PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES FOR PROVIDING INTERVENTIONS FOR GAMBLING RELATED PROBLEMS AND OTHER HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR – PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS

ABSTRACT (max 500 words)

Important aspect of the social welfare system is providing interventions for children and youth with behavioral problems, mainly externalizing behavioral disorders, delinquent behavior and addictions. In Croatia, children and youth can be referred to the social welfare system based on the Social Welfare Act, Family Act or Youth Courts Act, depending on the age, etiology and context of behavioral problems.

The main aim of this study was to explore how often social welfare professionals encounter different phenomenological types of behavioral problems and how confident they feel for providing interventions. Special emphasis will be put on gambling related problems among children and youth.

Specific aim is to explore possible differences between professionals who are providing interventions in the community and those who are working in an institutional setting.

A total of N=123 social welfare system professionals from 18 Croatian counties (age range from 25 to 64; M<sub>age</sub>=40.78; SD<sub>age</sub>=10.10) participated in this study. With regards to gender distribution, most of the professionals were females (n=109; 88.6%). A total of 75.6% professionals are providing community interventions/services, while 24.4% institutional interventions.

Results show that professionals working in an institutional setting more frequently work with different behavioral problems, while at the same time they report more doubts in their competencies for providing adequate psychosocial interventions. When it comes to gambling related problems, they find these competencies of great importance, while at the same time, they report not having enough education and specific knowledge in this field.

Results will be interpreted in the context of continuous life-learning of psychosocial professionals, as well as possibilities for providing professional supervision and support in the process of working with high-risk youth.

Key words: professional competencies, youth gambling, youth gambling related problems, high-risk behavior, social welfare system
AUTHORS SHORT BIO (MAX 75 WORDS EACH):

**Neven Ricijaš** is an associate professor at the Department of Behavioral Disorders (University of Zagreb, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences). He holds a doctoral degree in the field of juvenile delinquency and high-risk behavior. Since 2010 he has been a leader of several gambling related projects with the main aim to transfer new scientific and empirical knowledge into creating preventive and treatment interventions for people who develop gambling related problems.

**Sabina Mandić** is an assistant at the Department of Behavioral Disorders (University of Zagreb, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences). Her main professional and scientific interest is adolescent risk behavior, juvenile delinquency and behavioral addictions. She is an PhD student at the Social Work Center at the University of Zagreb where she plans to conduct doctoral research study in the field of internet addiction.

**Dora Dodig Hundrič** is an assistant professor at the Department of Behavioral Disorders (University of Zagreb, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences). She holds a doctoral degree in the field of gambling and has actively participated in the design and implementation of several research projects focused on youth problem gambling. She has, together with Neven Ricijaš, created a new course – „Gambling and other Behavioral Addictions“. She is also the head of Faculty’s Psychosocial Counselling Unit.