

Enhancing Social Work Fieldwork: Insights from the Women's University in Africa

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Abstract: This study examined the nature and effectiveness of social work fieldwork supervision at a Zimbabwean university. There is limited research on fieldwork supervision in developing countries, particularly Zimbabwe. A mixed methods approach was employed to explore students' experiences of supervision during field placement. The study population consisted of final-year social work students at the Women's University in Africa who had completed their fieldwork practice. Institutional and participants' consent was obtained, and all ethical requirements—including confidentiality and anonymity—were observed. Forty respondents for both qualitative and quantitative samples were selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire containing both closed- and open-ended items. Quantitative data were analysed statistically using Microsoft Excel and qualitative responses were analysed through narrative content analysis. Findings showed that 90% (n=36) of student social workers reported receiving effective fieldwork supervision, citing strong guidance and support from supervisors that enhanced their skills and knowledge. However, a handful of students faced challenges during fieldwork supervision, such as unhealthy supervisor relationships, supervision by non-social workers and inexperienced social workers, and inadequate supervision. This paper will assist institutions, students, researchers, fieldwork supervisors, welfare agencies and social workers to design and implement a policy about fieldwork supervision. This paper recommends capacity strengthening of fieldwork supervisors and collaboration among key stakeholders to improve fieldwork supervision.

Keywords: Fieldwork supervision; social work; fieldwork supervisor; fieldwork coordinator; student social workers; experiential learning; social work education

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine social work fieldwork supervision within a Zimbabwean university. Fieldwork supervision refers to planned and regular sessions during which the supervisor and the student social worker engage in discussions about the student's placement tasks and assess their learning progress. The primary aim of fieldwork supervision is to enable students to develop professional competence within a particular welfare agency setting. Supervisors provide guidance, support and mentorship throughout the fieldwork experience. Two categories of fieldwork supervisors are involved in the fieldwork process: agency supervisors and academic supervisors. Agency supervisors (fieldwork supervisors) are practising social workers who are based in welfare agencies who interact with students on a daily basis. Academic supervisors (fieldwork coordinators), on the other hand, are appointed by the university's social work department and are responsible for monitoring and reporting on students' learning progress. Both agency and academic supervisors are expected to assist students in integrating theory with practice (Twikirize and Tusasiirwe, 2015).

Social work fieldwork supervision is essential for training competent social work practitioners, nevertheless it faces several obstacles that hinder its effectiveness. These obstacles may affect the quality of fieldwork supervision, learning and service delivery. Despite its importance, fieldwork supervision faces numerous challenges. A study conducted by Mboniswa (2007) in South Africa reported a lack of designated time for fieldwork supervision, while Mbau (2005) found that supervision processes were often unstructured and informal. Dimo (2013) further argued that ineffective supervision leads to inadequate student competence in field practice. In Zimbabwe, social work fieldwork supervision encounters obstacles such as insufficiently qualified agency supervisors, shortages of supervisors and placement agencies, as well as high students' enrolments (Dhemba, 2012). These challenges collectively undermine quality of fieldwork supervision.

Despite the importance of social work fieldwork supervision, there is limited scholarly information on social work fieldwork supervision practises in Zimbabwe and Africa. Most studies focus on European contexts, leaving a gap in understanding Zimbabwe's unique opportunities and challenges (Dhemba, 2012). There is also limited scholarly information about fieldwork supervision in Zimbabwe. Dhemba (2012) highlights the scarcity of literature and the absence of comprehensive guidelines to support supervisors. Knowledge generated from this study is therefore expected to provide a useful benchmark for the Women's University in Africa School of Social Work to assess the effectiveness of its fieldwork supervision practises. The findings are anticipated to contribute to strengthening fieldwork supervision and enhancing the delivery of effective social work services. Consequently, this study examines social work fieldwork supervision in a Zimbabwean university through the lens of social work students. The main objectives of this study are to be realized by: exploring the nature of social work fieldwork supervision and assessing the effectiveness of social work fieldwork supervision.

