

Southern Regional Quality Improvement Center for Child Protection Review of Literature Associated with Social Work Supervision

Introduction

The history of social work supervision parallels the development of the profession: beginning as an administrative process for monitoring the work of volunteers in the late eighteenth century, later becoming focused on training and as a supplement formalized professional education. With the rise of the psychoanalytic method, supervision refocused on therapeutic support for the individual worker. In the 1950's the rise of professional independence and backlash on the psychoanalytic model marked the decrease in the role of supervision. Most recently, limited resources and a call for accountability have transformed supervision into business management and its corresponding administrative aspects (Bruce and Austin, 2000; Brashears, 1995).

The purpose of this literature review is to determine what is currently known about the characteristics and effective techniques of supervision in public child welfare. Of particular interest are models of supervision that have been supported empirically that address concerns identified in our Needs Assessment. We will also attempt to identify gaps in the literature which projects funded by the SR QIC would do well to address, pushing the field forward. An extensive literature search was conducted about supervision of caseworkers in child protection and other fields using the University of Kentucky Library system which has access to a significant number of databases. The databases searched include:

- WebSpirs (PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts, CC Search, SilverPlatter MEDLINE, Allied & Complementary Medicine Database, CINAHL Database, ERIC Database, Exceptional Child EdRes, EMBASE, AGELINE);
- Web of Science (Social Science Citation Index);
- First Search (World Cat Database);

- InfoTrac; and,
- EbscoHost.

The following search terms were used in various combinations in each of the databases: supervisor/supervisors/supervisory/supervision; supervisory/supervisor/supervision training; child protection/welfare; protective services; casework/caseworkers; case management; and professional/staff development. The search was not initially limited by year of publication. However, prior to actual review of documents, the citations were narrowed down according to relevance to the purpose of the project with more current literature being emphasized.

What follows is a summary of the literature as it relates to the Quality Improvement Center's focus on supervision. Several broad categories are employed: Supervisory Roles and Functions; Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare; Special Problems in Supervision; Measuring Effectiveness; Supervisory Characteristics and Style; Supervision Techniques and Practice Models; and Use of Evidence-based Practice in Child Welfare. Overall, it will be demonstrated that much of the literature is conceptual rather than empirical. Further, studies in the latter category often focus on field instruction rather than supervision of professionals (Bruce and Austin,2000). Unfortunately, the literature contains little emphasis on supervision in public child welfare settings.

Supervisory Roles and Functions

Brashears (1995) observed that much emphasis in the literature is on conceptualizing the functions and roles of social work supervision. Debate ensued as to whether supervision constituted a distinct form of practice requiring different skills. Seven classic supervision texts were analyzed by Bruce and Austin (2000) which attempt

to delineate supervisory functions. Best known are Kadushin's three primary functions of supervision: administrative, supportive and educational (1992). Austin (1981), Middleman and Rhodes (1985), and Bunker and Wijnberg (1988) each expand their vision of supervision to larger numbers of categories. Holloway and Brager (1989) focus on the political aspects. Shulman's (1993) interactional supervision emphasizes the parallel process between the worker-supervisor and worker-client relationship. Munson (1993) attempts to build the use of theory into the supervision process emphasizing the more clinical nature of supervision. Authors often take a generalized, conceptual approach to describing roles or functions (Greene, 1991; Hodge, 1989), promoting techniques for improving practice such as case review, joint home visits, clinical conferencing ("Caring", 1987); or transactional analysis of narratives (Varghesse and Vassel, 1985).

Tsui conducted a review of supervision research in 1995 and found only 30 empirical articles on supervision over the past 25 years. He further found little rigor or focus on theory building, with most studies being cross-sectional and exploratory. Tsui (1995) noted that several articles sought to empirically document the functions of supervision without attempting to evaluate effectiveness (Ko, 1987; Pilcher, 1984; Scott and Farrow, 1993; Poertner and Rapp, 1983; Greenspan et. al. 1992). A study by Elera and Lazar (1994a) examined the compatibility of administrative and educational functions of supervision, finding that they ought to be separated. This is relevant to potential QIC applicants, given the emphasis in public child welfare on the administrative function of supervision. An attempt was made to identify relevant articles since Tsui's

study was completed to determine if the trends he identified in the research shifted, and those found will be summarized below.

