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The patchy landscape of supervision in Albania

**The patchy landscape of supervision for child protection professionals in  
Albania**

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### **Abstract**

To provide a snapshot of the state of child protection supervision in Albania, this article presents findings from a small-scale study undertaken to explore the views and experiences of professionals in multidisciplinary child protection teams. Our aims were to provide a description of current supervisory practice and explore perceptions and experiences of supervision. Data were collected via five key informant interviews and surveys completed by 17 frontline workers. We found a patchy landscape of understanding and provision of supervision in Albania.

**Keywords:** supervision, multidisciplinary, children, families, child protection, social work, Albania.

## The patchy landscape of supervision in Albania

### **The patchy landscape of supervision for child protection professionals in Albania**

In Albania, the social work profession, and child protection services, are relatively new and in a state of development (Dhëmbo et al., 2020). Albania is classified by the World Bank as a middle-income economy, with relatively low levels of unemployment and universal health care guaranteed by the constitution. The population stands at just under 3 million people, of whom about 600,000 are aged between 0 and 14 years of age. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), "Albania has made enormous development gains over the past two decades and has moved from being a poor, isolated country to one with a middle-income, high development status [in which] commitment to family is strong [albeit] the family and community environments are also those where women tend to be undervalued, violence is tolerated and children have low status" (Byrne, Gëdeshi & Kulluri, 2021). It was not until the dismantling of the country's communist dictatorship in the early 1990s that social work began to develop as a distinct profession, and many services for children have since then tended to rely on foreign donor funding. Recently, Albania has introduced a national system of child protection, albeit one described as fragmented (Lai, 2016), with under-developed quality review mechanisms, regulatory frameworks, and insufficient human and financial resources (Tahsini, 2017).

### ***Contemporary child protection services in Albania***

Following these relatively recent legal changes in the country, the main child protection mechanisms and structures in Albania now include a National Council and State Agency for the Rights and the Protection of the Child, inter-sectoral technical groups, and local child protection units overseen by regional directors (Council of Ministers, 2017). These different organizations are required to cooperate with one another and with relevant civil society organizations, to ensure that children are safe from abuse and neglect, provide support for families, and protect individual and family rights.

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Local child protection units are the only specialized structures with referral mechanisms in the country and they form the basic building blocks of the child protection system. Each unit has a mixture of professionals, including social workers for both adults and children, child protection workers (non-social work qualified), a coordinator of services for female victims of domestic abuse, and administrators. Each unit also coordinates externally on a case-by-case basis with regional inter-sectoral technical groups, including representatives of other professions, such as health, education, and the police. Child protection units hold the primary day-to-day responsibility for protecting children from abuse and neglect, meaning that their work includes identifying and assessing children at potential risk of harm, monitoring and supporting their families, and coordinating multi-professional responses (Tahsini, 2017).

### ***The place of supervision in child protection work***

Internationally, supervision is recognized as a key component of effective child protection practice and other social services for children and families (Beddoe & Wilkins, 2019). In the east and south-east of Europe, supervision is in varying stages of development (Wilkins et al, 2022). In Albania, supervision has been described as “central to good social work practice” (Dhëmbo et al., 2020, p. 5). Even so, the research evidence from the country is limited in scope, albeit with some excellent individual examples. Notably, Dhëmbo (2015) published a study of child protection practices and related workforce needs in the country. This study, based on a desktop review of relevant documents, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, explored perceptions of social work in general, the organizational environment, and the training and education of the workforce. Within this broad remit, a lack of (good) supervision was identified as a specific challenge. Not all students were supported via supervision while on placement, and for some this persisted into employment post-graduation. As a result, among other recommendations, Dhëmbo suggested the need for more

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supervision training, and called for “social work professional supervision [to] become part of social work practice in Albania” (p. 32). Part of our inspiration for undertaking the current study was to consider what, if anything, might have changed in the 8 years since Dhëmbó’s work was published, and to explore how supervision is being delivered now in Albania.

