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Supervision among social care workers: prevalence and effects

By

Janice O'Donnell

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<u>Declaration</u>

This research dissertation is presented as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts in Advanced Social Care Practice. It is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any other academic reward or to any other institution. Where use has been made of work belonging to others it has been fully acknowledged and referenced.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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Aims and Objectives

Aim

Supervision among social care workers: prevalence and effects.

Objectives

1. To explore the understanding/ experiences of supervision among social care workers.

2. To explore the frequency/type of supervision provided to social care workers.

3. To examine the level of satisfaction with supervision among social care workers.

Abstract

Supervision can be defined as '*an accountable process which supports assures and develops the knowledge, skills and values of an individual group or team. The purpose of supervision is to improve the quality of their work and in social care this should optimize the capacity of people who use services to lead independent and fulfilling lives*' (Grey, Field, & Brown, 2010, p.49)

Supervision has been widely recognised as a valuable tool to promote best practice and has become a mandatory component among many social care organisations. The aim of this research was, to explore social care workers experiences on supervision within their workplaces. The objectives of this research firstly looked at social care workers knowledge and understanding of supervision and their individual experiences of supervision. The results examined the experiences of supervision which varied greatly between the respondents. A qualitative method was used to collect relevant in depth data. The researcher received rich data on the topic, and this gave the researcher a great insight into the experiences and opinions of supervision among social care workers. The researcher acknowledges that although a great amount of rich information was obtained, it is difficult to make conclusions as to the general population of social care workers, with any confidence, due to the small sample size used.

However, the data showed that supervision can be very individual, between the supervisor and the supervisee. The staff who received formal supervision seemed to have different workplace issues that needed to be addressed within in the supervision sessions.

Secondly the research looked at the type and frequency of the supervision sessions. Three of the participants received regular individual supervision, but felt that this could be improved on through regular planned sessions, and giving staff an opportunity to discuss their own issues and promote new ideas within the supervision sessions. The results indicated that the majority of staff where receiving some form of informal supervision.   The elements of supervision which the participants found to be the most important were on professional skill development, reflection, and time to seek and receive feedback.

Thirdly the research examined their level of satisfaction within work place supervision. The overall findings of the study suggest that the majority of participants had negative views on their individual supervision sessions. The results indicated that the majority of the participants had an issue with the management structure within their organisations, and for not delivering effective quality supervision and support. The results gave many suggestions on the ways supervision could be improved, such as allocated time and more staff involvement in the process. Recommendations suggest that supervision training be made available for all staff.

It was evident that there was not of research available on social care workers views on supervision and the experience they had within this process, also most of the research relayed heavily within the nursing profession. Also evident was that, there did not seem too much research available, on the outcomes of supervision and the effects this may have on service users.

Section 1

Literature Review

<u>Introduction</u>

Professional supervision is an '*integral part of effective practice*' for social care practitioners. (O'Neill, 2013, p.182). In Ireland today, social care workers work in all different types of settings, from childcare residential services, disability services, youth work, and community development among others. Social care workers work with families, children, the elderly, and community groups. Social care workers generally speaking, work with vulnerable people in need of help and support (Lalor & Share, 2013, p.42). Social care work is characterised by its '*uncertainty and complexity*' (MacKian & Simons, 2013, p.229).

Social care work is mainly conducted through personal relationships and interactions, with clients who need practical support or personal care. With the recent adverse publicity, particularly regarding nursing homes the Health Information Quality Authority (H.I.Q.A) is under increasing pressure to ensure consistent levels of quality in all caring environments. Therefore, due to the level of expectations of service users and their families increasing, the expectations for consistently higher quality care places enormous demands on the service providers. Against this background a policy of improved supervision is seen as a necessary element of management duty of care.

The supervisor and the supervisee both share responsibility for carrying out their role in this collaborative process. The overall aim of professional supervision should be to provide the best possible support to staff in accordance with the organisation's responsibilities and accountable professional standards. Therefore, organisations are likely to achieve better and more consistent outcomes if workers are supported, and have a clear understanding of their roles, duties and responsibilities, and, if they are assisted and supported by a supervisor with whom they have a good personal relationship.

In general society has become much more demanding of service provision, and there is now an increased requirement for quality and standards across all areas social care practitioners work. Research into what happens within supervision, suggests that effective supervision generates good outcomes for workers as well as service users. '*Effective supervision can often be the difference between: success and failure; stress and job satisfaction; worry and*

reassurance; good practice and excellent practice. Its significant role should therefore not be underestimated' (Thompson, 2002, p.57).

Supervision is widely recognised as an essential tool to promote best practice, especially in workplaces which are highly relationship based.

This research project aims to examine the experiences of supervision among social care workers and illicit their views and opinions.

Definition of supervision

'Professional supervision is a partnership process of ongoing reflection and feedback between a named supervisor and supervisee(s) to ensure and enhance effective practice''. (O'Neill, 2013, p.184, Bromberg (1982), Hess, (1980) Morrison (2003) all suggest that supervision is a relationship between two people, one of whom has the purpose of using it to improve his/her work with someone in his/ her life and the other who has the purpose of helping him or her to do this.

Supervision has a '*general goal whereby one person (the supervisor) meets with another (the supervisee) in an effort to make the work more effective'* (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000, p.50). This is further demonstrated by Morrison (2003, p.56) where he defines that supervision should be '*a cooperative and facilitating process'* which aims to: enhancing the worker's personal development, assure that the worker is acting professionally and is accountable for his/her work. Supervision is a diverse and rich subject area, where each supervisor can find perspectives and ideas which will be useful and stimulating for their practice.

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The purpose and function of supervision

The primary functions of supervision are: administrative case management, reflective practice, personal support, professional development and mediation, in which the supervisor acts as a bridge between the individual staff member and the organisation. (Carpenter &Webb, 2012, p.8)

According to (O'Neil, 2005, p.165) '*Accountability, Support and Learning are the main functions of supervision.*' Similarly Kaduchin 1976, (cited in Hawkins and Shohet, 2000,

p.42), identified the functions as Managerial, Supportive and Educative. In the area of social care, employers and service providers must be answerable to service users for their actions.

The employees in turn must have a clear understanding and be fully aware of their role and their responsibilities. Support is necessary if the individual staff member is to carry out their work in a demanding work environment. Ongoing learning and personal development is a vital aspect of supervision. Reflection and feedback are recognised as key components in all effective supervision. O'Neil (2013, p.186) suggests that '*Each of these three functions need to be present in a balanced way over time if supervision is to meet its objectives*'.

The overall purpose of supervision is to promote best practice for workers, to enhance the social care worker's professional skills, attitudes and knowledge, in order to achieve competency in providing quality care. (Morrison, 2003, p.46) suggests that '*The overall aim of supervision is to promote best practice for clients by maintaining existing good practice and continuously striving to improve it*'. This is further highlighted by (O' Doherty, 2013, p.13) who also suggests that effective supervision '*enhances the standard of work undertaken, so that in turn vulnerable members of the public will have an improved quality of life?*'.

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<u>Providing effective supervision.</u>

There have been many recommendations made on the necessity for formal supervision as a means of promoting professional practice.

For effective supervision to exist within organisations, there are many things that can assist the supervision process such, the resources and the ability to provide quality effective supervision. It must invest in training for supervisors and allow time for supervision within the workplace. Organisations need to ensure that they have a policy for supervision, this will ensure that supervision is available for all (O' Neill, 2004, p.21).

Supervision is a process in which the supervisor and the supervisee have '*responsibilities*' *if* is to be effective. These include: Preparation for the supervision session, starting session on time and using this time fully, two-way communication and honest feedback, contributing to

the agenda by both parties and having no interruptions during supervision session (O'Neill, 2013, p.184).

Recently ongoing changes in the professional practice in social care have led to an increased emphasis on the need for effective supervision. There is now an increased stringency on social care workers as they will be moving towards professional registration with CORU. This is a   regulatory body for health & social care professionals. CORU originates from the Irish word coir meaning fair, just and proper. These are values which resonate deeply within CORU and reflect their commitment to protecting the public, by regulating health and social care professionals (www.coru.ie). This has led to an increased demand for accountability and also an increase in professional competence, as we have seen previously, in other health care roles such as social work and nursing.

