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Perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision within the Department of Social Development in the Limpopo province, South Africa

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CHAPTER FIVE

MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions based on the findings and makes recommendations in relation to the research problem. The overall aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision. The study had four objectives and the summary of the findings will be presented according to these objectives.

5.2 Main findings

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To elicit the views of newly qualified social workers regarding the perceived strengths of the DSD Framework for Supervision;
- To explore challenges encountered by them regarding supervision;
- To explore their perceptions of factors that affect the quality of supervision within the DSD; and
- To elicit their views on how supervision can be enhanced.

5.2.1 Objective 1 - To elicit the views of newly qualified social workers regarding the perceived strengths of the DSD Framework for Supervision

The participants identified the following strengths in the Supervision Framework; it ensures compliance with the values and ethics of the profession and the employing organisation; it expresses the need to ensure professional development; it advocates the need for a formal supervision contract in place between supervisor and supervisee and aims to regulate some compliance to the stipulations of the Framework.

The participants described their understanding of supervision in terms of the definition and their experiences of supervision. According to the Supervision Framework, supervision is described as a procedural and imparting way of mentoring and passing on knowledge, based on social work theories, by practitioners with five years and more working experience, to new graduates, through prescribed methodologies, in order to promote professional growth and improve quality of services to the users (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). In this study, the participants were able to define the aspects of social work supervision, although they did not use the definition stipulated in Supervision Framework. However, they indicated the same understanding of supervision and relate it to work coordination, supportive supervision, knowledge and experience of a supervisor and structured supervision.

On the frequency of supervision, the study revealed that newly qualified social workers do not receive supervision as stipulated in the Supervision Framework. The frequency varied from once in three months to no supervision at all. In addition, some participants seemed confused about the duties of supervisors within the DSD. One may conclude from these findings that even though the DSD has developed and implemented the Supervision Framework, there are still challenges for newly qualified social workers to receive supervision as proposed. This is also confirmed by the study conducted by Engelbrecht (2013) on social work supervision policies and framework, which revealed that despite the introduction of the South African Supervision Framework, unmanageable workloads between the supervisors and the supervisees affects the quality of supervision. Furthermore, the actual practice differed from the requirements of the DSD Framework in that most participants do not receive fortnightly supervision.

On the method of supervision, there is no consistency in this setting regarding the method of supervision. The study revealed that nine social workers receive individual supervision, but not as defined by the Framework for social work supervision. This supervision is normally received during staff meetings, signing of quarterly reports or when a social worker calls to ask questions over the phone. Individual supervision is regarded as suitable because it enables the supervisor to attend to the individual needs and development of each supervisee. Also, from the findings, none of the interviewed social workers who participated in this study were receiving group supervision. Group supervision has benefits and is less time consuming since the supervisor is able to see all the supervisees at one time. This could assist those supervisors who are supervising many social workers, as sometimes individual supervision may not be possible.

Five social workers in the study were receiving peer supervision. This method of supervision may not be suitable for newly qualified social workers as they are still inexperienced in the field of social work. However, it may be suitable if a senior social worker or an experienced social worker is involved in peer supervision. Even though supervision has been identified with professional growth and development, the study showed that there are some social workers who are not receiving supervision at all. Five participants reported not to have everreceived supervisionnor had any regular meetings with their supervisors. A significant number of participants in this study indicated that when they have difficult cases at work, they ask their colleagues to assist them. The risk associated with lack of supervision is that, it will affect service delivery because the rural communities, social work services are strongly relied on by the people and furthermore, lack of supervision will negatively affect the professional development of social workers.

5.2.2 Objectives 2 and 3 - To explore challenges encountered by newly qualified social workers regarding supervision and factors that affect the quality of supervision within the DSD

These two objectives were intertwined, as during the study, the participants discussed them in combination. In this study, amongst other challenges identified was lack of resources such as transport within the DSD. It was highlighted that lack of transport made it difficult for supervisors to reach the newly qualified social workers they were expected to supervise. Other participants highlighted the issue of geographical locations, as it hinders supervision. The District of Waterberg is mostly rural, the settlements are scattered and the offices of social workers in the Waterberg District are located far from their supervisors' offices.

Some participants felt that their supervisors are also not well trained to execute the functions of supervision. In a situation where training for supervisors is not provided, this could potentially be true, because appointed social work supervisors are given posts on the basis of their years of work experience, regardless oftheir knowledge and skills. Although the Supervision Framework has identified the training of supervisors as a crucial aspect, the Framework does not clearly define frequency of attendance or sanctions in terms of non-compliance by supervisors (DSD & SACSSP, 2012).

The ratio of supervisor to supervisees was also highlighted as being unmanageable in the Waterberg District. Although the Supervision Framework states clearly that the ratio of supervisor to supervisees is 1:10 (one supervisor to ten supervisees), it seems that the DSD is not adhering to this ratio. In this District, one supervisor was allocated 23 supervisees compared to the 10 supervisee ratio noted in the Framework. This is as the result of the

shortage of social work supervisors within the Waterberg District. Other findings that emerged were the high workload of supervisors; besides supervision, supervisors are doing other tasks such as attending workshops and meetings.