For the purposes of our study, we refer to the following definition of supervision:

A process which aims to support, assure and develop the knowledge, skills and values of the person being supervised (the supervisee). It provides accountability for both the supervisor and supervisee in exploring practice and performance. It sits alongside an organisation’s performance management process with a particular focus on developing people in a way that is centred on achieving better outcomes for people who use services and their carers. (Davys & Beddoe, 2020, p. 22)

This definition seeks to expand on Kadushin’s (1992, 1993) well-known model, in which supervision has three primary functions – administrative, educational, and supportive.

Administrative supervision means the development and maintenance of good professional standards, adherence to the law and relevant policies, and efficient service delivery.

Educational supervision means the development of each worker, of their skills and abilities, to ensure they can meet their full professional potential. Supportive supervision means taking care of the worker’s emotional and social well-being, and the cultivation of productive and functioning relationships between different professionals.

Whilst Kadushin’s (1992, 1993) model is a useful starting point for thinking about supervision, it is important to acknowledge that contemporary conceptions of supervision, such as the one quoted above (Davys & Beddoe, 2020), tend to have a more explicit focus on adult learning and reflective practice. For example, Scaife (2019) described learning as one of the principal purposes of supervision, including changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, behavior, and understanding. Similarly, Walden and Gordon-Pershey (2013) proposed

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an integrated model for supervision based on Bloom's taxonomy (Conklin, 2005) in which learning is structured in stages of increased complexity, including i) knowledge (*What are the most common challenges experienced by families in this locality?*), ii) application (*What interventions might be useful in relation to these challenges?*), iii) analysis (*Compare and contrast three different interventions*), and, finally iv) synthesis and evaluation (*How might you adapt this intervention to meet the needs of this specific family?*). Likewise, the importance of supervision in relation to reflective practice has been increasingly emphasized (Ferguson, 2018). For example, Baldwin (2016) explored the role of reflection *in* supervision and the relationship between supervision *and* reflective practice, and considered how reflection is a necessary component for professional and organizational learning. On the other hand, Manthorpe et al. (2015) explored the views of newly qualified social workers, managers, and service directors in England and found they considered reflection to be an 'optional extra' within supervision (see also Pitt et al., 2021).

Despite the widespread consensus about the importance of supervision for child protection and social work practice (Beddoe & Wilkins, 2019), the evidence-base is relatively underdeveloped. Following their systematic review of the literature in relation to child welfare, Carpenter et al. (2012) went as far as saying the evidence base was "surprisingly weak" (p. 1843). Their review included 21 mostly cross-sectional studies, finding associations between supervision and benefits for workers, including job satisfaction and self-efficacy (see Mor Barak et al., 2009), and for organizations, including retention (see Renner et al., 2009) - but not for people using services. More recent studies have started to reveal associations between some models of supervision, notably systemic group supervision, and more empathic, collaborative, and purposeful work with families (Bostock et al., 2022; Bostock et al., 2019; Forrester et al., 2017), albeit this model has proved challenging to

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implement at scale, certainly within the context of English child welfare services (Bostock et al., 2017).

### ***Supervision in Albania***

In Albania, there are a limited number of references to supervision within the national guidance for social services (Council of Ministers, 2015; Council of Ministers, 2017; Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth, 2020), and nothing specific to define what it is, its purpose, or how it should be provided. The Law on the Rights and Protection of the Child (Council of Ministers, 2017) also refers to supervision, but only in relation to *oversight* of the workforce. In the Standards of Services of Child Protection Units (Council of Ministers, 2015), supervision is described as “case management, [involving a] discussion on how to manage cases effectively.” Accordingly, Child Protection Unit heads are responsible for ensuring that their employees are supervised by someone with a university diploma in social work or psychology, plus a minimum of 5 years’ experience working with children and families. Yet even these standards are relatively outdated and based on laws that have since been amended or replaced (Tahsini, 2020). The Order on the Organization and Functioning of the Psychosocial Service in Pre-university Education (Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth, 2020) describes supervision more explicitly, as something provided by a social worker or psychologist, requiring a master’s degree and 3 or more years’ practice experience. This Order also specifies the need to have at least one supervisor per 30 employees. Although this Order provides a more specific basis for supervision in *psychosocial education*, it does not apply to *child protection* or *social services* more generally.

