment of child abuse. The need for continuous education is high and there have been few opportunities for further qualifications. Besides lack of relevant degrees and of a plan of the responsible authorities of this service for continuous education of the personnel, there are also lesser opportunities for trainings in the cities outside of the capital. The existing qualifications are mostly linked with the individual motivations, interests and attempts of the interviewees.

Lack of relevant degrees for many professionals and lack of sufficient experience/training for working in the school environment, are barriers identified also from the professionals of partner organisations.

Perception of child abuse as a concerning phenomena and an issue of public interest

All existing school service professionals consider child abuse a disturbing phenomena, since they are exposed to the phenomena at schools in many dimensions, such as parent-child, teacher-child, child to child, and also because they notice an accepting attitude towards violence in parents, teachers and children themselves. They also report that children show a 'double standard' toward physical abuse, by considering it as such when it comes from the teachers, but not from parents.

Overall, the professionals consider the issue of child abuse and a society matter, but it is noticed also a tendency to attribute to the family most of 'the guilt', part of a model which tries to find someone to blame, more that to look for solutions. Further more, a part of the interviewees consider child abuse a problem of the society, because they are concerned with the consequences of this abuse for the future of the society (abused children can become problematic citizens). It seems that the needs and the suffering of the individual child in the present, are not a sufficient argument for the society, according to them.

It is also noticed an ambivalent attitude towards child abuse. This is reflected in the attempts of the professionals to justify less 'serious' or 'non frequent' forms of abuse. This attempt is noticed more in the professionals without the relevant degrees, because they also try to justify situations of abuse from parents or teachers, while the others seem more aware of their own internal conflict over this issue, which seems also to be linked with their limited opportunities to influence the situation.

Identification of child abuse cases

All professionals confirm the existence of all types of abuse, and their exposure to them, while working at schools. Psychological abuse by teachers is shown, besides yelling and insults, through misuse of marks/pupil evaluation, or through inappropriate requests, such as obliging children to make various informal payments to the school (for school

furniture or activities, etc), or to follow private courses conducted by the teachers themselves. On the other hand, this type of abuse is very hidden, so it is very difficult to identify. The Ministry of Education, due to lack of coordinated attempts to minimize child abuse by teachers, has undertaken some measures which are considered arbitrary and nonefficient by professionals of partner organisations, such as a hotline where children can complain for teachers, which are then immediately penalized extremely by the Ministry authorities.

Child age increase is connected with the change of the type of abuse by teachers, but not with its existence. The professionals report more cases physical abuse in primary schools, when children are younger, and later on there are more cases of emotional abuse. So, the most fragile and vulnerable children are those who are even more maltreated, while this change is only and simply related to the hesitation of teachers to confront physically stronger children. The professionals use various forms of identification, but their effectiveness seems limited because of several barriers, such as: lack of identification skills, acceptance of abuse, hiding of abuse from parents, teachers and children, and the limited time each professional can spend in each particular school (1-1 ½ day per week). Even for the professionals of partner organisations, the time restrictions are considered a fundamental barrier for the effectiveness of any intervention.

Individual casework and barriers in the process

The child abuse casework of the professional consists in collecting information, a few individual meetings with the child, attempts to work with the abusive parent, or with the cooperating parent and with the school administration, also few referrals in other organisations, outside the school. There is a lack of common procedures for case treatment. Also, it seems that, due to lack of functioning of the links of the child protection system, the professional goes beyond the limits of its position, in terms of time, professional and administrative competencies to treat the case. Cases of neglect are perceived as even more difficult to treat, and they are considered even more overlooked.

