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Supervision Training Needs: Perspectives of Social Work Supervisees

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Supervision Training Needs:
Perspectives of Social Work Supervisees

By

Melissa A. Mak, LSW

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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Leann Thompson, LSW
Tricia Schilling, LICSW

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Supervision Training Needs: Perspective of Social Work Supervisees

By Melissa A. Mak

Research Chair: Dr. Felicia Sy, Ph.D.

Committee Members: Leann Thompson, LSW; Tricia Schilling, LICSW

The topic of social work supervision has received a fair amount of attention in recent years, especially with new supervision training requirements for licensing supervisors recently implemented by the Minnesota Board of Social Work. However, the majority of the previous research on the topic of social work supervision training has been gathered from supervisors, rather than supervisees. The purpose of this survey research was to investigate the perceptions of social work *supervisees* surrounding the topic of supervision and supervision training. Using quantitative survey research, responses were received from thirty total survey respondents regarding their perceptions surrounding the topic of social work supervision and the possible need for additional training on the topic. The findings strongly supported previous research linking the provision of quality supervision to better service delivery and overall stress management for social workers. In addition, varying reported frequencies of supervision sessions indicated a concerning issue regarding the need for consistent provision of formal one-on-one supervision. The findings from this research study also provide implications for specific topics within social work supervision that may require additional training and also the need for supervision training for supervisees and supervisors alike.

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Introduction

The topic of social work supervision has received increased attention over the past two decades. This is in part due to the increasing evidence linking the provision of quality supervision to work retention, job satisfaction and quality service delivery to clients (Hancox, Lynch, Happell, & Biondo, 2004). According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the purpose of social work supervision is “to enhance the social worker’s professional skills, knowledge, and attitudes in order to achieve competency in providing quality patient care and aids in professional growth, development and improves outcomes” (2003, p. 2). However, research has found that nearly a quarter of social workers working with children and over a third of adult services social workers are not receiving adequate supervision (Hunter, 2010). This illustrates the ongoing lack of value being placed on the provision of quality supervision for social workers. Furthermore, as research on social work supervision has also shown that adequate and effective supervision can positively affect the service delivery to clients, this also devalues the populations being served and raises concerns about best practices and ethical decision-making (Barak, Dnika, Pyun, & Xie, 2009).

In addition, the Minnesota Board of Social Work recently increased qualifications for licensing supervisors to include a one-time requirement of thirty hours of training on the topic of supervision (2011). This suggests a perceived need for additional professional training and education on the topic of supervision, specifically for social work supervisors. In fact, according to Kate Zacher-Pate, Executive Director of the Minnesota Board of Social Work, the new licensing requirements were implemented because the Board perceived the need for “more rigorous standards to ensure competence” (personal communication, September 26, 2012). The Board also recognized that there was a growing national trend to require specific training for

social work supervisors and subsequently felt the need to require this type of training statewide because Minnesota's existing supervisor requirements were quite minimal (personal communication, September 26, 2012). More importantly, the Board also wanted to ensure that ethical and competent standards of practice were being adhered to in the field of social work in response to concerns that the Board's Compliance Panels had received from licensees regarding their ineffective supervisory experiences that may have been lacking in efficacy and competency (personal communication, September 26, 2012).

Extensive research has also shown that properly-executed supervision has been found to increase worker retention, job satisfaction, coherence, creativity and efficiency and also decrease work-related stress for social workers (as cited in Hancox et al., 2004; Kavanagh, Spence, Wilson, & Crow, 2002; Barak et al., 2009). This further illustrates the importance of adequate social work supervision. In fact, according to the American Public Human Services Association's (APHSA) 2004 report, of all the organizational and personal factors that can positively contribute to staff retention, "good supervision" was listed first in order of importance by state administrators. The report also listed "improved supervision" and "supervisor training" as two of the top five agency actions that could be taken to retain quality frontline workers and one of the preventable ways to avoid high staff turnover (APHSA, 2004).

Given the important role that quality supervision plays in the field of social work, the topic of social work supervision has received a great deal of attention over the past twenty years to both legitimize the need for professional and competent supervisors and also highlight the importance of investing in quality supervision practices. Research has not only shown that quality supervision helps improve service delivery to clients, but also leads to great job satisfaction and worker retention. It comes as no surprise then that the Minnesota Board of Social

Work has recently increased licensing supervisor's requirements to include the need for specific training on the topic of social work supervision.

The purpose of this survey research was to investigate the perceptions of social work supervisees surrounding the topic of supervision and gather data to determine if there is a need for supervisee training on the topic of supervision. The researcher surveyed social work supervisees using an online survey containing likert-scale questions to collect relevant data relating to their supervisory relationships, previous training experience on the topic of social work supervision and their thoughts regarding the need for additional social work supervision training. Data collected from the surveys was compared to the current literature on the topic of social work supervision to determine if similarities or discrepancies exist and make recommendations for further social work education and training.

The following section of this research paper provides a review of the current literature relating to the topic of social work supervision. As the primary interest of this research study was to investigate the training needs on the topic of supervision, an overview of the evolution of social work supervision and types of supervision will be provided, along with additional important themes found in the current literature. These themes include the importance of social work supervision, effective elements of supervision and also the current trends in social work supervision training and emerging supervision training programs that have been found to be effective.

Literature Review

Review of the current literature related to the topic of social work supervision articulates the importance of the provision of competent supervision for social workers and also highlights the significance of the supervisory relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Moreover, a growing body of research on the topic of professional training related to social work supervision has also received increased attention.

The Evolution of Social Work Supervision

The subject of social work supervision has long been discussed by scholars as far back as the early 1900s, with the most prominent early scholarship between 1920 and 1945 with *Family and Social Case-work* and Robinson's *Supervision in Social Case Work* in 1936 and *the Dynamics of Supervision Under Functional Controls* in 1942 (as cited in Kudashin & Harkness, 2002). Robinson (1936) defined social work supervision as primarily an educational process between supervisor and supervisee. This definition was based on the assumption that supervisors had a unique set of skills and wealth of knowledge that they could in turn teach to and share with their supervisees. According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002), the educational component of social work supervision has indeed received the greatest amount of emphasis historically, according to past literature.

However, the administrative and supportive functions of social work supervision also took center stage as the social work profession further developed and diversified (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Tsui, 2005). In the 1950s and 1960s, a growing diversification of state agencies and client populations, paired with a greater emphasis on staff accountability gave way to an increased emphasis on the administrative tasks of social work supervision. The field of social work also became much more attuned to the supportive function of social work supervision

during the early 1970s, amidst growing concerns about civil rights and the human rights of oppressed groups (Mandell, 1973). Kadushin and Harkness (2002) also noted a marked increase in the literature related to the supportive tasks of social work supervision starting in the mid 1970s in response to a growing need to address staff burnout. The field of social work was greatly influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic theory, and the concept of therapeutic support, which evolved into the notions of parallel process whereby a worker's ability to understand and support the client is similar to the supervisor's ability to understand and support the worker (as cited in Bruce & Austin, 2001).

In response to changing social climates and the evolution of professional social work, Kadushin offered a broader definition of social work supervision to not only include the existing educational and administrative tasks of supervision, but also to include an "expressive-supportive leadership function" (as cited in Shulman, 2010). Kadushin (1992) argued that the addition of this supportive function in the supervisory relationship allowed the supervisee to feel a sense of worth and security as professional social workers and also helped build a positive working relationship between supervisor and supervisee.

However, the integration of these three functions of supervision (administrative, educational and supportive) for social workers is often threatened by ever-changing economic and social trends and practices (Shulman, 2010). Research by Berger & Mizrahi (2001) indicated that a growing trend over the past twenty years has evolved where clinical social workers are increasingly being supervised by other professionals outside of the field of social work in order to reduce administrative and staffing costs. Furthermore, supervisors are often over-extended in terms of their job responsibilities and commitments. In response to this trend, Strong et. al (2003)

strongly cautioned that cross-discipline supervision can jeopardize resolutions to ethical dilemmas and contribute to the devaluing of the skills unique to the field of social work.

The evolution of social work supervision over the past century is indicative of the social and economic trends of the time. It also reflects a growing trend in the field to recognize that the task of supervision is not merely an administrative or managerial task, but rather an important task that is multi-dimensional, thus requiring specific training and mastering of skills.

However, the literature surrounding the historical development of social work supervision fails to address if the changes in social work supervision over time have also led to a change in trends on the topic of supervision *training*. In other words, the literature fails to explore if training on the topic of social work supervision has also evolved over the years based on the needs of the social work profession and societal changes. Have supervision training needs changed over the past century or do they remain the same? There also appears to be a lack of historical literature outlining the evolution of social work supervision training as an educational part of the social work profession. Tsui (2010) briefly mentioned the first fieldwork supervision training courses offered in 1911, but little additional literature can be found describing how the provision of supervision *training* has evolved across practice settings in the past century. Furthermore, given the many changes to supervision approaches, one might expect the literature to also reflect an increase of supervision training opportunities to educate social work supervisors on how the provision of supervision has changed over the past decade.