It is important that employees can discuss any aspects of their work with their manager. Service-user confidentiality should not breached during supervision sessions, although there is a clear responsibility to ensure that supervision discussions take place in a private room rather than a shared office.

Supervision should be used to support and develop social workers professional judgement in handling and sharing confidential information. Managers should ensure that practitioners are

aware of their responsibilities regarding confidential information throughout the supervision sessions.

Different types of supervision.

Individual Supervision

Individual supervision as the name suggests is where supervision is focused on one individual. This involves meeting each staff member at his/her stage of experience and confidence. The individual can openly talk about issues/concerns that may be affecting his/her work. This can be the most effective form of supervision.

Group Supervision

Supervision may be in groups. This is a useful tool as staff may gain support from other members of the staff team, or learn by other members of the team experiences.

Another breakdown is between formal and informal supervision.

Formal Supervision has a clear focus, clear aims and objectives for the session. These are planned sessions and should occur at regular intervals. The structure of formal supervision gives staff preparation time, regularity of evaluation, and records kept of points of issue.

Informal supervision is advice or frontline support from the manager in an informal way. This is not seen as the most reliable method of supervision, as it does not allow for reflection of work, or records to be kept of the supervision session.   However, informal supervision may be useful in some situations whereby an individual needs immediate assistance. This type of informal supervision may be useful in certain instances within social care. For example staff may be dealing with challenging behaviour, or working alone with service users, or may be having difficulties understanding service user wishes.

Models of Supervision

There are many different types of supervision models.   These include; psychodynamic models, cognitive/behaviour models, and development models of supervision (Kaufman & Schwartz, 1993). Morrison and Wonnacott (2010) suggest that there is a need for '*one clear model'* of supervision.   This model would combine the four functions of effective supervision: management, professional development, emotional support and mediation. This model of supervision focuses on the needs of the service users, the staff, and the organisation. This model connects all the elements for effective supervision. (Carroll & Tholstrup, 2001, p.13) also highlight the need for one coherent model of supervision for social care workers. Although there are many models of supervision, the key functions of supervision remain the same these include support, education and accountability.

Skills and qualities for a supervisor

The supervisory relationship is built on trust, confidentiality, support, and empathic experiences. Other qualities inherent in the supervisory relationship include constructive feedback, safety, respect, and self-care. (Spouse & Redfern, 2000, p.7) suggest that the supervisory relationship is at the '*heart and soul of supervision'*.

There are qualities and skills needed for effective supervision. Supervisors and supervisee's must have the ability to be open to change for new and different situations that may arise within the workplace, may be open to new ideas and working from different angles to solve issues.

Supervisors must also be able to demonstrate humour, humility and patience throughout supervision sessions (Gilbert and Evans, 2000: cited in Hawkins & Shohet, 2009, p.50).

Supervision entails a sophisticated understanding of professional practice. For practitioners who take on this supervisor role they must be highly competent in their field of knowledge.

Previous Research on Supervision

Gordon & Donnellan, (2010) in this article they follow the progress of social workers through their first year of employment. It focuses on the experiences of social workers employed with children and families. Questionnaire and interview data were gathered from staff. These were all newly qualified social workers working in children's services in three local authorities and were invited to complete an initial postal questionnaire, with those that returned completed questionnaires were also interviewed for the study. Key findings of the study was that supervision is a key learning and support mechanism for staff. Other findings

included that nearly all the participants in the research study appreciated the open door policy commonly operated by their line manager as a means of informal support.

(Chipchase et al, 2012) suggests there is little research regarding the role and qualities needed in the supervisor role, for supporting staff and student placements. This paper reports the views and perceptions of medical and allied health students and supervisors, on the characteristics of supervision. A qualitative case study was used involving semi-structured interviews of eight health professional students and four clinical supervisors before and after their placement.

This research suggests that supervision from educators whose profession differs from that of the students can be a beneficial and rewarding experience. In this study the common theme that emerged was that the participants valued inter-professional supervision, and there was agreement that profession-specific supervision was not required throughout the supervision sessions. This theme was also evident in my research project as four of the participants had supervisors whose profession differed from their own, as the majority of social care workers interviewed were supervised by a nursing profession supervisor. Further research is required to understand this view. Many professionals may work in teams supervised by staff whose profession may differ from their own.

(Beddoe, 2010) also did a small brief exploratory study on professional supervision in the 'Risk Society'. Supervision is an expanding professional practice in health and social care. This research was carried out with six qualified social care workers who had supervision qualifications. They had also supervised staff in more than one field of practice, and had five years supervision experience.   Overall the views of these participants reflected a positive experience of supervision. Three major themes emerged from these interviews.

These included: (I) the professional growth of supervisees (ii) the supervision process and how this should occur (iii) the functions of effective supervision.

(Redmond et al, 2012) study focuses on the experience of supervision among social workers. A series of questions were used to explore different aspects of the supervision experience.

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Respondents answered questions such as 'Do you receive supervision and do you supervise others? '117 participants reported to supervise others while 87 of the respondents regularly received supervision. The frequency of supervision received or required was also discussed. The most common response frequency of supervision was monthly. However it was noted in the research that more participants would like to be receiving monthly supervision. Finally participants were also invited to rate the general level of satisfaction with the supervision they received. While 24 respondents (13.2%) reported that the question did not apply to them as they did not receive supervision, another 35 (19.2%) stated that they were very satisfied while (9.3%) reported that they were '*very dissatisfied*' with the supervision they received.   This research although based on social workers results, is on par with my research study on social care workers on supervision, and the level of satisfaction.

(Dawson, 2013) identified several factors which could improve supervision among allied health professionals. This research study, had fourteen supervisors who participated in a focus group. This was followed by the completion of a questionnaire by twenty-six supervisors. The results of this study were as follows: more time needed for supervision, more resources, and increased consistency, and structure and feedback regarding the supervision process. Feedback to the supervisor was considered important to improving supervision; it was noted that there was little or no feedback occurring, Further education was suggested to empower staff to drive their supervision process.

The findings suggested that supervision was perceived as being generally positive for the supervisor and for patient care, while acknowledging the need for protecting supervision time, and the provision of critical feedback requires improvement. Development of supervisor feedback mechanisms, supervisor and supervisee training and improved documentation will assist the improvement of supervision, leading to the provision of quality patient care.

Another interesting article by (Ratanasiripory, 2002) results highlighted that the '*interperpersonal relationship style*', and the '*supervision tasks*', accounted for the majority of negative experiences within supervision.

This review of the literature has identified a substantial body of research that suggests that the provision of supervision is associated with positive outcomes for the worker and for

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organisations. However, there is little empirical evidence indicating that the lack of structured supervision inevitably leads to poor outcomes. This review found no studies evaluating the impact of supervision on specific aspects of job performance.

Policy on Supervision

The Children's   First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (1999), refers to the appropriate supervision of staff, in order to help them address to issue of stress amongst staff. In this publication, *The National Children's Strategy- Our Children, Their Lives,* (2000) it states that all staff will have available to them '*skilled supervision and support'* in order to facilitate their work with children.

The Kilkenny Report (1993)**,** showed proof that lack of accountability and ineffective communication between professionals have led to unsafe practice. This, and enquiries such as Kelly 1996); West of Ireland Farmer Case (Bruton, 1998); Monageer Inquiry (Brosnan, 2009); and the Roscommon Child Care Case (Gibbons, 2010), all drew attention to the lack of supervision in place, and this was a major factor in the in the provision of inadequate services.

Buckley & O'Nolan (2013) report on recommendations from inquiries into events in families and their interactions with State services, and their impact on policy and practice their recommendations highlight the necessity that '*supervision of frontline staff should be no less than monthly and may need to be more frequent for new or inexperienced staff'* also that managers '*who provide supervision to staff should receive training in supervision theory and practice'*.

Stress and burnout among social care workers has received increasing attention among social care workers, as significant changes have impacted on the role and responsibilities of workers

that they are expected to take on. Societal changes and investigations such as these , the recent being Aras na Trachta investigation, has led to increasing pressure on staff to provide high quality care and higher standards of care , however this lack of support for staff can lead to high levels of stress and burnout. Findings suggest that social care workers '*who perceive that their supervisor to be supportive have less potential for burnout*' (Lloyd, King, & Chenoweth, (2002).

