

**STAFF SUPERVISION WITHIN THE
PROBATION AND WELFARE SERVICE**

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requirements for degree of Masters in Social Work.

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Declaration

I affirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has never been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any other university. I agree that the library may lend or copy this thesis on request.

Signed

Sinéad O'Connell

Date _____

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the practice of professional staff supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service. It presents a comprehensive review of the literature in relation to staff supervision and specifically in probation. The research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, using an interpretivist approach. It presents clear findings on the practice of staff supervision within the Service and highlights the main findings, which indicate that there is neither a consistent form of delivery of supervision nor a standard method or model of provision of supervision experienced by the respondents.

Key recommendations include introducing a comprehensive standard for supervision in the Service, the use of supervision contracts, agendas, and developing a nationwide agency policy on staff supervision and education and training and supervision of Supervisors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Social work supervision has been identified as one of the most important factors in determining the effectiveness and quality of service to clients, and job satisfaction levels of social workers (Tsui, 2005). As an indirect, but vital, enabling social work practice, it is surprising that supervision has not received as much attention as other components of social work practice, for example, social work research or social work administration (Tsui, 2005: preface). There is a noticeable lack of critical and in-depth discussion on the state of the art and evidence-based practice of social work supervision in the existing empirical research literature (Harkness, 1995; Tsui 1997b, 2005). At the recent Irish Association of Social Workers' Conference (Dublin, 12th & 13th May 2005) the importance of supervision was highlighted by a number of key speakers. The Continuing Professional Development Policy Draft, presented by IASW President, Monica Egan, at the conference recognised that supervision was important for professional growth and good social work practice (Egan, 2005).

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, supervision has been defined in a number of ways. These have included definitions from the fields of counselling, social work, and more recently nursing. It has been described as a process, developed in response to perceived needs, which allows for the supportive learning of the individual worker while ensuring accountability for practice (O'Neill, 2004). For the purpose of this research, the definition by Morrison (2001) will be used as a working definition:

‘Supervision has been defined as a process where one worker is given responsibility to work with another in order to meet certain organisational, professional, and personal objectives. These objectives include competent accountable performance, continuous professional development, and personal support’.

Supervision has long been recognised as an effective tool to improving professional practice and giving support to social workers. This is recognised as having particular relevance in social work incorporating controlling interventions in peoples' lives. In the context of child protection work, for example, The Report of the Kilkenny Incest Investigation (McGuinness, 1993) states:

‘Regular professional consultation and supervision are also essential for those working in child abuse. Supervision facilitates learning, provides an opportunity to plan and evaluate and supports workers. Supervision also promotes good standards of practice to the benefit of the public. We recommend that newly qualified staff should have additional support and supervision when working in this area’.

Supervision is an essential component of social work practice and a lack of it can potentially lead to wrong decisions, stress, burn-out and possibly high staff turn-over (Morrison, 2001). Absence of effective supervision can also have negative consequences for the four key stakeholders within Social Work practice –

1. Service users
2. Staff
3. The agency
4. Collaborative working.

(Morrison, 2001)

Having noted the importance of supervision in the social work literature, the researcher identified through her practice placement and locum employment within the Probation and Welfare Service, a value in examining the practice of supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service to aid good practice, and ultimately benefit the major stakeholders.

Aim of the Research:

The aim of this piece of research is to examine, describe, and assess professional supervision within the Irish Probation and Welfare Service.

Objectives of the Research:

The objectives are: -

- To examine the nature and quality of current supervision practice in the Probation and Welfare Service, on the basis of the experience of probation staff
- To ascertain the extent and level of supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service
- To illustrate the factors that contribute to effective supervision
- To assess agency guidelines on supervision and ascertain whether they match the reality of the practice of supervision
- To contribute to the best practice on supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service and
- To make recommendations for more effective supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service.

Research Questions:

The questions this piece of research will try to address are as follows:

- What is effective supervision?
- What are the benefits of effective supervision?
- How does and should supervision operate within the Probation and Welfare Service?