Literature study

Origins of fieldwork supervision

Origins of fieldwork supervision can be traced back to the late nineteenth century in voluntary organisations in the United States of America and Europe. Fieldwork supervision was the only foundation of learning through the apprenticeship that was provided by the Charity Organization Society. During this period, fieldwork supervision was mostly apprenticeship, whereby more experienced and knowledgeable supervisors trained new volunteers with less experience. In the first half of twentieth century, the notion fieldwork supervision extended to welfare programs assisting both as an internal control measure for social workers in the public sector and as a standard for professional growth. During 1960s and 1970s, fieldwork supervision became supportive in nature comprising treatment oriented, psychological and understanding. Currently, fieldwork supervision is now well established in professional social work practice throughout the world (Dhemba, 2012; Sithole and Shokane, 2023). In Zimbabwean context, social work fieldwork was introduced during the colonial era (Dziro, 2013). Currently, social work fieldwork is prevalent and is coordinated by social work education institutions and implemented by development and welfare agencies.

Effectiveness of fieldwork supervision

The study conducted in Australia by Zuchowski et al. (2021) reported that fieldwork supervision was effective because it provided opportunities for professional development, learning and support. Additionally, the study conducted by in the United Kingdom by Gregory

et al. (2025) reported that fieldwork supervision enables social work students to link theory and social work practice, supports students to develop skills, behaviours and knowledge required to enter social work profession. Thus, fieldwork supervision is crucial in social work education.

The study conducted in South Africa by Mboniswa (2007) reported fieldwork supervision was effective because it was realistic, practical, skilful and educative. In addition, the study conducted by Mbau (2005) cited that fieldwork supervision was effective because it assisted social work students to grow personally and professionally as they received new skills, support and knowledge during fieldwork supervision. The study conducted at the University of Venda in South Africa by Budeli (2018) indicated that social work students were subjected to infrequent and irregular supervision during fieldwork practice. The study conducted in East and Southern Africa by Dhembha (2012) indicated that in Zimbabwe fieldwork supervision was not effective due to shortage of qualified agency supervisors, shortage of suitable agencies for fieldwork, lack of financial support for students on fieldwork and lack of visitation by school supervisors. Despite its effectiveness, fieldwork supervision is currently facing several challenges that require timely intervention. These challenges can hinder students' learning experiences, reduce the quality of professional preparation, and limit the overall impact of field-based training.

Fieldwork supervision challenges persist in Zimbabwe due to socio-economic instability and poor remuneration of social workers, leading to a mass exodus of experienced social workers to developed countries such as United Kingdom and Australia for greener pastures. Consequently, social work students are left under the supervision of inexperienced social workers, and in some instances, they are supervised by unqualified social workers who cannot mentor students to become effective social workers. Zimbabwe, being a developing country, faces resource constraints, resulting in limited resources to frequently supervise social work students on fieldwork placements. Therefore, the root cause of Zimbabwe's social work fieldwork challenges is the country's poor economic situation, which causes a mass migration of experienced social workers and a shortage of resources for fieldwork supervision (Dhembha, 2012; Muchinako and Muridzo, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts experiential learning to present fieldwork supervision. This theory was propounded by David Kolb in 1970s and issued it in 1984. Experiential learning is learning by practical experience. The main principles of this theory include active engagement, self-initiated learning, relevant experiences and self-evaluation. Experiential learning theory has been extensively used in previous fieldwork supervision studies. It is fundamental framework for understanding and improving the learning process within fieldwork supervision. Experiential learning, with its emphasis on hands-on experience and reflection, aligns well with the practical and applied nature of fieldwork supervision (Schmidt and Rautenbach, 2015).

Research methodology

A mixed method approach was applied in the study. The target population for this study were final-year undergraduate social workers at Women's University in Africa who had completed fieldwork practice. A sample for both qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study was of forty student social workers (that is 20% of study population) who were randomly selected participated in this study. Each final year student social worker who completed social work fieldwork practise had an equal chance of being selected. Social work students were randomly

selected from university's final year social work students list using a random number generator. 20% sample size was representative sample of the population and ensured manageable data analysis. The researcher developed an online questionnaire, and the link to the survey questionnaire was sent to respondents. The questionnaire was programmed to probe for qualitative data for some questions had both closed and open-ended questions. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Relevant ethical measures such as confidentiality and anonymity were observed. The researcher ensured that the respondents were not harmed, whether emotionally or physically. The researcher ensured that collected data were valid by using relevant, clear, and unbiased questions. The researcher also ensured that data were reliable by ensuring consistent online data collection procedures that were programmed to safeguard high-quality data collection. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Women's University in Africa Bulawayo campus coordinator and from the respondents. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. Respondents were informed that the research findings would be utilised for research purposes before the beginning of the study. Quantitative data was statistically analysed using Microsoft Excel. Data were presented using pie charts and tables. Qualitative data were analysed using narrative content analysis.