Impact of Supervision on Outcomes

The case for focusing on enhancement of supervision practice as a vehicle for improving child welfare practice is well documented as it is widely recognized as a necessary and beneficial aspect of child protection work. This began early in our history when Mary Richmond in 1917 described supervisors as “critical outsiders” who must help workers make good practice decisions, and asserted that the quality of casework had more to do with the quality of the supervisor than the quality of the worker (Rabinowicz, 1987, p. 89). The potential impact of supervision on organizational improvement is described in many ways in conceptual articles.

Rushton & Nathan (1996) recommend expanded training for child protection supervisors because of the importance of the supervisor’s role in supporting front-line workers. Diwan, Berger, & Ivy (1996) found that supervision can provide quality assurance in case management by monitoring timeliness, completeness and appropriateness of services and by building skills and shaping attitudes of workers. The Texas Optimum Method Project (Texas Department of Human Resources, 1982) also identifies supervision as a critical aspect of effective service delivery to children and families. Irvine (1984) states that supervision is essential in child protection agencies for the protection of clients and stress relief of workers, and that it is useful in helping new workers acquire counseling skills, overcome anxieties and deal with transference issues. Supervision behaviors are further associated with workers’ ability to transfer information gained in training to the work place (Gregoire, Propp, & Poertner, 1998). Fizdale (1958)

reported that supervision helps students and beginning workers to integrate theory and practice and to develop social attitudes. This article also suggested that supervision serves as a medium for review and improvement of the agency's practice. Peer group supervision was further presented as a model that allows workers to assume full responsibility for their quality of practice while still receiving necessary supervision.

Supervision is found in the empirical literature to affect organizational, worker and client outcomes on a number of levels. A number of studies have linked supervision to reduced worker stress (Himle, Jayaratne and Thyness, 1989; Martin and Schinke, 1998; Ratfill, 1988; Davis-Sacks, et. al., 1985; Ballew, 1979; and Buck, 1972). Others have found it to be significantly associated with turnover and staff retention, which is a major issue in public child welfare (Ellett and Millar, 2001; Schoen et. al., 2001; Cicero-Reese and Black, 1998; Harrison, 1995; Whelley and Miracle, 1994). According to Rycraft (1994), the most frequently cited reason that workers terminate employment in child protection is low-quality supervision. Interviews conducted in this study revealed that caseworkers feel their supervisor strongly influences staff morale, job satisfaction and job turnover. Samantrai (1992) found that child welfare workers who experienced their supervisors as sympathetic and supportive had positive attitudes about their jobs regardless of difficult conditions such as high caseloads, personal danger and inadequate physical work space. On the other hand, to those who experienced their supervisors as critical, non-supportive or uncaring, such difficult conditions seemed intolerable. Related to this are studies which associate supportive supervision with worker job satisfaction (Newsome and Pillari, 1991; Rouktis and Koeske, 1994).

The connection between supervision and worker practice, as well as client outcomes, has also been empirically documented. Banach (1999) explored the coping mechanisms of child welfare workers in a family preservation program. This study found that the workers managed boundary issues through supervision. Workers used supervision to clarify feelings about cases, define next steps and set limits. McGrew and Bond (1997) suggest that supervision is an important, but understudied, aspect of team service delivery. They reported that high-quality, consistent supervision of caseworkers has been associated with greater worker motivation. Also, this study found that greater supervisor involvement in direct services was related to increased service provision to clients with severe mental illness. Young conducted a qualitative study of a clinical group supervision project for child welfare workers in an MSW program, and found that they reported increased assessment and treatment skills. In another qualitative analysis, psychoanalysis workers reported increased analytic skills through their supervision (Berkman and Press, 1993). Similarly, Norman (1987) found that supervision is an optimal learning tool in mental health to help supervisees develop diagnostic and treatment skills. This article also reported that supervision is important in providing emotional support to supervisees. Bibus (1993) found that supervisors' skills and workers' skills in the use of supervision influenced workers' initial engagement with clients, particularly with involuntary clients. Better skills resulted in more effective engagement and greater benefit to clients. Gleeson (1992) found that supervision of child welfare workers contributes to acquisition of essential practice knowledge and skills. Supervisors can help workers evaluate their performance to identify and learn from their successes and mistakes.