The Rationale of the Study:

The present study grew out of the researcher's experience as a Community Child Care Worker and as a Social Work student and a Locum Probation and Welfare Officer in the Probation and Welfare Service. In both settings she found that supervision practice, to the extent that it exists, can focus on the management and agency related functions. In such situations, supervision can focus less or even lack the supportive and the educational functions, which may be because of the sometimes ad hoc basis on which it is provided. To the researcher's knowledge, a study such as this has never been conducted on the Probation and Welfare Service in the Irish context. As will be seen, the majority of the Irish literature focuses on Child Protection Work. Therefore, it would appear to be a timely piece of research.

The researcher's belief is that this research will be of benefit to social work practice within the Probation and Welfare Service. The researcher would like to establish if good supervision aids good practice and what are the factors that enhance or contribute to effective supervision. This will in turn highlight the blocks to supervision and when supervision is not effective, what the consequences for the respective stakeholders are.

Functions of Supervision:

Richards and Payne (1990: 12) identify three basic functions of supervision:

‘The management function: ensuring that agency policies and practices are understood and adhered to; prioritising and allocating the work; managing the workload; setting objectives and evaluating the effectiveness of what is done.

The educational function: helping staff to continue to learn and to develop professionally, so that they are able both to cope with societal and organisational demands and to initiate fresh ways of approaching the work, according to changing needs.

The supportive function: enabling staff to cope with the many stresses that the work entails’.

Morrison (1993) added a fourth function:

‘The mediation function: which involves ‘the establishment of healthy feedback mechanisms from the organisation to the individual and equally important from the individual to the organisation’.

O’Neill (2004: 29) writes ‘anecdotal evidence suggests that the experience of many practitioners has been that, if provided, supervision has focused on either one or two things ... Ensuring that certain work or tasks were carried out or... it has focused on themselves as individuals without considering the context of the work’. This is borne out to some degree by the researcher’s experience, referred to above.

O’Neill goes on to suggest that supervision would ‘benefit from considering a *Dual Focus Approach*. This will ensure an Operational and a Developmental Focus’ (O’Neill, 2000, 2004).

Structure of the study:

This research study is divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1: introduces the reader to the topic of supervision and supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service. This chapter also outlines the aims, the objectives, the research questions, and the rationale for this research study.

Chapter 2: discusses themes from social work supervision literature, namely the evolution of supervision, recent research, and supervision approaches.

Chapter 3: presents an outline of the methodological process used in undertaking the research.

Chapter 4: presents the findings from the research in clearly identified themes.

Chapter 5: presents an analysis of the research findings. The implications of the research findings will also be discussed.

Chapter 6: presents a summary of the conclusions and the recommendations that emerge from this research project.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction:

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the major themes related to the research questions found in the literature on social work supervision. It discusses social work supervision in terms of its evolution, recent research, approaches and models. The chapter's conclusion summarises the main points and examines the implications of these points for this study.

Coffey, Dugdill and Tattersall (2004: 735-746) have noted:

‘The public sector is facing an impending shortage of staff, because young people no longer want to work in it and nearly a third of its workforce is over 50 years of age. Staff working within the public sector report that stress is the biggest single factor affecting their decision to leave. Staff working with children and families reported the highest levels of absenteeism, poorest well-being, and highest level of organizational constraints. Job satisfaction was low compared with established norms for various occupational groups.’

Turner, (1995:127) wrote ‘supervision is an effective tool for professional staff development which managers would be foolish not to consider. However, many managers subvert the supervision process into a means of controlling or instructing staff, instead of as a means of developing staff’. Lishman (1999) also commented on this when stating that ‘the above quotation indicates the potential dilemma and danger of supervision. It can become a management tool of accountability and efficiency. Equally it can be used to enhance professional development and thereby practice and service provision’

Social Work and Probation Practice:

The historical development of probation work in Ireland paralleled the British experience to an extent. Probation's relationship with social work has become an increasingly

contested one in these islands in recent years (Dack & Geiran, 2003:4; Geiran, 2005). Geiran (2005:82) writes ‘that probation in Ireland ... has its shared roots in charitable voluntary work, which became professionalised over time’. In Ireland, Dack and Geiran (2003:4) suggest:

‘that there are valid grounds for maintaining the broadly social work perspective on probation work. These included shared historical roots with social work in the United Kingdom, ongoing probation connections with social work in other European jurisdictions, Service orientation towards (professional) social work entry qualifications, the predominantly social work education and training of most Probation and Welfare Officers at present, and the assessment and intervention methods and models employed by them’.

