

THE PROCESS OF MULTI-SECTOR COOPERATION IN PROVIDING SUPPORT TO FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CITY OF NIŠ^a

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Abstract

The paper will present the results of research that dealt with the perception of inter-sectorial cooperation at the local level in relation to providing support for children with developmental difficulties and/or disabilities (CDD) and their families. The research considers two groups of participants: (1) the parents of CDD in the quantitative part, and (2) representatives from the relevant organizations in the qualitative part. The key findings of the research indicate differences in the perception of the success and importance of inter-sectorial cooperation for the subject meter. While the representatives of the institutions perceive inter-sectorial cooperation as successful, the parents recognize it as unfavourable. Some relevant institutions were perceived by parents as insignificant, or they rated the cooperation with some of them as very low. Even the institutions do not clearly recognize the mutual importance of this cooperation. This may indicate either a lack of cooperation, an overlap of responsibilities, or the insufficient visibility of certain institutions in the community. Normative forms of cooperation, except in one example (cooperation between preschool facilities, the Centre for social work and Center for Developmental Counseling), are almost absent.

Key words: multi-sector cooperation, children with developmental difficulties and/or disabilities, decision makers, City of Niš.

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ПРОЦЕС МЕЂУСЕКТОРСКЕ САРАДЊЕ У ПРУЖАЊУ ПОДРШКЕ ПОРОДИЦАМА ДЕЦЕ СА ТЕШКОЋАМА У РАЗВОЈУ И/ИЛИ ИНВАЛИДИТЕТОМ У ГРАДУ НИШУ

Апстракт

У овом раду ће бити представљени резултати истраживања које се бавило перцепцијом међусекторске сарадње на локалном нивоу (пример Града Ниша) у погледу подршке деци са тешкоћама у развоју и/или инвалидитетом и њиховим породицама. Истраживањем су обухваћене две групе учесника: (1) у квантитативном делу, родитељи поменуто деце, и (2) у квалитативном делу, представници релевантних институција. Кључни налази истраживања указују на разлике у перцепцији испитаника о успешности и значају међусекторске сарадње у области која је испитивана. Док представници институција међусекторску сарадњу доживљавају као успешну, родитељи је препознају као недовољну. Неке релевантне институције родитељи су перципирани као безначајне, док су сарадњу са неким оценили веома ниско. Такође, неке од институција не препознају јасно важност своје улоге у пружању подршке овој популацији. Овакав резултат може указивати на: недостатак сарадње, преклапање одговорности више установа или на недовољну видљивост одређених институција у заједници. Резултати показују да нормативни облици сарадње, осим у једном примеру (постојање протокола о сарадњи између Развојног саветовалишта, Центра за социјални рад и предшколске установе) готово да изостају.

Кључне речи: мултисекторска сарадња, деца са тешкоћама у развоју и/или сметњама у развоју, доносиоци одлука, Град Ниш.

INTRODUCTION

Families of children with developmental difficulties and/or disabilities (CDD), like all other families, have developmental tasks that they fulfil throughout the life cycle (Žegarac et al., 2014). But these families have certain unique characteristics that inevitably call for support. These families differs in following terms: (1) they experience discrimination based on disabilities; (2) they are more likely to encounter socioeconomic challenges (such as poverty and inadequate financial support for additional medical expenses); (3) they must navigate complex relationships with community institutions and services; and (4) they encounter challenges related to the availability and the adaptedness of social, health, and educational services (Žegarac et al., 2014; NOOIS, 2017). Whether a family receives required assistance depends on a number of factors. In Serbia, mandated support is generally recognized as good considering the legal context; however, not all children have equal access to it, particularly when it comes to the social protection and school systems (NOOIS, 2017; Korać, 2018). The degree of support depends on the cooperation of these families and significant institutions in the local community. Many authors recognize a partnership between institutions and families as crucial (Canavan et al., 2006; Munro, 2011; Gillen et al., 2013; Marković, Stanisavljević Petrović, 2021).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical ground for this paper is the ecosystemic approach. The author who created the ecological-systems theory is Urie Bronfenbrenner. (1977). The fundamental tenet of this theory is that comprehending an individual's development requires a knowledge of the mutual impact between the individual and the many systems surrounding him. More specifically, he observes how a person develops in connection to the environment in which they exist, or the environment in which they interact with their surroundings. As seen in the context of the topic of this study, the outcomes and quality of care for children with disabilities are highly dependent on the complex influences of the systems that surround the child. Other authors have often used this theoretical basis to explain the interdependence and interrelationship of systems, all with the aim of clarifying the complexity of the context in which the child's needs should be met and his development encouraged (Schweiger, O'Brien, 2005; Anderson, Mohr, 2003). According to this theory, the cooperation of all significant actors from the child's environment contributes to the adequate support of the child's development. Some of the important actors are the child's family, as well as many sectors in the community such as: health, education, social protection, and NGOs.