Presentation and discussion of findings

The following section presents findings of the study. The findings revealed that the experiences of students regarding fieldwork supervision were similar even though there were minor differences. A total of 40 students participated in this study.

Gender of respondents

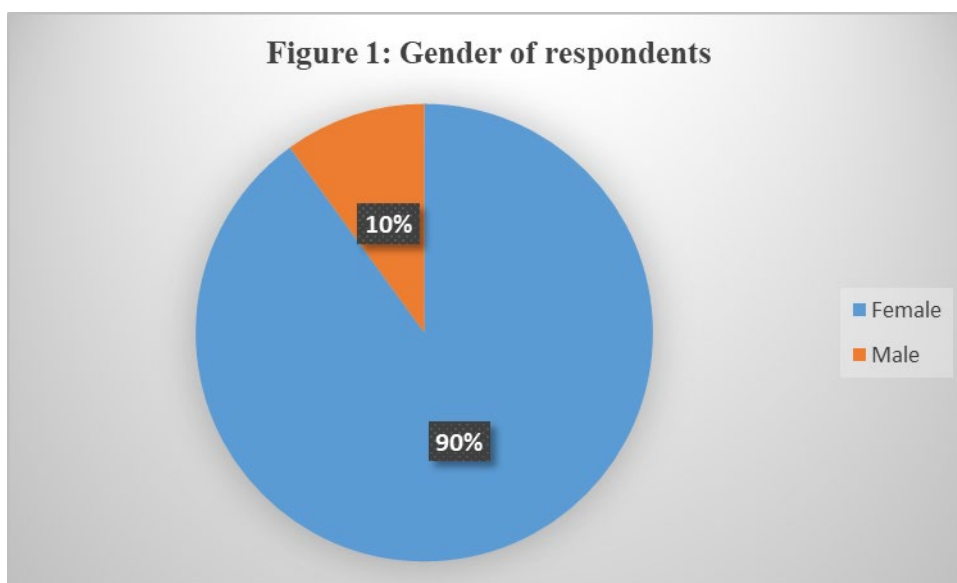


Figure 1 indicates that 90% (n=36) of student social workers at Women's University in Africa are females and 10% (n=4) are males. The researcher strongly believes the above links with international social worker demographics in terms of gender distribution, whereby the bulk of social work practitioners are females. This shows that social work is a female-dominated profession.

Age distribution of respondents

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

| Age group | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 20-29 years | 30 | 75% |
| 30-39 years | 5 | 13% |
| 40-49 years | 4 | 10% |
| 50 years and above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The above table indicates that most respondents—75 % (n=30)—are between 20 and 29 years of age, 13% (n=5) are between 30 and 39, 10% (n=4) are between 40 and 49, and 2% (n=1) are 50 years of age and above. Thus, based on age, one can guess that most student social workers are young people who are still energetic and eager to render social work services.