### ***Summary***

As social services, and especially child protection units, develop in Albania, there is a growing need for effective supervision to support professionals in the difficult task of helping families, and protecting children from abuse and neglect. The limited research available to



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date indicates that supervision is more often absent than embedded, and sometimes undervalued. In our study, we explore contemporary views and experiences of supervision among Albanian child protection professionals working in multidisciplinary units. We do so to see what might have changed in the country in relation to child protection supervision since Dhëmbo's (2015) study. For example, we aimed to consider whether any of Dhëmbo's recommendations have been implanted and if so, what difference this has made for the day-to-day experiences of supervisors and practitioners. We were also keen to explore the views of qualified social workers *and* non-social work child protection professionals, given the development of multidisciplinary child protection teams within Albania, and to consider the practical provision of supervision (e.g., frequency). Our research questions for the study were as follows:

1. How is supervision organized and provided for child protection professionals in multidisciplinary teams in Albania?
2. How do child protection professionals in Albania describe the value of their supervision?
3. How do these findings relate to Dhëmbo's (2015) previous recommendations in relation to the development of supervision in Albania?

#### **Methodology and methods**

To address these questions, we adopted an exploratory and constructivist methodology and used two methods of data collection – an online survey followed by a small number of qualitative research interviews. Data collection took place between January and March 2022. The lead author was based in Albania and the second author was based in the UK.

#### ***Online survey***

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An online survey was completed by frontline professionals working in multidisciplinary child protection teams, distributed via an anonymous link ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)). The survey was available in Albanian or English, at the respondent's discretion. In the survey, respondents were asked about their personal and professional characteristics (e.g., age range, sex, working pattern, and professional background). Respondents were then asked a screening question to determine if they were a supervisor, supervisee, or both. Second, respondents were asked about the provision and nature of their supervision, such as the frequency of supervision meetings. The questions in this section were based on those used previously by Wilkins and Antonopoulou (2019) to enable a degree of comparability between supervision in Albania (the country of the first author) and in the UK (the country of the second author). Third, respondents were asked to complete two standardized measures - the Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale (LASS; Wainwright, 2010) and the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory (SWAI; Efstation et al., 1990).

The LASS (Wainwright, 2010) is a standardized measure focused on the respondent's most recent supervision meeting. It consists of three items: i) the extent to which the session *focused* on things the worker wanted to focus on, ii) whether the supervisor and worker *understood* one another, and ii) how *helpful* the session was. Responses are given via a Likert-scale from 1 to 10. This scale is recommended for use given its brevity (Watkins & Milne, 2014, p. 379). According to a study involving 140 clinical psychologists (Wainwright, 2010), the LASS has adequate internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .713). Concurrent validity for the scale has also been established (*ibid*) relative to the Supervisory Relationship Questionnaire (Palomo et al., 2010) and convergent validity in relation to the Supervision Satisfaction Questionnaire (Conn et al., 2009). In addition to the LASS, we also asked a fourth bespoke question, to check whether the respondent's most recent session was

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typical or atypical (with lower scores indicating the session was more typical). In this paper, we report the results of the LASS as provided by supervisee and supervisor respondents.

The SWAI is another standardized measure, consisting of 19 items, organised into two sub-scales (Rapport and Client-focus), with Likert-scale responses from 1 to 7. The first 12-items are combined (mean average) to provide an overall score for the respondent's experience of their supervisory *relationship* (Rapport sub-scale). The remaining 7-items are combined (mean average) to provide an overall score for the extent to which supervision meetings are *client-focused* (Client-focus sub-scale). Higher scores indicate a more positive Rapport and more Client-focused meetings. The SWAI has been recommended for use in supervision research (Watkins & Milne, 2014, p. 379) and remains "a commonly utilized measure of supervisory working alliance" (O'Donovan & Kavanagh, 2014, p. 461). The measure has good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.71 - .90) and adequate convergent and divergent validity (*ibid*). In this paper, we report the results of the SWAI as provided by supervisee respondents only.