Field Supervision vs. Staff (Professional) Supervision

Historically, the social work profession considered student supervision and staff (professional) supervision to be similar until the mid-1960s, given that both types of supervision include an educational component. However, in the late 1960s, the social work profession began

to realize that while professional supervision and field supervision were similar in nature, there were several practical, conceptual and methodological aspects of both types of supervision that made them distinct from one another, and thus should be viewed separately using different approaches (Tsui, 2010).

According to Bogo and Vayda (1998), there are several key differences between the frame of reference of student fieldwork supervision and that of staff supervision. First, the main purpose and focus of fieldwork supervision is education (development of skills and competencies), contrary to the focus of quality service delivery in professional supervision. Secondly, fieldwork supervision includes activities that revolve largely around teaching and research, whereas professional supervision often places a large emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery to clients. Fieldwork supervision also focuses primarily on future-oriented goals (i.e. values, knowledge acquisition, skill competence), while professional social workers tend to focus on present-oriented goals.

Bogo and Vayda (1998) also suggest that the method of governance over fieldwork supervision and professional supervision create a difference in needs for supervision. For example, fieldwork supervision is provided within an institution or collegiate setting whereby decisions are typically made by consensus. Professional social workers, however, operate in more bureaucratic organizations where authority may be centralized and hierarchal in nature, thus inherently changing the dynamics of the supervisory relationship.

The difference in supervision contexts between fieldwork supervision and professional supervision have led researchers to believe that the provision of professional supervision requires additional training on some of the more administrative tasks of supervision, including the role of buffering the contexts of social work practice specific to the organizations in which professional

social workers practice. This research highlights the uniqueness that pertains to the provision of professional/staff supervision that requires specific training.

The Importance of Professional Supervision

A great deal of research has also been conducted to illustrate the importance and significance of the provision of adequate and competent supervision. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the purpose of supervision is “to enhance the social worker’s professional skills, knowledge, and attitudes in order to achieve competency in providing quality patient care and aids in professional growth, development and improves outcomes” (2003, p. 2). Chapman (2008) further elaborated that supervision provides social workers with unique skill building opportunities and the development of a professional identity. Kraemer et al. (2011) also suggested that effective clinical practice relies heavily on supervisory competencies which require training and experience to acquire.

Researchers have indeed found that supervision offers a unique level of support and guidance to front-line workers that not only encourages professional development, but also ensures the provision of quality patient care and also helps to increase quality practice standards (Culbreth, 2001; Hancox et al., 2004). Extensive research has also linked the provision of supervisory support to higher staff satisfaction rates, greater productivity, along with better overall health outcomes, including less fatigue and less depression (Kawakami, Kobayashi, Takao, & Tsutsumi, 2005). However, researchers also argue that insufficient time and attention is being paid to the value and importance of clinical supervision (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Kaiser, 1997; Munson, 2002; Strong et al., 2003). According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services (MN-DHS) (2007) and Culbreth (2011), practitioners believe that both the quantity and quality of supervision have suffered greatly due to increasingly limited resources

and the misconception of supervision as solely an administrative or managerial task provided by upper-level management. Research by Hair (2012) further supports this claim as she reports that both the availability and quality of social work supervision has suffered greatly across the world regardless of practice settings.

Research by O'Donoghue et al. (2005) and Rossiter, Walsh-Bowers, & Prilleltensky (1996) also demonstrated that supervision, rather than the social work code of ethics, is more often the primary source for ethical decision making for social workers. This further illustrates the increasing importance of the provision of adequate and quality supervision to social work practitioners in order to ensure ethical and competent social work practice. As Shulman (2010) stated,

a supervisor interacting skillfully with a supervisee will have a positive impact on their working relationship. This relationship will be the medium through which a supervisor may influence the supervisee's practice. In turn, the supervisee's behaviors may influence the outcomes of practice with clients. (p. 15)

This further highlights how the supervisory relationship can affect direct practice and ultimately client outcomes.

While the literature on the importance of quality supervision in the field of social work is vast and abundant, many researchers have overlooked the topic of *how* the social work profession should ensure the provision of such quality supervision (i.e. does training on the topic of supervision ensure the provision of quality supervision?). Furthermore, researchers have also neglected to emphasize the important role that *supervisees* play in the supervisory relationship and fail to consider the possible deeper causes of poor supervision (possible lack of training on the topic).

Effective Elements of Supervision

Given the previously mentioned importance of supervision in the field of social work and how this can affect service delivery, it is important to highlight some of the qualities that have been found to be a part of an effective supervisor relationship. Many dynamics occur in the presence of the supervisory relationship, several of which are particularly beneficial for both the supervisor and supervisee involved. Other dynamics can inhibit the productivity and integrity of the supervisory relationship.

In their research, Falender and Shafranske (2004) found that supervisors who were not particularly committed to the training relationship with their supervisees made for very non-productive supervisory relationships. Heppner and Roehlke (1984) also found that supervisees reported greater satisfaction with their supervision if the supervisor highlighted their strengths and helped increase their self-confidence as practitioners. A positive communication climate between supervisor and supervisee also correlated with higher job satisfaction and job performance (as cited in Shulman, 2010). According to Barak et al. (2009) and Kudashin and Harkness (2002), a supervisor using a combination of the following professional skills can positively enhance a supervisee's overall work experience, (1) offer guidance and education on work-related issues in a knowledgeable and skillful; (2) provide emotional and social support to staff and (3) interact effectively with and influence supervisees.

Past research has also shown that proper supervision for social workers should include feedback on a regular basis. Some researchers suggest one-on-one supervision at least monthly, while others suggest more frequent sessions (such as every other week) depending on the social worker's level of comfort in autonomy and their professional experience (Hunter, 2010; McGregor, 2011). However, regardless of the consensus on the amount or frequency of

supervision, researchers agree that regularly scheduled supervision needs to take place in order to practice competent and well-informed social work (Jones, 2006; Kavanagh et al., 2002).

According to Mordock (1990), research has shown that feedback not only fosters job motivation, but is also directly linked to an individual's perceptions of their own competence. Moreover, researchers suggest that social workers and their supervisors should have a collaborative and honest discussion about the frequency, content and form of supervision in the very beginning of their supervisory relationship (and ongoing, as needed) in order for social workers to feel well-supported and for clear expectations to be established (Jones, 2006; Kavanagh et al., 2002).

Research by Jones (2006) also found that competence and trust play a very important role in the supervisory relationship. In his research, Jones found that a supervisee's trust in their supervisor often led to more effective supervisory relationships. In turn, the supervisee's trust in their supervisor also increased based on the perceived competence and knowledge base of the supervisor (Jones, 2006; Dill & Bogo, 2006). In fact, Kavanagh et al. (2002) discussed how a lack of confidence in one's knowledge base or training (on the part of the supervisor) served as a large barrier to providing effective supervision. Moreover, supervision should foster professional growth and help broaden the knowledge base of the supervisee, which Ross (1992) suggests is a primary function of the social work supervisor and is also subsequently affected by the supervisor's own wealth of knowledge. This was further supported research conducted by Strong et al. (2004) who found that,

supervisors needed to be able to establish a safe and trusting environment for the supervisee. It was not enough for the supervisor to just be an experienced clinician in mental health. The quality of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee was

clearly important. Issues of trust and the purposes and goals of supervision needed to be agreed to by the two parties early in the supervisory relationship. (p. 198)

While researchers have compiled an exhaustive list of both generalized and field-specific elements of social work supervision that make for effective and quality supervision, specialized training to educate supervisors on these supervision concepts or skills remain overlooked. Given the research that has been conducted on element that help foster a positive supervisory experience, why are supervisors and supervisees not educated on these elements and how to incorporate them into their professional relationships?

In an attempt to address this need for supervision training or education in the field of social work, the profession has made great attempts to offer supervision training to supervisors. Some preliminary data has also become available on what types of training supervisors find the most helpful and effective in their learning experience.

Current Trends for Supervision Training

Given that research has shown the increasing importance of the provision of competent supervisor to social workers, one might easily conclude that extensive training programs have been developed to provide supervisors with the necessary knowledge and skills to competently provide supervision. Olmstead and Christiansen (1973) urged the profession to pay close attention to the particular need for formal and explicit training for the topic of supervision. In their report on social work staff problems, they proclaimed that “there appears to be a pressing need for supervisory training. The function of supervision is too crucial to leave to trial-and-error learning. Systematic instruction in the fundamentals of supervision warrants a high place on any list of training requirements” (p. 6). In addition, Shulman (2010) suggested “new supervisors, as well as experienced ones, need clear and simple models of supervision practice that will help

them to understand their roles and to learn how to implement complex human relations tasks” (p. 7). However, education and training opportunities on the topic of social work supervision continue to remain in short supply (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

Despite repeated recommendations which have been made from both the practice literature and research that supervision training is necessary for supervisors to provide effective services, review of the current literature reveals that there appears to be no clear standards on what constitutes quality training on clinical supervision and supervision training opportunities remain scarce (Barak et al., 2009; Erera, 1993; Hadjistavropoulos, Kehler, & Hadjistavropoulos, 2010; Hancox et al., 2004; Rosenfield, 2012; Strong et al., 2004; White et al., 1998). In addition, despite the research findings regarding the importance of social worker supervision, Landsman (2007) found that supervisors are still lacking the proper resources and supports themselves to provide adequate and competent supervision.