Qualifications that respondents are studying

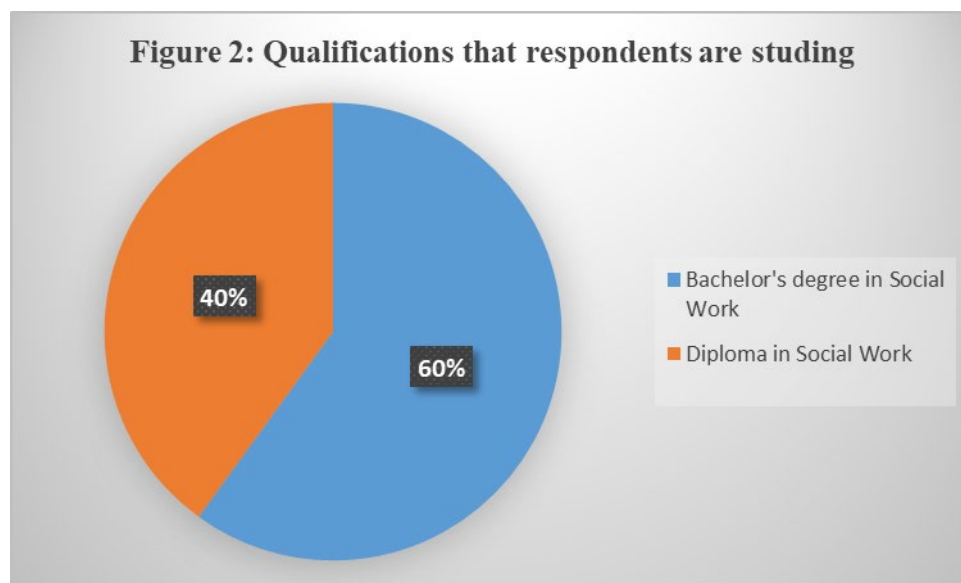


Figure 2 above shows the qualifications that respondents are studying. 60% (n=24) of respondents are studying for a bachelor's degree in social work, while 40% (n=16) are studying for a diploma in social work. The researcher believes the above correlates with international demographics for student social workers, whereby the majority of student social workers are studying for a bachelor's degree in social work.

Nature of organisation

Table 2: Nature of organization

| Organisation | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|
| Department of Social Development | 15 | 37% |
| Ministry of Health & Child Care | 6 | 15% |
| Ministry of Women Affairs | 1 | 2% |
| Non-governmental organisation | 8 | 20% |
| Prisons & Correctional Services | 3 | 8% |
| Urban Council Social Services Department | 7 | 18% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The above table shows that 37% (n=15) of respondents were placed in the Department of Social Development, 20% (n=8) were placed in non-governmental organisations, and 18% (n=7) were placed in Urban Councils' Social Services Department. 15% (n=6) were placed in the Ministry of Health and Child Care, and 8% (n=3) were placed in the Prisons and Correctional Services. Only 2% (n=1) were placed in the Ministry of Women Affairs. It is important to note that in Zimbabwe, the Department of Social Development is the primary setting for social work practice. Hence, most student social workers do fieldwork practice at the Department of Social Development. While Zimbabwe's government departments, such as the Department of Social Development, offer substantial settings for social work practice, social work is also practised in non-governmental organisations and other settings such as hospitals under the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Prisons and Correctional Services and in municipalities.

Respondents who received supervision during fieldwork practice

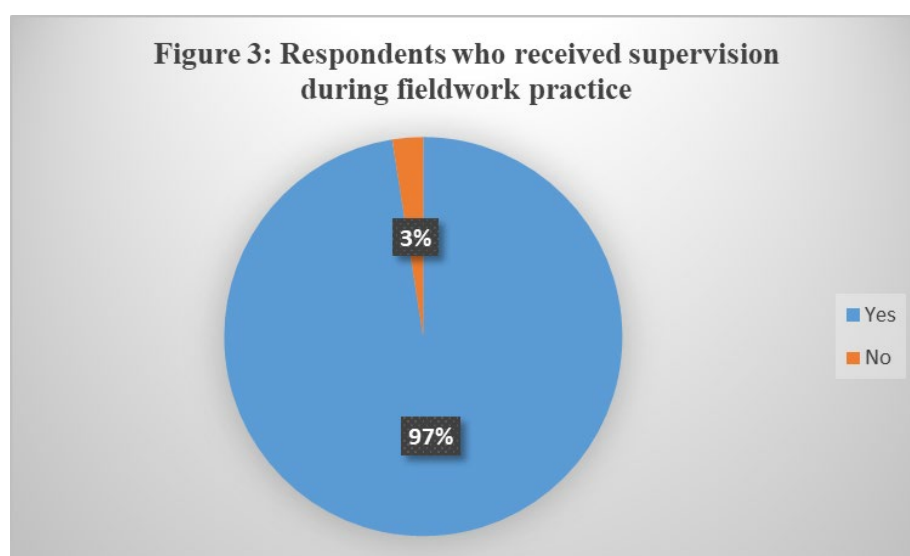


Figure 3 shows that 97% (n=39) of the respondents received supervision during fieldwork practice, while only 3% (n=1) did not. This suggests that most student social workers received guidance and mentorship from either a field instructor or a field coordinator during fieldwork practice. Dimo (2013) resonates that most social work students on fieldwork practice are supervised and supervision helps them to integrate theory and practice. This shows that fieldwork supervision is important in initiating social work students to social work profession.