#### ***Key informant interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with key informants (n=5) in Albania to explore their views and experiences of supervision. An interview schedule was developed, composed of nine primary questions and an additional five for those with direct experience of *providing* supervision. The interview schedule was developed by both authors working together, with a starting point being Dhëmbo's (2015) previous findings. For example, at the start of each interview, key informants were provided with the definition of supervision provided above (Davys & Beddoe, 2020). They were then asked to describe their own role, the current state of supervision in Albania, their understanding of the history of supervision in the country, what makes supervision especially important for child protection practice, what

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policies and procedures guide the work of supervisors in Albania, how effective supervision is, and what challenges and opportunities exist for supervision.

### *Sampling*

Sampling was conducted on a pragmatic and purposeful basis (Robertson & Sibley, 2018; Suri, 2011). For the key informant interviews, the aim was to recruit a set of respondents with expertise about the provision of supervision in Albania to help us address research questions 1 and 3. Inclusion criteria were i) currently working in Albania ii) in the field of child protection, iii) with more than 2-years practice experience, and iv) knowledgeable about supervision. The lead author circulated an invitation to 53 individuals within Albania who met the inclusion criteria, five of whom agreed to take part, from a mixture of public and non-public organizations - including an NGO program coordinator, two Heads of Child Protection Units, the Head of a Psychosocial School unit, and a representative of the State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child. For the survey, the inclusion criteria were i) currently working in Albania ii) in the field of child protection, and iii) based within a multidisciplinary child protection team, to help us address research questions 1, 2, and 3. To recruit survey participants, the first author circulated an email invitation to the same 53 individuals, 17 of whom completed it, including social workers, psychologists, and child protection workers. Thus, the recruitment for the survey and the interviews relied on availability sampling (Daniel, 2011), and we make no claims for representativeness. **The total sample consisted of 19 respondents (14 completed the survey, 3 completed the survey and took part in an interview, 2 took part in an interview).**

### *Data analysis*

Interview data were analyzed using a form of thematic analysis (Polkinghorne & Arnold, 2014; Polkinghorne & Taylor, 2019). Recursive Abstraction follows a six-step

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process, starting in this case with transcripts of the interviews, which were analyzed by both authors separately and in discussion (see Table 1).

Survey data were analyzed via SPSS for Mac (version 25), to provide descriptive statistics. The standardized measures within the survey (i.e., the LASS and SWAI) were analyzed according to their instructions. To help check the veracity and validity of the analysis, the findings were first presented at a conference in Albania as part of a keynote presentation by the first author. This was followed by a round-table group discussion with supervisors and practitioners, to reflect on the key themes and implications for practice.

While we did not systematically collect feedback from these supervisors and practitioners, there appeared to be a general agreement that the findings fairly reflected the nature of supervisory practice within Albania, and that the recommendations made (see below) were reasonable and necessary.

#### ***Ethics***

Ethical approval for the study was provided by the second author's University, School of Social Sciences' Ethics Committee. Survey responses were collected anonymously and respondents were not asked for any information about specific children or families. As part of the consent process, respondents were reminded not to share confidential information of this kind, and none did. For the interviews, a similar consent process was used, and transcripts were prepared from the audio-recordings anonymously, with all potentially identifiable information omitted. All data were stored securely on the second author's University network.

#### **Findings**

We start with the survey data, organized as follows - (1) personal and professional demographics, including experience of supervision; (2) frequency, format, and length of

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supervision meetings; (3) the content of supervision meetings; (4) the helpfulness of supervision; and (5) the LASS and the SWAI.

### *Personal and professional demographics*

Respondents were mostly female ( $n = 14$ ; 82.3%) and aged between 25 and 34 years ( $n = 7$ ; 41.2%), 35 and 44 years ( $n = 8$ ; 47.1%) or 45 and 54 years of age ( $n = 2$ ; 11.8%). The majority were working full-time ( $n = 16$ ; 94.1%) and had a master's degree ( $n = 13$ ; 76.5%). Most said they worked in the field of social work and social care ( $n = 12$ ; 70.6%), while the rest worked in education ( $n = 5$ ; 29.4%). Most said they worked directly with children and families ( $n = 12$ ; 70.6%), all in the field of child protection ( $n = 17$ ; 100.00%).

