
Supporting Social Workers in the Context of Dementia Care: A Critical Analysis of Current Approaches

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ABSTRACT

This review article focuses on the key support mechanisms and factors influencing the professional development and mental health of social service workers caring for people living with dementia. The aim of the text is to systematically analyse current knowledge on the importance of supervision, training programmes, organisational culture and technological support in preventing burnout syndrome and improving quality of care. Based on a critical analysis of scholarly sources published between 2000 and 2024, the article identifies the main challenges faced by the workforce and presents recommendations for practice aimed at strengthening the supportive environment in organizations. The paper provides a comprehensive overview of the factors that influence workers' motivation and professional identity and highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to supporting their professional and personal well-being.

KEYWORDS

burnout syndrome, dementia, organizational culture, professional development, social services, supervision

Introduction

The demographic structure of older people in Europe has been undergoing significant changes in recent decades, with far-reaching implications for the social, economic and health systems of individual countries. Population ageing is characterised by an increasing proportion of people aged 65 years and over in the total population, due to a combination of low fertility, increasing life expectancy and other demographic factors. According to Eurostat's interactive publication '*Demography of Europe - 2023 edition*', the proportion of people aged 65 and over in the European Union will increase from 16% in 2002 to 21% in 2022. This ageing trend is evident in most EU Member States, with some countries facing a more significant increase in the proportion of older people than others. Italy and Portugal have the highest proportion of older people in Europe, with the highest proportion of the population aged over 65 in 2023, at 24% of the total population. This high share can be partly attributed to low fertility, high life expectancy and limited migration of younger populations. Countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Finland followed with only slightly lower shares of the elderly. These countries also face similar challenges, including demographic ageing and increasing demands on pension and healthcare systems. The average share of the population aged 65 and over in the European Union was around 21.3% in 2023. This average masks significant differences between Member States. Countries with higher incomes and better health systems tend to have longer life expectancy, which increases the proportion of older people. At the other end of the spectrum (the lowest proportion of elderly), countries such as Iceland, Luxembourg and Turkey had a proportion of less than 15%. These countries have a younger demographic structure, which may be the result of higher fertility rates, lower life

expectancy or higher rates of immigration of younger people. In the case of Turkey, the relatively young population plays an important role (Statista, 2023).

Thus, there is not only an increase in the number of elderly people every year, but also an increase in the number of people with dementia. Every year, the number of people diagnosed with dementia increases by 5.4% in the Czech Republic and in Europe in general. Every 20 or 25 years, this number doubles (Holmerová, Horecký, & Hanuš, 2016). This aspect has and will undoubtedly continue to have a major impact on society, not only in terms of economic but also social impact. Therefore, the social services system will be forced to implement fundamental changes, whether in the system of financing, legislation, quality of services, material and technical equipment or personnel standards.

In the Czech Republic, in 2017, a total of 17,856 people stayed in residential social services designed for people living with dementia - the so-called homes with a special regime, of whom 12,478 were women (i.e. 70%), 5,376 were men and 2 were children or young people under the age of 18. The number of clients in residential care homes is on an upward trend, but unfortunately this is also true of the number of unfulfilled applications. While in 2013, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic registered 15,488 unsatisfied applications, in 2017 the number of unsatisfied applications was already 22,348, and the number of unsatisfied applications thus significantly exceeded the number of clients placed in homes with special regime (Wija, Bareš, & Žofka, 2019). The increasing trend in the number of beds in homes with special regime is also evident in the Register of Social Service Providers of the Czech Republic (Register of Social Service Providers, online, citation 2024-12-20), which is managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, where there are more than 400 providers of registered social service homes with special regime with a total capacity of 23 674 beds.

In the context of statistical data in the context of social services workers themselves, we can publish data from Horecký (2020), who states that in the European Union, 11 million workers are employed in the social services sector, representing 4.7% of all jobs in the European Union. It is also one of the most dynamically growing sectors. Over the last 10 years, 2 million new jobs have been created in social services on a European scale, and the Czech Republic has lagged somewhat behind in this significant growth. Even the overall data on the number of employees in social services in the Czech Republic varies. According to a 2019 analysis by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, there are a total of 75,656 FTEs in social services in the Czech Republic. According to Eurostat, the total number of people working in social services in the Czech Republic is 105,100. Working in social services is the domain of women in all European countries. In terms of employees, women represent 81.56 % of the total workforce. In two countries (Portugal, Slovakia) the figure is even over 90%. The highest proportion of men working in social services can be found in Germany, 24.8%. The 50-64 age group represents one third of all workers in the social sector in the Czech Republic (Horecký, 2020).