The professionals identify various barriers to treatment, such as: the resistance of children to cooperate, because they fear their parent's reaction, if he learns of their contact with the professional; the resistance of the parents to cooperate, which lowers the opportunities for treatment, because the general rule of asking for parental permission to contact the professional, becomes a paradox, when the parent is abusive; the tendency of heads of schools to 'solve internally' the cases, in order to preserve the school reputation, even when cases need to be reported. The 'easier to treat' cases, in terms of cooperation of all parties, are the most successful, while those of heavy and persistent abuse, have less opportunities for treatment, in absence of regulations which give the obligation to act to the school personnel (teachers, heads of school), and which enable the professionals to follow up the case till it is closed, or to report in case of refusal to cooperate.

Another added barrier is the fact that the existing professionals are not oriented (or trained) to work outside the schools, so working with families becomes more of a challenge, which is also complicated by logistical difficulties. The weak links of the child protection system in Albania, make it difficult, and sometimes impossible for the professionals to refer cases in protection services outside schools. This is a problem especially for rural areas. Also there is a lack of specialized psychological services for cases of children, victims of sexual abuse.

Confidentiality issues and case documentation

Some professionals of partner organisations confirm the existence of a basis of trust in the relationship child-school service professional, in cases of child abuse, which varies from one professional to another, but it seems higher, compared to teachers. On the other hand, they express a common concern about preserving confidentiality, for several reasons: the existence of a cultural tendency not to preserve confidentiality, lack of regulations which clarify confidentiality and penalties for lack of it, and also lack of an ethical code (and the relevant body/professional organisation) for these school professionals. The partner organisations professionals express extreme resistance to the idea of the case being discussed between professionals, because of the implied risk. In this context, it becomes very important to clarify and make official regulations of confidentiality and penalties for lack of it and also to ensure child safety after identification of abuse and abuser.

The existing school service professionals report of a model of case documentation, which is mainly individual and self-made. There are not recommended and common forms, to facilitate communication between colleagues and internal supervision of cases, besides of an initiative of the Tirana group. Also, there are no regulations about confidentiality of documents and forms. Overall, documentation is not addressed well, as a tool for assessment, monitoring and supervision of case treatment. The first steps in this direction started in 2010, with the approval of the Manual for Child Protection, (prepared by Terre des Hommes, Albania), by the Ministry of Education.

Also, even though the standards of casework, based on the service regulations of the Ministry of Education and also, in international models of practice, consider very important the component of case supervision, the professionals report that this is implemented only through occasional meetings with the colleagues of the same city, with a similar level of knowledge and experience.

Prevention work

The existing school service professionals report that prevention work exists mainly at an informative level, and only through group discussions with children, parents and teachers. Their formal yearly 'workplan' is mainly a summary of informative activities or reactions to emergency situations, and not a strategic plan. Other limitations identified by the professionals are: the limited time they can spend at each school, lack of interest from parents and teachers and lack of necessary skills for the professionals without a relevant degree. Though not well-organized and well-extended, the preventive strategies are considered the most successful and possible, given the strong limitations of this service.

Barriers in working with the other important parties inside the school and in the profile of the school professional

The advancement of the work of existing school service professionals, related to child abuse, according to them, is not only linked to, but depending on good relationships with the head of school, especially because of their lack of 'status'. Another difficulty in the cooperation with important parties in the school is lack of interest from teachers/parents. These factors seem connected, because the lack of status to ask for cooperation, makes it possible only on a 'friendly basis'. In this context, there is some resistance from the professionals to report to the head of school child abuse by teachers, because this would put at risk their relationship with the teacher.

The partner organisations professionals consider also an important barrier the fact that the school service professional is administratively dependent on a authority, such as the head of school, and on the other hand, he needs to monitor some of the aspects of his work, related to child abuse. This is not possible in a relationship of disbalanced power. To summarize, the most important barrier for all professionals is the lack of necessary regulations, which give to the school professional the power to act. These makes the professionals feel 'not acknowledged' by the school system, which means by other parties inside school. Due do this lack, the professional is 'at mercy' of their willingness to cooperate, and consequently, his potential for success is low when there this will is absent.