Citing Boswell (1996) and Jones et al (1992), Vass (1996:183) lists the essential skills for social work with offenders as:

1. communication (including listening, oral and written);
2. assessment and evaluation (including report-writing and record-keeping...);
3. intervention;
4. relating knowledge to practice;
5. forming and maintaining professional relationships;
6. managing and coping with workload;
7. use of self.

Vass also (1996: 135-136) summarises the values of offender-orientated probation work as comprising:

- a. respect for persons,
- b. care for persons,
- c. hope for the future,
- d. community cohesion,
- e. social justice, and
- f. confronting crime.

Both the skills and values listed in respect of probation work parallel closely those required for social work in general (Dack & Geiran, 2003:5). Perhaps more than in any other area of social work, there is a long history of debate as to whether probation work *is* in fact social work at all. This question is manifested most noticeably in the *care* versus

control discourse, which has continued in probation literature and practice for decades (see Goslin, 1975; Raynor, 1985; Trotter; 1999). However, there is little evidence that probation work is not social work, solely on the basis of its controlling elements (Geiran, 2005:97).

What is Professional Staff Supervision?

The literature offers a plethora of definitions of supervision. Rich (1993: 137) points out that ‘no single definition or theory exists by which to describe its meaning, methods or purpose uniformly’. That said, within the literature, Kadushin’s (1992a) definition is often proposed as the most comprehensive, and is used by a number of authors as the starting point for their own attempts at offering a definition (Brown et al., 1996; Bennie, 1995; Shulman, 1993; 1995). Kadushin (1992a: 22-23) defines social work supervision in the following terms:

‘The supervisor is an agency administrative-staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance the on-the-job performance of the supervisees for whose work he is held accountable. In implementing this responsibility, the supervisor performs administrative, educational and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship. The supervisor’s ultimate objective is to deliver to agency clients the best possible service, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in accordance with agency policies and procedures. Supervisors do not directly offer service to the client but they do indirectly affect the level of service offered through their impact on the direct service supervisees’.

This definition emphasises that supervision occurs within an agency context, and it recognises that supervision has a place in both agency management and structure. Essentially, the three functions of supervision described - namely administration, education and support - reinforce that the supervisor is the bridge between management and the front-line professional. The objective of the best possible service to clients emphasises that supervision is a quality control process and the indirect service element highlights that the supervisors role is akin to that of a coach who prepares, observes, shares in, guides and assists (from the metaphorical side-lines) the supervisee in their work. Shulman (1993; 1995) adds to Kadushin’s definition through reference to the supervisor’s role as a mediator between the management and professionals.

Brown and Bourne, (1996: 9), define supervision as:

‘the primary means by which an agency-designated supervisor enables staff, individually and collectively; and ensures standards of practice. The aim is to enable the supervisee(s) to carry out their work, as stated in their job specification, as effectively as possible. Regular arranged meetings between supervisor and supervisee(s) form the core of the process by which the supervisory task is carried out. The supervisee is an active participant in this interactional process’.

Overall, supervision can be viewed as a response to needs:

- ‘the need of the worker to be supported, challenged and developed in a demanding, complex and often stressful working environment;
- the need of the service user (client) for safe quality care at times of need;
- the need of the organisation to ensure best practice and accountability of its employees’. (O’Neill, 2004)

As can be seen from the above there is an overlap between the definitions. For the purpose of this study, the working definition will be Morrison’s (2001):

‘Supervision has been defined as a process where one worker is given responsibility to work with another in order to meet certain organisational, professional, and personal objectives. These objectives include competent accountable performance, continuous professional development, and personal support’.

Supervision and Its Origins

The international literature reviewed, argues that social work supervision is as old as social work itself, and that the history of supervision is inseparable from the history of practice theory (Tsui, 1997a; 1997b; Munson, 1993). Nevertheless, the literature indicates that two important factors have shaped the development of social work supervision, namely: (1) the practice environment and (2) the process of social work professionalisation (Munson, 1993; Tsui, 1997b; Brashears, 1995). These two factors have been most apparent in the shifts in emphasis between the administrative and

professional aspects of social work supervision during its history (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Tsui, 1997b).

