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# Models and Modes of Social Work Supervision

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### Introduction

The field work experience provides an opportunity for students to integrate the basic knowledge acquired through coursework into the real world of practice through a supervision process. Although the acquisition of basic knowledge about human behaviour, social policies and programmes, social work intervention strategies, etc. is certainly prerequisite to successful practice, it is not completely sufficient. The guidance that supervision provides in regards to how to apply this knowledge to the field of practice is an important component of a student's learning. This chapter discusses the functions of supervision in this overall process, in addition to the supervision models and modes that are generally used in the social work practicum to assist in this regard. Also reviewed are the administrative and cultural contexts of supervision in an educational practicum.

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## **Definition and General Functions of Supervision**

Supervision in an educational practicum is generally defined as the relationship between a student, or subordinate, and supervisor who oversees the development of the student throughout the practicum experience. Within the context of this relationship, the supervisor monitors and evaluates the student's development of responsibility, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and ethical standards in the practice of social work. During this process the supervisor provides consistent feedback to the student as he or she works toward achieving a maximum level of performance in all these areas. In addition, the supervision process consists of the face-to-face contact between the supervisor and the student during which the student appraises the supervisor of important case material and every aspect of his or her involvement with clients.

In social work, supervision is considered an integral part of professional practice. It primarily relates to agency-based professional practice and forms part of the ethical standards of assuring competent and accountable practice with clients. The various functions of supervision are as follows:

- Assessing the student's level of knowledge and skill.
- Assuming responsibility for working out a plan that will provide the student with an array of appropriate and challenging learning opportunities during the practicum.

- Assisting the student in understanding and adapting to the community or environment where the practicum takes place.
- Assessing the “fit” between the student’s and client’s backgrounds and experiences (i.e. urban/rural, middle/lower class) and their implications for interactions.
- Monitoring the student’s practicum experience and assisting in evaluating the student’s performance.
- Assisting the student in identifying his or her learning needs, formulating learning objectives, and preparing a learning agreement.
- Facilitating the student’s learning by providing guidance and serving as a source of information.
- Assisting the student in integrating social work theory and the specific experiences of the practicum.
- Educating the student by modeling appropriate practice behaviours and techniques, providing relevant feedback and encouragement, clarifying and interpreting various behaviours exhibited by the student, and sharing experiences that enhance the student’s development.
- Encouraging self-acceptance and enhancing self esteem.
- Encouraging interpersonal regard.
- Managing interpersonal and organizational tensions.
- Fostering interdependence of the student.

- Advocating for the student.
- Evaluating the student's progress and development.

Supervision occurs within an agency setting in which the supervisor serves as the primary teacher in the field whose aim is to teach the core skills of social work practices, such as interviewing, listening, observation, recording, assessing and prioritizing client problems, developing interventions, etc. Other administrative tasks are also taught, which include planning, budgeting, drafting, etc. Other important components of supervision also include the development of professional attitudes and behaviours, such as accountability, assuming responsibility, good time management skills, and a general commitment to completing the work assigned in a professional manner. The supervisor will generally use a number of techniques to assist in facilitating a student's learning, such as:

- Engaging in a discussion of case material and asking why a certain intervention was used.
- Didactic teaching, such as providing information directly.
- Experiential teaching, such as role playing in which the supervisor demonstrates a particular skill or technique.

In general, the supervision process is based on the development of a positive supervisory relationship that will be discussed later in this block. Undoubtedly without this relationship, the functions of supervision will not achieve the primary purpose of helping a

student attain the level of knowledge and skills necessary to enter the field of social work practice.

## **Development and Task Models of Supervision**

Just as social workers follow models of practice in working with clients, supervisors also generally follow models of supervision that are typically associated with supervision in social work. In this section we will discuss two primary models of supervision that are generally used in preparing new practitioners to work in various human service professions – the developmental and task models of supervision.

The *developmental* model of supervision is more of a process-oriented model that follows the various stages of learning that a new social worker generally experiences during his or her development of professional knowledge and skills for practice. The primary focus of a developmental model of supervision in field work is on how students change as they gain more training and experience in the field of practice, based on a shift in identity (from student to practitioner) and the skills that develop with the experiences gained. In the developmental model of supervision, supervisors primarily attempt to match their behaviour and teaching techniques to the developmental needs of the student. In other words, the supervisor assesses where the student is in terms of his or her level of skill and knowledge, then the supervisor must structure learning experiences and teaching techniques that are consistent with this level of skill and knowledge.

The developmental model generally consists of four stages of development that students or new practitioners follow as they gain experience in the field of social work. At each stage the student's development is strongly influenced by three general themes, all of which have an enormous effect on the other themes. Those themes are:

- The development of the student's professional self and identity.
- The relationship between the supervisor and the student.
- The relationship between the supervisor and the administrative structure (or practice context) within which he or she works.

The stages of development are as follows:

**Stage One:** During this stage the student is very dependent on the supervisor and lacks the competence needed for independent work. Students also generally lack self-awareness and have little experience in working with clients. Learning takes place by shadowing the supervisor and observing his or her style of practice.

**Stage Two:** This stage is generally characterized by a dependency-autonomy conflict. As the student's awareness increases, he or she strives for independence but is not ready for complete autonomy. At this stage the student needs more independence and less restrictiveness than the first stage.

**Stage Three:** This is the stage of conditional

dependency in which the student is generally more differentiated, motivated, insightful and empathic. He or she is more comfortable with a perception of professional self and is able to function with a great deal of autonomy. The student at this stage is also able to formulate assessments well and develop appropriate interventions for clients with minimal input from the supervisor.

**Stage Four:** At this stage the student has developed a high level of competence and is able to independently formulate accurate assessments with appropriate interventions. Students at this stage are able to take responsibility for their own learning.

In general, the developmental approach to supervision is very appealing as it follows the predominant view of most social work practitioners – that social workers become better practitioners with more experience and training.

The **task** model of supervision is very similar to the developmental model, however it relies heavily on the assignment of tasks that help students develop to a more advanced level of practice. This model includes a focus on both **functions** and **tasks** within supervision which are, respectively, the *how* and *what* of supervision. For example, some of the tasks that are included in the model are: monitoring-evaluating; instructing-advising; modeling; consulting; supporting-sharing. Likewise, some of the functions are: counseling skill; case conceptualization; professional role; emotional awareness; self-evaluation. The consequence is a 5 (task) by 5 (function) matrix, with 25 resulting task-function combinations (See Fig. ).

<b>Functions (How)</b>						
		Counseling Skill	Case Conceptualization	Professional Role	Emotional Awareness	Self-Evaluation
<b>Tasks (What)</b>	Monitoring-Evaluating					
	Instructing-Advising					
	Modeling					
	Consulting					
	Supporting-Sharing					

**Fig. : Functions and Tasks in Supervision**

A supervisor might, for example, engage in monitoring-evaluating (the how) of the student's counseling skill (the what), or might engage in consulting concerning the student's emotional awareness, and so on. Hypothetically, a supervisor might engage in any task with any function, but realistically there are probably some task and function matches that are more likely to occur in supervision.

## **Models of Supervision**

**Direct observation of the student:** Regardless of the particular model of supervision used, there is no substitute for directly observing a student's work with a client. Several arrangements can be used for conducting these observations. One way is for the supervisor to be physically present in the room with the student or accompanying him or her on home visits. Another possibility involves the use of special

observation rooms equipped with one way mirrors. By observing sessions as they occur, supervisors get a better sense of the social work process of assessing and counseling a client. They can listen to what is said, watch the nonverbal behaviours of the student and client, note key moments of the session, and get a deeper awareness of the overall “feel” of the interventions. In some arrangements, supervisors can also instruct the student during the interaction. Using a technique known as a “bug in the ear,” supervisors observe the sessions from behind a mirror and can speak to the student through a microphone connected to tiny earplug-type speakers.

Although direct observation can be one of the best ways for students to learn counseling techniques, a drawback is the fact that they can be intimidated by the supervisor’s presence – even if he or she is behind a mirror – and therefore their already existing anxiety can be elevated. In such instances, it is helpful for supervisors and students to establish an agreement about how directly observed sessions will proceed, what the goals and objectives of the session are, and perhaps engage in a role play before the actual client session begins.

**Didactic supervision:** One approach to supervision is similar to what instructors and students do in their academic classes. Didactic or teaching supervision is best chosen when an intern wants to learn, or a supervisor wants to teach, specific information about a theory, technique, or some topic relevant to the intern’s activities. The goal of a didactic approach is to get information across as efficiently as possible so the

student can learn and apply the information directly to his or her work. Didactic approaches tend to be particularly appealing to beginning learners because they feel a need for concrete, practical information to help them cope with the anxiety and ambiguity of starting something new. Perhaps the main drawback to didactic methods is if they are relied upon too heavily, supervision can become merely another venue for lecture-based instruction.