However, there are few isolated incidents where students did not receive fieldwork supervision. Fieldwork supervision sharpens student social workers' skills. Similarly, studies conducted in East and Southern Africa by Dhembha (2012) indicated that some social work students do not receive supervision during fieldwork practice due to shortage of qualified social workers. In Zimbabwe many social workers are leaving the country for greener pastures in United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and United States of America. As a result, many welfare agencies are employing non-social workers with social science degrees such as sociology and psychology. Thus negatively affecting fieldwork supervision.

Frequency of agency fieldwork supervision sessions

Table 3: Frequency of agency fieldwork supervision sessions

| Frequency of supervision | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Weekly | 8 | 20% |
| Monthly | 9 | 22% |
| Bi-monthly | 2 | 5% |
| Quarterly | 11 | 28% |
| Bi-annually | 9 | 23% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Grand Total | 40 | 100% |

The table above shows that 20% (n=8) of the respondents were supervised weekly, 22% (n=9) were supervised monthly, 5% (n=2) bi-monthly, 28% (n=11) quarterly, 23% (n=9) bi-annually and 2% (n=1) indicated none of the above. On the contrary, studies conducted at a South African university by Budeli (2018) found that the majority (58%) of the respondents were supervised monthly during fieldwork practice. The essential phenomenon about these findings is that frequency of fieldwork supervision differs which means there is no uniformity regarding the frequency of fieldwork supervision meetings. The researcher is of the opinion that student social workers should be supervised when necessary or when there is a need.

Duration of agency fieldwork supervision

Table 4: Duration of agency fieldwork supervision

| Duration of supervision | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 45 minutes | 21 | 52% |
| 1 hour | 7 | 18% |
| 1-2 hours | 5 | 13% |
| 3-4 hours | 2 | 5% |
| 5-6 hours | 4 | 10% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The table above shows that 52% (n=21) of respondents' fieldwork supervision sessions lasted for 45 minutes and 18% (n=7) reported that they lasted for 1 hour. 13% (n=5) of the respondents indicated that fieldwork supervision lasts for 1-2 hours, 5% (n=2) reported that it lasted for 3-4 hours, while 10% (n=4) of the respondents indicated that fieldwork supervision lasted for 5-6 hours. However, 2% (n=1) indicated none of the above because they did not receive any fieldwork supervision. On the contrary, studies conducted by Mbau (2005) found that the majority (50%) of the respondents reported that fieldwork supervision sessions last for one hour at a time. The findings of this study revealed that the duration of fieldwork supervision sessions differs which means there is no uniformity regarding duration of fieldwork supervision session. The researcher is of the opinion that a reasonable duration of fieldwork supervision is between forty-five minutes and one hour.

Fieldwork supervision by a qualified social worker

Table 5: Fieldwork supervision by a qualified social worker

| Supervision by a qualified social worker | Number of responses | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|-------------|
| No | 2 | 5% |
| Yes | 37 | 93% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The table above indicates that qualified social workers supervised 93% (n=37) of the respondents during fieldwork practice. In corroboration with quantitative data in Table 5, some respondents cited the following:

My supervisor was a qualified and registered social worker with a degree in social work.

She was a qualified social worker.

However, 5% (n=2) of the respondents indicated that non-qualified social workers supervised them. 2% (n=1) of the respondents stated none of the above because they did not receive supervision at all. Students who were supervised by non-qualified social workers expressed the following:

I was supervised by a psychologist because the social worker left for greener pastures on the first week when I started my attachment.

My supervisor was a counsellor by profession.

From the above figures and assertions, fieldwork supervision is taken seriously because most student social workers receive it from qualified social workers. However, there are very few incidents where students are supervised by non-qualified social workers with social science qualifications such as psychology and counselling. Social work profession draws up concepts, methods and theories from disciplines such as counselling and psychology hence psychologists and counsellors have the capacity to supervise social work students on fieldwork practice. Dhemba (2012) resonated that social work is practiced in numerous settings and it unavoidable that non-social workers will have to supervise student social workers. The researcher is of the opinion that students who are supervised by non-qualified social workers should receive high frequent guidance and monitoring from the university fieldwork coordinator.

Planning for fieldwork supervision

Table 6: Planning for fieldwork supervision

| Fieldwork supervision planning | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Yes | 27 | 68% |
| No | 12 | 30% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The table above shows that 68% (n=27) of respondents planned for fieldwork supervision with their supervisor. In corroboration with quantitative data in Table 6, some respondents indicated the following:

We planned for supervision with our supervisor when we started attachment. Our plan was detailed and it covered the whole duration of attachment.

