Article

Social Auxiliary Workers as the "Cinderellas" of Supervision: The Case of John Taolo Gaetsewe District, Northern Cape Province

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Abstract

The supervision of social auxiliary workers has received little attention, both in research and supervision practice. Social auxiliary workers are trained and qualified to support the services of qualified social workers. Yet, despite their importance in social welfare service delivery, social auxiliary workers are seen as the stepchild to social workers and are often neglected in terms of receiving supervision for their professional duties. This article explores how social auxiliary workers experience supervision to guide their daily activities. Although there are a few studies on the supervision experiences of social auxiliary workers in South Africa, there are no previous studies focused on the Northern Cape province. This article is based on a qualitative study that used an exploratory and descriptive research design. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from six social auxiliary workers in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District of the Northern Cape. Using Tesch's eight steps of analysis, the findings reveal the inconsistent use of the role and function of supervision in developing the capacity and training of social auxiliary workers and the implications of ineffective supervision. A key recommendation is that social auxiliary workers should have mandatory, structured and supportive supervision to uphold the professional purpose of employing social auxiliary workers in the context of social service delivery to vulnerable populations.

Keywords: capacity and training; social auxiliary workers; social work; supervision

UNISA university of south africa PRESS

Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development
Volume 36 | Number 3 | 2024 | #16576 | 18 pages

https://doi.org/10.25159/2708-9355/16576
ISSN 2708-9355 (Online)

Introduction

The provision of welfare services in South Africa comprises a core group of social service professionals that include social workers and social auxiliary workers (SAWs). The introduction of SAWs to the South African social service arena was initiated in the 1990s, even though the concept of SAW was developed some 40 years earlier (De Kock 1999; Schultz 2015; South African Council of Social Service Professionals 2007; Zibengwa 2016). Internationally and locally, the terms "social work assistant", "clinical social work aide", "social auxiliary worker" and "case work aide" are used to describe practitioners providing supportive and complementary functions (Woods 1992). Working in diverse areas of South African social work practice, SAWs are crucial to supporting social workers in enhancing the psychosocial wellbeing of individuals, groups and communities.

The Problem Statement and Rationale

SAWs are trained personnel, registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), who work under the guidance and supervision of registered social workers to further the reach and goals of social work (Goliath 2018). This article argues that SAWs, as are all social service personnel, are deserving of structured supervision that would enable them to perform optimally in their supportive roles to social workers. As a support service, SAWs may not function independently; therefore, supervision is a mandatory condition of practice (Department of Social Development (DSD) and SACSSP 2012; Goliath 2018). This contention is further entrenched in the *SACSSP Policy Guidelines for Course of Conduct, Code of Ethics and the Rules for Social Workers* (applying equally to SAWs) (SACSSP 2006 as amended) wherein it is argued that SAWs strive to maintain high standards of competence in their work and recognise the boundaries and limitations of their training and competencies. In emphasising the competency of social workers who provide supervision to SAWs, this policy document ignores the need for social workers who render supervision to SAWs to have a thorough knowledge of the roles and competencies of SAWs. Instead, and as reflected in section 5.4.1 of the SACSSP Course of Conduct policy document (SACSSP 2006), there is no requirement for supervisors (social workers) to be cognisant of the roles of SAWs in order to render supervision. This implies that, despite SAWs being specially trained for their roles, a social worker as the supervisor need not have specialised training or understanding of the SAW's roles and competencies to supervise SAWs.

Notwithstanding the above supervisor requirements, SAWs may be reported to their employer and to the SACSSP for professional misconduct should they fail to abide by the general standards of the profession. Key general examples of unethical behaviour of SAWs include acting with dishonesty in implementing professional duties, failing to maintain registration or be registered as a SAW with the SACSSP while in practice and, importantly, functioning without the proper guidance and supervision of a registered

social worker (SACSSP 2006). Zibengwa's (2016) views further highlight that SAWs are not effectively supervised due to limited access to supervision and Goliath (2018) argues that supervision for SAWs focuses mainly on administrative functions, raising questions of the effectiveness of supervision.

Coined in 1697 by Charles Perrault, the fable of Cinderella highlights issues of inattention given to persons not considered worthy of societal interest. In the context of this article, the metaphor of the Cinderella fable is used to highlight that SAWs receive little attention within the social services spectrum; thus, the supervision of SAWs appears to be a relegated function and is not viewed as a priority.