Nowadays there is much more awareness of the necessity of supervision, with many organizations having a formal supervision policy. However this may not be the case for some organizations that are only starting to introduce supervision policy, particularly in the area of disability day services and residential care. This may be changing with the introduction of new standards in the disability sector. These standards are enforced under HIQA, the Health Information quality Authority. The National Standards for Residential Services (2013) for Children and Adults with Disabilities are based on key principles which guide residential services on how best to provide a safe and effective service, and the best standard of care for children and adults with disabilities.

They state that:

7.3.4 Staff are to be provided with access to support and advice. Staff are to receive regular supervision and support by appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

7.3.6 A written record kept of each supervision session, support and performance appraisal, and a copy is given to the member of staff. The record is signed by the supervisor and staff member, at the end of each supervision. A copy of the support and performance appraisal session should be available for inspection**.**

From all of the above, it is clear that the necessity for improved supervision in the whole area of social care has never been greater. This need has arisen at a time off budget cutbacks, staff shortages and a huge reliance on casual staff for the provision of services. The researcher was interested in exploring how this difficult balancing act was being achieved across a number of different organisations.

The current study

There is a variety of research available in the area of the importance of good quality and effective supervision, in particular in nursing and social work professions. However the research is limited for social care workers, in particular for those that work within the disability sector. The current study will attempt to address some of the current gaps in this area.

In this research project, the researcher carried out a small scale in-depth study into five social care workers views and experiences of their own individual supervision.

The research objectives were;

To explore the understanding/ experiences of supervision among social care workers.

To explore the frequency/type of supervision provided to social care workers.

To examine the level of satisfaction with supervision among social care workers.

This study was inevitably limited in its scope and nature based on the small sample of social care workers. Nevertheless it highlights some key messages on the reality of supervision as experienced on the ground, as distinct from the best practices as discussed in the literature above.   As we shall see, just at a time when good quality supervision is more important than ever, in many situations it appears to be the first casualty of staff cutbacks and time constraints.

Section 2

Method

Method

Introduction

This methodological section will outline the research method employed for this project in order to examine its aims and objectives. It will also give a detailed description of the research method employed, the participants, materials, procedure, any ethical considerations involved in the research project and any possible delimitations of the study.

Research Design

This research study seeks to obtain the experiences, opinions and views of supervision among social care workers. A qualitative research design was chosen in order to carry out the study. The use of interviews were thought to be the most suitable method for this research, as the researcher felt that this method would yield a more in-depth insight into social care workers views and experiences on supervision. The researcher felt that this would be much more beneficial to the study than quantitative methods, as it allows much more flexibility, and an in-depth view into social care workers own experiences of supervision. Bryman suggests that

semi structured interviews enables the researcher '*to elicit information, feelings and opinions in a more casual manner'* (2008, pp. 155-183).

Semi- structured interviews allowed the researcher to vary the sequence of questions depending on the flow of the interview. However Mayrut, & Morehouse (1994, p.7) suggest it is the qualitative '*interviews job to be alert and responsive, to sense an opportuntine time to ask a question, or to know when a question has been asked out of sequence*'

Questions for the interview were based on the objectives of the research study.

These objectives are:

1. To explore the understanding/ experiences of supervision among social care workers.
2. To explore the frequency/type of supervision provided to social care workers.
3. To examine the level of satisfaction with supervision among social care workers.

Interview questions were used as a guide some of which were '*open –ended questions this allowed participants room to expand on experiences and issues they felt were important'*. (Bowling, 2009, p.283) .The use of non- verbal communication was also noted by the researcher throughout the interview process, such as body language, eye contact, movement and having and being eager to take part in the interview. The interviewer used on interview guide in order to ensure the objectives of the study were met. (Refer to Appendix 111). The interviewer used a research guide but also allowed for flexibility throughout the process to allow the interviewees to discuss their experiences and opinions where necessary. Patton 1990 (cited in Mayrut, & Morehouse, 1994, p.6) suggests that '*careful attention to the ordering of asking questions will increase the likelihood of a productive interview'*.

In order to fine tune the interview questions and process and to identify any confusion that might have arisen in a live interview session, the researcher carried out a mock interview complete with all of the information that the live interviewees subsequently would receive. This was achieved with the cooperation of a work colleague and resulted in some changes to the structure and phraseology of the questions. After the changes were made the researcher re-enacted the mock with a different work colleague to improve the researcher own

interviewing skills and time management. Only after these changes were made and the researcher was sufficiently confident in her own competence in the interview process did the researcher proceed with the live interviews.

Each interview began with general baseline questions to establish the participant's background, how long they had been working in the area of social care. The researcher they began to ask about experience questions, and there understanding of supervision. Finally the researcher then asked open opinion questions on supervision, their individual supervision and on ways this could be improved within their organisations. This allowed the researcher to get a deep insight and understanding into the participant's views and experiences on supervision.

Participants

A small sample of five participants was used to gain a sufficient amount of information for the research study. The criteria that was set for the participants, was that they all had to be social care practitioners, who had worked for five or more years in social care settings.   The sample selected for the research project was a convenient sample meaning that it involved using two participants which were conveniently available to the study; this is also known as haphazard sampling/accidental sampling (Beins, 2004). The researcher approached these individuals as they were known to the researcher, and asked if they would like to participate in the research project. The other three participants were selected by a research method known as snowball sampling,   '*one participant opens up access to another*' (Neale, 2008, p.227). The first two participants   were asked to pass on information to anyone that might be interested in taking part in the research. They then nominated other staff members who might be interested in taking part in the research. These were then approached by the researcher and asked if they were interested in taking part in this research project. The participants included four female and one male participants.

Participant	Background	Years' Experience	Region

Participant one **Linda**	social care worker in disability sector, works in residential care	8+ years	Athlone
Participant two **Mary**	Team Leader who works in a day service for people with intellectual and physical disabilities.	10 years	Galway
Participant three **Ann**	Social care worker /works in a day care that cares for people with intellectual and physical disabilities.	9years	Galway
Participant four **Erika**	social care worker Day service for people with various disabilities.	5 years	Athlone
Participant five **John**	Team manager Residential care Disability sector/residential care	11years	Athlone

Materials

An information sheet was given to all the participants prior to the commencement of the interviews so that participants were aware of what to expect in participating in the research

project, refer to Appendix 1. The interviewees also received a participant consent form and consent for the recording of the interview before the interviews began, refer to Appendix II. There was also an interview guide made available to the participants prior to interview, refer to Appendix III. A list of questions was established prior to the interviews so that the researcher had a clear guide to adhere to, so that interviews remained on the topic.

The researcher used a dictaphone to record the interviews for analysis. All participants chose to have their interviews on the premises of Athlone Institute of technology, this was agreed with supervisor. Permission was granted for this when ethics approval was agreed. A suitable time was discussed with each of the interviewees and the interviews were carried out by the researcher.

Procedure

The researcher wanted to gain a deep insight into the topic of supervision among social care workers. It was decided to use a method of qualitative research, as this would allow the researcher to get an in-depth knowledge of the views and experiences of supervision among social care workers.

Permission had been granted from the ethical committee in Athlone Institute of Technology. Information sheets and interview schedules (refer to appendices) were given to the interviewees, so they had time to consider if they wished to participate in the study. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality and with an assurance by the researcher that no identifying information would be in the final report.

The researcher then conducted the five semi-structured interviews in an environment and time that was approved by all the participants. Before the interviews began, the participants were asked to sign a consent form (refer to appendices) agreeing to take part in the study and permission from them for the use of a dictaphone for recording the interviews. The participants initially were informed at the beginning of the interview process that if at any stage they wished to withdraw from the interview process that would be fine with the

researcher. The interviews varied in duration from twenty five to thirty minutes. This gave the researcher rich data on which to base the findings.

On completion of each interview the researcher listened to the recording to make sure it was successful before transcribing them. When all five interviews were completed the researcher then began to analyse the data collected in order to find similarities and differences between the participants' experiences of supervision.