Researchers further concluded that few specific training programs were provided to social work supervisors. In the scarce instance of providing training to supervisors, the topics addressed were primarily managerial in nature, with little to no attention being paid to the interpersonal and leadership skills needed in a successful supervisory relationship (Shulman, 2010). Furthermore, supervisors were often promoted from within organizations and were assumed to have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide supervision (from their experience as front-line staff), without further training or education specific to the provision of supervision (Hadjistavropoulos, et al., 2010; Landsman, 2007). According to Peake, Nussbaum and Tindell (2002), as few as 20% of supervisors have any formal training relating to topic of supervision. Moreover, incoming supervisors often rely solely on their experiences as former supervisees to inform their knowledge-base on the provision of supervision (Hadjistavropoulos,

et al., 2010). While these personal and professional experiences serve as valuable sources of reference, relying solely on these experiences without additional training or education relating to supervision often proves inadequate, which in turn can greatly affect quality service delivery to clients (MN-DHS, 2007; Milne & James, 2002).

Research conducted thus far has shown that supervisors are generally not receiving an adequate amount of training on how to provide quality supervision. However, there is some indication in recent years, specifically in the state of Minnesota with the new Board requirements that this trend is shifting. Community educators and university faculty are beginning to respond to the need. This changing trend can be found in community training notifications to licensed professionals and University course offerings for continuing education. Yet researchers have failed to investigate the *specific* training needs of these supervisors and determine if there are particular topics within supervision that require special consideration when training supervisors. Furthermore, researchers have also overlooked the possible need for supervision training for *supervisees* as well. Virtually all of the research conducted surrounding the need for supervision training has elicited feedback and responses directly from supervisors, overlooking the dynamic and interactional nature of the supervisory relationship. Very little attention has been paid to investigate if there is an explicit need for this type of training for *supervisees* as well. Given this gap in the current literature, this researcher conducted a study to determine what the perceived supervision training needs are from a *supervisee's* perspective.

While research has shown insufficient supervision training in the social work profession, several pioneers have set out to implement and promote supervision training programs to social work professionals in an effort to address the proven need for additional supervisory supports.

The following section will outline a few recently established supervision training programs and what researchers have found to be particularly useful in their training.

Emerging Supervision Training Programs that Work

In an effort to address the lack of education and training on the topic of supervision, researchers have conducted studies to evaluate the effectiveness of several existing supervision training programs to determine what aspects of the training programs are particularly beneficial (Hancox et al., 2004; Kaiser & Kuechler, 2008; Kraemer Tebes et al., 2011; Landsman, 2007; MacEachron et al., 2009) . Review of these training programs provides the social work profession with valuable information on specifics that create for more productive and effective learning experiences.

As cited by McMahon and Simons (2004), supervision training has historically been guided by the following four main goals:

1. To provide a theory or knowledge base relevant to supervisor functioning,
2. To develop and refine supervisor skills,
3. To Integrate the theory and skills into a working supervisory style, and
4. To develop and enhance the professional identity of the supervisor (p. 302)

Mordock (1990) further suggests that supervisors need training in the following areas:

1. Clarifying desired performance outcomes of workers,
2. Identifying tasks and activities that are instrumental in achieving these outcomes,
3. Providing specific feedback to workers regarding their performance, including identifying competencies that need enhancing as well as deficiencies that need correction,
4. Providing incentives to workers who improve practice competencies (p. 82)

In response to the expressed need for more education and training on the topic of supervision of social work practitioners, the College of St. Catherine and the University of St. Thomas began developing a training program in 1994 specifically geared towards social work supervisors. The primary focus of this training was to illuminate the specific skills and knowledge needed to become a competent supervisor, above and beyond the essential skills necessary to be a competent social work practitioner (Kaiser & Kuechler, 2008). Through pre- and post-test data analysis, the researchers found that the supervisors participating in their training programs found the following topics particularly helpful:

- setting effective limits with supervisees
- understanding the dynamics of power and authority
- how to help guide supervisees in their practice
- addressing issues of transference and counter-transference
- defining the line between supervision and therapy
- establishing clear expectations with supervisees regarding evaluation of their performance
- working effectively with supervisees who are culturally different (Kaiser & Kuechler, 2008, p. 90-91)

Kaiser and Kuechler (2008) further suggest that social work supervisors should be trained using a three-part training program that includes the following main objectives:

- 1) Highlight basic knowledge and skills related to the supervisory process,
- 2) Provide additional trainings that are specific to their particular agency settings,
- 3) Provides supervisors with the opportunity to participate in regular consultation about supervision practices, particularly amongst their colleagues (p. 94).

In evaluating another training program for social work supervisors, Hancox et al. (2004) also found that supervisors preferred an *interactional* and *practical* approach to supervision training in order to help them apply theories of supervision to real-life supervisory situations. MacEachron et al. (2009) also found similar results in their research. In their research study of supervisors participating in supervisory training, supervisors valued *active participation* the most in their training sessions. Participants also found that this type of approach enabled them to further develop the specific skills required of them as supervisors and they also benefited by learning from other supervisors' experiences. According to MacEachron et al. (2009),

supervisors wanted to bring their policy issues and supervisory dilemmas to training and talk about how others deal with similar situations. They wanted an open forum to explore what they often referred to as the 'collective genius of the group'. (p. 181)

Research by Falender & Shafranske (2007) further suggested that supervision training that emphasizes supervisor competencies encourages the development of professional skills to ensure that supervision meets local standards of practice and accountability. Kramer et al. (2011) also found that supervision training using the model of interactional supervision significantly increased a supervisors' perceived ability to manage supervisory relationships, manage supervisee job performance, and promote the professional development of their supervisees.

Gaps in Current Literature

A review of the current literature on the topic of social work supervision illustrates the evolution of the supervisory relationship, the importance of this supervisory relationship, provides ideas for what constitutes effective supervision and also begins to provide insight into how to best train supervisors on the topic of supervision. However, these research findings were largely based on research studies where information and feedback were gathered primarily from

social work supervisors, not supervisees. Thus, additional research is needed in order to investigate what the general perceptions of *supervisees* are surrounding the topic of social work supervision and training. Furthermore, the current literature fails to address the possible supervision training needs of supervisees, in addition to their supervisors.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework, along with the professional and personal lenses used to approach this research topic will be presented next. These lenses provide the researcher with framework from which to examine the topic of social work supervision and may also demonstrate possible biases of the researcher involved.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this project is based on Shulman's theory of Interactional Supervision. In his book titled *Interactional Supervision* (2010), Shulman proposes that social work supervision should not be viewed simply as a one-directional process where information is transmitted from supervisor to supervisee, but rather should be understood as a *interactional* process between supervisor and supervisee, where supervisor and supervisee have qualities and knowledge to bring to the supervisory relationship. According to MacEachron, Gustavsson, Lavitt and Bartle (2009) this model of supervision has received increasing support as the social work profession has increasingly viewed supervision as a consultation/collaboration process, rather than a simple administrative or managerial task.

As Shulman (2010) further explained, this interactional model of supervision perceives "the supervision dyad as a dynamic interaction in which the supervisor and worker are constantly influencing and being influenced by the behavior and expressed emotions of the other" (p. 12), which further suggests that in the supervisory relationship, both parties (supervisor and

supervisee) play a major part in the process. Shulman's interactional model also suggests that the supervisor-supervisee working relationship is the medium through which a supervisor can influence the outcomes of client practices (2010).

The foundation of Shulman's approach to supervision includes three main assumptions:

1. Common dynamics and core skills are central to all supervision processes,
2. These dynamics are universal to the different types of interactions in which supervisors are involved, and
3. There are parallels between the dynamics of supervision and any other helping relationship (as cited in Bruce & Austin, 2008).

According to Shulman's model of interactional supervision, supervision is seen also as a mediating process in which the supervisor interacts with multiple systems, irrespective of the type of social service agency, using the three phases of work (beginning phase, middle/work phase and ending phase) (as cited in Bruce & Austin, 2008). The core of Shulman's (2010) approach to supervisory practice is the parallel process through which staff are educated about their interactions with clients by using the supervisory interaction as a *model* for relationship-building and strengthening. The parallel process in the *tuning in* and *contracting* phase involves the supervisor in teaching workers to begin the *interactional* process by clearly and directly identifying the processes of tuning in and contracting, and then modeling those skills. Through this process and model of supervision, workers are encouraged to recognize their inherent authority and the authority that their clients bring to the helping interaction (as cited in Bruce & Austin, 2008).

Application of Framework to Research Topic. Using Shulman's theory of Interactional Supervision to approach the research topic of social work supervision training, the need for

supervision training of *both* supervisor and supervisee is implied in order to make for an effective supervisory relationship. In other words, the current literature on expressed training needs of supervisors alone is insufficient. Therefore, the researcher focused on the expressed training needs on supervision for supervisees (as previous research has primarily focuses on the responses from supervisors only). Furthermore, this theory suggests that supervisor and supervisees have the mutual responsibility in acquiring competence in the topic of supervision. Based on this, this research was focused on investigating if supervisees have received training on the topic of social work supervision.

Professional Framework

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, social workers have several ethical responsibilities to the clients they serve across all practice settings. One of these ethical responsibilities is the expectation that social workers should demonstrate professional competence when providing services to clients and also strive to continue to broaden their knowledge and competence to meet changing cultural and societal diversities (NASW, 1996). According to the NASW's Code of Ethics, "social workers should provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience".