The study was conducted in the John Taolo Gaetsewe (JTG) District of the Northern Cape province where research studies are generally scarce. The main author worked as a social worker in this district and observed that the majority of SAWs were employed in government departments. This study aimed to explore the experiences of supervision received by SAWs in the JTG district, with a focus on the nature of supervision received, the challenges encountered, and the skill development needs of SAWs.

Scope of Practice of Social Auxiliary Workers

SAWs are trained and registered professionals whose scope of practice includes assisting the social worker with preventative services, community work, community education on resources, administration, research and practical support (SACSSP 2007; SAQA 2014). Internationally, social work assistants play a similar role under the supervision of a social worker (Schultz 2015). When compared to the roles and responsibilities of social workers, the tasks of the SAW differ in terms of range, intensity, levels of competency and responsibility. A SAW is more likely to be engaged in limited and non-therapeutic services within the key functions of social work (Goliath 2018). To illustrate, by supporting social workers in their statutory functions, a SAW connects families to appropriate services or assists with resource utilisation and compliance.

Despite these limited responsibilities, Schultz (2015) argues that the services of SAWs are invaluable, particularly amid the increasingly high caseloads of social workers. Schultz (2015) adds that the services of SAWs are especially valued in non-therapeutic groupwork interventions, the distribution of food and material relief to vulnerable communities and community outreach projects. Thus, while this contingent of staff is professionally trained and suitably registered for practice, they must be supervised by a registered social worker (SACSSP 2006). In addition, standards for SAW practice are set by the SACSSP, which prescribes mandatory professional supervision throughout their careers (DSD and SACSSP 2012). Failure to fulfil their role obligations within professional requirements would render the SAW unethical (DSD 1993). Thus, it is imperative that the quality of guidance and support provided to SAWs by social work supervisors is structured and developmental.

Supervision as a Conduit for Ethical Behaviour

The compliance with professional codes of practice by social service professionals are regulated by the SACSSP code of ethics (DSD 1993; SACSSP 2006), ensuring that professional values are upheld and thereby protecting the rights of society. The policy document on the course of conduct of SAWs (SACSSP 2006) identifies the core values upon which the social work mission is based, summarises the broad ethical principles reflecting the profession's core standards, is designed to identify core standards that hold social service professionals accountable, and articulates the core ethical responsibilities expected (SACSSP 2006). SAWs must maintain a high standard of professional competency within the boundaries of their scope of practice. Working strictly under the professional supervision of a registered social worker, a SAW renders non-therapeutic micro level services, support groups at the meso- level, and designs and implements macro-level projects within communities. This implies that all aspects of SAW service delivery are implemented under guidance and mentorship.

However, should a SAW pursue professional practice without supervision, it falls foul of the professional code purported by the SACSSP. The implications are that, despite the years of experience held by a SAW, should there be an adverse effect on the service user, it then brings the profession into disrepute. Disciplinary procedures may be implemented at an organisational level as well as by the SACSSP's Professional Conduct division when SAWs (and social workers) contravene the provision of various rules contained in the *Rules Relating to Acts or Omissions of a Social Worker, Social Auxiliary Worker, or Student Social Worker that May Constitute Unprofessional Conduct* (DSD 1993).

The SACSSP Code of Ethics is clear on supervision in two key aspects, namely that SAWs function under supervision, and that the supervisor may be held liable in an instance of alleged unprofessional conduct lodged against the supervisee (SACSSP 2006). Receiving supervision is a requirement for practice, which the next section examines.

Supervision as Key to Professional Development of SAWs

The aim of supervision in the social work profession is to continuously monitor the work of the incumbent (Engelbrecht 2019) and to ensure a high work output and a high work ethic (Nadesan 2020). In addition, supervision for social service professions is generalised to assist with staff retention, emotional support, professional development, guiding service delivery and dealing with ethical problems (DSD and SACSSP 2012; Engelbrecht 2019; Goliath 2018; Zibengwa 2016). Schultz (2015) maintains that planned structured sessions are important for professional development, although ad hoc and unplanned supervision sessions also occur.