Literature offers various definitions of multi-sector cooperation, and one of the most comprehensive points out that it represents the connection or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations from two or more sectors with the aim of jointly achieving results that would be unachievable by a single organization or sector (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006). The need for multi-sector cooperation arises for a number of reasons. One of those reasons, according to the authors, is that we live in a world of 'joint power', which means that today there are multiple places in which diverse groups are connected and share responsibility for how that area will be managed (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Bryson et al., 2006). The next reason that sticks out is the necessity to limit unilateral decision-making and involve as many stakeholders as possible in the process of determining a community's priorities. Pluralism enables better participation, and excludes the monopoly of one sector in the decision-making process and the creation of local policies (Bozeman, 2002; Perišić, 2016).

When it comes to multi-sector cooperation, the authors highlight another important aspect, which is the adherence to the institutional framework. Namely, the institutional environment represents the normative, legal, and regulatory elements that organizations must adhere to if they want to achieve the necessary legitimacy for certain products of cooperation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Products of cooperation can be protocols on joint action, proposals of public policies or the establishment of new citizen's services. The institutional environment is especially im-

portant for partnerships focused on public policy or solving public problems, because it includes broad systems of relationships in areas of public competence that can directly influence collaborative purposes, structure, and outcomes (Scott & Meier, 1991). More precisely, if a proposal is defined by different organizations, usually only one has the authority to adopt the proposal and prepare the institutional framework for its implementation (most often the one from the public sector).

Regardless of the fact that the importance of multi-sector cooperation in providing support to families of CDD is recognized, research shows that this cooperation is non-existent or fragile, i.e., not at a satisfactory level (Irimija, Chiriacescu & Vasic, 2019, Chiari et al., 2023). The shortcomings of this type of cooperation are recognized at the local level in the following forms: underutilized local potential, underdeveloped instruments of multi-sector cooperation, insufficient connection and cooperation of experts from diverse institutions, and overlapping jurisdictions (Irimija et al., 2019; Chiari et al., 2023).

LOCAL CONTEXT – THE CITY OF NIŠ

In the City of Niš, as well as in a considerable number of other local self-government units, there are numerous challenges in providing daily services in the community. The problems are inadequate planning and a lack of financial resources, and the absence of licensed service providers. In addition, the City of Niš belongs to the first group of local self-government units in terms of the level of development. Therefore, it is not entitled to dedicated transfers from the state budget for social protection services. The Social Protection Law established dedicated transfers in social protection as a mechanism for providing financial support from the national level to local self-government entities for the provision of social protection services (The Social Protection Law, 2011, section 207). Local self-government units with less development than the national average can benefit from dedicated transfers (Regulation on dedicated transfers in social protection, 2016).

The city budget allocates slightly more than 1% of its budget to service expenses. Insufficient financial resources have a significant impact on service development, which is exacerbated by the unsystematised monitoring of the needs for this type of service, and then the absence of a database on the size and specifics of the population of CDD. During the previous initiative carried out by the 'Nauči me' Organization (2022), a survey was conducted which showed that 160 students in 15 elementary schools (out of a total of 36) have developmental difficulties or some form of disabilities, and only 45 of them use one of the social protection system services that should be available to all of them (the service of a personal assistant).