In terms of the impact on clients, Harkness and Hensley (1991) linked supervision to the workers' use of basic communication, problem solving and relationship skills. This in turn affected client satisfaction among adult outpatients at a mental health center. Patients reported greater satisfaction when supervision was client-focused than when supervision had a mixed focus on administration, training and clinical consultation. Harkness (1995) found that the supervisory skill of problem-solving is linked with client goal attainment. It seems to be linked in that the supervisory problem-solving skill affects the worker's practice skills and the worker-client relationship, and these in turn affect client goal attainment. In the same way, the supervisory skill of empathy is linked with client contentment. In addition, supervisory skills and the supervisory relationship were found to be associated with client outcomes, and the supervisory relationship was found to be the best predictor of client outcomes. DePanfilis (1996) discusses the important role of supervisory staff in implementing child protection systems. According to this article, supervisors affect the acceptance of, and readiness for, change by staff, and supervisory involvement can determine the ultimate success of assessment and treatment programs.

The supervisor is seen to be in a key role in promoting an organizational culture which is focused on client outcomes. Organizational climate was found to be a significant factor in promoting child psychosocial functioning, while interagency collaboration was not (Glisson and Hemmelgarn, 1998). Moore, Rapp & Roberts (2000) describe a three year project in Kansas that documented the beneficial impact that supervisors can have by using client outcome data to improve child welfare services, citing specifically improved staff morale; development of a common language and

organizational culture; increased accountability; improved supervisory practice; improved child welfare policies; and increased performance. This supports the capacity of child welfare agencies to apply an evidence-based approach to their practice. These studies and other show that research into effective supervision in child welfare has the potential to impact the CPS system in a substantial way.

Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare

The child welfare literature that addresses supervision is often focused on the establishment of competencies or standards for supervision (Colorado DHS, 1994; Bernatovicz and Barkley, 1995). Approaches to individualized assessment of staff's strengths and professional development plans is emphasized, typically recommending discussion of all cases rather than those in crisis. Other recommendations include structured case review, facilitation of self awareness, and self-reflective practice such as those produced by the Colorado Department of Human Services (1994) and Bernatovicz and Barkley (1995). The majority of articles have used key informant interviews or focus groups to generate their supervision standards.

Other articles examine the special issues or challenges that confront supervisors in contemporary child protective services (Cosier and Glennie, 1994). For example, Crutherds (1985) describes in detail the essential functions of the supervisor in each stage of the CPS process, due to its typically crisis-ridden and involuntary nature, and would be an excellent resource for insight into how supervision in this type of setting is different. Crutherds (1985) emphasizes the importance of clinical skill and a less hierarchical, consultative approach, which utilizes observational rather than methods of assessing worker practice that rely on self-report. In a similar vein, Compher et. al. (1994)

promoted the development of support groups and techniques for enhancing the supervisory relationship due to the very emotional nature and potentially explosive nature of CPS.

Special Problems in Supervision

One subset of articles in literature examines problems in social work supervision. Based on a review of cases, Nash (1997) noted a lack of appropriate supervision in the majority of CA/N fatalities with prior involvement by the child welfare agency (Nash,1997). In the Casey Foundation's panel report regarding the New York City CPS system, the number one improvement goal is the strengthening supervision, as they found that "supervision is too often focused on task management and ensuring compliance with regulatory or contractual mandates, to the exclusion of coaching, developing and supporting a largely young and inexperienced workforce" (2000, p. 7). This report echoes the findings of the SR QIC's Needs Assessment for our ten state region.

Kane's (1991) dissertation also had similar findings, concluding "reliance on the open door in the absence of a more formal supervisory strategy works against the development of empowerment based practice. In order for growth to occur, supervisors must engage workers in a relationship which is consistent and developmental" (p. 109). Her proposed model includes the use of parallel process, direct observation and feedback, group supervision, the development of learning communities, and peer collaboration and support for supervisors. Three other articles document and examine the effective use of parallel process to promote learning and enhanced practice (Fox, 1999; Raichelson et. al, 1997; Williams, 1997), and studies regarding the effect of observational methods and

group supervision in field instruction have been summarized above. The impact of a model combining these aspects in public child welfare supervision is untested.

