

Researching Supervision: a participative learning process for knowledge production in social work?

Synnöve Karvinen-Niinikoski
Liz Beddoe, Gillian Ruch, Ming-sum Tsui

University of Helsinki

Supervision is recognised as a prerequisite for good practice and development in social work but may be considered inadequately researched (Carpenter et al. SCIE Briefing 43, 2012; O'Donoghue & Tsui, BJSW 2013, 1-18). Whilst threats and challenges to supervision persist, associated with the colonisation of the human service professions by New Public Management practices (Maidment & Beddoe ASW, 2012 65.2; Ruch 2012, BJSW 42.7) it can still be understood as a factor for promoting excellence, productivity and practitioner retention as an essential part of social work practice (Yliruka & Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2013 JSWP 27.2). Looking at social work across the globe in specific national settings supervision is likely to be very different across diverse contexts. The absence of an international consensus about what constitutes good supervision suggests it is timely to map supervisory practices. Given the complexity it is imperative that research be undertaken to explore how supervision is understood and operationalized in different settings. To realise this, a Delphi Survey has been devised as an initial research strategy, based on the following research question: Is there an international consensus on what should be on the agenda for research and development of supervision in social work? The Delphi study method can be utilised for establishing a consensus - specialist / regional / international - on subjects such as research priorities and best practice guidelines. Essentially a multi-phase project the study involves two or more questionnaires given to "experts" or important stakeholders, in which each iteration produces clearly ranked research or other priorities. This current study aims to recruit 50 or more participants in 15 countries. This paper will outline the processes engaged with to design and conduct the study and will report on early findings from the first phase of the project.

Keywords: supervision, delphi study, international social work, knowledge production.