The professional relationship and responsibility in providing quality care is closely related to the ethical behaviour and actions of the personal assistant. The organisation - social service provider delegates a specific relationship, the care relationship with the user, to a specific professional worker, in our case a personal assistant. However, the responsibility of the institution/provider for quality care does not end here. The whole of the organisation should still support the work of the worker. The joint responsibility for team care implies a definition of the role of the worker and the institution. This can be directly operationalised in concrete measures that motivate the worker in his work: salary, job and administrative support. The institution is content-friendly, that is, it has ownership of the content commitment, and this is recognised in its policy. This implies not only ensuring quality care for the social service user, but also ensuring that the institution cares for the worker. Only in this connection

can shared responsibility take its proper shape. Quality care and support from the organisation, provide the worker with the background to carry out his direct work with the user (Laan van der, 1998). Such support requires both time and quality - that is, freeing up time for initiation and working conversations, supervision, and the possibility of training and other types of professional development and further education. This offer cannot be "non-committal" given that the institution as a moral actor has to bear its own share of responsibility for quality care. The institution shapes its own responsibility for quality care through the content of executive leadership. Increasingly, the starting point for the provision of quality care is the specified demand of the care seeker. This requires a different way of thinking for helpers and caregivers who both assess demand and try to match it to the care seeker. This means asking:

"What type of care seeker is contacting me and what is their real request?"

The development is also linked to sufficient attention in addressing mental health problems in all service users and to greater use of compensatory aids. Acceptance of the idea that the occupation is satisfying, that it brings some fulfilment and is part of the meaning of life, becomes a guide to identifying with the work and accepting it as one's own. The nature of the work, together with the individual's personality and social factors, can positively influence identification with the occupation. Jurovsky (1980) and Laan van der (1998) agree that a worker identifies more easily with a job that is varied, with feedback and with the opportunity to participate in decision-making.

A frequently addressed issue in the context of clients and social service workers is social isolation. Social exclusion is discussed by Daněk, Klugerová (2023). Social exclusion is a major issue that modern society is attempting to address. It has negative impacts not only on a local level but also on a national, European, and even global scale. In today's interconnected society, it is important to recognize that social exclusion issues in other countries or on other continents will have an impact on us. Therefore, it is crucial to strive for the elimination, prevention, and combat of social exclusion through all possible means. Cooperative learning, which replaces traditional competitiveness, plays a crucial role in strengthening social bonds among students and developing their collaborative skills (Bačová, 2024). In view of the above data, it is evident that it is essential to give maximum support and care to people who provide direct care to the elderly/people living with dementia. In the context of our professional text, these are social service workers, whose work is physically and mentally demanding, and therefore it is important for employers to work with the idea of development, but above all with support mechanisms that will serve as an apparatus of assistance and support for the performers of this difficult work.

Controllable support mechanisms/tools for social work

Social workers often have to deal with difficult situations that are physically and mentally challenging. They are often subjected to a high workload that is also emotionally exhausting. Many times, the workplace is not equipped with the necessary tools for the work and lacks, for example, the modern tools needed to handle clients appropriately. Clients living with dementia in the residential social service are in the facility because of their unfavourable social situation, their health condition is gradually deteriorating and the assistance and care for these people is very demanding. During the course of their services, the workers are confronted with various situations that can be triggered by both the client and family members.

A social services worker meets clients in palliative care on a daily basis, takes on the role of a companion or provides support to a family member in difficult moments. The social services worker also routinely encounters non-standard client behaviour. This can range from restlessness to aggression, caused by different types of illness. Thus, it can be said that the risk factor is undoubtedly the workplace

environment and the type of clients the worker cares for. High workloads and the demands of the work can lead to isolation from one's own environment. This isolation can result in a negative impact on their social and emotional support. High demands are placed on social service workers and it is essential that they are equipped not only with practical skills but also with the ability to deal with situations that are emotionally challenging. If they are not adequately trained, it is possible that they may have problems when dealing with difficult situations and may also be exposed to high levels of stress (Kopecká, 2011).

In addition to the risk factors already mentioned, there are a number of other factors that increase the risk of burnout syndrome and psychological difficulties in social service workers. These include low motivation and job satisfaction, limited opportunities for development and professional growth, conflict and tension in the work environment, lack of self-care and low levels of personal relationships, unclear job requirements and job insecurity. It is extremely important for employers, managers and social service workers to recognize these risk factors and try to prevent and minimize them in order to prevent burnout syndrome and psychological difficulties in workers (Maroon, 2012).

We will not address here the specific factors that can negatively affect social service workers in their work - the performance of care for social service users living with dementia, where we can include, for example, psychological stress, stress or burnout syndrome. The aim is to highlight support mechanisms that can help to cope with the above mentioned factors.