Gleeson and Philbin (1996) describe the challenge of supervising the implementation of new mandates such as kinship care practices without empirically-based models. They recommend support and mentoring for supervisors so they can promote development of worker's clinical skills. Packard's study (1993) documented public child welfare worker perception that they are not allowed appropriate participation in organizational decision-making. On a related topic, Drake and Washceck (1998) developed a competency-based method of promoting feedback upwards from workers to supervisors, piloting an evaluation instrument to measure impact. Burke et. al.'s (1998) research examined what circumstances led to the weakening of working alliances in supervision (such as differences in theoretical orientation and presentation style), and the identification of supervisory behaviors (such as the encouragement of disagreement) that led to repair.

Other studies examine the stressfulness of child welfare supervision, an issue very important to public agencies wishing to maintain the stability of this workforce. Silver (1997) identified predictors of supervisory job satisfaction, the most significant being a) race, b) amount of time spent collaborating with other professionals, and c) organizational climate. Norvelle et. al (1993) examined public child welfare supervisors' tendency to suppress anger which was associated with increased perception of stress and physical symptomatology. They further found that managerial style was not related to job satisfaction, psychological stress, physical symptoms, or anger.

Measuring Effectiveness

The empirical study of effectiveness in supervisory issues is minimal. Some are concrete, but limited, such as Schoech's evaluation of the use of videotaped examinations of supervisory competence (2001). Others are weak methodologically and non-specific, such as Magnuson and Wilcoxson's (1998) qualitative study which established vague criteria without instrumentation for the measurement of increased worker skill and knowledge. Bowers (1999) found a significant variance in what supervisors thought was effective in supervisory practice. This study further established that most supervisors used case management as opposed to the purported client-centered approach due to workload. Hutt and King (1983) interviewed workers and found a facilitative relationship to be necessary but not sufficient condition for positive supervision. They also concluded that effective supervision integrated both task and person-oriented behavior, and that negative, critical experiences prevented supervisee learning. Similarly, Harkness et. al. (1991, 1995) found that a mixed focus in supervision (administrative, training and clinical consultation) was related to better client satisfaction outcomes than a client-focused approach alone.

Supervisory Characteristics and Style

Another body of literature looked at the impact of various characteristics of supervisors and supervisees. In a study conducted in Arizona, MacEnchroon (1994) found no significant differences between tribal and public child welfare agency supervisors. York and Hastings (1985) found that the effects of supportive supervision does not increase with worker maturity. York and Denton (1990) found that the most significant

predictor of worker performance was that leadership behavior which was related to communication.

Many studies have looked at aspects of supervisor style. Hipp and Munson (1995) promote a partnership model, as opposed the traditional hierarchical models, that promote collaborative learning and the pursuit of client and worker goals, and is based on feminist theory. A similar claim is offered by Nelson (1997) who promotes an interactional approach to supervision to empower female professionals, in which a collaborative relationship and shared power are central themes. Munson (1981) found job and supervision satisfaction to be higher in a supervisory competency model than a sanction model. He did not find a difference in such satisfaction between different structural models of supervision (traditional casework, group or independent practice). Russell et. al. (1983) found a substantial number of supervisors in a large human service organization to be unconcerned for either people or production. Granvold (1977) found that educational differences do not have a significant impact on supervisory style and in another study (1978) found a positive relationship between the trait of consideration in supervisors and supervisory procedures supporting autonomy, responsibility and decision-making. He further found a positive relationship with procedures such as regular conferences with staff, review of case records and time studies and supervisory procedures supporting worker autonomy, responsibility, self initiation and independent decision-making. Eiskovits et. al (1985) adapted Munson's instrument measuring supervisory variables and found that they (i.e. administrative skills and professional development of workers) were positively correlated with work environment variables (i.e.

task orientation and independence) and treatment environment variables (i.e. autonomy and clarity of rules).

Supervision Techniques and Practice Models

Most helpful in the relatively small body of literature on casework supervision is the work that has been done on particular practice models or techniques to be used in social work supervision. The majority of this work is conceptual in nature and would greatly benefit from validation through the QIC demonstration projects. It is also important to note that the majority of the literature focuses on clinical social work settings that do not include child welfare specifically, with a couple of exceptions. Again, the profession would be pushed forward, if some of these models could be evaluated in CPS agencies, due to the specialized nature of the work and the clientele.