At the beginning of every month we will plan for supervision with my supervisor.

However, 30% (n=12) reported that they do not plan for fieldwork supervision with their supervisor. 2% (n=1) of respondents indicated none of the above because they were not allocated a supervisor during fieldwork practice. Some students also expressed the following views when asked why they did not plan for supervision with their supervisors:

My supervisor was always busy, we never had time to sit down together and plan for anything.

We did not plan for supervision because we were not aware that planning was needed.

From the above assertions and figures, it can be concluded that most students and their supervisors planned for fieldwork supervision. Budeli (2021) resonated that fieldwork supervision should be thoroughly planned by both students and their supervisors. However, there were very few instances where fieldwork supervision was not planned because supervisors were always busy and some had no idea about planning for fieldwork supervision. The researcher is of the view that it is the responsibility of both the student social workers and their supervisors to plan for fieldwork supervision.

Fieldwork supervision methods

Table 7: Fieldwork supervision methods

| Fieldwork supervision methods | Number of responses | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Individual supervision | 16 | 40% |
| Group supervision | 23 | 58% |
| Peer supervision | 0 | 0% |
| Co-supervision | 0 | 0% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The table shows that 40% (n=16) of the respondents reported that the method that was applied during fieldwork supervision was individual supervision. 58% (n=23) of the respondents indicated that group supervision was the method that was applied during fieldwork supervision. 0% (n=0) of the respondents indicated they neither applied peer supervision nor co-supervision during fieldwork practice. 2% (n=1) of the respondents stated that they applied none of the above because they did not receive supervision during fieldwork practice. From the above figures, it is clear that group supervision was mostly applied during fieldwork supervision. Mboniswa (2007) indicated that group supervision saves time for both student and supervisor. The study's findings revealed that students and their supervisors did not apply peer supervision and co-supervision. Mbau (2005) alluded that students are free to interact and consult with others during peer supervision. Budeli (2018) indicated that co-supervision provides students with an opportunity for diverse learning and amplified accessibility to support and advice. Thus, supervisors should apply diverse methods of supervision during fieldwork supervision to sharpen the skills of student social workers.

Functions of supervision applied during fieldwork supervision

Table 8: Functions of supervision applied during fieldwork supervision

| Function of supervision | Number of responses | Percentage |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Administrative supervision | 8 | 20% |
| Educational supervision | 27 | 68% |
| Modeling supervision | 1 | 2% |
| Motivational supervision | 3 | 8% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Grand Total | 40 | 100% |

The table above shows 68% (n=27) of the respondents reported that the function of supervision that was applied during fieldwork supervision is educational supervision, 20% (n=8) indicated administrative supervision, 8% (n=3) selected motivational function and 2% (n=1) modelling chosen function. However, 2% (n=1) indicated none of the above because they did not receive supervision. From the above figures, it is clear that educational supervision was mostly applied during fieldwork supervision. Budeli (2018) indicated that educational supervision helps student social workers improve and increase their social work practice skills. Thus, fieldwork supervision should apply diverse functions of supervision in order to equip social work students with skills and knowledge to be effective professional social workers.

Satisfaction with fieldwork supervision

Table 9: Satisfaction with fieldwork supervision

| Satisfaction with fieldwork supervision | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---|---------------------|-------------|
| Satisfied | 17 | 42% |
| Very satisfied | 19 | 48% |
| Not at all satisfied | 3 | 8% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The table above shows that 48% (n=19) of the respondents are very satisfied with the fieldwork supervision they received, and 42% (n=17) of the respondents are satisfied with it. In the same vein, the study conducted in South Africa by Budeli (2018) reported that the majority (54%) of respondents were satisfied and 11% were very satisfied with fieldwork supervision they received during fieldwork practice. In corroboration with quantitative data in Table 9, some respondents indicated the following:

I am very satisfied with supervision that I received during my attachment. My supervisor was my mentor, she guided me throughout my attachment.

I'm satisfied because my supervisor was very good. He ensured that we learn a lot about social work practice during our practical. He was always there for us.

However, 8% (n=3) of the respondents were not satisfied with the fieldwork supervision they received during practical. 2% (n=1) of the respondents responded none of the above because they did not receive supervision. Likewise, the studies conducted in a South African university by Budeli (2018) found that the minority (31%) of the respondents were not at all satisfied with supervision they received during fieldwork practice. Some students also expressed the following sentiments when asked why they were not satisfied with supervision:

The truth is that I was not satisfied with supervision that I received during my attachment. We were always busy with food distribution in rural areas. My supervisor was always on workshops or in Harare attending her master's degree classes.