More specifically, the NASW Code of Ethics also outlines the following ethical responsibilities for social workers on the topic of supervision and consultation:

- (a) Social workers who provide supervision or consultation should have the necessary knowledge and skill to supervise or consult appropriately and should do so only within their areas of knowledge and competence;

(b) Social workers who provide supervision or consultation are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. (section titled “Social Workers’ Ethical Responsibilities in Practice Settings”, 1996)

Another relevant ethical principle upheld by the NASW is the principle that social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships and how these relationships can influence change. The NASW Code of Ethics elaborates that this implies:

social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities. (section titled “Ethical Principles, 1996)

This ethical principle not only highlights the importance of the worker-client relationship (and how social workers can influence their clients), but also articulates the importance of the supervisor-supervisee relationship in influencing change and client outcomes.

Application of Framework to Research Topic. According to the NASW’s discussion of the ethical responsibilities relating to the provision of competent supervision, this particular research topic of investigating the perceived training needs on the topic of social work supervision is imperative. Social Workers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that they are practicing competently, including the practice of supervision. Furthermore, the social work profession’s emphasis on competence, education and training necessitates the need for research on perceived training needs of social work supervisors and supervisees in order to ensure ethical social work practice. The Minnesota Board of Social Work further acknowledged the significance of requiring supervision training across practice settings (by increasing licensing

supervisor requirements to include supervision training), which reflects a realization in the social work profession that training in this topic is necessary and pertinent.

The NASW ethical principle emphasizing the significance of human relationships also articulates the importance of viewing supervision as a means to facilitate social and personal change, both for social workers and their clients. This principle also encourages the social work profession to view the supervisory relationship has a dynamic interaction requiring the participation of both supervisor and supervisee.

Personal Lens

As a county social worker working in a department providing long-term care case management to the elderly and individuals with disabilities, this researcher has first-hand knowledge of the importance of quality supervision and how this can ultimately affect job satisfaction, work-related stress and client care. In addition, recent departmental changes have further highlighted how detrimental a lack of quality and competent supervision can be in terms of overall job satisfaction, service delivery and team morale.

After the absence of a department supervisor for over six months, this researcher's team of coworkers (long-term care case managers) had a very difficult time adapting to the reorganization of the department and adjusting to a new supervisor that is unfamiliar with the department's programs and job duties. It has also become very evident to this researcher and coworkers that there may be a need for specific training for supervisors in order to best support front-line staff.

Application of Framework to Research Topic. This personal lens creates several biases on the part of researcher. First, this personal lens assumes that this researcher's negative experience of poor supervision is common or widespread across the social work practice settings.

Second, the assumption that the need for training on the topic of supervision is a long-standing, chronic and systemic issue to be addressed exists, rather than the consideration that the issue of poor supervision is simply a direct result of our current social or economic state, which may eventually resolve itself.

Methods

Based on existing research and literature on the topic of social work supervision, this researcher conducted survey research to investigate the perceived need for supervision training, specifically from the perspective of supervisees. Further details about the final research design are discussed in the following pages.

Study Purpose and Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the amount of training that current social work supervisees have had on the topic of social work supervision, determine if there is a current need for additional training on the provision of quality social work supervision and finally, examine specific topics within social work supervision training that need particular attention. Data collected was solicited from supervisees only. Furthermore, for purposes of this research project, the researcher was primarily interested in responses from social workers working as case managers and their perceptions of their respective supervisors. For these reasons, the researcher utilized a quantitative online survey to gather research data from social workers providing case management services.

Data Collection Instrument Development and Categories of Questions

A 15-question survey developed by the researcher to gather data from social worker supervisees in long-term care case management positions was used for this research study. Survey questions were designed to collect information from current case managers on the topic

of social work supervision and elicit their opinions on the need for additional training on the topic. Respondents were asked to answer these survey questions relating to their experience on the topic of social work supervision training, how they perceive supervision to affect their service delivery to clients and also investigate what the perceived needs (surrounding the topic of supervision training) are from the perspective of supervisees. Respondents (social work supervisees) were asked to indicate if they feel that additional training on the topic of social work supervision is necessary (both for themselves as supervisees and for supervisors in general). Finally, respondents were also asked to indicate which specific topics in social work supervision supervisees and/or supervisors need additional training on.

Sampling Method and Data Collection Process

A convenience sample was collected from a list of 83 social workers working in private agencies providing case management services were used to gather data in the spring of 2013 using a quantitative online survey developed by this researcher. Respondents surveyed were case managers who were employed by private agencies contracted with metropolitan counties to provide case management services to elderly or disabled individuals. Survey participants were also Licensed Social Workers (LSW), licensed by the Minnesota Board of Social Work. The researcher was given a list of case managers (email addresses only) that met the selection criteria (employed as a case manager and identified as a supervisee and have LSW credentials) and the researcher sent the research participants an online link to complete the survey. Participants were asked to complete the online survey developed by this researcher on a voluntary basis and data collected was subsequently used for data analysis.

Measures for Protection of Human Subjects

Several important measures were implemented in gathering data from case managers using the developed survey to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. First, the research project and all relevant information were presented to and approved by the University of Saint Thomas' Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that all necessary measures were made to protect the potential survey participants and ensure that the research proposal adhered to all ethical standards for human research. Data was not collected until formal approval was received from the IRB. In addition, prior to completing the quantitative survey online, survey respondents were asked to review a one-page disclaimer (online) that contained information on informed consent (see Appendix B), comprehensive details about the purpose of the study, instructions on how to complete the survey, along with risks and benefits associated with participating in the study. The letter of consent also contained important information on how the researcher will maintain confidentiality of the research results and how the research data will be stored and utilized. Research data collected was stored securely online using a password-protected user account accessed only by the researcher. Research data will be permanently destroyed on June 1st, 2013. Respondents were also informed that participation in the survey was voluntary and that they may choose to skip any of the survey questions or stop the survey at any time, for any reason.

Data Analysis

The researcher used largely descriptive statistics for data analysis in order to interpret survey data collected to best answer the main research question: what are the perceived training needs of supervisees on the topic of social work supervision? (see Appendix C for a complete list of survey questions used). Additional survey questions were used to gather basic information

from survey participants including their educational background, length of time in their current case management position and current supervision frequency.

Findings

After receiving official approval from the University of Saint Thomas' Institutional Review Board for the research study, the researcher sent individual emails to the sample of 83 social workers purposively selected to complete the online survey containing 14 questions related to the topic of social work supervision training. Survey participants were given three weeks to complete the online survey anonymously.

Participants

Of the 83 social workers chosen, 30 completed surveys were received for data analysis, presenting a response rate of approximately 36%. The first four questions of the survey were used to gather basic demographic and background information from participants. The first survey question asked "How many years have you worked in providing case management services?" Possible survey responses were categorized into four categories (less than one year, over one year to 5 years, over 5 years to 10 years and over 10 years of case management experience).

Figure 1 below charts the data received from the 30 completed surveys.

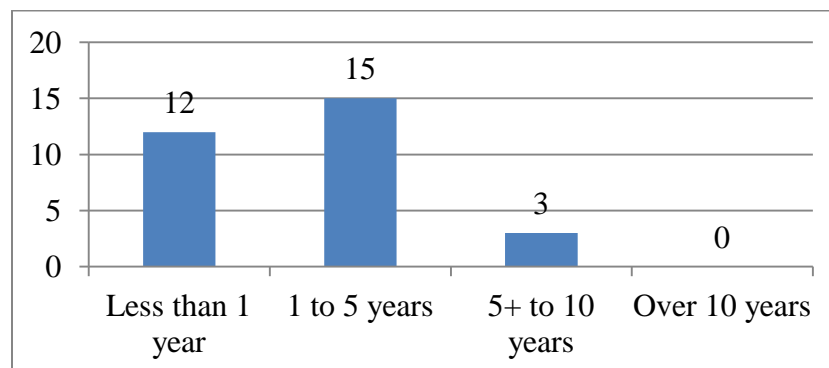


Figure 1. Participants' years of experience in providing case management experience

Based on the 30 participants' responses, 12 participants (40%) reported that they had less than 1 year of case management experience, 15 respondents (60%) indicated that they had 1 to 5 years of case management experience and no participants reported more than 10 years of case management experience.

The next survey question (survey question #2) inquired about survey participants' educational background. This survey question asked participants to identify their highest level of education completed. Figure 2 below charts the responses of the 30 completed surveys.

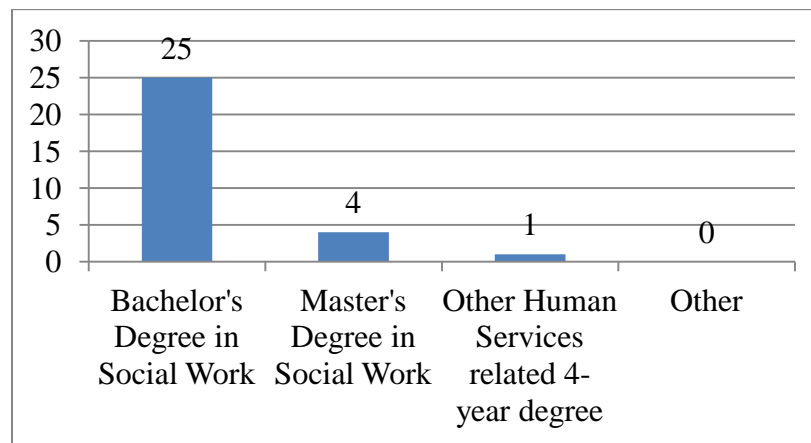


Figure 2. Participants' reported highest level of education completed.