Supervision is undeniably important not only in the professional but also in the personal life of social service workers, as well as other actors in the helping professions. And it does not matter whether we perceive it as an individual or group tool for support and assistance. The question still remains the introduction of supervision processes into everyday professional reflection, not only in social work, and the realization of managers that it is an adequate tool that can ensure the quality of social services and the professionalism of workers, which is always mentioned.

Mahdalová (2018) defines the most important ideas of supervision:

- Increasing the value of social work for clients and increasing the professionalisation of care processes;
- Professional support for workers who use supervision with regard to their competence development;
- supervision should help to increase one's own possibilities and abilities;
- the supervisor should provide the basic conditions of supervision: warmth, respect, genuineness, empathy and understanding;
- every professional needs supervision;
- if the client's well-being is at stake, the other tasks go by the wayside.

Úlehla (2005) views supervision in the context of social work as an asset that is conducive not only to organizations but also to the workers themselves, not only social workers but also social service workers and other managerial actors. It also helps to clarify the mission of the workplace and the organization, to prevent overwork, to prevent burnout syndrome, and to help effectively manage feelings of powerlessness and guilt. It then also improves the services offered to clients and the reputation of the organisation.

The view on the importance of supervision and its perception or necessary place in the environment of helping professions in particular, but also specifically in social services can be supported by appropriate research conducted.

In Social Services - Webb, Wilkins, & Martin (2022) aimed to explore how decisions are made during supervision of work with children and families, within a child welfare agency in England. The main aim of the study was to identify the various factors that contribute to decision making in this context,

including the role of supervision, the influence of organisational culture and the impact of individual factors. Secondary aims of the study included exploring the decision-making process, identifying factors that influence decision-making and exploring the implications of these findings for practice. The authors conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with social workers and supervisors working in the field of child and family work. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying and interpreting patterns in the data. Specific research outcomes include describing the decision-making process in supervising work with children and families, identifying factors that influence decision-making, and exploring the implications of these findings for practice. The study found that decision-making in supervision of work with children and families is influenced by a variety of factors, including the nature of the case, the expertise of the social worker, and organizational culture. The authors conclude that understanding these factors is key to effective decision-making in this context.

Williams (2022) focuses on exploring the role of attachment theory in the emotional and psychosocial context of social work supervision. The main aim of the study was to explore how attachment theory can inform social work supervision practice, particularly with regard to the emotional and psychological well-being of social workers. The sub-objectives of the study explored applications of attachment theory in social work supervision, identifying ways in which attachment theory can inform supervision practice, and examining the implications of these findings for social work practice. The author used a literature review methodology to explore the role of attachment theory in social work supervision. A wide range of literature, including theoretical and empirical studies, was reviewed to identify key themes and concepts related to attachment theory and social work supervision. Specific outcomes of the research include exploring the relevance of attachment theory in social work supervision, identifying ways in which attachment theory can be applied to inform practice and exploring the implications of these findings for social work practice. The study found that attachment theory provides a useful framework for understanding the emotional and psychosocial needs of social workers in supervision and can inform the development of more supportive and effective supervision practices. The author concludes that understanding attachment theory is essential for social work supervisors to create a safe environment for social workers in supervision, promote their emotional well-being, and enable them to provide better quality care to clients.

In health care - Kilminster and Jolly (2000) focused their scholarly research on clinical supervision, which plays a vital role in postgraduate and, to some extent, undergraduate medical education. However, it is probably the least researched, discussed and developed aspect of clinical education. The main aim of the study was to identify the various factors that contribute to effective supervision in the clinical setting. The sub-objectives of the study were to identify the different models of supervision used, to evaluate the effectiveness of supervision and to identify the characteristics of effective supervision. The authors conducted a systematic review of the literature related to supervision in clinical settings. The study found that effective supervision is characterized by clear goals, feedback, support, and a focus on learning and development. The authors concluded that effective supervision is essential for developing clinical competence and providing quality care. Feedback is essential and must be clear. It is important that the trainee/worker has some control over and input into the supervision process. Finding sufficient time for reflection can be a challenge. Trainee/worker behaviours and attitudes towards supervision need more investigation; some behaviours are detrimental to patient care and learning. Current supervision practice in medicine has very little empirical or theoretical basis. Working not only in social services, but perhaps also in health care or education, brings many challenging or unexpected events. Not to view these professions in a negative light, it is evident that

helping professions undoubtedly bring joy, a sense of happiness, achievement and other positive emotions, but in the context of the focus of this thesis it is necessary to describe and highlight the risks of these professions. Emotional distress is therefore an integral part of the helping professions as is the appeal to the professionalism and erudition of workers. Equally important, then, is the mental balance that helps us to cope with everyday moments with a certain detachment and professional outlook that has a human touch and warmth. However, for this we need diverse sources of support and assistance, whether in the private or professional sphere (Venglářová, 2013).