As has been previously stated, much of the literature on social work supervision is concerned with field instruction, the supervision of students. Recent studies into instructional methods have begun to shed light on those that offer the best learning experience. Wheisenhunt et. al. (1997) found that direct observation of students (such as with a 2-way mirror) and audio/videotape review were associated with the strongest learning experience but these techniques were rarely used by field instructors studied. Fortune et. al. (2001) found that co-interventions, such as co-therapy, process recording and Socratic questioning (in which the field instructor uses questioning techniques to promote critical thinking in students) was associated with the student's perception of quality learning experience. Knight (2001) surveyed students' perception of effective field instruction. At the end of practicum, students valued activities encouraging them to be self-critical and to link the classroom, and theoretical models, to practice. While

conceptual in nature, Griffith and Frieden (2000) provide a detailed discussion of uses of Socratic questioning, journaling, Interpersonal Process Recall (using videotaped interviews) and reflective teams to facilitate reflective thinking in students. While clearly findings related to the field instruction of students cannot be assumed to be generalizable to supervision in public child welfare, this literature contributes to the body of knowledge promoting such techniques.

Another area of field instruction literature has application as well—that related to group supervision. Tebb et. al. (1996) examined the strengths and limitations of individual and group supervision. In another article a detailed model using groups to promote peer consultation (Kuechler and Barrett-Human, 1998). In the psychiatry literature, Treves et. al. (1998) utilized a group supervision model during a five year period that progressed from patient-oriented to therapist-oriented stages to address both the educational and experiential needs of supervisees. Empirically, Starling and Baker (2000) conducted a qualitative study of a peer group supervision project and found it to decrease confusion and anxiety, clarify goals, and increase confidence in supervisees, and to enhance the supervision process overall. Ray and Alterkruse (2000) studied individual, small and larger group supervision formats, finding that all led to similar progress and learning, but larger group supervision promoted increased autonomy and confidence. However, students preferred individual supervision, suggesting the merit of mixed models. Young (1998) conducted a qualitative evaluation of a clinical group supervision project involving public child welfare staff participating in graduate practica, which demonstrated increased assessment and treatment skills by self report. Marks & Hixon (1986) found that peer group supervision, in combination with other forms of

supervision and training, was effective in assisting public child welfare workers with professional growth. Workers ranked individual supervision, consultee-centered consultation, and peer group supervision as the top three learning methods.

The literature includes several articles that individually address specific techniques outside a larger model of casework supervision. Walsh (1999) describes a method for incorporating existentialist themes in supervision. Reams (1994) explores the use of Kohut's psychoanalytic concept of self-object transference, including idealizing, mirroring and twinship, in supervision. Itzhaky et. al (1999) applies Martin Buber's Dialogue Theory, highlighting the use of reciprocal dialogue that goes beyond day-to-day transmission of information or skills in supervision. Rigazio-Digilio and Anderson (1994) describe in detail the use of questioning to assess the student's cognitive-developmental orientation, examining the competencies and constraints of each and outlining applicability outside individual models of practice. Each of these articles individually promote deeper and more clinically intensive interaction within supervision than is typical in public child welfare practice, thus having some potential applicability. A few models, or broader frameworks, seem to cluster in the literature. The first is the task-centered approach, which is familiar to many as a practice approach. Research related to it is discussed by Reid (1997). These studies involve field instruction, once again, but may have merit in the development of project approaches as well. Caspi and Reid (1998) conducted a field trial and applied a specifically outlined, multiphase task-centered model, which is focused on the educational process. They report positive results with field education students, and their results reflect the need for structure in the supervision process. Larsen (1980) provides a very detailed description

of this model of instruction, and the use of process recordings and audio-videotape review as assessment strategies. The components of this model include the mutual identification of goals, tasks and potential obstacles, as well as structured review and evaluation. Larsen and Hepworth (1982) conducted a comparison study of “traditional” and competency-based/task-centered approaches to field instruction. The latter was reported to yield a higher level of competence and confidence in core skills, however the traditional model was unsystematic and variable, so the comparison is uneven and may speak more for the benefits of structure and specificity of technique than the model itself. Gambrill (1994) called into question the task-centered model of practice for discounting the use of theory and focusing on clients’ identification of problems. She further asserted that it is based on assessment methods of “questionable validity.” (p. 589) These concerns, in addition to that fact that this is a brief form of supervision makes it less applicable to the SR QIC project.