Most respondents said they received supervision ( $n = 14$ ; 82.4%), and more than half that they also provided it ( $n = 11$ ; 64.7%). Just under half said they received *and* provided supervision ( $n = 8$ ; 47.1%). More than half ( $n = 10$ ; 58.8%) answered the questions from the perspective of a supervisee, while the remainder did so from the perspective of a supervisor.

### *Frequency, format, and content of supervision meetings*

Respondents who received and/or provided supervision were asked about the frequency, format, and content of their supervision meetings. Most reported having monthly supervision, with a similar number reporting more frequent meetings (weekly or fortnightly). A minority said they had supervision less often than monthly or never (see Table 2). Group supervision was the most common model ( $n = 13$ ; 76.5%), with the remainder reporting one-to-one meetings.

### *The content of supervision meetings*

Respondents were asked about the content of their supervision meetings and what topics they typically discussed. The most common topics identified were *risks and needs*, followed by *the children they were working with*, and *emotional support*. Supervisors were more likely to say they discussed *emotional support*, *analysis and reflection*, and the *quality of the*

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*worker's practice* compared with supervisees. In fact, supervisors were more likely to say they discussed *all* the suggested topics, apart from decision-making (see Table 2).

### *The helpfulness of supervision*

Most respondents said that having supervision helped in a range of ways, especially for the *quality of the worker's practice*, and for *analysis and reflection*. (For each item, respondents provided a score between 1 = *supervision does not help at all* and 5 = *supervision always helps*). Overall, supervisees were a little more likely to say that supervision was helpful, compared with supervisors (see Table 2).

### *The Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale and the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory*

Results from the Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale (Figure 1) indicate that supervisors were more positive about their most recent supervision session compared with supervisees, but only slightly. Supervisors were also more likely to say the previous session was typical, compared with supervisees. Results from the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory (Figure 2) indicate supervisees gave relatively high ratings for Rapport (compared to normative scores reported by Efstation et al., 1990) and slightly lower scores for Client-focus (*ibid*).

### **Key informant interviews**

Building on the survey data, from the key informant interviews we generated four themes using the process of Recursive Abstraction outlined above: (1) defining the purpose of supervision, (2) the value of supervision, (3) the need for a well-developed legal and practice framework, and (4) examples of good supervisory practice.

#### *Defining the purpose of supervision*

There was some confusion among interviewees about the nature of supervision and how it should be provided. Managers know they should and want to support their staff, but often lack guidance on how to do it. In the words of one interviewee, "Besides a small article

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on the law, there is nothing. Is it monitoring or supervision? We are stuck here. We have tried to design an internal document, a methodology of work, based on pieces of [advice] offered by NGOs working in this field, on which to base our monitoring of child protection workers” (Head of Child Protection Unit 1). Another interviewee expressed their frustration, saying “After the new law, the concept of head of unit supporting the child protection worker was introduced and there is confusion in this regard. We have had cases when the worker comes and tells you – take this case, I cannot do anything about it. I do not think it should function like this” (Head of Child Protection Unit 2).

Considering the purpose of supervision as it currently functions, it was seen mostly as an administrative activity, especially in state services. Some differences were identified between different geographical regions, so that in some places there were more developed structures for professional supervision. The State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child (SARPC) offers ‘technical assistance’ for casework, according to their mandate, including for child protection workers, via phone calls, e-mails, and sometimes field visits. While this assistance could operate as a form of supervision, as one key informant reported, the team consists of only six people and must cover the entire country. By contrast, when supervision is provided externally, and via NGOs, it is more likely to include educational and supportive functions.

#### *The value of supervision*

Participants’ views about the value of supervision were two-fold. They reported supervision within state-funded services happens informally, if at all, and mostly in response to crises. It is not often intentional or planned. Supervision meetings may vary from once a week to once a month (or less often). In services provided by NGOs, supervision is more likely to be planned, regular, and to have set objectives. According to one NGO program coordinator, “I see the attempts to do supervision mainly as [being] non-institutional, non-



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public.” However, as supervision within NGOs is often reliant on project-based funding, it can also be less reliable. In some cases, workers are “over-supervised,” as they supervised via multiple NGO projects, while other workers not supervised at all.

