EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISORS IN NORTHEASTERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative and exploratory study was to describe the experiences of social workers working in supervisory capacities throughout Northwest British Columbia, with a focus on the challenges they experience working in rural and remote communities. Five participants were involved in this study; four female and one male. Individual interviews were used to collect data. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, then reviewed and coded based on emerging themes, using thematic analysis.

This study identified four major, over-arching themes and a cluster of subthemes. The major themes were: recruitment and retention challenges, a northern context, budget implications, and areas for further consideration. An extensive literature review supported this research, however, this study revealed an interesting finding that has not been identified in the literature reviews, succession planning in social work.
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I would also like to acknowledge all of the participants in this study. Thank you for sharing your stories with me and for granting me permission to use them in this research.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to the most important people in my life, those that have supported and encouraged me throughout this entire process. For all of the special events that I missed with my children to all of the family dinners I did not sit back to enjoy. This work is dedicated to my amazing spouse, Rob Price and my three children, Austin, Isabella, and Matthew. This work is also dedicated to my mother, Rosa Gonzalez, my father Mario Gonzalez and my siblings Ed and Kyle who have always supported me and my love of lifelong learning. Without the support of my amazing extended family, I could not have done this. For this support, I acknowledge and thank my in-laws, Robert (Bob) Sr. and Alfreda Price. To the friends that I consider sisters that offered continued encouragement and were always ready to step in and help with my family, I thank and acknowledge, Lorelle Walker-Kluss and Danika Love Shinde. I am truly blessed with an amazing circle of people.

I dedicate this to all of you.
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Introduction

There are many factors that contribute to the success and longevity of an employee within an organization. Organizational fit, success in the job, wages, and career advancement are key factors that can contribute to an employee’s sense of satisfaction with their employment. Regardless of the aforementioned, an ineffective supervisor with an unsupportive style of supervision can impact how a supervisee functions. An employee’s interest in their work or desire to excel can be derailed or accelerated based on the style of supervisory leadership one is under. This is particularly true in a high-stress, emotionally charged workforce. This is especially true when examining the profession of social work and the impact that an effective or ineffective supervisor has on social workers. Although important, the focus of this research is not the effect of supervision on social workers, but what it means to be a social work supervisor. Further narrowing my area of research, I focused on the effect(s) and challenges that northern social work practice has on being a supervisor. Although there is literature directly relating to northern and remote social work practice, it does not focus on the geographical area of northwestern British Columbia. Specifically, this research intends to answer the question; What challenges are experienced by social workers in supervisory capacities, who live and work in Northwestern British Columbia?

This topic is of particular interest to me as I am a social worker currently working in a supervisory capacity and I live and work in Northwestern British Columbia. I have direct experience with both successes and challenges of being a supervisor and my intention was to explore these factors with fellow social work
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia supervisors in Northwestern BC. Prior to being a supervisor, I worked under the leadership of many Team Leaders, Executive Directors, Program Coordinators, and others, and all had very different approaches to supervision. My own experience and sense of achievement and satisfaction with the work I was doing was, in many ways, impacted by the leadership style of the supervisor I had.

In Northern social work practice, physical geography has a clear impact on all aspects of service delivery, the social workers themselves, and those that supervise them. Practicing in remote, northern settings presents various limitations and strain on workers, such as having multiple roles with clients, having no sense of privacy or anonymity, and always ‘being on’ as it is not uncommon for someone to ask you a work related question when you are out in public, after hours. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of social work supervisors in Northwestern BC and with the intention that this research will be useful in making recommendations to local and provincial policy makers.

Definition of Terms and Key Concepts

The following terms and key concepts will appear throughout this research and for the purposes of clarity, they require a definition.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development defines Northwestern British Columbia, in their Service Delivery Area guidelines as: the area comprised of Dease Lake, Fort Nelson, Hazelton, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, Haida Gwaii, Smithers, and Terrace (MCFD, 2013). This research was conducted within the geographical boundaries as described above.
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**Social work supervisor** is defined by Kadushin (1992), “as an agency administrative-staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate the on-the-job performance of the supervisees for whom he is held accountable” (p.22). “Supervisors do not directly offer services to the client, but they do indirectly affect the level of service offered through their impact on direct service supervision” (p.23). This definition clearly identifies all the elements of supervision important to this research, therefore will be the definition referred to throughout this research.

Understanding the concept of *northern social work practice* is critical to this research. Many attempts have been made to define North and the definitions are generally based on personal experience. However, despite the relative nature of definitions, some elements are fairly constant in the definition of the north. These include remoteness, isolation, relatively severe climate, sparse populations, limited services, transportation challenges, and economies dependent on single industries and resources (Schmidt, 2009).

For the purpose of this research, a **social worker** will refer to a person that has achieved a minimum of a four-year Bachelor degree and is working in the capacity of a social worker. Social workers help people increase their capacities for problem solving and coping, and they help people obtain needed resources, facilitate interactions between individuals and between people and their environments, making organizations responsible to people, and they also influence social policies (Barker, 1999).
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*Obstacles* will be defined as something that obstructs or hinders progress.

**Research Design**

I entered the field of social work at a young age, not realizing that the work I was doing at a local transition house, was a form of social work. Being part of a person's personal journey is something that I have never taken lightly. I have always been very open and welcoming to any and all stories that were shared with me. Those stories, I later realized, were the catalyst for some of my deepest learning and the reason, I have chosen to conduct research via a qualitative lens. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe one important element of qualitative theory that makes this a natural fit for my research; One major feature is that qualitative research focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what 'real life' is like (p.10). Qualitative theory allows for the research to be conducted in various settings, primarily where participants live and work. I believe that the ability to conduct research in a space that is comfortable for the participant(s) will only benefit the richness of the dialogue shared.

**Theoretical Framework**

The intention of this research was to explore the challenges faced by social work supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia. Exploratory research is one of open inquiry and attempts to find out what is going on. Exploratory research is also often used when there is not a lot of information available on a certain topic or phenomenon. As this qualitative study is exploratory in nature, a thematic analysis
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia framework will be used to analyze the data. Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study collected data from interviews with Social Workers working in a supervisory capacity in Northwestern British Columbia. Research was conducted over a three month period between September and November 2012.

**Personal Standpoint**

Ultimately, the reason that I chose this particular area of research is because of my own personal experiences as a social worker in supervisory roles as well as, being the recipient of supervision. Having immigrated to Canada from Mexico at the young age of two, my area of residence has been primarily Northwestern British Columbia. Aside from a couple of years studying abroad and working in another province, the area of Terrace and Kitimat has always been home. I can attest to the many benefits of working and living in a small, rural community, and I have lived through many of the challenges as well.

Studying, working, and living in small rural northern communities have provided me with opportunities for quick professional advancement. I began working as a Transition House Support worker at the age of nineteen, where I was constantly challenged by residents and co-workers around my perceived 'lack of life experiences', based on my age. I had to be very cognizant about how I presented myself, how I communicated, and how I approached certain situations. I was always eager to participate in any and all professional development opportunities.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia available in order to build my knowledge base. It was during my four years as a support worker at this Transition House that I started to recognize the importance of knowing and acknowledging my personal world and self-views and the importance of not allowing them to interfere with my ability to effectively provide support. As my professional and personal life began to evolve, so have my own personal standpoints. Conducting this research was a constant reminder of how diligent one must be to contain those standpoints and not allow them to influence participant interviews, comments, or opinions.

After working as a support worker in the Transition House, I moved on to a local sexual assault crisis centre, staffing the 24 hour crisis line, training new recruits, and working closely with the local medical and public safety personnel. Afterward, I moved to the position of Coordinator of a local woman’s counselling program where my experience as a supervisor began. This experience lasted seven years, with a short break as I was having a child. In my career, I have worked with men, women, youth, and young children, all in the area of trauma, abuse, neglect, and addiction. All of these experiences and stories also impacted my world view and my personal standpoint in the areas of relationships, child rearing, and healthy living.

My work as a Child Protection worker in both Northwestern BC and in the city of Calgary Alberta also significantly altered my personal views and standpoints, and ultimately turned my career in the direction of education. Currently, I work for a post-secondary institution in an administrative position with various employees reporting to me throughout the region.
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The reason I find it important to share this is to clearly demonstrate my experience and personal interest in my chosen area of research. I have first-hand experience in dealing with successes of being a social worker in a supervisory position, but I have also been witness to the many challenges. I have experienced many challenges throughout my career as a supervisor. The challenges included issues such as recruitment and retention of staff, accessing professional development, and staff being related to clients. The intent of my research was to explore whether these challenges have also been experienced by my colleagues. Throughout this process, I remained aware of my own thoughts and opinions as the participants shared their experiences. This was a great personal process for me to undertake.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Literature Review

There is substantial literature to compile this review. The information collected was done via the general library catalogues and online databases. Online resources were referred to throughout the review process.

This literature review focused on understanding northern social work practice, identification and history regarding the concept of ‘North’, and examining supervision as it relates to social work and other professions.

North

Many different lenses have been used to attempt to define north. The first person to try to quantify the idea of North through his valeurs polaire, or polar value scale, was Louis-Edmond Hamelin. In Louis-Edmond Hamelin’s *Canada: A geographical perspective* he focused on very specific themes about the geography of Canada. However, he developed ten criteria for nordicity and only five themes were used in its [the text's] construction: the influence of cold conditions, a geography of space, the different cultural groups, economic structure, and lastly urban life (Hamelin, 1973, p.xiii). Amanda Graham quoted Hamelin in her article, “Indexing the Canadian North: Broadening the Definition”; where Hamelin wrote that the North is as much a concept as a place (Graham, 1990, p.21). In that same article, Hamelin is noted as stating that because of this, the North was the subject of a great deal of ignorance and misconception (Graham, 1990, p.21). These misconceptions continue to exist today, specifically by those who have never
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia travelled outside of their own metropolitan hub. Colleagues at professional gatherings and training seminars have asked me why I chose to live and work where I currently do.

Hamelin identified ten fundamental criteria (latitude, summer heat, annual cold, types of ice, total precipitation, natural vegetation cover, accessibility by means other than air service, population, and degree of economic activity) as 'the raw material for a specific index of nordicity (Graham, 1990, p.4)'. Although important for geographers, defining the north is important at the government and employer levels as well. Governments and other major employers in the North also had a keen interest in this issue, for they desperately required an equitable method of determining levels of benefits for northern-based employees (Graham, 1990, p.5).

Despite the effort put forth by Hamelin, and other geographers, it remains difficult to define the north as it continues to be a concept that remains relative and subject to different definitions that are determined by the individual or group that constructs the definition. However, despite the relative nature of definitions, some elements are fairly constant in the definition of north, and these include things like remoteness and isolation, relatively severe climate, sparse populations, limited services, transportation challenges, and economies dependent on single industries and resources (Schmidt, 2009a).

**Northern social work practice**
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The profession of social work is one that is characterized by many as one of the most difficult professions as it continuously engages with populations that are typically vulnerable, disenfranchised, needing of additional support, and victims of some form of violence or neglect. In “Northern Social Work Practice: An Ecological Perspective (1995)”, Roger Delaney uses the following passage from, “Reinventing the Local Economy”, written by Stewart Perry and Mike Lewis, that speaks to the societies and groups within which social workers predominantly find themselves:

“The despair engendered by chronic poverty, the isolation felt by so many living in wounded circumstances, the lack of influence or control over their own lives or the social well-being of their own community-all this leads to a complex of social pathologies that infect our society. People without hope become people who cannot cope. And people who cannot cope become individuals, families and communities. As such conditions extend over time, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, crime, intergenerational poverty, spousal and child abuse rise in prominence” (1995).

I found this passage to be particularly powerful in describing what typical social work practice looks like.

The need for supports, both internal to the workplace, and external to the workplace is vital for the longevity of a social worker. Being able to “leave it all at work” and “turn it off” does not only come with time and experience, but the type of practice and physical geography of the practice within which you work. For the purposes of clarity around the concept of practice, I use the following quote from
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Roger Delaney, “Practice has been conceptualized in terms of methods (case work, group work, community, administration, policy and research), field of practice (school social work, medical social work, psychiatric social work, child welfare social work), different schools of thought (functional, diagnostic, existential, problem solving, unitary, generalist) and different purposes (social action, rehabilitation, personality changes, social skill development)” (Delaney, 1995, p.1).

Social workers who live and practice in small, isolated, northern communities, are faced with a unique set of challenges and obstacles compared to their counterparts in urban settings. Living conditions can be unusually stressful and extreme, whether it is 40 degrees below or whether the nearest town is three hours away, things that are easily done in the south such as travel can be difficult and downright impossible in the north (Tranter & Vis, 1997). The social worker who provides service to trauma survivors may simultaneously be therapist, friend, neighbor, community organizer, referral agent, advocate, and may be directly impacted by the traumatic event as well (Tranter & Vis, 1997). Defining and understanding northern social work requires identifying the elements or characteristics that serve to set it apart from other forms of social work practice (Schmidt, 2009a).

