SUPERVISON AND NORTHERN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

by

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Abstract

This research explores how practising social service providers view and understand the role of supervision within their organizations, and what their experiences have been in regard to supervision within the social service field while working in Prince George or a neighbouring northern community in British Columbia. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured approach, revealing the unique perspectives of social service providers within a northern context. Thematic analysis identified three major themes associated with the experiences social service providers have had with supervision: support, availability, and accountability. The recommendations provided by participants, along with the findings of this study, have the potential to influence change in the social service field, as they highlight the importance of and need for supervision.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the people who actively try and be a force for good. To all those people, professionals or not, that continuously choose to help others, and to those who continue to believe in, and fight for what is right. "There is some good in this world, and it's worth fighting for"—J.R.R. Tolkien.

Chapter 1   Laying the Groundwork

For the past eight years, I have been involved in working in the social service field. Having started my social service career working as a youth care worker in a residential group home setting in Prince George, I did not have experience with or exposure to supervision in my workplace. When I left the group home, I moved on to working for an organization in the Lower Mainland, and this is where I had my first experience with supervision in the social service field.

On a weekly basis, my colleagues and I were expected to schedule a one-hour time-slot for individual team supervision (we worked in pairs) with our program coordinator and a separate one-hour slot with our program psychiatrist. Supervision with our program coordinator was a time when we could discuss struggles we were having with our clients, things that were going well, and our approaches to supporting our clients in achieving their goals. Our supervision time with the program psychiatrist was a more in-depth process. During this time, we explored possible meanings of incidents/behaviours and processed how our exposure to certain situations was impacting our mental well-being—with the intention of helping the counsellors avoid compassion fatigue, as well as ensuring appropriate boundaries were maintained, since the nature of the program required counsellors to spend a significant amount of time with the clients and their families.

In addition to our time with the program coordinator and program psychiatrist, we were expected to attend group clinical meetings once a week—where all members of the program were in attendance (members of the team included the other counsellor pairs, program coordinator, program psychiatrist, program psychologist, program social worker,

vocational counsellor, and program manager). The group-clinical allowed us to go over our cases in a setting where the other members of our team could provide feedback on our cases (and vice versa), allowing us the opportunity to be exposed to different approaches and perspectives in regard to our clients and providing us with support, given that many of the cases were complex.

Finally, we were encouraged to schedule a meeting with the program social worker on a monthly basis in order to gain understanding of this piece of work with our clients. Although this meeting was not mandatory, it was available to us if we chose to accept this opportunity. Meeting with our program social worker (as well as with the other members of our team) allowed us to support our clients using a multidisciplinary approach.

In the summer of 2016, I found myself relocating back to Prince George, where I now work as a Mental Health and Addictions Clinician. Unfortunately, I have not experienced supervision in my current organization. Having spoken with co-workers and others in the social service field in Prince George, it has become evident that supervision opportunities are limited. My previous exposure to supervision, in the Lower Mainland, was a positive experience. I found supervision to be beneficial to my practice, and for my overall well-being. Working with high-risk clients has been challenging both professionally and personally. Supervision provided a safe environment wherein I could reflect upon my practice, learn from colleagues, and receive feedback, support, and guidance from those in supervisory positions.

Having experienced working in the field in situations where supervision was not available, and then working for an organization where supervision was essentially mandatory, has sparked my interest in the area of supervision. Based on my experiences, I

feel access to supervision is both beneficial and necessary in the social service field, and I would like to learn more about the experiences others have with supervision. I hope the personal experiences shared by the participants through this research can contribute to existing literature on the topic and provide some insight into the availability and role of supervision in Northern British Columbia.

Supervision: A Brief Introduction

Supervision is an integral component of reflective practice and a vital part of social work (Fook, 1996). Social workers are faced with the difficult task of searching for relevant and innovative solutions to their work with their clients, against an ever-changing backdrop of societal, organizational, and economic structures. Supervision provides social workers with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and allows practitioners a venue to engage in dialogue wherein reflection, evaluation, and discussion can lead to the development of innovative and necessary solutions to issues faced in the field (Kadushin, 1992). Munson (2002) defined supervision as a collaboration between a supervisor and a supervisee, where the supervisor has been designated to support the supervisee in the areas of administration, teaching, and generally helping the supervisee in terms of their practice.

Goal of the Research

The goal of my research is to explore the experiences of supervisees in regard to supervision in the field of social work by becoming familiar with existing literature on the subject, while also contributing to it by conducting research of my own. The aim is to interview social workers in order to understand how supervision plays a role in their practice. Through semi-structured interviews, participants will share their experiences of supervision—what it looks like in their place of employment; how often it is provided and

how easy it is to access supervision time; how they feel supervision impacts their practice; and what they see as the purpose of supervision.

Significance

Supervision provides social workers with the opportunity to engage in critical discourse analyzing their values, knowledge, skills, and their understanding of the work they are undertaking. In addition, in the supervisory environment, social workers are given a safe outlet to process their feelings and reflect upon how their work is impacting them on a personal level, as well as being provided with the opportunity to process through interpersonal conflicts whether they exist between social worker and client, or with colleagues (Askeland, Dohlie, & Grosvold, 2016). Effective and meaningful supervision ensures best practice, ethical decision making, and the overall well-being of the social workers. However, if supervision is inappropriate, inadequate or unavailable, and social workers are not provided with a safe venue wherein they can reflect and receive feedback and support, this could contribute to worker burn-out, as well as decisions being made that are not in accordance with best practice methods (Egan, Maidment, & Connolly, 2016). It is my experience that social service workers in the northern communities, such as Prince George and the surrounding communities in British Columbia, appear to have limited access to supervision in their organizations.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectional Approach and Intuitive Decision Making

When working in any location, social workers need to find approaches or methods that will work best for the clientele in a specific situation. Personally, having reflected upon my own professional and academic experiences, the theoretical framework I identify with is the intersectional approach, a method that I feel could be quite useful when working with

vulnerable populations. The intersectional approach recognizes that everyone has unique social categories and statuses (Wilkinson, 2003). This view can have a direct impact on the services we deliver, as we may identify with one or some of the barriers the client faces, yet we fail to seal the cracks through which clients can fall. In a sense, the intersectional approach is a part of the ethical decision-making process. However, it needs to be utilized more often for us to identify all the barriers our clients face, thereby allowing the best decision to be made. According to literature on the topic, practitioners do not often use the intersectional approach because it requires more time and effort, which translates into higher immediate costs for the organization/agency (Wilkinson, 2003). In the long run, it may save money for us to take the time to develop a holistic set of standards so that we do not label and categorize individuals or groups of people. However, as cited in Miller (2007), "it is ultimately the nature of the relationship between the professional and client . . . that forms the basis of ethical activity, and it is the professional who is accountable for his or her decisions and subsequent activity" (p. 36).

In addition to the intersectional approach, I feel intuitive decision making is also of importance. There is something to be said about our instincts and intuitions (Gray & Gibbons, 2007). That isn't to say that one would base their decision making solely on their intuitions; rather, one would take into consideration what role intuitions are playing in order to make an informed decision in whatever the situation may be as:

> there is no shortcut to the wisdom of good judgment. If we are not careful, proliferating ethical decision making frameworks could become like the never-ending raft of diets people latch onto when what is really required to lose weight is a lifestyle change (Gray & Gibbons, 2007, p. 235).

So, what does this have to do with supervision? Based on both literature and my own experience, intersectionality and intuitive decision-making were a lens through which I approached my research. Ultimately, a number of the participants interviewed, for my research, revealed that they did rely on some aspects of both the intersectional approach, as well as intuitive decision making. At the same time, many participants commented on potential consequences of basing decisions on intuition, and expressed their disappointment at not being able to discuss or impact policies and services that may meet the needs of clients who often fall through the cracks. It seems that supervision can greatly assist when utilizing both the intersectional approach and intuitive decision making. Nakash and Alegria (2013) found that compared with novice workers, those who are at a midpoint in their career or those who are considered experts tend to have an intuitive understanding of situations and thus use tacit knowledge to determine the appropriate action required in a situation. Therefore, being able to converse with an experienced supervisor can allow a novice or experienced social worker to identify potential cracks through which clients may fall, while also allowing them to discuss and process their intuitive thoughts on a particular situation, hopefully resulting in the best decisions regarding the clients being served.

Research Questions

I feel that for supervision to be beneficial and meaningful, it is important that the needs and concerns of social workers be explored. I believe that effective supervision would involve a relationship between supervisor and social worker in which an honest conversation can take place, where the social worker can share their experiences and views. In my view, the relationship between supervisor and supervisee must consist of a mutual willingness to understand, validate, and work together to provide the best service possible to clients while

ensuring the safety and well-being of the social worker. To examine the experiences of social

workers in northern British Columbia, I propose the following guiding questions:

1. How do social workers define/describe clinical supervision?

2. What are social workers' views on the accessibility and quality of supervision in their

   organization and the impact this has on their practice?

3. What are perceived to be the most important aspects of supervision for social workers

   to experience supervision positively?

Chapter 2   Literature Review

O'Donoghue and Tsui (2013) state that there has been a rise in social work supervision research conducted over the past forty years. It is clear from the literature that supervision is often understood differently within the profession (Beddoe, Karvinen-Niinikoski, Ruch, & Tsui, 2016). Despite the varying understandings, supervision has, over time, become an integral part of social work and there have been a variety of forms of supervision (Gould & Baldwin, 2004). In the past, as social work practices were being developed, supervision served as an integral tool for teachers, researchers, and practitioners to develop and describe social work practices and theories (Gould & Baldwin, 2004). There have been numerous discussions and debates regarding the meaning and function of supervision in social work. Therefore, it is imperative to attempt to define supervision.

Defining Supervision

Supervision is a complicated process; it cannot be easily defined, nor can its effectiveness be easily and accurately assessed (Hawkins & Shohet, 2002). As a result, numerous definitions exist. Bromberg (1982) defines supervision as a relationship between two people, one of whom utilizes supervision to improve her work with someone in her life, and the other who has the role of helping her to accomplish this (Bromberg, 1982, cited in Inskipp & Proctor, 1995). Hess (1980) describes supervision to be the ideal interpersonal interaction, in which the goal is for the supervisor to meet with the supervisee to assist the supervisee in working more effectively (Hess, 1980, cited in Hawkins & Shohet, 2002). Haynes, Corey, and Moulton (2003) stress the importance of supervision in assuring service quality and define it as an educational and administrative support process for professionals. Itzhaky and Aloni (1996) assert that supervision is a decision-making instrument to develop a

mentoring process. Ultimately, supervision can be understood as a process where the intent is to unify the experiences and knowledge of supervisors and supervisees (Caras & Sandu, 2014).