The requirements for the supervision of SAWs by social workers is indicated in various policies, including the Policy Guidelines for Course of Conduct, Code of Ethics and the

Rules for Social Workers (Section 5.4.2 *f*) (SACSSP 2006), the Policy for Social Service Practitioners (SACSSP 2016), and the Supervision Framework for the Social Work Profession (DSD and SACSSP 2012; Goliath 2018). In this instance, supervision refers to the monitoring of all tasks performed by SAWs (Ncube 2019). According to Goliath (2018), crucial to SAW practice is the role of the supervisor, who becomes the mentor and guide for the incumbent, with a lack of professional supervision inevitably resulting in improper or irregular behaviour.

SAWs should receive structured supervision on all aspects of their everyday duties. Three key functions of supervision are administration, education and support (Kadushin and Harkness 2014; Schultz 2015). As an educational tool (Mbau 2005), supervision furthers the capacity of SAWs to ensure effective service delivery (Goliath 2018; Kadushin and Harkness 2014). Supervisors can take on more than one role at a time, such as educator and supporter, during the supervision process (Schultz 2015). As SAWs focus on administrative tasks and implementing organisational procedures, it is important for the supervisee to have guidance on administrative functions, processes and tasks (Kadushin and Harkness 2014; Tsui 2005). The educational function of supervision is a complementary process whereby supervisor and supervisee work towards improving knowledge and understanding to ensure professional development (Kadushin and Harkness 2014). Lastly, the supportive function of supervision addresses the emotional effects of practice, bearing in mind elements of burnout and effective stress management (DSD and SACSSP 2012).

Methodology

In attempting to understand the supervision experiences of SAWs, the authors used a qualitative approach and an exploratory research design (Creswell 2013; Babbie 2014). The study received approval and ethical clearance from the University of Johannesburg research ethics committee (REC number 01-280-2020).

As this was a qualitative study of limited scope, a sample of six participants was selected using purposive sampling. It was found that data from the six participants resulted in data saturation. Participants were recruited via social work managers who acted as gatekeepers. The letter to the gatekeepers emphasised the need for voluntary participation and that no details of participants would be provided to the gatekeepers. Once a voluntary sample was obtained, the researcher used sampling criteria to further select six participants. These sampling criteria included a minimum of six months' work experience and working within either the governmental or non-governmental sector. All participants were female as the researcher was unable to locate male SAW participants in the study region who met the sampling criteria. Work experience ranged from two to 10 years post qualification and practice contexts were mostly at child and youth care facilities and state welfare departments. Interestingly, one participant was a qualified social worker but was employed by the state department as a SAW. Participants who had less than six months' post qualification experience were excluded from the study as

they did not meet the minimum criteria, nor would they have gathered sufficient supervision experience as a SAW.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, largely in English, with one interview in Afrikaans due to the language preference of the participant. The language and translation of interviews were interpreted by the researcher who is bilingual. Guided by a semi-structured interview schedule (Greef 2011) and with the permission of each participant, the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis purposes.

Data analysis provided meaning to the collected data to enable the researcher to better understand the narratives of the participants (Carey 2012). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the study's participants and key information, such as identifying information of participants and their employers, was anonymised to protect the identifying details of their employing organisations. The researcher used the eight steps suggested by Tesch (1992), which include reading the data with understanding, allocating codes to pieces of data and then categorising the codes to form themes. It was important to organise the data according to codes and categories as this led to more in-depth findings (Braun and Clarke 2006; Kiger and Vapio 2020). Subsequently, the data were controlled with literature studies to demonstrate reliability and validity (Fouché and Geyer 2021).

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, the researcher was guided by the four tenets, as discussed by Shenton (2004). To ensure credibility, the researcher used member checking to allow for participants to check the written transcripts for correctness; to ensure transferability, the research report contained details on the recruitment of the participants, the data collection methods, methodological descriptions of the context and the context of the data; to ensure dependability the researcher clearly articulated the purpose of the study and, importantly, kept an audit trail where attention to detail about the research process was documented; and to ensure confirmability, the researcher had to consider factors that would allow the study to be replicated at another geographical site and, importantly, the researcher kept a journal to reflect on personal thoughts and biases that would cloud objectivity in the research.