Wharf (1984) as cited by Barter (1997) in his article, Strategies for Northern Social Work Practice, highlights a consistency found in literature on northern remote and rural social work practice:
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- generic rather than specialized: a characteristic which is dictated by the fact that staff are responsible for all problems arising in large geographic areas,
- practice which recognizes the utility of natural helping networks, and actively seeks to identify these networks and build on the, and,
- practice provided through community controlled structures to ensure that services are tuned to local needs, are connected with each other in a way that makes sense in the community, and are responsible to and supported by a definable constituency

(p.239).

Kenneth Barter cites Hanton (1980) in identifying three categories of helping systems that exist in northern remote and rural communities: primary, informal and formal (p.239):

- The primary helping system consists of the family, the neighborhood, and/or the community. It’s a joint community effort whereby neighbors help neighbors. Families, parents, and children are quite familiar with each other and voluntarily lend a hand when someone is in crisis or in need of assistance. The primary helping system forms over a period of time whereby a cohesive group is formed, and shared values and expectations are present. Those involved in the primary system find the supports essential to their survival in northern remote and isolated communities;
- The informal system includes institutions such as schools, churches, the local businesses, and local community associations. Given their involvement and roles with people, there exists a helping function. In northern remote and rural communities there is an identified presence of the primary helping system in these informal helping systems;
- The formal helping systems are those agencies, institutions, and programs that have a responsibility and/or mandate to provide and deliver certain helping services. These services are carried out by professionals in accordance with established policy and procedures. In northern rural and remote communities the public sector is usually responsible for the delivery of these services – health, welfare assistance and child welfare

(pp. 239- 240)

The profession of social work carries with it some very challenging situations in general; however, I believe it is fair to say that northern social work practice has some additional pressures.
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**Isolation and rural practice**

Immense size is one of the most striking geographical characteristics of Canada; its area is exceeded only by its northern neighbor, the Soviet Union (Hamelin, 1973, p.1). This enormity of land creates a vast amount of distance between communities, and particularly between northern and southern communities. These huge dimensions are a measure of the greatest problem of the country, sheer distance (Hamelin, 1973, p.1). Hamelin continues by stating that the sheer distance itself is an economic disadvantage and also a factor which has influenced the history of settlement (1973, p.1). The distance between rural and urban communities has a direct impact on social work practice.

Barker defined isolation as 'the condition of being separated and kept from others" (1999, p.255). Whether or not it is intended, separation from others is inevitable when working and living in small, rural, isolated communities, such as the communities where the supervisors of this study reside. These people face many of the same problems and needs as do urban clients; in addition they often encounter difficulties because of limited services and resource systems, less acceptance of any variations from the social norms prevalent in the area, and fewer educational and economic opportunities (Barker, 1999, p. 420). It [rural] is sometimes seen as a negative concept, meaning anything which is not 'urban,' but 'rural'. Rural is also defined using specific organizational criteria such as the census definition of rural, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development definition of rural, and rural postal codes to name a few (Schmidt, 2009a). When the north is seen only as a frontier, then it is easily characterized-and-dismissed by boom and bust cycles.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia based on opportunistic exploitation of natural resources (Schmidt, 2009a). These last few statements are typical of the inherent challenges that face social workers immediately upon their arrival in northern, remote communities, even prior to meeting any clients. Isolation also contributes to lack of resources for both the social worker and the clients they are working with.

Isolation in a remote area may also mean that there are few choices over resources that might benefit users, whether to support them in their homes or elsewhere if that becomes impossible (Turbett, 2010). Turbett (2010) continues, the seeking out of alternative ways to meet need, or even the creation of required resources may not fall within the remit of an urban-based worker, but for the rural generalist this will be a basic requirement of the job (p. 38). Although Colin Turbett is speaking of rural social work practice in Scotland, the issues and challenges remain the same. In Scotland, a remote location often goes hand in hand with a stunning environment and opportunities for outdoor activities in leisure time that might involve considerable travel in other settings (Turbett, 2010). Turbett acknowledges that this work setting does carry with it a personal sacrifice for the worker, particularly if the worker is a person from a city that is accustomed to the night life, entertainment, and other amenities a city has to offer. These challenges are identical in rural and remote northern communities in Canada.

Michelle Aukema (2005) cites Mcdonald (1990) and notes that there are two distinct populations in a small, rural, or remote community. "The first consists of people who are insiders: that is, they were born into the community or are long-term residents of the area (p. 57). They are aware of the history, values, norms and
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia morals, and the social and behavioural expectations of their particular community. The second group is made up of people who are termed “outsiders”. They are people who are born and raised outside of the area and have no historical connection to people in the area. They are seen as temporary residents.

Doctors, members of the RCMP and social workers most often fit within this category. Professionals new to a remote northern community are not aware of the community norms, expectations and patterns of the community and often face the challenge of establishing trust with community members as more often than not; these professionals do not remain in the community long term. These temporary residents do not have the knowledge of the expected behaviours and unwritten social rules that make up the fabric of the community, and often break them (Aukema, 2005). For example, several years ago, I was working in child protection with a social worker who was new to social work, new to working with aboriginal communities and new to living in a remote northern community. She was doing an investigation on a family and when she went to do a home visit, she was very critical of the fact that there was little food in the cupboards and accused the parent of not appropriately feeding the kids. I entered the conversation as it was getting heated and asked the parent whether they had any other food in the home. The parent then gladly showed us the many jars of traditional foods they had and lead us to the freezer in the carport that was also filled with fish and other traditional First Nation foods and berries. I use this example as it reminded me of the fact that unless you are familiar with the community norms and practices within which you work, it can
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia be very difficult to ever feel as though you are fully engaged in a community. This setting multiplies the level of isolation a new professional can experience.

Another level of isolation that a professional can face is in the form of personal support for themselves. It is very difficult to be a client and colleague of another professional in the community. One of the participants in this study shared:

"I feel really isolated in my position, I have the best counselors in the community that work for me but I can’t disclose with them because that would be disclosing about other staff and that would be highly unethical and is just not a place that I would be willing to even consider going."

**Challenges in remote northern practice**

As previously mentioned, isolation and lack of resources are characteristics of working in a remote, northern community, however, they are not the only challenges. Boundaries, ethics, multiple roles, confidentiality, travel, community norms, lack of ongoing professional development, and worker visibility significantly impact a social worker’s practice and personal life. Setting personal and professional boundaries is exceedingly more difficult in small communities than larger metropolitan areas.

Social workers, in northern communities are very visible in the communities they serve. In larger centers, a social worker can go to work then go home without thinking about running into a client at the local grocery store, sporting event, child’s school, or even the local liquor store picking up a bottle of wine. This however, is the reality of working in the north. Pugh, as cited in Schmidt, notes that social
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia workers in small communities are highly visible, and this lack of anonymity means that it is difficult to keep a low profile (Schmidt, 2009a). He continues, community members are in a position to scrutinize and draw conclusions about the social worker’s character and behavior (Schmidt, 2009a).

Being highly visible allows for continual assessment by community members. Personally, I have examples where I knew I was being watched by those around me, particularly when it came to how I was parenting and disciplining my children when they were having tantrums in public. In fact, in one circumstance, one of the mothers I was working with, when I was in child protection, was witness to my son becoming hysterical because I would not buy him what he asked for while at a local store. I was not aware that she was around, but when we were discussing parenting and appropriate ways of dealing with tantrums, she brought up that scenario and commented on how I can talk the talk, but certainly could not control my own children. If I lived in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, or any other larger centre, I would have never felt like I had to justify how I responded in my personal life during a conversation with a client as it simply would not come up unless I chose to disclose the information. Personal credibility is always being questioned when you live a ‘fish bowl’. The personal is professional in northern social work practice, and workers must be prepared to be called to account for aspects of their life that would not even be a consideration in an urban environment (Schmidt, 2005).

Another personal example of this public scrutiny is the night the social workers from the office decided to go and celebrate one of their colleagues’ birthdays at the local [and only] pub. When we arrived, you could almost hear the
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chatter between the folks present, we could definitely feel the stares. We sat in a round booth at the back of the pub, where we thought we would be less visible. Earlier that morning, I spent a great deal of time with a mother who had just been reunited with her children. She had worked diligently on her sobriety, parenting courses, and on stabilizing her home. She was very successful and I was very pleased to have been able to see her achieve her goals. One of the conditions for the return of her children was that she refrains from the use of alcohol and maintain sobriety. This same evening, she was out ‘celebrating’ the return of her children and she was consuming a vast amount of alcohol. I remember feeling so disappointed in what I was witnessing, that I left. At home I remember feeling really upset, emotional, and then embarrassed that I myself, was in an alcohol drinking establishment. Had I lived in the city, or even a larger centre, it would have been highly unlikely that I would have been faced with such a dilemma/conflict. This ultimately led to the personal decision to no longer make myself visible in public venues such as the local pub. Evidence in the literature shows that conflict is “experienced intensely at the level of daily life for social workers in northern communities (Zapf, 1993, p.696)”.

In her thesis, *Vicarious traumatization: The dangers of the unknown* (2010), graduate student, Sheri Bishop discussed the findings of her research as they related to the northern context. One particular quote she used that derived from her interviews, clearly exemplified the intricacies of northern practice:

I was in Subway a couple of months ago and it was late at night but it was fairly full, about three quarters full. I knew something about everyone who was sitting in there absolutely everyone. There was a fellow in there with a
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...they had just gotten together recently, I had seen the woman's children for years around something that had happened in her family so there's all of that history. The fellow, I had seen a young girl that he had allegedly abused, it was heading in to court and that girl became so stressed that she actually killed herself and so here he is sitting with another client with young girls...and I see that whole dynamic ~ Tracy, Transition House worker.

Delaney and Brownlee (1995) sum up the realities of northern practice by listing the following characteristics;

- Large geography, low population,
- Lack of societal resources,
- Single or dual industry employment,
- Formal and informal government structures,
- Rich mixture of ethnic groups,
- Churches playing a major community role,
- Smaller scale of living with close family and Community ties,
- Demand for high value consensus, loyalty and high behavior conformity.

(Delaney & Brownlee, 1995, pp. 46-47)

These aforementioned characteristics contribute to ethical dilemmas that face northern social workers.

Additionally, Delaney and Brownlee (1995) succinctly sum up six specific examples of ethical issues that are common in northern practice;

- Issues stemming from limited supervision and limited collegial feedback
- Issues stemming from practicing beyond competence
- Issues stemming from dual relationships
- Issues stemming from having too much information
- Issues stemming from personal drift
- Issues stemming from community adaptation

(Delaney & Brownlee, 1995, pp. 47-51)
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Being continuously aware and conscious about personal bias, world views, and interests is a standard of practice in northern practice. A strong and effective supervisor can be the key component so that social workers are properly suited to appropriately deal with ethical situations as they arise.

Having multiple roles or dual relationships with clients is a reality of northern social work practice, as they are almost impossible to avoid and can present very serious challenges. Ethically, this is one of the most challenging yet critical pieces for a social worker in a remote rural northern community to manage. A dual relationship is generally regarded as any relationship that exists in addition to the professional helping relationship (Schmidt, 2008). Schmidt (2008) continues, the term multiple relationships refer to the same thing although it acknowledges that there may be more than one type of relationship in addition to the professional helping relationship (p.10). It is highly unlikely and uncommon for urban social workers to choose to live in a community or neighbourhood as the clients they serve, however, in remote rural communities, there is very limited control over this. This concept explains the fact that people who share the same community space but who have a worker-service relationship, are also likely to encounter one another in settings involving other types of relationships (Turbett, 2010). Ethical dilemmas and dual roles are almost unavoidable within the realm of northern practice. In larger centers, a social worker can go to work, and then return back to their part of the city to resume their personal life. In rural, remote, northern communities, this is almost impossible. It is not uncommon to find your client serving you at the local grocery store, or even at the parent-teacher evenings at your child's school. For
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some social workers in remote communities, it can involve the agency dealing with
their own family members as service users (Turbett, 2010).

There are governing bodies of various professions that clearly define
dual/multiple relationships. The American Psychological Association 2010 edition
identifies 10 ethical standards that all registered and practicing Psychologists must
adhere to. Ethical standard number three (3) is Human Relations. Within this
standard, section 3.05 Multiple Relationships reads:

(a) A multiple relationship occurs when a psychologist is in a professional
role with a person and (1) at the same time is in another role with the same
person, (2) at the same time is in a relationship with a person closely
associated with or related to the person with whom the psychologist has the
professional relationship, or (3) promises to enter into another relationship in
the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to
the person. (APA, 2010, p. 6).