Data Analysis

When the interviews were completed the researcher listened to the recording, for transcribing the interviews. The researcher than transcribed the recordings. Substituted names were used throughout the transcribing of the interview tape. Tapes were destroyed once transcripts were completed. When the interview transcripts became familiar, the researcher then begin the process of coding the data. Coding is described as a '*mechanism for thinking about the meaning of data and for reducing the amount of data'*. (Huberman & Miles, 1994, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 360). The researcher then begin to analyse the data, and pick out the dominant themes and differences that emerged from the data. The coding and data entry was then verified by my supervisor in order to prevent interviewer bias.

No participant raised any issues or concerns with the interview process. The researcher listened actively and did not use any leading questions. All of the participants were asked afterwards if they were happy with the interview process. All agreed that they were.

Ethical Considerations

The general ethical principle governing research is that '*respondents should not be harmed as a result of participating in the research',* and that they should give their '*informed consent'* to participate (Bowling, 2009, p. 176). All of the research participants were provided with a written information letter and consent form prior to interview. All participants gave voluntary consent in writing to participate in the interview process prior to interview. Also the researcher explained, prior to interview that if participants at any stage were free to withdraw from the interview process, they could request same. This voluntary consent gave the participants the freedom to choose to participate in the research or not.

Participants were also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research. Names and locations of the participants were changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of staff and the locations were they worked. The researcher felt that this was much more ethical way to carry out the researcher as, the pool of social care workers, working within this type of service may be limited, and also the researcher wanted to maintain absolute confidentiality, due to the nature of the work involved with service users.

Delimitations

The researcher noted a small number of limitations during the research study. One of these was the limited time scale to complete this research study and also balancing the time of having a   full time job and a young family. The sample of the study was relatively small having only five participants; who were available to participate in the study. Therefore, the number of research participants is not sufficiently large to be considered a representative sample,   of   the views and experiences shared of all social care workers views on the topic of supervision.

The researcher also acknowledges that due to the voluntary participation of the interviewees there may be an inbuilt bias in those who presented themselves for interview. They maybe on the one hand more positive about their careers and experiences or on the other, maybe more disgruntled and looking for a forum for complaint.

 Also another limitation of the study itself was having set criteria for participants, i.e. social care workers who were working five or more years in the area of social care. This had the effect of narrowing the pool of potential interviewees. However, having more experienced social care workers enriched the data and more common themes emerged.

Conclusion

The research sample used a small sample size in order to ascertain social care workers views and experiences and opinions of supervision. They were chosen using a convenience and snow ball sampling methods. A qualitative method was used to collect relevant in depth data. The researcher received rich data on the topic, and this gave the researcher a great insight into the experiences and opinions of supervision among social care workers. The researcher acknowledges that although a great amount of rich information was obtained, it is difficult to make conclusions as to the general population of social care workers, with any confidence, due to the small sample size used.

This chapter outlines the methodology applied to the gathering and analysis of the research data. It looks at the design, participants, procedure, ethical considerations and various limitations. The findings of the research and the themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in the results section.

Section 3

Results

Results Section

This section looks at the data received from the five semi-structured interviews with a sample group of social care workers. For the purposes of this research study and in order to differentiate participants they will be given substitute names and locations, in order to ensure confidentiality.

The researcher first transcribed each of the interviews. Having completed the five interviews, the researcher set about establishing similar themes and opinions from the interviews. Transcripts of the interviews were then coded, to establish similar themes and opinions between the interview questions and each of the participants.

The results will be illustrated in relation to themes which emerged under the research objectives.

The results will be discussed under the following headings.

1. To explore the understanding/ experiences of supervision among social care workers.
2. To explore the type/frequency of supervision provided to social care workers.
3. To examine the level of satisfaction with supervision among social care workers.

All of the participants that participated in the research study met the research brief. All participants were working in the area of social care for five or more years and were full time permanent staff. The participants included four female and one male social care worker.

Staff A: Linda is a social care worker in residential care for eight years. Staff B: Mary is a team leader in day services for ten years. Staff C: Ann has worked in day care for nine years. Staff D: Erika is female works in day service for seven years. Staff E: John is a manager of a residential service for people with disabilities and has worked in this area for eleven years.

1. **To explore the understanding of supervision among social care workers.**

The participants all worked in the disability sector of social care. Two of the participants worked in residential disability settings and three participants worked in day care disability settings. During the interviews with the participants a number of themes and patterns began to emerge. The following results will be based on these themes.

A dominant theme that emerged from the data was that all of the participants believed that they had a clear understanding of the term supervision, what workplace supervision entails, and the value of supervision. However when asked by the researcher what did they understand by the term supervision, responses and opinions varied between participants.

Linda stated that '*supervision is important for staff. A supervisee should feel supported by her supervisor to discuss issues that might arise in the workplace. Good quality supervision is a must if any workplace is to run smoothly'*.

Ann also responded that '*she felt supervision was a necessary support for staff... time for them to discuss things that may be bothering them in the workplace. If there are ongoing issues in the workplace which are not being addressed it can become very frustrating. Regular supervision should motivate staff and keep them fresh, and interested at their work'*.

Erika felt *'supervision was vital for new staff, training them in, getting them updated on different policies and a great chance to discuss with the manager different issues that may arise within the staff team. For new team members it is vital that enough time is afforded both to the supervisor and the supervisee. In the current climate this does not always happen. Supervision with more experienced staff is not as necessary unless new policies or changes were being implemented'*

Mary believed that supervision *'in an ideal world supervision should be a great support for staff encouraging them, guiding and motivating staff in reality of course supervision usually falls short of these ideals, particularly due to the skill of the supervisor and the pressure of time.*

John said *'For me supervision is like a road trip you have got to know your destination your objectives.,, if you like, you have got to make sure your vehicle is roadworthy and has enough fuel and you have got to make sure all the way along that you take the right turns and remain in control otherwise you will never reach your goal, supervision is a bit like that.*

Overall the participants seemed to have a good understanding of what effective supervision should involve, but already some of their opening statements hinted at some negative personal experiences. The participants had a broad understanding of the overall role of supervision within an organisation. None displayed a narrow negative feeling that supervision was simply about management trying to catch them out at every opportunity.

2. To explore the type and frequency of supervision provided to social care workers

What Supervision did they receive?

Linda had a good understanding of the differentiation between formal and informal supervision. She seemed to be in a fortune position that her manager was constantly available

for help and support from which she seemed to draw a lot of comfort. *'I can contact the manager and seek her advice on any situation, I find she is really very supportive, and will help any issues. If there are ever any issues with clients or their families or if I am caring for a client that is new to me she is always on hand'*. Linda reported not receiving not much formal supervision and seemed happy enough with this.

However Ann reported a contrasting view as she did not receive a huge amount of informal supervision and she felt that by and large she did not need a lot of supervision. She seemed somewhat frustrated by the lack of regular formal supervision generally in her workplace, meetings were often rushed, cancelled due to some emergency and most frustrating of all agreed actions not being followed through. '*Since the cutbacks a few years ago their seems to be less and less time to deal with things issues that arise more on more of our time firefighting..'* Ann received irregular formal   supervision '*were are supposed to have. An hourly meeting every month we are lucky if we have a half hour every three months'*.

Erika also had a good idea of formal and informal supervision. Erika rarely seeks out her supervisors help and advice after seven years she feels she is clear about her duties and her responsibilities. Erika stated that '*Currently we don't receive formal supervision, at the moment if there was something wrong or issue we would need to contact the manager. We don't receive formal supervision, we have some staff meetings, and quarterly personal review which is pretty much the same thing every time.*

Mary had some individual support meetings, she felt that this was ineffective however, she would like to have these formal sessions on a monthly basis, as currently has them three times per year, and '*she feels that this is insufficient working in a busy environment with service users that have complex needs and need a lot of care, she also felt that her manager at the moment does not have a lot of time to support staff, on a day to day basis as her manager works on the frontline three days a week, has office days two days per week but she can see that manager does not have a lot of time for formal support for staff, like really how is a manager supposed to be available for informal/formal support for ten staff, and care for twenty odd service users while working themselves on the frontline caring for others'*.