Of the 30 final survey participants, 25 participants (83.33%) indicated that their highest level of education was a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work, while 4 participants (13.33%) indicated that they had obtained a Master's Degree in the field of Social Work. Finally, only one participant indicated that their highest level of education completed was a Human Services related 4 year degree.

Training/Education on Social Work Supervision

The next variable (survey question #3) analyzed was the participants' identified education and training experience specific to the topic of social work supervision. This variable was operationalized in the online survey question that asked "as a supervisee, have you received

any specific training or taken any educational courses on the topic of social work supervision?”

Figure 3 illustrates the results from the study for this nominal-level variable.

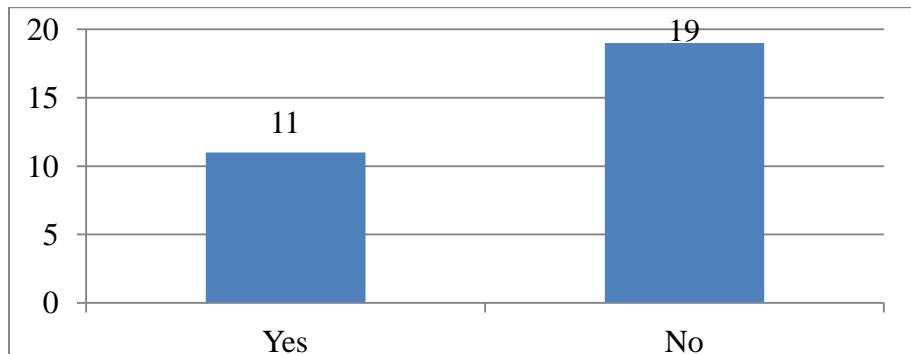


Figure 3. Distribution of participants surveyed who have received supervision training.

Of the 30 total survey respondents, 11 respondents (37%) identified that they had received training on the topic of social work supervision, while 19 respondents (63%) indicated that they had not received any specific training or education on the topic.

Survey question # 4 served as a follow up question to question #3 and asked survey participants to indicate the reason(s) that they had received training or education on the topic of social work supervision. The figure below (figure 4) charts the various responses provided by the survey participants.

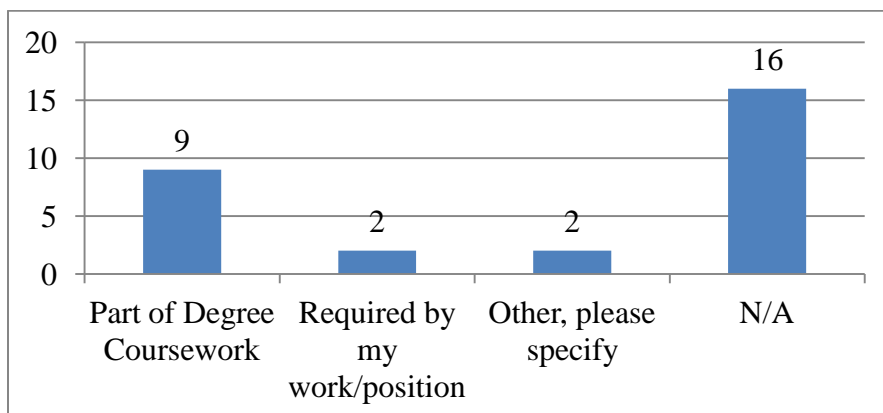


Figure 4. Participants’ reported reasons for receiving training/education on the topic of supervision.

For this survey question, participants were asked to check all that may apply and only 29 total responses were received. Based on the collected data, participants indicated that the training or education was received because it was part of their degree coursework 9 times, and because it was required by their work or position twice. 16 responses indicated that this was question was not applicable to them (i.e. they had previously indicated they did *not* receive any formal training or education on the topic). The response “Other, please specify” was selected twice and respondents provided answers including “CEUs” and “wanting to maintain supervisor skills”.

Formal Supervision Sessions

The next survey question (question #5) asked participants to indicate how often they met with their respective supervisors for formal supervision sessions. Survey question #5 asked “as a supervisee, how often do you meet with your supervisor for formal supervision sessions, on average?” Figure 5 below illustrates the array of responses provided by participants.

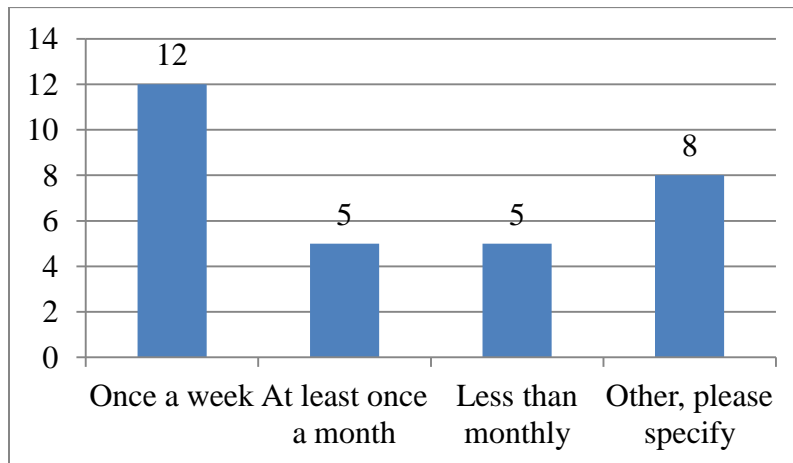


Figure 5. Frequency of supervisory meetings, as reported by supervisee participants.

Of the 30 total responses, 40% of participants (12) reported that they met with their supervisor once a week for formal supervision sessions, while 5 participants indicated that they met at least once a month and less than monthly each with their supervisors. Finally, 8 respondents (26.67%) chose “other” for this survey question and respondents’ answers included

“as needed” (5 out of the 8 in this category), “twice per week”, “three times per month”. One respondent’s answer to this was “we discontinued meeting monthly because I am more familiar with my job duties. I go in and ask questions whenever they arise.”

Attitudes or Beliefs Towards the Importance of Social Work Supervision

Survey questions 6-13 were designed to elicit opinions from the supervisee participants regarding the importance of social work supervision and supervision training. For these particular survey questions, participants were asked to respond using a 5-point likert scale.

Survey question #6 asked participants to respond to the following statement “as a case manager, I feel that the amount and quality of supervision I receive is adequate to support me in my work” using a 5-point likert scale. Figure 6 below charts the 30 total responses received from the online survey.

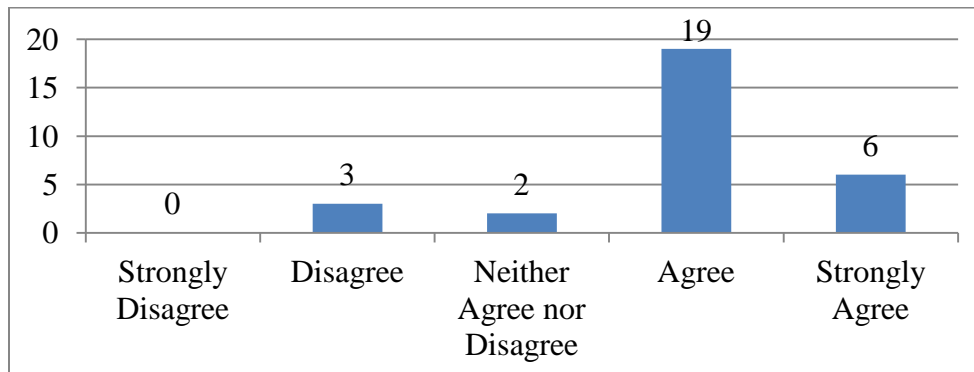


Figure 6. Participants’ opinions regarding the amount and quality of supervision they receive.

Of the total responses (30), 3 participants (10%) disagreed with the statement that the amount and quality of supervision they received helped support them in their work. 2 participants neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement and 25 participants indicated that they either agreed (19) or strongly agreed (6) with the statement about the quality and amount of supervision they receive.

The next survey question (question #7) asked participant about their opinions regarding *supervisees* receiving training on the topic of social work supervision. This ordinal-level variable was operationalized with the following survey question: “As a supervisee, I believe that supervisees should receive training on the topic of social work supervision” using a 5-point likert scale. Figure 7 below illustrates the survey respondents’ responses to this survey question.