In addition to the fact that the planning of the service should be based on precisely determined data, from the previous advocacy cycle of the 'Nauči me' Organization, we realized that inter-institutional cooperation is critically important, which would contribute to the networking of existing resources in the City of Niš and a more comprehensive response to the needs of these children and their families. In this regard, we carried out research that aimed to determine the characteristics of multi-sector cooperation from the point of view of parents and the representatives of relevant institutions so to offer answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of the parents of CDD regarding cooperation with competent institutions in the City of Niš?
2. What is the perception of the representatives of competent institutions about mutual cooperation, as well as cooperation with parents of CDD?
3. Are there any obstacles/constraints in the process of this cooperation?

METHODS

The research was conducted in two phases during December 2022 and January 2023. In the first phase, a quantitative survey was conducted in which data was collected from the parents of CDD regarding their experiences with various institutions at the local level. In the quantitative part of the research, data was collected through a Google questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 37 questions related to the child's characteristics, available support and experiences, and the assessment of cooperation with institutions. All data is shown as an aggregate. The method of data collection and presentation ensured the anonymity of children and their parents. The data from the Google questionnaires was transferred to the Microsoft Excel program, and was further processed. The sample included 60 parents in the quantitative part of the research. All parents were asked questions related to the existence of cooperation experiences and satisfaction with cooperation with various actors at the local level. A Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used, where 1 indicated the lowest and 5 indicated the highest level of cooperation.

In the second, qualitative phase of the research, interviews were conducted with key actors at the local level in the area of the support and protection of this population. Six interviews were conducted, with a representative of: Mara Center for the Provision of Social Protection Services (CPSP), Bubanj Special School with a Student Dormitory (SS), Sveti Sava Center for Social Work (CFSW), Center for Developmental Counseling (CFDC), Center for Marriage Counseling (CFMC), and Dan Center for Family and Parents' Association (PA).

For participation in the qualitative part of the research, oral consent was obtained from the participants based on sufficient information about the research objective, the method of data collection, and the presentation of results. In addition, the consent of the managers of the institutions where the participants are employed was obtained. As Brown and Clarke (2006) suggested, with consent, the conversation was recorded and transcribed, after which the data was processed through thematic analysis by authors who independently analysed the transcribed material. As Craswell (2014) proposed, collecting and processing all data implied anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy protection, which was ensured through the encryption of the names of the participants and the removal of all content by which a person could be identified in the data.

RESULTS

Quantitative Part of the Research

The analysis of the age distribution of participants i.e., children and young people whose parents participated in the research, shows the following according to the Republic Institute of Statistics' age categories (2021): 25 of them are in the 5-9 age category, 21 of them are in the 10-14 age category, 10 of them are in the 15-19 age category, 3 of them are in the 20-24 age category, and 1 is in the 1-4 age category. Regarding the type of disability, more than half of the children (n 33) reported autism, almost a quarter encounter multiple difficulties (n 12), while other difficulties occur in a few cases (e.g., disharmonious development, cerebral palsy, paraplegia, 'crying cat' syndrome, Smith-Magenius syndrome). The diversity of the characteristics of children in relation to age and types of disabilities can also indicate the diversity of their needs.

When it comes to the paediatrician's support during the diagnostic process and the period after that, 28.3% of the parents rated this support as 1, the same percentage rated it as 3, while 20% of the parents gave the highest rating to this support.

For the Development Counseling Center, slightly more than half of the parents (53.3%) cooperated with this service; 35.3% of the parents rated this support as 2; 17.6% as 3; 8.8% rated it as 4; and 35.3% of the parents gave it the highest rating.

The majority of the parents (86.7%) cooperated with the CFSW. In almost half of the cases, the reason for cooperation was the realization of the right to attendance allowance; in a more limited number (n 7 and n 6), it was about obtaining certificates for obtaining benefits such as discounts on utilities or vehicle registration, and financial assistance. Advisory work occurs merely in one specified case. Half of the parents who cooperated with the CFSW rated that cooperation with a grade of 3.