Mahdalová (2018) highlights the importance of relationships. The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee should be based on trust and openness to achieve good supervision, so that there is an open space for transferring/sharing information, establishing a good contract, working consciously with ethical issues and creating a safe place of support and acceptance.

An important idea is highlighted by Ivzhenko (2020) when she describes the supervisor as a professional in the helping professions who has several years/long term professional experience in direct interaction with people and with team leadership. Thus, the main task is to help workers in their work and also in its reflection. This role of a supervisor is not to be confused with that of a manager.

In view of the above, the most important thing is therefore the ability of the supervisor to have an overview of the given/particular problem and to have an optic of complexity.

Professional and personal development

Professional development can be defined as: 'the planned process of modifying attitudes, knowledge and skills through learning to achieve effective performance in a particular activity or set of activities. It aims, from a work perspective, to develop an individual's capabilities and to meet the present and future workforce needs of the organization' (Armstrong, 2007, p. 531).

Professionally interesting findings are also provided by the research of Dobiášová, Hlubučková, Smékalová, Hloušková (2025) which describes the optimal development of professional skills, among students, with the help of an adequate assessment and development tool. One of the most successful methods for the development of social and emotional skills, which are not only important for counselling, is video training, which allows for visualised self-reflection and self-assessment. The video training method helps students find balance.

Armstrong (2007) further states the goals of professional education, which are mainly to develop the competencies (skills and abilities) of workers. Through this process, their job performance should be improved. It also offered an opportunity to employees that when human resources are needed in the organization, the existing employees are primarily approached and thus selection from internal sources takes place. The necessity of saving time and financial costs that are required in adapting and training a new employee. However, it is evident from these specific objectives that only the aspect of benefit to the organisation was used in defining them, which is not an appropriate strategy in the field of social services, as the needs of employees are also expected to be taken into account and preferred. However, the objectives of vocational training are much broader. Therefore, Armstrong (2007) goes on to point out that it is not just about meeting the needs of the organisation, but there is also a meeting of needs at the level of the workers themselves who must be participants in professional learning and development.

Hronik (2007) views the issue of employee development and training as a kind of assessment of the state of harmony and disharmony. It is all based on the identification of learning needs that are implemented in four core areas of the worker, specifically the areas of what the worker CAN - KNOWS - CAN - WANTS. The identification of learning needs thus implemented is to be built on the partnership principle of superior and subordinate, with the aim of finding a common solution.

According to Bednar (2012), all employees in an organization represent its wealth. It is essential to work with employees, motivate them to develop and encourage them to gain further professional experience, which constitutes their professionalism. Furthermore, Bednar (2012) points out that the training and development of employees in an organization has a great influence, or even dependence, on the quality of the social service offered and provided. Employees are the actors that create the quality of social service. Even the Social Service Quality Standards themselves highlight and work with this idea to define the staffing of a social service, this is specifically standard number 9. a 10.

Social service quality standard number 9 - "*Staffing and organisation of social services*" - The so-called staffing quality standards, or people management systems and processes, are areas that every employer must have thought through, regardless of whether or not they provide social services at all or how many. In the social sector, this issue is all the more challenging because it also takes into account the qualifications of the people who provide the social service. This is highlighted by Sections 109 and 110 of the Social Services Act, which define the activities and qualifications of a social worker, and Sections 115 and 116, which, among other things, define other workers who may perform social services, in particular the position of social services worker. However, other persons, mostly volunteers and trainees, may also cooperate in the provision of social services and their activities are subject to the obligations of the social service provider ... (Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, as amended). In order to ensure the fulfilment of the personal goals of social service clients, it is necessary to have an adequate number of competent staff. Within each job position it is necessary to have a job profile, a list of requirements of the abilities and skills (competences) of the worker who is in this position. The aim is not just to have a defined job description, but expectations in the form of outputs and outcomes with requirements for knowledge, behaviour ... necessary to meet the requirements and expectations of the employer/social service provider.

Social Service Quality Standard number 10 - "*Professional Development of Staff*" - is another of the so-called staffing standards and touches on the professional development of service staff. It instructs the social service provider to address the issues of wage/salary valuation of staff, but also the issue of non-financial motivation. It addresses information exchange rules as well as independent expert support. This can be not only a supervisor, but also, for example, a lawyer, a doctor or a clergyman, if the service needs such an expert for its support for various reasons (Veškrnová, Sladká-Ševčíková, 2013). Although social service workers in the context of social worker have different nature of their work, as well as the actual job description, or legislative requirements for the exercise of their profession, they have similar educational obligation in the course of their profession. We can thus speak of professional development.

