ABSTRACT

There is a limited body of research about formal support for parents with intellectual disabilities in the context of the Czech Republic. As the process of deinstitutionalization continues, people with intellectual disabilities have more opportunities to make decisions about the ways they want to live in society and establish partner relationships. It is therefore appropriate to look at whether the available formal support adequately responds to the needs of families with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, the aim of this research was to analyze the existing system of formal support for parents with intellectual disabilities. The author also examined how social workers are prepared to work with this group of parents. Last but not least, the aim of this research study was to analyze the experience of parents with intellectual disabilities with formal support. In order to conduct such a comprehensive research study, the author used a mixed method research approach. Specifically, interviews, vignettes and the Support Interview Guide were used with parents with intellectual disabilities, as well as a survey and focus groups with social workers. The participants in this study were 18 parents with intellectual disabilities, 294 social workers who completed the survey, and 39 social workers who took part in focus groups. The research findings indicate that social workers often work intuitively with parents with intellectual disabilities, without having sufficient knowledge about appropriate work techniques and methodological support. Furthermore, it was concluded that the existing set up of the Czech social service system does not meet the needs of parents. Specifically, there is a lack of suitable accommodation, such as provision of field services, which would offer intensive support. The key finding was that while parents with intellectual disabilities are satisfied with the support received, their parental skills are not sufficiently strengthened. This often slows down the process of empowerment. The research findings demonstrate the need to extend professional training of social workers. They need to learn about parenthood of people with intellectual disabilities, familiarize themselves with appropriate support tools and ensure that they are provided with methodical guidance.