Ethical Considerations

The study was guided by research ethics, including voluntary participation. Participants could withdraw from the study without their details being reported to the gatekeepers. Every attempt was made to conduct the interviews off-site and when using office space, the researcher ensured that the office was private and away from the rest of the staff. Pseudonyms replaced identifying details of participants. Ethics of care were abided by, ensuring that the researcher was extra attentive to sensitive information disclosed by the

participants. The researcher was aware of her own position as a social worker and as a supervisor as well as the possible effect of this on the recruitment and interview processes. The study received ethics approval from the University of Johannesburg on 11 December 2020 (REC-01-280-2020).

Key Findings

Following a thematic analysis process, three key themes emerged from the data. Pseudonyms are used in the data presented.

Theme 1: Learning and accepting what it is to be a SAW

This study found that SAWs entering the field were motivated by an interest in serving people. Yet their interest waned after being confronted by a lack of career growth opportunities, poor salary structures and a lack of alternative work or study options.

> In most organisations, they don't have social auxiliary workers. People are going through a lot, so they need our help. [Sally]

> I do enjoy being here because we work with people. [Nancy]

However not all participants shared a passion to work with people.

> I turned 36, I saw an advert where they offered people who want to study a learnership in social auxiliary work. [Jane]

> I came across this opportunity of being a SAW, so the learnership provided that relief. But now we learn to love being a SAW. We learn how to do the work required. [Nancy]

According to the SACSSP (2007), such learnerships with a monthly stipend during training were provided by the Health and Welfare Sector Educational Training Authority to support the training of SAWs. The learnerships were intended to increase the capacity of the SAWs' knowledge acquisition and skills development.

Theme 2: Supervisors as subjective and biased

Supervisors were perceived as biased and unfair to supervisees. This was articulated by two participants:

> They think that this one is clever and this one is "rocking the boat". [Sally]

> A supervisor must not think that because he or she is in that position, that they know everything. I have a social auxiliary work certificate, and I know how to handle certain situations at work. [Jessica]

From these narratives, feelings of being disrespected prevailed. Gxashe (2018) indicates that working with people from diverse backgrounds develops the capability to build relationships and fosters a passion for social change.

> Supervisors are chasing statistics; they are not chasing quality. [Sally]

> We are constantly told, you do this, you didn't do this, you must pull up the socks here. They make several changes to our work plan. [Jane]

The above narratives show supervisee dissatisfaction, which indicates the need for consultation between the supervisor and supervisee. Participants wanted an increased sense of self-worth and to be treated with dignity*:*

> I want to know that I am on the right path. I want to leave supervision with a clear mind that I have the necessary support from my supervisor. I want to leave knowing I have expanded my knowledge. [Jessica]

Theme 3: Supervision related to training and job expectations of SAWs

While SAWs have a certificate that qualifies them for employment in that field, specific training is required in specified contexts. Training is seldom consistent and is learnt on the job. One participant reflected on their on-the-job training experience:

> So, what they will do is they will normally employ you, then they will take you for training, maybe for two- or three-day training, and then that is it; you have to go back to work. And then you will find your way around. And then, at month-end, you needed to produce statistics on your workload. They needed to know how many cases you have done and are not worried about how you are working. They told us that they don't have the resources but [were] expecting me to perform my work at the very same time. I felt stressed out and restricted in my work. [Jane]

Participants reflected on travel time. The Northern Cape province in South Africa covers a vast area, with long distances between towns. This results in time lost travelling to and from work:

> There is not a lot of employment available; there is not many employment organisations available, especially in rural areas where we work. So, it is difficult unless we get to the urban towns. [Jessica]

Conversely, a rare narrative on the positive impact of supervision was noted:

> Supervision assisted me to get theory to understand the practical world, so [the] supervisor did actually help us, informing of ways and techniques on how to tackle the work side. [Angela]

The above quote highlights Falendar and Shafranske's (2004) argument that supervisor competency is important to develop the knowledge and skills of the supervisee, which in turn improves service delivery.

> They expect us to cope. We cannot cry. We feel the pain of our clients. I think supervisors should be there to provide debriefing. We go through a lot of emotions with our clients, so debriefing also helps, so that you can go home feeling refreshed. [Jane]

Maintaining professional boundaries between the supervisor and the SAW is critical. This suggests that the nature of the supervisory relationship should be professional and anti-discriminatory (Caras and Sandu 2014; Chibaya and Engelbrecht 2022; Parker 2017).