The aim is to support the idea of professional development, which is based on the mutual cooperation between the employer and the social worker, where both parties want to work on the development and, for example, specialisation for a given target group in order to improve the quality of the social service provided. With regard to the focus of our thesis, it is precisely the target group of seniors with dementia, where specialist courses are offered that have a diverse overlap from communication to therapeutic techniques in the context of the target group.

The above idea is described in general terms by Bednář (2012), who describes the variety of possibilities in the field of education, where it can be independent education, distance learning, project work, on-the-job training, development of skills and abilities (competences) that improve the work performed and expand the expertise. Personally, we would also add the process of sharing experiences under the guidance of experts or managers, where sharing "good and bad" practices is a convenient development technique that does not place demands on the participants of the sessions.

The Professional Association of Social Workers in Social Services conducted a social survey in 2016-2017 (140 respondents), where social workers and social service workers were interviewed on the development and promotion of lifelong learning. In most cases, the system of accredited courses or long-term training programmes is successful. This model of lifelong learning provides an extensive range of areas of social work, and in these it is possible to expand one's professional knowledge and skills in a committed way. On the positive side, these courses, seminars and training programmes reflect the current demands of social work development and have the capacity to adapt in terms of content and availability. As a result, staff are able to respond to the demands of the professional and lay public, while being able to respond equally to the demands of the client or their worsening social situation. A well-configured system of lifelong learning can support the client's sense of his or her own professional values and professional self-esteem. At the same time, it can also be said that with the growth and development of social work in the Czech Republic, the continuing education of social workers has successfully managed to configure these systems, even in the context of the requirements of current events and needs (Tajanovská, 2018).

Thanks to the systematic nature of the process of professional education and development of social workers, the impetus for this process can also be sought not only from the workers themselves, but also from the clients. The educational process, with regard to practicality and real applicability, should be built on a degree of interactivity and practicality. As in other fields, motivation of social service workers plays a big aspect.

According to Rezlerová (2008, p. 49), an essential fact that affects the whole process of professional education and development is the awareness of social service workers that without further education it is impossible to keep in touch with technical development as well as social development. "Everyone should take responsibility for their own professional growth. Without it, its added value and at the same time its "price" on the labour market will decrease".

Without vocational training not only for social service workers, there could be no development, no increase in their quality and, last but not least, no social recognition of social service workers. Further training can help to develop the personal qualities mentioned above for the profession. It also contributes to finding a certain personal balance and defining boundaries - in relation to clients and in relation to the employer (Stárek, Klugerová, & Víšek, 2023).

A social service worker should possess a wide range of competencies and qualities that enable him or her to perform his or her job effectively and successfully. An indispensable character competence is patience and empathy. Patience and empathy is a key tool in being able to empathise with a person suffering from Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia, as these clients are more difficult to express their needs and requirements. The social worker must be able to listen to these clients in order to provide adequate support and assistance (Holmerová, Jarolímová, & Suchá, 2009).

Another indispensable competency is knowledge of communication techniques. Clients who suffer from one of the types of dementia experience gradual changes in their ability to use verbal expressions. Along with this, these clients lose the ability to understand the meaning and sense of partial words and in the last stage they stop communicating altogether. It is therefore essential for the social worker to be able to read what the client is trying to communicate, whether verbally, through facial expressions or body movements (Koběřská, 2003).

The concept of education aims to improve the quality of services provided. The acquired knowledge can then be implemented in everyday practice. Direct care workers who care for clients with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia can take training courses in the context of the target group. Courses can focus on understanding the progression of Alzheimer's disease, communication in the different stages of the disease or non-verbal techniques, for example.

Organisational culture/culture within an organisation is one of the key components influencing the functioning of any organisation, including those operating in the social work field. This concept encompasses the set of values, normative beliefs, traditions and practices that determine the way an organisation functions and how its members work together. Organizational culture provides the foundation upon which other processes are built and determines what will be done and how it will be done in a given organization (Schein, 2010).

A strong organizational culture provides fertile ground for the development of what is called a learning organization, which supports individuals in their ability to learn and adapt to change. The concept of a learning organization, as described by Senge (2006), involves processes in which employees actively take responsibility for their learning and development. This approach enables individuals to learn not only new skills and knowledge, but also to critically reflect on their practice and seek new solutions. It is therefore essential to focus attention on the learning processes in an organisation that take place on a day-to-day basis and have the potential to significantly impact on work effectiveness.

The culture of an organisation significantly influences the collective identity of employees. Castells (2011) defines collective identity as a group of individuals who share a common goal and declare their self-definition based on what they do and what they want to be. Similarly, Frost (2007) describes collective identity as shared hopes and dreams shaped by shared experiences and history. This shared identity involves not only reflection on the self but also a desire to create values that contribute to the development of the organization. In the context of social work, Musil et al. (2019) highlight that social workers often share common ideas and values that are either internally accepted or recognized as a tool to achieve organizational goals. This process creates a framework for coordinating and motivating employee behaviour.

Leading the constitution of organizational culture is primarily the responsibility of management. Top managers have a key role in promoting and reinforcing the values that form the basis of organizational culture. Their role involves the clear communication of these values, their emphasis and application in daily practice (Kotter, 1996). Leadership by example and regular communication with employees are essential to creating a supportive work environment that fosters both personal and professional development.

Creating a culture of a learning organization in social work can help foster trust and openness among staff, which has a direct impact on the quality of services provided. At the same time, it should be taken into account that informal learning, which takes place during the daily interaction between team members, plays an important role. It is this form of learning that can promote the sharing of knowledge and skills that would otherwise go unused.

In conclusion, organizational culture and learning organization culture are inextricably linked to the effectiveness and quality of social work services. A key factor for success is the active involvement of all organizational participants in the learning process and the sharing of values that support long-term development. It is essential that the leadership of the organisation pays attention not only to formal learning but also to creating an environment that encourages open dialogue, collaboration and reflection.

Recommendations for practice

Based on the content of the above text, we recommend the following practical measures to complement the text to make it useful for both academic and practitioner audiences:

1. Introduce regular supervision: this is a key measure to support social service workers who are faced with emotionally and physically challenging situations on a daily basis. Supervision is not only a tool for reflecting on work experiences, but also a space for sharing problems, finding new solutions and

strengthening collegiality among staff. Individual supervision allows workers to focus on specific cases they encounter during their practice and to reflect on their actions and attitudes. In this process, the supervisor acts as a support, providing feedback, suggesting possible solutions and motivating further professional growth. Group supervision then creates a platform for sharing experiences between team members, fostering mutual trust and providing reassurance that they are not alone in their problems. The supervision process should be led by a qualified supervisor who has expertise and skills in supervision and counselling. It is also important to create a safe environment where workers can talk openly about their problems while finding effective ways to manage emotional stress. The organisation should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of supervision and ensure its continuity in order to make a long-term contribution to improving the quality of services provided. Incorporating supervision processes into routine practice can significantly reduce the risk of burnout and increase staff motivation. It strengthens their ability to cope with challenging situations and at the same time supports their professional self-reflection. Therefore, the introduction of regular supervision is not only a prevention of psychological exhaustion, but also a tool for improving the overall atmosphere in the workplace.

2. Tailor-made training programmes: are an essential element for strengthening the expertise of social service workers and ensuring the quality of the care provided. These programmes should be designed to meet the specific needs of staff and clients. One of the key areas of training is stress management techniques, which help workers to reduce psychological stress and improve their ability to respond effectively to crisis situations. Courses on communicating with clients with dementia provide practical tools to improve verbal and non-verbal interactions, especially during the difficult stages of their illness. Workshops on crisis intervention are also an important part of the course, teaching how to manage unexpected situations and provide adequate support to clients and their families. Training programmes should be interactive and include practical scenarios that allow workers to apply the knowledge they have gained in real situations. It is also important to create an environment for sharing good practice where staff can share their experiences with each other and seek inspiration to improve their practice. The organisation should regularly assess the needs of its workforce and adapt training activities to current challenges. Involving subject matter experts, including psychologists, therapists and specialist trainers, can contribute to the quality of training courses. The availability of these programmes is also an important aspect, so that as many employees as possible can participate in training without overburdening their working time. Regular participation in training programmes not only increases the professional competence of staff, but also their confidence and motivation. This approach promotes professional development and contributes to building a culture of continuous learning within the organisation. The end result is not only a happier workforce, but also a higher quality of care provided to clients.

3. Promoting the mental health of: social service workers is key to ensuring their long-term work capability and overall satisfaction. Employers should create a system that allows employees easy access to professional counselling, psychologists or therapists. This system should include not only regularly available services but also crisis support for situations where workers face acute stress or emotional exhaustion. The psychological strain of working with clients on a daily basis often leads to burnout syndrome, which can negatively affect both the health of workers and the quality of care provided. The availability of professional help is particularly crucial in settings where workers face challenging interactions with clients with dementia or other complex diagnoses. In addition to individual therapy sessions, it is advisable to introduce group sessions aimed at sharing experiences and mutual support. These meetings can foster collegiality and create a space for open discussion about challenging situations that staff face. Mental health promotion should be integrated into the organisational culture

so that employees see mental health care as a natural part of their work. In addition to professional support, it is important to organise workshops on stress management techniques and mindfulness to help workers cope better with everyday challenges. Investing in the mental health of employees will translate into higher productivity, lower absenteeism rates and higher employee satisfaction in the long term.

4. Flexible working arrangements: are a necessary step towards creating a healthy working environment that meets the individual needs of social services staff. Shorter shifts can significantly reduce the physical and mental strain on workers, which is particularly crucial in demanding professions such as dementia care. Shorter working hours allow staff to better balance work and personal life, which contributes to their overall satisfaction and motivation. Another element of flexibility is the possibility of individual shift planning. This means that employees can better adapt their working hours to their personal needs, such as caring for their family or studying. These measures not only improve work morale but also reduce the risk of absenteeism and turnover. Ensuring sufficient staffing is also a key aspect of flexible working arrangements. Adequate staffing allows the workload to be spread out and ensures that each employee has sufficient time and energy to perform their tasks. This is particularly important in environments where staff face high stress and challenging client situations. Introducing flexible working arrangements requires changes in organisational management, including rethinking existing processes for shift planning and communication with staff. However, investing in these changes will pay off in the long run as they contribute to greater efficiency, employee satisfaction and quality of service.

5. Technological support: the introduction of modern aids and technology into the social services environment is a key step in ensuring more effective and safer care for clients, especially those with limited mobility or specific needs. Working in social services is often physically demanding and can have a long-term negative impact on workers' health, which modern technology can significantly minimise. One of the most important areas of technological support is the introduction of aids for handling clients. Height-adjustable electric beds, ceiling lifting systems and mobile hoists greatly facilitate the transfer of clients and minimise the risk of injury to workers. These aids not only improve the physical safety of staff, but also increase the comfort of clients, who can be moved with greater dignity and care. Another example is the use of anti-kneeling mattresses, which help prevent health complications for clients with limited mobility. However, technology is not limited to physical care. Modern communication systems enable more effective team coordination and rapid response to crisis situations. For example, the use of electronic shift scheduling and care recording systems simplifies administrative tasks and allows staff to focus more on the actual care of clients. In addition, mobile apps can be deployed to monitor clients' health status or smart bracelets that monitor vital signs, improving the prevention of health complications. Investing in technological support also has a significant impact on the long-term sustainability of the social services workforce. Less physically demanding work contributes to lower staff turnover and makes the sector more attractive to new workers. Organisations should therefore seek to regularly upgrade their equipment and train staff in its use. Technological support not only improves working conditions, but also contributes to higher quality and efficiency of service delivery, which is key to ensuring decent care for clients.

6. Promoting teamwork: is one of the most effective tools for improving the working environment in social services. Working in this sector is often emotionally and physically demanding, which highlights the need for a strong and cohesive team that can face the daily challenges together. Regular team meetings play a key role in this respect, providing a platform for open communication, sharing of experiences and mutual support. Team meetings allow staff to discuss the challenging situations they face and to find common solutions. These meetings can be structured to include both a reflective part

aimed at evaluating current practice and a creative part where employees can suggest innovations and improvements to working conditions. Sharing best practices that can inspire other team members is also an important element. The promotion of teamwork should be systematic and include regular training sessions aimed at developing soft skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution and trust building. These skills are key to creating a harmonious working environment and preventing potential misunderstandings or disputes. It is also advisable to introduce team-building activities that strengthen relationships between team members and contribute to a better atmosphere in the workplace. Transparent communication from the organisation's management is also an important part of promoting teamwork. Managers should regularly inform employees about strategic goals, planned changes and other key issues that affect their work. Open dialogue between management and employees builds trust and motivation. Fostering teamwork has a direct impact on the quality of service delivery. A cohesive team is better able to respond to clients' needs, coordinate activities and deliver care at a higher level. Therefore, investing in building team spirit pays off in the long run not only for staff, but especially for clients who benefit from higher quality and more efficient care.

Rewarding staff: creating a system of recognition and rewards for a job well done is key to the motivation and long-term satisfaction of staff in social services. Working in this sector is often physically and mentally demanding, so it is important that employers actively recognise the commitment and contribution of individual workers. Recognition is not just a financial reward, but includes a wide range of measures that can improve the overall quality of working life. Financial benefits, such as special bonuses, pay increases or the provision of training allowances, are an effective way of motivating employees and showing them that their work is valued. Educational allowances can be used for professional development, such as training courses or certifications, which also improves the quality of service provided. Another example is the possibility of using financial rewards to cover personal expenses such as health care or transportation to work. Non-financial benefits play an equally important role. These include recognition in the form of public praise, awards or the possibility of taking extra time off. Such actions promote a positive atmosphere in the workplace and increase employee loyalty. Employers can also introduce programmes aimed at promoting work-life balance, such as flexible working arrangements or support for sports and leisure activities. The reward system should be transparent and fair so that employees are aware of the criteria by which they are rewarded. It should also be flexible enough to respond to individual needs and preferences. Regular communication about staff achievements and contributions creates an environment where staff feel valued and motivated to develop. Recognition of employees is not only a tool for motivation, but also a way to increase their professional self-esteem and overall satisfaction.

Introducing a workload monitoring system: the introduction of a physical and psychological workload monitoring system is essential for the early identification of problems and their effective resolution. Working in social services places high demands on workers' physical fitness and mental resilience. Without regular workload assessments, there is a risk of overwork, burnout or even serious health complications. The monitoring system should include regular questionnaires and assessments focusing on physical health, mental well-being and working conditions. These tools provide a comprehensive overview of the workplace situation and identify areas that need immediate attention. The system should also include regular discussions between employees and their supervisors where problems can be openly discussed. Technology solutions such as digital applications or online platforms can facilitate this process. For example, health monitoring apps can offer workers recommendations based on their current condition and highlight the need for rest or consultation with

a specialist. This data can be further used to optimise work schedules and shifts to avoid overworking employees. Follow-up intervention based on the results is also an important aspect. If the assessment shows that employees are facing excessive workload, the organisation should immediately take measures such as adjusting working hours, strengthening the team or offering professional support. Regular training and workshops on stress management techniques can be another effective tool for reducing psychological strain. Implementing a stress monitoring system contributes to the long-term sustainability of the working environment and increases employee satisfaction. A transparent approach to stress assessment also builds trust between employees and management. The system is not only a prevention tool, but also a means of improving the efficiency and quality of service delivery, which is crucial to the long-term success of the organisation.

Conclusion

The issue of occupational stress and excessive workload of social service workers is currently one of the most important topics of professional discussion on the sustainability and quality of care for clients with dementia. The dynamics of demographic change, manifested by the increase in the population of seniors with cognitive impairment, escalates the demands placed on institutions and individual workers. This article provides a comprehensive synthesis of knowledge on support mechanisms and organizational approaches that have the potential to contribute to systemically strengthening workforce resilience and improving quality of care. A review of existing research and conceptual frameworks shows that supervision, targeted training programs, technological support, and cultivation of organizational culture are not separate interventions but complementary pillars that, in their synergy, determine the ability of workers to manage long-term emotional, physical, and cognitive strain.

The contribution of this review paper is, in particular, the critical integration of findings across different disciplines - from social work to human resource management to occupational psychology - and their placement in the specific context of dementia care. The text thus offers a conceptual framework that allows for the interpretation of support mechanisms not only as ad hoc interventions responding to acute crises, but as part of a long-term strategic cultivation of an environment in which there is a persistent professional and personal erosion of workers due to accumulated psychological strain. This approach reflects the modern paradigms of the learning organisation and collective identity of workers, which have so far been only marginally reflected in the Czech professional discourse. The specific added value of the article is also the emphasis on the importance of technological innovations as a means of reducing the physical demands of work and optimizing work processes, which has not yet been part of comprehensive approaches to the prevention of burnout syndrome. This technological dimension is still often reduced to a peripheral agenda in the Czech environment, although foreign experience clearly shows its direct impact on the sustainability of work performance and the quality of client care. In the final discussion, it can be concluded that mere implementation efforts without long-term anchoring of support mechanisms in the value framework of the organisation cannot bring fundamental change, as the risks of emotional exhaustion and loss of professional identity are structurally conditioned by the setting of the work environment.

In conclusion, it is clear that without a strategic approach oriented towards the prevention of burnout syndrome, continuous professional development and targeted support for the mental health of workers, it is not possible to ensure long-term sustainable and quality care for people with dementia. This article highlights the importance of viewing workers as key actors whose professional and human capacity is essential for the success of the entire social service system. Organisations must therefore approach the issue not just as operational risk management, but as a values and cultural transformation

aimed at creating an environment that promotes not only performance but also meaningfulness, belonging and long-term professional identity. The overview presented in this paper can serve as a starting point for the formulation of comprehensive strategic measures and inspiration for further empirical research that will verify the effectiveness of the described approaches in the specific conditions of the Czech social services system.

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