A combination of various factors, such as lack of other helping professions inside school such as social workers, or of supporting services outside schools, the high number of schools that each professional works with (3-4 schools for each professional) and the difficult problematics of each school, make the existing ratio professional : child very high. The suggested balance in terms of status(used by the Ministry of Education to create the positions for the professionals), between teachers and professionals, is complicated by the fact that they work longer hours than the teachers and they are also paid differently between colleagues, depending on the school they work in (obligatory vs. high school).

Another factor which heavily influences the quality of work and also the professionals' motivation, is lack of offices. At the beginning of this service this was a fact for each professional, while today, in the best of the cases, they share a common room with the school doctor, nurse, etc. This lowers the level of access to the professional for children, especially in cases of abuse.

Also, these professionals consider all the difficulties of this position, combined with a low and demotivating salary for them, as very professionally disappointing for anyone who wants to work in this field. Therefore, it is likely that these position doesn't attract very qualified candidates, or ones who would like to stay there for long. On the other hand, they also perceive some job insecurity, because of the frequent changes of heads of school, whenever a new political party comes to power in Albania. It seems that for the moment, the professional is in a 'Cinderella/stepchild' role, where a lot is asked from him, but care and rewards are very low.

Cooperation between workers with a social work and a psychology background, barriers and opportunities

The professionals with relevant degrees consider very valuable and desirable the cooperation between social workers and teamwork, which have been informally possible only in Tirana (because there are professionals with social work and psychology in degrees, but no formal social work positions). Cooperation between colleagues results to be lethargic. The professionals work in isolations and there is a strong lack of communication between different cities. Inside the same city, they can be supported only by each-other, but still there is a very weak group identity, constrained by distance, school distribution, isolated work and lack of relevant degrees.

The partner organisations professional consider the school social work position as very important, and more appropriate than then school psychologist, especially in child protection cases, while their vision of a better service, is that of working in a multidisciplinary team, composed by a social worker and a psychologist, including productive relationships with teachers; also, formal networks and teams which include professionals outside the schools, such as the child protection worker in the municipalities.

The handicaps of the professionals without relevant degrees are deep and multifaceted. They express severe lack of knowledge, problematic attitudes, and therefore problematic behaviors. This situation can be solved only by removing these professionals by the service. The same conclusion, which was reached in the internal evaluation of the Ministry of Education, and supported by a regulation in 2008, seems very difficult to be applied. Meanwhile, this regulation clearly cut the potential of the service to be transformed to a psycho-social one. This step is clearly in conflict with the views of the current school service professionals (with a psychology degree, a social work degree, or without a relevant degree) and also with the views of the partner organisation professionals, in terms of the school service in general, and of the protection issues in particular.

A vision of the service in the future

The vision of these employees includes changing the responsible authority for the services, combined with an autonomy of the service, similarly to international best practice models, where these services seems to be more effective outside the school, in countries where the professions are new and not well-accepted. They contest strongly the existing hierarchy of the existing service and developed the idea of creating a decentralized service, close to the local structures, where professional supervision can be offered by professionals in the field.

Concluding remarks

Worldwide, the school is being accepted more and more as the logical locus of the services which target the problematics of child abuse. The use of a multidisciplinary approach inside the school is considered very succesful in prevention and treatment of child abuse. In Albania, the position of the child protection worker/specialist inside the school is still being shaped and for the moment it is held by school psychologists, part of a service with an intial other focus, and already overloaded. There are still challenges, due to unclear regulations, unappropriate responsible authority for the service, gaps in the referal system, gaps in knowledge and skills of the existing school service professionals themselves, and also in case supervision, time limitations, etc, which make it difficult to follow up abuse cases and treat them successfully. Use of a multidisciplinary approach inside schools, and the presence of school social workers in the educational team are considered as very valuable by the existing school professionals and also professionals of partner organisations in the field of child protection. Recent legal developments and the support of nonprofit organisations in this field are important, but a more coordinated response, supported by the government is needed, in order to ensure timely solutions for every child and for the school to become an integrated part of child protection system both at local and national level.

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