

SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT TRENDS

S. H. PATHAK*

Supervision is part of the administrative process. It has two main functions — administrative and teaching. In its administrative aspect, it is concerned with the assignment of work and watching the performance of the workers, in regard to their adherence to administrative policies and procedures, and to the quality of their work. The teaching aspect includes the guidance given by the supervisor for the improvement of the knowledge and skills of the worker. Evaluation is a part of both the administrative and teaching functions, though its objective and use in these two areas of supervision are different.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUPERVISION IN U.S.A.

Literally, the term supervision means "overseeing". In this sense, supervision is as old as the profession of social work. There is evidence to suggest that the teaching function of supervision was recognised as early as 1869 when the Charity Organization Society was formed in England. During the early phase of the C.O.S. most of the work of investigation and giving help to poor people was done by volunteers known as friendly visitors. The only paid employee was the secretary of the district or branch office whose job was to supervise the work of these volunteers, which included some forms of training. Gradually, the responsibility for the training of volunteers and field workers began to receive greater attention as the C.O.S. further developed the work of investigation, recording and friendly visiting, and supervision be-

came more pedagogic. The pedagogical function of the supervisor received further impetus with the opening of schools of social work during the 1920s in U.S.A. Field work was considered as an essential part of the education for social work. The students who were placed for field work in social welfare agencies were supervised by the agency staff. The assignment of the teaching function by the schools to the agency staff was in part, if not mainly, due to the fact that the schools of social work in those days had very few teachers on their staff. The teaching function of supervision was also strengthened due to the developments in U.S.A. following the great economic depression. The introduction of mass relief programmes during the 1930s and the expansion of public welfare programmes in 1940s resulted in the employment of a large number of untrained social workers by the government welfare departments. It was essential to train these workers for carrying out their responsibilities adequately and thus large-scale in-service training and other staff development programmes were started. The supervisors in the public welfare agencies were entrusted with the responsibility to provide in-service training to the untrained social workers.

The developments in supervision have close parallels with the developments in casework. During the 1930s, casework began to draw heavily upon dynamic psychiatry, particularly that of the Freudian psychoanalytical school. There was great emphasis on the emotional factors in helping and the significance of caseworker-client

* Mr. S. H. Pathak is Reader in Social Work, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi, Delhi-110 007.

relationship. The earlier directive approach in casework was discarded and the clients' involvement in the solution of their problems began to be emphasized. The active role of the caseworker was frowned upon and the passive approach was becoming increasingly widespread. Supervision in social work during this period — the 1930s and 1940s — was influenced by these developments in casework practice. The supervisors felt uncomfortable about their administrative responsibilities and tended to concentrate on the teaching function of supervision. This resulted in ignoring or avoiding the administrative function of supervision. In their teaching role, supervisors tended to adopt the passive approach in their conferences with students or workers. The recognition of the importance of the emotional aspects of learning and the relationship between the supervisor and the student or worker, was influenced by the supervisors' experience of casework with clients as well as the new developments in the educational theory which also recognised the role of the emotions in learning. Since most of the supervisors were caseworkers before, they brought to their new task of supervision, their knowledge and skills of casework practice. In fact, it was believed that the relationship between the caseworker and the client was similar to that between the supervisor and the student or worker, and the knowledge and skills of casework could be utilised in supervision in developing and maintaining the supervisory relationship. Virginia Robinson in her book, "Supervision in Social Case Work" published in 1936, wrote: "I have set myself the problem here of *lifting supervision out of its confusing entanglement with the casework process** in order to see it as a unique teaching process which has grown up inside of casework, indigenous to it, but

different from it in important ways" (Robinson, 1936).