> It's important that the supervisor displays qualities [of] good conduct. The supervisor takes on the role of a superior and should help you on a level that you are on. [Angela]

> I would like a supervisor to show me the way, to have more understanding of things, and show me because I'm actually below the level of the supervisor. To be honest, there is no supervision. [Jessica]

> It [supervision] is now and then. [Sally]

These findings support the argument that the frequency of supervision is not a priority (Parker 2017; Swanepoel 2015).

> Currently, with supervision, we are working under the guidance of a social worker. But that supervision is simply working together; her work becomes my work. We are busy like this on a daily basis. [Nancy]

> We are told beforehand; this is what will be covered in supervision. And so, you are also involved. It is not official supervision. Our supervisor normally just calls us to the office and tells us, you are supposed to do this and this and this. She checks on my work, for example, I capture the foster care files onto an Excel spreadsheet. So, the supervisor checks whether I am on the right track. That is the end of that session of supervision. [Jessica]

Preparing the content of each supervision session is the task of both the supervisee and the supervisor. This is important to enhance the quality of supervision (DSD and SACSSP 2012). However, both participants above indicated that supervision focused more on monitoring that the work got done than on being developmental and growth oriented (Chibaya and Engelbrecht 2022; Engelbrecht 2019).

Theme 4: Perceptions of the quality and function of supervision

Supervision, as the findings suggest, posed different opportunities, including developing new skills, sharing ideas and group supervision.

> Having supervision helps, because I can then plan better, and I know I am good at something. [Angela]

> We had a group where we are discussing challenges we are facing; it's a platform for us to talk about everything, for example, when is a challenge that we are facing. [Nancy]

Angela's narrative supports the finding by Cloete (2012), where supervision is likened to mentoring. Nancy's experience underscored the notion that group supervision is an opportunity for group interaction and to derive solutions together, drawing on the combined years of experience in the field (Goliath 2018). The findings suggest that supervision creates opportunities to develop new skills and share ideas. This creates an enabling environment that allows supervisees to positively interact with their supervisors.

> There hasn't been any supervision since I started working here [3 years ago], and whilst my supervisor was scarce, I haven't gotten any supervision from anyone else. I just try to get my way and move around. But there is no supervision—nothing. Regular supervision is needed, even quarterly. [Sally]

This quote highlights that limited resources in the workplace limit the effectiveness of service delivery (Goliath 2018; Nadesan 2020).

Supervisors should be advocates of resources and organisational support, yet the contrary was discovered as the quote below explains:

> We do not have the resources; we must beg for resources. and supervisors will tell you that they don't have this, and they don't have that … that there is no money. They sometimes provide me with airtime, but I have to use my own personal cell phone. [Sally]

The COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on South Africa and all workers, including social service professionals. Social distancing regulations under COVID-19 made supervision particularly challenging. As a result, virtual supervision was introduced using platforms such as WhatsApp:

> We were told that we must sit at home for two months. And we returned to work thereafter; no one came to our offices to find out what is going on with you guys. Are you OK? I guess that they just expected us; that I mean we are OK. [Sally]

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown also impacted on practice experiences where supervision and service rendering had moved to online interventions as the participant below explains:

> Yes, supervisors, clients and social workers must contact us on our personal cell phones, and supervisors expected us to participate in group supervision without resources such as work cell phones. [Nancy]

This quote explains and supports how they were on the frontlines, making provisions for material aid, psychosocial support and social services during the lockdown (Rasool, 2020).

Similar to other practitioners, SAWs had to limit exposure to colleagues and clients, adhere to social distancing protocols and receive online or cyber supervision. The experience of cyber supervision, on the one hand, is positive because participants were exposed to new means of communication with their supervisors.