In the book *Staff Supervision in Social Care*, Morrison (2003) states supervision to be a process through which cooperation is fostered and dialogue is facilitated with the goals of nurturing and assisting in the professional development of the worker, increasing the worker's effectiveness in the work they do, and ensuring that the worker is acting responsibly and ethically.

Ideally, supervision is meant to be a safe, confidential relationship between supervisor and supervisee whereby there is an opportunity to reflect, ask questions, and seek guidance. Page and Wosket (1994) state that supervision is supposed to provide a supportive environment. Kadushin (2003) has defined supervision as a process wherein practice, thoughts, and even the personality of the worker are placed under scrutiny. Morrison (1993) provides a more clinical definition, stating that supervision is:

> a process in which one worker is given responsibility by the organization to work with another worker in order to meet certain organizational, professional and personal objectives. (p. 11)

For my research, I will not be using one specific definition of supervision. Rather, a broader definition encompassing a range of perspectives will be considered in order to gather a wide range of supervisory experiences, as opposed to limiting experiences to fit a specific definition.

Purpose of Supervision

The purpose of supervision is intimately tied to the definition of supervision; however, as previously discussed, supervision is a complex process, and it is difficult to concisely define the process or purpose. Thomlison (1999) stated that supervision is a process that allows new social workers the chance to reflect critically upon what they are experiencing and witnessing while providing an opportunity to learn and problem solve in conjunction with a senior social worker. In a profession which is highly involved in the lives of others, supervision and consultation play, or should play, an integral part in the practice arena. Supervision is an active dialogue between the social work supervisor and the supervisee (Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Social Workers, 2011). Morrison (2003) suggests the purpose of supervision is to improve upon and enhance the social worker's knowledge, attitudes, and professional skills in attempts to achieve and maintain competency in care provision. "The overall aim of supervision is to promote best practice for clients by maintaining existing good practice and continuously striving to improve it" (Morrison, 2003, p. 46).

Page and Wosket (1994) highlight the purpose of supervision as an activity through which "teaching, guiding, counseling and directing" (p. 16) take place. Brearerly (1995) found supporting a supervisee with the emotional and mental aspects of their work to be one of the more fundamental purposes of supervision, as the work can be demanding and can often result in workers feeling anxious or burnt out. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) also see the value of supervision in assisting in the prevention of stress and burn-out; however, they regard supervision as an opportunity that enables supervisees to continuously learn and develop, thus resulting in the worker performance being optimized. Supervision is vital in a

profession where one's role is to pay close attention to the needs of others, and where stress, feelings of incompetence, and being emotionally emptied are familiar territories (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006).

According to the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers (NLASW) *Standards for Supervision of Social Work Practice* (2011), supervision is an activity that occurs between the social work supervisor and the social work supervisees, which is conversational in nature. As per this document, supervision has a five-fold purpose:

➢ Knowledge and skill development

➢ Professional development as a social worker

➢ Support and facilitation of self-reflection

➢ Promotion of social justice

➢ Administrative tasks (NLASW, 2011, p. 6).

Providing the best services to clients, which are in accordance with the social work code of ethics, organizational policies and procedures, and have practice-based evidence available, is the most important goal of supervision (NLASW, 2011). The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) *Code of Ethics* (2005) outlines six core values and principles that are important in upholding the standards for supervision (NLASW, 2011, p. 8). The six core values outlined by the CASW *Code of Ethics* (2005) are:

➢ Value 1: Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons

➢ Value 2: Pursuit of social justice

➢ Value 3: Service to humanity

➢ Value 4: Integrity in professional practice

➢ Value 5: Confidentiality in professional practice

➢ Value 6: Competence in professional practice

In considering supervision, Value 6 highlights that there is an inherent responsibility for social workers to continuously maintain professional competence (CASW, 2005). In order to ensure professional competency, social workers are expected to aim consistently to develop their professional knowledge and skills and to use new knowledge appropriately in terms of applying it to their level of skill, competence, and education (CASW, 2005). In addition to this, Value 6 states that social workers should request supervision and consultation when needed (CASW, 2005), connecting supervision to the concept of competency in professional practice.

Working in Remote Communities

Green (2003) outlines a number of issues that arise from social work in remote communities. Although the Green article is about social work in Australia, the issues discussed exist in social work with remote communities in northern Canada as well. Challenges that arise from working in remote communities, as Green (2003) and Schmidt (2008) outline, are belonging to the community in which you work, dual and multiple roles, lack of anonymity, confidentiality and privacy, personal safety measures, adapting to rural practice, and supervision and debriefing. Due to the nature of remote communities, all of these issues can make ethical practice complicated.

Issues of confidentiality and privacy are difficult but not impossible to overcome in a rural, northern setting. The social worker would need to adopt a vigilant practice approach to ensure privacy and confidentiality are not violated. Dual and multiple roles occur from belonging to a smaller community, and this cannot be avoided. However, supervision, continual education, support, and reflection can play a crucial role in ensuring these

relationships are managed appropriately (Scopelliti et al., 2004). In short, social workers need to ensure they maintain appropriate boundaries (Reamer, 2003), and that they leave work matters at work, and supervision can assist in supporting a social worker in finding and maintaining those boundaries. Alternatively, a social worker could choose not to be a part of the community, but they may find it difficult to establish a trusting relationship with their clientele, resulting in the social worker feeling disconnected—which could be harmful to the social worker as well as the clients (Reamer, 2003).

Issues of personal safety can also come into consideration. It is not uncommon for social workers in remote communities to be threatened or not welcomed by the community (Green, 2003). Unstable relationships with clients in remote communities can make it difficult for social workers to gain the trust and respect of community members. This threat is not only a concern for supervisees but also one that northern supervisors experience (Schmidt, 2008). In northern communities, which tend to be smaller, anonymity is a challenge—most people know one another, and you are more likely to run into someone you provide service to in a public location (Schmidt, 2008). Supervisors need to be aware of the stress that comes along with visibility and safety concerns, for themselves and supervisees, given that one of the responsibilities of a supervisor is to be mindful of the effects stress can cause (National Association of Social Workers, 2013).

Although there are many obstacles a practising social worker might face directly when working in a northern community, there are also a number of issues that may hinder service provision based on how the clients are feeling. For example, clients may feel uncomfortable with the level of visibility and be hesitant or avoidant when it comes to accessing services (Schmidt, 2008). The fear that others in the community may find out what

services they are accessing, labelling, and stigma all create challenges that may be difficult

for clients to overcome (Schmidt, 2008). In turn, if clients become avoidant or reluctant to

access services, the social worker faces an arduous task in trying to provide services to them.

At this point, it would be beneficial for both the social worker and the client to have access to

supervision to assist in finding a solution.

Similarly, a potential lack of supervision opportunities is likely to add difficulty for

the practising social worker with respect to processing how to best approach any of the

previously mentioned situations, along with any ethical dilemmas that may arise. However,

this issue can be resolved, to some degree, through the use of technology, especially for

supervision (Chan & Holosko, 2015).

Barriers to Supervision

In addition to the challenges faced by social workers, outlined above, social work

supervisors are faced with a number of difficulties when attempting to provide the best

service to clients in northern or remote communities. Schmidt (2008) found that northern

supervisors emphasized staff turnover and retention as one of the biggest issues. Supervisors

in northern communities are tasked with having to train new and possibly inexperienced

workers in the field, with the added responsibility to ensure workers are educated and aware

of the sensitivities when working with First Nations populations (Schmidt, 2008). As training

can be an exhaustive process, some supervisors found that once workers were trained and

ready, they would leave the community (Schmidt, 2008), resulting in empty positions and the

need to find and train new workers. Constant turnover results in time and resources being

expended on training new staff, and supervisors are required to ensure their staff are

competent, as it is the responsibility of the supervisors to make certain the clients receive the

best service (Kadushin & Harkness, 2003).

One of the participants from the Schmidt (2008) study shared that their role as a

supervisor was essentially non-existent as their role was more that of a front-line worker

because there was no staff to be doing the work. If supervisors are filling the role of the

front-line social worker, providing supervision for workers is much less feasible. Jones'

(2004) research identified personal and practical concerns such as supervision being rushed,

lack of access to appropriate supervision, insufficient time for consistent supervision, and

consequently workers feeling they were missing out on an opportunity to gain knowledge as

well as a safe space to critically reflect on the issues they face in their work on a daily basis.

These issues would be further exacerbated in situations where supervisors have dual roles as

supervisor and worker.

Westergaard (2013) found that supervisors and supervisees expressed how crucial it

is for supervisees to have a safe space where they can talk about practice, process their

experiences, and avoid internalizing experiences that come with working with vulnerable and

difficult families. The research indicated that both supervisors and supervisees recognize the

importance of supervision. The research conducted by Schmidt (2008) highlights some of the

struggles for supervisors working in northern communities. As identified previously, staff

retention and high turnover rates often result in supervisors finding themselves conducting

front-line duties as opposed to supervisory duties. Supervisors working in the north have also

noted that new hires tend to be new graduates or inexperienced (Schmidt, 2008), thus

requiring more training, education, development, and time involvement. Although new social

workers require more supervisory investment, northern supervisors acknowledged that there

are some benefits—new graduates are more malleable than experienced workers (Schmidt, 2008). Whereas experienced workers are less likely to change their views and methods, new graduates entering the field are often open to considering alternative values, beliefs, and practice methods (Schmidt, 2008).

Although this research will not be looking at the difficulties faced by supervisors, it is important to note the extreme responsibility that rests upon their shoulders, particularly in the context of northern and remote practice. When working in various locations, with varying degrees of resources available, social workers need to find methods that will work best with the clientele in the specific situations. Supervision is a time when different methods can and should be explored. Therefore, consistent supervision creates an optimal situation wherein social workers can reflect on and discuss practice models and the ideologies on which they are based, cultural competency, and structural and other related issues that impact service provision (Munson, 2002). However, if supervisors are constantly recruiting and training new staff, they may not be available for those workers who continue to work in the field and require supervision.

How Supervision Can Help

The supervision relationship should be used for learning about different professional experiences and perspectives, and supervisees should be assisted in gaining and developing new skills (Caras & Sandu, 2014). Through this relationship and the exchange of knowledge and experience, the practising social worker has a chance to broaden her scope and understanding of different social systems and structures. The goals of supervision are relatively simple. Through the process of supervision, social workers are provided the opportunity to reflect on their practice methods, through which further learning can take

place. If supervision and consultation are successful in helping practising social workers reflect on and improve their practice methods, the likelihood of quality service being provided to clients is much higher (Thomlison, 1999).