I think it was not adequate because we will do it as a group and I never had the chance for one-on-one supervision. Even group was just rushed for ticking boxes.

From the above figures and assertions, it is very clear that most social work students are satisfied and very satisfied with the fieldwork supervision they received during fieldwork practice. However, few students were not satisfied with supervision that received during fieldwork practice because students and supervisors were always busy hence they had limited time for supervision. The researcher is of the opinion that fieldwork supervision must be prioritised and given adequate time and attention in order for all parties to be satisfied.

Supervisory relationship during fieldwork practice

Table 10: Supervisory relationship during fieldwork practice

| Relationship with agency supervisors | Number of responses | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Very good | 23 | 58% |
| Good | 11 | 28% |
| Average | 3 | 8% |
| Poor | 1 | 2% |
| Very poor | 1 | 2% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The above table shows that 58% (n=23) of the respondents had a very good relationship with their agency supervisor during fieldwork practice, and 28% (n=11) had a good relationship with their supervisor during fieldwork practice. 8% (n=3) had an average relationship with their supervisor during fieldwork practice. In collaboration with quantitative data in Table 10, some respondents cited the following:

My supervisor was a mentor to me, he will always guide and support me. Every time he was willing to help me, I will approach him every time when I had challenges and he will always support me.

My supervisor was very open. She was very free to me and I was always welcome in her office.

However, 2% (n=1) of the respondents had a poor relationship with their supervisor, and another 2% (n=1) had a very poor relationship with their supervisor during fieldwork practice. 2% (n=1) of the respondents indicated none of the above because they had not been allocated a supervisor during fieldwork practice. In support of bad relationship with the supervisor, one student said:

My relationship with my supervisor was not good from the first time I started my attachment. She will always mock me claiming that I have a strong rural background. I was always a laughing stock because of my rural background so I ended up avoiding her to avoid conflict.

From the findings, it can be summarised that most students had good and very good relationships with their supervisors. This aligns with study findings by Budeli (2018), who reported that social work students had welcoming and warm relationships with their supervisors. However, there are very few incidences where students had strained relationships with their supervisors. The researcher is of the opinion that a good relationship between a student and a supervisor models good professional conduct for forthcoming social workers.

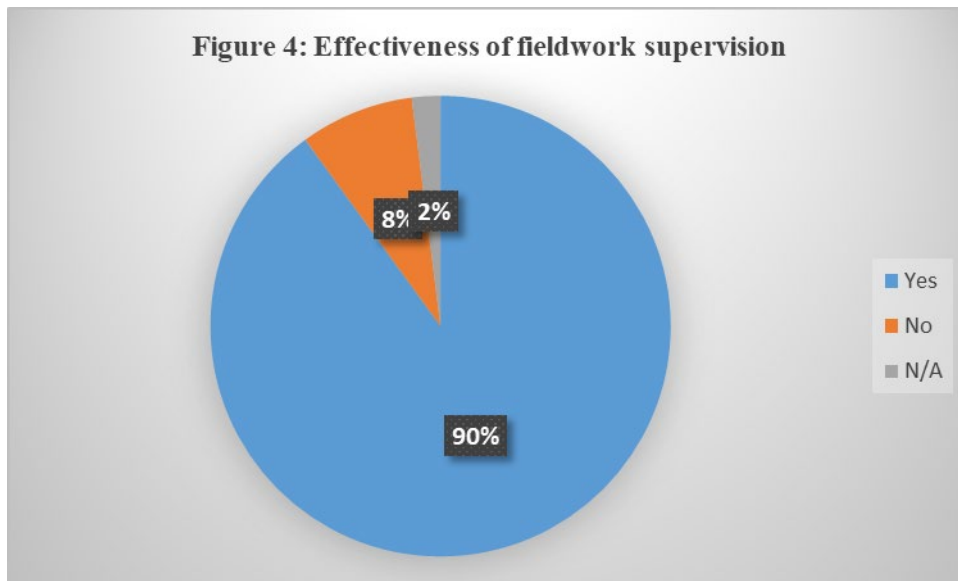
Initiator of fieldwork supervision sessions