John responded with an opposing view, that he is a manager and is always available to staff for informal support but this has its challenges, working in a twenty four hour care service, *'he stated although he regularly has individual supervision sessions with the staff team, he rarely receives any formal supervision sessions himself from his line manager apart from his annual review. With increasing pressure of time due to budget cutbacks John finds it increasingly necessary to target his informal supervision to those who need it most'.*

The predominant theme amongst most of the participants was that the supervision in their workplaces is not as effective as it could be due to time constraints. The data indicated that formal supervision was more likely to take place in residential settings. However it was noted in the research that four of the participants would like to be receiving monthly supervision. The results indicated that most of the participants would like to have an agreed time and place for supervision sessions, away from service users and other staff members, as they would have less interruptions.

3. Social care workers own experiences of supervision

The experiences of supervision varied greatly between the respondents. The data showed that supervision can be very individual, between the supervisor and the supervisee. The staff receiving supervision seemed to have different workplace issues that needed to be addressed within in the supervision sessions.

Overall the respondents own experiences of supervision seemed to be fairly negative and dissatisfied with their experience of supervision. Apart from one participant Linda, who has regular monthly supervision sessions with her line manager she stated that *'supervision helps improve the service we provide, supervision can make us more aware of not overlooking different issues. I find it helps me with my everyday work with different issues that might arise'.*

Ann was very forthright in her personal experience of supervision where she spoke about the current lack of formal supervision sessions within her day service. 'I think a manager needs to be more available for staff. I think most organisations haven't a clue about the people they care for. Senior management don't seem to understand at all how units are run at all... We have little supervision within the day service and are just left to get on with it... Supervision

would assist me to get on with my work, decrease stress levels and show me that I am going in the right direction in my work with service users and provide me with the feedback I need'.

However Erika did not have such strong views on day centre supervision she felt that as she had been working in the area of disability for seven years, and she had a good understanding of her role and her job, however she felt that '*having one on one time with a manager would be good when if she had any issues that she needed to discuss'.*

Mary suggested that '*I don't understand why there is no priority given to staff. Staff look after those that need care, however higher management seem to be totally unaware that staff need effective supervision to prevent burnout and support. How can staff effectively do their job caring continuously for people without support, this will lead to stress, burnout and staff dissatisfaction and poor staff development.*

John experience of supervision '*supervision is a necessity, however issues need to be discussed, in a timely manner I think as a lot happens in a busy environment and supervision assists staff to carry out work effectively and give a manger a chance to nip issues in the bud, before they develop I think this in turn definitely affects the quality of care, as these issues can hinder staff performance. He echoed the concerns of the other participants as he himself would like to be in a position to spend more time both in one to one and in group supervision as it is he finds it necessary to devote most of his time to devote to staff that are performing less well whereas ideally he would like to spend time improving all staff performance. He realises he sometimes leaves the more capable staff to fend for themselves and this may lead to negative motivational outcomes for some'.*

A common theme amongst the participants with the possible exception of (Erika) is that both formal and informal supervision is essential and time should be made available for this, which they felt would enhance their overall experience of supervision. A common complaint was that this time was increasingly less available due to staff shortages and budget cutbacks.

4 <u>To examine the level of satisfaction with supervision among social care workers.</u>

Two of the participants displayed overall satisfaction with their own supervision but for somewhat different reasons. Linda whose manager seemed to be able to accomplish what other managers found difficult i.e. being always available for help and support. Erika on the other hand did not receive much formal or informal supervision but was satisfied with this arrangement as she felt she herself was not in need of much supervision. She did however recognise that some of the less experienced or capable staff were not receiving the amount of supervision which they required to enhance their overall staff performance.

Manager John was overall not satisfied with the amount of time he had to spend on staff supervision or the amount of time his staff were available for individual sessions during working hours. He seemed however to juggle his supervision responsibilities within these constraints. '*If only I had one part time assistant to do some of the paperwork I would have more time to spend interacting with staff 'the good staff as well as the weak, this would be good for me, for the staff, for the service users and the overall morale of the unit*'.

Ann was clearly frustrated about the lack of quality supervision within the workplace. She complained that staff training and staff supervision had a very low priority within her unit '*it seems that more and more crisis are arising which results in staff training, staff meetings being cancelled managers not being available for ongoing support this causes a further decrease in moral which is likely to lead to more crisis or absenteeism and the vicious circle continues.*

Mary also seemed to be unsatisfied with the level of formal supervision within the workplace she stated '*why should respite care be different to day care, were provided care for people with intellectual and physical disabilities, some of the same type of people, attend day and residential care yet.. Staff in residential care are have high quality supervision, but staff in day centres do not need this support.*

Erika commented that '*because HIQA are coming to residential care, day services seem to be left behind, as day service has no watchdog which makes no sense, day services should be regulated the same as residential care. Staff should have more quality supervision in day services/like residential care. If they need it as they are also as caring for people who high needs and those who have challenging behaviour issues also*'.

The results indicated that the majority of the social care workers displayed some levels of satisfaction with the supervision they received however, the data also showed that some participants seemed to feel a lack of support with regard to the quality of the supervision they

received. The participants who worked in day care centres all commented on their levels of satisfaction on informal supervision and reasons to why they did not receive formal supervision. These participants felt that they needed an effective supervision policy in place, and to have individual supervision sessions monthly/or six weekly sessions, not unlike those that worked in residential care.

The results for the participants that worked in the area of residential care, The responses for those receiving supervision was monthly, six weekly or ad hoc basis. The majority of the participants wanted to have an agreed specified time, and place to discuss issues openly with manager, and thus enhance their overall satisfaction within supervision sessions.

The effects of experiencing unsatisfactory supervision

Another dominant theme that was evident throughout the data was the impact of experiencing, unsatisfactory supervision and the impact this had. The lack of quality supervision can have a huge impact on the social care workers work as previously discussed in chapter one. The data indicated that most participants felt supervision should have a role in enhancing staff performance and to improve the of quality care to service users.

Mary discussed '*that with no supervision in place issues are not discussed so you could make a mistake or continue to make a mistake if the manger is unaware. Staff unaware, supervision should be necessary for all day service providers, as it is necessary for best practice of service user's needs.* Ann stated '*if issues like incidents are not discussed it means incidences can happen again, i.e. with supervision should give us time to look in depth at incidents to help prevent them for from happening again.*

The results indicated various reasons given for inadequate or unregular supervision in their organisations. Statements made include; '*Mary I feel that service issues very important however, staff can be made to feel that they or what they think is unimportant when there is no time for them'.*

John stated '*that things are so busy at the moment, with everything paperwork etc., it leaves very little time it can be very difficult to juggle staff and service user needs. Managers are expected to do a lot of work for staff and workers, senior management don't seem to see how busy frontline mangers are'.*

There are clear guidelines set out for social care workers working in the area of residential care as discussed in section 1. However. It became clear through the research results that

some of these guidelines were not being followed according to the research participants. As some of the respondents felt that they were not receiving the adequate support and advice they needed, necessary to complete their work.

For the social care workers who work in day service that received no formal supervision, they seemed to be open and positive towards having more effective supervision in their workplaces.

Over the course of the interviews many important reasons for supervision were noted by the participants. These include Professional development, time to reflect on work issues/practices, reviewing incidents, plan work going forward, stress management and to receive feedback with regard to staff performance. The majority of the participants, felt that by having effective supervision sessions within the workplace, would assist them, better in their jobs and   to support service users.

Supervision Policy and Supervision Training

Supervision policy

The researcher wanted to establish if the participants had a supervision policy in place. Three of the participant's Ann, Linda and John said that they did have a supervision policy within their organisations. Each policy stated that they should have a formal one on one meeting with management to discuss workplace issues between the manager and staff. These policies included having a written agreed sign out sheet, for both the supervisee and the supervisor, for expected outcomes for next meeting.

Erika did not know or was not aware of a formal supervision policy in her workplace. Mary stated '*she that did not know if a formal supervision policy had however did have a support meeting policy in place and felt that this entailed the same for the day service where she worked. When discussing Mary supervision policy within the workplace, she discussed how it*

entails they are to supposed to have a formal meeting with manager three times a year, with agreed actions and to include any training that they would need.