Strauser et. al. (1997) promotes a structured Case Conceptualization Model in which the supervisor assists the student in integrating cognitive, behavioral, emotional and interpersonal aspects of the client to synthesize the information into a comprehensive understanding. This model, which is presented for use both in individual and group formats, includes three components: diagnostic and clinical information including the generation of clinical hypotheses; short and long-term goal development and outcome measurement; and process variables, including the client-student emotional responses and interaction. There are similarities between this model and a problem-based learning approach more commonly used in medical education, which focuses on the identification of relevant case-level questions and consultation of the professional literature to support

that multi-dimensional synthesis of the case. This case conceptualization model may not be comprehensive enough for adaptation for the SR QIC projects as it does not address many of the issues identified in the Needs Assessment. However, it is worth reviewing as a potential process for the case-related portion of the supervisory models proposed.

A third model is also drawn from practice. It has been referred to as solution-focused or solution-based in addition to other terms. Corcoran (1999) provided a rationale for solution-focused interviewing in CPS. Rita (1998), Presbury et. al. (1999), Juhnke (1996) and Thomas (1994) each describe in detail how this model, originally developed by DeShazer, can be used in supervision. It uses scaling questions, pre-suppositional and miracle questioning, and other techniques to promote a strength- or competency-based approach. Berg and Kelly's book *Building Solutions in Child Protective Services* (2000) systematically applies this model to CPS practice and, in more abbreviated fashion, the supervision of staff in public child welfare. This material was generated based on a qualitative study of CPS practice variations among 150 workers and supervisors, and proposes a new paradigm that assumes worker competence and uses a collaborative empowering approach that promotes forward thinking in casework. This resource, based on Cantwell's (1994) work offers very detailed techniques such as structured peer consultation, creative questioning and self-reflection.

Two important textbooks on social work supervision are based on research, primarily descriptive or exploratory, into supervision practice. Shulman's text, *Interactional Supervision* (1993), published by the National Association of Social Workers, was based in two studies. The first (1981) surveyed workers and supervisors in Canada (including a substantial proportion of child welfare practitioners) focusing on

relationship between supervisor skills and the working relationship. Relevant findings include that workers prefer that supervisors spend more time on teaching practice skills, and then discussing research that would be helpful on the job, with less time spent on administrative requirements. This led to a second study designed to build a grounded theory of social work practice (1993). His resultant model of interactional supervision focuses on the working relationship, empathy, parallel process and regularly scheduled individual and group supervision based on the teaching role. Techniques used in the model include tuning in to the worker, contracting on the purpose, structure and content of supervision, and the use of empathizing, elaborating and sharing data behaviors during the working phase of supervision.

Harkness (1995) examined skills & relationships in supervised social work practice to test Shulman's interactional helping theory on the basis of client outcomes. A correlational design was used to determine associations among weekly worker ratings of supervisory skills and relationships, client goal attainment, and generalized contentment in a community mental health setting. One pattern of findings lent modest and conditional support to subsets of Shulman's theory, but a challenge to the general theory was established by evidence that supervisory skills and relationships have independent associations with client outcomes. Clearly further study of this model is called for.

Munson states that his text, *Handbook of Clinical Social Work Supervision* (2002), is grounded in a number of studies of field instruction and supervision, primarily focused on worker/student perceptions and the classification of techniques and styles. He justifies the need for a structured approach such as he promotes as follows: "Clinical supervision is an intensive teacher-learner relationship...that is vaguely defined, lacking

in precise guidelines and consisting of unstructured formats...They fall back on treatment skills to get by in supervision...This mismatch of needs and performance capability gives rise to many of the problems in supervision (2002, p. 40).” He describes his model as interactional and focused on teaching and the clinical aspect of supervision rather than management, which often takes precedence. He asserts that to be effective, supervision must be structured, regular, consistent, case-oriented and evaluated. He outlines a number of supervisory techniques that promote good practice techniques, such as case presentation, Socratic questioning and contracting. The application of theory and research to case situations is seen as a tool in the educational process. The supervisor’s role in helping workers process ethical dilemmas and potential ethical demands is deemed critical. To Munson, clinical casework supervision must address in parallel on two levels of knowing: technical competence focused on the individual case horizontally; and perspective or theoretical learning which vertically works to integrate understanding across a series of cases.