> In this age of the fourth industrial revolution, those platforms are very important, right? So, supervisors need to make sure that their subordinates are also taken care of. [Sally]

On the other hand, one participant preferred in-person supervision due to difficulties with connectivity:

> I think it is better face-to-face because online has many interruptions with signal problems, then you must stop. Then this completely disrupts the whole supervision session, so you forget what you wanted to do and move onto the next point, and to me, this is very disruptive. [Jessica]

The suggestion to overcome such a challenge was a possible change of venue or booking an interview room for a set period with no interruptions as indicated below:

> I suggest removing the supervision sessions from the workplace building because at work there is always interruptions and always obstacles. The supervisor and the social auxiliary worker are expected to drop the supervision session and do other work in the office. [Jessica]

Moving to a disturbance-free zone allows for a focused supervisory session where SAWs are capacitated on self-development that lies beyond day-to-day professional tasks.

Job dissatisfaction emanated from a lack of resources and time spent daily travelling from home to work and from work to visiting social service beneficiaries.

> I don't have the time. I get to work at half-past seven, leave work at four o' clock in the afternoon, and I travel 60 kilometres every day on a single trip, in and out; so, when I arrive at home, I am too tired to do anything with my family. [Jane]

This quote explains that a participant felt disrespected by her supervisor who did not acknowledge their skills and knowledge, which was aggravated by the lack of recognition for work done. Had the issue of travel been identified during supervision, alternatives could have been designed to help the supervisee overcome feelings of neglect, overwhelm and tiredness.

Discussion of the Findings

Supervision is idealised as a planned and organised activity with diverse functions that provides organisational support, skills development and emotional support (Chibaya 2018). Yet, the supervision process as narrated by participants lacked meaningful interactions. Similar to a finding by Nadesan (2020), participants raised concerns that supervision of SAWs was seen by supervisors as a chore to their already burgeoning workload.

The narratives reflect the lack of support and relational supervision elements experienced by SAWs. These narratives also show the propensity of supervisor to focus solely on work functions. Chibaya and Engelbrecht (2022) have suggested that supervision should focus on all aspects of work, not simply on statutory duties, to encourage critical self-reflection in the field. However, the current study revealed that from the perspectives of SAWs, their supervision was not viewed as a priority by supervisors. SAWs viewed supervision as largely irregular, unprioritised or so infrequent that it bordered on non-existent. Coined the "Cinderella syndrome", this type of supervision hampers the learning and professional development of SAWs.

As indicated in Theme 1, given the high rates of unemployment in South Africa, the participants' decisions to take up the learnerships were consistent with Gxashe's (2018) finding, where the field of SAW was entered into out of necessity and wanting any form of paid employment.

In Theme 2, it was noted that job satisfaction for SAWs was important and that this cadre seek to have their professional needs recognised (Zibengwa and Bila, 2021). Zibengwa and Bila (2021) contend further that receiving structured supervision focused on the administrative, educational and supportive needs of SAWs would have highlighted individual participants' needs during the supervision process. In turn, this could demonstrate constructive improvement in job satisfaction.

Only one participant spoke about the supportive role of supervision. According to Zutshi and McDonnell (2007), the supportive role of supervisors should enable them to identify when the supervisees are unable to cope with work stresses and to support SAWs. Notably, there were limited service and structural resources available to SAWs.

The frequency of supervision was a point of concern in Theme 3. Whereas the supervision framework (DSD and SACSSP 2012) explains that supervision (of social workers) should be provided at least fortnightly for the first three years of new graduates, before moving to consultations as the need arose, the supervision of SAWs should be more frequent, for example, weekly and for a minimum of five years' experience in the field, before moving to fortnightly and monthly in frequency (DSD and SACSSP 2012). The view that SAWs need constant supervision and monitoring with a view to gaining independence is also held by Engelbrecht (2019) and Goliath (2018). Supervision should be developmental and structured. However, a participant

indicated that there were challenges relating to times and frequency. This resulted in limitations in discussions that were often constrained by short times set for the sessions, limited resources, distractions in the workplace and cyber supervision.

The costs of remaining on the SAW career trajectory were also considered. Given that becoming a social worker takes a minimum of four years of university training, involving high costs, studying SAW presented a viable and cost-effective alternative.

The sentiments raised in Theme 4 of this study suggest that supervision should be a tool to develop knowledge and skills and to prevent backlogs in workloads. Supervisors were perceived as lacking expertise, similar to an earlier finding by Goliath (2018) and Bree and Canaverab (2018). Thus, SAWs are faced with far more than job expectations. This was also suggested in a study by Manthosi and Makhubele (2016), wherein SAWs lost valuable work time completing administrative forms, which detracted from the focus on service delivery. The crux of the narrative of Jane suggests that on-the-job training is not as supportive as expected and that SAWs are expected to work at full capacity without proper training and support.