Table 11: Initiator of fieldwork supervision sessions

| Initiator of supervision | Number of responses | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Supervisor initiated supervision | 23 | 57% |
| Student had to ask for supervision | 3 | 8% |
| Both the student and the supervisor | 13 | 32% |
| None of the above | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

The table above shows that 57% (n=23) of the respondents reported that the supervisor-initiated supervision, and 8% (n=3) indicated that the student had to ask for supervision. 32% (n=13) of the respondents reported that both student and supervisor-initiated fieldwork supervision. However, 2% (n=1) of the respondents indicated none of the above because they were not allocated a supervisor. Hence, they did not receive any supervision. This is in line with study findings by Budeli (2018), who reported that in most instances, group supervision is supervisor-initiated supervision because it is supervisor-led, while students mostly initiate individual supervision. From the findings, it can be summarised that in most instances, supervisors-initiated supervision, even though there are a few instances where students had to ask for supervision and isolated incidents of supervision initiated by both student and supervisor.

Effectiveness of fieldwork supervision



Respondents evaluated whether the fieldwork supervision received was effective or not. As shown in the above graph, 90% (n=36) of the respondents indicated that they received effective fieldwork supervision, 8% (n=3) cited that it was not effective and 2% (n=1) indicated that the question is not applicable to them because they did not receive any form of supervision. In the same vein, the study conducted in South Africa by Mboniswa (2007) found that the majority (51%) of the respondents indicated that they received effective fieldwork supervision while the minority (49%) of respondents reported that fieldwork supervision they received was not effective. The findings of the study revealed that most students believe that the fieldwork supervision they received was effective, but there are a few students who believe that the fieldwork supervision they received was not effective. Mbau (2005) indicated that respondents who received effective supervision were assisted in growing personally and professionally since they received new skills, knowledge, and support during supervision. This means that their future clientele will also receive quality social work services.

Experiential learning is relevant in this study because fieldwork supervision provides social work students with practical experience, enabling them to apply social work theories in real-world practise. This experiential learning assists social work students in building confidence and developing practical skills. Effective supervision supports social work students' experiential learning by providing mentorship, guidance, and feedback, enhancing social work students' readiness for real-world social work practise.

Recommendations

The Universities' Departments of Social Work, Department of Social Development and the Council of Social Workers should organise seminars and workshops to strengthen the capacity of all social workers regarding fieldwork supervision. Such workshops and seminars should be compulsory to social workers who supervises student social workers on fieldwork practice. This will guarantee that social workers who supervises students are well competent to offer effective fieldwork supervision.

Social work students should ensure that they plan for fieldwork supervision with their agency supervisors. Agency supervisors should maintain professional relationships with social work students. Social work students should be treated with respect and dignity. Social work students should be allocated supervisors who are willing to dedicate their time to mentor and guide students.

The Council of Social Workers in Zimbabwe in collaboration with Universities' Departments of Social Work should develop a policy on fieldwork supervision. The policy should cover issues of criteria of appointing fieldwork supervisors, the roles of fieldwork supervisors and supervisees. The process of conducting fieldwork supervision must be defined in the policy. The policy should be communicated to all welfare agencies to warrant transparency.

It will be beneficial if this research can be extended to other social work training institutions to ascertain whether views of students regarding fieldwork supervision are similar as those who took part in this research. If a study is done at national level, conclusions can be made based on comprehensive assessments of a bigger sample hence be able to make generalisations. This can assist in ensuring that recommendations are focused at national level whereby standardised procedures and policies on fieldwork supervision can be established and implemented to ensure effective fieldwork supervision.

Conclusion

The study examined the nature and effectiveness of social work fieldwork supervision at a Zimbabwean university and found that a significant proportion of social work students received effective fieldwork supervision during their fieldwork placements, while a handful of students encountered challenges such as unhealthy supervisor relationships, inadequate supervision, and supervision by non-social workers and inexperienced social workers. The study makes a significant contribution by addressing the gap identified in the literature. This paper will assist institutions, students, researchers, fieldwork supervisors, welfare agencies and social workers to design and implement a policy about fieldwork supervision. This study has limitations because the sample was drawn from one private Zimbabwean university, restricting generalizability to other Zimbabwean universities. Future research is needed to confirm these findings and examine fieldwork supervision in more detail.

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my late parents who were very proud of my academic achievement.

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