According to Thomlison (1999), there are a number of benefits of having supervision and consultation as an integral part of the social work profession. Social workers are provided with a safe environment to explore different dilemmas that arise throughout practice; this is important, as it allows the social worker to become aware of, and gain insight regarding the causes of the various types of dilemmas. Carpenter, Webb, Bostock, and Coomber (2012) found that workers identified safe, supportive, and confidential atmospheres for supervision as key in assisting them to process the implications of their practice experiences. Through the identification of complicated issues and situations, social workers and supervisors are able to explore alternative approaches to working in particular situations and with their clients.

Research suggests that supervision, when provided on a regular basis, contributes to job satisfaction and professional development (Carpenter et al., 2012). A sense of empowerment, self-efficacy, commitment to the organization, willingness to stay with the organization and social and personal well-being were also found to be positive outcomes for workers who were provided with regular, supportive supervision (Carpenter et al., 2012). The primary professional obligation of social workers is to ensure that current knowledge is the foundation of professional practice, thus allowing the social worker to promote the best interests of the clients. Access to supervision allows social workers the opportunity to understand practice situations and the options for intervention at a deeper level, which in turn supports the professional obligations (NLASW, 2011).

For supervision to be beneficial to supervisees, supervisors must also be involved in continuously developing their knowledge of specialization and skills pertaining to supervision specifically (NLASW, 2011). Thus, supervisors should be able to address many of the issues a practising social worker may be facing. Some examples of the skills and knowledge required by supervisors to provide competent supervision are:

➢ Knowledge of theoretical supervision models

➢ Knowledge of supervisory functions and roles

➢ Knowledge of documentation requirements of supervisors

➢ Ability to be planned and purposeful in interactions with supervisees

➢ Knowledge of diversity and culturally competent practice

➢ Ability to individualize supervision to diverse personalities and circumstances and the needs of supervisees

➢ Ability to be effective in the use of questions in supervision

➢ Knowledge of stages of worker development

➢ Knowledge of adult learning theories and adult learning styles

➢ Ability to identify learning needs of supervisees

➢ Ability to assist supervisees to establish measurable objectives for learning and performance

➢ Ability to support the professional development and autonomy of supervisees

➢ Ability to critically appraise and evaluate the supervisee and provide evaluative and developmental feedback

➢ Knowledge of techniques to be used in supervision

➢ Knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of transference, countertransference, boundaries, dual relationships and parallel process

➢ Knowledge of the impact of stress, distress, burnout and compassion fatigue on supervisees

➢ Knowledge of the liabilities and responsibilities of supervisors (NLASW, 2011, p. 10)

Functions of Supervision

In a field as diverse as social work, supervision serves a variety of functions. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Best Practice Standards in Social Work Supervision (2013) lists a number of functions of supervision, with a particular focus on the role of the supervisor with each function:

➢ Leadership and Role Model—Supervisors are looked at as being in leadership and role model positions. In other words, supervisees look to their supervisor for an example of how to conduct themselves in situations. The supervisor's words and behaviours are noticed and can influence the supervisee's own thoughts and actions (NASW, 2013). It is the responsibility of the supervisor to create a learning environment through which the supervisee can learn how to work in various environments, including those environments in which their clients are located.

➢ Competency—Supervisors are expected to be competent and should participate in ongoing training, educational, and certification programs in supervision. "Supervisors should be aware of growth and development in social work practice and be able to implement evidence-based practice into the supervisory process" (NASW, 2013, p. 15). The ongoing training and education that a supervisor partakes in benefits the supervisee directly as well. The more knowledgeable and experienced the supervisor

is, the more likely the supervisor will be competent in the supervisory role—being

able to provide guidance and information to the supervisee.

➢ Self-Care—According to the NASW Standards in Social Work Supervision (NASW,

2013), a vital responsibility that falls upon supervisors is to notice and address any

indications of job stress in themselves and their supervisees. Supervisors are not only

tasked with the responsibility of identifying when a supervisee may be experiencing

job stress, but are also responsible for providing resources to help the supervisee.

Supervisors in northern communities have the added stress of staff turnover, which

leads to supervisors feeling less competent in providing services to best practice

standards, due to limited staffing resources (Schmidt, 2008).

Supervision is one of the professional venues wherein social workers are provided

with an opportunity to reflect on their use of judgment and discretion (Gould & Baldwin,

2004). It appears the function of supervision, then, is to provide a professional opportunity

for social workers to process their practice, skills, and personal thoughts and feelings about

different situations; however, just as it has proven to be difficult to find one definition of

supervision, the functions of supervision can also be understood differently by researchers

and practitioners. Kadushin (1992) and Morrison (2003) acknowledge that there are three

main functions/roles of supervision—*educative, supportive, and administrative*—however,

they wrote with a focus on the supervisor. Inskipp and Proctor (1995), who focused on the

benefits for the supervisee, described the main functions/roles of supervision as *formative,*

restorative, and normative. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) focused on the process of both

supervisee and supervisor and found three main functions/roles of supervision:

developmental, resourcing, and qualitative. Therefore, the function/role of supervision in the

context of social work can be understood differently depending on the process that is being focused on.

Beddoe, Karvinen-Niinikoski, Ruch, and Tsui (2016) found that there was noticeable interest in supervision practice in social work and a desire to explore supervision outcomes that focus on practice development as opposed to administrative tasks. According to the Beddoe et al. (2016) study, participants wanted to focus on practice development and would prefer supervision to reflect that focus.

Summary

According to the literature, supervision is considered to be a crucial process for those working in the social service field. Workers benefit from having a safe and supportive venue where they can reflect on and improve their practice. Supervisors are in a role where they can provide education and feedback to supervisees while allowing an opportunity for supervisees to discuss any struggles, concerns, or recommendations related to their work. The research highlights the value of having supervision provided on a regular basis, and the argument can be made that workers, as well as clients, would benefit from social service organizations implementing supervision as mandatory practice.

Chapter 3   Methodology

This chapter will describe exploratory qualitative research and apply the approach to my research exploring social service providers' experiences of receiving supervision in Northern BC. I used semi-structured interviews to collect information from the participants and have described the research and data collection processes in this section. Thematic analysis was the method used for data analysis in order to identify themes in the information the participants provided through the interviews. I have also included a brief description of phenomenological qualitative research, as my research is influenced by this methodology in the sense that my research goal was to reveal the real-life experiences of social workers/service providers with supervision in Northern British Columbia, specifically in Prince George.

Exploratory Qualitative Approach

An exploratory qualitative approach is undertaken in research when studying an area in which there is limited previous research. Such an approach provides an opportunity for in-depth interactions that assist the researcher to connect with the research participants in order to probe a new area. This deeper interaction allows exploration into the rich meanings of the participants' experiences and thoughts (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002). Exploratory qualitative research relies on any available secondary research, such as existing literature on the topic, while also seeking to discover the direct experiences of people in the situation being examined (Schutt, 2006); this was integral in helping me formulate the interview questions. In addition, this approach aims to give meaning to actions and issues that directly affect and concern the participants (Schutt, 2006). The exploratory qualitative approach is the best approach for the research I conducted, as it is an area of limited research in northern BC and

allowed me to utilize previous research on supervision, conduct semi-structured interviews to

gain insight on the topic, collect my own information from participants, and use the

information collected to contribute to the existing literature on the topic of supervision.

Although I did not use a fully developed phenomenological approach, my research is

influenced by it. A phenomenological approach allowed participants to share their

experiences openly, honestly, and with as much or as little detail as they felt necessary.

Phenomenological research is a qualitative research methodology the goal of which is to

describe experiences that have been lived by those who are being asked to participate (Water,

2016). This approach allows for understanding subjective experiences and assists in gaining

insights into a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Lester, 1999). For my research, I was

interested in knowing how my participants viewed and experienced supervision within their

organization.

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and participants to be focused,

engaged in conversation, and have open communication within a framework that guides the

interview. However, this style of interview also remains open, allowing flexibility (Keller &

Conradin, 2010), including for the researcher to ask follow-up and probing questions that

may enable participants to share information-rich data pertinent to the research questions.

The interviewer/researcher has determined the questions she would like to ask before the

interview takes place but has room for adjustment during the interview process. The purpose

of the semi-structured interview is to have participants feel comfortable enough to talk freely

and honestly about their experiences while ensuring the researcher gathers in-depth

information on the research topic. Semi-structured interviews do not limit or restrict the

interviewer, in the sense that this style of interview allows the interviewer to follow her

instincts and improvise questions accordingly (Marlow, 2005). For my research, before

conducting the supervision specific interview, I asked participants a number of demographic

questions (Appendix D). By asking these questions before the interview, not only did I

acquire a needed description of my participants, I also broke the tension and had the

participants feeling comfortable and at ease when it came time to discuss their experiences

with supervision.

The flexibility of a semi-structured interview approach allowed me to ask for clarity

from participants in terms of their responses and provided the opportunity to expand on

existing questions in order to gain further insights. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) identified the

ability for the interviewer to follow up and clarify the meanings to participants' answers as a

benefit to using semi-structured interviews as this decreases the possibility of

misinterpretation. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow up with each

participant and ask for clarity or elaboration after each question, assuring relevant responses

and rich data.

Sampling

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), the typical approach to sampling within

qualitative research is purposive. Based on the focus of this research, I used purposive

sampling to gather participants who had relevant information to contribute. Purposive

sampling aims to generate "insight and in-depth understanding of the topic of interest"

(Patton, 2002, p. 230). Purposive sampling involves finding and selecting participants based

on their ability to provide information-rich data (Patton, 2002). Snowballing and friendship

pyramiding (Braun & Clarke, 2013) are common strategies used in qualitative research and

can be useful tools in purposive sampling. Snowball sampling is the technique I used to recruit participants for this research study. With snowball sampling, participants can be located via personal or organizational contacts. The researcher may also ask any recruited participants if they know of anyone who may be interested in participating in the study (Patton, 2002).

Criteria and Recruitment

The criteria to participate in this research included that participants were 19 years of age or older, currently working as a practising social service provider in the city of Prince George or the surrounding northern communities, and had a Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW). Participants with a Master of Social Work degree (MSW) were not considered for this study, nor were participants who had previously been in a supervisory role, as the experiences of these participants are beyond the scope of my research, which focuses on BSW social workers who have not yet been in a supervisory position. Participants were not chosen based on whether they receive supervision; rather, for this study, I wanted to know participant experiences with, and their thoughts about supervision and whether it is provided or not.

As stated previously, participants were recruited using the snowball sampling approach. For this research, the goal was to have six to eight participants who were able to share their experiences in relation to the research topic. Saturation was achieved with six participants having been interviewed and no apparent new or unique information being gleaned. I transcribed the recorded interviews myself, and participants were given the opportunity to review the transcription of their interview if they chose to do so. This allowed

them to ensure there was no discrepancy between the data I had collected and the information the participant believed they shared.

In order to recruit participants, I distributed project posters to a variety of social service organizations in Prince George. I also requested that the UNBC social work program send an inter-program email, with the project poster attached, be sent to social work students and alumni in the hope that word of mouth would generate potential participants for me to interview. The poster included contact information for interested participants to reach me. Once a potential participant made initial contact, I arranged for them to receive a copy of the poster, a research information letter, and a consent form for them to review (Appendices A, B, and C). Once the participant had an opportunity to review the information, if they chose to move forward, we arranged an interview time and location. As I was interested in the experiences of social service providers working in Prince George and surrounding communities, the location of the interview varied depending on where the potential participant resided. All of the participants who chose to participate in the study resided in Prince George, and the date, time, and location for the interviews were discussed and arranged. All interviews took place in a safe, agreed upon location in the community. Interviews were conducted in person and recorded by electronic recorder and notes taken by hand by the researcher.

Ethical Considerations: Confidentiality, Privacy, and Consent

Participants were asked to include no personal identifiers on any questionnaires or research material; the researcher removed any that were mistakenly included. The information from the semi-structured interviews was reviewed to ensure that potentially identifying information was not disclosed in the thesis document. All participants received a

copy of the informed consent form and the research information sheet, which addressed privacy and confidentiality concerns. In addition, at the time of the interview, I went through the consent form one more time with participants and obtained their written consent before proceeding.

All data collected were stored on a secure, password-protected computer, and all hard-copy information and electronic recordings of the interviews were kept in a locked safe at my place of residence. Upon completion of the thesis process, all research information will be stored in my thesis supervisor's locked cabinet, at her UNBC office, for five years; after five years, all hardcopy information will be shredded, and all electronic information deleted.

Prior to beginning the recruitment process, I submitted a research proposal to the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board. The participant recruitment process and participant interviews took place only after I received REB approval.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

What is Thematic Analysis?

"Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 7).

The process of thematic analysis includes three major steps: identifying emerging themes, examining the themes in depth, and taking note of and reporting the patterns detected in the data. Inductive and deductive approaches are also included in thematic analysis. The *inductive approach* involves finding patterns and themes in one's data (Patton, 2002) and is considered to be a *data-driven analysis*. Data-driven analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002), as previously stated, involves discovering themes through analysis of the data; thus, a

strong link exists between these themes and the data. In this case, the researcher is not attempting to have data fit into an existing framework. A *deductive approach*, on the other hand, differs in that it is fuelled by the researcher's theoretical interest, and the themes extracted are meant to fit into the existing framework that the researcher has chosen (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002).

For this research, I used an inductive approach to analysis as I hoped to discover emerging themes that were strongly linked to the data collected through my interviews. As my research was exploratory, I did not have a specific theoretical or analytical interest or pre-existing framework into which I hoped to have themes fit.

What is a Theme?

"Themes are abstract constructs the investigators identify before, during, and after analysis" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a theme as something that encapsulates important features within the data that are directly related to the research question and show some degree of meaning within the data set. They state that before coding, the researcher should determine what is considered to be a pattern or theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Essentially, a theme captures a significant message relating to the research question.

Conducting Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, like other qualitative research, has different phases, and the stages are not unique unto themselves. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six steps involved in thematic analysis but draw attention to the fact that the steps are a guideline and are not intended to be used as hardline rules. Patton (1990) emphasizes that guidelines are not rules, and therefore following the basic rules should be done with flexibility in order to fit the

research questions and data. Analysis is not a "linear process where you simply move from one phase to the next. Instead, it is a more recursive process, where you move back and forth as needed, throughout the phases" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 17). Analysis is a process that takes shape over time and therefore should not be rushed (Ely et al., 1997). Braun and Clarke (2006) outline the six steps involved in thematic analysis that I followed to complete my analysis:

1. Familiarising yourself with your data

   Once I gathered my information from my participants, I needed to transcribe the verbal recordings of the interviews. After the verbal recordings had been converted into written form, I read and re-read the converted data to become completely familiar with it.

   Transcription: This is the process of converting verbal data (recorded from interviews) into written form. When using an interpretive qualitative methodology, transcription is a vital phase (Bird, 2005), as transcription is integral to the creation of meanings rather than merely converting sound into writing (Lapadat & Linsday, 1999). I transcribed the interviews myself and found this process assisted me further in becoming familiar with the data and helped me identify themes emerging from the data.

2. Generating initial codes

   Here is where I began to produce my initial *codes* for the data collected. In order to produce codes, I needed to read and reread the transcripts to identify passages that were linked by a common theme. The coded data were written in a notebook, and

after all of the data were coded, data that was similarly coded were combined in a

hand-drawn table.

3. Searching for themes

At this stage, I had a list of codes generated from the data I had collected. My focus

was on themes and sorting the different codes into potential themes. Themes are made

up of related codes. Some codes may create main themes or sub-themes, or may not

be relevant at all. At the end of this phase, I had a number of themes/sub-themes.

4. Reviewing themes

This stage required me to refine my themes. There are two levels in this stage: 1)

Reviewing at the level of the coded data—re-reading all of my data that made up a

theme to ensure the data created a coherent pattern. 2) Reviewing at the level of the

themes—here I thought of each theme in relation to the overall data I had collected.

5. Defining and naming themes

During this phase, it was important for me to identify what the essence of each theme

was. When naming themes, names needed to be concise, impactful, and able to relay

to the reader what my theme was about. This step is about recognizing the core of

each theme and then writing a detailed analysis for each. By the end of this phase, I

was able to clearly define my themes—what they were and what they were not.

6. Producing the report

At this stage, I conducted the final analysis and wrote up my report. I provided

evidence of each theme using examples from the data. The report is a concise,

coherent and a logical representation of what the data indicates.

Ensuring Credibility

Qualitative research, when carried out properly, is an in-depth, reliable, and credible method of research, despite criticisms indicating the contrary (Anderson, 2010). In order to ensure credibility in my research findings, I took a number of steps. I accounted for personal biases, which could have influenced findings, by reflecting upon my own experiences and perspectives. In addition to this, the questions asked of participants were designed to be neutral and void of any leading words, which added to ensuring personal biases were not present. Other steps taken to ensure credibility in my research findings were: including verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts to support findings, keeping a reflective journal while collecting and analyzing data, and inviting participants to comment and give clarification and feedback on their interview transcript and the themes I produced from their interview.

Member-Checking

As the researcher, I needed to be aware of my own biases and aimed to ask for clarification from participants during the interviews in order to ensure I did not misinterpret what was being reported to me. Member-checking assisted in decreasing misinterpretation. Member-checking involved providing each participant with a copy of their data to allow for correction or clarification; however, not all participants chose to review their interview transcript. One participant who did request to review her interview transcript was able to clarify and elaborate further on a few of her responses. None of the participants chose to review the themes produced from the interview process.

Implications for Practice

Because this research was exploratory, I did not expect to make conclusive discoveries. Rather, I hoped to gather information on the experiences of social workers in Prince George and the surrounding northern communities with supervision in their workplace—including experiences where supervision is not provided or available. The hope was to gain a better understanding of practising social workers' experiences with supervision while creating a document that can contribute to the existing research on the topic. This research aimed to review the role of supervision, gain a better understanding of how available it is within the social work field in a northern community such as Prince George or the surrounding communities, and gain insight into how practising social workers feel supervision impacts the quality of the services provided to clients. All participants will be notified when the defence of this thesis has occurred, and those who are interested in my findings will be given a copy of the results. Further implications for social work practice and policy are discussed in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

In social work practice, we face situations that do not always have an obvious solution. In larger urban areas, social workers are privileged to have more consistently available colleagues and supervisors to discuss issues that may arise. Social workers working in remote and northern locations are less likely to have these resources and support available (Green, 2003).

Beddoe et al. (2016) provide insight into the interest in supervision within social work and the desire of supervisees to have an opportunity for supervision. Supervisees and supervisors all face challenges in receiving or providing supervision, depending upon

location, resources, and time availability. This research examines the experiences of the

supervisees, and in order to accurately capture and understand these experiences, an

exploratory approach was necessary. This research examined the importance of supervision,

with a particular focus on the importance of accessibility and quality of supervision when

practising social work in a northern community, with the aim of not only revealing the views

of supervisees but also providing a basis for, and background to, future research in this area.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to answer specific questions, in regards

to supervision, while also being provided the opportunity to elaborate on their own

experiences, and add any information they felt was relevant to answering the questions in a

manner which represented their experiences.

Chapter 4   Research Findings

The following chapter will outline the results of the research exploring practising

social service providers' experiences with supervision in their workplace in Prince George or

outlying northern or remote communities. Included in the results are participant

demographics, discovered themes, and related subthemes. Participant quotations describing

their experiences will be used throughout the section to highlight the results.

Demographics

A demographic questionnaire was created and distributed to participants to gain

insight and understanding about the social service providers participating in this research.

The goal was to have six to eight volunteers participate in the individual interviews;

however, only six participants were found and interviewed. All six completed the

demographic questionnaire before the one-to-one interview with this researcher. The

demographic questionnaire was designed, and distributed to gather general background

information about the participants. The questions included were also asked in order to see if

any patterns emerged and, specifically, to see if participants with similar demographic

responses had similar or different experiences with supervision, as this could possibly

identify a potential area for future research.

The highest level of education completed by all six of the participants was an

undergraduate degree in social work. Two are currently working on graduate degrees but

have not yet completed. The participants ranged in age from 26 years of age to 55 years of

age. Two participants were in the 26–35 age range, two in the 36–45 range, and two in the

46–55 range. Occupational identification also varied: one participant identified as a support

worker, one participant as a mental health worker, one participant as an entitlement officer, one participant as an adult guardianship worker, and two participants as social workers. Four participants identified as Caucasian. One participant identified as Middle Eastern. One participant identified as First Nations—status—but also as Caucasian. Five participants identified an income of $60,000 or more. One participant identified an income between $25,000 and $39,999. All six participants are currently employed, five working fulltime and one working part-time. In terms of length of time working in social work, two participants have been working in the field for 4–7 years, two for 10 years, one for 17 years, and one for 18 years. Length of time working for their current employer also varied. Four participants have been working for their current employer for 1–3 years, one for 4–7 years, and one for 26 years. All participants stated that they reside in Prince George, and their primary area of work occurs in Prince George. Finally, five participants identified as female and one identified as male.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Results
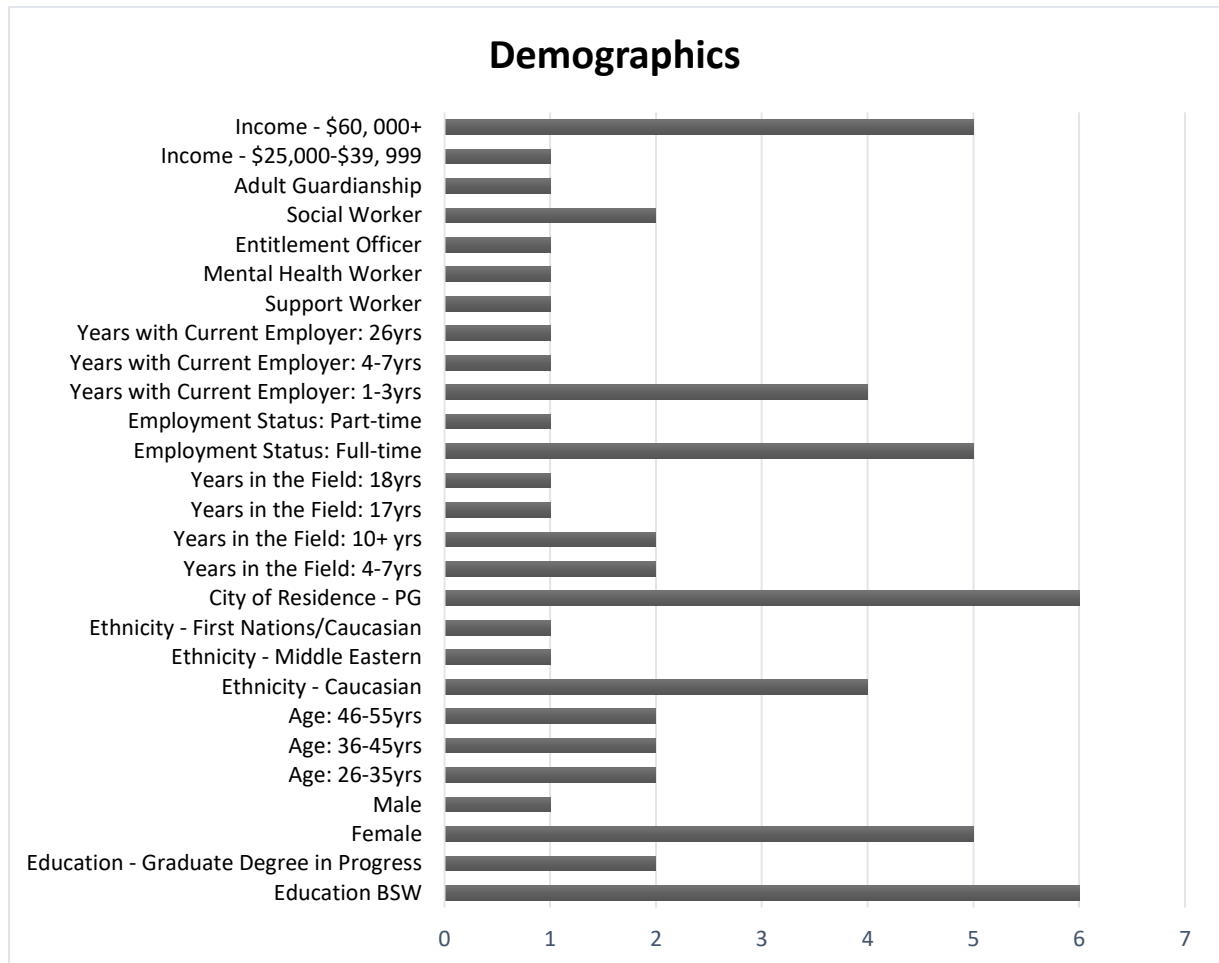
Participant Interview Results

Participants were interviewed in one-on-one sessions. Interviews were conducted in a

semi-structured fashion, and all participants were asked the same questions (Appendix E) to

generate dialogue and address the research question. However, during the individual

interviews, some participants were asked questions not found in the Questionnaire Guide

(Appendix E) as a method of assisting them to elaborate or provide clarity while sharing their

experiences. Three main themes emerged as a result of the interviews: *Support,*

Accountability, and Availability. Subthemes found within each major theme are listed in

Table 2.

Table 2

Results From Participant Interviews

Theme	Support	Availability	Accountability
Subtheme	Objectivity Guidance Confidence	Designated Supervision Time On Demand/Open-door Policy	Ethical Practice

Support

The first theme to emerge from the data is *Support*. All of the interviewed participants

described expecting supervision to be an experience wherein they receive support from their

supervisor. All participants stated that feeling supported plays a vital role in their ability to

provide the best possible service to clients. Participants' testimonials revealed three

subthemes*: Objectivity, Guidance, and Confidence.*

Objectivity. As participants described their experiences with supervision and what

they believed the role of supervision to be, all participants stated feeling supported, and

receiving support was an important part of the supervision process. While elaborating on

their responses, participants described the importance of having a supervisor to reach out to

when faced with a confusing or complicated situation, allowing the opportunity to receive an

Objective perspective on a specific situation. However, although participants found

objectivity to be important, it is worth considering whether supervisors can be completely

objective, as their own perspectives and experiences will potentially influence their

responses. One participant reflected upon her current experience with supervision and said

the following about her supervisor: "She's ahh she's quite reflective and objective when it

comes to things. And it's helpful." Another participant described potential pitfalls when it

comes to working with people, stating:

> I think one of the big problems social workers face is that they're too caught up in
> what they want to do, from an idealistic kind of practice or uh framework, but not
> actually in what they can actually do when it gets to being in the field.

This participant continued:

> You need someone to monitor you and you need someone to ensure that you're doing
> the right thing. And sometimes ethical dilemmas, and things like that, you might not
> even know you're doing the wrong thing until someone else is there to catch a
> perceived conflict of interest or whatever it is.

> Participants detailed the importance of having a safe place where they could reflect

on their practice and receive feedback. One participant commented that she felt the role of

supervision was to "really provide a framework um for a support staff to complete their job-

related duties um to the social work that they're doing within that particular role um and

making sure that they're adhering to the social work principles and practices." Each of the

participants alluded to wanting supervision sessions to be a time where they could connect

and receive perspectives other than their own. One participant described:

> Having someone in that role of supervision to provide guidance and support, that
> have themselves the experience of the area in the service they provide . . . so, you'd
> be able to get, you know uh a good mentor and recommendations and things to help
> you in certain areas, where you may lack or have some difficulties.

Another participant mentioned how service providers could benefit from having supervision

as it allows for service providers to reflect upon their practice with another person who can

provide different perspectives and answer questions arising from working with clients:

> I think the role of supervision is more or less to provide some sort of a bouncing board for us, as practitioners to be able to speak—to have somewhere there that when we are unsure of something that we can ask questions.

Although all of the participants described an objective and service knowledgeable supervisor to be beneficial to their practice, a number of the participants shared experiences where supervision and/or an objective supervisor was not available. One participant described her understanding of the role of supervision as follows:

> Um, to me the role would look like someone coming into the place of employment, where I work, and actually sticking around for more than half an hour. And actually sitting down and talking to us about the clients that we work with, the house, the home and how it runs, what their role is as a supervisor, how it works with us and how it's supposed to work with us. But that doesn't happen very much.

This participant's description of what she believes the role of supervision to be and what she experiences in her workplace highlights one of the challenges faced by workers who do not have supervisors accessible to them. In addition to this, her response indicates how supervision is lacking in her workplace, and that the staff are not aware of the role of their supervisor and how they, the workers, can benefit from supervision.

Guidance. Guidance emerged as a subtheme, with participants describing the role of a supervisor as guiding supervisees with their practice. Four out of the six participants specifically mentioned *guidance* when describing the role of supervision and what supportive supervision entails.

Participants' responses included the following statements:

Participant 1: "I really think that supervision is there to sort of help guide you through those tough situations."

Participant 2: "Any kind of social service where you are dealing with people uh there's a lot of ethical issues, there's a lot of rules, laws and policies and grey areas that you need someone with a higher degree of experience on the job to kind of guide you."

Participant 3: "It's good to have that supervisor uh or even the team lead in that department to kind of, you know, kind of consult and be able to, you know, just to get some guidance or and see how things are going."

Participant 4: "My supervisor's just kinda . . . kinda just gives me some guidance on where to go and how I'm doing, and it's just so helpful to have that reflection."

Participant responses reflected the importance of having supervision sessions where they could meet with their supervisor and receive guidance when needed. One participant commented: "If you need guidance and you're lacking supervision you're setting yourself up for a pretty high degree of failure."

Confidence. Most participants described wanting to know their manager/supervisor agreed with how they conduct their practice, and they tied this to how confident they felt in their practice. Participants described feeling confident in their practice as being crucial, as they are dealing with people's lives. For the majority of the participants, support from supervisors was connected to feeling confident. One participant stated supervision was useful in "making sure that I'm on the right track in supporting [clients]." Another participant commented that the impact supervision has on her practice is that "it made me more confident in my work. It made me feel like someone's got my back."

When participants were asked about how they believed supervision impacted the quality of their practice, they responded similarly. The most common responses mentioned how when supervision is available and supportive, workers are likely to work harder and feel

more confident in approaching different scenarios. One participant, who stated supervision

was essentially non-existent in her current workplace, commented that having supervision

available would

> probably just benefit us as workers and give us more encouragement. . . . Quality, the
> quality would be better for us . . . it would just be enhanced better for us, it would
> make me feel better as a worker to know that I have the confidence to do things, and
> knowing that I have that backing.

This participant elaborated, stating: "just makes you feel better and do better work," when

referring to knowing you have "that backing."

Support appeared to be the most pervasive theme arising from the participant

interviews. Regardless of the question asked, participants continuously returned to the

concept of having support available to them, whether it was in the form of receiving

objective feedback about situations, guidance with individual practice, building worker

confidence, or just knowing there was someone available to them when needed.

One of the participants described her experience working in a remote northern

location, saying that the support she needed there looked different from the support she needs

when working in a non-remote location such as Prince George.

> I've had some really good job opportunities to do really remote practice, and
> sometimes the support that I needed from my supervisor didn't have anything to do
> with the actual work that I was doing with clients, but it was all the other stuff that
> came along with doing that remote practice that people have to deal with, that
> professionals have to deal with, in terms of travel, um lack of support, lack of
> resources, um hiccups along the way. Things not being set up, um, you know really
> difficult uh environments to try and do counselling sessions in. And, how do you
> protect confidentiality within really small communities? Especially when there's lots
> of political things going on in communities and trying to stay really neutral, and um
> as well as building up support and trust with a community because it's not just about
> the practice that you're doing.

Availability

Participants shared their experiences with supervision and how often they participate

in supervision sessions. The second theme to emerge from the interviews was *Availability* of

supervision in the workplace. From participant responses, it is apparent that formal

supervision is not a common occurrence. Most participants described supervision as a casual

encounter with their supervisor in which they asked their supervisor a specific question.

Some participants shared that although they work in Prince George, their supervisor is

located in an office in another city. One participant's responses reflected the absence of a

supervisor, while the remainder of the participants' responses reflected supervisors being

available to them, as the supervisor was present in the office. Participants' responses revealed

the subthemes of *Designated Supervision Time* and *On-Demand Supervision.*

Designated supervision time. When participants were asked how often supervision

is available to them, most did not indicate a designated or scheduled supervision time. One

participant commented: "They just don't have enough time to meet with us as much as we

need, in a formal fashion." She continued:

> We can pop in and talk about anything all the time, but it's really emergent, crisis-
> based all the time. And, what gets dropped because of the incredible workload, they
> have incredible workloads, we have incredible workloads . . . is the real one on one
> sessions [where] we can kind of have bigger conversations—how do we advocate for
> change, um politically, policy-wise, internally, to make some of those um
> circumstances better for us as staff and for our managers, which all, you know,
> directly impacts our clients.

Another participant, when asked how often supervision was provided in her

workplace, replied: "We have email, we have a com-log. They all have cell phones that they

are on-call from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. So, if we have a problem we call our house manager, but

after 5 o'clock it's on call, which is not our house manager." Her response indicated no real

supervision. This participant describes supervision as a "question and answer" period, as opposed to a formal meeting where the supervisor provides support, feedback, and education. Her response also reflects a similar idea to that of the previous participant: supervision is crisis management as opposed to one-on-one sessions where in-depth dialogue and collaboration can take place.

Some participants, however, described having scheduled supervision sessions with their supervisor once every two weeks. One participant commented: "Right now, I get it every other week, so twice a month. So that's now, but when I first started it was every week." When asked what prompted the change from once a week to every other week, the participant responded: "As I was able to be more confident and comfortable in my work that I do, she was able to do it every two weeks for me." Another participant had a similar experience: "Every two weeks, or more. I could actually call him anytime, although he does not, my boss does not currently physically reside in Prince George." Although some participants report having supervision available to them every two weeks, access to supervision any time was a common experience. However, the type and depth of supervision varied.

On demand supervision/open door policy. Although some participants stated they do have a designated time assigned for supervision, every participant mentioned supervision or their supervisor being available to them at any time. Participants mentioned "on demand" supervision, as well as their supervisor having an "open door policy" for workers, "if and when needed." One participant commented: "So, in my current workplace I have almost, what you call like 'on demand' supervision." Another participant stated: "I can physically call him at any time, I can email him. . . . I can text him."

Although participants described being able to access their supervisor at almost any

time, they did not describe formal supervision occurring during these times. Most

participants described supervision as a time for "question and answer," where if they were

struggling with something, they could contact their supervisor for guidance. For example:

> In probation, it was immediate, and it was there if you needed it so…on a formal
> level, it was only done a couple of times a year, where you would sit down and o like
> a quality assurance plan, or you would do your performance evaluation or file
> reviews…or things like that.

Participants expressed gratitude for having supervisors who were available to them

almost immediately; however, almost all participants stated it would be beneficial to have

scheduled time for formal supervision consisting of more than quality assurance work or

performance evaluations. One participant shared her thoughts on what she would like in

terms of supervision if she could change anything about the supervision she is receiving:

> I really would like to see our agency promote the time to give us that bigger
> framework from or immediate job-related duties. Um, and to allow, really allow them
> [supervisors] to have the time to spend with us and guide us for continued
> development in our practice and our training and our levels in skills, and our
> knowledge base around social work and social work practice. I really feel like right
> now we're just putting out fires and ripping off Band Aids.

Another participant expressed a similar thought:

> I think you need someone in a supervisory role or managerial role, or actual position
> of power to sit you down and catch you on those things [maintaining professional
> boundaries and ethics], or sometimes even monitor you constantly . . . and not in like
> a micromanaging kind of way, but to be there through the course of your employment
> on [a] regular basis to give you updates on your performance, to see your work style,
> um to monitor potential pitfalls that might not be obvious to you, and someone to
> check your work and um give you feedback . . . of a critical nature that's beyond just
> "Oh you did your job today, that's good" or "What'd you think of this file?"

Other participants had the following to say when asked what they would change

about supervision so it would be more beneficial to them and their practice:

Participant 1: "I would definitely prefer a supervisor that their job is just to be a supervisor—

you know a clinical supervisor. I find it when our supervisors have to do paperwork or have

to do administrative things, and be our supervisor . . . it kinda bogs them down."

Participant 2: "I think if they were able to schedule more one-to-one time that would be good

for sure. But I think if they were able to do those more often, I think we would be able to

feel, we're already supported, but I think we'd feel more supported and we'd definitely have

more conversations [about the work we do]."

Participant 3: "[Discussing] educational opportunities [with our supervisors] would be

wonderful because that would keep us more up to date."

Accountability

The theme of *Accountability* emerged through questions asked about the role of

supervision and how supervision impacts the quality of the participants' practices. *Ethical*

Practice surfaced as a subtheme. Participants shared their thoughts on *Ethical Practice* and

the importance of ensuring ethics guidelines are upheld, especially in a field where the lives

of others are directly impacted by service providers.

Ethical practice. All of the participants alluded to the importance of having someone

to turn to when they felt unable to address a particular situation in their work. There was a

unanimous consensus among participants that issues are likely to arise that require a

supervisor's or a manager's input in ensuring proper practice procedures are carried out. One

participant stated:

> Good supervisors are people that do a degree of mentoring and are there for you,
> especially when you start a new job. Any kind of social service where you are dealing
> with people uh there's a lot of ethical issues, there's a lot of rules, laws and policies
> and grey areas that you need someone with a higher degree of experience on the job
> to kind of guide you.

None of the participants said they were incapable of making tough decisions on their own; however, every participant mentioned the importance of having someone to turn to for guidance and reassurance that best practice methods were being utilized when providing service to clients.

> I think that's ultimately what it comes down to because you need someone to monitor you and you need someone to ensure that you're doing the right thing. And, sometimes ethical dilemmas, and things like that, you might not even know you're doing the wrong thing until someone else is there to catch a perceived conflict of interest or whatever it is.

Some participants who had some experience working in smaller communities touched on issues that can arise not based on the service provider's quality of work, but as a result of the unavoidable consequences of working in a small community. One participant recounted:

> I was living in a small community, and sometimes I would see clients there [in the community], [during supervision we] would talk about, you know, they know where you live, or certain things that could become a potential conflict of interest, but I never really had a really formal issue with that. But what I would do [in the face of an ethical dilemma], the first thing I would do is assess the situation myself and determine whether or not I need a higher level of involvement from a supervisor.

Another participant shared her thoughts and experiences from when she worked in a remote location:

> You really do become part of that community [when working in a remote location], and um how do you do that in a really good, professional, ethical way? That you remain neutral and trustworthy to every member in that community because sometimes you are that only practitioner—everybody has to feel comfortable coming to you . . . and, that you have no favourites and all of those things. So, supervision [is] really important for that piece.

Other participants expressed the importance of having someone to turn to for guidance in tough situations. One felt it was the role of a supervisor during supervision to

have my back and hold me accountable to what I do, so that I'm not just kind of going based on my gut all the time, or just doing something that is probably not a good thing. My supervisor gives me some guidance on where to go.

Another participant, when discussing what she does when faced with a dilemma, remarked:

So thank goodness that there is more than one staff in each house, usually. Between the two of us if we can't figure it out then we know that we're having to call the manager, or we call on-call, because there's just some things you just don't fool around with. I mean, there's people . . . there's people's lives that we take care of . . . so, if there is ever a dilemma we will, if we can't figure it out, we will definitely call someone else for sure.

This particular participant described a work environment where a supervisor/manager is usually not available at her worksite, and communication with the supervisor is commonly done via text message or email. Her comment "thank goodness that there is more than one staff" speaks volumes. In her case, workers rely on one another as supervisors, and supervision is not available. Another participant, however, commented:

I've seen people act in what they think is in the best interested [of their clients], when in reality they need someone that's not a co-worker, or a peer, to call them out on, you know, "Maybe this is not in the best interest of the client. Maybe this is transference, or this is countertransference." You're walking a very fine ethical line, and I don't think your peers can be that person; sometimes, I think, you need someone in a supervisory role or managerial role, or actual position of power to sit you down and catch you on those things.

Each participant interviewed shared their experiences with supervision in their workplace. Although not all participants specifically mentioned *ethical practice*, each spoke of how important it was to provide services that were in the best interest of their clients, and many participants linked best practice to guidance from supervisors.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the themes and subthemes revealed the unique experiences participants have had with supervision in their workplaces. All participants stressed the importance of feeling supported by their supervisors and connected support with feedback received from supervisors. Participants commented on supportive supervision being an activity wherein a supervisor was objective, provided guidance, and, as a result, increased workers' confidence. Availability of supervision was another aspect highlighted by participants through the individual interviews. Participants appeared to be pleased with the "on demand/open door" policy their supervisors had in place; however, less than half of the participants actually had designated, scheduled supervision times with their supervisor. In addition, all participants described current supervision as more of a "question and answer" period than an opportunity to discuss issues in depth. All participants felt a major role of supervision was to hold workers accountable in order to ensure ethical practice and best practice procedures were adhered to when dealing with clients. Overall, participants stated they had some form of supervision, but none of the participants confirmed receiving supervision as defined by the literature. Participants noted time constraints, lack of funding, and supervisors having multiple roles as reasons to why supervision is limited in their individual agencies.