5.2.3 Objective 4 - To elicit newly qualified social workers' views on how supervision can be enhanced

The findings of this study showed that most social workers felt that there should be regular supervision for newly qualified social workers. Because newly qualified social workers lack orientation and knowledge of governments' rules, regulations and laws, it may be difficult for them to work independently. The literature has showed that supervision plays a role in improving the quality of services to clients. Therefore, the more supervision is provided to newly qualified social workers in the Waterberg District, the better could be services provided to clients. In addition it was asserted that the situation could be improved if supervisors contacted their supervisees at least once a month. Regularly supervision is significant as it gives supervisees' an opportunity for learning and professional growth. During supervision sessions an agenda is set with the clear goals of the session based on supervisee's development plan (Engelbrencht, 2014).

5.3 Conclusions

This research study documented the views of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision. Social work supervision is a misunderstood concept in the Department of Social Development in Waterberg District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. While it is addressed within the Supervision Framework of the Department of Social Development, for Supervisors to mentor and provide supervision for newly appointed social workers, this important activity is not rendered. When social work supervision is not offered, communication is affected between newly appointed social workers and their supervisors, which can potentially affect

the effectivenessand efficiency of service provision to surrounding rural communities. The social worker is a trusted person for problem solving and family matters in these communities; it is therefore risky for the supervisors not to provide supervision and to allow newly qualified social workers to offer social work services to the community without proper monitoring and guidance. This is a weakness of the Department of Social Development in the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province of South Africa, because lack of supervision literally translates into lack of professional development within the Department.

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that DSD supervision is not rendered according to the Framework forSocial Work Supervision and that there are still challenges to be overcome within the District of Waterberg in the Limpopo Province,with regard to supervision. It is of concern that this lack of supervision could jeopardise the quality of services rendered to the clients of the DSD.

5.4 Recommendations

The following are recommendations established from the findings of the study.

5.4.1 Recommendations for social workers and supervisors

Newly qualified social workers are not receiving supervision and are not being mentored as much as they wish,which can potentially affect the quality of their work; thiswas seen as a challenge to most of the participants of this study. For these reasons, an agreement should be entered into that supervisors should work at offices nearer to their supervisees in order to be more accessible; supervision must be provided as frequently as possible and supervisors should be available to answer supervisees' questions encountered while working with the community.

The findings revealed that there are not enough social work supervisors in the Waterberg District to supervise and monitor the work of newly qualified social workers; therefore it is important that group supervision should be recommended, since it is timeeffective and many supervisees can be seen at once. Given the low number of supervisors within the Waterberg District, it is not easy for them to render individual supervision to all supervisees. However, individual or peer supervision could still be rendered when the need arises.

5.4.2 Recommendations for the Department of Social Development

The South African Department of Social Development needs to capacitate the early career social workers to understand the duties of the supervisors within the DSD in the Limpopo Province. Furthermore, additional supervisory posts should be created and filled to accommodate the existing number of social workers who need supervision. This may assist the DSD to adhere to the ratio of supervisor to supervisees, as stipulated in theSocial Work Supervision Framework.

There is also a need for the Department of Social Development to establish a Human Resource Development Programme to empower more social workers (with five years of working experience) to take on the role of supervisors, since the current supervisors are not capable of offering such services effectively. In addition, supervisor job descriptions should be adjusted so that they are not allocated so many responsibilities in addition to providing supervision; supervision currently does not seem to be viewed as a priority by supervisors based on their daily work load. Practical issues such as stationing supervisors far from offices where supervisees work, should also be addressed.

The spatial configuration of rural communities is also one of the challenges affecting supervision in the Department of Social Development. To address this challenge, the use of electronically supported supervision (e.g. through Skype) should be promoted. This is significant because it will enable supervisors to have access to their supervisees especially those who are located in rural areas.

It is also critical that monitoring and evaluation of supervision for newly qualified social workers be undertaken. This should be done by following up and assessing whether supervision is rendered in line with the Supervision Framework. Monitoring and evaluation will assist in assessing the impact, and measuring the effectiveness of implementation of the Supervision Framework. This will assist managers and policy makers to make informed decisions about Framework operations.

The key informants, who are also social workers with years of experience, have indicated that there are other managerial responsibilities that are assigned to them, in addition to providing supervision. This is a clear indication that the Department of Social Development needs to review its structure, and ensure that supervisors are not given administrative work that requires them to be away from their supervisees. Daily interaction and regular communication could strength the relationship between supervisors and newly qualified social workers.

5.4.3 Recommendations for the South African Council for Social Service Profession (SACSSP)

In terms of the findings of this study, it is recommended that the SACSSP should issue practice guidelines for supervision and also monitor how supervision occurs. Furthermore,

the SACSSP should regularly review the Supervision Framework and evaluate where there is a need to revise it.

5.4.4. Recommendations for Educational Institutions

Lack of training for supervision has been identified as one of the challenges affecting the quality of supervision within the DSD. Therefore, it is recommended that educational institutions should offer accredited courses on supervision or continuing professional development (CPD) courses. This will assist supervisors to have better knowledge and understanding of how supervision should occur.

5.5. Future research

A similar study should be done in other districts of the Limpopo province to gain further insights into the challenges encountered by newly qualified social workers regarding supervision. Furthermore, research could also be conducted within the Department of Social Development nationally to assess and evaluate the implementation of the Supervision Framework.

Although the Department has developed the Supervision Framework, the findings in this study showed that there are still challenges with regard to supervision of newly qualified social workers. This study has shown that the Department needs to take this into consideration supervisionso that the challenges faced by newly qualified social workers may be minimised. Supervision offers growth, learning and development that are essential for social work profession. It is commendable that DSD has put in place the Supervision Framework, but there is a need for greater understanding and attention to implementing the framework.