Another development in supervision during this period is the focus on the change in the attitudes and the personality of the students and the workers. Even here, supervision was influenced by the increasing emphasis in casework on therapy and its pre-occupation with the psychological problems or psychological aspects of material need. As casework began to get interested in the emotional aspects of helping and the role of emotions in casework relationship, they turned increasingly to psychoanalytical theory for enlightenment. At the same time, the recognition of emotions in learning, which was influencing educational theory and in particular casework supervision, resulted in over-emphasis on the personality and psychological problems of students and workers who were emotionally disturbed by their contact with human material in the raw. They also found the new knowledge gained from psychiatry personally disturbing. Helping the supervisee with his personal problems became one of the responsibilities of the supervisors.

Since most of the supervisors had worked as caseworkers and dealt with similar problems, they used the same approach with the students and workers in handling emotional problems in learning. The fear of being "caseworked" by supervisors was widely prevalent among the students and workers. As early as 1936, Virginia Robinson recognised the existence of this problem in supervision. It is indeed ironical that Elizabeth R. Zetzel, a psychiatrist, had to remind social work supervisors that the main purpose of supervision was didactic and not therapeutic, (Zetzel, 1953: 146).

The concept of consultation as a part of the teaching function of the supervisor

* Emphasis supplied by the writer.

evolved in the necessity to distinguish the learning needs of the advanced and experienced workers from those of the new or less experienced workers. The responsibility and the decision to seek guidance from the consultant was left to the experienced workers, whereas those in supervision were required to meet the supervisors in formally structured supervisory meetings and the supervisors were held accountable for the performance of these workers.

Though the discontent against the existing supervisory practices was first expressed in 1948, the open revolt took place in the fifties. Several questions were raised, and doubts expressed, about the nature and content of supervision in the agencies. All these centred round the length of the period of supervision; the dependency fostered by the one-to-one relationship between the supervisor and the worker; the disproportionate time spent on process recording, the accountability of the supervisor about the performance of workers; the desirability of dealing with personal problems; the acute anxiety of workers regarding supervision, particularly evaluation; too much control and power being vested in the supervisors over the workers; the complexity of the administrative and teaching functions; and the desirability of combining these in one person, and such other problems. As a result, there was a good deal of rethinking about supervisory practices and experiment in new methods and procedures. The major experimentation was the use of the group approach in supervision, described as 'group supervision', 'peer group supervision', etc. Though there was some initial resistance to this approach, it was gradually accepted that use of group methods in supervision was advantageous. Its main advantages were recognised as the reduction of time invested in supervision, the advantage of learning from one's peers which was found to be particularly suited to some workers

who felt threatened in individual supervision, the variety of professional contacts it offered and the widening of the learning opportunities. At the same time, it was accepted that the use of group methods should supplement and not substitute individual supervision. Other experiments or suggestions included brief recording supplemented by oral reporting in conferences, providing the employees the choice of the supervisor, evaluation of workers' performance by more than one person or by a panel (including the supervisor but also another person who was not supervising the work), to reduce subjectivity in evaluation and minimise the employee's fear of evaluation. There was also re-emphasis on the administrative function which had been neglected so far. During the next decade, the rethinking of existing views and practices in supervision, and experiments of the type mentioned earlier, particularly the use of group methods, continued.

So far, the historical development of supervision has been discussed with reference to the situation in the social welfare agencies. This was done because supervision evolved as part of the administrative process in welfare agencies and many developments that influenced it over the years took place in the agency setting. Until recently, and in fact even today, the prevalent view about supervision in social work seems to be that it is generic in nature and can be applied in educational institutions as well as in social welfare agencies. Most of the literature on supervision in social work developed around the practice of casework, and the few books and articles that have appeared on supervision in group work have generally taken the position that the knowledge and skills of supervision are the same irrespective of the method. The only difference that was recognised was in the content of the knowledge and skills of the particular method or service, namely

social groupwork. This view of supervision as generic has been challenged recently by Irwing Miller (1960: 69-76). He has pointed out some of the different features of supervision in social groupwork such as use of observation by the supervisor during group sessions, the power and influence of the group over the workers and the nature of group's relationship with the groupworker which is less dependent than that of the client and the worker in casework.

SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

In regard to the nature of supervision in social work education, a few differences have been recognised. The field work programme has always been considered as an important and integral part of social work education based on Dewey's philosophy of 'learning by doing'. In the early years of social work education, which began in U.S.A. during the last decade of the 19th century, it was almost a practical necessity for the schools to send students for field work to the agencies and to have them supervised by the agency staff. The schools in those days did not have adequate financial resources either to start their own training centres or to employ the required number of teachers for supervision of students. This meant that the administrative and the teaching functions were combined in the agency supervisor, though it was obvious that the teaching function was the more dominant one in the case of students. Also, there was acceptance of the idea that the main objective of field instruction was education and in case of a conflict between the educational and administrative objectives (service to the clients) the educational objective should prevail. In assigning the work to the students the supervisors were guided by the criteria of selecting cases or groups suited to the

beginning phase of learning, and progression from the simple to the more complex cases or groups as far as this was possible. The individual differences in the learning pattern of the students were noted and an educational diagnosis was made as part of the supervisory process. Another important difference between supervision of employees and supervision of students is that, the former is concerned with the specific knowledge and skills pertaining to the performance of a job in a particular agency, and the latter is concerned with the preparation of students for assuming professional responsibilities in the field of social work.

For the supervision of the field work of students, some of the schools of social work later began to employ full-time field instructors who were given unit of students in the agencies. This was probably necessitated by the practical difficulty of finding more field work placements as the number of students enrolled in schools of social work increased during the 1940s and 1950s and also as more schools of social work came up in some of the larger cities. The agencies with qualified and experienced supervisors were not adequate in number for the placement of the increasing number of students. So the schools began to utilise those agencies which were not included until then because of the lack of suitable qualified supervisors and to employ full-time instructors who were assigned to these agencies, such as the departments of public welfare which had very few trained social work staff and still fewer who could take the responsibility of student supervision.

During the late fifties, experiments were made in some schools in the use of group methods in the supervision of students. This was to supplement the individual supervision which was common until that time. The advantages of this approach have already been referred to, briefly. Very recently, a few schools have started their own service

centres or training centres as part of the universities and they place students for field work in these centres. This is not yet widespread; the placement of students in community agencies where they are supervised by the agency staff or by the full-time instructors employed by the schools is more common. A few schools are also experimenting with the integrated methods courses, described as a single practice method. The students are no longer placed in a single agency; nor are they assigned cases or groups for developing the knowledge and the skills pertaining to a specific method. They are placed in a problem area in a community rather than a specific agency. They are asked to observe the work in the agencies for a specified period of time initially, before being provided with opportunities for working with people. It is too early to envisage the implications of these new experiments in the social work curriculum, particularly in regard to field work and supervision.

Referring to the recent trend towards abandoning supervision, particularly individual supervision in field instruction, Ruth Smalley, a well-known social work educator, has expressed concern that it might retard social work's development as a profession (Smalley, 1969).

SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA

A review of the social work literature in India during the last twenty years indicates that very little has been written on this topic. Three articles in two journals of social work, one paper presented at a seminar on field work, and a small book on supervision published by a school of social work, based on a series of discussions by a group of social workers including teachers and agency supervisors, are the only available literature on supervision. The recently published Encyclopaedia of

social work in India has no article on supervision, and the article on social work education has only a paragraph dealing with a few problems in supervision. There is no dearth of articles on social work education in India. This paucity of literature on supervision is all the more surprising, because the teachers in schools of social work are the dominant group among the few writers in the field and social work education has always been a favourite topic with them. Would it be wrong to conclude on the basis of these facts that the importance of supervision is not sufficiently recognised in our country?