Supervision Training

Another theme which emerged from the data was the role of workplace training with regards to supervision. Most of the participants responded that they did not have any in house workplace training in supervision and were unaware if their line manager had training on supervision. However one of the participant's manager John had completed some workplace training on supervision and added that his line manager would also have completed supervision training. John stated *'yes we continuously have training sessions on supervision and refreshers and training on management issues on how to deal with certain issues that might arise in staff teams, throughout supervision sessions with staff. I feel it is very important to keep us up to date and helps us to relate better to staff issues, and work more effectively with staff'*

The data highlighted that out of the five participants, only one the participant had training on supervision training who was a manager. When the researcher asked, did they have any supervision training within their organisation? The majority responded that no there didn't have any mandatory training on supervision within their organisation or were not aware of same. All of the participants stated that they would have done some training on supervision in college. However with the research criteria set, at five of years more working full time, in social care, participants would not have received any supervision training since then. The results indicated that there did not seem to be any clear emphasis placed on supervision training within their individual organisations for the supervisee.

Conclusion

Overall most of the participants where fairly negative towards the quality of the supervision they received. The participants described how they would like a more regular structured way and set times for their supervision sessions. Three of the participants received regular individual supervision, but felt that this could be improved on through regular planned sessions, and giving staff an opportunity to discuss their own issues and promote new ideas

within the supervision sessions. The results indicated that the majority of staff where receiving some form of informal supervision.

The results from the participants who worked in day services, did not receive any type of formal supervision and the majority wanted an effective supervision policy in place. However they did receive some informal supervision when questioned further by the researcher. This cannot be concluded for all disability day services, due to the limited numbers in this study. The results from the participants who worked in residential care, indicated to a lack of quality towards their supervision experiences.

All of the participants that received supervision felt that quality of their supervision, and the supervisor skills were a necessity to assist them with their job performance and their individual personal development, and that this felt this in turn would have an impact on the quality of service provided to service users.

The results indicated that the majority of the participants had an issue with the management structure within their organisations, and for not delivering effective quality supervision and support. The results gave many suggestions on the ways supervision could be improved, such as allocated time and more staff involvement in the process. The social care workers all felt this would improve the quality of the supervision sessions they received. A key point noted in the results was, that there did not seem to be any clear emphasis placed on mandatory supervision training for the supervisee's within the organisations that each of the participants worked. However there did appear to be training for supervisors, but not supervisees.

However many key points can be taken from this research. The majority of social care workers who took part had an extensive knowledge of what supervision entailed and the benefits of effective supervision. The results from the research showed that the residential disability sector had the most comprehensive policies with regard to supervision. However day services who still have no regulatory body seem to be falling behind, with regard to supervision policy within these organisations. The majority of participants stressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of regular quality supervision and the impact on the professional development of staff, this therefor may have an impact on the quality and standard of care that is provided by social care workers to service users.

Supervision has been widely recognised as a valuable tool to promote best practice and has become a mandatory component among many social care organisations. However, there are

still some organisations that have yet to fully embrace the process of effective supervision within the culture of their organisations, in order to provide quality care services.

Section 4

Discussion

Discussion

Introduction

This section of the study will assess the extent to which the findings of the research study are consistent with the literature review. For clarity and consistency, the discussion will be structured in a format that is similar to the results section and in accordance with the studies aims and objectives.

The aim of this research study was to explore the views and experiences of supervision among social care workers. This is against a backdrop of several years of budgetary constraints, reductions in numbers of qualified staff on the frontline, and adverse publicity following HIQA investigations. The researcher was also interested in seeing if the anecdotal evidence heard on a regular basis, is mirrored in the responses from my randomly selected interviews. The result of chronic underfunding has led to a situation where staff stress, disillusionment and burnout are to be widely reported.

The interviewees in this study have openly discussed their opinions and experiences on their individual supervision. This section of the study, will be set out under the following themes, in accordance to the researcher's objectives.

1. To explore the understanding/ experiences of supervision among social care workers.

2. To explore the type/frequency of supervision provided to social care workers.

3. To examine the level of satisfaction with supervision among social care workers.

1. **To explore the understanding of supervision among social care workers.**

Professional supervision can be a positive and enabling process that gives the supervisee and the supervisor time together to reflect on work practice. This process can give the worker the opportunity to review and evaluate their work, through discussion and observation. Supervision aims to identify issues, solutions to problems, improve practice and to increase the knowledge of the professional. (Morrison, 2001, p. 21) suggests that supervision is '*a*

process in which one worker is given the responsibility by the organisation to work with another in order to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives'.

A dominant theme that emerged from the data was that all of the participants believed that they had a clear understanding of the term supervision, what workplace supervision entails, and the value of supervision.

Supervision is widely recognised as an essential tool to promote best practice, especially in workplaces which are highly relationship based. According to (O'Neil, 2005, p.21) '*Accountability, Support and Learning are the main functions of supervision.* The participants all seems to have a good understanding of what effective supervision should entail. The data indicated that the majority of the participants referred to support as the most crucial element to *effective supervision.*

Ann also responded that '*she felt supervision was a necessary support for staff... time for them to discuss things that may be bothering them in the workplace. If there are ongoing issues in the workplace which are not being addressed, it can become very frustrating. Regular supervision should motivate staff and keep them fresh, and interested at their work'.* This view was also supported by Linda who discussed '*supervision is important for staff. A supervisee should feel supported by her supervisor to discuss issues that might arise in the workplace. Good quality supervision is a must if any workplace is to run smoothly'.*

Mary believed that supervision '*in an ideal world supervision should be a great support for staff encouraging them, guiding and motivating staff. In reality of course supervision usually falls short of these ideals, particularly due to the skill of the supervisor and the pressure of time'.*

When discussing the term supervision and what it entails for them as employees, all participants seemed to have a good understanding of what effective supervision should involve. The participants had a broad understanding of the overall role of supervision, and what their role was in relation to this. This maybe due to the fact that all participants had a degree in social care, and all would have studied supervision over the course of their studies.

When examining the issue, all participants mentioned support in relation to supervision, and ways in which the supervision should support them in their roles. However none of the participants mentioned the model of supervision within which were working. All the

participants seemed to have a good level of the knowledge of supervision, whether formal or informal supervision, and the different ways supervision can be organised, whether individual sessions or group sessions. The participants in this research seemed to have a good understanding of the importance of supervision, even if most felt deprived of such support. The research indicates that effective supervision is associated with jobs satisfaction, commitment to the organisation and staff retention. It can be significantly linked to employee's perceptions of the support they receive from their employer.

2. <u>To explore the type/frequency of supervision provided to social care workers.</u>

Overall most of the participants where fairly negative towards the quality of the supervision they received. The participants described how they would like a more regular structured way and set times for their supervision sessions.   Three of the participants received regular individual supervision, but felt that this could be improved on through regular planned sessions, and giving staff an opportunity to discuss their own issues and promote new ideas within the supervision sessions.   The results indicated that the majority of staff where receiving some form of informal supervision.   The elements the participants found to be the most important were on professional skill development, reflection, and time to seek and receive feedback.

(Redmond et al, 2012) study focused on the experience of supervision among social workers. The most common response frequency of supervision was monthly. However it was also noted in this research that more participants would like to be receiving monthly formal supervision.

(Dawson 2013) study also suggested that: more time is needed for supervision, more resources, and increased consistency, and structure and feedback regarding the supervision process.   Feedback to the supervisor was considered vitally important to improving supervision. This also seemed to be evident in this research project, where the participants noted that there was little or no feedback occurring in their individual supervision sessions.

In order for supervision to be effective it needs to occur on a regular basis. In some agencies this would be weekly, others every two weeks and others monthly. This depends on the nature of the work, and the availability of both people. However the supervision session

should be uninterrupted (phones off, both parties unavailable to third parties), and should be about an hour or an hour and a half in duration. A supervision contract should be drawn up at the beginning, identifying the goals of supervision, when and where it will take place, if and how it will be recorded, and how the agenda will be drawn up for the sessions. It should also identify when and how the supervision would be reviewed, and the scope of confidentiality. It would be also helpful to have a broad outline of how the supervision session would be structured. This was conveyed by the responses of the participants in the research.