Considering all parents, 95% have experience in cooperation with the Interdepartmental Commission, and they evaluate this cooperation with grades 3 (31%), 4 (25,9%), and 5 (29,3%).

Regarding cooperation with the Administration for Children, Social and Primary Health Care (ACSPH), the largest number of parents (48.3%) are not sure which institution it is, while 31.7% of parents have experience with cooperating with this institution, mostly due to rights to child allowance, or benefits like discounts on utilities, vehicle registration, and free parking. The majority of parents who had the experience of cooperation with ACSPH (56.5%) rate this cooperation with 3.

The largest number of parents could not evaluate cooperation with CFMC because they were not informed about the existence of this institution.

Regarding education, more than half of the children (65%) attend a regular, not special, school. In the majority of cases (85%), parents had the opportunity to choose the school for their child. There is almost complete consensus that the school their child attends is indeed the best option. Concerning regular schools, the parents recognize the significance of inclusion, with an emphasis on the importance of peer relationships. For children attending special schools, the importance of smaller class sizes, greater focus on individual children, and the specific expertise of the staff is acknowledged. A considerable number of parents (43.3%) rate their collaboration with the educational institution with a grade of 4.

Just over half of the children (53.3%) are entitled to the services of a personal assistant. Parents' collaboration with the personal assistant, and the collaboration between the school and the personal assistant, are rated with the highest grade.

Regarding the coordination with the Department of Social Activities of the City of Niš, a 38.3% of the parents rate it with a grade of 3, while only three parents gave it the highest rating.

Parents were also asked to provide one example of good practice collaboration with the aforementioned institutions, where 50% of them singled out the school, around 10% of the parents highlighted a positive experience with the Interdepartmental Commission, while other institutions (CFDC, CFSW, and CPSP) are sporadically mentioned; 10% of the parents state that there is no example of good practice collaboration:

A positive example regarding the school is that the child has been warmly accepted by both the teacher and the other students. They haven't been singled out as individuals with developmental difficulties and have been seamlessly integrated into all school activities.

(Parent 5)

Parents pointed out inadequate collaboration with almost all of the mentioned institutions. Some examples include: (1) impoliteness, (2) delays and failure to meet deadlines for issuing documents, (3) a general

disinterest in deeper assessments of individual profiles, and (4) the notion that all collaboration is superficial and burdensome for them.

Qualitative Part of the Research

In the qualitative part of the research, key actors were asked to identify significant actors at the local level in supporting CDD and their families. All participants in the study recognized the CFSW as a significant actor in supporting children and families. Following that, 70% of the participants mentioned educational institutions (elementary schools, special schools, kindergartens), the local government, specifically the City of Niš, and specific services (e.g., the Department of Social Activities), as well as parent associations. Healthcare institutions and the CPSP were recognized as significant actors by 50% of the participants. The Development Counseling Center, Interdepartmental Commission, National Employment Service, Pension and Disability Insurance Fund, and private service providers of various services were each mentioned once.

Furthermore, participants were asked questions related to their perception of the collaboration among their representative institutions, as well as the characteristics of that collaboration. The representative of the CFSW recognizes that this centre has the most intensive collaboration with the CPSP. This collaboration involves assessing needs, recognizing rights, and making decisions regarding the use of day-care and respite care. The collaboration is evaluated as good. They also pointed out that both institutions operate within the same context of limited resources (for example, an inadequate number of employees). This collaboration is also emphasized as significant by the representative of the CPSP, who described it as “phenomenal” and “problem-free”. In addition to the collaboration with the CFSW, the CPSP also considered the successful collaboration with the Department of Social Activities of the City of Niš.

The representative of the SS also perceived the CFSW as the institution with which they collaborate the most, and they assess this collaboration as ‘mostly good’. The specificity of this collaboration lies in the fact that the school facilitates the realization of rights and services in the field of social protection, especially for students who are placed in the student dormitory affiliated with this school. As an examples of ‘excellent collaboration’, special school representative singled out the CPSP and the Institute for Mental Health. There is also collaboration with regular and other special schools. Bubanj Special School has become a resource centre for other educational institutions that educate CDD students, and the development of standards that will regulate this school’s function and responsibilities as a resource centre is in the works. This has the potential to be a significant opportunity for inter-sectoral collaboration, and collaboration in the process of providing support to families of CDD in the City of Niš.