It is reported that as early as 1830 there was a social welfare agency in existence in Calcutta (Abrahamson, 1959:9). Between 1880-1910, the Christian missionaries and Indian social reformers had started several institutions for the orphans and the widows in different parts of the country. Social Service League, founded in Bombay in 1911, started programmes for the welfare of women and industrial workers. Some form of supervision at least in its administrative aspect might have existed during this period. But the idea of training for social work only took hold when the Social Service League started arranging evening lectures in social work. It can be said that the teaching function of supervision began to emerge by this time. Later, with the establishment of the Sir Dorabji Tata School of Social Work in 1936 (now known as the Tata Institute of Social Sciences) social work education took a formal shape. It is well known that the school was started at the initiative of an American Missionary, Dr. Clifford Manshardt, who was familiar with the social work education in his country and was influenced by it in starting the first school of social work in India. Field work was included as part of the educational programme and the students were sent out to work in slum areas and welfare

organizations. In the field work programme the teaching function of supervision was recognised, but it still did not develop as we understand it today. The students were placed in the agencies to observe the work and the administration of programmes. They were left to fend for themselves without any systematic effort being made to organise a sound field work programme and relate it through supervision to the theory courses offered at the School. Though courses on social casework were taught by visiting foreign teachers, the methods courses were not well developed nor did they receive the proper emphasis until the 1950s.

With the establishment of a few more schools of social work in the country during the early 1950s and the employment of teachers who were educated in U.S.A. by the schools of social work, supervised field work programmes were introduced in these schools. Since the teachers had undergone supervision, they adopted modern supervisory practices in field work supervision. The absence of a sufficient number of field work agencies suitable for the field work placement of students and the unavailability of professionally trained staff in these agencies led some of the schools of social work to start their own service centres. However, a large number of students continued to be placed in the social welfare agencies in the community and they were supervised by the teachers in the schools. Most of these teachers had no field experience after their training in social work and had joined the staff of these schools soon after their graduation in social work. This inevitably led to the separation of the teaching and administrative aspects of supervision — the school teachers assuming the teaching responsibility and the agency staff the administrative responsibility. It should be noted here that the starting of service centres and the employment of full-time field instructors by the

schools of social work are relatively recent developments in U.S.A. Because of the peculiar circumstances prevailing in our country, the schools of social work had to start the field work programme on these lines.

The broad features of field work supervision in the Indian schools of social work have been similar to the American pattern of field work supervision. Individual supervision through weekly meetings between the supervisors and the students has been characteristic of field work supervision in the schools. From the beginning, group meetings have been utilized either for orientation of students before they began their field work or to discuss certain common problems and to fill in the gap in theory at certain stages during field work placement. But group meetings in field work have been used to supplement individual supervision.

Despite the fact that professional education for social work has been in existence for thirty-five years, and there are approximately 10,000 professional social workers in the country, supervision is still not widely practised in India. A large number of social welfare agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, continue to employ personnel with no education in social work. As a result, most of these agencies have very few professional social workers on their staff. Even now, it is not uncommon to find social welfare agencies run by social workers with no education in social work. In these organizations, supervision is practised in its narrow historical meaning of 'overseeing' and thus, it is disliked by the employees. This situation has been further aggravated in some agencies where the professional social workers are supervised by voluntary social workers or paid workers with no professional education. As a result, the teaching function of supervision which is so essential for staff development, and consequently for the improvement of the quality of service,

and ultimately for the progress of the profession itself, is yet to find its proper place in our country.

Some of the major problems in supervision of students in schools of social work may be briefly mentioned here. As already stated, employment of a relatively small number of professionally educated social workers in the social welfare agencies has compelled the schools of social work to provide supervision in field instruction mainly through their teachers. This has increased the work-load of the teachers in many schools which are understaffed and affected adversely the quality of supervision. There are also a few schools which have not yet recognised the importance of supervised field instruction for professional practice. Finally, there is the glaring discrepancy between the approach of the agency staff, mostly non-professional (though in some cases with long field experience) and the approach of the school supervisors who are

young, theoretically well-versed but frequently inexperienced in practice, which often creates confusion instead of clarity, and cynicism instead of commitment to the profession in the minds of the students. According to Gore, this situation is so serious that it is a wonder if the students do not suffer emotional breakdown (Gore, 1968:259).