The consensus appears to be that although supervision seems to have greatly improved in some areas of social care in, it is still not afforded to all staff in all fields. With the introduction of a regulatory body HIQA to residential services, the respondents in this study who worked in residential care all had a clearer supervision policy in place. However the results from the participants who worked in day services, did not seem to have any type of formal supervision, and the majority wanted an effective supervision policy in place within their organisations. Standards of care have been set in the residential sector, and a regularity body to ensure standards of care are being met for the service users that need support and assistance. There seems however, to be no set policy regarding workplace supervision, or a regulatory body to ensure quality high standards of care are being met for people with a disability, who attend day services.

However, this New Directions policy (2012- 2016) for day services, which is a new proposed approach to adult day services in Ireland. Highlights many factors such as, individualized supports, people having more choices, people learning new skills and ensuring that people with a disability are participating fully in community life.

In Ireland there are a total of 530 locations indicated that they provide services to people with a disability, 281 locations provided services to people with mental health difficulties, 196 to people with a physical and sensory disability and 108 to people with autism. This policy New Directions endeavours to enhance service user's lives, by providing more community inclusion and person-centered planning. This policy the first of its kind for day services, and a positive step. It has many great ideas on, individualized services and person centred planning. However it fails to mention, staff within these services, and how they can effectively provide this, it does not mention supervision of staff, training or personal development of staff to achieve these outcomes.

From this research it seems that day services who have no regulatory body, may have different policies on supervision within different organisations.   One respondent's also commented on this in the research. Erika commented that '*because HIQA are coming to residential care, day services seem to be left behind, as day service has no watchdog which makes no sense, day services should be regulated the same as residential care. Staff should have more quality supervision in day services like those in residential care. As we are also caring for people who have high needs, care and those who have challenging behaviour issues also*'.

3. **Experiences of supervision among social care workers**

From the research it became apparent that the majority of the participants have a negative view on their individual experience of supervision. They all gave various different opinions on their individual experiences. These included, Mary stated that '*no priority time given to staff, staff can feel unimportant*'

Ann also spoke about a '*lack of understanding and a feeling of not being supported in the workplace, and not receiving feedback*'

John shared a different view that he '*would like to be in a position to spend more time both in one to one and in group supervision as it is he finds it necessary to devote most of his time to devote to staff that are performing less well whereas ideally he would like to spend time improving all staff performance. He realises he sometimes leaves the more capable staff to fend for themselves and this may lead to negative motivational outcomes for some*'.

All the participants seemed to value the ideal of what effective supervision should entail, and many sighted organisational factors as to the reasons it was not as effective in practice. A common theme that emerged from the data, in discussing their experiences of supervision, seemed to be the lack of quality time afforded to staff and staff supervision amongst the participants. The participants sighted different reasons for this, these included: budget cutbacks, giving managers less time in the office and more time on the frontline, more paperwork requirements, which leads to less time for actual formal supervision and quality time spent for managers both with staff team and service users, the continuous use of hiring relief or temporary staff , the use of Fas, Tus workers and volunteers to assist full time staff

where previously these positions would have been filled by permeant full time social care workers.

One participant views put it very effectively '*where she spoke how over the last few years their service has seen a number of staff retirements who were replaced with relief staff working different days here and there'*. This can be upsetting for service uses, where there is no continuity of care for them, and it can be even more difficult for the permanent staff to do their job, as they are continuously advising and assistance new staff. That is ok for brief periods, however, the service users need consistency in this service, most of whom have a learning disability and may not adapt well to continuous change, and this could make the job much more difficult for full time staff.

All of the participants mentioned the issue of, the constant use of relief staff /and or high turnover of staff, and the use of Fas / Tus schemes to prop up staff teams and spoke regarding this, which could lead to lower overall standard of care given to service users. Often the manager's time and the more senior staff members time may be spent assisting Fas, tus workers volunteers etc. Making time for necessary formal supervision impossible.

From the research there seems to be a lot of informal supervision is going on, due to the lack of quality staff employed. Regular structured supervision and professional development, of more experienced staff, seems to be neglected.

The overall impression I received from this study was one of frustration stress and burnout on the part of social care employees. It seems as if the lack of investment in qualified staff and the resulting low levels of service quality over many years now, has led to many social care workers feeling frustrated, stressed and suffering from burnout. Whatever chance there was for escaping adverse outcomes in the short run, the fact that this has been going on for many years inevitability leads to disillusionment for staff, and questions the quality of care for service users. It seems that the lack of staff development, control and a chaotic work environment have become the new normal, so much so that some staff no longer see the need for or request change.

Against this background the onus is on senior management, right up to political level to ensure that adequate funding of the whole disability sector is made available. There is also the question of the structure of the whole disability sector within the country. What we

essentially have is a multiplicity of voluntary organisations, who manage to do some to do some little fundraising, but are largely funded by the state. Similar to the plethora of NGOs in the Development sector, this leads to a huge amount of duplication at administrative level, leading to a poor use of scarce resources. There seems to be some justification for the perception among front line staff that the weight of budgetary cuts falls at their feet while the upper management of these organisations come away unscathed. . And a more robust oversight on the part of HIQA is to be welcomed, in that the resultant bad publicity may help bring pressure to bear at a political level. One would hope that rather than scapegoat the individuals or units concerned, the powers that be would see many of these as examples of systemic problems requiring systemic solutions. Apart from that it is not easy to see where the demand for change will come. Service users, their families of their advocacy groups are lacking a loud voice and do not represent a strong lobby at political level. Many front line staff in social care have become so desensitised by years of burnout, that their ability to demand change has diminished. Service users are entitled to a well- staffed, well supervised quality service, but unfortunately this seems still quite a distance away.

Without adequate resources at the front line, we can expect more damming reports by HIQA and adverse publicity in the media such as we saw in Aras Attracta in County Mayo, Leas Cross and many others. It is clear in the case of Aras Attracta that there was a lack of qualified staff, staff training, staff development and supervision in place Effective supervision should identify failures in both commission and omission. It is of the upmost importance that unprofessional conduct on the part of a service provider be identified at the earliest stage. Otherwise misconduct can become habitual and much more difficult to eradicate. In addition to this, failure to act in a timely fashion may see a situation where other staff members may copy this behaviour leading to a culture of poor standards.

Equally important are failures of omission where service providers fail to provide for basic needs or adequate care. Again timely intervention is essential to avoid the development of poor practice or an undesirable culture to emerge. Under this heading also comes the delicate question of whistleblowing. An inevitable downside to lack of supervision, lack of professional and qualified staff is the difficult position a staff member may find themselves in, due to the conduct of a work colleague. In situations where supervision is lacking or supervisors are stretched, there will be a greater likelihood of whistleblowing instances to arise. This puts individual staff members in an unnecessary stressful situation, torn between the welfare of the service users and loyalty to a colleague. In a well organised and fully

qualified and staffed unit, where supervision is given sufficient priority, such failures in performance are much less likely to lead to whistleblowing situations.

Dawson, (2013) study also compounded this view, these findings suggested that supervision was perceived as being generally positive for the supervisor and for patient care, while acknowledging the need for protecting valuable supervision time. And while there is a large volume of literature on models and types of supervision, there seems to be less on how to actually create a good culture of supervision within a chronically challenged and stretched environment.

It can be difficult where staff/managers may feel that they are unsupported in the workplace. The majority of staff in this spoke how lack of time and lack of quality supervision definitely had an impact on the units where they worked, most spoke about firefighting. Organisations need to recognise the importance of effective supervision and the impact that this can have, to lead to a higher quality service being provided. This would lead to higher levels of morale amongst staff members and more positive experiences within the workplace.   Unfortunately in many situations, the type of formal supervision, with all the benefits for manager and staff, as described earlier, is now seen as a dispensable extra, at the first sign of a crisis. The tragedy is that, if this policy is allowed to continue, it will increase the likelihood of more crises occurring in the future, and this vicious circle feeds on itself.

This type of environment can surely be of no benefit to a professional worker hoping to develop their skills and provide the best possible care and outcomes for service users. This observation is worrying in an age where social care workers pride ourselves on providing optimum quality of care for our service users.

Formal and informal supervision is essential to the overall management within organisations and time should be made available for this, all participants felt that this would enhance their overall experience of supervision.

The skill of the supervisor

Most of the participants made comments on their manager individual supervisor styles. This was a very important aspect throughout the research. The results indicated that the participants mostly felt a lack of support throughout their formal supervision sessions. Participants sighted many reasons for this, leading to many organisational factors such as the skill and time resources of their manager.