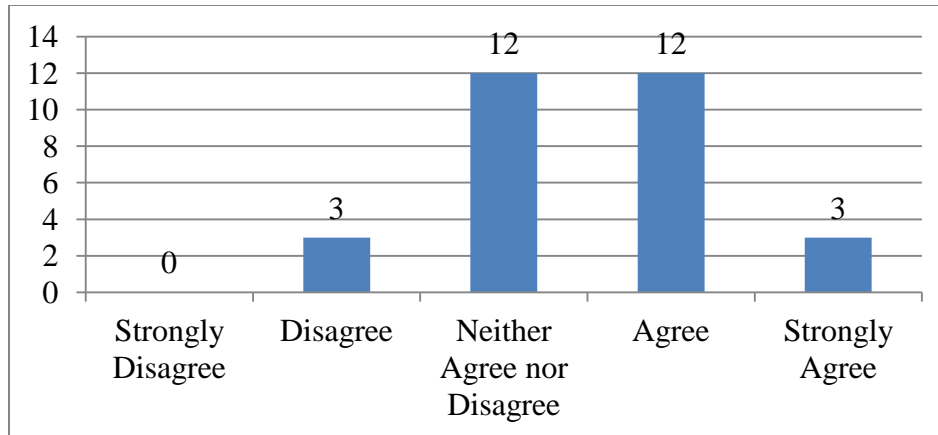


Figure 7. Participants’ opinions towards supervisees receiving training on the topic of social work supervision.

From the 30 total responses received, 3 respondents (10%) disagreed with the statement that supervisees should receive training on the topic of social work supervision, while 12 respondents (40%) neither agreed nor disagreed and another 12 respondents (40%) agreed with the statement. Finally, 3 respondents (10%) answered that they strongly agreed with the statement indicating that they felt social work supervisees should receive training on the topic of social work supervision.

Question 8 on the survey asked survey participants to respond to the following statement using a 5-point likert scale “as a supervisee, I know what *content* should be included in social work supervision”. Figure 8 illustrates responses received from the 30 completed surveys.

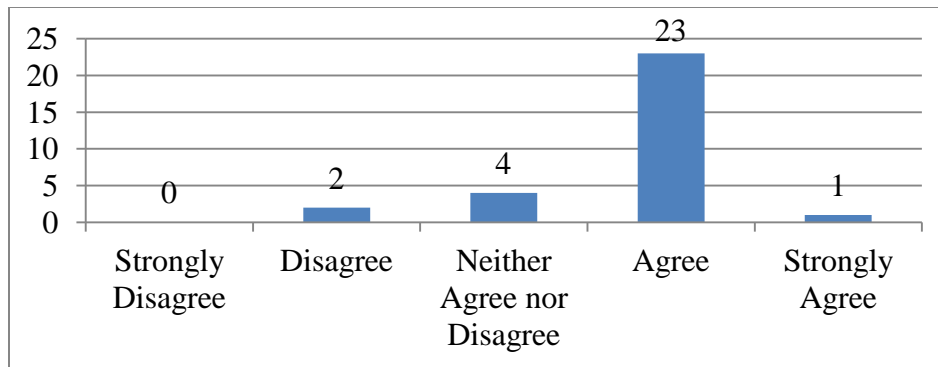


Figure 8. Participants' reported understanding of content to be covered in supervision sessions. For this question, no respondents strongly disagreed with the statement "as a supervisee, I know what *content* should be included in social work supervision", while 2 participants said they disagreed with the statement. 23 participants reported that they agreed with the statement and 1 participant strongly agreed with the statement regarding supervision content. Finally, 4 participants neither agreed or disagreed with the statement.

The next survey question (question #9 on the survey, see Appendix C) analyzed was the participants' responses regarding mandatory training for *supervisors* on the topic of social work supervision. This ordinal-level variable was operationalized with the following question: "As a supervisee, I believe that *supervisors*, in general, should receive mandatory training on the topic of supervision" using a 5-point likert scale. Figure 9 below illustrates the responses received from survey respondents.

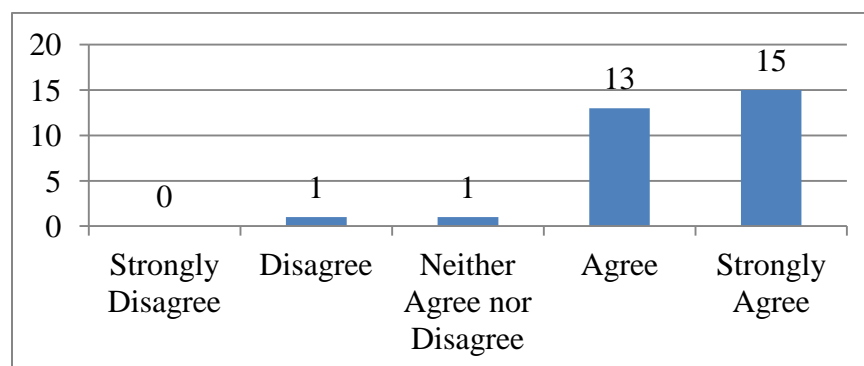


Figure 9. Survey responses regarding mandatory training for social work supervisors.

One respondent disagreed with the statement that supervisors should receive mandatory training on the topic of social work supervision and another respondent stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. However, 13 respondents (43.33%) responded that they agreed with the statement and another 15 respondents (50%) strongly agreed with the statement.

Survey question #10 asked participants to respond to the following statement, “As a supervisee, I believe that quality and adequate supervision helps provide quality service to clients.” Figure 10 below illustrates the responses of the 30 survey participants.

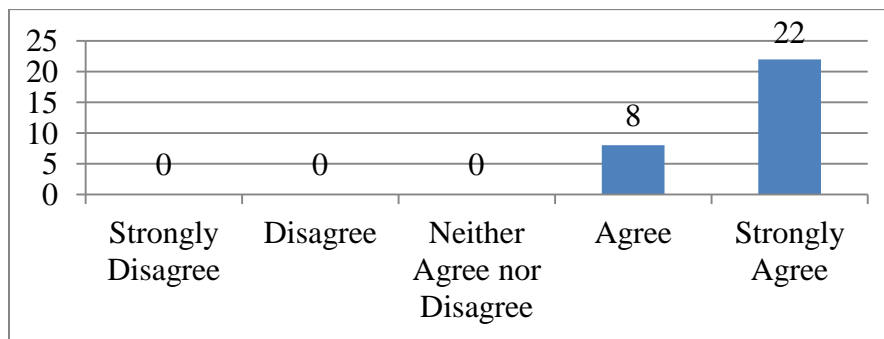


Figure 10. Participants’ responses regarding the statement that adequate and quality supervision affects quality service delivery to clients.

All of the 30 respondents (100%) either agreed or strongly agreed that quality and adequate supervision helps them provide quality service to their clients and among those, 22 respondents (73.33%) indicated that they *strongly* agreed with this statement.

The next survey question (question #11) asked participants to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement “as a supervisee, receiving quality and adequate supervision helps me to better manage the stress and workload in my position as a case manager” using a 5-point likert scale. Figure 11 charts the 30 responses received from the online survey participants.

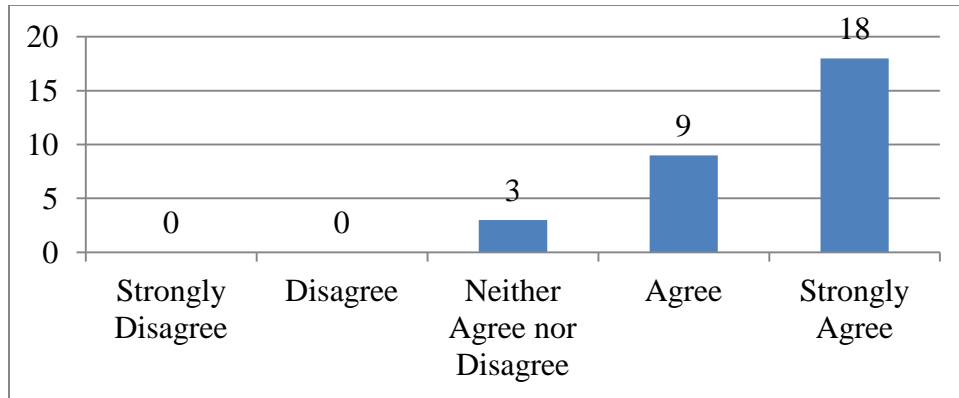


Figure 11. Participants' attitudes towards how receiving supervision helps them manage their stress and workloads.

Of the 30 participants who responded to the survey, 3 respondents (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, while 9 (30%) and 18 (60%) agreed and strongly agreed that receiving adequate and quality supervision helped them manage the stress and workload in their position respectively.

Question 12 on the survey asked participants to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement "I believe I am equally responsible for making the best use of my supervision sessions with my supervisor" using a likert scale. Figure 12 on the following page charts the answers provided by the survey respondents. Of the 30 total completed surveys, all the participants either agreed (16 respondents or 53.33%) or strongly agreed (14 respondents or 46.67%) with the statement about being equally responsible for making the best use of their supervision sessions with their respective supervisors.

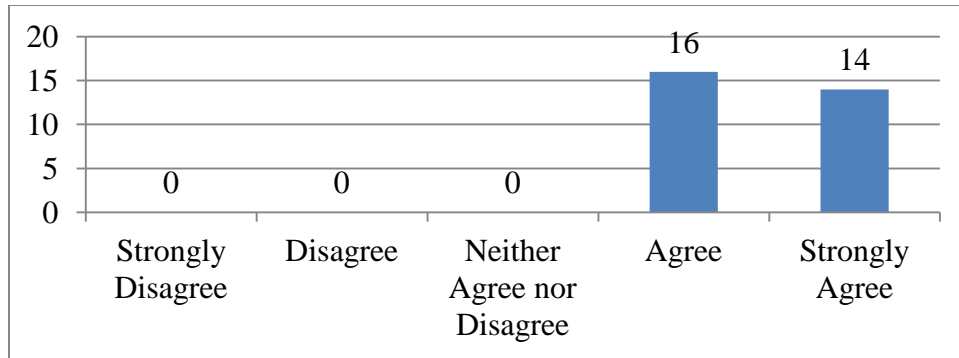


Figure 12. Participants' attitudes towards being equally responsible for making the best use of their supervision sessions.