Principle 1 of the British Columbia College of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics
and Standards of Practice (2009, p.9) reads:

1.8 Social workers avoid conflicts of interest and/or dual relationships with
clients or former clients.

While the footnote attached to the statement reads:

“Dual relationship” is defined as a situation in which the social worker, in
addition to her/his professional relationship, has one or more other
relationships with the client, regardless of whether this occurs prior to, during,
or following the provision of professional services. A dual relationship does
not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest; however, where dual
relationships exist, there is a strong potential for conflict of interest and there
may be an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Relationships beyond the
professional one include, but are not limited to, those in which the social
worker receives a service from the client, the social worker has a personal,
familial or business relationship with the client, or the social worker provides
therapy to students, employees or supervisees. Social workers embark on an
evaluation of whether a dual relationship might impair professional judgment
or increase the risk of exploitation or harm to clients. (BCCSW, 2009. p.13).
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

While it is important and critical to professions to have ethical guidelines and standards, it remains difficult to not engage in multiple relationships with clients in remote, rural communities. It becomes especially important for a social worker in a small, rural, remote northern community to always be self-aware and continually reflect on their own practice to ensure adherence to the professional guidelines that govern our profession.

**Supervision**

The Social Work Dictionary defines supervision as an "administrative and educational process used extensively in social agencies to help social workers further develop and refine their skills, enhance staff morale and provide quality assurance for the clients" (Barker, 1999, p. 473). With respect to supervision in social work, Kadushin and Harkness (1992, 2002) divide it into three basic functions or components: administrative, educative, and supportive.

Administratively, supervisors often assign cases to the most appropriate social worker, discuss the assessment and intervention plan, and review the social worker's ongoing contact with the client (Barker, 1999, p. 473). The supervisor is the bridge between the frontline workers and management. As an administrator, the supervisor has responsibility for agency management, and specific, clearly defined administrative–managerial functions are assigned – which become the essence of administrative supervision (Kadushin, 1992, p. 46). Kadushin (1992) identifies several responsibilities of administrative supervision; staff recruitment and selection, inducting and placing the worker, work planning, work delegation,
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating work, coordinating work, the communication function, the supervisor as an advocate, the supervisor as administrative buffer, and the supervisor as change agent (p.46). The administrative function focuses heavily on the human resource element of supervision. In implementing her administrative responsibilities and functions, the supervisor organizes the work place, agency facilities, and human resources to achieve agency administration objectives in a way which qualitatively and quantitatively, is in accordance to agency policies and procedures (Kadushin, 1992, p.77).

Educational supervision is a teaching and learning process in which there are two partners (Tsui, 2005, p. 80). Tsui (2005) identifies that the focus of educational supervision is on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of direct guidance. Feedback is an important part of supervision as within the educational supervisory model, the supervisor acts as the resource person. Administrative supervision focuses on what the frontline workers should be. Educational supervision focuses on what the frontline workers are (Tsui, 2005, p.80).

Kadushin (1992) describes educational supervision as being concerned with teaching the worker what he needs to know in order to do his job and helping him to learn it (p.135). Studies of functions that supervisors identified as those they are performing included such educational activities as “teaching,” “facilitating learning,” “training,” “sharing experience and knowledge,” “informing,” “clarifying,” “guiding,” “helping workers find solutions,” “enhancing professional growth,” “advising,” “suggesting,” and helping workers solve problems (Kadushin, 1992, p.135). An
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia, educational supervisor focuses on the teaching of the skills and attitudes necessary for the adequate performance of clinical social work.

Educational supervision supplements in-service training by individualizing general learning in application to the specific performance of the individual worker (Kadushin, 1992, p.136). This process facilitates the overall development of skill in the staff person's area of expertise and interest. Supervisors see their educational responsibilities as a mechanism and process for developing the staff (Tsui, 2005, p.77). Educational supervision is especially important in northern practice as there are very few opportunities for ongoing professional development as the distance between educational opportunities and those in the north, make it far too expensive to be accessible. The cost factor limits northern workers from attending formal professional development opportunities on a regular basis. Northern and rural social workers must be sufficiently motivated to continue their professional development without external prodding, as would normally occur when southern supervisors, peers, and related professionals provide ideas, feedback, excitement, and suggestions for continued professional growth (Delaney & Brownlee, 2009, p.121). This demonstrates the importance of educational supervision for northern social workers.

Another function of supervision in the profession of social work is supportive supervision. Social work is considered a high-risk profession in terms of stress and burnout because of the high level of demands on various stakeholders (Tsui, 2005, p.83). Alleviating stress for workers is the role of the supervisor, and a benefit of the supportive style of supervision. The ultimate objective of this component of
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia supervision is the same as the objective of administrative and educational supervision – to enable workers, and the agency through the workers, to offer the client the most effective and efficient service (Kadushin, 1992, p.224).

Administrative supervision provides the organizational structure and access to agency resources that facilitate the worker’s job; educational supervision provides the knowledge and skills required for doing the job; supportive supervision provides the psychological and interpersonal context that enables the worker to mobilize the emotional energy needed to mobilize the emotional energy needed for effective job performance (Kadushin, 1992, p.227). Supportive supervision is primarily concerned with increasing effectiveness of the worker through decreasing stress that interferes with performance, and increasing motivation and intensifying commitment that enhances performance (Kadushin, 1992, p.228).

Citing a sample survey of 800 social workers, conducted by Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness in 1989, Tsui (2005) states that the instrumental support and informational support provided by a supervisor may reduce psychological stress and, in turn, relieve burnout and job dissatisfaction of frontline social workers (p.81).

Schmidt (2009b) identifies five themes in the responses gathered during the interviewing of 22 social work supervisors in Alberta and northern British Columbia, that describe the complexities of northern supervision;

- theme one suggests that the opportunity to become a supervisor may happen more rapidly in northern social work practice
- theme two pertains to issues that stem from difficulty in recruitment and retention of social work staff
- theme three is the opportunity for growth and change
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- theme four is the need to have knowledge about aboriginal people and culture
- theme five is the need to be a creative generalist

(Schmidt, 2009b)

Although not specific to Northwestern British Columbia, the themes listed above very adequately represent my own personal experience.

Supervision ensures that clinical (supervision) is conducted in a competent manner in which ethical standards, legal prescriptions, and professional practices are used to promote and protect the welfare of the client, the profession and society at large (Falender, 2004). In the Handbook for Clinical Social Work Supervision, Carlton Munson defines clinical supervision as the following:

Clinical supervision is an interactional process in which a supervisor has been assigned or designated to assist in and direct the practice of supervisees in the areas of teaching, administration, and helping. The supervisees are graduates of accredited schools of social work who are engaged in practice that assists people to overcome physical, financial, social, or psychological disruptions in functioning through individual, group, or family intervention methods (2002).

For the purpose of clarity, this research will not focus on the clinical supervision of social workers in the north, rather will focus on the experiences and challenges that social work supervisor’s face.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research

As this research is exploratory in nature, qualitative research methodology was a natural fit as it allowed for the collection of data via interviews and discussion with the participants. Neuman (2000) defines qualitative data as, “information in the form of words, pictures, sounds, visual images, or objects” (p. 517).

Qualitative research is used in many forms of social sciences. In a qualitative study, the activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity threats are usually going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others (Maxwell, 1998, p. 70).

Qualitative information involves the non-numerical examination of phenomena, using words instead of numbers, and focuses on the underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Marlow, 2005). Qualitative analysis allows the researcher to have the flexibility to do this, all the while remaining connected to the initial research topic.

The exploratory component of this research is important as it intends to explore a particular set of challenges within a geographical location that has little literature attached to it. This strategy is undertaken when little is known about the topic under study (Marlow, 2005). Exploratory research (sometimes called formulative research) aims to gain familiarity with or to achieve new insights into phenomenon, often in order to formulate a more precise research question or to
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia develop hypotheses (Palys, 2003). Exploratory research relies on naturalistic inquiry, the collection of qualitative data, and inductive analysis because sufficient information is not available to permit the use of quantitative measures and experimental designs (Patton, 1987, p.37).

I chose these methods as I believe they complement the purpose of this research. It allowed me, as the researcher, to explore the challenges faced by social work supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia, by having the participants share their experiences. By sharing their stories, the participants have added value to the research as their words become the data which you will see supports my findings. I have tried to capture the feelings and emotions as accurately as possible in an attempt to relay the information as was shared with me. Personally, I believe that the ability to present research findings where the focus is on words and meanings instead of numbers, allows for a deeper connection between researcher and participant. This connection is the vehicle that facilitated the meaningful dialogue that occurred during the interview stage.

**Thematic Analysis**

Thematic Analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are casually related; or something in between these two forms (Boyatzis, 1998). Boyatzis (1998) “states, a theme is a pattern found in the information that at a minimum describes and organizes the possible observations, and at a maximum,
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (p.4). Boyatzis identifies four stages throughout the thematic analysis process;

1. Sensing themes - that is, recognizing the codable moment
2. Doing it reliably - recognizing the codable moment and doing so consistently
3. Developing Codes
4. Interpreting the information and themes in the context of a theory or conceptual framework - that is, contributing to the development of knowledge (1998, p.5)

Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). Braun and Clarke (2006) continue by stating, what is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions and recognize them as decisions (p.80). Thematic analysis can employ two methods of interpretation: essentialist/realist or constructionist. Essential/realist reports experiences, meanings and the reality of the participants, while constructionist method examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within a society (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.81). I elected to use the essential or realist method to interpret the data received from the interviews. With an essential/realist approach, you can theorize motivations, experience and meaning in a straight-forward way, because a simple, largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning and experience and language (language reflects and enables us to articulate meaning and experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I wanted to focus on the individual
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia experience of the participants not the social constructs within which they work and live.

**Research Method and Design**

**Participants**

Purposive sampling, as defined by Neuman (2000) is a type of nonrandom sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult to reach population (p.517). As the target participant group for my research was very specific to social work supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia, I employed the practice of purposive sampling in order to identify participants. Snowball sampling became a natural process of participant recruitment. Although I did not request participants to refer other potential participants in my direction, three of the five participants did so, on their own initiative. Snowball sampling involves identifying some members of the population and then having those individuals contact others in the population (Marlow, 2005, p.147).

In total, five individuals participated in this research, all of whom are supervisors of social workers in Northwestern British Columbia. Originally, In order to have been selected for participation in this research, each participant must:

1. Be a graduate from an accredited post-secondary institution with a minimum of a four-year bachelor degree
2. Be currently working in a supervisory capacity as a social worker
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

3. Be living and working in one of the communities along highway 16 and/or highway 37 south as defined by this research: Prince Rupert, Terrace, Kitimat, Hazelton, and/or Smithers, British Columbia

4. Be over the age of nineteen (19)

As a result of the remote nature of the geographical area, one of the participants, that did not meet the criteria of formalized education, was selected to participate in this research. This participant was viewed as having a significant combination of education and many years of experience in my research area, thus this person was chosen. In all, five individuals agreed to participate: four females and one male.

Permission was received by the provincial Risk Management division of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, allowing research to be conducted with MCFD workers, however, there were none that participated in this research. All of the participants are representatives of a broad range of non-profit organizations throughout the prescribed region.

Procedure

Initial contact

As I have worked and lived in this area for quite some time, I knew of a few people that would fit my participant criteria. I sent emails to those that I already had an existing working relationship with, informing them of my intended research and my invitation to have them be a participant. In order to provide a full and clear picture of the research and my aim as the researcher, I included an electronic copy
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia of my approved thesis proposal for review. For the participants that I did not already have an established rapport with and those that were referred to me, I contacted them via telephone first, then followed up with an email that also included the electronic copy of my approved thesis proposal.

Initially, I anticipated that having an existing working relationship with many of the professionals in the area would facilitate the recruitment process. As the recruitment process went on, I began to discover that one of the most significant challenges of northern practice, the issue of multiple roles, was affecting my ability to recruit participants. Upon initial discussions, potential participants seemed eager and willing to help, however, several decided to not continue as they were not comfortable doing so knowing we would continue to have work related interactions after they participated in this research.

In all, ten individuals expressed interest in participating. Emails and telephone calls were made to potential participants across the region. Three decided for personal reasons that they could not participate and two, I never heard back from again, despite several attempts, therefore leaving me with the five participants. Of the five participants, only two were individuals with whom I had an already established working relationship. Interestingly, one of the reasons given by two of the potential participants to not participate, was due to what they felt would be lack of anonymity in a small town. Despite personal attempts at re-assuring them that all effort would be made to ensure confidentiality, they chose to not participate.
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Data collection methods

Data collection took place during the months of September to November 2012. I used two methods of collecting data from the participants: a demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The demographic questionnaire was completed by the participant during our initial meeting.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire can be used in a couple of ways. It may be a list of questions given to the participant who will then record their answer in writing and return back to the researcher, or it can serve as the guide for the questions a researcher verbally asks the participants while recording their answers. For the purposes of this research, I developed a questionnaire to gathering demographic information about each participant (Appendix A), that was given to each participant for them to complete. The questionnaire consisted of six multiple choice questions and one question relating directly to the organization that employs them. The questionnaire was not handed out to each participant until after the participant Information and Consent Form (Appendix B) was reviewed and all questions about the research were answered and the participant was ready to proceed.