While all seem very promising, none of these similar but distinct models have been well-researched regarding their ability to yield positive outcomes in public child welfare supervision. When reviewed, a number of common themes, or potential best practices, emerge which have been incorporated into the SR QIC’s RFA. The comparative analysis of the evaluation of pilot projects applying such techniques or models within public child welfare has the potential to push our field forward. These projects will respond to the well-documented call in the literature and SR QIC Needs Assessment for models of structured, clinical casework supervision in child protective

services, within the bounds of empirical research that will hopefully reveal what works well under what circumstances.

Evidence-based Practice in Child Welfare

The Quality Improvement Center Program is grounded in the notion that it is imperative that we rigorously research issues related to child protection practice in order to move the field forward and improve services to children. Thus, it is essential to look at the literature on evidence-based practice. Researchers, educators, and public child welfare administrators understand that there is a gap between practice and supporting research that impedes the practice outcomes we seek. The SR QIC's Request for Application, therefore, will require the infusion of evidence-based practice in proposals to evaluate casework supervision techniques.

In the past several years more rigorous research designs have been applied to practice related to child protection. These have yielded findings of interest to the line worker and administrator alike. For instance, Rossi, Schuerman and Budde (1999) found that inconsistencies in casework decisions were not predicted by case characteristics, and that there was a wide variation in decision-making by CPS workers and experts, although they agreed conceptually on what characteristics are important in decision-making. Similarly, Munro (1999), found professionals in Great Britain based assessment of risk on a narrow range of evidence biased by information readily known to them, overlooking significant data known by other professionals. DePanfilis and Zuravin (1999) identified predictors of recurrence during treatment to be child vulnerability, family stress, partner abuse, social support deficits, and interaction between family stress and social support deficits. In follow-up, the same authors (2001) examined service-related variables,

finding that only attendance at services predicted recurrence. Other variables, such as admission of wrong-doing by perpetrators, number of casework contacts, court involvement, client cooperation, or degree of improvement in identified problem areas noted at case closure were not predictive of recurrence in their sample of cases from Baltimore, MD. Dawson and Berry (2002) review existing research which identifies effective components in engaging families in child welfare, which are shown to contribute to positive case outcomes. In research reviewed it was revealed that worker behaviors, including setting mutually satisfactory goals, providing services that clients find relevant and helpful, focusing on client skills rather than insights, and spending sufficient time with clients to demonstrate skills and provide resources, have a greater impact on outcomes than caseworker characteristics and qualities. Through this discussion they make a strong case for how evidence-based practice could positively impact families. These few examples offer much for the design of training programs and service procedures for child protection practice.

The very movement toward evidence-based practice is debated in the literature. Gambrill (1999, 2001) asserts that despite our proclamation, social work continues to be an authority-based profession, and that the knowledge that has been generated is underused by practitioners. It is her belief that we must adopt an evidence-based approach to move forward. Webb (2001), on the other hand, disputes the notion that practitioners will change their practice, even when made aware of research findings. Gira and colleagues (2001) review the research on techniques to increase the use of evidence-based information in medicine, and conclude that educational outreach visits, use of local opinion leaders and computer systems showed some effectiveness in changing behavior

when monitoring and feedback were present. Multifaceted strategies were most successful. If we believe that outcomes would be improved if child protection workers applied research findings in their practice, social work would do well to take note of the medical field's example.

Summary

It can be seen by a review of relevant literature, that casework supervision is an important but infrequently researched aspect of practice. The impact of supervision on child welfare staff turnover, satisfaction, worker skill and client outcomes has been well documented. Our needs assessment finding that administrative aspects of supervision may impede the effective provision of clinical, casework supervision is echoed in the literature, and there is a call for a more structured approach to casework supervision. Targeted strategies such as formal individual and group supervision meetings, case review, methods of observation of worker practice, the promotion of critical thinking, and self-reflective practice have significant potential for impact. At the same time, there are numerous techniques or approaches that may be selected for casework supervision, but none have been extensively evaluated for use in public child welfare. Many reviewed models have merit for their potential applicability to child welfare. Casework supervision models for child protective services would do well to incorporate the infusion of a learning environment that promotes evidence based practice in such a way that is realistic to the workload born by workers region- and nation-wide. With the information gleaned from this review, paired with the rich data collected in the needs assessment, the Southern Regional Quality Improvement Center is seeking applications for proposals which will implement and rigorously evaluate models of casework supervision.

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