Question 13 of the online survey asked participants to respond to the statement “as a supervisee, I believe that receiving specific training/education on the topic of social work supervision will help improve the overall outcomes of supervision sessions”. Figure 13 below illustrates the results received from surveys. Only 29 of the 30 completed surveys provided a response to this particular survey question, therefore only 29 total responses were available for data analysis. 18 total participants (62.07%) either agreed (12 participants) or strongly agreed (6 participants) with the statement, while 9 survey participants (31.03%) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement. Finally, 2 participants (6.9%) stated that they disagreed with the statement regarding the belief that training or education on the topic of supervision will help improve the outcomes of supervision sessions.

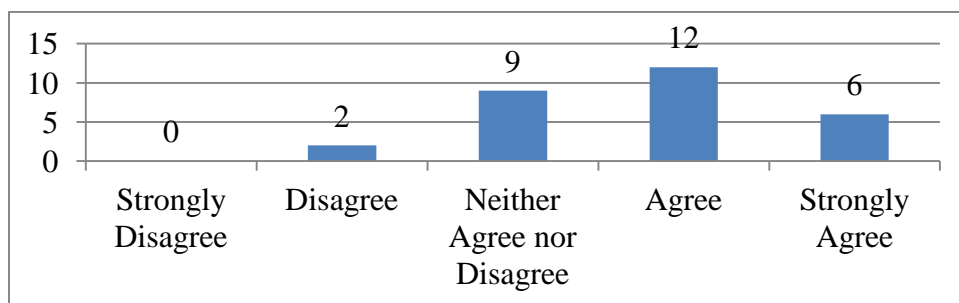


Figure 13. Participants' opinion regarding if supervision training/education will help improve the overall outcomes of supervision sessions.

The final survey question (question #14 on the online survey) analyzed was the participants' responses regarding specific topics within social work supervision that supervisions may need additional training on. Survey participants were asked to check off topics within supervision that they believe supervisors could use additional training on. Participants were asked to check all topics that may apply as it may have been possible that respondents felt that multiple responses were warranted. Table 1 below shows the survey respondents' answers to this question.

Table 1

Reported topics within social work supervision that supervisors need additional training on, as reported by supervisees surveyed

Social Work Supervision Topics	# of Responses
Purpose and Importance of Supervision	12
Content to be covered in Supervision	14
Administrative Aspects of Supervision (i.e. staff recruitment, work delegation, monitoring/evaluating work, communication, etc)	14
Educational Aspects of Supervision (i.e. teaching and training of skills and knowledge necessary for job)	22
Supportive Aspects of Supervision (i.e. addressing burnout, stress, feedback, etc)	27
Other: Please Specify:	0
None	2

Because survey participants were asked to check all answers that apply, a total count of more than 30 were received for this survey question. Of the possible responses, the topic related to the purpose and importance of supervision was selected 12 times, while the content to be covered in supervision and administrative aspects of supervision where each selected 14 times. Respondents checked "educational aspects of supervision" and "supportive aspects of

supervision” 22 times and 27 times respectively. Finally, “none” was selected twice by survey participants.

Discussion

Several pieces of data collected in this research study reveal consistencies with the existing literature on the topic of social work supervision and the need for training on the topic. This is particularly apparent in regards to the importance supervision plays in quality service delivery to clients and supervisee’s ability to manage stress. Consistencies were also apparent in regards to topics within social work supervision needing additional training. However, some data from this survey also provided new information for future consideration.

Effect of Supervision on Patient Care and Supervisees’ Stress

Past research on the topic of social work supervision has shown that the provision of quality supervision helps cultivate higher quality patient care and can also significantly improve the overall health (i.e. symptoms of fatigue and depression) among supervisees (Culbreth, 2001; Hancox et al., 2004; Kawakami et al., 2005; Mordock, 1990). Results from this research study are consistent with this finding as 100% of the supervisees surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that adequate and quality supervision directly affects service delivery to their clients and 90% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that adequate supervision helps them better manage their stress and job as case managers. These results strongly support the need for quality supervision for social workers to not only better serve clients, but also to help workers feel supported in their work.

Supervision Frequency

According to previous research, in order to fully benefit from supervision sessions, supervision meetings should be scheduled at least monthly, if not more frequently based on the

supervisees comfort level with working autonomously (Hunter, 2010; Jones, 2006; Kavanagh et al. 2002; McGregor 2011). However, 5 of the 30 survey participants indicated that they met with their respective supervisors less than monthly and an additional 5 participants commented that they did not participate in regular scheduled supervision sessions, but instead only met with their supervisors “as needed” (see Figure 5). This indicates that over 30% of the survey participants acknowledged that they either met less than monthly or did not have regular scheduled supervision sessions with their supervisor. These findings may indicate a possible lack of understanding regarding the purpose and importance of supervision sessions, or may be indicative of the limited resources (time in particular) available in the field of social work.

Tasks of Supervision

Previous research has also suggested that there is a general misconception that supervision is solely an administrative or managerial task (Culbreth, 2011; Shulman, 2010). Past researchers have also provided some clear distinctions between tasks unique to fieldwork supervision and professional supervision in the workplace (Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Tsui, 2010). Results from this study also suggest that certain topics within supervision may be under-emphasized in the field of social work. When asked about specific training needs in social work supervision, the top 2 answers selected by survey participants were “educational aspects of supervision (i.e. teaching and training of skills and knowledge necessary for job)” (over 24% of the total responses) and “supportive aspects of supervision (i.e. addressing burnout, stress, feedback, etc)” (30% of total responses), suggesting the possibility that these tasks are otherwise overlooked in the provision of supervision. These results are particularly interesting given the previously reported responses regarding how the provision of supervision helps case managers

manage their stress. Yet the participants felt that the supportive aspects of supervision could use additional training.

Training for Social Work Supervisors and Supervisees

A good deal of emphasis has historically been placed on the need for providing supervisory training in the field of social work as it cultivates ethical decision making, professional identity and provide quality service delivery to clients (Olmstead & Christiansen, 1973; Shulman, 2010; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Findings from this quantitative research study were consistent with this perceived need. Of the 30 completed surveys, 28 respondents (93.33%) either agreed or strongly agreed that social work supervisors should receive mandatory training on the topic of social work supervision. This further supports the growing trend to emphasis supervisory training in the field of social work and stresses the importance that supervision plays in service delivery and outcomes.

In regards to training on the topic of social work supervision for *supervisees*, as previously mentioned, past research appears to have overlooked this crucial piece of the puzzle. Using the theoretical lens of *interactional supervision*, which suggests that the task of supervision is interactive and dynamic in nature, this researcher expected to yield data to indicate that supervision training was not only important for supervisors, but also *supervisees*. However, data from this research study yielded interesting results. When asked if supervisees should receive training on the topic of social work supervision, half of the survey participants (15 out of 30) either agreed or strongly agreed that supervisees should receive training on the topic (Figure 7). While these results cannot be generalized across the entire field of social work practice based on the limitations of the study (to follow), the results provide some support for the provision of supervision training to not only supervisors, but also *supervisees*.

However, while support for supervision training for supervisees appears somewhat established by this data, half of the survey participants' responses also provide more insight into supervision training needs in the field of social work. As previously mentioned, 50% of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that supervisees should receive training on the topic of social work supervision. However, 3 respondents (10%) disagreed with the statement and another 12 respondents (40%) indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. These responses may indicate that some supervisees could have a misconception regarding the active role they play in their supervisory relationships or their unfamiliarity with what supervision truly entails as a supervisee.

Implications

Results from this quantitative study provide several implications for social work practice, education and future research. Specifically, implications for supervision training for supervisors *and* supervisees, specific training topics and supervision frequencies are highlighted. In addition, implications for future research to expand on the research sample are also indicated.

Implications for social work practice and education. Data collected from survey participants indicated that over half of the respondents (19 out of 30) had not received any formal training or education on the topic of social work supervision. Moreover, when asked if supervisors should receiving training or education on the topic of social work supervision, over 93% of respondents agreed that supervision training for supervisors is needed. Half of the respondents agreed that *supervisees* should also receive training on the topic. The varying responses regarding training for supervisees (question # 7) also provide some indication that the supervisees may have misconceptions regarding the role they play in their supervisory

relationships. Therefore, this study's results give a good indication that specific training on the topic of supervision is needed in the field of social work (for both supervisors *and* supervisees).

In addition, consistencies apparent between the current study and previous research regarding how adequate and quality supervision affect service delivery to clients and overall manageability of the job of a social worker further emphasizes the great importance and significance quality supervision plays in the field of social work. Not only does the current study support the idea that quality supervision affects worker health outcomes (i.e. ability to manage stress) and help supervisees manage their the job duties, it also supports the idea that supervision plays an important role in helping supervisees make well-informed decisions when it comes to services provided to their clients. Therefore, strong support for training on *how* to provide and ensure quality supervision is warranted and emphasized.