The origins of social work supervision are unclear, (Munson, 1993). Munson (1993) speculates that it was most likely based on a model of supervision developed in England by the medical profession, a model which was subsequently exported to America. Whilst this argument seems plausible, there appears to be little in the recorded history to support it. The early history of supervision can be traced back to the Charity Organisation Societies Movement, which began in Buffalo, New York, USA in 1878 (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Tsui, 1997b). The supervision itself involved the paid agents of this movement being supervised as part of their apprenticeship (Munson, 1993). The extent to which this supervision included both administrative and professional aspects is debated (Munson, 1993).

Tsui (1997b, 2005) covers this debate well and asserts that supervision began with an administrative emphasis because the first visitors of the Charity Movement were the employers, who were untrained volunteers from the upper class and were not supervised. These employers recruited paid agents towards the turn of the century from the middle and working classes. They then provided administrative supervision to the paid agents as a means of maintaining accountability (Tsui, 1997b, 2005). When a number of paid agents were established, Tsui (1997b, 2005) argues, the professional aspects (namely education and support) began to be addressed as the paid agents implemented an apprenticeship approach. In 1898, the first recorded social work training course was offered by the New York Charity Organisation Society (Tsui, 2005). This course marked the beginning of agency-based education and training, and evolved in 1904 into the New York School of Philanthropy.

This school later developed into the first school of social work in the USA - the Columbia University School of Social Work (Kadushin, 1992a), with the first course in supervision being offered in 1911 (Kadushin, 1992a; Tsui, 1997b, 2005). In the 1920s, social work

training moved from the agencies to universities. As a result of this move, the professional aspects of supervision were further promoted, as supervision became viewed as an educational process for learning social work practice (Munson, 1993; Tsui, 1997b; 2005). The viewing of supervision as an educational process also contributed to the development of the individual supervisor-supervisee conference as the primary mode of delivery (Munson, 1993; Tsui; 1997b; 2005). From the 1920s onwards a social work supervision literature base began to develop. Kadushin (1992a: 11) emphasises this point by stating that thirty-five articles on social work supervision were published between 1920 and 1945 by the *Family Casework* (now *Social Casework*) journal. In 1936, the first book on social work supervision, *Supervision in Social Casework*, written by Virginia Robinson, was published (Kadushin, 1992a). In this book, supervision was defined as 'an education process' (Tsui, 1997b: 194).

The emergence of the professional aspects of social work supervision, through an increased emphasis on education, was further assisted by the integration of psychoanalytic theory into social work practice from the 1930s to the 1950s. This integration resulted in practice theory having a significant influence in supervision, and led to the rise of the notion that supervision was a 'parallel process' of casework (Tsui, 1997b; Munson, 1993; Kadushin, 1992a). Tsui (1997b: 195) argues that the next major historical theme was the debate from 1956 to the 1970's between 'interminable supervision and autonomous practice'.

This debate arose from the increasing professionalisation of social work, and the view espoused that a social worker's professional status was compromised by interminable supervision (Tsui, 1997b). One result of this debate was that a trend began to develop away from interminable supervision to a defined period of supervised practice, which was then followed by autonomous practice (Munson, 1993). This debate also arguably gave rise to the concept of consultation in social work, and the view that the autonomous practitioner would consult in particular cases, rather than have an ongoing supervision relationship (Kadushin, 1977). This could also account for the approach used within probation practice (see Chapter 4).

Supervision in Modern Social Work Practice

Kadushin (1992a: 14) argues that in the 1970s two further factors emerged. The first was an increased preoccupation with accountability due to the fiscal constraints of publicly funded agencies and the beginnings of the shift from Keynesian-based demand economics to the economics of laissez-faire. The natural result of this factor was an increased emphasis on administrative supervision. The second factor was the discovery of 'burnout', which emphasised the importance of the supportive aspects of supervision (Kadushin, 1992a). The type of supervision that these two factors brought to the fore in the period immediately prior to the new managerial era, was one focused on administrative accountability and support of the worker, rather than directly upon professional practice.