Group supervision, as a strategy, could be used to create a supportive environment (Hendricks et al. 2021). Group supervision may be ideal in organisations that do not have sufficient supervisors (Roby 2016). However, group supervision differs from individualised supervision and should instead be a form of group training (Engelbrecht 2019) to support all participants in attendance at that session.

Engelbrecht (2019) raised the issue of service delivery in rural areas being vastly different from services and resources available in urban settings. Ultimately, it is the training of SAWs in these areas, under the supervision of social workers, that would guide and support their learning opportunities. This form of development supervision is integral to the supervision process, and yet it seems was neglected during the supervision rendered to participant SAWs in the JTG district. Reflecting on the findings identified, SAWs reported that they felt overwhelmed and required emotional support within the workplace instead of focusing solely on administrative duties. This neglect of supervision contributed to feelings of inadequacy and questions about competence, thus fostering the Cinderella metaphor.

Limitations of the Study

The study size is relative to the limited scope of the study. A larger study would include a wider range of participants and a larger sample size. However, accessing appropriate participants proved difficult as some potential participants feared participating for personal reasons. Access to participants who worked on rotational shifts would have also benefitted this study. Therefore, reflecting on the socio-political context of the study, the findings could be transferable to similar contexts. While a mixed-methods study would have also been suitable, access to a larger study sample may have been a

challenge as locating available participants required concerted effort by the researchers. Interviewing supervisors may have also contributed to understanding the supervision of SAWs from the supervisors' perspectives. The sample did, however, have a wide age range, which provided a varied sample of experiences. Notably, this study had participants only from government departments; perhaps the results would have been enhanced by having a balance of participants from both government departments and the non-governmental sector. Furthermore, we speculate that the interviews that were conducted in the workplace may have created an identification challenge and thus affected the participants' ability to share freely. Interviews held at the workplace were shorter in time than those conducted outside of the workplace.

Conclusion

This study uncovered the supervision experiences of SAWs in a geographical region that has not been largely studied. One of the key findings is that supervision is perceived as an ad hoc and largely unstructured process, implying that this unstructured process does not comply with policies designed to enhance quality supervision. In a bid to address resource limitations, supervisors resorted to group supervision, ignoring the need for the individualised development and growth of SAWs. Addressing individual challenges at a group level reveals a lack of concern for confidentiality and supportive supervision. Perhaps even the implementation of developmental supervision is thus questionable, as SAWs understand their supervisors to see supervision as an additional chore.

Receiving proper and structured supervision would have provided SAWs with support and empowerment to fulfil their duties. Furthermore, having supervisors who could identify gaps and training needs would have enhanced professional growth and resource mobilisation. Supervisors of SAWs should be tasked with identifying training needs and engaging with experts to address such needs. Effective stress management should be factored into discussions during supervision.

This article therefore suggests that it is the responsibility of the supervisor to create developmental spaces for SAWs within a nurturing supervision practice. However, expectations differ, whereby the supervision of SAWs is neglected and avoided due to the workload of the social worker, once again purporting the Cinderella fable metaphor. Perhaps an inspiration to motivate supervisors and SAWs to implement structured supervision that is all together developmental and educative is to align supervision with credit-bearing courses for continuing professional development, thus facilitating planned, structured and organised supervision sessions. Ultimately, it is imperative that SAWs function effectively within an empowering environment. Strategic and developmental supervision is required to facilitate job satisfaction and professional development.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this report, the following recommendations are suggested to address the supervision needs of SAWs to identify actionable feedback:

Recommendations for practice are that: (1) mandatory, weekly and structured supervision sessions of SAWs should be applied; (2) the supervision process should be structured to include a combination of developmental, supportive and management supervision, with measurable outcomes; (3) there must be consideration for the career pathing of qualified and experienced SAWs to become supervisors; and (4) SAWs should be encouraged to attend accredited training that would allow for a career pathing of SAWs into supervisory positions (of other SAWs) as well as enter the study of social work.

Further research is recommended in the field of supervision of SAW from the perspective of supervisors and to include SAWs from the broader social services sector.

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