**Case discussions:** Although students are most familiar with didactic approaches, the most common activity of clinical supervision is typically case discussion. As the name implies, case discussion means the student describes a case to the supervisor and the two discuss what is going on. Case discussions can take a variety of formats depending on the goals and preferences of the student and supervisor. Perhaps the most common approach involves students describing what is happening in a case, explaining their actions and offering interpretations for what is happening. The supervisor typically listens, asks questions, and may offer alternative interpretations or suggestions.

**Tapes and role plays:** Video or audio recordings of sessions with clients enable the supervisor and student to observe the actual interview process with a client. This is an extremely valuable method for clinical training, although some time limitations prohibit reviews of the entire session. This mode of supervision presents an interesting paradox. Most students want to present a positive impression of their skills and work, there is also the temptation to choose only those points in the session where one feels particularly confident

in their work. As an alternative, students should choose a few sections where they feel they work and a few other sections where they felt lost, confused, overwhelmed, etc.

An alternative to working with recorded sessions is to enact a client session with the supervisor. Role plays involve students taking the roles of clients, trainees or other staff members and acting these roles as they portray a situation or interaction of interest. They can be particularly helpful in developing basic helping skills and in learning to deal with difficult clients or staff. Role plays can also help students to become aware of their counseling style and, in some instances, about significant issues in their own lives. Supervisors can also use role plays to learn about issues and techniques in supervision.

**Direct observation of the supervisor:** The majority of students prefer this mode of supervision above most others. While they recognize that discussion about their own work can only take them so far, they also feel they can learn a great deal when they can watch their supervisor in group or individual sessions, read reports written by the supervisor, and observe him or her in other actions such as staff meetings, conferences, etc. One way to accomplish this is for the supervisor and intern to work jointly in counseling clients. This is most commonly practiced in group or couples counseling, but it can also be used with individual clients. Although most supervisors are open to this process if it is consistent with the needs of clients, many are not aware that students would like such an opportunity. As a result, students may need to take

the initiative of asking if they can observe the supervisors in different setting.

### **Cultural and Administrative Context of Supervision**

Helping students gain cultural competence within an administrative structure that facilitates this process is an important component of the practicum experience. Not all agencies provide an opportunity for students to work with diverse client populations, therefore the supervisor and student together will need to develop creative strategies to meet this expectation, as being a culturally competent social work practitioner is at the core of the social work value system. Therefore the supervisor can look at ways in which the student can be exposed to others who are different from them and develop ways of exploring their awareness of cultural diversity. Most agencies have client populations that represent different areas of diversity such as race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, spirituality, political philosophy, socioeconomic class, education, family background, and life experiences.

The administrative structure of an agency can provide an opportunity for students to apply in the practicum setting the cultural competent knowledge, skills, and values that they have gained in their coursework. However, how can a single agency or supervisor have adequate knowledge about the varied and diverse client systems with which a new social worker will work with during his or her career? Generally it is helpful to note that there are five essential elements of cultural competence that can apply to an individual or larger

system, such as an agency: (1) value diversity; (2) capacity for cultural self-assessment; (3) awareness of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact; (4) institutionalized cultural knowledge; and (5) programs and services that reflect an understanding of diversity between and within cultures. Although true cultural competence is a lifelong challenge and opportunity, students can proactively seek out opportunities in their practica to interact with others whose life experiences differ from theirs so they can better understand ways in which they can be helpful to those individuals or groups. While they may be intimidated upon leaving the “comfort zone” of working with those client systems that are most like them, they are encouraged to broaden their understanding of those individuals or groups with whom they have little or no experience.

Some specific questions students can ask themselves and discuss with their supervisors in the process of working with diverse clients can include the following:

- How are issues of diversity handled in the agency?
- Are these issues included in the agency’s assessment process?
- Is it permissible to include these issues in the assessment and interventions conducted by the social workers in the agency?
- If the practicum agency supports the inclusion of issues relating to diversity and cultural competence into social work practice, are you clear about the appropriate way to acknowledge and discuss the issues?

- Does the potential for a value and/or ethical conflict exist if the client's values or beliefs are different from your own?

In addition to working with diverse client populations, students may also be working under supervisors who represent different racial, cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Just as it is important for students to understand these differences as they relate to the client system, it is also important to understand similar differences as they relate to the supervision experience. For example, cultural norms may dictate a different style of supervision in which communication barriers might exist. Recognizing and understanding these differences when communicating problems or concerns is important to the development of a positive supervisory experience and should be clarified in the beginning of the practicum.

### **Conclusion**

Appropriate supervision is an important component of the field work experience as it provides an opportunity for students to apply the knowledge gained from their coursework to the field of social work practice. Specific functions of supervision include the structuring of activities that are in accordance with the student's level of knowledge and skill that they bring to the practicum, in addition to the evaluation of the student's progress throughout. Two key models of supervision that are commonly used in social work to prepare students are the developmental and task models. Both are similar in many ways as they are designed to help students achieve a level of proficiency in practice that is gained through experience and the accomplishment of certain

tasks assigned by the supervisor. The varying modes of supervision (live and didactic supervision, role plays, video and audio tapes, etc.) are conducted within the context of these models. Another integral component of supervision is the provision of opportunities that expose students to issues involving diversity and that allow them to develop a significant level of cultural competence appropriate for entry into the social work profession.

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## **Administrative and Environmental Aspects in Social Work Supervision**

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### **Introduction**

Supervision within the social work field experience is considered an educationally focused teaching relationship that is authority based and has periods of closeness and distance. The supervisor-student relationship is typically implemented through an individualized, one-on-one teaching arrangement based in a community/agency.

In order to fully understand practicum supervision and how to make good use of it, it is first necessary to examine the essential components of supervision within an organizational structure. Practicum supervision in an agency setting places less emphasis on the supervisor being an overseer of a student's work although that is an integral component of the role. More emphasis is on being a skilled master of the work to be done, in addition to being a teacher and a leader. Within this context, it is the supervisor's responsibility

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to model good social work skills and behaviors to adequately prepare students for the real world of practice. A positive supervisory relationship based on a style of supervision that facilitates learning is an important component of the practicum experience. In addition, a thorough orientation to the expectations of supervision helps to set the stage for a positive supervisory experience that will serve as a frame of reference for the student in future social work jobs. This chapter will discuss the beginning phase of practicum supervision, which includes the orientation to the roles and expectations of supervision and a focus on the supervisory relationship. Also discussed will be the styles of supervision that are most conducive to the facilitation of a positive supervisory relationship in which boundaries can sometimes be blurred and the authority role challenged.

### **Orientation to Field Work Supervision: Roles and Expectations**

While all agencies vary in regards to their structure, levels of authority, etc., there is a need for supervision at all levels within an organization – the individual level, the team level, and the department and organizational level. Each level is generally supervised as a whole entity, e.g., the department is supervised with regard to how it functions as a department. This supervision is essential if each level, whether it be in a social work department, health service or school, is going to provide a measure of containment and understanding of what happens within it. It is important for students to understand this organizational structure when beginning a practicum, in addition to their role within

that structure. The agency providing field practicums must have a well defined structure with well defined roles for its employees, rather than informal lines of authority and a loose organizational structure.

Every practicum begins with a thorough orientation to the expectations required by the educational program prior to beginning the experience. However, different expectations are generally required by the onsite supervisor and agency that might differ from those in another practicum setting. The first orientation topic to cover is the structure of the agency and the role of the practicum supervisor within that structure. Some supervisors only assume administrative responsibilities while others carry caseloads in addition to their administrative role. Having a thorough understanding of the practicum supervisor's role is an important part of the learning, particularly in regards to the varying responsibilities that social workers assume within an organization.

Another important aspect of orientation is the role of the field work supervisor and how that might vary from the role of the practicum supervisor within the agency. The field work supervisor is given administrative tasks by the educational program that include the functions of identifying suitable agencies in the area where field work can be done and securing their cooperation and consent for the same. These selections are made based on specific criteria established by the program. The practicum supervisor has the role of orienting the student to the objectives of the agency, the existing programs within it and how they function, the resources available to the agency, and the needs of the clients/communities that are served (Hawkins & Shoheit, 1997).

A thorough orientation to the role of the student in the agency is important in helping students to understand the expectations of their duties and the limitations that are inherent in being a student learner within an organization. For example, the student is not expected to be given clerical work or fundraising tasks but instead should be given tasks that are consistent with their contract and that facilitate their learning. They can also be included as the member of a team assigned to mobilize resources for a particular activity. Similarly, they may help the agency occasionally by doing office related work that provides them with a learning experience.

An important component of the orientation also includes the communication of expectations by the supervisor during the course of supervision. The student should have an understanding of the following information (Baird, 1996):

- When supervisory sessions are scheduled
- What the expectations are with regard to the review of written material by the supervisor and due dates
- The protocol for reporting absences or scheduled appointments outside the agency
- Agency policies and procedures
- Protocols regarding confidentiality and dealing with potentially harmful...?
- Safety issues or concerns and a strategy for dealing with them
- Other important information that is deemed necessary by the agency, supervisor, and the educational program.

To assist in clarifying expectations, it is helpful for the student and supervisor to independently develop a list of expectations and assessment criteria for the supervisory relationship from both perspectives. Specifically, the student can develop a list of expectations for him/herself and the field supervisor can do the same. They can then compare the lists and develop a mutually agreed upon set of expectations of each other regarding supervision. Examples of areas to consider in developing the lists include the following (Bogo, 1993):

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Expectations of Self</b> <i>(List specific expectations of yourself)</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Assessment Criteria</b> <i>(List measurable outcomes used to determine whether expectations are achieved)</i></p>
Use of supervision	
Preparedness for supervision	
Follow-up to supervisory recommendation	
Demonstration of adult learning	
Demonstration of assertiveness	
Demonstration of appropriate professional feedback	

## **The Supervisory Relationship: Styles of Supervision**

Another important aspect of the orientation is the student-agency supervisory relationship. The qualities of a good supervisory/student relationship usually parallel the qualities of a good practitioner/client relationship. Just as in work with clients, the supervisory relationship must be built on trust and openness, thus allowing the exchange of honest communication and critical feedback. The student should be able to feel safe in sharing concerns about the practicum in addition to his or her style of learning, so the supervisor is able to structure the supervision accordingly and make necessary changes in the practicum experiences.

The establishment of a positive relationship begins with an open discussion by the supervisor regarding his or her style of supervision. Supervisory style can best be defined as the way the field work supervisor shares his or her theoretical orientation, practice and supervisory philosophies. Supervisory style consists of a series of behavior patterns used by the supervisor to establish a working relationship with the student. It can generally be categorized as (1) *active*, which is problem oriented, directive, and interpretive, or (2) *reactive*, which is process oriented, indirect, and non-interpretive (Munson, 2002).

There are varying styles and techniques that are used which generally reflect a particular style of practice that incorporates a supervisor's personality style. Under the categories of active and reactive, typical styles of

supervision are as follows (Munson, 2002):

**Philosopher-philosophical style:** Sometimes supervisors launch into philosophical abstractions that have little or no application from the student's point of view. They often use either lengthy explanations or brief global statements, which frequently make the new learner extremely frustrated as important case material is not dealt with directly.

**Theoretician-theoretical style:** The supervisor often uses theory as the primary focus and believes that the mastery of theory leads to good practice. According to this style, once the theory has been mastered, the student can deal with future case material on their own. The theoretician tends to be logical and orderly in their approach to supervision and are frequently viewed as "taskmasters" when it comes to dealing with clinical material. The only time they are viewed negatively is when they talk about theory in the abstract, thus not relating it directly to case material and learning.

**Technician-technical style:** This style is very different from the other two styles. Instead of being philosophical or theoretical in orientation, the supervisor deals almost exclusively with details of case problems and relates them to technical skills. It is a problem focused and interactionally oriented style of supervision in which questions are asked in highly specific and empathic ways. Without confrontation or threat, the student can be pressured into dealing with difficult material. The technician has patience with new learners and responds in ways that encourage them to find their own answers. They are also respected by those they supervise and

are often viewed as demanding, having a no-nonsense approach to supervision. This is generally the preferred style for students just entering the social work field, although a combination of the three styles at the appropriate time can also be effective.

It is important for the student to have a complete understanding of the style of supervision used by the supervisor during the orientation phase of the internship. As adult learners, it is also important for students to be responsible for identifying their particular learning style along with the teaching style of the direct supervisor. Routinely engaging in discussion about each other's style will enable the student and supervisor to continue to understand how of the other processes and utilizes information. The insights gained from identifying a supervisory style will serve as a guide for the supervisor in assigning tasks and activities, teaching knowledge and skills, and evaluating the student's performance and progress. Within the forum of an open discussion, the student should also have the opportunity to provide feedback on how his or her learning style matches the supervisory style, and how areas that differ might be dealt with.

It is important for students to remember that supervision is an interactional process that parallels in many ways the social worker-client relationship and the helping process in general (Baird, 1996). In order for them to benefit from the supervisory experience, it is important for the practicum instructor to employ many of the helping skills and techniques that social workers use in working with clients.

## **Appropriate Use of Supervision**

Learning how to use supervision appropriately is of central importance to the practicum student. Because social work is challenging and stressful, and also because students work directly with clients' lives, they require skillful guidance, direction, support, and feedback from the practicum supervisor. The practicum supervisor must not only help students acquire specific skills, they must also help them manage the emotional and intellectual challenges and the personal issues that emerge in their training. This responsibility may place supervisors in a role that is very much like that of therapist for the trainee. However this should be avoided as much as possible. Supervisors should always refrain from entering a treatment relationship with the student intern.

Students should strive to use supervision in a purposeful and responsible manner. Regular supervisory meetings held at a specific meeting time each week are recommended, since this will help them avoid the difficulties of having to constantly arrange a suitable meeting time. Students should prepare for these meetings in advance and not expect the supervisor to do all of the talking. Questions should be brought to the meeting, in addition to observations and requests for feedback. The student should use this time to examine his or her performance and explore new ideas. Expectations of the student are generally reinforced in these meetings and will primarily relate to the following:

- Dependability and follow-through on assigned work

- Attention to detail and proper procedures
- Initiative in work-related assignments
- A cooperative attitude toward the practicum instructor and other staff
- Willingness to learn from whatever tasks are assigned
- Openness to supervision, including asking for, and learning from, constructive criticism
- Willingness to seek help when needed
- Appropriate use of authority
- Decision making issues.

When students initially begin a practicum, it is common for them to experience a high degree of anxiety and fear. They are often afraid of making a serious mistake or in some way hurting their clients. Even the most confident student will often feel a lack of confidence when initially placed in their first professional social work setting. Therefore the student needs to be made to feel comfortable in communicating these concerns to the supervisor. When this occurs, the supervisor should attempt to normalize the student's feelings in this regard and assist them in gaining a level of confidence through consistent and ongoing positive feedback, when warranted.

### **Dealing with Conflict in Supervision**

Although most students have positive supervisory experience, conflicts that interfere with learning are

not uncommon. The three areas of conflict most identified by students are: theoretical orientation and practice approach, styles of supervision (particularly those that conflict with styles of learning), and personality issues. Because conflicts in supervision are not uncommon, several guiding principles may help students and supervisors deal with conflict more effectively. The first principle is to approach conflicts as opportunities for learning rather than situations that interfere with learning. In the process of managing a supervisory conflict, the student may be able to discover such things as how to react to conflict, what kinds of issues or interactions tend to promote conflict, and how the student can more effectively cope with the simplistic aphorisms that "everything is a learning experience" or "conflict builds character." One of the largest blocks to resolving conflicts is the underlying idea that "conflicts should not happen and I should not have to deal with them". If students take an attitude of learning from a conflict, rather than an attitude of anger, fear, or avoidance, they are more likely to deal more effectively with the situation (Baird, 1996).

A second guiding principle is to identify what a conflict is really about before raising it with the supervisor. Is the student at odds over issues of theory or technique? Does he or she feel that the supervisor is not giving him/her sufficient support? Are logistics such as timing of supervision a problem? In thinking about the key subject of a conflict, it should be recognized that often the surface content of a conflict does not necessarily reflect the "real" nature of the difficulty. For example, people who work together might get into a conflict over who should have the bigger office. In reality, the conflict

is probably not about the office size but, in reality, about who wants or deserves more rewards or prestige and why. In addition, asking oneself the difficult question of what role you might be playing in the conflict is extremely important for a satisfactory resolution. This might involve getting an outside perspective, particularly if the student has difficulty with self-exploration of fault or limited self-insight. For example, a student might go into a discussion convinced that a supervisor places too many demands on his or her time. In discussing this situation with someone else, it might appear that the supervisor is actually paying the student a compliment by relying on him or her. It is also possible that the student might have a role in the conflict because he/she does not tell the supervisor when he/she is overwhelmed. The purpose of getting another opinion is to understand what is happening – not to prove that one is right (Baird, 1996).

Trying to see the situation from the supervisor's perspective is another valuable step toward resolving a conflict. Is the supervisor doing or saying things for reasons that might not be immediately evident but, rather, might make perfect sense from his or her position. Is the supervisor aware that a conflict exists? If so, would she or he define the conflict differently? Asking oneself these questions would help resolve a conflict with speaking directly to the supervisor about it.

One more important element of dealing with a conflict is to ask oneself what it is that one might want to be different, and what it is that one would like to see happen to be satisfied. This might be a change in the

way one interacts with the supervisor, or it might be a modification of some arrangement, such as a change in work hours, the assigned caseload, or a similar matter. By thinking about what one's desires are, it will enhance one's ability to more clearly articulate both the present situation and suggestions for change. This can undoubtedly help both the student and supervisor identify specific steps for dealing with and resolving the conflict.

Finally, although the ideal may be that conflicts can be resolved to the mutual satisfaction of everyone, there are times when this is not the case. Under such circumstances the best solution may be to negotiate a change in supervision or placements. This does not have to be a negative experience for the people involved. Sometimes after efforts have been made to resolve a situation, it becomes apparent that people just do not match well and the most constructive way of dealing with the situation is to arrange for an alternative. In such situations it is a good idea to enlist the involvement of a central third party, such as another supervisor or an instructor who can help mediate and find alternatives that are mutually satisfying.

## **Conclusion**

An integral component of practicum supervision is the development of a mutually satisfying relationship between supervisor and student. This relationship is developed much like the relationship between social worker and client in which the core foundations include trust and openness. Various styles of supervision are used by supervisors and are largely based on technique as well as personality styles. All supervision

arrangements must include the communication of expectations by the supervisor, which sets the stage for a learning experience in which the student has direction and understanding of his or her role within the agency and placement. This will assist the student in learning the appropriate use of supervision throughout. Additionally, the appropriate means of dealing with conflict in supervision are essential to student learning from the beginning in order to preserve the placement while, at the same time, developing skills to deal with other similar situations in the real world of practice.

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## Supportive Functions in Supervision

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### Introduction

The practicum supervisor assumes an important role in the professional development of a new practitioner, a major component of which is the modeling of appropriate skills in dealing with the various stressors that arise during the course of the practicum. Therefore, it is necessary for supervisors to communicate to students and prepare them in advance for the types of stressors they are likely to face and the need to develop good coping skills at the beginning of their professional career for dealing with these stressors. Students need to have a clear idea about ways in which they can deal with the many challenges of their training and work in ways that will enhance their growth, both as individuals and as professionals.

In order for students to identify ways of dealing with stress, they need to have a general understanding of the common sources of stress that practitioners commonly experience in social work and the ways in

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which those stresses are likely to affect their lives and work. In addition, they need to develop ways in which they can manage the demands of internships, school, family, friends, etc., in ways that provide a sense of balance in their lives. A sample of the typical questions that students generally ask themselves – and supervisors need to address – are as follows:

- How do helping professionals balance their professional roles with their personal lives away from work?
- How can they manage the conflicting demands of an internship?
- How does the internship influence their ideas about the clients they work with?
- How does the internship affect close personal or social relationships?
- What personal qualities does a student have that will help them in dealing with the stress of the work?
- How will they be able to recognize if they are being adversely affected by their work?
- How might they cope with a situation in which they recognize that they are under excessive stress and their professional effectiveness or personal wellness is being harmed?

The supportive role the supervisor plays in helping students deal with stress in the practicum can present a number of challenges, one of which is the issue of

maintaining boundaries in the supervisory relationship. Another issue presented is that of how to deal with conflict that might occur within the relationship. The goal of adequately preparing the student at the beginning of the practicum, and setting specific guidelines to be followed, are extremely important in order to prevent potential negative outcomes.

### **Common Stressors Leading to Burnout and Compassion Fatigue**

Considering the typical demands social workers encounter in a normal day, it should not be surprising to learn that at one time or another most helping professionals will find themselves working under significant stress that can have a negative impact on their clients. Research suggests that on some occasions more than half of the population of helping professionals have worked when their own distress might have impaired their effectiveness (Tomlinson, Rogers, Collins, and Grinnell, 1996). For most student interns who are new to the field and full of energy and dedication, the stress of practice may not be an immediate concern. However, such stresses should not be ignored and could ultimately lead to severe problems and/or impairment.

Many studies that have sought to identify the sources of stress revealed that helping professionals must contend both with stresses directly related to their work, in addition to stresses in their personal lives. The major sources of stress that have been highlighted in research findings are job stress, illness or death in a family, marital and/or financial problems, a developmental

crisis, or personal illness. Studies that have focused more on student interns and stress have identified the following factors that have primarily contributed to problems in this area: client behaviours, practitioner experiences, and therapeutic beliefs that were rated as stressful by practicum students and interns.

The various behaviours exhibited by clients that tend to cause the greatest degree of stress for practitioners are physical assault on the social worker, suicide attempts, and suicidal statements or threats. Compared to more experienced professionals, practicum students are more likely to rate as stressful such client behaviours as blatantly psychotic speech, homosexual and heterosexual flirting on the part of clients, stress from premature termination with a client, and clients' lack of motivation or progress. Those behaviours exhibited by clients that are likely to make a student angry, frustrated or irritated are: client resistance; impositions on the social worker; verbal attacks; the social worker becoming over involved in client dynamics; and a more general category of other incidents (e.g., client failing to show up for appointments, clients continually blaming others or refusing to work on their own issues, clients asking for special privileges, or unnecessarily calling the social worker at home).

Exposure to cumulative stress, crisis, and even traumatic events in our professional or personal lives can cause physical and/or emotional exhaustion that leads to professional burnout or compassion fatigue. Burnout is defined as too much work or frequent frustration at work that leads to physical and emotional exhaustion

(Greenberg, 1999). Compassion fatigue, or secondary traumatic stress, is defined as the natural consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other (Figley, 1995).

Radey and Figley (2007) have recently extended this notion, recognizing compassion as an essential element in effective social work practice. Built on feelings of sympathy and empathy, compassion expresses an "unselfish concern for the welfare of others" (Marriam-Webster, in Radey & Figley, 2007: 207). When social workers are repeatedly exposed to the suffering of their clients, for instance, they may find themselves increasingly unable to rebound or offer the quality of service they know would be best. Failing to take good care of themselves, dealing with lingering distress from troubling events in their own lives, inability or refusal to control stresses at work, and the lack of satisfaction in work all deplete the social worker's ability to do his or her best (Figley, 1995).

Occupational stressors, when unchecked, can result in worker burnout. Role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload play a large role in the onset of burnout within the work place. Stress related problems often result from a combination of: 1) individual perceptions of the problems, 2) environmental demands placed on the individual that have a direct effect on his or her ability to deal with the problems, and 3) one's physiological responses when confronted with stress. When stressors are social or psychological rather than physical, the stress response builds up tension that is not released. As a result, it utilizes energy that is not

restored and can ultimately lead to exhaustion. Over a period of time, prolonged exposure to the stress and the resulting exhaustion can cause significant problems to one's physical and psychological well-being.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue**

- Change in behaviour and/or job performance
- Increased physical complaints of fatigue, irritability, muscle tension, stomach upset, and susceptibility to illness
- Social withdrawal; pulling away from coworkers, peers, family members
- Emotional exhaustion, loss of self-esteem, depression, frustration, loss of commitment and moral purpose in one's work
- Loss of curiosity and desire to learn, often accompanied by a negative attitude
- Spiritual change, decline in spiritual beliefs, questioning of the meaning of life (often accompanied by cynicism).

### **Impact of Stress on Professional Functioning**

It should be evident from the discussion thus far that there are numerous possible sources of work-related and personal stress in the lives of student interns and helping professionals. This raises question about how such stressors may affect us as individuals and how stress impacts our work with clients. As professional social workers, we frequently become overwhelmed with

the problems our clients face and often try to find our way towards professional renewal after exposure to cumulative stress. However, we often fail to develop the necessary strategies for dealing with stress and preventing burnout until it begins to have a serious impact on our professional functioning. The following chart indicates the effect of prolonged stress on job performance, interpersonal relationships, morale, and behavioural functioning (Greenberg, 1999).

<b>Effect on Job Performance</b>	<b>Effect on Interpersonal Relationships</b>	<b>Effect on Morale</b>	<b>Effect on Behavioural Functioning</b>
Decrease in quality of work	Withdrawal from colleagues	Decreased confidence	Absenteeism
Decrease in quantity of work	Impatience	Loss of interest	Exhaustion
Decline in motivation	Decrease in quality of relationships	General dissatisfaction	Faulty judgment
Avoidance of job tasks	Poor communication	Negative attitude	Irritability
Increase in mistakes	Subsumed by own needs	Apathy	Frequent tardiness
Establishment of perfectionist standards	Staff conflicts	Demoralization & feelings of incompleteness	Irresponsibility
Avoidance of job tasks		Lack of appreciation	Overworked; frequent job changes
Obsession with details		Detachment; reduced self-esteem	Substance abuse

In addition to the mental and emotional toll caused by stress, there are also numerous physical effects that can be just as costly and thus impair one's professional functioning. The physical inactivity created by extreme stress can lead to physical problems which often develop from patterns of storing stress through muscle tension.

This can lead to shoulder and neck pain, headaches, etc. It is not uncommon for students to report severe stomach pains and other signs of physical reactions to extreme tension, which can also serve as warning signals for one's capacity to deal with job related stress and prevent future burnout.

When social workers begin to experience the unpleasant symptoms of burnout or compassion fatigue, they often seek ways to loosen these symptoms. If appropriate methods are not available or fail, physical, emotional or mental withdrawal provides ways of distancing themselves from clients or work and thereby reducing the stress. This is a perfectly understandable response, however it can adversely affect the individual and their clients as well. Withdrawal can also lead to further frustration and negative feelings as social workers recognize their lessened effectiveness and their inability to find more creative or constructive solutions.

Radey & Figley (2007) offer suggestions for rebalancing these tensions, and introduce the alternative of achieving compassion satisfaction. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, they emphasize the potential of increasing one's sense of positivity by paying close attention to three factors: our degree of positive affect or attitude in interactions with clients (remembering that there are always reasons to maintain hope for improvement), our access to supportive resources (including contacts with colleagues and supervisors), and practicing self-care through maintaining activities that add pleasure and enjoyment to daily life.

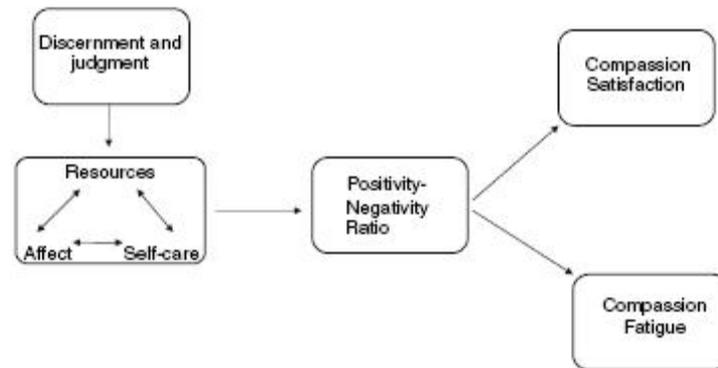


Fig.: from Radey & Figley, 2007

### Using Supervision to Deal with Stress: Maintaining Professional Boundaries

The individual personality characteristics of a student and social work practitioner have much to do with the ways in which they deal with stress and potential burnout. Among those characteristics often mentioned in the literature are: (1) a lack of clear boundaries between self and work, (2) extreme degrees of empathy, (3) exceptional levels of commitment, and (4) a fragile self-concept (Baird, 1996). In addition, a student's poor training during the course of an internship can also be a contributing factor. For example, one's inadequate training for a job can often leave one feeling unprepared, vulnerable, insecure, and fearing failure – common feelings of students as they enter the unfamiliar learning environment of the field practicum. Preparing students to deal with the stresses of their job is of equal importance as training them to deal with the technical aspects of a social work position. Therefore it becomes critically important for the supervisor to model

appropriate skills in coping with stress while performing the necessary tasks of his or her professional position. Modeling good coping skills for students is of equal importance to modeling good practice skills, both of which are integral components of a practicum experience.

During the orientation component of the practicum, a supervisor generally assesses the student's level of learning and capacity to adapt to the complexities of the various problems that often accompany any social work position. At the same time, the supervisor should also be assessing the student's coping skills and how they typically deal with stressful situations, both within and outside their professional environment. Within the supervisory relationship, it's important to have open and frank discussions with the student about the skills that typically are helpful in alleviating their stress, and those that are not. Helping the student learn new more effective skills for coping are an important part of their learning as they prepare to enter the field of practice. By offering suggestions for new ways of coping with the stressors that the student encounters as they work independently with clients, and following up on ways in which they implement these suggestions, can be of enormous benefit to them. In order for this learning process to effectively occur, it is important for the student and supervisor to have a positive relationship in which there is an environment of trust and freedom to express adverse feelings openly, without fear of reprisal. Students need to feel comfortable in discussing their feelings of fear and inadequacy in dealing with client problems within the supervisory

relationship, where these feelings can be normalized by the supervisor and suggestions can be made for ways of dealing with them effectively.

A positive supervisory relationship can pose difficult challenges, such as in the case of a dual relationship in which the boundaries between student and supervisor become somewhat blurred. This can easily occur in situations where a student might be experiencing role conflict, personal problems, or significant anxieties about his or her work with a particular client. Due to the personality characteristics of the supervisor, he or she might have a need to provide therapeutic services to the student and assist him or her in dealing with the conflict on a level that is outside the professional supervisory role. This should be avoided, as the supervisor who also performs the role of therapist with a student can create a serious ethical dilemma and cause harm to the student/supervisor relationship.

Dual relationships between supervisors and students have proven to be difficult issues to resolve and have been the topic of much debate in the professional literature. Problematic dual relationships with students include intimate relationships, therapeutic relationships, and social relationships. What makes a dual relationship unethical is (1) the likelihood that it will impair the supervisor's judgment, particularly if they are evaluating the student and therefore have some input into their practicum grade, and (2) the risk to the student of exploitation (Bernard and Goodyear, 1998). Therefore, any form of dual relationship should be strictly avoided. Practicum students should be given

a significant amount of information on boundary issues in a professional setting and what procedures they should follow in reporting incidents in which they are being sexually harassed.

Undoubtedly, unlike therapy relationships, persons who work together will share other experiences. Supervisors and students often become close through formal and informal contacts. In an agency or school, it sometimes happens that someone under supervision is someone with a personal style that allows the supervisor to be more candid than he or she is with other professional peers. Some of these relationships are very gratifying and provide much support for both the student and supervisor, particularly in times of stress. Therefore, efforts should be made to differentiate between dual relationships that abuse power or exploit or harm students and those that occur within the positive context of a maturing professional relationship.

### **Dealing with Conflict in Supervision**

An important point to remember is the fact that in any relationship, whether personal or professional, conflict inevitably will occur between or among the parties. Conflict can stem from opposing goals the two parties might entertain or extreme differences in personality characteristics. Often, however, it stems from a "mistake" that one party has made. The manner in which the parties resolve or fail to resolve the conflict will dictate whether the relationship continues to grow and develop, or to stagnate and possibly terminate. The relationship between a supervisor and student supervisee is not unique in this regard. Supervisor-

supervisee conflicts can arise from many sources, some more problematic than others. Normative conflict generally arises from the processes of any two people who interact over time. Inevitably there will be times in any relationship when the parties will feel angry, hurt, surprised, and/or disappointed with one another. To resolve those conflicts and impasses is healthy and strengthens the relationship.

Another normative factor in supervisor-student or supervisee conflict concerns the student's developmental level. In particular, tension and dissatisfaction with supervision may be at its greatest with the more advanced student. Like any adolescent, supervisees/students at this level vascillate between feelings of confidence and insecurity, as the student may have actively assimilated information from many sources but still has not had enough time to accommodate and find his or her own way of behaving professionally. This is not, in itself, a matter for concern, particularly if the supervisor is able to understand and anticipate this particular developmental phenomenon. But conflicts can also arise for more problematic reasons. For example, the conflict may arise from a student/supervisee transference, or from a supervisor transference. Or conflict might also arise from a personality conflict between student and supervisor that might be difficult to resolve. Role ambiguity might occur when the student is uncertain about role expectations the supervisor and/or agency has for him or her. Oftentimes more advanced students are placed in more advanced roles within agencies in which they are

expected to perform as seasoned practitioners rather than students. This places the student in an unfair position in which their learning needs are considered secondary to the personnel needs of the agency.

When conflict occurs in supervision, it is important for the supervisor to take the initiative to establish a procedure for resolving the conflict as soon as possible. Appropriate problem solving skills should be utilized within the framework of a positive supervisor-student relationship based on open communication and trust. The student should be willing to openly discuss his or her concerns with the supervisor and both should work together to reach a satisfactory, mutually agreed upon solution. Therefore, a positive problem solving process will help the student to learn an appropriate method of dealing with conflict that can be applied to other professional settings.

Should conflicts occur as a result of a power differential in which the supervisor exercises inappropriate power over the student, this can be very destructive to the supervisory relationship by violating mutual trust and respect. In such instances, it might be necessary for a third party to intervene and assess the situation, with the ultimate goal of preserving the relationship and placement, if possible.

## **Conclusion**

Prolonged job related stress can ultimately lead to professional burnout and/or compassion fatigue in many helping professions. It is important for social workers to recognize the symptoms of extreme stress

and develop strategies for dealing with them immediately. In the social work practicum, students have an opportunity to learn effective coping mechanisms for dealing with stressors in the workplace by observing the modeling of positive coping skills by their supervisor.

The positive supervisory relationship also provides an opportunity to discuss other problematic issues relating to the practicum. However significant boundary violations can also occur, particularly in relation to intimate, therapeutic, and social relationships that might develop between supervisor and student. Conflict inevitably occurs in all relationships, and normative conflict is to be expected in the supervisor-supervisee/student relationship as well. Understanding the basis for the conflict, and taking immediate steps to resolve it, are important tasks for both the supervisor and student as they make efforts to engage in effective problem solving skills that focus on preserving both the supervisory relationship and practicum placement as well.

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## 12

# Field Practicum Supervision in Distance Learning Mode

*\*Manju Kumar*

### Introduction

You are by now aware that social workers deal with some of the most vulnerable people in our society and at times of greatest stress. There can be of tragic consequences if things go wrong. Social workers need to be properly equipped for such challenging tasks. By the very nature of social work education system established over time and acknowledged globally, students will have to undertake much of their learning in practice settings and demonstrate their competence in practice. It is one of the few courses which are completed primarily within a workplace or 'field' setting. Field instruction therefore can be a very complex and demanding endeavor.

Field education for the social work programs provides experiential educational opportunities directed toward the development of professional identity, self-understanding and competent practice. (Field

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*\* Manju Kumar, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar College, Delhi University, Delhi.*

Education Dalhousie University, Canada 2005). One of the primary functions of social work education is to help students get professionally socialized in social work values, ethics and skills while integrating with these a multitude of concepts drawn from multiple disciplines and learnt through course work.

One serious reservation about offering social work education through distance / open learning has been the perceived need for 'face-to-face' interaction with teachers to acquire professional socialization. While knowledge content is imparted through print and electronic media supplemented by direct contact with tutors at the study centres, the major burden of ensuring professional socialization of students in social work course through the distance learning mode falls on supervised field – based instruction. Field education or the practicum experience is at the core of Social Work Education. It is viewed as the most significant contributor to the development of professional expertise. It engages the student in supervised social work practice and provides opportunities to apply theoretical learning in the field setting.

### **Supervision in the ODL Mode: By Faculty and / or Professional Social Worker at the Placement**

Traditionally, students are placed in the field settings by the educational institutions and faculty performs the twin role of teaching academic courses and supervising field work. The professional social workers employed at the placement agency provide additional supervisory inputs at the field level. Sometimes, in open

community settings, faculty member is the sole supervisor and guide.

Under the field practicum design in social work education through distance learning, the students *do* get field instruction by a person professionally qualified. However, this person may or may not be their course teacher. The nature, content and strategies of field work supervision, therefore, vary from the traditional model. The field instructor, the student's primary field learning resource, is sometimes also the placement agency's representative to the educational program. Besides, the field instructor may not be the course teacher but one who is a teacher in conventional system of social work education. This situation requires a high degree of conceptual clarity in the performance of the supervisory functions in Field Instruction in the DL mode.

You have become familiar with various functions performed by field instructors. The field instructors under the DL mode perform all those functions but requiring higher sensitivity to the levels and backgrounds of students. The medium of field work supervision is not only the traditionally used individual and / or group conference but also electronic media like emails, teleconferencing, telephonic consultation etc.

### **Course teacher as supervisor of field practicum**

In many instances, the person entrusted with the responsibility of teaching one or more subject of the syllabus also takes up the task of providing field instruction. The supervisor guides the students allocated to her / him for a designated period, generally

for one year. Supervisory tasks start from selecting placements for respective students, keeping in mind the educational objectives of field work, students' level and background; and mission, goals and programmes of potential placement agencies. Supervisors prepare and orient the students about what is expected of them, and what situations they are likely to encounter during field work. The field practicum supervisor then assigns tasks, holds individual and group conferences to discuss and review students' performance and field experiences. S/he provides feedback and necessary guidance to help students acquire professional learning. The supervisor maintains liaison with the social work professional at the agency. The supervisor is responsible for maintaining discipline among the supervisees and finally undertakes appraisal of students' learning. The evaluation is generally a mix of appraisal by internal (the field instructor) and external experts. Giving detailed orientation to the agency set up, assignment of daily tasks and on site guidance and supervision are the responsibilities of the professional social worker employed in the placement agency.

Even in case of the supervisor being other than the course teacher (someone teaching in the conventional system, or a social work graduate working in a social sector / human service organisation) the tasks outlined above hold good. In the case of one working in a social sector / human service organisation, the supervisor has an added responsibility of clearly spelling out the educational goals of field learning, and helping students integrate their theoretical learning with field practice by highlighting application of theoretical concepts in actual practice.

**Placement – based supervision**

This is a situation where the professionally qualified social worker employed in the placement agency alone is responsible for students' field instruction. The field practicum instructor has to perform both the roles – represent the placement agency, help students integrate theory with practice, and help achieve educational objectives of field practicum.

Examination of the workplace as a learning environment reveals it is far from ideal and poses unique challenges to the practicum supervisor, especially when that role is assumed by a workplace supervisor. Specific interests of student and employee may not coincide, and the interests of both diverge from those of organizations. (Chris Hughes, 1998)

Another challenge faced by the field practicum supervisor based at the placement is in the context of a student who may be working in the same agency but in a role not strictly that of a professional social worker. In fact that may be the very reason why that student has joined the course. The supervisor has to differentiate the assignments expected as part of field practicum from the tasks currently performed by the student so that the latter is able to acquire professional learning and identity.

Many of the professionals taking up the responsibility of supervising field practicum have had long experience in the field. While supervising field practicum of budding professionals, they need to demonstrate to the students a balanced view of the importance of academic grounding and practice wisdom.

## Strategies of supervision

Supervision, an integrated part of social work education, is a complex process. Numerous models, theories and approaches have been formulated to ensure effective supervisory inputs. Supervision of students is generally a mix of more than one style, approach, model or strategy. Keeping in mind the diversity of any one group of students enrolled in the course through DL mode, it is even more important to apply a mix of approaches to suit the needs and levels of the students. Given below are some of the strategies which supervisors employ to achieve their goal of providing professional learning to students of social work:

- Managing early stages of field practicum and setting the tone of open dialogue and purposeful action.
- According to developmental models of supervision, the supervisee proceeds through a series of developmental stages and tasks. The goal of supervision is for the supervisor to guide the supervisee through these stages. It attends to the developmental shifts occurring in the supervisory process and provides input as a function of the skill level, developmental level and maturational level of the supervisee.
- While supervisory strategy based on developmental model is best suited at the beginning of the field practicum or during the first year of the course, reflective approach is favoured more for a relatively more advanced student.
- Three different orientations are important for supervision. Supervisor can focus on *the client*, *the*

*methods or the process of the work.* Often the supervisor changes between these focuses within one meeting. There is also a development from client- to method- and later on to more process-oriented supervision. This is reflected in the IGNOU Model for BSW course in the context of three years' field practicum design.

- Supervision, though a process, occurs within a structure. Specific individual and group sessions for providing supervisory inputs are formally prescribed. For these sessions, the students are expected to come prepared with their observations and queries. Supervisors are expected to provide students meaningful feedback-both oral and written about students' learning and performance.
- Supervision goes on *continuously* and is organized with regular meetings over a period of time.
- As mentioned above, supervisor can be internal (course teacher) or external (Professional social worker employed at the placement agency). Many times the two different kinds of supervision are co-existing.
- Professional social work supervision is a process which facilitates critical reflection upon actions, processes, persons, and the context of social work practice. This process takes place within a professional relationship between a social work supervisor and supervisee(s). The strategy of supervision is to nurture this relationship.
- Individual Supervision, Peer Supervision, Group Supervision – all the three styles are utilized in the supervision of students.

- Supervision refers to a range of strategies, including: preceptorship, mentorship, and coaching. Placement decision-making, orienting, motivating, encouraging task performance, addressing problems are some other strategies which supervisors use to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.
- Cyber supervision is an upcoming strategy, especially in the case of distance learning. Chatting online with the supervisor in real time not only helps getting guidance, the student also is able to retain record of the supervisory inputs.
- Supervision involves use of both informative and problem-solving approaches.
- Supervision can be reactive or pro-active or both. Reactive supervision is triggered by a significant event, problem or concern.
- Proactive strategy seeks to avoid major supervisory challenges through planning, communicating and being involved.
- Students' response to supervision passes through four stages, namely dependence; pseudo-dependence; interdependence; independence (Jake J. Protivnak, 2003). Supervisors have to adapt their styles and strategies accordingly.

As mentioned above, supervisors need to adapt their approach and interventions according to the need, level and background of the students; educational objectives of field instruction; and goals of the placement agencies.

**Tools of Supervision**

Supervisors make use of a number of tools in the supervisory process. While most of these are also utilized by the supervisors in the traditional system of social work education, some hold higher primacy for those in the Distance Learning system.

- Structure of field practicum and supervision define clearly the objectives, nature, role, and expectations of field learning and supervision.
- In this context, Field Practicum Journal for students and Guide for supervisors prove major supervisory tools.
- Supervisor-supervisee relationship is a most vital tool in the hands of the supervisor. As students learn theoretical contents primarily through self-study materials, this tool is most critical to students' acquiring professional socialization.
- Feedback –both formal and informal – is an important tool for the supervisor. Written comments on students' field records in the Field Journal of the students are a constant source of guidance.
- Other forms of feedback, such as self-assessment by the students and / or peer review are also used by supervisors.
- Educational assessment is an important tool for supervision. It is an on-going process and helps students understand whether or not his/her supervisor is happy with his/her performance. This monitoring and reviewing of the work and learning occur periodically so that both supervisor and

supervisee are clear as to the students' strengths and areas that need improvement.

- Summative evaluation at mid term and at the end of the term is the culmination of the ongoing assessment process. Term-end appraisal places the students' learning within the parameters of achievement of minimum standards of field learning; allowing the student to move upward on the ladder of the course.
- Communication is basic to the entire process of supervision. Active listening and open channels of communication are basic tools of supervision.
- Observation of the students at the placement and in the supervisory conferences act as additional resource for the supervisor's assessment of the students.
- Structured individual and group conferences are acknowledged as the most important tools of supervision. On account of this, the IGNOU model ensures a minimum number of these conferences.
- Process records of students' work at the placement are one of the most valuable tools of supervision. These records provide focus and direction for supervisory inputs. Case records or case studies are very useful tools for generating reflective discussions in individual and group conferences.
- Review is a powerful self evaluation tool. Self-Reports, however, are only as good as the observational and conceptual abilities of the supervisee. It is the seasoned insightfulness of the

supervisor that offers many opportunities for utilizing these as supervision tool.

- Video, Audiotape and live observation are tools often utilized by the supervisors. There are, however, ethical dimensions to recording student's work with the clients.
- Reflective questioning in the supervisory conferences act as a supervisory tool, especially in the case of more mature and advanced student.
- Demonstration, role playing and role modeling are some other tools in the hands of a creative supervisor. Role Playing is ideal for practicing skills. Role Modeling is learning by watching an expert perform the task to be learned. Demonstration is a presentation by an expert that displays and explains a procedure, followed by opportunities to discuss and practice the skills.
- Supervisors employed in the placement agency can use 'shadowing' in the early phases of learning or in case of continued difficulty in student's performance.
- Effective and constructive criticism can be used as a tool to promote growth. It is preferable that the focus of the criticism is on the work and not on the individual involved.
- Praise for the achievements is an important tool for nurturing the relationship and building student's self-confidence.
- Student-initiated e-mails act as a supplemental modality for supervision. Videoconferencing can be

a tool both in individual and group supervision, though the issue of confidentiality has to be kept in mind.

- The supervisor draws upon his /her own professionally disciplined self, i.e. an integrated whole of professional knowledge, skills and the attitudes acquired overtime. Supervision is a process parallel to that of social work practice. The only difference is that the students are not treated as clients requiring therapeutic interventions.
- Self-disclosure by the supervisor.

### **Functions of the Supervisor: Educational, Administrative, Helping**

You are already familiar with the three categories of functions performed by field instructors or field work supervisors, namely, educational, administrative and helping / supportive functions. Design of Field Practicum in Social Work Courses offered by IGNOU through distance learning provides for elaborate process of Field Instruction – both structured and informal. Following is a brief exposition of various functions expected of supervisors under this model.

You will do well to refer to the illustration of field practicum organized for BSW course students given in the previous block of this book.

#### **a) Educational Functions**

- 1) Designing and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study.

- 2) Giving theoretical content, whenever the classroom teaching is not in tune with field work needs – Whether or not the field instructor is a course teacher, the supervisor is frequently required to give theoretical information or give appropriate reference for locating necessary information. It is particularly crucial in the DL mode because acquiring the knowledge component of the course is based on self-study by the students.
- 3) Identifying professional skills in daily field work assignments.
- 4) Professional socialization – teaching students to apply values and principles while using social work methods.
- 5) Giving knowledge of micro-macro linkages, legal provisions, govt. schemes, information about community resources. As the students grow confident and more settled to meet field practicum demands, the supervisor refers them to relevant sources to procure information instead of giving it.
- 6) Teaching the use of tools and techniques of social work practice.
- 7) Demonstrating use of methods and skills – through lab work or at the placement itself.
- 8) Teaching record-writing , documentation work
- 9) Provide frequent and accurate feedback.

- 10) Facilitate reflection and critical thinking through well planned and structured supervisory sessions.
- 11) Dealing with ethical dilemmas in field work decision-making.
- 12) Working with co-workers and utilizing supervision, accepting and utilizing feedback.
- 13) Teaching NGO / GO management including maintaining records, working on committees, budgeting, project proposal formulation, inter-agency coordination etc.
- 14) Guidance on research exercise – catching students to take up any research-based assignment – teaching students about research methodology, i.e. data collection, data analysis and reporting.
- 15) Innovative projects to help individuals / groups / families / communities - introducing by direct instruction or encouraging students to take initiative themselves.

b) **Administrative Functions**

Besides the above-mentioned responsibilities, supervisors are expected to perform certain administrative or managerial tasks which are very important for smooth and efficient operationalisation of the design of field practicum, which in turn makes students' professional learning possible. Following are some of the administrative tasks of field practicum supervisors:

- 1) Selection of agencies for field placements
- 2) Placements of students- different phases in placement: screening, minimum orientation, goal setting, actual placement, and evaluation and closure. (St. John David, 1975).
- 3) Giving orientation about field practicum and expectations from students, explaining the use of the Field Journal. Rather than 'fix' the mistakes, better to tell the do's and don'ts before hand. Preparing students for their first professional roles is no small task. It requires giving detailed attention to innumerable contingencies.
- 4) Keeping attendance of students, ensuring submission of records and maintaining log of students' work.
- 5) Maintaining students' discipline in placements.
- 6) Planning and holding of supervisory conferences, giving prior intimation to the supervisees so that they can make necessary arrangements for attending the same. This is all the more relevant in distance learning programmes.
- 7) As different from an on-going educational assessment, supervisors have to formally evaluate students' performance and level of learning in terms of professional skills, knowledge and attitudes.
- 8) Maintaining liaison with placement agencies /

agency supervisors. Maintaining good public relations with agencies and network of human service agencies, agencies in the social and corporate sector is very important. This task requires placement-based supervisor to make extra efforts to rise above agency bound loyalties and perceive PR exercise a part of supervisory work.

- 9) Visiting field placements, coordination with course tutors.
- 10) Arranging of orientation / observation visits of different organizations as directed by field practicum objectives.
- 11) Resolution of Field work related problems.
- 12) Achieving alignment of field –based learning objectives with placement agency’s goals, and practice modalities.
- 13) Serving on Governing Boards of relevant organizations.
- 14) Supervisors have to be vicariously responsible for what their students are doing in the field. Irrespective of the educative value of allowing students to learn ‘by doing’, often by trial and error, supervisors have to ensure that this manner of learning does not aggravate the problems of the client groups. Supervisors have, therefore, to be cautious and to critically assess students’ work.

**c) Helping Functions**

During field practice, the student will be facing real social problems and will discover both the impact of these experiences and the requirements of interaction with the people with whom they have to co-operate. Field practice awakens a range of feelings in the student, including insecurity in the role. Students struggle with confusion and self-doubt as they attempt to develop self-efficacy as a professional. The learning process in social work involves a reappraisal of own attitudes and values. In this process, the student needs the support of a supervisor.