Although the value of supervision is recognized within the NGO field, this is not always the case in areas of state-governed practice. As such services develop, they face the constant challenge of being underfunded and short-staffed. One key informant stated, “Child protection workers are new [to the work] and sometimes get stuck. This is amplified by lack of human and financial resources. The empowerment of professionals [via supervision] reduces some of these limitations and increases quality of services” (State Agency representative). Even so, there can be a lack of understanding about supervision, especially outside of NGOs. One key informant explained, “State structures do not understand its importance, [but for us] the need is emergent, screaming” (NGO program coordinator).

#### *The absence of a well-developed legal and practice framework*

Key informants identified two main challenges for the consistent provision of supervision. First, as noted above, they commented often about the lack of national policies and guidance for supervision. Second, they noted the lack of specific training and support for supervisors as well as development opportunities for prospective supervisors. Heads of Social Services in many places do not have social work or psychology qualifications, and thus cannot provide supervision themselves (according to current regulations). Those who are qualified must often balance their supervisory roles alongside their own case-holding responsibilities. As one key informant stated, “I am a supervisor and at the same time a social worker in two schools and one kindergarten. Supervision needs time, it is challenging to do both roles” (Head of Psychosocial School Unit).

#### *Good supervisory practices*

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Despite these challenges, the key informants identified clear examples of good practice in Albania. Many individual supervisors were described as available, responsive, and empathic. An NGO program coordinator said, “[our supervisor helps] my workers to feel listened, appreciated, to help them ventilate.” Key informants also identified how supervision makes a difference for workers, for their emotional well-being and their ability to provide a good service. One Head of a Child Protection Unit said, “After they get used to our discussions [supervision meetings], they feel comfortable, they learn to do their work better, and [this] is reflected in a better quality of case management.”

### **Summary**

In summary, when supervision is provided for child protection professionals in Albania, it most often happens monthly and mostly via a group model. According to supervisees, common topics for discussion include *risks and needs*, the *children being worked with*, and *emotional support* for workers. According to supervisors, common topics also include *analysis and reflection*, and *the quality of the worker’s practice*. Where available, supervision is said to help with all these things, while supervisees were slightly more positive about the helpfulness of supervision relative to supervisors. Yet there remains a lack of clarity about the purpose of supervision, and in general it is more likely to focus on administration. State-funded services place a lower value on supervision compared with NGO services, and workers in the former may be “under-supervised,” while those in the latter may even be “over-supervised,” partly because of the nature of project funding. At a national level, there is a lack of policy and guidance and a lack of training and support for supervisors (and prospective supervisors). Despite these challenges, examples of good practice are evident – and when supervision is provided regularly and by a suitably experienced and skilled supervisor, workers feel listened to and appreciated, they develop the knowledge and skills needed to do their jobs well, and the quality of service is improved.

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### Discussion

Based on our findings, supervision in Albanian child protection services seems to be in a state of development, and one that is only partially recognized and provided for. Overall, this status reflects and reinforces earlier findings from the country (Dhëmbo, 2015). Some good practices are evident, yet the general provision of supervision appears to be patchy.

*How is supervision organized and provided for child protection professionals in multidisciplinary teams in Albania?*

Regarding the definition and purpose of supervision, our findings indicate there are different perspectives within Albania, especially between NGOs and state services. When supervision is provided, it happens most often on a monthly basis, reflecting the pattern of supervision seen in other parts of Europe, including the UK (Wilkins & Antonopoulou, 2019). Especially in state services, concerns were expressed by key informants that the focus of supervision is primarily administrative, with little room for education, emotional support, and reflection. Although in some situations, such as during a crisis, supervisors can have good reason to be more *directive* (Wilkins and Jones, 2018) this concern about an overly-administrative focus is perhaps the one heard most often about supervision around the world (Beddoe, 2010; Beddoe et al., 2021; Egan et al., 2016; Egan, 2012; Manthorpe et al., 2015; Turner-Daly & Jack, 2017). Thus, while the very real constraints imposed on services in Albania because of limited resources must be acknowledged, it is true of better funded services that supervision may also be “captured” by managerialism. Indeed, it may be that this situation results not necessarily from limited resources so much as from the nature of “risk work” and risk-management (Beddoe, 2012; Broadhurst et al., 2010), as well as the role-confusion of asking people to be *both* case managers *and* supervisors.

*How do child protection professionals in Albania describe the value of their supervision?*

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Nonetheless, our findings also suggest that in many circumstances, where it is available, supervision is experienced as helpful in a range of ways by supervisees and is perceived as helpful by supervisors. Such perceptions are comparable with the experience of supervision in other countries. For example, in a survey of 315 social workers in the UK (Wilkins & Antonopoulou, 2019), newly qualified workers said their supervision helped primarily with *clarity about risk and need*, and the *quality of their practice*, with average scores of ~3.5 (on the same 5-point scale used for our survey). In Albania, respondents also said that their supervision helped with these things, and to a similar degree (3.3 and 3.7 on a 5-point scale respectively). These results suggest that, where supervision is provided in Albania, there is nothing unusual or sub-standard about its quality, at least as reported by those taking part.

#### *Developments since Dhëmbo*

As outlined in the introduction, Dhëmbo (2015) completed a previous study of child protection practice in Albania, which included some helpful insights about supervision. Our study builds on this existing work by looking specifically at supervision for multidisciplinary child protection professionals. By so doing, we found some encouraging signs. Especially within NGO services, supervision is valued and often provided. When workers have access to regular supervision, whether in NGO or state services, they tend to be positive about its content and helpfulness. Supervisees also reported generally positive relationships with their supervisors (above average, based on the SWAI rapport sub-scale). We also discovered that supervision is mostly provided on a monthly basis and, unlike in some other countries, via group meetings rather than on a one-to-one basis. Given the developing strength of the evidence base in relation to group supervision (Bostock et al., 2022; Bostock, Patrizo, Godfrey, Munro, et al., 2019), this practice could bode well in terms of improving the quality of practice.

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Yet the provision of supervision is also hindered by the lack of a legal and practice framework, with some key informants suggesting that it only takes place in response to crises. Lines of responsibility may also be somewhat blurred, as managers are also asked to act in supervisory roles. The lack of training and support for supervisors, and prospective supervisors, also persists despite previously being identified as a pressing need (Dhëmbo, 2015).

#### **Limitations**

This study is among the few to consider the provision of supervision in Albania, and the first (that we know of) with an exclusive focus on the provision of supervision in the field of child protection in the country. However, as with any small-scale study, there are some important limitations we want to emphasize. First, we relied on a small and non-representative sample, and thus we cannot make any claims about generalizability or representativeness. Given the size of the sample, it would not be meaningful to conduct any statistical analysis, for example to consider whether the differences between supervisors and supervisees might be statistically significant or merely the result of chance. Second, we were not able to check our analysis of the qualitative data with the key informants themselves. Third, both authors are interested in improving the quality of social work supervision and believe in the value of supervision *a priori*. Thus, we acknowledge our own potential biases, and can only present the findings from our own perspectives.

#### **Conclusion**

We conclude that there are four main challenges for the development of child protection supervision in Albania: (i) the development of a proper legislative and policy framework for supervision, which recognizes the supervisor role and sets out roles and responsibilities for supervisors and supervisees alike, including evaluation and documentation of supervision; (ii) the development of social service structures in

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municipalities, including recruitment of the appropriate number of trained and experienced staff; (iii) strengthened collaboration between public and non-public agencies, in an effort to use all existing expertise and other resources in this field and ensure the provision of all three functions of supervision; and (iv) the development of a properly trained supervision workforce. The simultaneous development of all these aspects, while ambitious, is necessary to ensure a better understanding of supervision and its value and create the conditions for more effective supervision in the future of child protection services in Albania.

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#### Declaration of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by authors.

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