The representative of the CFMC mentions that they collaborate “with everyone”, but the specificity of this collaboration is that it is initiated “unilaterally”. Due to a lack of staff, the CFMC does not have the ability to initiate collaboration with others or to organize preventive activities. However, they state that they respond to all collaboration requests they receive. The CFMC, which is affiliated with CFSW, currently has one staff member employed. All of this affects the frequency of families contacting the CFMC. Even if its services are free and no referral to the Centre for social work or other institutions is required, as the representative of this institution says, people are insufficiently informed about the existence and role of the CFMC. For the few who are informed, the location of the CFMC constitutes an obstacle to the arrival and use of services that can constitute a significant source of support in taking care of themselves, the child, and other family members. Namely, the office of the CFMC is within the CFSW and, as stated by the participant in the research, people do not require the stigma that can be borne by those who employ the services of the centre. If they do overcome all the mentioned obstacles, they come to the family or individuals mainly because of dysfunctional patterns in family functioning. Namely, as the representative of the CFMC states, due to facing a child’s illness or condition, families do not command adequate support, which can often lead to the mutual blaming of spouses, different mechanisms of acceptance of such a condition, and ultimately divorce.

As a significant aspect of collaboration, the representative of the CFDC mentions that, since 2018, there has been a protocol for mutual collaboration in Niš between the health centre, the CFSW and the ‘Pčelica’ preschool institution. Most often, families of children with developmental difficulties use services from all three institutions.

The representative of the PA discussed their experience, as well as the individual experiences of parents, with other institutions and organizations. They collaborate with all stakeholders. However, as they said, they are obliged to collaborate with some of them, while they are willing to collaborate with others. The key challenges identified relate to: (1) collaboration with the local government in terms of the untimely allocation of funds and the creation of support services that do not align with the needs and perceptions of children and families, and (2) the CFSW in terms of long wait times to exercise rights. Collaboration with educational and healthcare institutions depends on how sensitive each individual institution is to the needs of children and families, so there are examples of both good and bad practice collaboration.

On the other hand, the PA assessed collaboration with the Interdepartmental Commission, personal assistants, and agencies providing these services as ‘good’. They also emphasized that there is ‘good’ collabora-

tion with the private sector, where various treatments (psychological, special education, and speech therapy) are provided.

There are misaligned assessments of collaboration with local authorities and their responsiveness to the needs of the CDD and their families. According to the PA, unresponsiveness is evident in the untimely allocation of resources and the creation of support services that do not consider the needs and perspectives of children and families. All of these factors contribute to inadequate and insufficient support. As for institutional representatives, they assess the engagement of local authorities as successful or state that the local government “somewhat” understands this population.

DISCUSSION

The Center for Social Work is the most commonly recognized significant actor at the local level in supporting the CDD and their families. Additionally, almost 90% of the parents participating in the quantitative research stated that they cooperated with the CFSW. On a scale of 1 to 5, half of the parents rate their satisfaction with cooperation as a 3. A large part of the cooperation with the CFSW is related to exercising rights (assistance and care benefits, obtaining documents), while the use of counselling-therapeutic and social-educational services is negligible. One of the challenges in this cooperation is, in fact, the long wait for exercising rights. Additionally, a very small number of parents (just over 10%) are informed about the existence of the CFMC in Niš, which functions within the CFSW. Participants in the qualitative research did not recognize this institution as a significant actor in supporting families caring for the CDD. This situation is not surprising considering that, despite its existence for several decades, it lacks sufficient staff (currently only one professional worker), operates on a single shift, has premises within the CFSW, and has insufficient or non-existent promotion of its services. In this context, it is crucial to raise awareness of the CFSW counselling-therapeutic and social-educational services. It appears that promoting the services offered by the CFMC, enhancing its professional capacity, and implementing multiple shifts are of particular importance.