Chapter 5   Discussion & Recommendations

In this chapter, a discussion of the findings and the themes identified from the data is presented. The results highlight the experiences of social service providers working in a northern community and connect them to related literature. Participants provided thoughts and recommendations that will contribute to the existing literature on the topic of supervision within a northern practice context. In addition, participant recommendations have the potential to influence change in social services, as they highlighted the importance and need for supervision within the field.

Discussion

Support

Participants shared their personal experiences of supervision while working in a social service position. A prominent theme demonstrated through participant interviews was support. Participants highlighted the difficulty involved in working in a field that directly impacts the lives of service users. They stressed the importance of feeling supported by their organizations/supervisors in order to maintain confidence in their abilities and thus continue to do the work they do. Bogo, Paterson, Tufford, and King (2011) found that a safe, confidential space being provided through supervision was vital in helping workers process the personal impact of practice experiences. As participants in my study also mentioned, being able to discuss their feelings and thoughts about the work they do is integral to them continuing in their work. For all of the participants interviewed, the opportunity to reflect and process with a supervisor was directly linked to feeling supported in the workplace.

Landsman (2008) found that workers' emotional satisfaction with their job was affected by the degree to which the workers felt supported by their supervisors. One participant interviewed for this study, who identified having a very supportive supervisor stated: "I really work hard because I want to represent our company well because I get treated well. I want to make sure I treat my coworkers and the individuals that we serve well." Participant responses lend support to the importance of supervision and the role it plays for workers—not only in terms of job-related duties, but as a factor contributing to worker motivation, confidence, and the quality of service being provided to service seekers. Fleming and Taylor (2007) found staff considered the following activities during supervision to be beneficial:

- Better afterhours communication with supervisors

- Weekly contact with supervisors

- Appropriate levels of information being provided for clients requiring temporary coverage

- Additional time and support being provided during/after crisis.

Availability

Unanimously, study participants described their experiences with supervision as being focused on administrative tasks or crisis management. Most participants could identify what they would want from supervision and were able to state they would like more focus on clinical practice or specific practice skills; however, this is not available to them. Currently, for most participants, supervision consists of discussing administrative tasks and answering specific questions about specific case files. Kavanagh et al. (2003) found that supervisees reported that supervision focused little on their clinical practice or practical skills.

Furthermore, Kavanagh et al. (2003) stated supervisees identified the following items as problems with the supervision they were receiving:

- Availability of supervision being infrequent

- Supervisors lacking experience in the role

- Supervisors requiring further training and development of supervision skills

- Lack of guidelines

- High workloads

One participant had the following to say regarding the availability of and ability to contact her supervisor after hours: "There is somebody always answering the on-call phone, and they will do their best to help us. And, if they can't figure it out, then they'll call the house manager at home; it's just that we can't call them after 5 p.m." Her account of accessibility to her supervisor indicates the struggles faced by some service providers in accessing supervision for crisis management, guidance, or even support.

Accountability

A number of participants interviewed highlighted the importance of maintaining ethical practice as service providers ultimately impact the lives of the service seekers. Many participants stated they felt it was the role of supervision to discuss ethical practice and to ensure workers upheld social worker ethics, as well as organizational ethical standards. Participants felt workers in the social service field need to be held accountable in their practice, and the onus is on the supervisors to hold workers accountable. One participant stated: "There needs to be a higher degree of enforcement of rules; especially things like ethical rules, and accountability for what social workers are doing with their clients."

Collins-Camargo and Miller (2010) found that when the focus of supervision was shifted from administrative and crisis-driven approaches to a more supportive, evidence-based practice approach, supervisees functioned differently with their clients. As a result, service users were found to have an increased level of engagement with case planning, appeared to be demonstrating positive empowerment and motivation for positive change, there were fewer complaints while positive feedback increased, and service seekers were more actively involved with services (Collins-Camargo & Miller, 2010).

Recommendations

As the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences with supervision of social service providers working in Prince George or other nearby northern locations, each participant was asked for recommendations on improving supervision to service providers. Recommendations from participants call attention to where supervision provision can be improved in order for practitioners to provide the best service possible to their clients. As participants shared their recommendations, it was evident that they all felt supervision to be pertinent in ensuring best practice and best client care, as well as playing a crucial part in maintaining worker satisfaction and motivation in the workplace. This next section will present participant recommendations.

Participant Recommendations

Study participants suggested a number of recommendations they felt would improve their own experiences with supervision, as well as recommendations for the practice of supervision in the social service field. For example, nearly all participants touched on the importance of having more time with supervisors to discuss issues in a manner other than simple question and answer. Participants stressed the importance of being able to connect

with supervisors to discuss issues in depth, as opposed to rushing communication to receive a

surface level response for a particular situation. All participants mentioned feeling supported

as an integral part of feeling competent in the services they provide to their clients. However,

they also mentioned needing the time to sit down with their supervisor to discuss their

practice methods and receive guidance, as this contributes to their feeling of being supported

in the work that they do. Related to the issue of time, several participants recommended the

following:

- Having one-to-one scheduled supervision time

- More opportunity to better communicate the work, requirements, struggles, and

  successes with supervisors

- To have clinical supervisors who are only responsible for clinical supervision—some

  participants reflected that having supervisors who are also in charge of administrative

  tasks and carry their own caseloads often do not have the time to provide supervision

- Less crisis-focused supervision, as participants felt this method was just a Band-Aid

  solution to bigger issues that are never addressed.

Other participant's recommendations focused on educational opportunities,

discussions around professional growth, and exploring current policies, procedures, and the

current and potential gaps in service provision. Participants felt there definitely should be

formal supervision scheduled for all workers in social service agencies and felt this was

especially vital for new workers entering the field. A focus on ethical practice and guidelines

was recommended, as many participants felt working with people can create many "grey"

areas, and having supervision to help guide one through potential ethical dilemmas was

integral to providing the best services to clients. What participants would like to see more of,

not only in their individual organizations, but also in the social service field as a whole, is

supervision sessions where there is the opportunity to discuss practice, worker, and

organizational development. Furthermore, all participants highlighted the importance of

supervision being a time where they, along with their supervisor, can explore current

policies, procedures, and gaps in services, and use the time to collaborate on methods

through which gaps can be filled, address flaws in current policies and procedures, develop

new policies, and work continuously on evolving and developing new approaches as opposed

to maintaining the status quo. As one participant concluded her interview, she stated:

> I think a little bit more time to really reflect on social work, because you've got a
> crisis going on, no one wants to talk about social policy and how we can advocate for
> political change within our internal structures that [will] support better services for
> our clients.

The final recommendation, and perhaps one that requires further research was

ensuring supervisors have the training and support they require in order to provide adequate

and beneficial supervision to workers. One participant stated that "unless supervisors feel

supported in their supervision provision, and unless there are incentives for supervisors to

provide formal supervision, supervision practice will continue to be neglected."

Summary of Discussion and Recommendations

Research demonstrates that supervision, more specifically good supervision, is

associated with perceptions of worker effectiveness, job satisfaction, and commitment to the

organization and the services provided. Service providers identified the difficulty involved

with working in the social service field and stressed the importance of being provided an

opportunity to reflect on their practice, feelings, thoughts, and struggles in a safe and

confidential environment, such as one that can be provided through supervision. Research

suggests supervision is directly linked to workers' perceptions of feeling supported, thus may help reduce staff turnover.

Good supervision, which participants stated they would find beneficial to their practice and clients, involves a focus on professional development, emotional support, skills development, opportunities for reflective, guidance, and feedback. Research also suggests that good supervision requires supervisees to feel as if they have a positive relationship with supervisors in order to foster safe and honest communication about the work being conducted.

Ultimately, further research is required on the topic of supervision with specific focus on supervisees' experiences with supervision. Collecting supervisee experiences and understanding of where they feel organizations can make adjustments can create change required to help workers feel supported and consequently better serve clients.

Chapter 6   Winding down

This final chapter will address limitations of this study and potential areas for future research. Furthermore, a discussion related to the implications for social work practice and the influence this study may have on changing current policies will be included here. Concluding this thesis, there is a summary of my personal learning from having participated in the thesis process.

Limitation of the Study

Although this research offers the first-hand experiences of social service providers working in a northern community, there are some limitations. Participants were recruited on a first come first interviewed basis, with the final number of interviewed participants being six. Five out of the six participants identified as female social service providers with a bachelor's degree in social work. Research recruitment produced only one male for the research sample. In addition, although participants interviewed worked for different organizations and in different roles of social service provision, the research may have benefited from having the experiences of more than one person from each organization/role; as experiences are individual, this would have allowed for a richer context of information.

The goal of this research was to explore the experiences of social services providers in Prince George and the neighbouring northern/remote communities. Despite my willingness to travel to different locations to widen the prospect of participants from outside Prince George, all participants interviewed were from Prince George. Although a couple of participants had experienced working in smaller communities, none currently worked in a community outside of Prince George. A factor that may have impacted lack of participation

from outside of Prince George was the timeframe for data collection. As I conducted

interviews with the first six participants who contacted me, there was limited time for other

participants to connect. Increasing the duration of recruitment, as well as the data collection,

may have increased the possibility for further representation of communities neighbouring

Prince George. Increasing the duration of recruitment may also have allowed the possibility

of more participants; however, as described in Chapter 3, I was seeking a sample size of six

to eight participants and stopped recruiting when saturation was reached at six participants.

There is limited representation of cultures, limited cross section within organizations

and specific service provision roles, service providers identifying as male are not represented,

and timeframe and sample size constraints limited the ability to have a more varied sample.

All these factors may have influenced the results of this study. However, the personal

experiences presented by the service providers help provide a window into the current levels

of supervision being provided to social service workers with a BSW who are working in

Prince George. The quality insights provided stress the importance of supervision being

available to social service providers and bring attention to this service need, thus providing

data that can assist in improving the quality and accessibility of supervision for social service

providers in Prince George and those working in remote and northern locations.

Future Research

As this particular study was exploratory, it helps set the stage for future research on

the topic. Based on the participants' experiences with supervision and the current literature

on the topic, there appears to be evidence of positive outcomes for workers and organizations

associated with the provision of supervision. However, as this study discovered, supervision

had not been implemented, formally, into organizational structures where participants

worked. Given this, there is little evidence available through this study demonstrating that the

implementation of structured supervision can, and does, contribute to positive outcomes for

workers (e.g., job satisfaction) or organizations (e.g., retaining skilled/trained practitioners).