(Ratanasiripory, 2002) in his research highlighted that the '*interperpersonal relationship style*', and the '*supervision tasks*', accounted for the majority of negative experiences within supervision.

The supervisor must have a good sense of their own attributes, skills and be aware of their own feelings and reactions. (Hawkins & Shohet, 2009). The supervisor needs to be aware how to work effectively with supervisee's, as this relationship may constantly evolve. Being a supervisor may not be for everyone they must have many skills as discussed in section one. These skills along with training and an in-depth knowledge of effective supervision, can lead to successful quality supervision sessions.

Two of the participants voiced their opinion on this such as, Mary believed that supervision '*in an ideal world supervision should be a great support for staff encouraging them, guiding and motivating staff. In reality of course supervision usually falls short of these ideals, particularly due to the skill of the supervisor and the pressure of time*'.

Ann, speaking about her personal experience of supervision, stated that s '*with the current lack of formal supervision, a manager needs to be approachable and readily available for staff supervision and be able to be confidential*'

Staff Training

Another theme which emerged from the data was the role of workplace training with regards to supervision. Most of the participants responded that they did not have any in house workplace training in supervision, and were unaware if their line manager had training on

supervision. The data showed that out of the five participants, only one the participant had training on supervision.

Training for supervisors and supervisees is crucial to develop understanding in order to deliver effective supervision in a person centered way. Dawson's study (2013) highlighted that further education was a necessity '*to empower staff to drive their supervision processes*.

All of the participants stated that they would have completed some training on supervision in college. However with the research criteria set, at five of years more working full time, in social care, participants would not have received any supervision training since then. The results indicated that there did not seem to be any clear emphasis placed on supervision training within their individual organisations for the supervisee. This also raised the question regarding the level of qualification of people working within day services, and in particular staff working in day services, who are not qualified to degree level, and who may have no educational and training on workplace supervision at all, much more research needs to be done in this regard.

There should be both initial and ongoing training for staff. Good training makes both staff and managers more confident and more competent, and helps keep the organization moving forward. Key to effective supervision is a trained supervisor and perhaps mandatory training course should be available for all. In this way both the supervisor and the supervisee have a clear vision from the outset of their roles and their responsibilities regarding effective supervision within the workplace.

From carrying out this research it is evident that supervision is a central aspect to professional social care practice. Not only does it seem to benefit employees, service users and organisations as a whole. The need for trained supervision for all staff working within the disability sector, needs to be developed effectively. However challenges remain in relation to how good practice can be introduced and sustained both in day care and residential services.

Section 6

Conclusion

Conclusion

From this research we have explored the experiences and opinions of five social care workers on supervision. The purpose of this study was to highlight the issues being faced on the front

line of disability services around the area of supervision. The majority of social care workers who took part seemed to have an extensive knowledge on the process and the benefits of receiving effective supervision.

Supervision in many organisations is both an important and difficult job, one which requires a lot of effort and thought, supervision addresses the need to develop the skills and knowledge for staff to provide quality services to service users. Supervision assists organisations to ensure that standards are maintained and policy and procedures of organisations are adhered to. Staff members should meet regularly with their supervisor. However there are large variances in policy between residential services and day care services. Where supervision did take place participants seemed dissatisfied with the quality and frequency of the supervision sessions. All participants stressed the need that supervision should be given a higher priority within their individual organisations.

As we seen from the research it is necessary, and it can be the difference between having a workplace that is '*continually in crisis or one which runs smoothly*' (Thompson, 2002, p.12).

Section 7

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research

It was evident from the research that the majority of social care workers who took part seemed to have an extensive knowledge on the process and the benefits of receiving effective supervision. However with the limit of the study on five or more years, having worked in social care, it was alarming that only one of the participants would not have received any kind of supervision training since then. Much more supervision training, on the job, needs to take place, for supervision to be an important aspect within the culture of organisations.

The impact of supervision on outcomes for service users and carers has rarely been investigated thus this makes it difficult to assess the impact of supervision on outcomes to service users themselves. The literature presents only a part of the picture, as any changes in the supervisory process are not informed by the perspective of the service user and carers. Much more research needs to be investigated into the impact of supervision and outcomes for service users. In order to get a better representative study the researcher would suggest completing a large scale study from a sample of social care work.

Quality now more than ever, has now become a significant part of disability services, placing service users, placing their rights and individual choices at the forefront of disability services today. Therefore successful service provision must be '*based on quality and quality of service given'* (Spouse and Redfern, 2000, p.2). With this ever increasing demands on service provision, which leads to more increasing demands on staff. Staff now more than ever, have much more responsibility to ensure the requests of service users are being met daily. It is clear from the research however that with these ever increasing demands, with no further resources are being made available for new staff supervision, therefore the situations seem far from the ideal in some circumstances. It is evident from this small scale study that quality structures are needed in place, to ensure that service users' needs are placed at the center of care. Therefore organisations need to provide conditions where frontline staff can work effectively and efficiently by promoting supervision, which can enhance professional development, staff can receive feedback and ensure that they are providing a quality service.

Section 8

Reference List

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Section 9
Appendices

Appendix 1.Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Supervision among social care workers: Prevalence and Effects

My name is Janice O'Donnell and I am completing a research study, as part my of course, Masters in Advanced Social Care Practice in Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). As part

of my course work this year, I am undertaking to do a research project and have chosen to study supervision among social care workers. For my study I will be asking social care workers there views on supervision, the frequency, type and level of satisfaction of supervision that you receive? I am also looking to gain an insight into social care workers views and experiences of workplace supervision, and if this an impact working with vulnerable groups.

Who is being asked to take part and what will we do?

I am asking social care workers who work directly with vulnerable people who need support. Interviews should last no longer than twenty minutes to thirty minutes. You will be asked to talk about your experiences of supervision working in social care settings.

Do I have to do this?

No, it is up to you if you wish to take part in the study. If you do not feel comfortable at any point of the interview you may stop your participation and choose not to continue with the interview.

What will be done with the information?

I will record the interview so that I can listen to it later. I will then write up a summary of what you, and others who took part in the interviews said in a report for my research. I will not use your name in the report or any identifying aspects, i.e. your location, or the service that you work for. Everything thing that is discussed that in the interviews will only be used as part of this research project.

What will happen with this report?

My supervisor and an examiner will read my report and it may be chosen to be placed into the library in AIT. Interviews tapes will be destroyed after completion of research project.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 086-2175875.

Thank you

Janice O'Donnell

Appendix 11.Participant Consent Form

Supervision among social care workers: Prevalence and Effects

I agree to take part in this study, Supervision among social care workers: Prevalence and Effects. Janice has explained the study to me and an outline of the research questions that will be asked. I understand that I will take part in an individual interview. I will discuss this topic from my own experience. I understand that I will not be named in the report and details as to where I work will be omitted in the final report. I understand that I can decide to stop the interview at any stage if I do not wish to continue.

Do you agree to have interview recorded?   Yes-------------   No------------

Participant: ---   Date: ----------------------

Researcher: -- Date: -----------------------

Appendix III Interview Guideline

Supervision among social care workers: prevalence and effects

Before we begin the interview process, I'd just like to remind you again that participation is voluntary and at any stage during the interview process if you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop the interview process, just let me know. Thank you.

1. How long have you worked in the area of social care?

2. In which field of social care are you employed?

3. What do you understand by the term supervision?

4. Does your organisation have a supervision policy?

5. Do you regularly receive supervision?

6. What type of supervision do you receive? Formal/informal How often?

7. How do you feel about the supervision you receive?

8. Do you think it is effective?

9. Who do you have supervision with?

10. How often would you like to receive supervision?

11. To what extent do your current supervision sessions deal with issues that are important to you?

12. How do you feel your supervision sessions could be improved?

13. Do you think supervision has changed since you first started in the workplace?

14. Do you have any training with regard to workplace supervision, if so what type?

15. As far as you are aware, has your supervisor received any formal training on supervision?

16. What style of supervision have you found the most effective for you?

17. In your opinion do you think supervision for social care workers is important? Please discuss?

18. In your opinion does supervision affect the type of care provided by social care workers?

19. Any other information relevant to the topic? Please discuss?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview.