



RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges of Social Work Field Supervision in District Sargodha: A Phenomenological Analysis

¹Neha Bajwa, ²Dr. Beenish Ijaz Butt and ³Shajiah Qursam

1. MPhil Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Research Fellow, National School of Public Policy, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: beenish.ijaz@uos.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This article aims at examining the challenges faced by Field supervisors of Social Work Field Practicum in District Sargodha. The Social Work Field Practicum is an essential part of Social Work education, allowing students to implement theoretical concepts and knowledge during the practice of social welfare environments. Existing literature shows certain challenges faced by field supervision during Social Work Field Practicum. Followed by phenomenological analysis, this qualitative research used the interview guide to collect data from the field supervisors till saturation was achieved. The study identified disconnect between the academic curriculum and actual field experiences, a lack of Social Work qualifications among certain supervisors and varying levels of effort. Moreover to overcome this issue, it suggests recognizing and motivating committed supervisors, rotating students through various field environments, extending field hours, enhancing collaboration between academic and field supervisors, and providing regular training workshops for supervisors to refresh their skills and knowledge.

Keywords: Social Work, Field Practicum, Field Supervision, Theory-Practice Gap, Supervisors' Challenges

Introduction

According to Bogo (2020) fieldwork supervision stands as the principle's characteristic of Social Work because it demands theory-based knowledge to put into practical use. The practice-based profession and academic discipline of Social Work promotes social change and development along with community development and empowerment of individuals in groups (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014). Fieldwork within Social Work education describes the supervised learning experience where students implement theoretical knowledge at practice sites to develop their professional abilities (Papouli, 2014). The international standard in Social Work education requires fieldwork supervision to deliver essential abilities needed by students when working with complex social issues such as poverty and inequality according to Kadushin and Harkness (2021).

Fieldwork training enables students to understand and practice the values along with ethics embedded in the Social Work professional practice. The Social Work values consist of social justice alongside empowerment and humanitarianism (Kirstman-Ashman, 2017). Students acquire the knowledge and skills to practice as Social Caseworker, Case Manager, Group Worker, Group Counselor, Family Counselor, Community Organizer or Planner, Administrator or Policy Practitioner and Social Researcher through a combination of classroom education and supervised fieldwork training (Zastrow, 2016). Under supervision students of graduate-level Social Work participate in fieldwork training which takes place within an organizational structure known as a fieldwork agency. As Kirstman-Ashman (2017) describes, an organizational structure and supervision as, the formal along with informal system of establishing coordination and distribution defines organizational

structure as the framework which determines tasks and responsibilities and sets authority lines and communication methods and power dimensions within organizations. Organizational structure comprehension requires professionals to understand decision-making processes alongside command structures and client service procedures as well as Social Work role integration within the organizational framework.

District Sargodha, a key region in Punjab, Pakistan, offers a distinctive setting for fieldwork supervision due to its agricultural economy and socio-economic diversity (Rehman et al., 2021). The population in Sargodha experiences difficulties because they maintain both traditional rural customs and urban practices (Hassan & Malik, 2022). Professional Social Work students need to modify their practice approach under supervisor leadership when working in contexts like rural income-dependent child labor households (Malik & Rafiq, 2023; Khan & Ahmed, 2023). Supervisors face complex challenges in their work environment because institutions provide insufficient backing which underlines the necessity for studying unique challenges specific to regions (Ahmed & Khan, 2022; Siddiqui & Jamil, 2021).

A field supervisor's job requires merging three essential responsibilities which include mentorship and evaluation as well as cultural mediation according to Kadushin & Harkness (2021) and Cleak & Zuchowski (2020). These demands intensify in Pakistan due to inadequate resources while institutional negligence leads to poor commitment levels and unsuccessful outcomes (Malik & Rafiq, 2023; Hassan & Malik, 2022). Supervisors at Sargodha operate within specific circumstances wherein they need cultural sensitivity and professional skills to support students addressing gender-based violence cases in conservative environments (Rehman et al., 2021; Butt & Zaman, 2024). The research analyzes these circumstances by investigating how supervisors maintain their dedication despite accomplishing targets (Bogo 2020; Iqbal & Saeed 2020).

Literature Review

Recent Social Work literature extensively demonstrates the importance of field supervision which establishes competent Social Workers by fulfilling various essential roles. The beneficial outcomes from regular supervision sessions include both constructive criticism together with mentorship and reflective practice chance. The supervisory process allows supervisees to connect theory to practice which lets them handle difficult client situations successfully. As per Bogo (2015) field instructors acts as mentors to demonstrate all the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethical competencies of effective Social Work practice. The mentorship process helps create competent practitioners ready to provide high-quality service delivery for their clients.

Miteva, S. (2024) explains that supervision facilitates Social Workers to make ethical decisions wisely regarding confidentiality matters and dual relationships and mandatory reporting obligations. Field supervision along with ethical guidance enables Social Work ers to attain continuous professional development through its support. Supervisees learn new approaches from their supervisors who simultaneously practice reflective methods while offering helpful comments. The continuous support system promotes an organization that learns and adapts because Social Work continuously develops and changes. Various subjects at the Essex Social Care Academy deliver ongoing professional development training so Social Workers can boost their career growth opportunities (Devassy et al, 2022).

The direct supervision of fields leads straight to enhanced client results. The quality of supervision in place enables Social Workers to handle client needs in an effective manner. Having a supervisor improves workers' decision capabilities through critical thinking skill development while ensuring their methods reflect established industry standards. The process alignment between supervision objectives and best practice standards produces both higher service excellence along with favorable client interactions. The Social Work

Miteva, S. (2024) finds supervision supports Social Workers to deliver better results when caring for their clients. The emotionally challenging aspect of Social Work practice often results in employee burnout and exhaustion from repeatedly caring for others. During field supervision supervisees benefit from a nurturing setting which enables them to exchange professional experiences and handle work-related worries and obtain emotional support. The necessary support helps Social Workers maintain their well-being and decreases work-related stress to improve job satisfaction. The article from Social Work Miteva, S. (2024) explains that supervision creates opportunities for Social Workers to address their challenges alongside receiving emotional backing reducing their burnout potential.

Field supervision facilitates the effective integration of Social Work students into practice settings. Supervisors provide structured guidance and continuous assistance for students to learn agency procedures along with performance expectations as well as practical implementation of educational content. The integration of educational and supervision sessions builds essential skills needed by novice practitioners to grow in competence and confidence. According to Everett et al. (2011) proper orientations during the first days of field placement help lower student anxiety levels while enabling the formation of supervisory relationships. The organized framework provides students comprehensive readiness to take part in meaningful professional experiences. Field supervision continues to face important barriers because supervisors serve large caseloads while maintaining insufficient resources and varying proficiency levels. The solution of these obstacles demands creative strategies together with organizational backing. Efforts at Essex County Council to support Social Worker career progression and development occur under leadership of the Essex Social Care Academy. The Essex Social Care Academy began operations in 2012 to provide ongoing professional growth through training that supports various professional subjects which advances career options and progression (Devassy et al, 2022). The field supervision success proves how organization-backed initiatives produce beneficial results in practice.

Social Work supervision depends on substantial theories which provide fundamental knowledge for executing both supervision activities and educational instruction. This study uses two interconnected theoretical frameworks namely Reflective Practice Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) for its research purposes. These conceptual frameworks help supervisees while explaining professional experiences by showing their position in relation to both personal connections with clients and wider organizational surroundings. These frameworks merge to deliver complete insight about the dual role of Social Work supervision as an educational development tool and operational management system inside institutional and educational settings.

Professor Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides an organizational framework which positions supervisees in multiple social and institutional systems while offering this framework to Social Work education. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) human development follows systems of interconnected environments which include microsystem (immediate relationships), mesosystem (setting interactions), exosystem (indirect environments), macrosystem (societal cultural norms) and chronosystem (developmental time changes). The model enables field instruction supervisors to recognize intricacies in the variables which impact how supervisees learn during their practice experience. Each of the university environment as well as the field placement agency together with the client populations functions as a separate system that shapes the student learning process.

Microworld Placing Two and Ecological Systems Theory function as a complete framework to study Social Work supervision. The cognitive and emotional realms inside the individual Social Worker form the core focus of Reflective Practice but EST directs its assessment towards external system frameworks that impact these subjective experiences. The combined framework enables supervisors to create immediate responses for

supervisees' growth and modification of field education settings. Supervision effectiveness and Social Work trainees' ability to perform as reflective systems-aware practitioners in elaborate social settings both improve through integration.

The two conceptual frameworks jointly provide essential knowledge about the development and dynamics that occur in Social Work supervision programs. The skills of professional judgment emerge from Reflective Practice through student self-reflection combined with dialogical practice while Ecological Systems Theory presents the theoretical context for student development in social and institutional arenas. The supervisory model achieves stronger effectiveness through their joint use because they connect professional development to personal aspects as well as structural elements of practice.

Materials and Methods

The study used a qualitative research design; the choice of qualitative research is also justified in light of the limited research available on field supervision in Pakistan. Local institutions, particularly in semi-urban areas like Sargodha, often lack structured supervisory frameworks. The research design is structured around a descriptive phenomenological model to explore lived realities of field supervision as encountered by Social Work Supervisors. Descriptive designs are suitable when the objective is to provide a comprehensive summary of specific phenomena, without influencing or controlling variables (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The researcher used purposive and convenience sampling techniques to select respondents who were currently serving as field supervisors in district Sargodha. Respondents were selected based on their roles and nature of their work. The criteria for selection included accessibility, availability, convenience, and consent to participate. Respondents were designated officers in field placements. As the study aimed to provide an in-depth account of the Social Work field supervisors, 11 field work supervisors participated in the study. They were all based in district Sargodha and had varying degrees of education and experience. The respondents included 3 males, and 8 females with 5 to 18 years' work experience. Most of them worked for government institutions, except for 2 who worked for nongovernmental organizations.

Data was gathered directly from respondents through the interview guide. Interviews were conducted in the Urdu and English language because some participants find it difficult to respond in English. Interview guide were arranged for data collection. Open ended questions gave the researcher an opportunity to probe. The data was collected to the point of data saturation. In this study the data saturation was achieved by the eleven interviews. All interviews were audio recorded in MP3 format by the consent of participants. After collecting data from respondents, interviews were manually transcribed exactly by using the collected data from interview guide.

The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews in verbatim, ensured they were accurate and employed thematic content analysis to pin point key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach allowed the researcher to group and sort the data into the themes and categories derived from recurring patterns that focused on the research objectives. The researcher then examined the interview transcripts multiple times, identifying challenges faced by Social Work field supervisors in district Sargodha. Following this, the researcher organized the data into transcribed form. Transcribed data was formulated bases on the prevalence of the concepts evident in the responses from Social Work practitioners. The data was subsequently categorized into themes for deeper analysis and discussion. After conducting the interview sessions, the findings were categorized into five major themes. These themes included roles and responsibilities of Social Welfare Officer, understanding of students regarding field work, strategies or approaches used by field supervisors to evaluate students, challenges faced by field supervisors and suggestions or solutions to prevent problems.

Results and Discussion

Theme- I- Theoretical Knowledge and Field Work realities: is there any nexus?

Theoretical knowledge is the academic knowledge students learn in classroom and is part of their syllabus and this is smooth learning. Practical field work is where students are sent to different placements related to their field where they can gain professional knowledge or can practice what they learn in classroom. When the respondents were asked about the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge, they were of the view that,

Practical knowledge has more importance, in fact our theoretical knowledge gets completion by practical knowledge. In my opinion field realities are more difficult because academic curriculum is like a clear picture but in field apparently there is no picture possibly in field what you assume is different practically. So, both align together because field work polishes the students and make them brighter.

Another respondent replied,

There is a wide difference, students have no clearance of subject or concept. There is no interpretation of knowledge regarding field e.g. Activity of donation and psychological assessment of residents. Students are not practically implementing what they are learning they are weak in this sense. In my opinion field realities are challenging. In field our smartness and experience teach us. Every matter is different to other we have to handle it according to require situation. The skills and Principles and techniques we learn in academic also help us in field.

Another respondent replied,

The students who have command in theoretical knowledge has its best understanding are able to link it with practical knowledge and a phase come when there is no link of theoretical knowledge with practical person learn with experience. In my opinion academic curriculum and field go side by side academic curriculum gave us idea about field in class room before going to field but when students come for field work who have best understanding of subject link the things with academic knowledge which provides them more understanding.

Many of them were of the view that

There is contradiction in academic curriculum and field realities because what we read is different in field. If we talk about personal past experience then theoretical and practical field have zero link because forty days training was nothing to relate in practical field life but if we talk about training after promotion that was outstanding that training is hundred percent applicable in practical field life that covers all practical grounds. Mostly things relate in field with what we read in academic curriculum not as it is but aligned to some extent.

In Social Work theoretical knowledge is incomplete without practical knowledge. Students cannot understand their subject or field completely until they don't perform practical or work in field work settings. Academic curriculum and field realities are aligned together. Knowledge of theoretical is quite different from practical knowledge when it comes to implementation. Framework created by theoretical knowledge is different in practice and needs regular revisions and implementation of new models.

Theme- II- Strategies or Approaches: there is no model

Strategies and approaches are frequently treated as synonymous, yet they embody different ideas. An approach refers to a general mindset regarding situation, shaped by foundational philosophical beliefs. In contrast, a strategy involves a meticulously devised

plan intended to reach particular, long-term objectives. This theme focuses on strategies and approaches used by Social Work field supervisors to supervise Social Work students. Field supervisors were asked that do they follow any specific method or model to supervise Social Work field work students. Every student is different with other with respect to both psychology and knowledge so supervisors deal then according to them. Technique and guidelines also vary from supervisor to supervisor. One of the respondent replied:

No there is not any model or method I specifically follow to supervise Social Work field work students. Social Work department should provide a guideline to field work agencies to guide these are areas in which you have to make our students expert and teach them practical skills. This will helpful for both students and field supervisors.

Model and methods in Social Work were new terms for respondent so, he expects that department or university should guide us in this regard to supervise students.

Respondents were asked through which technique they evaluate Social Work field work students' performance. They were also asked do they use any strategy to monitor students to perform their activities. They discussed the nature of their activities and mode of discussion with students after every activity. They discussed about their attitude, punctuality and interest towards their work. One of the respondent said:

Best way to teach Field work students is I give assignments to them and check them weekly and then report to their internal supervisor. I evaluate the student's performance through their punctuality, aptitude and attitude. Their body language tells all about their learning aptitude.

Most of the respondents evaluate students through their punctuality and activities they perform some also keep in touch with their internals so that students remain more vigilant. Feedback after any task is core thing it tells us about pros and cons and makes us more prepared for next task that how the work can be best and goals can be achieved. Feedback of students in field work is also helpful for supervisors they may get any idea which can be applied on future students. To make this practice of field work more fruitful. Respondents said that:

Time to time I take feedback from students verbally and face to face but at the end at the completion of their field work I take written feedback from students I also ask them to write their suggestions how it can be better.

Most of supervisors said that time to time they take feedback from students verbally and at the end evaluate them through viva vocal.

Another participant replied that,

I do follow Social Work models but mostly used model is culturally responsive strategies because women came here are from different background or culture so we deal them accordingly.

Many of them said that,

I don't follow any specific model. I just follow need-based strategies which are also criteria according to requirement of agency's student.

Theme- III- Challenges Faced by Field Supervisors

Almost every profession faces some challenges. If these challenges are not addressed, they become hurdle in goal achievement and success. Social Work field

supervision also faces some challenges which may be due to work load, lack of guide lines or communication gap between internal and external supervisors. Supervisors may face challenge due to poor understanding of theoretical knowledge or less time. One of the respondent said that

Institutional policies don't prohibit us in any matter while implementing supervision protocols so I deal with field work students in every way to enable them professional in future and compete in competitive seats. There is no resistance from department in fact 100% support is given. If some students show reluctance then their organization is changed.

Another participant said that,

It's varied from supervisor to supervisor (internal supervisor). Sometimes misconception is created when students misperceive the things and tell them in department to internal supervisors but matter is resolved through communication. Such cases become challenging for us.

Another respondent opines as,

This supervision is not in our official or job tasks so institution don't give us extra time for this, we have to manage it from our daily tasks. Students and department show cooperation in this regard.

One respondent replied that:

Field work students don't have in-depth knowledge of case work; group work and community development they only know the one-line definition. Further, only few students take interest you can say three out of ten do field work with dedication. Some students even don't know how to take case histories. Then these students are challenging for me I give them more briefing about things and more time.

Respondent had mixed opinion that some students have excellent knowledge some have poor understanding about theory of Social Work. It depends upon interest of students and their background knowledge.

Conclusion

To perform practical of any subject understanding of theory is very much necessary. Purpose of field work is to give students opportunity to practice what they learn and know about challenges of field realities as well as to gain professional knowledge so that they can understand their subject and know their domain. Similarly, Social Work students are sent to field placements to practice their primary methods of Social Work by applying principles, techniques and models of Social Work.

Despite being largely content with their positions, the research discovered that Social Work field supervisors in district Sargodha deal with a number of difficulties. Since many supervisors have not received formal training in Social Work, their knowledge of professional practices and concepts is limited. Effective supervision is further hampered by inadequate student understanding and a lack of coordination between internal and field supervisors. Enhancing the quality of field work requires regular training, well defined supervisory standards and improved communication between agencies and institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusion it is recommended that

- Field work knowledge might be included in classroom learning as a credit hour so that students will aware of objective and importance of field work, so that they can compare that theoretical knowledge in field and apply it practically.
- Field supervisors should be provided with regular guide lines to supervise students.
- An evaluation Performa should be given to field supervisors to mark performance of every student individually.
- A good liaison between internal and field supervisor is mandatory and training workshops should be organized for field supervisors for updated knowledge where they are taught with skills.

References

- Ahmed, S., & Khan, A. (2022). Bridging theory and practice: Challenges in Social Work education in Pakistan. *Journal of Social Work Education and Practice*, 7(3), 45–58.
- Bogo, M. (2015). Field education for clinical Social Work practice: Best practices and contemporary challenges. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 43(3), 317-324.
- Bogo, M. (2020). *Social Work supervision: Contexts and concepts* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1), 3–26.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. SAGE Publications.
- Butt, A., & Zaman, M. (2024). Cultural competence in Social Work supervision: Lessons from Pakistan. *Asian Social Work Journal*, 9(1), 12–25.
- Cleak, H., & Zuchowski, I. (2020). Mapping Social Work field education in the 21st century: A scoping review. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 50(6), 1755-1773.
- Devassy, S. M., Thampi, K., Harrison, J., Scaria, L., Metzger, J., & Joubert, L. (2022). International social work: Cross-cultural supervision of interns from the West in India. *British Journal of Social Work*.
- Everett, J., Miehl, D., DuBois, C., & Garran, A. M. (2011). The developmental model of supervision as reflected in the experiences of field supervisors and graduate students. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 31(3), 250-264.
- Hassan, R., & Malik, S. (2022). Socio-economic disparities and Social Work practice in Punjab: A case study of Sargodha. *Pakistan Journal of Development Studies*, 5(2), 89–104.
- Iqbal, T., & Saeed, M. (2020). Urbanization and Social Work challenges in Pakistan: Emerging trends. *Journal of Urban Studies and Policy*, 3(4), 67–82.
- Kadushin, A., & Harkness, D. (2020). *Supervision in Social Work* (6th ed.). Columbia University Press.
- Khan, A., & Ahmed, S. (2023). Social Work in Pakistan: Addressing contemporary challenges. *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(1), 33–49.
- Kirst-Ashman, K. K. (2017). *Introduction to Social Work and social welfare: Critical thinking perspectives* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Malik, N., & Rafiq, S. (2023). Burnout among Social Work field supervisors in Pakistan: A qualitative study. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 43(2), 123-136.
- Miteva, S. (2024). Supervision and Ethics. *Knowledge - International Journal*, 66(1), 149–154.
- Papouli, E. (2014). Field learning in Social Work education: Implications for educators and instructors. *Field Educator*, 4(2), 1-15.
- Rehman, A., Khan, M., & Ali, S. (2021). Cultural influences on Social Work practice in Pakistan: An ecological perspective. *International Social Work*, 64(5), 678-692.

- Siddiqui, H., & Jamil, R. (2021). Evolution of Social Work education in Pakistan: Opportunities and gaps. *Journal of Educational Development*, 6(3), 101-115.
- Zastrow, C. (2016). *Introduction to Social Work and social welfare: Empowering people* (12th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.