In addition, although participants mentioned supervision being imperative to ensuring service

users receive the best service available, no evidence is provided via this research indicating

that supervision directly affects outcomes for service users, thus future research could look

into the benefits supervision has on outcomes for service users.

Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice

Collectively, the study participants emphasized a need for social service organizations

to implement supervision as mandatory practice. The current literature on the topic links

supervision to beneficial outcomes for workers, and policy-makers should consider

promoting the use of supervision more widely. Supervision has the potential to increase the

effectiveness of workers, promote job satisfaction, and, as a result, contribute to staff

retention—which has been shown to be an issue in northern and remote locations.

In conclusion, this study has the potential to facilitate dialogue and stimulate change

within social service organizations in northern BC. Input from practising social service

providers is imperative as they are the ones on the frontlines providing services to those in

need. If service providers feel they and their clients would benefit from having supervision

implemented as a formal structure within their organizations, then there is a real chance to

influence policy and program development affecting service users. For this study to have any

impact on social work practice and policy, those in the field would need to be aware of it.

Consideration will be given to providing an educational presentation for the Northern Branch

of the BC Association of Social Workers or by organizing an educational event for social

workers in the community to hear about my research. Also, all participants will be notified of the completed study, and those who are interested will be given a copy of the results.

Personal Learning

Hunt (2010) emphasizes that the perspectives and voices of research participants are key to reflexive research. Having had the opportunity to interview the participants who were willing to participate in my study, I am grateful to them for having shared their insights, thoughts, feelings, and experiences with me. Processing their experiences, and reflecting on my own, has allowed me to understand perspectives other than my own. Each participant had their own struggles, strengths, and needs within the context of their work, and reflecting upon their experiences has assisted me in being more perceptive to my colleagues and other service providers that I collaborate with regularly.

Reflecting on the stories shared with me allows me to ground myself in my practice while allowing me to be more patient and considerate of those I work with. Social service work is difficult—each participant interviewed made this clear, and I know this from personal experience as well. If supervision is not widely available to social service providers, then it is vital that we service providers be that support we all need. Conducting this research has provided me with insights and recommendations I may not have otherwise recognized. All participants and their experiences have further fuelled my desire to advocate for support, guidance, education, and professional growth opportunities for service providers.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Information Sheet

Graduate Thesis Researcher: Savita Jaswal, Masters of Social Work Student
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Supervisor: **Dawn Hemingway**, Associate Professor School of Social Work, UNBC

Title of Study: **Supervision and Northern Social Work Practice**

Purpose of Study: I am currently recruiting participants to take part in a research study entitled *Supervision and Northern Social Work Practice*. I would like to request your participation, in order to gain insight and understanding into the experiences of social service providers with supervision within their workplace. Participants for this study will be selected based on a few criteria: All participants need to be currently working as a practising social worker/service provider within the city of Prince George, or a surrounding northern community. All participants must be currently working for a social service agency, and must possess a Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW). Those with a MSW, or those who have had experience as supervisors themselves, will not be eligible for the current study.

Methodology: For the purpose of this study, there will be one method of gathering information from participants—through face to face interviews. All participants will be asked the same questions, and all questions will be related to participant experiences with supervision. There will also be a brief demographic questionnaire before the formal interview begins, with questions such as your age, education, occupation, etc. Participants are asked to answer the questions honestly, and to the best of their ability. Participants may choose to answer all, some, or none of the questions—as this is completely voluntary. Interviews will be tape recorded, and all recordings will be kept secure and anonymous in order to protect participant confidentiality.

Benefits: Participants will have the opportunity to provide information on the role of supervision within current social work practice. The goal is to build literature on the topic of supervision, and the importance/benefits of having it available to service providers in Northern locations, in order to ensure workers are supported, and that clients receive the best service possible. Through participation, participants are provided the opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences with supervision, and

contribute their input on what works and what could be done differently.

Risks:	There are no foreseeable risks. Participation is completely voluntary, and therefore, you may withdraw your participation at any point.

Costs/incentives: There are no financial benefits nor costs to participating in this research. Participation is completely voluntary; therefore, immensely appreciated by the researcher.

Confidentiality   All information will be kept confidential. You are asked to leave no personal identifiers on any questionnaires or research material—such as, the demographic questionnaire and the sheet outlining the interview questions. The consent form will require a signature, and will be stored separately from other data collected. All electronic information will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer, and all hard-copy information will be kept in a locked safe at the researcher's place of residence.

Voluntary   The decision to participate in this research study is completely your own. Participants have the right to withdraw from the project at any stage. There are no consequences for choosing not to participate, or in withdrawing from this study. If you would like further information on the purpose of the study, or procedures to be utilized, feel free to contact the researcher. Once the research has concluded, participants will be notified, and results will be shared with those who are interested.

Questions/Concerns: If you require any further information, have any questions or concerns, or would like to receive the results of this research project please contact Savita Jaswal (student researcher) by telephone or email (information provided at the top of this form) or Dawn Hemingway (research supervisor) at 250.960.5694. If you have any complaints about this project please contact the Office of Research at UNBC via email or telephone - reb@unbc.ca or 250.960.6735

Thank you for your consideration,

Savita Jaswal
Master of Social Work Student

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

I understand that I am agreeing to participate in a research study.	☐ Yes	☐ No
I have read, or the researcher has read the attached information sheet to me and I have received a copy.	☐ Yes	☐ No
I understand that the researcher will be recording the interview with a voice recorder, and may also be taking notes by hand.	☐ Yes	☐ No
I have been provided an opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns I have with this study.	☐ Yes	☐ No
I understand the benefits and risks involved in participating.	☐ Yes	☐ No
I understand that the researcher is obligated to maintain my confidentiality, and that no personally identifying information will be used in the final thesis report.	☐ Yes	☐ No
I understand that only the research student and her supervisory committee will have access to identifying information about me, and that fictitious names will be used to protect my identity (all committee members are also obliged to maintain the confidentiality of participants).	☐ Yes	☐ No
I understand that if I disclose information about a concern for the safety of an individual, that the researcher has a legal duty to report this information to the appropriate authorities (e.g. police, child protection services, adult protection services, etc.)	☐ Yes	☐ No
If you wish to be contacted to review your interview transcript, or to acquire a copy of the preliminary results, please leave your contact information below: _____	☐ Yes	☐ No
I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I can withdraw from the study at any time.	☐ Yes	☐ No

By signing this form, I acknowledge that the researcher has explained this study to me, along with informing me that participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw at any time.

_____   _____
Participant's Full Name (Please Print)   *Participant Signature*

_____
Date signed

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   *Date signed*

Appendix C: Recruitment Advertisement

Advertisement for Recruitment of Practising Social Service Providers

UNBC graduate student looking for practising social service providers (e.g., social workers, mental health and addictions workers, youth care workers, etc.,), who possess a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, currently working in Prince George, or the surrounding northern communities, who are willing to be interviewed.

This graduate student research is about the experiences that practising social service providers have with supervision within their place of work. Specifically, the researcher is interested in gaining an understanding about the experiences social service providers have with supervision while working in a northern community of British Columbia.

What do you have to do?

The student researcher can be contacted by phone or email to arrange a one-on-one in person interview. Contact information is provided below.

How much time will it take?

Interviews are expected to be approximately one hour to one and a half hours in length.

Where will the interview take place?

The location will be mutually decided by the participant and the researcher. All interviews will occur at an agreed upon safe location within the community.
All information shared in regards to this research will be confidential.

To participate or get further information, contact Master of Social Work student Savita at:
Cell Number: 250.981.6861
Email: sjaswal@unbc.ca

Appendix D: Demographic Interview Questions

1) What is your age?

    □ 19-25 yrs   □ 56-65 yrs

    □ 26-35 yrs   □ 66-75 yrs

    □ 36-45 yrs   □ Over 75 yrs

    □ 46-55 yrs

2) What is your highest level of education completed?

    □ Post-Secondary Education

- Degree (undergraduate/graduate), diploma, certificate?

           _____

- Other, specify please:

           _____

3) What is your current occupation?

□ Social Worker

    □ Support Worker   □ Child Protection Worker

    □ Mental Health Worker

    □ Care Worker

    □ Other, please specify: _____

4) What is your ethnicity?

    □ First Nations   □ Asian

    □ Métis   □ Caucasian

    □ Inuit   □ Other, please specify: _____

5) What is your annual household income? *(Voluntary)*

        □ Less than $15,000

        □ $15,000 - $24,999

        □ $25,000 - $39,999

        □ $40,000 - $59,999

           □ $60,000 or more

7) What is your current employment status?

           □ Full-time

           □ Part-time

           □ Casual

           □ Shift work

           □ Other, please specify: _____

8) How long have you been employed by your current employer?

           □ Less than one year

           □ One to three years

           □ Four to seven years

           □ Other, please specify: _____

9) How long have you been in the field of social work/service provision?

           □ Less than one year

           □ One to three years

           □ Four to seven years

           □ Other, please specify: _____

10) In what area of Northern British Columbia do you primarily work?

11) In what area of Northern British Columbia do you live?

Appendix E: Research Question & Questionnaire Guide

Research Questions: How do practising social service providers view and understand the role of supervision within their organization, and what have their experiences been in regards to supervision within the social service field?

Questionnaire Guide:

1. Can you explain, to me, your understanding of the role of supervision within the social service field?

2. What experiences, if any, do you have with supervision within your workplace? Describe?

3. How many supervisors have you had during your career as a social service provider? (If applicable). How have these supervisors differed?

4. What kinds of activities happen during supervision? Describe.

5. In your workplace, how often is supervision provided?

6. When you are faced with a dilemma, what do you do?

7. Please provide your thoughts about the quality of supervision within your organization, if available.

8. How does supervision impact the quality of your practice? OR How would supervision impact the quality of your practice? (Ask if supervision is not provided)

9. Do you feel safe and comfortable seeking supervision? Explain.

10. If you could change anything about the role of supervision within your workplace, what changes would you like to make? Why?

Appendix F: Research Ethics Board Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

MEMORAND
UM

To: Savita Jaswal
CC: Dawn Hemingway

From: Henry Harder,

Chair Research

Ethics Board

Date: July 20, 2017

Re: E2017.0501.031.00

**Supervision and northern social work
practice.**

Thank you for submitting revisions to the Research Ethics Board (REB) regarding

the above- noted proposal. Your revisions have been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the REB.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Henry Harder

Chair, Research Ethics Board