The results of the analysis of the work of healthcare institutions in terms of their support and cooperation, specifically in case of the CFDC, are arbitrary. Namely, this data can only be explored within the context of the information gathered from the single interview with the institution's representative. She specifically mentioned that in Serbia, early intervention and more comprehensive parental support through the education of doctors, other professionals, and educational and social protection institutions started in 2017. More intensive activities following this model have been carried out in Niš in the last 6 years. Since the majority of children in this sample are older than 5 years, it means that they did not have the

opportunity for this kind of support. It is significant to highlight that poor or non-existent cooperation might increase the likelihood that the this family will not receive early support — support that should guide all other forms of work with the family (Birkin et al., 2008; Grant & Isakson, 2013; McManus et al., 2020; Yingling & Bell, 2020).

Besides the representative from the CFDC, no one else mentioned the existence of collaboration protocols among institutions. This does not necessarily imply that such protocols do not exist, but rather that not everyone is aware of them or recognizes them as significant documents. Additionally, it means that protocols are only normatively defined. The absence of collaboration among institutions can lead to a lack of awareness of the responsibilities of other key stakeholders and, consequently, a failure to guide parents to where they can receive support, or even cases of misdirecting them to the wrong institution. This results in what is often referred to as ‘wandering of parents within the system’ and a growing sense that they cannot find support within any of the supporting systems (healthcare, education, social welfare, etc.).

Establishing clear collaboration protocols, re-establishing those already in place, conducting joint meetings, and involving stakeholders from different systems in discussions on common topics are significant mechanisms for improving this situation. All of this aligns with findings from other studies that emphasize that collaboration should not be taken for granted and it must operate within a specific normative framework. Otherwise, it leads to the risks described in previous research: overlapping jurisdictions, underutilization of existing resources, failure to develop new services, and so on (DiMaggio et al., 1983; Irimija et al., 2019; Chiari et al., 2022).

According to research, there are several obstacles preventing people from accessing support, including the complexity of the system and its fragmented approach to support across services, the limited capacity and availability of services, regional differences in service provision, and delays in assessment and the diagnostic processes. (Chadwick et al., 2002; Crane et al., 2016; Ridding & Williams, 2019; Sapiets et al., 2021).

Our research results show that there is a different assessment of the success of inter-sectoral collaboration. While representatives of institutions perceive this collaboration as successful, parents of children recognize it as less supportive. Parents express the highest level of satisfaction in relation to collaboration with schools and personal child assistants. On the other hand, parents show the lowest level of satisfaction in relation to collaboration with the Department of Social Activities. Regarding collaboration among institutions, there are no examples of bad practice collaboration mentioned; instead, this collaboration is described as “good”, “mostly good”, or “excellent”. However, although this collaboration is described in positive terms, the participants do not provide specific ex-

amples to confirm it. Such findings also align with those of other authors, emphasizing that it is beneficial when collaboration processes follow a 'bottom-up' approach because the needs of a specific group are more accurately identified at lower levels. However, it is crucial that key decision-makers understand these identified needs and work together to establish the infrastructure to meet them (Bryson et al., 2006, Cullen, M. A., & Lindsay, G. A. (2019).

In regard to collaboration with the local government, different stakeholders assess this collaboration differently. At times, it is viewed as successful, but there are also observations that the local government is not sufficiently responsive to the needs of children or that they display some insensitivity towards this population. This result is in line with some other studies' conclusions (Tissot, 2011). The participation of those for whom the services are intended, along with all other interested parties, in the decision-making process is one of the most significant mechanisms to ensure that services are designed to meet the expressed needs. It is the responsibility of decision-makers to facilitate this participation, as well as to develop mechanisms for public advocacy by parents and other stakeholders, ensuring that this process proceeds as effectively as possible.

It is important to note that more than half of the parents reported receiving none, or insufficient support from extended family or the community in caring for the child. The absence of support from the informal sector, as well as the adequate level of support provided to the family by public institutions, should be signs of the possibility that the family's resources for child care will be worn out. Some services, such as various treatments (defectological, speech therapy, psychiatric, physical, etc.) and some free activities (sports, cultural, educational, entertainment, etc.), are also provided in the private sector. However, many parents fail to provide these facilities to their children for financial reasons, being overloaded with taking care of other needs in the family, a lack of resources at the local level, or a lack of information.

