

## **Presentation of the project “*Psychology in mental health care protection*”, that is implemented in Republic of Croatia**

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### **Abstract**

Parallel to the public discussion about development of *National Strategy for protection of mental health*, which was subsequently adopted in Croatia for the period since 2012 to 2016 year, a group of psychologists working in the public health system has launched a professional public discussion about the inclusion of psychology and psychologists as well as effective application of psychological profession potentials and practice in interdisciplinary approach to the proactive mental health care. Within the project “*Psychology in mental health care protection*” there are published three books that have blazed the trail to the psychology and other collaborating disciplines to more quality care for humans’ mental health.

Keywords: *mental health – protection – promotion – psychological activity*

### **Introduction**

Mental health, as a part of general health, presents the important area for the individual, family and society as a whole so that prevention, early detection, diagnostics, treatment and rehabilitation of mental disorders and illnesses, as well as addictions are of special health interest of the population. The attention of modern medicine and public health activities should be directed to the preservation of good health, and not solely on the treatment of impaired mental health and health in general. The public health care system in the Republic of Croatia indicates a social and political concept aimed at improving health and extending and improving the quality of life of the population through the health education, disease prevention, and other forms of health, social and other interventions.

Following these principles, during the year 2010 Republic of Croatia has adopted the *National Strategy for protection of mental health for the period since 2012 to 2016 year*.

### **Objective and organization of the project**

In order to achieve the full inclusion of psychology and psychologists and the effective application of the psychological profession potentials in interdisciplinary approach to the proactive mental health care, as well as inter-

sectoral cooperation and recognition of good psychological practice, psychologists employed in the public health system in the Republic of Croatia have in the year 2010 launched the project entitled "*Psychology in mental health care protection*". The project aims to include applied psychology in the field of protection and promotion of mental health in order to address socially relevant issues of mental health in accordance with areas and measures defined in the *National Strategy for protection of mental health in the period since 2012 to 2016 year*.

This initiative of mentioned group of psychologists is prompted by the introduction of protection of mental health as a separate activity at the level of primary health care within the framework of services for mental health care protection and prevention and outpatient addiction treatment at the county public health departments.

Within the broader theme of mental health issues, the intent of this action was to consider the capacity of psychology for effective intervention in the field of preservation and protection of mental health, especially for universal prevention measures in the different fields: the labour, health, education, social welfare, but also in the general population (in community) as well as in the vulnerable population groups. Particularly important intention was to encourage interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration and researches in the field protection of mental health.

### **The flow of activities in project implementation**

For the purpose of encouraging and advancing cross-sector collaboration in the implementation of the National Strategy measures, at professional conferences since the year 2010, the discussions bring together psychologists and prominent professionals in the relevant fields of applied psychology, as well as representatives of the cooperative and other helper professions. The purpose of this professional public hearing was to discuss the possibilities and limitations of applied psychology for effective intervention in the protection and promotion of mental health, especially underutilized space for universal prevention measures (in the preservation of mental health and the prevention of disorders) at the organizational and social level, in schools, labour organizations and community, i.e. wherever potentials and space for effective interventions exists. The ultimate goal of these activities was to reach a consensus on the general platform for the first time in the Republic of Croatia, and as clearly and explicitly define the guidelines for the preparation of working standards for psychological activity in the protection and the promotion of mental health. As an incentive for professional public debate in 2010th year was created a book, "*Psychology in mental health care protection*" the first book in a series of three books published so far.

Afterwards, a number of professional and scientific meetings have followed, at which experts have discussed the psychology capacities for proactive action in the field of mental health care protection. Following these activities, in the period since 2010th until 2011th year, and through the professional public discussion that included a large number of psychologists and experts in collaborative professions, in a year 2011 the guidelines that make up the content of the publication *“Psychology in mental health care protection, the proposed guidelines for psychological activity in the protection and promotion of mental health”* were separated. A large number of psychologists have participated in the development of this second book in the series, with the intention to include these guidelines into their labor standards in the psychology profession in this area in the future. This book defines the areas of action and explicitly states what psychologists are doing or can do in order to preserve the mental health of people.

Once the guidelines defined the scope of activities of psychologists in the mental health care of people it has remained to prepare guidebook through the immediate expert actions following a good professional psychological practice. Pursuant to the above in 2012<sup>th</sup> it was created the book *“Psychology in mental health care protection; manual of psychological activity in the protection and promotion of mental health”* which is a guide to psychological practice in the protection and promotion of mental health and support to the psychologists in practice. This is the third book in the series which presents a good psychological practice and describes the professional activities of psychologists due to the affirmations of psychological profession potentials and improving of interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral cooperation in protecting and promoting mental health.

In order to exchange a rich professional experience gained in this project with experts outside the Croatian borders, publisher Institute of Public Health “Sveti Rok” Virovitica-Podravina County has presented a project and books from the project at professional conferences in the neighboring countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mostar), Serbia (Donji Milanovac) and Hungary (Pécs).

### **Conclusion**

The project *“Psychology in mental health care protection”* has launched a professional public discussion parallel to the public discussion on the adoption of the *National Strategy for protection of mental health in the period 2012 to 2016 in the Republic of Croatia*. During the development of the project and as a result of professional public hearings there were published three books: *“Psychology in mental health care protection”* (2010), prepared with the intention to serve as a starting point for discussion on the capacities of psychology for effective intervention in the protection and promotion of mental

health and prevention of mental health problems; the publication *“Psychology in mental health care protection, the proposed guidelines for psychological activity in the protection and promotion of mental health”* (2011) in which have been operationalized and defined activities and tasks that psychologists can use to contribute to achievement of the objectives i.e. efficiency and effectiveness of measures for action defined in the priority areas of the National Strategy; and the book *“Psychology in mental health care protection; manual for psychological activity in the protection and promotion of mental health”* (2012), which affirms the bio-psychosocial approach to the mental health and is a guide through a good psychological practice in line with previously agreed guidelines for psychological activity.

Publisher of all these books is the Institute of Public Health of Virovitica-Podravina County “Sveti Rok”.