Interviews

The primary source of data collection was individual interviews. Kvale (1996) states that the research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation (p.5). Kvale continues by defining one form of research interview – a semi-structured life world interview and defines it as an interview
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon (p. 6). The interview, although consisting of mere conversation, was not entirely unstructured. I maintained control of the conversation by preparing a list of interview questions, divided into three sections (Appendix C). However, as the conversation evolved, I did use prompts for clarification of the information being shared. An important element of the interview process was to not ask leading questions, and to be very cognizant of personal biases when looking for answers. I noticed a couple times throughout some of the interviews, I used the words, “I think” and quickly corrected myself. Being present during this stage of the data collection is critical in order to keep one’s own biases from directing the interview.

The initial phase of the interview focused on current employment, followed by some questions regarding self-care, and ending with questions regarding recommendations for change. As mentioned earlier, I already had an existing working relationship with two of the participants, so it was very important for me, in the researcher role to keep the interviews on track and ensure the dialogue was only related to the research. I was diligent in making sure that all five interviews were conducted in the same manner and with the same level of interaction.

Patton (1987) identifies three approaches to qualitative interviewing. The three approaches involve different types of preparation, conceptualization, and instrumentation (Patton, 1987, p.109). The three different types being the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardized open ended interview. The informal conversational interview relies
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction, typically an interview that occurs as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork (Patton, 1987, p.110). Patton (1987) describes the interview guide as a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview and essentially provides topics or subject areas about which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject (p.111). Finally, the standardized open-ended interview consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged for the purposes of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words (Patton, 1987, p.111).

The standardized open-ended interviews that were conducted ranged from one hour and fifteen minutes, to two hours and a half. All interviews were audio recorded and then later transcribed by a third party transcriber. The third party transcriber hired to do this work, committed to maintaining confidentiality and signed the Transcriber Agreement of Confidentiality (Appendix D). Initially, my intention was to transcribe each interview myself. However, this was not possible for reasons that prevented me from doing so. I do not feel this affected the analysis of data in any way. I spent many hours reviewing the transcripts and listening to sections of the interviews when I was not sure of the tone or intent of a comment as it was written.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

The individual interviews were conducted in locations that were mutually agreed upon and where the participants were comfortable confidentiality would be maintained.

**Ethical considerations**

Prior to any research being started, time and dedication must be given to following the proper ethical protocols as ethical considerations are a critical piece in the research process. On July 19th, 2012 the University of Northern British Columbia's Research Ethics Board, approved my research proposal (Appendix E), granting me permission to proceed with the research.

All of the participants that participated in this research did so willingly. They were informed that participation in this research was entirely voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw from the research at any time. All of the participants were over nineteen years of age and of sound mind to provide informed consent. None of the participants were harmed throughout this process and no deception or compensation was used. All of the data; transcribed interviews, demographical questionnaire, my own researcher’s notes, and audio recordings of the interviews were kept and continue to be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. All information stored on my computer has been password protected. The information will be kept for one year after successful thesis defense. After one year, I will personally destroy all written and transcribed material. All computerized files and audio recordings will be erased.
Confidentiality was very important to the majority of my participants. For those that did agree to participate, any identifiable information was changed or altered to protect their identity, including being referred to as participant 1, participant 2, participant 3, participant 4, and participant 5.

**Methodological Integrity**

**Credibility**

For the qualitative researcher, reality is based on people's definitions of it, rather than on something externally present (Marlow, 2005). Marlow (2005) continues, the subjective experience is what needs to be studied, rather than the objective one. Since reality is perceived as interactive and constructed, the subject's role in the research process is more active (Marlow, 2005). Qualitative research is more subject-driven while quantitative research is researcher-driven. Regardless of the research type, establishing credibility is critical to any piece of research. All well written research must undergo a level of testing to ensure that the research is credible. For the purposes of establishing credibility in this research, the following measures were taken: member validation, reflexivity, and peer review.

**Member validation**

Member validation is used to demonstrate the authenticity and trustworthiness of research by having the participants read and confirm the researcher's findings. After reading the transcripts and listening to each interview twice, a list of initial themes was then devised. Each participant was then contacted via email asking them to review their transcript of the interview as well as the initial
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia themes I identified to ensure that my analysis of the information they shared was a correct reflection. Throughout the actual interviews, I was also very conscious about checking in with the members and asking for clarification to ensure that I in fact was capturing what they intended. Four out of the five participants in this research responded to my request. The four that responded agreed with the initial themes as presented.

Peer review

Peer review is a common practice for researchers to engage in when looking to have their research published in scholarly journal articles. Researchers are happy to make their research available to their peers (i.e., other scientists and researchers) through scholarly journals (Neuman, 2000, p.10). Although this research was not reviewed by an established researcher or scientist, a review of a set of transcripts and my identified themes was conducted by a Masters level professional from my place of work. My colleague, who holds a Masters in Education, reviewed the transcripts and the initial themes that I identified. Upon completion of her review, she confirmed that my themes were an accurate representation of the information in the transcript and offered some additional insight as to some potential linkages between themes. For the purposes of clarity, I want to express that the copy she received to review had all of the identifying information removed from it, prior to her receiving a copy. All identifying information was blacked out and then photocopied once again. Confidentiality of the participants was and continues to be of utmost importance to this researcher.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a critical part of qualitative inquiry. As cited in Bishop (2010), Dowling identifies that researchers should engage in continuous self-critique and self-appraisal at every stage of the research process; “it involves being aware in the moment of what is influencing the researcher’s internal and external responses while simultaneously being aware of the researcher’s relationship to the research topic and the participant”. In order to help me ensure that I was continually self-reflecting, I kept journals of the times when I felt most challenged to not allow my own experiences guide the direction of the discussions with participants.

Reflexivity requires a critical attitude towards data, and recognition of the influence on the research of such factors as the location of the setting, the sensitivity of the topic, power relations in the field and the nature of the social interaction between researcher and researched (Brewer, 2003). Throughout the interview process, I was very aware of my choice of words. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, I had to correct myself a few times when probing for more information so as to not start off a statement with the words, “I think”.

The Northwest region of BC is vast in its geography, however, the Social Work community is not as large, and therefore, it was realistic to expect that I may already know my potential participants in one capacity or another. This added another level to the importance of reflexivity and ensuring that the conversations being had were directly related to the research.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics

Despite the fact that there were only five participants in this research, it is important to note the information gathered from the demographical questionnaire. Descriptive statistics describe numerical data (Neuman, 2000, p.317). The demographical questionnaire provided information on the participants that was not garnered during the interview process and allowed for this researcher to better understand the participants in the study.

In regards to my research and thesis, I used an inductive approach. As mentioned earlier, journal writing helped me in terms of my own experiences and possible bias related to this topic. Although I did enter in to an interview with a pre-determined set of questions, I did not have a pre-determined set of themes already established or determined. Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytical preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.83).

Establishing themes

I began the process of establishing themes by reading the entire transcript of each participant interview straight through without stopping to make notes or comments. On the second read through of each transcript, I began to make notes along the margins and colour-coded words that emerged repeatedly. When unsure of the tone or context of how something was transcribed, I listened to sections of the audio interviews again. During the third read of the transcripts, I began to identify
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia words that appeared in all five transcripts and created a highlighted list of those common words. This entire process allowed me to narrow down and group the themes that ultimately lead to the development of the final themes and sub-themes. The fourth review of the transcripts gave me the opportunity to confirm whether I missed any additional themes.

After repeated revision and review, the four overarching themes that emerged were:

- Theme 1 – issues relating to recruitment and retention challenges,
- Theme 2 – issues specific to working and living in northwestern British Columbia,
- Theme 3 – issues regarding finances and appropriate funding, and
- Theme 4 – issues regarding retirement, finding the right replacement and some recommendations
Chapter 4

Research Findings

In this Chapter I will discuss my findings beginning with demographical information, followed by a section on qualitative analysis and a detailed section on the four main themes identified by the research. These four themes will be further broken down into important sub-themes that emerged throughout the research and will be used to understand the challenges faced by social work supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia.

Demographical Information

Ten potential participants were contacted, three decided not to participate, five agreed to participate and two did not respond to the invitation at all. Therefore, this research is based on the interviews with five participants.

Of the five participants, four (80%) were long term residents of the Northwest, while one (20%) had been living in the area for less than five years. The participant selection criteria required that each participant have a minimum of a four year bachelor degree from an accredited post-secondary institution. Four (80%) of the participants met this criteria, while one (20%) did not. For the purpose of this research, that is qualitative and exploratory, one of the participants not having a formalized credential did not influence the research in any way. On the contrary, it confirmed one of the realities of remote northern practice; that employees tend to advance faster when working in remote northern communities. The one participant who did not meet the criteria was still invited to participate as I felt their years of
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia experience in the field of social work and social work supervision, would add richness and greater depth to the overall research.

The data gathered by the demographic questionnaire is important to this research as it helps to identify the background of the participants and how they fit within this research.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Table 1

*Participant Demographics Questionnaire (n=5)*

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Exercising the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

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Due to the small size of the participant group, the demographic data collected was very simple to analyze. One section that requires additional explanation is in the section of Cultural Identity. Although three of the five participants are non-First Nation/Aboriginal/Inuit/Metis, two identified themselves as such and one elected the 'other' category. This participant had strong views of identifying her own cultural heritage and her immigrant family experience, therefore, she chose to select 'other' and identify herself as being of European descent.

The organizations that employ the participants in this research, as described above, are all non-profit organizations, however, the organizations differed greatly in the services they provide, size, client population served, and the level of education of their employees. The main similarity of the organizations was the varying level of education that their employees have. The organizations have employees that range in education from high school graduation, to an enrolled doctoral student. The majority of the education level, however, was at the para-professional level, social service work diploma, with some employees having completed an undergraduate degree. The size of the organizations ranged from three employees, excluding the participant, to 21 employees, excluding the participant.

Qualitative Analysis

Data was gathered through individual interviews with five participants that currently work as supervisors of social workers in Northwestern British Columbia. The data gathered was then analyzed using thematic analysis. During the initial stage of analysis, there were many themes that emerged, upon extensive review,
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the themes were narrowed down to four overarching themes with a set of sub-themes within each.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Recruitment and Retention Challenges</td>
<td>Competing with the boom</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The training cycle</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of access to professional development</td>
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<td>2. A northern Context</td>
<td>Benefits of small communities</td>
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<td>Anonymity</td>
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<td>Managing community expectations</td>
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<td>3. Budget Implications</td>
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<td>Inequitable funding calculations</td>
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<td>4. For future consideration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Success planning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
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Recruitment and Retention Challenges

The first theme, recruitment and retention challenges, has four sub themes: Competing with the Boom, The Training Cycle, Isolation, and Lack of Access to Professional Development.

**Competing with the boom**

For the first time in well over a decade, the Northwest Region is experiencing a resurgence of employment options. People are working, and making good money doing so. One might think that this is good for the region and good for the
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia economy, but from a social services perspective, the boom brings with it various challenges.

The notion of an abundance of work in the region has brought many new residents to the area, many of whom have arrived with false hopes of employment. One participant describes the situation affecting the agency she runs,

Then we've also seen a lot of people, it's hard to describe them, like they're people that I describe that come in with the hope of employment ... that have been sent here by other communities, but they are certainly high, high needs individuals or families. So, we are seeing high, high needs; we're seeing a lot from Eastern Canada. So, I don't know what the message was out there in terms of come to (community name), there is jobs or come to the Northwest, there is jobs. We deal with their families and that, but a lot of these individuals need supported employment or mentored employment or training first, you know?

The challenges of competing with a booming economy are two-fold. Not only is there an increased challenge to keep up with the demand on agencies and organizations, there is an increased strain on being able to retain qualified and capable employees who can earn a substantially higher wage elsewhere.

Participant 2 adds:

We start with entry level, like you know, you don't have to have a bachelor or masters degree to come and work at (organization name), so a lot of that's to do with personality and beliefs and attitudes and you know, where you are yourself and then you can do the training from there. So the pool was always big enough to hire from, but now with the boom going on in the community those are now the labourers in all the big paying jobs and making double what they can make at (organization name). It's become really hard.

Another participant adds:

We've struggled in the last couple of months because most of our young men, some of which we were trying to bribe to stay with us by providing education have gone to much higher paying jobs than what we can ever do. And yet, you know, when you talk to them their real heart and motivation is
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working with people, but you know they can make much better money doing paving outside, you know, stuff like that.

One participant shared:

Having lived here for forty-plus years and knowing almost everybody and the ones I don’t know as community members, I am related to, so your hiring pool is small. You know everybody and everybody’s families and their aunties and uncles and it’s hard, I don’t know, hard to not let that be a bias in your decisions.

**The training cycle**

Training a new employee can be a daunting task for any supervisor. The participants in this research all made reference to spending time training a new employee to both the organization and their new role, as well as to the community and region, only to have them leave a short time later. One participant shares:

It takes its toll, that’s for sure; turnover. You invest time, resources and a lot of personal energy, to uh, have to start all over again within a really short time. The shortest time a worker stayed with the organization after completing an intensive orientation was three months.

Unless a new worker is originally from this geographical area, it becomes increasingly more challenging to recruit long-term staff. One of the participants speaks to her experience as a worker new to the area:

Family is important to me and I don’t have any here. There are lots of Aboriginals but just because they are Indian too doesn’t mean that I can easily fit in with people. It’s hard. I have looked at going home many times, but there really aren’t any jobs like the one I have now, so I stay. But I am looking.

Another participant add:

I have been in a few different supervisory roles in the last 10 years and have supervised several new workers. I have even supervised a couple of practicum students. Those that are from the area tend to stick around, those,
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from uh, from another area, especially the city, leave. They leave as soon as they can.

Although familiar with the cycle of training new staff and having them leave for other work, one participant stated that she felt her organization was a stable workplace, with little turn over:

Most of our staff are from (name of community), ya and they've come back and they want to be here and are raising their families here and stuff like that. Ya, when I look at my, our staff demographics, ya, most of the people are local. They grew up here and came back type of thing.

It is important to note that the statement made by the participant around the stability of her employees, supports the claims made by the previous statements in relation to the fact the staff that are new to the area, tend to not stay.

Isolation

Social work in remote and geographically isolated communities carries with it a unique set of challenges when it comes to the retention and recruitment of staff. Throughout this research, two separate notions of isolation were discussed during the interviews: personal isolation and professional isolation.

One participant shared:

Hard to keep staff, especially those that didn't grow up in this area or in a small town period. They get affected by weather, lack of night life and most significantly, lack of private life. If they are single, there really is nowhere to meet any one – hard to go to the one and only pub in town to meet someone, like romantically when everyone knows what you do for a living.

Another participant spoke of how working in an isolated community, with limited professionals makes it difficult to keep a qualified professional:
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This year we have had three key people leave. Our (title of professional) was only with us for a year and it took us a long time to recruit in the first place and a lot of her reason for moving was family in the Okanagan. She settled in not badly in the community, but it is hard to come into a small community so it wasn’t quite the right fit for her, so that one is a struggle area there.

Professional isolation is a true barrier for the retention of staff. When new graduates move to small communities to begin their professional careers, there are often challenges; challenges that can be exclusive to small, isolated rural communities. Many participants spoke of the need to be a generalist in practice as you tend to become all things to all people in a small community and for some, that is a challenge that is accepted, and with others, it is not.

The other challenge is probably self-confidence because you are often the sole practitioner, and you have to just follow your academic knowledge, your knowledge. But you have to also follow your intuition, your gut, you are doing it sometimes differently that what might have been in the textbook, type of stuff. That’s probably the biggest challenge when you work alone, or work further away from some of the centers, bigger centers, and stuff like that, that I’ve run in to.

One participant spoke to the pressure that you can feel when being seen as the only professional social worker in the community:

Anonymity is tough for sure, but also workwise, the fact that there are not a lot of services for everyone that needs it so you kind of become viewed as someone who has all the answers. That’s a lot of pressure – when people think you can help everyone and really, you can’t. I hate saying no to people, and always have, but it would be worse to think you know it all and really mess things up and believe me, it’s happened.

Another participant echoed some retention challenges:
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We hire new grads, like me, I can easily fall in to this category, from down south and most of us don't make it because of how isolated it is here and we don't come prepared with the idea of not having any privacy. But, we invest the very limited funds we have in to them and then a few months later, they leave. I almost left, several times!

Not only is professional and personal isolation a barrier to recruiting and retaining qualified workers, but physical geography is as well. One participant succinctly described this during our interview:

There isn't 24/7 transportation out of the community and we are right at the end of the line, there is no other road. One road out. And often it is closed because of weather conditions. If we aren't snowed in we can get people back and forth. To get to a specialized doctor often means Prince George, hundreds of kilometers away. Other challenges specific, maybe people relate to it and maybe they don't, it's a tiny community, we can walk anywhere, however, it's not safe to. And that's not because it's a place of crime, it's a little town in a country and there's lots of wild animals. So, on a walk to work any day you can expect to walk into black bears, grizzly bears, deer, the cat varieties, you know the bobcats and whatnot, so, you know. You know, people do walk around but usually pack a can of bear spray or something with you just to be safe.

One of the participants I interviewed spoke to a different level of isolation that may not necessarily be felt by all front line workers:

I feel really isolated in my position. So you know, I have maybe two people outside the agency and that are not related to me, given that majority of the people in the community that I'm related to. Two that I feel safe, and that are... that know me and my job well enough that I can debrief with them and know that it's a safe place to do it. But they are not always available when I need them, right?

Isolation covers both the feeling of being geographically isolated but also both professionally and personally. The participant interviews demonstrated
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia challenges with respect to recruitment and retention of workers that is typically only experienced in remote communities, as well as the direct impact isolation has on them personally.

**Lack of access to professional development**

Lack of ongoing professional development is a significant barrier for keeping staff up-to-date and connected with others in the same field throughout the province. The major challenge to accessing professional development is the cost of travel to have staff attend events in the lower mainland, where most of the training and conferences are held:

So, my budget is for the year for 18 staff, is for professional development is $12 000 all together. That’s not even $1000 per person and that does not include myself and my assistant, so two admin people. There is very rare opportunity within our region, within driving distance of the day to go for training. So I would say maybe once or twice a year something comes up that is anywhere from a half day to at the very most, two days of training in the region that I can send more staff to right? So, I try to send half the staff so the other half can cover the shifts in (organization name). So there’s that. The rest of the training is all sometimes in Prince George which costs exactly the same amount for us to get staff to as the lower mainland. So, it’s about 12 to15 hundred dollars per staff to go when you include flight, accommodation, registration, meals, and transport back and forth from airports to get to their venues.

Another participant echoed the challenges of accessing on going education and professional development opportunities;

We have to send people away and the cost of getting staff to Vancouver or even Prince George costs us a large amount of money and we just can’t afford it. Maintaining a high level or relevance in skill and up to date with training is critical for the organization and for the workers themselves. I feel like we fall behind in this area all the time because we just can’t afford it.
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Many agencies have begun to rely on distance learning and/or online programs for continuing education, however, that too has its challenges:

Continuing education is a big challenge. It's hard to stay motivated for education sometimes, it's like, you know, I'm tired, I don't want to read that. If you really want to go to something that is not in town that you can't do electronically or whatever, that's a significant barrier. The value of linking yourself together [with other like professionals] is so important and on-line learning doesn't give you that. As a professional you have to work hard to link yourself to your colleagues. I mean there's always been the telephone to phone and talk to colleagues and that was one advantage of being on (organization name) board provincially and then working nationally is that you know you always have resource guides and you think, ok, I can call. But you actually have a name and a face together because you run into each other at meetings and so then you pick up the phone and then you say, you know I've got X, Y and Z happening with a client what do I do?

The quote above identifies the importance of having staff attend, in person, training seminars, provincial meetings, and workshops in order to establish their own networks of colleagues and resources that can prove beneficial when you are working in an isolated and rural community. The quote below speaks to a potential danger from a community perspective:

The other challenge [of limited access to professional development] is that the [community's] perception is that the quality of service you are giving is not as good as where it could be somewhere else.

All of the participants shared their frustration around the additional barrier that being so isolated had on their ability to support their staff financially in attending professional development workshops and/or training seminars. However, it is important to note that three participants made reference to the increasing ease of access for staff to attain a social work degree with the creation and expansion of
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia regional campuses of both Northwest Community College and the University of Northern British Columbia.

A Northern Context

The second theme that emerged through the process was the concept of Northern practice and what that meant to the everyday lives of the participants. Three sub-themes emerged: benefits of northern practice, worker anonymity and managing community expectations.

Benefits of working in small communities

During the interview process, all of the participants identified that although there are challenges to working in the north, there are some benefits as well. One participant shared:

One of the pluses of working in small communities – you get exposed to a lot of stuff that you are forced to deal with, so your breadth of knowledge expands. My undergrad friends that I still keep in touch with are amazed at the stuff I have to deal with on a daily basis. They work in their organizations and have a very clearly defined role, because there are so many of them.

When asked about the benefits of working in a small community, one participant answered;

The ability to be innovative probably for me has been a big one. There can be less bureaucracy. I've talked with, I've been working on a couple provincial committees lately and I can go through my team, my board, consulting the community with a lot less of approval stamped, can't give it out, can't say anything, type of hierarchy.

Another participant added:

Isn't it about leaving a footprint in your community, in your world, making a change, doing something? That is what this job is, It's fulfilled me in my
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career aspirations, it's fulfilled me in who I am and always wanting to help others and you know, it's what you do for a person, what you do for a community.

A very significant moment was described by a participant when discussing the benefits of working and living in a small, rural community;

I received a letter in the mail anonymously about three or four months ago now from a (community name) resident who was born and raised here, moved away, she's an adult, has children of her own. She sent me this letter and she said that this year for her New Year's resolution she was going to send a letter a month to people that have left a mark in her life in a positive way, that have inspired her, motivated her or who she looks up to. And this is not a client, this is a child that grew up down the street from me. She said things like, "you probably don't know how many times I've observed you when I was growing up or how many times I watched you with your family. This just speaks to the whole idea of your life is a microscope by others in a small community.

Another participant shared her experiences;

I ended up becoming a program coordinator within eight months of me starting my position. There was a lot of turnover of staff and that opened up some doors for me that I didn't expect. I never thought I would take on a coordinator role, but it happened quickly and when the chance came up, I decided to try it. That was two years ago now.

Adding to the discussion, one participant describes her experience;

There are benefits for sure. As a social worker you can really become involved in the community and wearing different hats is sometimes helpful. The opportunities for moving up in to different roles comes way faster than if you were in a bigger area. You are exposed to many different situations and scenarios and if you are lucky, you can work with a team of other professionals in the community and learn from them too. There can be plenty of opportunities for advancement if you can stick it out.

Anonymity

Pugh (2006) as cited by Schmidt (2009a) noted that social workers in small communities are highly visible and this lack of anonymity means that it is difficult to keep a low profile. It also means that community members are in a position to
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia scrutinize and draw conclusions about the social worker's character and behavior.

One participant shared:

Most challenging? Having no real private life. It is hard to have a drink with a friend in a public place since there are really only a couple places in town to go and you usually run into a client, or a parent of a client. Being in as small a town as (community name) makes it really hard to find people to form friendships with, let alone someone to date.

Another participant adds:

Yesterday I was thinking about this and I was thinking of all kinds of different challenges we have here specific to living in the north in the rural area. I think a significant challenge for sure is that very fact that it is such a tiny community and it’s not just that I know everybody, all the staff know everybody. We constantly have family and friends coming in as clients. And that doesn’t happen in a larger centre, certainly not as often as here, you know? So as much as we say and practice and really believe and try to be as non-judgmental as possible, we always have issues of that. We always have issues because we know too much about too many people.

Another example of challenges in northern practice;

Another is, for me, and I know my staff have talked about this as well, is you can’t go anywhere and they see you. You’re always on alert, you’re always being evaluated yourself by everybody else. Clients, other service providers, other professionals in the community, like how you act, how your children act, you know, what happens in your family, you become a target. I don’t care that I am a target for people’s gossip, I just don’t have the energy to worry about that, but I care when it affects my family or my workplace. That’s a huge challenge.

There is always a challenge in small communities when it comes to dual relationships with community members. In northern practice, it is extremely important that a social worker is always aware of their professional boundaries and remaining ethical in the relationships one has with clients. A participant shared a very specific example;

I can honestly say my quality of life on my time off life, my away from work life is absolutely affected because of my job. I will give you an example. We have our home and we also have a rental home in the community that has
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two suites in it. I can’t advertise it for rent because I can’t rent it to any of our clients. Most of the people that would look to rent what we have to offer would be low-income clients who would have a power imbalance between me and them if I was their landlord so I just choose to not go down that road. It’s not fair to them or us right? So, it’s been empty now for a few months because I refuse to advertise it. I don’t want to have to have somebody come and have to say to them, “I can’t rent to you”. So, I wait for word of mouth and find somebody that way.

Another example of practicing in a northern, remote setting:

Being related to almost everyone in town makes it difficult to hire staff. I would rather not hire anyone I know personally or am somehow related to. I thought I was doing pretty good at making sure that didn’t happen until I hired a support position for our organization. I hired the most suitable candidate, and later, after a couple weeks of her beginning employment, I found out we [are] related. Then I had to deal with people in my community commenting that the reason she was hired was because of our family connections.

Challenges occur at all levels of practice as demonstrated by the quote below;

Challenges in terms of our agency? Recruitment of board members is a challenge because you get the same people and you really would like some succession, some rotation, some new ideas, but really, your resource base to pull from is really limited. Or you get new people that come in for a couple of years and then get transferred out because that’s the nature of also what’s happened.

Managing community expectations

Managing community expectations can be difficult as most times the expectations are not realistic and do not allow workers to have any personal down time. One participant shares:

If you don’t have anybody to back you up, which often happens in the North, you feel like you can’t leave. You can’t get out of town, you can’t take a holiday. You feel like, shoot, the people that you are working with are going to have no services for six weeks, you know that kind of stuff.

Another participant shares some humor as she responded:

The extra hours I put in that aren’t the paid hours, doing the same job– that’s quite a few! All the phone calls at home from staff after hours that need to debrief or talk or set plans up or troubleshoot, whatever. That’s all the extra volunteer hours in the field.
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With respect to vacation and time away, one participant added:

No, there is no one that replaces me so I have to set up, like for instance, I have a couple of board members that staff can go to if and when there’s different things that come up. I remain available by email when I am away, even on vacation. It’s really hard to go away and not take a bit of that with you.

Not ever being able to be ‘off-duty’ is a very common feeling for social workers in remote communities, the participants interviewed for this research also spoke to having to ‘be on’ when in the community but at all times to help support their workers. One participant spoke to this concept:

I have to be aware of my surroundings at all times, everyone knows who I am and the work we [the organization] do and so it’s like people expect to always be able to ask you work related questions when at the grocery store, medical clinic, getting gas, anywhere and it’s exhausting. I have become really good about setting those boundaries with people and letting them know that I am not working and that they can call the office. It has gotten to the point that I choose to go to the grocery store during odd hours when there are less people around. But this is just one other thing I have to manage.

One participant added;

My work contract says I am to work thirty-five (35) hours per week, Monday to Friday. However, that never happens. If there is a crisis in the community I get called even whether I am the best person to be called or not. In many cases, I am not, but because the community is so small, everyone knows how to get a hold of me, so they will call or even show up at my home.

Managing community expectations is complicated due to the size of rural and remote communities. The communities tend to rely on the professionals they have access to and like the participants interviewed, social workers are relied upon for various things and during all times of the day and night. This is just another example of the differences between northern practice and social work practice in large urban centers.
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**Budget Implications**

The third theme that emerged from the data collected was in relation to budget and the implications budgets have on northern practice as well as on the ability for supervisors to support and retain their staff. The two sub themes that emerged were: inequitable direct impact on retention and funding calculations inequitable.

**Direct impact on retention**

As mentioned earlier in this paper, it is becoming increasingly more and more difficult for organizations to compete with the economic boom that is happening in the Northwest region of British Columbia. One participant stated:

There’s the age old, never enough finances to do all the things you want to do in a non-profit and that adds pressure to the job. We’re losing staff constantly to the higher paying jobs. So being a non-profit without the fund base to offer great benefits package or any retention perks, you know. It’s really challenging. In the job itself, I would say that’s probably the biggest challenge.

Another participant spoke to the difficulty of retaining employees due to budget constraints:

A lot of the funding systems are minimizing the qualifications in terms of the level of what we can pay. So like for qualified child and youth care workers and qualified link workers, which is where we put social workers in the schools. We have to fight quite hard to maintain that we need to pay them appropriately, that we need to give them benefits and the, I mean the recent fight we’ve been having, if you look at what an SSA in the school is paid right now and what a social worker degree is paid, there is only about eighty (80) cent difference right now. Well, that’s just wrong! Then sometimes you get the feedback from the funder saying, well go to the lower level and my response is, well, they don’t have the competencies to do the job.

She continued:
It’s that credential creep, I think that’s the word they use sometimes for it, or evolving of new professions. Like, I mean, thirty (30) years ago we didn’t have SSAs in the schools. We didn’t have child and youth care workers the way we do now. And they are very valuable but they need to have the competencies and the mentoring for some of the families they work with and the kids they work with.

Another participant spoke to the impacts a change in budget may have on retention of staff:

More funds for professional development and ongoing training would help reduce some of the challenges I have seen in my time as a supervisor. Dollars specifically for the worker, like a northern living allowance or compensation of some sort. Wages in social work are typically not high to begin with and combine that with all of the other things you deal with when you are living in a small and isolated community, it’s really no wonder why many leave after a short period of time.

One participant related to budget constraints by adding:

It seems like every time that I plan a family vacation or time to get away is exactly when all the contracts come up or the funding deadlines happen, and you know, and it’s bizarre because they are different foundations from everywhere and not just government funding. But it always seems to work out that way, just when you think you are ready for winter vacation in January or February, that is when deadlines are for all of these last minute proposals to go in.

Another participant made reference to the building that houses the organization as being old, not maintained well and falling apart. The quality of the air is poor and it is difficult to access for folks with mobility barriers. This is just another example of the effects budgets have on working in small communities

**Inequitable funding calculations**

During the interviews the participants stressed their concerns about what I have called inequitable funding calculations. Despite the factors that make northern
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia practice more challenging with respect to the geographical areas served, the budgets do not reflect any of those factors. The calculations and contracts are based on a standard funding model that does not allow for extras relevant to northern practice such as extremely high cost of travel. A participant states:

The funding structure for northern social work type agencies really needs to be reviewed. I mean, how can we be expected to run an organization with the same amount of resources as an organization in a city, where they have a smaller area to provide service for, where there is ease of access to transportation and an abundance of options as far as other agencies to seek support from. Here, we have to travel and spend thousands on one or two employees in order for them to access training, or we have to travel to reach some of our most remote communities to provide support to people there. Some of these communities are only available via boat or float plane and we are supposed to do this all with the budget we have? It's really not effective.

A perceived challenge to actually having a new formula established for northern remote agencies is the constant flux of the government offices themselves. When a change occurs at the top, and the person at the top is not familiar with social service program delivery and even less familiar with northern practice, a halt in movement happens until that person is up to speed on his or her new position and role. One participant stated:

Well, our new Finance Minister, he's very nice, very good in Prince George. But he came from Forestry, he came from the dirt industries. Great learner though, I mean good communicator and stuff like that, but we have to start with, "well, a therapist is...." and stuff like that.

She continued:

MCFD is the leader in change. They had the shortest, MCFD has the shortest change in the history of bureaucracies about a year ago. They shifted to a new role and it lasted less than six weeks, and it shifted back.

Budgets play a significant role in how an organization functions and on the ability for an organization to provide support and encourage ongoing development.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia of staff. The impact is felt at all levels and changes made at the highest levels can have a direct impact on small organizations making it difficult to move forward.

For Future Consideration

The fourth, and final macro-theme was a culmination of discussion points that were important to the participants. It encompassed ways to move forward, offer recommendations for change, and stressed the importance of remembering to take care of one-self. This final theme is called For Future Consideration and the three sub-themes are staff mentoring, succession planning, and self-awareness.

Mentoring

One participant spoke about mentoring within her organization within the context of keeping the organization moving forward after she retires:

The biggest focus area is that peer-staff mentoring. How do you do mentoring within an agency because we don’t have the money to send everybody out to courses. So how do we do that inner learning? When I look at my staff, we’ve got some staff, one who’s even thinking of doing her PhD which is just mind boggling, who are continual readers, learners who are always asking questions and then others who are open to learning but apprehensive; don’t know or don’t have the skills or just don’t know how to get started with stuff, so how do we mentor that within an agency and keep it going?

Another participant, also preparing to retire within the next five (5) years added:

I wouldn’t leave until I knew somebody was, ready, I just wouldn’t do that. I plan to retire in three (3) to five (5) years. So we are actively looking to groom, maybe groom isn’t the right word, to mentor someone now. Someone to be able to take the position. And you know what? They’ll take it [the organization] in a way that I never thought to take it and that’s a good thing.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

A third participant that is nearing retirement shares:

Our Board is working on setting up a mentoring program now – mentoring of a person within the organization should start now, it should happen sooner rather later. They know I will be leaving within the next three years.

In the lower mainland, there are agencies that help establish a mentoring program within an organization and/or provide a mentor. One participant speaks about their knowledge of the program:

It would be ideal to have a system in place to help support implementing a mentoring program, similar to the model at Volunteer Vancouver where they have a list of volunteer mentors from professional companies and they link them with a smaller organization in terms of finding a mentor that matches the organization needs and wants. They have professionals that will go into your agency for a week or a month and mentor you or guide you and help but they don’t come to [community name]. It would really help alleviate the stress of finding a replacement for when I leave.

Succession planning

As the research progressed a recurring concept arose, and as a result of the repetition, I felt it important to identify and review. Four out of the five participants spoke to the concept of succession planning as being a critical piece to their role as a supervisor. “Succession planning is a process for identifying and developing internal people with the potential to fill key business leadership positions in the company. Succession planning increases the availability of experienced and capable employees that are prepared to assume these roles as they become available. Succession planning is about developing employees and supporting them in their careers to ensure your organization has the right talent for key position (Government of Alberta, Human Services, 2012).
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Four of the five participants are looking to retire within five years, therefore, it makes sense that succession planning is important for them now. One participant explained:

And the big thing that we are noticing which is, maybe is a good thing, maybe not, is that we are all in same about five or six year age bracket - the majority of the workers that work here. And that has been on my mind for succession. It’s a real concern for me because all my senior workers are three years older or younger than me and we are all at the same stage where we are getting ready to retire.

Another significant comment shared:

So yes, in a good way, I’m ready to let this [current employment/position] go and I’m happy to see there is some succession starting. We don’t have anybody right now in the agency that I know that could step in, take over and do a phenomenal job right now, but I know I am not irreplaceable and I know that we can find somebody to do that job.

One participant speaks about the need for succession planning that has already been demonstrated in the workplace:

[Staff person name] retired. I know it has been a couple of years but it took us a couple of years to recover from that in terms of... she had been with us for such a long time and she had that inner knowledge. She just did it all, it was everything from where is the plunger to where is critical data filed? So that is why we’ve been talking a lot about succession planning and how we document.

One participant added:

I retire in just under six years and I think about who will take over when I leave. What if I got hit by a bus tomorrow, or get really sick? Then what? We don’t have a plan B; that worries me a lot.

A fourth participant adds:

I am ready to retire but I have enormous guilt about looking forward to leaving. I feel a lot of responsibility for wellness in our tiny community, but I am tired, I am done. But who will take over? I am eligible to retire within two years, but I don’t know if I actually will, but I do know I am not staying here forever.
Another comment worth noting, relating directly to succession planning:

I'd really like to see the board work with me to set up something, somehow, someway, so that if we do have somebody within the agency we could start mentoring them now, so that in a few years they are completely ready to step in to the role. I honestly don't think we have that one person. We have several people that have skill sets either for the administration piece of it, or for the supervising of the front line services, but we don't have anybody that could do both that doesn't have serious power issues. I would really like that to happen right away. The issue with that is that they are both right around my age, so how long would they be there for? Long enough to mentor someone else?

The concept of succession planning, as demonstrated above, occurred in various contexts throughout the data collection process. As many social workers start to reach retirement age, succession planning may likely be discussed.

**Self-awareness**

The final sub-theme that arose from the collection of data, was the importance of self-awareness and care with regards to the employees and organizational health, but also the health and wellbeing of the supervisor. One participant described this process as it related to him directly:

My community is pretty small and either I am directly related to half the people here or I am related to them through my wife, so it's hard to rely on them to help me take care of myself. I like being outside, I like to walk the trails. I feel connected and grounded when I can do that. If I am not grounded or I feel in personal conflict, my response to my work can be negative and I am not proud of those moments. It's natural for the nature of work I do, but I remind myself that I am the example that my staff has and if I am not functioning, I can't expect them to either. It's a hard balance.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Another participant admits that the need to have a self-awareness plan or a self-care plan established is very important, but sometimes the dedication to creating one is not there, regardless of the emphasis she places on it for her staff:

My failing part; not usually, but lately [regarding her own self-care plan]. I do, however, talk about it with my staff. In fact, when I hire staff it is one of the pieces that we discuss that they’re responsible for their self-care, that they are given a certain number of self-care days, paid days in the year to take whenever they need it. That number of days is dependent on how many hours they work. Like, full-time get 12 days per year and part-time get 9. It is right in there, they sign a document that says if they have a day where they are not up to being fully alert at work, use one for those days.

She continued by explaining that she goes as far as supporting her staff to use those days when they know or are related to someone who accesses the services of the agency she runs:

Sometimes, actually, a lot of the time, staff use it when somebody too close to them is in the [centre name]. A sister, a friend. They’ll use it then. Since [community name] is so small, this happens often so I do encourage them to use their days.

Another participant described what self-awareness meant to her:

Let me explain; my definition of self-care is how I actively take care of myself also that I can continue to be the person I am who cares about others. That I know my value, that I’m aware of my value to myself. Not that I am the be all and end all to somebody else, but that I know my own personal value, my self-worth and who I am, and what I do to nurture that and care for that. That is what I see as my self-care.

One participant was very candid with her responses to this section of the interview:

After a bad day at the office, I just want to be home. I want to drink a glass (or more) of wine and just watch mindless TV. Facebook seems to help. I feel kinda connected to my friends back home through it, I know that sounds stupid, but it does help. If it is a long weekend, I may call a girlfriend that I met at university that lives in Prince George and head out there for the weekend.
Another participant spoke of how she promotes self-awareness and self-care within her organization:

I conduct an annual performance review with my staff. Each review has a minimum of four goals. You have your job description, you review it, you make changes and you set three to four objectives for the following year. The first three goals need to be focused around your work area. For the fourth goal, we really encourage you to set a personal goal. Some staff are more open about it and they come in every couple of weeks. The performance reviews help because the younger staff do have a different dedication attitude than what we perceived we had when we started, those of us that are senior staff. There is a higher demand for time-off, flex schedules, for continuing ed, and those are all costly for an agency.

She also shared a wealth of experience with the concept of self-care:

Well, provincially, you know, we did that work-life balance...and even nationally and in literature there's been an awful lot about workplace health and work-life balance and stuff like that but you almost wonder if the pendulum has gone a little bit too far. In terms of, it's good to have choice and it's good to have that work life balance but how do you also ensure that your commitment and your clients are being served, you know, how do you have those discussions? The annual performance review process helps me balance that.

The need for a healthy and balanced workplace relies on the support that staff receive with respect to taking care of themselves, however, there is no support from funders for this extremely important piece. The manner in which organization responds or encourages their staff to take care of themselves is entirely guided by the organization. The work that social workers do is not easy work, it is emotionally charged and can evoke a lot of one's own feelings and fears. A supervisor of social workers is not only responsible for ensuring their own personal wellbeing in order to lead their organization, but they carry the responsibility for the implementation of individual staff wellbeing as well. This responsibility adds another level of challenge to a supervisory role.
The focus of this section was to illustrate some of the challenges faced by social work supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia. Many of the findings were best represented in context by giving the participants voice through direct quotation. In the next chapter, I will discuss these results.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Chapter 5

Summary of Findings

This research was undertaken as a result of personal and professional experiences as well as my desire to better understand the experiences of my fellow social worker supervisors, furthermore, I was able to explore whether my own experiences were common. After spending time with all of the participants and hearing their stories, I found I was able to relate to many areas of their experiences, but surprisingly enough, not all of them, such as the need for succession planning and the implementation of mentoring programs within organizations. Some of the challenges were different than those that I experienced and/or continue to experience working and living in an isolated community in Northwestern British Columbia.

Relevance of Findings

Throughout the data collection process, the participants disclosed some of the challenges they experienced as supervisors of social workers in small isolated communities, but most also offered suggestions as to how to create change for the greater good of their organization, their communities, and their staff.

The literature review provided an extensive overview of the challenges of northern social work practice and also challenges that face supervisors of social workers that work in small and remote northern communities. The findings of this research also supported the information obtained through the literature review process. On a national and international level, working in remote communities...
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia presents a very similar set of challenges. The challenges included issues such as recruitment and retention of qualified workers, leading to high turn over of staff, the concept of physical geography impacting service delivery, feelings of isolation and lack of anonymity, and lack of professional development opportunities in remote communities coupled with lack of resources to have staff attend professional development opportunities in larger centers. These challenges were identified in the literature review, align with my own experiences and were findings of this research.

Two findings were different from my personal experiences and did not appear in the literature: succession planning as an emerging need and competing with a booming economy where workers prefer to work higher paying construction, camp, or labor jobs as opposed to their chosen social work profession.

Research Delimitations

Delimitations are parameters or restrictions imposed by the researcher (Mauch & Park, 2003). The delimitations I established and for the purpose of this study are:

1. Participants must have completed a minimum of a four-year Bachelor degree from an accredited post-secondary institute,
2. Must be working in the capacity of a supervisor with in an organization that does social work,
3. Must be living and working in Northwestern British Columbia in the communities of Terrace, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, Hazelton and/or Smithers.

In addition, participants were adults over the age of nineteen (19) with ability to give informed consent and willing to discuss their experiences as a supervisor.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Limitations of Research

The most significant limitation of this study was the geographical area I chose to conduct the research. Had I expanded the geographical boundaries of this research, a larger participant group may have been achieved.

Another limitation for this research was the inability to include participants from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. As a large employer of social workers in the region, having the ability to interview the supervisors within MCFD could have added another layer of richness and perspective as those participants may have provided a different view of challenges, particularly coming from a government ministry as opposed to a non-profit organization. Despite several attempts to recruit participants, I was unable to secure any for this study. The letter of consent from MCFD Risk Management is found in Appendix F and indicates the protocol I developed to include MCFD supervisors.

Recommendations

Several recommendations were repeated by all the participants. Some of the recommendations validated my own struggles and experiences while others were new. One recommendation that validated my own experiences as a supervisor was in the area of fiscal restraints and the need for more equitable funding formulas for remote northern communities. The very limited budgets that supervisors are forced to work with create many challenges, particularly when it comes to travel and accessing professional development. A recommendation that was new, stemmed from the need to plan effectively for succession and that perhaps a mentoring
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia program be in place for supervisors to access. The recommendations are highlighted below.

**Equitable funding formulas**

The continual struggle regarding financial constraints came across loud and clear throughout this process. The participants spoke of their struggles competing with high-paying labour positions, paying staff what they are worth in terms of their level of education, and the implications that a tight budget has on ongoing professional development. The high travel costs incurred by organizations in order to send their staff to a training seminar, conference, or workshop strains the overall budget. As a result, opportunities for professional development are limited and only small numbers of staff can attend.

A re-examination of funding formulas that take into account geography and isolation is a recommendation arising from this research. If the current funding formula remains, the agencies in the Northwest will continue to experience challenges resulting from financial restraints.

**Need for mentoring programs**

As four of the five participants of this research have retirement in their plans, the discussion of establishing a mentoring program within organizations was discussed repeatedly. It was felt that having an established mentoring program would help employees at all levels of the organization. New employees could be mentored by senior employees; employees looking to take on higher level positions could be mentored by those in the particular positions of interest, that in turn could
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia help with succession planning. A well-established mentoring program, as mentioned by a participant as being available in larger centers and frequently used by large businesses, could also relieve some of the additional expectations placed on supervisors as they could delegate some of the training responsibilities to the appropriate mentor. This relationship could be maintained with the use of technology and would not necessarily require the need for costly face to face contact.

If an internal mentoring program is not or cannot be established, then access to an external mentoring program that helps with general skill development is an option. An ability to connect with like-minded individuals with similar or the same career aspirations can be a very effective retention tool; particularly with new grads that come to the region with what one participant terms as ‘graditis’:

A lot of it is working through the couple of years that I call ‘graditis’ with new grads. We quite often will laugh, well that’s a “graditis” comment, let’s sit back and talk about it. But you know, you work hard to get your degree and you really want to make a difference and you get frustrated until you figure out whether that’s something I could help with or realize this is something I couldn’t do anything about – that takes a long time for some people to get.

Initiating a mentoring program would help all levels of the organization move forward and raise the level of organizational capacity.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Conclusion

Specific to the Northwest region of British Columbia is the current economic boom that is creating new challenges for social work supervisors. Workers are being drawn away from social work positions as industry employers can offer much higher wages than non-profit organizations can afford to pay. The age demographic of the participants in the study also impacted the findings as four of the five participants had retirement in their sights, that poses several new challenges; succession planning and mentoring of staff.

As mentioned earlier, I chose this research area as I have personal experience as a supervisor of social workers in remote northern communities and I intended on exploring whether my experiences were similar to those of colleagues in similar positions within the same geographical area. The majority of my practice has been within a northern, remote context and although there are many challenges, as described by the participants, there are many benefits as well, also described by some participants.

This research was both validating and enlightening. The validation came from the challenges shared by all of the participants that were similar to those I have experienced. The enlightening piece came from the sharing of the benefits of living in a small remote northern community and the recommendations moving forward. Aside from the validation and enlightenment, I feel that by taking on this research, I am forever changed. I began this process with a belief that I really knew and understood the region I live in and the communities within the region. After
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia spending time with the participants and really hearing their stories and struggles, I have realized that our communities are in constant flux and change and that I in fact, do not know our communities or their needs as well as I once did. I am also reminded of why I chose the profession of social work and it has created a desire in me to reconnect with the communities in a way that I did not expect. I am grateful and humbled by this opportunity.

As a result of the constant change in our communities, I would be interested to see whether the findings of this research would be the same in five to eight years from now, when the economic boom will likely have subsided and the access to increased use of technology will likely have a significant impact on how professional development is accessed, and what level of an impact this would have on recruitment and retention of workers.

Overall, it is clear that practicing within a northern context contributes to the challenges faced by supervisors of social workers. Social work is an emotionally charged profession bound by strong ethics and each worker must be committed to self-preservation and self-awareness. Without these self-reflective pieces in our practice, whether as a front line worker or team leader/manager/supervisor, we will not only fail our profession, but those who rely on the assistance we can provide.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

References


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**Demographic Questionnaire**

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<td>o 56 or older</td>
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<td>o Non First Nations/Aboriginal/Inuit/Metis</td>
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Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

What is your current marital status?

- Divorced/Separated
- Living with another
- Married
- Single
- Widowed

How long have you lived in Northwestern British Columbia?

- 0 – 5 years
- 5 – 10 years
- 10 – 15 years
- 15 – 20 years
- 20+ years
The following is a description of the research undertaken by graduate student, Irlanda Price, in the Master of Social Work program as offered through the School of Social Work at the University of Northern British Columbia. The following information describes the research and the overall process. Please read the information below and if this research is of interest and you would like to participate in it, simply sign at the end of this document.

The intent of this research is to explore the challenges of being a supervisor in small isolated communities located within a specific geographical area in Northwestern British Columbia. To highlight the struggles, the successes, and explore all areas the participant is willing to share.

To be eligible to participate, you must meet the following criteria:

- possess a of a four-year bachelor degree
- Currently working in a supervisory capacity
- Must be living and working in a community in Northwestern BC.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Once a participant has agreed to participate in this research, a mutually agreeable time will be scheduled for an in depth interview. This interview will not exceed two (2) hours and will be conducted in a confidential location that both the participant and researcher agree to.

Confidentiality of the information and protection of the identity of the participant is critical. All information shared by the participant(s) will be completely confidential. Interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed by a third party. The person hired to transcribe the recordings will commit to, and sign an oath of confidentiality that clearly defines their role and responsibilities regarding protecting all information they manage. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the participants’ identity and all identifying factors will be changed.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participants have the option of withdrawing from the study at any point and all information shared by the participation will be destroyed upon withdrawal from the study.

Upon completion of the research, if requested by the participant, the information gathered may be shared. An electronic copy of the completed thesis will be given to the participants who request it. The researcher will also be available to discuss the project at any time throughout the process, and post completion. All data collected will be destroyed one year after successful thesis defense.

For further information contact:
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Graduate student researcher, Irlanda Price; pricei@unbc.ca or 250.615.3624

Alternately, if you have any concerns or questions about the project, please contact the Office of Research at the University of Northern British Columbia; reb@unbc.ca or 250.960.6735 or Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Glen Schmidt via email schmidt@unbc.ca

I have read the information sheet and am willing to participate in this study as described on page one. I am aware that I may discontinue my involvement whenever I wish.

Date__________________________________________

Name__________________________________________

Signature______________________________________

Witness_______________________________________
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Interview Questions

Section 1 – Current Place of Employment

- Please describe the type of work you do, including age of clients/families, etc.
- How many hours a week do you normally work?
- What do you like most about your practice?
- What is most challenging within your practice?
- What is the most significant barrier you have faced in working in a rural community?
- In your opinion, what is the most difficult component of your work?
- How long have you been a supervisor?
- Before becoming a supervisor did you have any formal training in supervision? If yes, describe. If no, what factors prepared you for supervision?
- How many staff do you supervise?
- What made you decide to become a supervisor?
- In your current job as a supervisor, do you have opportunities for formal training and skill development as a supervisor? Describe.
- Are you content with your current position?
- How many staff have you supervised since becoming a supervisor?
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Do you think supervision in northern BC has unique challenges? If yes, please describe.

Section 2 – Self Care

- What is your definition of self-care?
- Do you talk to your clients about self-care?
- What is your own personal self-care plan? How consistent are you with it?
- After a bad day at the office, how do you unwind? How about on the weekend?

Section 3 – Recommendations for change

- If you could change one thing to improve your current workplace what would it be?
- If you could change one aspect of your supervisory role, what would that be?
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Transcriber Agreement

TRANSCRIBER AGREEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I, __________________________________________________________, transcriber for the research project undertaken by a graduate student of the University of Northern British Columbia, School of Social Work, agree not to disclose information of any nature or kind that comes to my knowledge respecting or relating to any participant in the research, unless required by law.

I acknowledge that this agreement shall remain in force and effect indefinitely, even after the project is complete and all data is transcribed.

I acknowledge that all sensitive information and material that I have in my possession must be handled in the following manner to ensure that it will never fall into unauthorized hands:

a) sensitive records or material must not be taken outside the confines of my home office unless requested by the Researcher.

b) upon completion, all sensitive records and material must be kept in a locked and secure storage unit. No materials or records of this research are to be kept on my desk without me being present.

c) all records and material in my possession must be given to the researcher upon completion of all transcribing services.

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

I acknowledge that I have read the foregoing instructions concerning the handling of sensitive information and material and that I am fully aware of my responsibility of protecting any sensitive materials with which I am entrusted as a consequence of my employment as a Transcriber.

I am aware that a breach of these instructions could result in immediate dismissal.