It is not enough to oversee students' work and teach them the use of social work methods. The students are expected to develop the 'professional self' which means that their 'self' is the main tool for offering professional interventions. Social Work education aims at bridging the gap between the 'personal self' and the 'professional self' of the students. Reassurance of worth and social integration support from supervisors go a long way towards providing students an anchor which they can hold onto in times of emotional turmoil, anxiety, stress and self-doubt. Supervisory activities with this focus are designated as 'helping' functions. Following are some of the helping functions of field practicum supervisors:

- 1) Creating an open supervisory environment,
- 2) Providing encouragement,
- 3) Attending to students' personal growth,
- 4) Building confidence,

- 5) Helping students develop self-awareness; understanding of personal vs. professional self,
- 6) Settling down in placements, with agency staff, co-workers,
- 7) Accepting demands of social work course,
- 8) Dealing with personal / family problems having impact on field practicum performance,
- 9) Keeping track of field assignments triggering personal unfinished agenda, and similarity in problems of clients and self or family,
- 11) Referral to counselors for in-depth personal counseling and to other agencies for addressing family and personal problems,
- 11) Career counseling,
- 12) Help students get balance between course demands and life outside it – job (for those working), family, friends, other interests or courses etc.,
- 13) Helping students with their struggle with confusion and self-doubt as they attempt to develop self-efficacy as a professional. Supervisors help students identify their strengths and trace professional dimensions of the assignments which may seem routine or unimportant.
- 14) Supervision should certainly become more relaxed and more supportive as time goes on.
- 15) Creating a bond and communicating before applying supervisory controls is very essential.

- 16) Professional learning is carried out within the context of the student/field instructor relationship. The field instructor/student relationship is the primary mechanism through which students develop a professionally reflective and self-evaluative practice stance. Helping dimension of field instructor's function helps nurture and strengthens this relationship.
- 17) A non-threatening environment of the relationship will help students accept constructive criticism and encourage them to change.
- 18) We have mentioned earlier that mentoring is one of the most highly recommended supervisory strategies. The word mentor infers caring, setting wise example, coaching and identifying mistakes without causing resentment.

### **Roles of the Supervisor**

Roles are a set of behaviours that the field practicum supervisors engage in to fulfill their various obligations. Some of the supervisory roles conceptualized by the experts are that of a (a) teacher, (b) enabler, (c) facilitator, (d) guide, (e) consultant, (f) counsellor (but the student is not a client), (g) co-coordinator, (h) an advocate to act on behalf of students' needs and problems, (i) mediator between agency supervisor and the student, or students and other staff members, (j) confidante. Besides the roles of a mentor and coach (with an emphasis on role modeling), an advisor, appraiser and referral agent are getting increasing mention in social work education literature.

## **Qualities of a Supervisor**

The discussion of various functions and roles that a field instructor performs leads one to perceive a person with a certain set of qualities and traits of personality. Skills of professional social work practice are also relevant. Supervision, as mentioned earlier, is a process parallel to that of social work practice. Professional values and principles are equally relevant. Ethical concerns are as much crucial in supervision as they are in the practice with clients. All these expectations get in clearer relief in the context of field practicum for students enrolled in distance learning course of social work. The supervisor has to adapt and respond to highly diverse student population. As stated elsewhere, the students may belong to those social groups who themselves face discrimination, biases and stereotyping in society. Socio-economic and cultural differences between the supervisors and students require concerted effort on the part of the former. Supervisors' own perceptions with regard to gender, region, caste and class may need to be understood and dealt with. Despite the fact that supervisory process has a parallel in professional practice, every good social work practitioner may not prove to be a good field practicum supervisor. Ability to apply all the skills, values and knowledge of the profession and still managing to view the students not as clients but budding autonomous professionals requires unique set of capabilities and sensitivity.

Various research studies on which kind of supervisors are rated highly by the students state that the supervisors with the following qualities are considered

by the students as being supportive of their professional learning: empathetic, caring, open-minded, fair and just, unbiased, tolerant of differences and accepting of the pace of learning of respective students (starting where the person is and moving at the pace of the individual), firm but flexible; knowledgeable of the field and having strong interpersonal and communication skills, rational and critically reflective, is secure in his / her position as a supervisor, believes in lifelong learning and professional development, is culturally sensitive and has a strong sense of professional identity. The supervisor is expected to have leadership qualities which reflect judicious use of power inherent in the supervisory process.

### **Supervising Field Practicum: Some Important Issues**

After having discussed the functions and qualities of a good supervisor, we are now looking up the issues which are relevant for fully comprehending the phenomenon of supervision of field practicum in the DL mode. Some of the issues we have already touched upon and some are self-explanatory like, **cultural gap** between the supervisor and students, especially in DL mode, **issues of gender** – supervising students of the opposite sex, disparity in age – (student may be much more mature in age than the supervisor) and **use of technology**. There are interpersonal dimensions of first three of these issues and in others, i.e. use of technology, there is a concern for confidentiality. Also tools of online supervision presume access and proficiency in relevant technology that may or may not be the case. In some of the remote areas, which are marked by very limited

educational facilities, access to advanced technology is still a distant dream.

Some other issues are being discussed further:

- **Training of supervisors:** We have already mentioned that being a good social work practitioner is not sufficient to becoming a good field instructor. Keeping in mind the need of training and orienting the supervisors, the IGNOU Model provides for Orientation (beginning of the term), face-to-face interaction with the Director at the University level, teleconferencing arranged periodically and Guide for Supervisors.
- **Field practitioner vs. academician:** Supervisors with academic or with practice orientation are likely to have different impact on students' professional learning. Those who are employed in human service agencies and take up field instructor's responsibility have to make an extra effort to refresh their theoretical base. On the other hand, course teachers taking up supervisors' role have to update their practice orientation. Students have to face field realities, which are far from ideal. Supervisors have to be tuned both to academics and practice realities.
- Students are placed **under different supervisor** in successive years of their course. They may find it difficult to adapt to different styles and orientation of respective supervisors. The subjective element in the supervisory process may appear less acceptable to the students who are not familiar with this trend in social work education. Supervisors

have to make special effort to allow students to get used to the idea and learn to benefit from this system. Professional learning in social work, after all, involves interacting and relating to different persons. In case a particular student responds negatively to the style of a successive supervisor, the onus is on the supervisor to help student get the maximum benefit from his approach and style.

- **Role conflict:** This is by far the most crucial aspect of supervision related dilemmas—how to maintain a healthy balance among administrative, helping and educational functions. Most social work supervisors ..... experience some form of role conflict in which they have to balance their differing responsibilities, multiple accountabilities and a range of relationships, when practicing in the supervisory role (O'Donoghue, 2000).

Some authors offer mentoring as the most effective supervision strategy. They suggest that this approach to supervision overcomes some of the problematic, hierarchical aspects embedded in supervision. (Manathunga, 2007). The play of power embedded in the supervisor-supervisee relationship is in sharp contrasts with the pre-requisites of a helping role.

The appraisal function places supervisors in a position of authority which has implications for the very movement of students on the ladder of educational achievement.

Vicarious liability of supervisors for what students do in the field may lead to restricted autonomy accorded to the students.

Sequential nature of educational objectives of field practicum makes a certain pace of learning mandatory. Despite the flexibility of distance learning mode, practical considerations of agency functioning place certain pressure on students to comply with the demands of practicum schedule.

Achieving role clarity is very important so as to minimize frustration among supervisors and bewilderment among students. Spelling out expectations from students and different roles of the supervisors, at the very beginning of the relationship and then periodically throughout the process may help in reducing adverse effect of this conflict in roles.

## **Conclusion**

We have traced, in this chapter, different facets of supervision of field practicum as it relates to social work education offered through distance learning. Supervision is a process which parallels that of social work practice. As such, it requires supervisor to establish a positive relationship with the student, adopt strategies, styles and approaches appropriate to the students' levels, learning styles, needs and educational goals of field practicum. No single strategy or approach is likely to suit all learning needs and all students. A judicious mix of different strategies will be more useful. A number of tools are available to supervisors so that they can perform their responsibilities effectively. Structured supervision, individual and group conferences, process records, case records, on-site observations and regular and constructive feedback are the primary tools which are used within the context of

supervisor-supervisee relationship. Supervisors perform three-pronged functions, namely administrative, i.e. operational and discipline related functions; educational, i.e. related to professional learning constituted of knowledge, skills and values; and the helping functions that deal with student as a person and are concerned with his personal growth.

You have also considered as to what kind of person a supervisor has to be – to be able to perform such diverse and demanding tasks. And finally, we reflected on certain issues which are inherent in the supervisory process – cultural and perceptual disparity between student and supervisor; getting training to perform supervisory role and to deal with role conflict that is again inevitable component of the complex process of supervision. Field learning gives students opportunity to integrate theory with practice. Supervisors also have to maintain a balance between theoretical grounding and practice orientation.

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