The varying levels of supervision frequencies reported in this study also provide support for a need to require consistent, scheduled supervisory sessions between supervisees and their respective supervisors. Given the importance supervision plays on social work practice as a whole, overlooking the need for *regularly scheduled* supervisory meetings is ill-advised and should be addressed.

Implications for future research. Based on data collected in this quantitative study, 90% of the participants surveyed had 5 years or less experience in providing case management experience. This may indicate that survey results may only be indicative of case managers with minimal experience in the field of social work case management. Therefore, it may be warranted for future researchers to redesign this study in order to gather more comprehensive data from supervisees with a variety of minimal to extensive experience in providing case management services. As this study limited its research sample to social workers employed as case managers,

it would also be interesting to see if future researchers could compare results from social workers in case management positions versus other practice settings to see if similarities or differences exist.

Strengths and Limitations

The research design for this particular research project posed several limitations. First, the sample size was small (30 respondents or 36% response rate) because of time restraints posed by the requirements of this research project. For this reason, data collected from this research project may not accurately represent the overall attitudes and trends toward social work supervision across all case managers and/or practice settings.

In addition, the research design was also be limited by its sampling method. As previously mentioned, survey participants were not randomly selected but rather selected based on their employment with contracted agencies that provide case management services. For this reason, data collected from respondents may only reflect social work practices (relating to supervision) in smaller, private settings. However, this may not accurately reflect the practices in larger, bureaucratic agencies (such as county social services) or other social work practice settings.

Another limitation of this research project was the sample group that was used to collect data. As part of the course requirements for this clinical research project, the researcher was required to enlist the assistance of two research committee members to help review the research proposal and final research paper. One of the committee members that served on this researcher's committee was also employed as the Executive Administrator at the private agency that was used for data collection. Therefore, the possibility of coercion due to authority over the survey participants may have caused for another possible limitation. However, the researcher

utilized additional measures to ensure that survey participants were aware that their survey responses would not identify them personally, or affect their relationship with the agency. Furthermore, survey questions were designed to elicit responses from participants to inquire about supervision training in broader contexts (survey questions were designed to ask about their opinions on supervision *in general*, not necessarily directly about their current supervisory relationship). These additional measures ensured that survey participants did not feel coerced or pressured into providing certain responses.

Although research study poses several limitations, the research study remains relevant in that past research studies have not adequately addressed what the perceived training needs are surrounding supervision, specifically from the perspective of *supervisees*. Furthermore, the research study also elicited information from supervisees on their need for supervision training. For these reasons, the data collected provides valuable data to the social work profession regarding the needs surrounding supervision training and help guide future training and educational opportunities for supervisors and supervisees alike.

Conclusion

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to investigate what the perceptions of social work supervisees (specifically case managers in this case) are surrounding the topic of supervision training. The researcher was also interested in supervisees' opinions regarding the need for supervision training for both supervisees *and* supervisors. The results of the study show support for how the provision of quality supervision positively affects client service delivery and worker satisfaction. The results also show supervisee support for the need for supervision training for social work supervisors. These results provide the social work field with the implication that specific training on the topic of social work supervision is warranted and needs

support. The varying responses regarding supervision training for supervisees may warrant further research, however, the interactive nature of supervision provides support for supervisee training as well. Research results also provide some indication that particular aspects of supervision (i.e. educational or supportive aspects) may be overlooked in certain social work practice settings, again warranting training on the topic of supervision to provide a more comprehensive and integrative definition to the tasks of supervision.

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Appendix A- Agency Consent Forms

DEC-21-2012 FRI 02:02 [REDACTED]

P. 02

[REDACTED]

December 21, 2012

Institutional Review Board
University of St. Thomas

To Whom It May Concern:

[REDACTED] agrees to participate in the research being conducted by Melissa Mak for her coursework at St. Thomas University conditionally as described below.

We understand that the participation of case managers employed by [REDACTED] is entirely voluntary and that participation of a certain number of case managers is not guaranteed by the organization.

In addition, participation in the study by [REDACTED] is contingent on the inclusion of other case management agencies, sufficient in numbers to protect against actual or perceived obligation by [REDACTED] and further to protect the confidentiality of the agency as a whole. We require further follow up prior to implementation of the study to ensure that this requirement is met. Please let us know which agencies will be involved.

While we agree to allow our case managers to voluntarily participate in the study, we do not agree to the use of our organization's name in the study or in any other publication without additional consent from the organization.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

December 24, 2012

Dear Melissa Mak,

Thank you for reaching out to [REDACTED] to complete your research on Supervision Training in the Social Work profession. This is definitely a very interesting topic. Licensure supervision is often a second thought when a social work acquires their first position in the field. I am interested to know the outcome of your research.

This letter is confirming [REDACTED] agreement to participate in Melissa Mak's Masters level research project. It is our understanding that [REDACTED] will be provided with an on-line questionnaire which will be answered by current case managers within our agency. The results will maintain the professional's confidential information, answers, and results.

If you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached at [REDACTED]
The owner [REDACTED] can be reached at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Waiver Case Management Supervisor

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

12/26/12

To Whom It May Concern:

[REDACTED] is providing consent to Melissa Mak and St Thomas Graduate School of Social Work to survey our case managers for your study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

[REDACTED]

Program Manager, Long Term Care

[REDACTED]

• Committed to the Provision of Quality Services for Individuals with Special Needs
Statewide •

• An Equal Opportunity/ Affirmative Action Employer •

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

GRSW682 RESEARCH PROJECT

Supervision Training Needs: Perspectives of Social Work Supervisees

I am conducting a study about social work supervision and the possible need for training on the topic of supervision. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a licensed social worker working in long term care case management. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Melissa Mak, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to investigate if there is a need for additional training on the topic of supervision. For purposes of this study, the researcher is interested in gathering this data from supervisees only.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following: participate in an online survey consisting of 15 survey questions relating to your job as a long term care worker and your opinions on the topic of supervision training. The survey is expected to take 10-15 minutes to complete. Finally, data collected in the survey will be presented to three research committee members, as well as formally presented in May 2013 as part of the graduate school of social work requirements. No identifying information from your survey will be given to the committee members or be presented.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has no identified risks and no direct benefits.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. Research records will be kept in a password-protected online file through Qualtrics (an online survey tool). Findings from the surveys will be presented to 3 research committee members. No personal or identifying information will be given to these committee members.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the survey at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should

you decide to withdraw, data collected from you may or may not be used towards the research study, based on your verbal consent to be included or excluded from the research study.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Melissa Mak. You may contact me before completing this survey, if needed. If you have questions, you may contact me at 763-291-0832. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

Please print a copy of this page for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. Proceeding with completing the survey constitutes your consent to participate in this research study.

Appendix C

Survey Questions

1. How many years have you worked in providing case management services?

_____ Less than 1 year

_____ 1 to 5 years

_____ 5+ to 10 years

_____ Over 10 years

2. Please identify the highest level of education you have completed:

_____ Social Worker with BSW or equivalent

_____ Social Worker with MSW or equivalent

_____ Other Human Services related 4-year degree

_____ Other Human Services related Master's degree

_____ PhD or ED Other

3. As a supervisee, have you received any training on or taken any educational courses specific to the topic of social work supervision?

_____ Yes

_____ No

4. If you *have* received specific training on or taken educational courses on the topic of social work supervision, please indicate your reasons for taking such courses or training:

_____ Part of Degree Course Work

_____ Required by my work/position

_____ Other, please specify: _____

_____ Not Applicable

5. As a supervisee, how often do you meet with your supervisor for formal supervision sessions, on average?

_____ Once a week

_____ At Least Once a Month

_____ Less Than Monthly

_____ Other, Please Specify:

Please answer the following questions related to your experience with supervision:

(1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neither Disagree/Agree; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree):

	1	2	3	4	5
6. As a case manager, I feel that the amount and quality of supervision I receive is adequate to support me in my work.					
7. As a supervisee, I believe that supervisees should receive training on the topic of social work supervision.					
8. As a supervisee, I know what <i>content</i> should be included in social work supervision.					
9. As a supervisee, I believe that supervisors, in general, should receive mandatory training on the topic of supervision.					
10. As a supervisee, I believe that quality and adequate supervision helps provide quality service to clients.					
11. As a supervisee, receiving quality and adequate supervision helps me to better manage the stress and workload in my position as a case manager.					
12. I believe I am equally responsible for making the best use of my supervision sessions with my supervisor.					
13. As a supervisee, I believe that receiving specific training/education on the topic of social work supervision will help improve the overall outcomes of supervision sessions.					

14. Please indicate specific topics within social work supervision that you feel supervisors should receive additional training on (if any, check all that may apply):

___ Purpose and Importance of Supervision

___ Content to be covered in Supervision

___ Administrative Aspects of Supervision (i.e. staff recruitment, work delegation, monitoring/evaluating work, communication, etc)

___ Educational Aspects of Supervision (i.e. teaching and training of skills and knowledge necessary for job)

___ Supportive Aspects of Supervision (i.e. addressing burnout, stress, feedback, etc)

___ Other: Please Specify _____