________________________________________
Transcriber Signature

________________________________________
Print Name

________________________________________
Date

________________________________________
Witness Signature

Project contact information:
Irlanda Gonzalez-Price, Graduate Student/Researcher
UNBC School of Social Work
pricei@unbc.ca  250.635.3111

Dr. Glen Schmidt, Associate Professor/ Thesis Supervisor
UNBC School of Social Work  Schmidt@unbc.ca
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Research Ethics Board Application

UNBC UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

APPLICATIONS ARE REMINDED THAT RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS SHOULD NOT BE UNDERTAKEN
PRIOR TO APPROVAL BY THE RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL FORM

Please check [ X ] one of the following options before completing the rest of the application.

[ ] This is the protocol statement of a routine undergraduate class project that is usually employed in your class. Please submit 8 copies to the Office of Research for full review by the Research Ethics Board (REB).

[ X ] This is a research project and a full Research Ethics Board review is requested. Please submit 8 copies to the Office of Research.

[ ] This is a joint research project involving the Northern Health Authority. Please complete the NHA Supplement. Submit 8 copies to the Office of Research and 1 copy to the Northern Health Research Review Committee.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

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<th>1. Researchers Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Irlanda Price</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Complete Address</td>
<td>4116 Temple St. Terrace, BC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>V8G 5N6</td>
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<td>3. Phone No.</td>
<td>250 635 3111</td>
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4. Supervisor's Name & Signature (if Researcher is a student)

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<tr>
<th>Name &amp; Position (Print)</th>
<th>Dr. Glen Schmidt</th>
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5. Program

| Master of Social Work |

6. Title of Project

| Examining the Challenges Faced by Social Work Supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia |
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

7. Type of Project

[ ] Class Project (Class projects are normally reviewed by professors after a protocol has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board).

[ X ] Thesis

[ ] Faculty Research

8. Source of Funding (if any)

There is no source of funding for this research. Any monies spent will be done by the researcher.

9. Is this project a replication of an earlier project or protocol that received ethics approval?

[ ] Yes  (Attach copy of the Certificate or letter and submit to the REB. Please clarify (on a separate sheet) if there are any changes being made to the previously approved proposal or if the proposals are identical).

[ X ] No  (Go to Question 10)

10. Purpose of Research

This research is part of a thesis to explore the challenges faced by Social Work Supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia. The data will be collected via interviews where the participants will be asked to share their lived experiences as
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

supervisors of social workers. In asking questions related to their experience, the researcher intends to explore some of the challenges of being a social worker in a supervisory capacity in small, rural northern communities. Specific attention will be placed on concepts such as, but not limited to;

- multiple roles,
- staff recruitment/retention,
- high visibility,
- confidentiality,
- boundaries and,
- professional development.

11. Project Dates:

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Expected Completion Date</td>
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12. Does this project require any physically invasive procedures (e.g. blood tests), potentially harmful physical regimes (e.g. special dieting) or potentially harmful psychological or social experiments (e.g. illusory perception tests)?

[  ] Yes

[X] No
Exmaining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

13. **Summary of Methods:** In the text box below give us a brief summary.

Sufficient information must be given to assess the degree of risk to participants.

The research will be qualitative and exploratory.

Individual interviews will be conducted with adults working in supervisory capacities, who have consented to participate in the research. Please see Appendix V, Participant Information and Consent Form. Extensive care and attention will be placed on ensuring confidentiality at every stage of the research.

Each interview will be recorded and consist of 20 questions. Prompts may be used to elicit further detail. Please see Appendix II, Interview Questions. At the onset of the interview, each participant will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. Please see Appendix I, Demographic Questionnaire.

A thematic analysis will be conducted upon completion of the interviews and all recorded interviews will be transcribed by a third party transcriber who will have completed and signed a Transcriber Oath of Confidentiality. Please see Appendix III, Transcriber Agreement of Confidentiality.

All data collected will be destroyed one year after a successful thesis defence. All information stored on the computer will be deleted and all hard data will be shredded.
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

14. Please append a complete copy of the research project proposal, including any interview protocols or questionnaires.

Attachments:

- [ X] Research Project Proposal
- [ X] Interview Protocols
- [ X] Questionnaires

15. How will participants be recruited? In the text box below give us a brief summary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants will be recruited via three (3) methods:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Individual contact: telephone, face-to-face meetings with workers with whom I currently have a working relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I will also ask my current network of colleagues to introduce me to their networks so as to expand the reach of this research and recruit more participants. I will then follow up with other potential participants by sending a letter of introduction to them about myself and the intended research. Lastly, I will follow up with them via telephone to assess their willingness to participate. A copy of the Participant Information and Consent form will also be provided for review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The recruitment of MCFD staff to participate will be done following the protocols set forth in the attached research consent letter. Please see</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

- A recruitment poster will also be placed in strategic locations in various communities explaining the research and listing a contact number for further information and/or to volunteer participation. Please see Appendix IV.

16. Will participants be competent to give consent?

[ X ] Yes  (Go to Question 17)

[ ] No  (e.g. Children and cognitively impaired people.) How will the issue of consent be addressed? In the text box below give us a brief summary.

17. Will participants be compensated?

[ ] Yes  How?

[ X ] No  (Go to Question 18)

In the text box below give us a brief summary.

18. Will consent be obtained from each participant either in writing or recorded?
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

[X] Yes Please attach a copy of the Consent Form or the questions/statements to be recorded. Each participant must receive one copy of the signed consent form at the time of signing. Please see Participant Information and Consent Form, Appendix V.

[ ] No Please attach information which will be provided to participants and/or participant communities.

19. Does the project involve any deception?

[ ] Yes Justify the use of deception and indicate how disclosure finally will be addressed.

[X] No (Go to Question 20)

20. What is your plan for feedback to participants? How do you propose to distribute results to participants?

As described in the Participant Information and Consent form, an electronic, PDF copy of the completed thesis will be distributed as requested.

21. Will the research participants be from an institutional population; e.g. company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, etc.

[X] Yes (Go to Question 22)

[ ] No (Go to Question 23) Please see Agency Information Letter, Appendix VI
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22. If the answer to Question 21 is yes, attach a letter of consent for access from the institution: e.g. company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons etc.

[X] Letter(s) of Consent attached. Please see attached letter of consent from MCFD

Appendix VII

23. Will the research participants be participating as representatives of, or on behalf of, an Aboriginal group?

[ ] Yes Attach letter of consent from appropriate authority, e.g. Band Council, etc.

[X] No Go to Question 24

24. Does this project require any other ethical approval, e.g. Northern Health Authority (Attach Schedule D), other Hospital, First Nations Band, etc.? If so, please ensure that all guidelines are followed.

[ ] Yes Please specify the agency and attach letter of consent/ethical approval from the appropriate authority.

[ ] Letter(s) of Consent attached

[X] No
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Ministry of Children and Families Consent

RE: Possible research with MCFD staff in northern BC

Rail, Rob D MCF:EX [Rob.Rail@gov.bc.ca]
Sent: Tuesday, July 17, 2012 2:09 PM
To: Irlanda Isela Price; Thomson, Anne S MCF:EX [Anne.Thomson@gov.bc.ca]; Railer, Shirley D MCF:EX [Shirley.Railer@gov.bc.ca]
Cc: Welch, Chris MCF:EX [Chris.Welch@gov.bc.ca]; Glen Schmidt

Please accept this email as MCFD support for the research to proceed as long as the noted privacy guidelines in MCFD participant invitations are followed. The MCFD sponsor should be able to facilitate this process. I hope this note is sufficient in indicating our support.

-----Original Message-----
From: Irlanda Isela Price [mailto:price@ubc.ca]
Sent: Tuesday, July 17, 2012 11:44 AM
To: Rail, Rob D MCF:EX; Thomson, Anne S MCF:EX; Railer, Shirley D MCF:EX
Cc: Welch, Chris MCF:EX; Glen Schmidt
Subject: RE: Possible research with MCFD staff in northern BC

Hello everyone,

I sincerely appreciate everyone's effort in assisting with my intended research. Anne, please accept my thanks for your quick review and response to my request. I am very excited to move forward. Once a local MCFD sponsor is identified, I will connect with that person directly.

My thesis supervisor, Dr. Glen Schmidt, has informed me that a quick letter from MCFD indicating the support of the research will be required in order to gain full approval from the Research Ethics Board. I am now asking if either of you is able to provide such letter?

I will gladly forward you a copy of the approval from the Research Ethics Board, and upon completion of the thesis, an electronic copy will also be sent to you for your records.

Once again, I sincerely appreciate your assistance.

Irlanda

From: Rail, Rob D MCF:EX [Rob.Rail@gov.bc.ca]
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2012 2:53 PM
To: Thomson, Anne S MCF:EX; Irlanda Isela Price; Railer, Shirley D MCF:EX
Cc: Welch, Chris MCF:EX
Subject: RE: Possible research with MCFD staff in northern BC

Thank you Anne for your speedy response. Shirley, am not sure if a local MCFD sponsor has been identified.

-----Original Message-----
From: Thomson, Anne S MCF:EX
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2012 4:16 PM
To: Rail, Rob D MCF:EX
Cc: Welch, Chris MCF:EX
Subject: RE: Possible research with MCFD staff in northern BC

Hello Rob, and thank you forwarding the information about the research project "Examining the Challenges faced by Social Work Supervisors in Northwestern British

https://etch.ubc.ca/owa/u?e=Item&k=PM.Note&ld=RgAAAADeYH7EH3e6QxOCVd... 7/18/2012
A privacy review has been completed, and it is noted that the researcher, Irlanda I. Price, will conduct face-to-face interviews with 8 to 10 social work supervisors in the communities of Prince Rupert, Terrace, Hazelton, Smithers, and Kitimat. The scope of the research will include supervisors working in other agencies/organizations as well as those working in supervisory capacities within MCFD. For ministry staff members, this project consists of "ministry facilitated contact", whereby an invitation to participate in the research should be extended by the ministry sponsor, and potential respondents may then choose to voluntarily participate in the interviews by contacting the researcher directly.

This method of recruitment will ensure that privacy concerns are met. In addition, the project must receive ethical approval from the post-secondary institution as well as regional approval and sponsorship in the North region before the research is conducted.

Please send a copy of the UNBC Research Ethics Board approval when it is received, and we would appreciate a copy of the final report when the project is completed.

Please phone or e-mail should you need any further information.

Anne Thomson
Research and Knowledge Translation
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Phone: (250) 953-4102

--- Original Message ---
From: Rail, Rob D MCF:EX
Sent: Friday, July 6, 2012 12:16 PM
To: 'Irlanda Isela Price'
Cc: Raimer, Shirley D MCF:EX; Thomson, Anne S MCF:EX
Subject: RE: Possible research with MCFD staff in northern BC

My apologies for not responding sooner. We need to find an MCFD "sponsor" who will support you in conducting this research. Shirley, I would suggest a CSM from one of the areas in which Irlanda wishes to conduct the research. I will send your proposal to Anne Thomson who conducts the privacy assessments. I am aware of other research being conducted in the North regarding "Supervision" but don't see any barriers to our supporting your research. Anne can provide further comment on the participant participation and recruitment process. I was not sure if your research includes SW supervisors outside of MCFD but may have missed this in reading the proposal.

--- Original Message ---
From: Irlanda Isela Price [mailto:isprixe@unbc.ca]
Sent: Thursday, June 28, 2012 3:44 PM
To: Rail, Rob D MCF:EX
Cc: riprices@telus.net
Subject: Possible research with MCFD staff in northern BC

Dear Director,

Good afternoon, I hope this finds you well. This is a follow up to the email forwarded to you by Ms. Shirley Reimer, a few weeks ago.

I would like to begin by introducing myself. I am a research student attending UNBC's Master of Social Work program. I am currently at the thesis writing stage and am...
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Agency Information Letter

Dear Agency Supervisor

I would like to begin by thanking you for your time in learning about a research topic that may include participation by a staff person from your agency. I am working on a thesis titled, Examining the Challenges Faced by Social Work Supervisors in Northwestern British Columbia, and I believe there are staff members within your organization that can greatly contribute to the overall research.

As the participants will be speaking about their own lived experiences working in supervisory capacities in Northwest British Columbia, the name of the organization where the participants work or have worked will not be disclosed. Participant participation is completely voluntary and every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of the participant and the stories they share.

Individual interviews will be conducted during the time of day that does not interfere with the participant’s work schedule.

If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. I am available via telephone 250.922.0345, email, pricei@unbc.ca, or in person.

Warm regards,

Irlanda Price

Researcher/UNBC Graduate Student

Master of Social Work Program
Examining the challenges faced by social work supervisors in NW British Columbia

Recruitment Poster

UNBC UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Are you a Social Worker in Northwestern BC? Are you currently in a supervisory capacity? Are you interested in sharing your experience as a northern social work supervisor?

University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) Master of Social Work graduate student looking for 8 - 10 research participants.

Eligible participants must have:

• A minimum of a four-year bachelor degree
• Currently working in a supervisory capacity in a social worker role
• Must be living and working in a Community in Northwestern BC

Participants must be willing to participate in one individual interview that will not exceed two hours in length. Researcher will do everything possible to ensure confidentiality.

For more information:

Irlanda Gonzalez-Price, MSW candidate

pricei@unbc.ca