

## **Pedagogues and Social Workers - Challenges of Collaboration**

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### **Abstract**

In their work, pedagogues and social workers respond to many pedagogical and social challenges that children and/or their families face. In order to successfully address these challenges, it is necessary to achieve a quality collaboration between the school and the social welfare centre. Seeking an answer to the question of quality of the collaboration, three research questions were asked in this research. The answer was reached using a semi-structured interview. The results showed that research participants assessed the following as important: collaboration (they also offered suggestions on how it could be improved), their own education and training, personality traits and personal views of “helpers”, the need to harmonise legislation and to employ social workers in schools as members of professional counselling services.

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**Keywords:** Quality, pedagogue, social worker, collaboration

### **Introduction**

The contemporary world abounds in challenges for both children and adults. There is an apparent increase in the number of divorces, family structures are changing, there is more poverty and insecurity because existence has become jeopardized, population migration are more frequent and the like. These are all the reasons that destabilise the members of the family unit. As a consequence of these "shakes", family psychopathology, poor parental control and lack of self-control in children and young people, substance abuse, increased addiction to modern technologies and gambling, and the like emerge (Kumpfer and Bayes, 1995; Thompson, Pinney and Schibrowsky, 1996; Vulić-Prtorić, 2002; Raboteg Šarić et al., 2002; Perrone et al., 2004; Farrington, 2005; Sullivan, 2006; Vrselja and Glavak Tkalić, 2011; Dodig and

Ricijaš, 2011). These types of behaviour of children and young people, and their parents as well, are becoming a more common socio-pedagogical challenge which socially responsible actors (institutions and individuals) are trying to address. In addition to these, we might say "more contemporary challenges", the "traditional" ones, such as school stress, academic failure, peer and family violence, aggressiveness, juvenile delinquency, etc., are still of topical interest. It seems that today it is really hard to grow up, but is even more difficult to raise children. Every day professionals (kindergarten teachers, primary-school teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, etc.) and social workers meet, raise and educate children and young people who have failed to find effective strategies to face these (and other) challenges and try to help them find a way out of sometimes almost dead-end life situations. The final outcome of these efforts is uncertain, but when families and professionals (pedagogues and social workers) manage to build a quality collaborative or partnership relationship and join their forces, it is very likely that they will help children and the young to successfully overcome the challenges they face in life. This paper focuses on the research of the quality of collaboration between primary schools and social welfare centres in order to reveal the critical points of that collaboration and to offer possible solutions.

### **Pedagogue's role and tasks in the contemporary school curriculum**

Contemporary school is aware of its limitations, but is trying to keep up with new knowledge on education in line with humanistic values (spiritual, ethical, and moral ones) and developmental curriculum and thus actualises the need to change the entire school system to "suit the pupils". School, as a fundamental educational institution of particular social interest must follow social change and respond to the challenges that the contemporary world brings (Giesecke, 1993; Stoll and Fink, 2000), but what makes these schools successful are their clear focus, high expectations, effective leadership, quality collaboration and communication, compliance with standards, monitoring of learning and teaching, professional development, stimulating learning environment, and family and community involvement in its activities (Shannon and Bylsma, 2007). Good collaboration and communication on the one hand, and family and community involvement in school's activities on the other are extremely important aspects especially for those pupils who are at risk (poor / neglected pupils), and come from a deprived environment (Edmonds, 1979, quoted in Marsh, 1994). Providing support for each child depends mostly on how much the school community is focused on individuals, how much it acknowledges contemporary knowledge and resources and how much it is directed to the quality collaboration of all participants of the educational process (Crandall et al., 1983, quoted in Marsh 1994; Berman and McLaughlin, 1997). Various experts are included in creating the curriculum

in particular, pedagogical employees in schools, but at the practical level of *implementation*, in addition to teachers, pedagogues (and other professional staff, if the school has them) play a special role. The role of the pedagogue in achieving collaboration between all the factors of the educational process, both within and outside the institution, stands out in particular. Pedagogue is one of the members of the professional counselling service whose job requires that he/she connects different knowledge and skills and collaborates with other experts in order to find the best solutions to specific situations and challenges. He knows the pedagogical theory and practice, and is therefore considered both a practitioner and a theoretician who knows the basics of psychology, biology, sociology, ethics, and of a number of other sciences (Milat, 2005). In addition to working directly with pupils, a pedagogue also performs many different tasks and duties and is also a consultant, coordinator and counsellor in a variety of activities of the educational programme (Jurić, 2004). Considering their competences and the type of work they do, and also insufficient staffing of professional services in many schools, pedagogues often also perform some tasks that border psychologists' and social workers' professional tasks. Therefore, Jurić (2004) points out that the pedagogue is a person who works in a dynamic environment and is in constant interaction with others and must adapt, continuously learn and work in collaboration with other partners. Other experts, who are not necessarily school employees, but who are indispensable for ensuring the necessary conditions for children who are at risk, help pedagogues in achieving certain tasks. Pedagogues enable the social workers, who are one of their partners, to collect information about the child, his behaviour in school, academic success, difficulties, peer status, and the like.

### **Social workers – roles and tasks**

Understanding the profession of social work is inseparable from notions - social change and development, social cohesion, empowerment of people, respect for human rights, and the like. These notions determine the purpose of social work, i.e. they emphasize the social well-being of individuals, social groups, and communities, support social cohesion in the period of change and help vulnerable members of the community by providing protection (Council of Europe, 2001, quoted in Bouillet and Uzelac, 2007). The key factor in the field of social work is the social worker who is the main and responsible person in organising and providing social services to individuals and groups in need who are often just because of their status discriminated. Some of the main duties of the social worker is to provide consulting services to the users of some of the aspects of social welfare, to represent them, to help them get their legal rights, etc. (Urbanc, 2006).

Čačinovič Vogrinčič et al. (2007) point out that social workers in their professional activities must respect several principles in order to successfully carry out the tasks of social work. Those principles are: comprehensive advantage - agreed solution that everyone will benefit from; contact - establishing communication with all those who are involved in the problem; interposition - include empathy and compassion, but also the distance that is necessary for operation; negotiation – a social worker creates the process leading to an agreement; participation - "third" parties who are needed to solve the problem; establishing there is a problem - admit when you cannot find a way forward and seek help from another expert, and social-ecological principle - social worker strengthens the natural social networks (family, friends, co-workers, neighbours).

In accordance with the international regulations, the Croatian Social Welfare Act (2015, Article 21) defines the beneficiaries of social welfare as: *orphans, children without adequate parental care, young adult, child victims of domestic, peer or other violence, child and young adult with behavioural problems, and family which require professional assistance or other support because of broken relations or other adverse circumstances.*

As social workers are not only service providers, developing a collaborative relationship with the client is one of their fundamental tasks. It aims to develop clients' *internal* motivation and encourage them to take an active role in creating better conditions necessary for a successful life (Social Welfare Act, 2015). Therefore, Moon (2001) emphasises that the essence of generating interlocutor's intrinsic motivation is the desire to become an active agent in his own life and create better conditions that will be more appropriate for his needs and those of his family. The goal of counselling is to guide the interlocutor into taking responsibility for his own choices by supporting, encouraging and strengthening him in the process, but also by guiding him to accept the natural consequences of his own irresponsible choices. The social worker achieves this during a professionally guided, structured and goal-oriented counselling conversation while maintaining an empathetic attitude, but does not take interlocutor's responsibility upon oneself. The ultimate goal of changing an individual's behaviour is a successful integration into society and only then the service users feel complete, appreciated, coherent, and socially connected (Adams et al., 2009). The process of social inclusion of users of services provided by the social welfare centres is often long lasting and uncertain and it is, therefore, important that the user is guided through the process by a professional (reflective practitioner) who is always ready to improve their own competences through a process of lifelong learning.

When it comes to social workers' tasks and activities related to younger clients (primary and secondary school population) and/or their families, then in order to reach quality solutions together the collaboration

with professionals in educational institutions, mostly pedagogues, is imperative in their work (Urbanc, 2006).

### **Pedagogues and social workers - protocols of collaboration**

The level and quality of collaborative relationships between a pedagogue and social worker depend on a number of personal and social factors such as, for example, legislation, professional atmosphere, the personality of the individual, the willingness to take an active part in collaboration, and the like.

Mutual collaboration is not explicitly stated in the Social Welfare Act (2015), but the Family Act (2015) includes the provisions on measures to protect the rights and welfare of the child, which pedagogues and social workers are also responsible for. Their collaboration is explicitly stated in article 132, paragraph 3:

*(3) The court and social welfare centres, parents and other persons or social welfare institutions that were entrusted with childcare are obliged to mutual collaboration and shall inform each other of the actions taken under paragraph 1 of this Article.*

The Ministry of Family, Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity adopted the Rules of Procedures in Cases of Family Violence (2004),<sup>27</sup> which require that a collaboration between competent bodies and other factors involved in identification and elimination of violence, including schools and social welfare centres is promptly established. Under this protocol, the social welfare centre must, upon receiving information on the violence (from the school or other source) or on the expressed suspicion of violence, report it to the police, and write an official note containing information on the victim. If a child who attends school is in question, the school pedagogue is very helpful in providing information. The second step is to establish contact with the victim of violence and inform him/her on the relevant legislation and the measures the social welfare centre plans to take (placing the victim in a shelter or home for victims of family violence, planning his/her safety protection, assistance in accessing free legal and medical aid). At this stage, school staff plays an important role, in particular the pedagogue who provides additional information that can help a social worker to clarify and solve a particular case (Rules, 2004).

If violence is committed in school, schools are under the Rules (2004) obliged to call a doctor. If a child is injured, they must notify the principal who will report the case to the police and inform the social welfare centre on the circumstances of the case. If in school there is an indication that the violence has been lasting for a longer period of time, then the employees must ask the

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<sup>27</sup>Hereinafter Rules.

experts from the professional counselling service and experts from the social welfare centre for advice. School employees also make an official note on the established violence, activities performed, interviews and statements by participants and eyewitnesses as well as personal observation, which is, if necessary, submitted to other competent bodies, including the social welfare centre.

Violence in the family and school requires that all state bodies cooperate because the responsibility for preventing, recognising, and effectively addressing it cannot be left only to the school or only to the social welfare centre. Such an approach to solving a case of violence would be partial, superficial, and ineffective. Therefore, quality collaboration is a prerequisite for a comprehensive and efficient protection of all family members. In addition to family and school violence, sexual violence is also common. Under the Rules of Procedure in Cases of Sexual Violence in Schools (2014), sexual violence is one of the most serious crimes but is reported the least, is most complex, is often invisible, and less recognized. In schools, sexual harassment is the most present form of sexual violence, but forced sexual acts and rape, as one of the worst forms of sexual violence, are also possible. The data show that between 23 and 58% of girls have been sexually harassed in schools. It is likely that effective prevention programmes and a more quality collaboration between schools and social welfare centres (Rules, 2014) can reduce these numbers.

If a child has been exposed to sexual violence or has witnessed violence in the family, the centre takes appropriate legal measures to protect the family, i.e. the child is removed from the family if the violence was committed against him/her. If sexual harassment or sexual violence happened in school, members of the professional counselling service first talk to the victim and provide him/her with adequate assistance and protection, and inform the principal who reports the case to the police and writes a report. It is pointed out that the school is not required to submit a report to the social welfare centre when the school has information on domestic or sexual violence. It is urged that the school nevertheless notifies the parents, competent social welfare centre, the police, and also, if necessary, the school doctor and the Ombudsman for Children. In a case of sexual harassment in school, the school must notify pupils' parents and the social welfare centre (Rules of Procedure in Cases of Sexual Violence in Schools, 2014).

Bouillete and Uzelac (2007) argue that cooperation between primary schools and social welfare institutions is necessary. Primary and Secondary School Education Act (2014) confirms that argument and orders primary schools to, in cooperation with social welfare institutions, observe social problems and adverse developments of pupils and take measures to remove

the causes and consequences of social problems and phenomena in pupils as explicitly stated in Articles 57 and 67.

In addition, under the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (2014), all school employees are duty-bound to protect the rights of pupils, and if these rights are violated or some sort of violence occurs, they must report it to the principal who must inform the social welfare centre (Article 70).

In line with the obligation to protect the rights of pupils, educational staff can impose pedagogical measures (admonition, reprimand, severe reprimand, transferral to another school according to the Ordinance of the Criteria for the Imposition of Pedagogical Measures, 2015), whose purpose is to change pupils' behaviour, and which are imposed for breaches of duty, failure to meet obligations, bullying, and other inappropriate behaviour. Under the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (2014), if the pupil is by a formal order temporarily removed from school, and a written decision on imposing educational measures was not issued, the principal must inform in writing the parents and social welfare centre (art. 83). In cases where a parent does not fulfil its obligations and neglects the child (PTA meetings, individual meeting with the teacher(s), childcare) the school reports it to the social welfare centre (Primary and Secondary School Education Act, 2014; art. 136).

The social welfare centre collaborates with ministries, cities, and municipalities as well as with all the bodies that need to obtain information. Among them are *educational institutions* that must provide the social welfare centre with necessary information about the ward, and the social welfare centre must write a note (Family Act, 2014, art.276).

It is clear that legislation explicitly states it is necessary that all the relevant factors in the community collaborate with the aim of helping children, young people, their families, and the like more efficiently and better. However, it would be desirable that the collaboration between educational institutions and social welfare institution is established even when there are no emergencies, no deviant behaviour of the individual/pupil and/or his family and the like. Organising humanitarian activities (volunteering, donations, humanitarian actions, etc.) could be a possible incentive for collaboration. In addition to collaboration among institutions (schools, social work, etc.), greater attention should be paid to the role of quality collaboration between parents and schools (Pahić et al., 2010) which is one of the crucial factors of a comprehensive child's development and success.

### **The importance of quality collaboration between the pedagogue and the social worker**

Quality collaboration of (at least) two systems – a school and an institution of social work, and with the aim of the welfare of the third - the

family, is imposed as an imperative. Teršelić and Mladineo (2006) point out that pedagogues and social workers can achieve significantly more when working together than they could achieve by working separately. In order to ensure a quality collaboration between these two factors and achieve the intended objective it is necessary to meet the following prerequisites: there has to be motive and interest to undertake such a venture; the community in which the change is planned to be implemented must be ready for it; a programme of changes that will lead to the desired result must be prepared; there have to be professional and motivated people who will devote themselves to the venture, and there must be enough time (Janković, 2002) to achieve the objectives, and willingness to invest energy. When the collaboration between a pedagogue and social worker is achieved, other relevant factors *in* and *outside* the school and institution of social work depending on the type and complexity of the challenge are included (doctor, social pedagogue, psychologist, and others). A quality collaboration between pedagogues and social workers can be a good example to pupils and indirectly have an educational role, because it gives them an insight into how collaboration has a synergy effect in dealing with difficulties; it is mandatory that the rights of pupils are respected during the process. One of the fundamental rights of pupils is active participation and freedom to express opinions when issues related to and / or having an impact on his/her life are addressed. The social worker and school pedagogue should take into account the child's view of the problem in accordance with his age and maturity, and together decide what is best for him (the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2001). Mutual relations, quality collaboration and communication are the key to solving problems in the child's current historical, social and cultural context (Urbanc, 2006). Therefore, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) point out that in successful schools there is an intense collaboration, communication and teamwork between professionals and other relevant members of the community. They are all connected and intensively collaborate with each other in order to timely identify and solve a problem which has arisen. Quality collaboration among professionals is inseparable from their efforts to include and engage pupils' parents (families), because without their participation the results would not be complete. However, practitioners most often complain that parents of children who have certain difficulties in adapting, in their behaviour and/or academic achievements are the hardest ones to be persuaded to collaborate. Unmotivated and uninterested parents can be "won over" by informing them about the possibilities of participating in school life, and by offering them activities (thematic meetings and lectures, creative and educational workshops, school open days, school activities and the like) that help them get a better insight into their current life situation, and also gradually raise the level of their pedagogical competences. These are all favourable opportunities for establishing a less formal, more

intimate, and closer communication between the pedagogue, social worker and parents, with the aim of building a better future collaboration (Ljubetić, 2013). Individuals can sometimes find collaboration to be a threatening experience, because it requires a certain adaptation, modification of the rhythm and the way their own work, sometimes even giving up on part of their own power and the like, but quality collaborative relationships include developing awareness of the equality and importance of each person in the team (Čudina-Obradović and Težak, 1995) who, within their scope of work, contributes to achieving the set goal.

### **Research methodology**

As the need for collaboration between school pedagogues and social workers is unquestionable, a research was conducted to determine the quality of collaboration between the two profiles of experts. For this purpose, three research questions were asked:

1. Pedagogue's and social worker's satisfaction with the chosen profession and their satisfaction with the collaboration;
2. Planning and methods of collaboration between a pedagogue and a social worker;
3. The perception of one's own competences and recommendations for improving future collaboration between pedagogues and social workers.

### **Research method - semi-structured interview**

In order to achieve the research objective, the qualitative methodology was chosen in which the unit of analysis was the interview (Lacey and Luff, 2009). The prerequisite for a quality conduct of an interview is a well-prepared interviewer. Therefore, in this study, the interviewer at the beginning of the meeting informed the participants of the nature and purpose of the interview, explained how the responses would be recorded, and got the participants' permission to record the conversation. "At all times, interviewers must remember that they are data collection instruments who must try to prevent their own biases, opinions, or curiosity from affecting their behaviour" (Tuckman, 1972, quoted in Cohen et al., 2007 p.279). The aim of the qualitative approach is to carefully investigate the participant's individual perceptions of the topic being researched. Unlike quantitative research where pre-set theses are checked (Milas, 2005), in qualitative research theory is developed on the basis of the information and knowledge gathered during the research (Mejovšek, 2007). In qualitative research "respondents are chosen deliberately based on personal decisions, because they have a certain quality, experience, opinion, information and the like which is assessed will contribute to the purpose of research" (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2013 p.79). The authors of

this paper also point out that the validity, reliability and meaningfulness of the results do not lie in the size of the sample, but the wealth of information.

In this research, data were collected by chain reaction ("snowball sampling"). The research involved three social workers and five pedagogues. Three social workers recommended five pedagogues, but only three of them agreed to be interviewed. The remaining two rejected the interview stating that they were ill and did not have time. The semi-structured interview was carried out during the period from April to July 2016 in institutions in which the respondents work - social workers were interviewed at the Centre for Social Welfare Split (the Head recommended three social workers who work with pedagogues and they were interviewed), and pedagogues were interviewed in primary schools in the city of Split.

A semi-structured interview was used to collect data. Researchers' goal was to explore the research problem area as much as possible and focus on research participants' interpretations and perspectives, rather than the number of respondents. Therefore, data is not reduced to a numerical form.

### **Data analysis**

The analysis of qualitative data includes the unique processing and interpretation, and is researcher's unique design (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2013) making an interpretative and reflexive interaction between the researcher and the collected data. According to Cohen et al. (2007) there are several stages in the analysis of qualitative data: generating natural units of meaning; classifying, categorising and ordering these units of meaning, structuring a narrative to describe the content of the interview, and interpreting data obtained by the interview.

In this paper, data was processed to minimise ethical dilemmas in qualitative research, to maintain the objectivity and to avoid selectivity in the analysis and interpretation of collected data (Code of Ethics, 2007). From the interviews conducted, a large amount of data was obtained by transcription which was analysed by coding (Cohen et al., 2007). Coding was done in order to avoid the usual data overload in qualitative studies (Miles and Huberman, 1994, quoted in Cohen et al., 2007). Bearing in mind the above stated, Kerlinger (1970, quoted in Cohen et al., 2007) defined coding as a procedure in which the responses and information obtained from the respondents are translated into specific categories, i.e. responses are converted into results. In this paper, the coding started after the transcript of the interview although Tkalac Verčič et al. (2013) state that coding can be begun during the data collection process.

## Research results

### 1. First research question: Pedagogue's and social worker's satisfaction with the chosen profession and their satisfaction with the collaboration

Having talked to the pedagogues and social workers, it is concluded that all of them are happy with their choice of study and profession. Both groups were guided by altruistic motives when they were choosing their profession (working with children, the helping profession): *"But certainly some kind of work with children, yes. Probably something similar ... I was torn between languages and pedagogy and I chose pedagogy"* (pedagogue A). The results also showed participants' intrinsic motivation (work energy, goal orientation, and training): *"Yes, because it is a combination of various knowledge and skills, because this is a very noble vocation, and because this is a job that enables us to really change things"* (social worker B). The obtained results are consistent with a research by Marušić, Jugović and Pavin Ivanec (2011, quoted in Šimić Šašić et al., 2013), which explored the motivation for choosing the teaching profession, which is similar to the profession of the pedagogue. Marušić et al. (2011, quoted in Šimić Šašić et al., 2013) reported the same altruistic (working with children, helping children to succeed, wellbeing of the society) and intrinsic reasons (interest in transferring specific knowledge). Šimić Šašić et al. (2013) in their research on the teaching profession also stated extrinsic motivations (long holidays, salary, social status) which the participants in this study do not stress.

In the city of Split there are twenty-seven schools and every social worker is responsible for two or more city districts as well as for schools located in the particular district. The analysis of responses leads to the conclusion that collaboration exists, but it could be better and that it takes place if necessary. Pedagogue A said that she collaborates: *"With social workers and with the centre "when the problem occurs", that is when violence or abuse are reported, when there are difficulties related to collaboration with parents and that's it."* Pedagogue B explains: *"Actually, I collaborate with the centre in relation to pupils who have behavioural problems most often, with our competent social worker for this area. And with the supervisor, as we have pupils who have control or family has control over the execution of parental rights and is then necessary to collaborate with them as well."*

Pedagogues and social workers collaborate most often in relation to children who are under increased care and supervision<sup>28</sup> of the social welfare centre. This measure is carried out by a qualified person appointed by the social welfare centre depending on the place of residence of the child.

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<sup>28</sup> Increased care and supervision is one of the correctional measures in the *Juvenile Courts Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 111/97, 27/98 and 12/02)*

Social workers provided answers similar to those by pedagogues: they collaborate only when there is a problem, and pedagogues are always ready for collaboration. However, pedagogues have certain objections regarding the feedback from the social welfare centre on the individual child. Pedagogue C notes: *"I think that our law requires that we get feedback, but they (the Social Welfare Centre<sup>29</sup>) say that according to their law it is not mandatory, so we never get any information in writing."* The need for feedback is justified and expected, and is regulated by the Family Act (Art. 132): *the social welfare centre shall immediately upon receipt of the report from Paragraph 1 of this article investigate the case and take measures to protect the child's rights and notify the complainant.*

Pedagogues and social workers tend to use the traditional forms of collaboration (short briefings) that they both justify by heavy workload, which is the reason they do not manage to do more than the basic tasks. Pedagogues state that schools have over 500 pupils, but only one pedagogue in the professional counselling team.

Social workers agree with their opinion, but also point out that it is important to react in time and not when it starts "burning under their feet". Social worker C states: *"The problem is that I would sometimes receive inquiries too late, at the end of the school year. School could have contacted us at the beginning of the school year. We don't really have to cooperate at the last stage. And also, which I also find surprising is that schools generally do not want to apply measures and seem to be apologizing to me for it."* Pedagogical measures in primary school according to the Ordinance of the Criteria for the Imposition of Pedagogical Measures (2015) are: admonition, reprimand, severe reprimand, and transferral to another school. Pedagogical employees in schools often do not impose pedagogical measures on time and pupils continue with unacceptable behaviour, so social worker A emphasizes: *"We had a case when a child was threatened to be expelled because of a fight, but no prior measures were used so we sent an official letter to the high school. We talked to the school's psychologist and we soon solved the problem. The fact is that the school has its own system of measures and sanctions that need to be applied, and we very much support it."* When there are uncertainties and dilemmas, it would be desirable that before imposing pedagogical measures the school's professional team consults with the competent social welfare centre. Unwanted consequences could be thus avoided.

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<sup>29</sup> Authors' note

## **Second research question: Planning and methods of collaboration between a pedagogue and social worker**

In the annual school action plan under the category of "other work", pedagogues plan to collaborate with social workers, but for example, even though schools develop and implement school prevention programmes (primary and secondary prevention), social workers do not participate in their implementation. Pedagogue A: *"We have school prevention programmes that are the prevention of violence, conflict prevention, violence awareness, awareness of some difficulties, neglect of the educational function of the family and all that."* We believe that quality collaboration between the social welfare centre and the school could yield positive results in the primary prevention area.

Interviewed pedagogues emphasise that they know the rules and regulations on situations in which they must contact the social welfare centre particularly in situations when children's rights are violated. According to the *Primary and Secondary School Education Act (2014, art. 70): Primary-school teachers, subject teachers, professional staff and other employees in educational institutions are obliged to undertake measures to protect the rights of pupils and to report immediately on every infringement of those rights, particularly on all forms of physical or psychological violence, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent behaviour, maltreatment or exploitation of pupils, inform without delay the principal of the educational institution who is duty-bound to report it to the relevant social services body or other competent authority."*

On the basis of the report, the Centre determines whether control needs to be imposed. According to Poredoš et al. (2006) the social welfare centre gets most information from the school (40%), family members (20%), health care institutions, the centre itself (15%), anonymous reports, and the police (5%). A research by Hrabar and Korać (2003) carried out across Croatia showed that unlike the police, schools most often do not act appropriately. Our research shows that social workers believe that pedagogues are reluctant to report a problem and that they act only when it is too late as illustrated by the example which was put forward by social worker B: *"We inform you that our pupil A.B. who is in the sixth grade has not been attending classes regularly for unknown reasons. The pupil often comes to school without the necessary supplies, the textbooks and notebooks are messy. The pupil often comes sloppy and sleepy to school. Parents do not respond to our call to come to talk about this. Please look into the situation and inform us on the information received."* When a social worker receives such a request, he discusses it and collaborates with the school or other institutions where the pupil spends his time, and then with the child and his parents and social anamnesis is done. Social anamnesis is a document that contains information about the pupil and why he came and

is relevant for future steps that will be undertaken for the benefit of the child. If it is recognised that there are disadvantages that prevent the normal development of the pupil, the family is warned, and if the warning is ignored, the social welfare centre imposes supervision of parental care.

This research has shown that social workers do not plan the collaboration with pedagogues, but they collaborate when a problem is detected. Social worker C points out: *"We do not have it in the plan at all, although we should, but we have these social pedagogues who collaborate a bit more with schools. They are the members of our professional team, and that's why ... We collaborate when it starts "burning under their feet", either the school turns to us, or we turn to them with some questions."* However, one of the three interviewed social workers (B) goes to school regardless of whether a problem has occurred: *"Well, I usually at least once a month go to school then together with pedagogues, if necessary with class masters or psychologists depending on the team at school, talk about some things. Sometimes before a problem occurs, sometimes when a problem has occurred, it all depends, the job is such that it is unpredictable and sometimes we have information from schools that there are families, that is a child, who could possibly go into treatment of the centre because of certain reasons. And at those meetings we always look at the progress of children who are already in treatment, and agree on further collaboration with schools."*

This research has also shown that social workers and pedagogues usually communicate by telephone, official letters and e-mail, and the least in person (social worker A): *"Oh yes, letters and phone, but most often the phone and then an official note is made after each telephone conversation."* Social worker B gives an example of how a collaboration should not look like, and refers to sending confidential information via other people: *"What can I say, it happened to me in primary school XY that over the phone I communicated (what I had to) and then they literally sent me an official letter with the required information by the cleaning lady."* Under article 18 of the Social Welfare Act (2015) the user must be ensured the confidentiality and protection of personal data and under article 19 of the same Act the user has the right to respect of privacy. Circumstances permitting, the priority is always given to personal meetings of experts. In direct communication, they can inform each other more thoroughly, discuss, arrange, and plan not only future actions and activities, but also ways of monitoring results and jointly develop an effective strategy to problem solving (Jurić, 2004). Primary and Secondary School Education Act (2014, Art. 57) also emphasises collaboration: *Schools also collaborate by receiving services from the social welfare institutions and health facilities, especially regarding the rehabilitation services and amenities.*

### **Third research question: The perception of one's own competences and recommendations for improving future collaboration between pedagogues and social workers.**

Data collected in this research show that pedagogues and social workers perceive themselves as professionally competent, apart from one social worker (C), who sincerely expressed a genuine uncertainty because she has not been working for a long time: "*Well what do I know, I'm pretty new at this, there should definitely be more effort, knowledge, skill and ability, more training.*" Other research participants base the perception of their own competence on their long experience or professional training they are currently attending or have attended. Pedagogue B says: "*I think that after thirty years of working in primary school I am competent for quality collaboration.*" Research participants (pedagogues and social workers) assess knowledge acquired in seminars and courses as important and emphasise their usefulness in personal or professional life and work, which is in line with a research by Cindrić et al. (2016). In addition, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) point out that every professional should place emphasis on education and training in areas most needed for the job. Participants in this research recognise this need and are already included in some type of professional development, or plan to do so in the near future, knowing that quality training is one of the protective factors, in particular because of the threat of burnout. Therefore, pedagogue B says: "*I think it's important to work on oneself because the job is such that we very quickly burn out and then forget why we came here, various types of training help us remember.*" In schools there can be a gap between the leading pedagogical goals and instructional practices leading to job *dissatisfaction* and burnout (Gudjons, 1994). Therefore, a continuous and well-designed professional development is necessary and welcome. When not attending formal professional training courses, pedagogues and social workers learn informally from professional literature, and that is very often their only mode of training due to lack of funding. Social worker A says: "*I would enrol into something new if I had the money, I still yearn for knowledge. Just, the money is my biggest problem.*" Milat (2005) emphasises that the need and interest for continuous learning is not just a matter of adult students, but is also a need and in the interest of companies in which professionals work.

Participants in this research offered suggestions for improving collaboration considering it is necessary to amend the Social Welfare Act which would make feedback compulsory with the aim of improving collaboration between pedagogues and social workers and welfare of the child. Pedagogue A says: "*Well, this feedback is insufficient, and maybe there should be some additional regulations so that this collaboration is more open in terms of some sort of procedures that would be known, not like this, on some kind of voluntary basis.*" Pedagogue C besides the need for feedback indicates the

need to harmonise both, Social Welfare and Family Act, and points out: "*They refer to their act - Social Welfare Act, which does not oblige them; however, in our Act it says that the Centre is obliged to give us feedback. And that's the problem.*" It is clear that the legislation is inconsistent in some aspects. Therefore, it should be pointed out that the Family Act (2014) obliges educational institutions to provide the social welfare centre and guardian with all important information relating to the ward. However, according to the Rules of Procedure in Cases of Sexual Violence in Schools (2014) school is not required to submit a written report to the centre, but is obliged to verbally inform the parents, social welfare centre, police, and Ombudsman for Children.

Researching the position and role of professional experts in primary schools, Margetić and Krapac (1992) found that teachers and the professional team continuously aim at completing the professional counselling service at school. It has been 25 years since this research was conducted and primary school system has developed considerably. However, in this aspect significant progress has not been noted, although the National Pedagogical Standard for Elementary Education (2008) explicitly states what profiles of professionals are needed for educational work of primary school which are as follows: pedagogue, psychologist, education and rehabilitation specialist, a librarian, and a health worker. Later research (Vrgoč, 2000) suggested that the collaboration would be even better and more efficient if the social worker was an integral part of the school team. Primary school Lapad<sup>30</sup> is one of the shining examples of the employment of a social worker. The social worker at primary school Lapad by telephone confirmed to the researcher that she is the member of the school team and she got the job through the project of the City of Dubrovnik whose goal is the employment of different profiles of professionals in primary school than the usual ones.

In accordance with the Ordinance on Compulsory Weekly Working Hours of Teachers and Assistants in Primary School (2014), this social worker from Lapad plans and programs work, is in direct contact with pupils, parents and school employees, takes care of the social status of pupils and their families, collaborates with the local community, if necessary, places pupils in other families and institutions, procures supplies and textbooks for socially disadvantaged pupils, conducts individual and group work with children and families, and participates in the creation of school-based prevention programmes. There are many reasons why the practice of employment of social workers should become a reality in primary schools: social worker on site can assess the situation and hold the necessary consultations with other experts, can create case studies that will help in future work with pupils,

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.os-lapad-du.skole.hr/>

parents and families, and can collaborate with institutions in the local community. The social worker may also include school mediation as a possible approach to problem solving. Unfortunately, we have witnessed that professional teams in primary schools are staffed very slowly and that social workers as internal members are rarely hired.

On the other hand, the results of a longitudinal study in the period from 1993 to 2003, show a fall in the number of professional staff in primary schools for about 30%, while at the same time, for example, in Slovenia a growth of 60% has been recorded (Mrkonjić, 2003).

**Instead of a conclusion – a SWOT analysis of the results**

A SWOT analysis based on the research results was performed. It provides an insight into the protective and risk factors of achieving collaboration between pedagogues and social workers (Table 1).

	<b>POSITIVE</b>	<b>NEGATIVE</b>
<b>INTERNAL ANALYSIS</b>	<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● specific knowledge and skills</li> <li>● child comes first</li> <li>● motivation (intrinsic)</li> <li>● altruism</li> <li>● flexibility and adaptability</li> <li>● openness to collaboration and dialogue</li> <li>● awareness of the need for real collaboration</li> <li>● direct contact</li> <li>● positive view on solving social problems (poverty, abuse, cutting classes, addiction ...)</li> <li>● collaboration with other bodies at the local and national levels</li> <li>● teamwork (pedagogue in his team, social worker in his team)</li> <li>● perception of the usefulness of working on oneself</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● problems of information flow</li> <li>● ignorance of the law</li> <li>● extrinsic motivation</li> <li>● slow reaction</li> <li>● lack of staff in school and the social welfare centre</li> <li>● lack of feedback between schools and social welfare centres</li> <li>● lack of professionalism when exchanging information</li> <li>● job burnout</li> <li>● non-existence of teaching methods for a social worker in schools</li> </ul>
<b>EXTERNAL ANALYSIS</b>	<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● organising professional meetings</li> <li>● changes in legislation</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● non-implementation of laws</li> <li>● ambiguity of the law</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● identifying problems on time</li> <li>● better connections between the school and the social welfare centre</li> <li>● financial support for professional training</li> <li>● quality collaboration between the school, the family, and the social welfare centre</li> <li>● intensive collaboration</li> <li>● building quality relationships</li> <li>● employing a social worker in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● lack of laws on collaboration between schools and the social welfare centre</li> <li>● slow response in certain cases</li> <li>● lack of regular exchange of information</li> <li>● negative public opinion on the school and social welfare centre</li> <li>● lack of mutual trust</li> <li>● negative and bombastic titles in the media where the school or the social welfare centre are reported on in a negative context</li> <li>● increasing number of complex cases that require more time and specific knowledge</li> <li>● collaboration mainly when it starts "burning under their feet"</li> <li>● lack of joint planning on time and tracking the results</li> <li>● different experiences and different views on the issue (school perspective / perspective of the social welfare centre)</li> </ul>
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Table 1. SWOT analysis

A review of Table 1 shows that research participants (pedagogues and social workers) assessed and explicitly stated as positive (strengths and opportunities) the factors relating to: **collaboration** (identifying problems on time, better connections between the school and the social welfare centre; quality collaboration between the school, the family and the social welfare centre; intensive collaboration; building quality relationships; openness to collaboration and dialogue; awareness of the need for real collaboration; direct contact; collaboration with other bodies at the local and national level; and teamwork (pedagogue in his team, social worker in his team); **education/training** (organising professional meetings; financial support for professional development; perception of the usefulness of working on oneself); **personality traits and personal views** (specific knowledge and

skills; child comes first; intrinsic motivation; altruism; flexibility and adaptability; a positive view on solving social problems (poverty, abuse, cutting classes, addiction ...) and the need to **change the legislation** and **employ a social worker in school**, as something that can be relatively easily solved and would probably have positive results.

Research participants point out several negative factors, i.e. threats and weaknesses (we will list only a few): problems of information flow, ignorance of the law and slow reaction, lack of staff in school and the social welfare centre, job burnout and lack of support from the media and the public. All of the above shows the commitment of the profession to build a quality collaboration of the two systems (school and the social welfare centre), because it is aware that the ultimate goal - the welfare of the child (in the end, of the family and society) largely depends on their collaboration. The relevant social factors (Ministries, Agencies, media, etc.) should make efforts and provide appropriate assistance and support in achieving the ultimate goal.

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