One solution to this problem is a suggestion by Banerjee that the teachers in schools of social work take up some work in the agencies for practice which may fill in the gap in their knowledge and skills in social work practice (Banerjee, 1964: 128-129). This will also enable the school supervisors to teach the students more effectively through demonstration by handling groups or cases in the agencies. These suggestions merit serious consideration and implementation by the schools of social work in India.

REFERENCES

- Abrahamson, C. Arthur
1959 *Group Methods in Supervision and Staff Development*, New York: Harper and Brothers, Footnote on p. 9.
- Banerjee, G. R.
1964 "Some Aspects of Field Work Supervision", *Seminar on Field Work in Social Work Education*. Association of Schools of Social Work in India, Waltair, pp. 128-129.
- Gore, M. S.
1968 "Education for Social Work" *Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India*, The Planning Commission, Govt. of India, Vol. I, p. 259.
- Miller Irving
1960 January "Distinctive Characteristics of Supervision in Group Work", *Social Work*, pp. 69-76.
- Robinson, P. Virginia
1936 *Supervision in Social Casework*, Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, p. 12.
- Smalley, E. Ruth
1969 "Values and Directions in Social Work Education", *Journal of Social Work Process*. Vol. XVII, pp. 30-31.
- Zetzel, R. Elizabeth
1953 April "The Dynamic Basis of Supervision", *Social Casework*, p. 146.

Significant trends include the decrease in the proportion of NASW members holding supervisory positions and the dearth of supervisors in the for-profit sector. These labor force trends are then discussed within the context of actual and potential changes in the purposes and practice of social work supervision, particularly in a managed care environment, and the implications of such changes for the profession. Discover the world's research. 17+ million members. This article draws on research studies and journal articles to examine the historical development of knowledge in social work supervision. The findings highlight the process and details involved in supervision. Social workers need to be confident, articulate, and professional with highly developed listening, oral and written skills. They also need stamina, emotional resilience and determination. Research and practice demonstrate that social workers will be more effective if they receive good quality supervision, both on a one to one basis from a manager and also from peer supervision in teams and via networks. The Social Work Taskforce recommended clear, universal standards for employers, including standards on supervision. (Building a Safe and Confident Future, 2009)¹. These have now been developed into a social work employers' standards and supervision framework.² These standards will be referred to in the policy.

1.1 What is social work supervision?

Working alliance between the supervisor and counsellor in which the counsellor can offer an account or recording of her work; reflect on it; receive feedback and, where appropriate, guidance. The object of this alliance is to enable the counsellor to gain in ethical competence, confidence, compassion and creativity in order to give her best possible service to the client. Supervision's objectives are "normative", "restorative" and "formative". These objectives could be measured by current instruments.

2.4 A history of supervision.

Social work, as a professional activity, has a centennial history in the United States, rich in traditions of practical work. Having knowledge about the system of higher education of social workers in the United States may also prove beneficial. The practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior; of social, economic, and cultural institutions; and of the interaction of all these factors. (National Association of Social Workers, 1973, pp. 4-5). The definition of social work from the United States (U. S.) may not be applicable to other countries. In addition to these direct services, there are employment opportunities in social planning, community organization, consultation, supervision, teaching, and administration. (p. 61). This chapter revisits social work supervision in South Africa and argues that it falls short of the transformation agenda in the welfare sector that seeks to shift the social welfare system and social work interventions from the clinical, rehabilitative and curative foci to the developmental perspective. As part of international social work master's degree current paper is unique in the sense that it encompasses both a master's thesis and a research project. Hence, as part of the master's thesis an author of current paper explored more. As part of international social work master's degree current paper is unique in the sense that it encompasses both a master's thesis and a research project.