CONCLUSION

Despite the recognized importance of multisectoral cooperation, this research also highlights a significant gap between its importance and practical application.

The research highlights the opportunities and challenges that come with working across sectors to support families in Niš that have children with developmental disabilities. The analysis of the local setting of Niš highlights several obstacles, including insufficient planning, budgetary limitations, and the lack of allocated transfers for social protection services. It also highlights the crucial role that institutional frameworks play in creating successful partnerships. These obstacles highlight how urgent-

ly the public, non-profit, and informal sectors need to collaborate closely. Although multi-sector cooperation is acknowledged as important, the research indicates that local collaboration in Niš is either non-existent or weak, characterized by untapped potential, underdeveloped mechanisms, inadequate specialized connectivity, and jurisdictional overlaps. Divergent attitudes on cooperation success are revealed by the qualitative insights, with institutional officials expressing greater optimism than parents. While collaborative methods that work well in the school system provide helpful direction, resolving issues that have been identified is essential to building a strong and effective support network for this vulnerable population.

LIMITATION OF RESEARCH AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Aside from the small sample size, which is not representative, this study has another limitation. This research lacked the perspective of formal power holders or decision-makers in this area, because their representatives declined to participate in the study. It would be important to include their perspective in future research. There were contradicting statements in the qualitative portion of the research. This constraint could be overcome through involving more representatives from these institutions in future studies. This would make way for a more objective look at the research questions.

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ПРОЦЕС МЕЂУСЕКТОРСКЕ САРАДЊЕ У ПРУЖАЊУ ПОДРШКЕ ПОРОДИЦАМА ДЕЦЕ СА ТЕШКОЋАМА У РАЗВОЈУ И/ИЛИ ИНВАЛИДИТЕТОМ У ГРАДУ НИШУ

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Резиме

Истраживање се бави анализом подршке породицама деце са тешкоћама у развоју и/или инвалидитетом на локалном нивоу, с посебним освртом на пример Града Ниша. Породице које се суочавају с оваквим изазовима често се суочавају с предрасудама, финансијским потешкоћама и недостатком сарадње с локалним институцијама. Иако је Република Србија препознала важност потребне подршке овој популацији, немају сва деца једнак приступ истој, посебно када је у питању подршка из домена социјалне заштите, здравства и образовања.

У циљу решавања ових проблема, наглашава се идеја међусекторске сарадње, која подразумева да установе из различитих система сарађују како би се постигао циљ свеукупне подршке овим породицама. Ово истраживање указује да је међусекторска сарадња у Нишу или непостојећа или недовољно развијена. Тачније, истраживање указује да често изостаје институционална повезаност, а самим тим и потенцијал пружене подршке.

Студија спроведена у Нишу открива проблеме као што су недовољно планирање развоја услуга које би пратиле потребе циљне групе, финансијска ограничења за потребне видове подршке, као и недостатак лиценцираних пружалаца услуга у заједници.

У квантитативном делу истраживања, родитељи деце са тешкоћама у развоју и/или инвалидитетом препознали су пре свега Центар за социјални рад као значајног актера у подршци, али су изразили различите нивое задовољства овом подршком. Сарадња са Управом за друштвене делатности, која је задужена за доношење политика о креирању локалних услуга за ову популацију, добила је најниже оцене задовољства.

Фаза квалитативног истраживања подразумевала је интервјуе с кључним актерима у локалним институцијама. Док представници ових институција сарадњу са родитељима ове деце перципирају као успешну, родитељи су изразили нижи ниво задовољства.

Рад сугерише да су јасни протоколи о сарадњи, потом заједнички састанци и укључивање заинтересованих страна из различитих система кључни за ефикаснију подршку намењену овим породицама. Уноточ препознавању значаја вишесекторске сарадње, постоји значајан јаз између њеног значаја и практичне примене у Граду Нишу.