Since the 1980s the international literature highlights the emphasis that accountability has had in social work supervision (Tsui, 1997b; 2005; Munson, 1993; Morrison, 1993, Kadushin, 1992a; Coulshed, 1990; Glastonbury et al., 1987; Bamford, 1982). This emphasis reflects the effect that what became known as the new managerialism (Tsui, 2005) has had on the social services and social work supervision. Initially this emphasis appeared to increase the dominance of the managerial aspects of supervision over the professional aspects (Kadushin, 1992a; Payne; 1994; Tsui, 1997b). The reaction to this managerial emphasis, however, has led to the professional aspects of supervision becoming reasserted in the literature, as social work practitioners and academics have tried to redress the balance. Bunker et al. (1988: xi) reflected this reassertion of the professional aspects, when they made the following statement that linked the supervisor's role to both the management system and professional practice:

'We view the role of the supervisor as embedded within both the management system and the professional practice system, as a key element in each and as an essential link between the two systems'.

Generally, the reassertion of the professional aspects of social work has occurred through the social work profession's reemphasis on social work supervision. One example of this

was the publication of a book titled *Interactional Supervision* (Shulman, 1993) by the National Association of Social Workers in the United States of America.

This reemphasis is also evident in the volume of recently published literature (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993; Morrison, 1993; Brown et al., 1996; Hughes et al., 1997).

A strong theme present in this literature, is the argument that supervision, through its interactional focus (which includes the interactions between the practice setting, the client, the social worker, the supervisor, the agency and its context), provides professional process accountability through the medium of reflective practice (Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993; 1995; Rich, 1993; Van Kessel et al., 1993; Tsui et al., 1997). The reassertion has been further supported by the establishment of *The Clinical Supervisor Journal* in 1983, and by the conceptualisation of the phenomenon of *Clinical Social Work Supervision* by Munson (1993). The strongest assertion of the professional aspects of social work supervision was made by Brashears (1995), who argued that a false dichotomy had been created between social work practice and supervision, and that supervision is social work practice and needs to be reconceptualised in this way.

Throughout the literature there are references to the old argument about interminable supervision versus autonomous practice but it suggests that on-going supervision throughout one's career is the most favoured option (Morrison, 2003; O'Neill, 2004; Tsui, 2005) and while there is widespread acknowledgement of the value of supervision, it is left up to individual workers and agencies to implement the process of supervision as they see fit.

Supervision and Effective Practice

Supervision provides a framework within which workers are helped to process the nature of their work experiences and give them meaning. In doing so, confusion and anxiety are modulated and the workers' internal world of thoughts and feelings becomes more manageable and stable. This process, of course, reflects precisely the kind of help which

social workers in turn need to be able to provide for their clients. They are more likely to be able to do so if they have experienced it themselves (Turner, 1995: 126).

It is arguable that as Turner (1995: 127) suggests:

‘supervision should help workers to become more able to take responsibility for their own work – thoughts, feelings, and actions – and to make better judgements about it for themselves. The ability to do this is at the heart of working professionally. It is, after all, the workers (not the supervisors) who have to go back and work with the client or situation. They will not be able to do so effectively if they are dependent upon their supervisor to evaluate their work and make judgements about it for them. All they can then do is keep coming back to their supervisor for “more”.’

Supervision can be an effective tool for professional staff development which managers would be foolish not to consider. However, many managers subvert the supervision process into a means of controlling or instructing staff, instead of a means of developing staff. It is not difficult to understand why this happens. The manager is, after all, ultimately responsible for the work of the agency, and is more emotionally and intellectually involved in the worker’s work than an ‘outside’ supervisor may be. This can create anxiety for the manager/supervisor and make it difficult for him or her to allow members of staff the freedom to create their own ‘agenda’ for supervision (Turner, 1995: 127).

Effective Supervision within Social Work

Within the field of professional supervision in the social services there is an extensive, established body of literature (Bennie, 1995). Authors from Great Britain and the United States of America dominate this literature with Kadushin (1976; 1992a), Munson (1979; 1993), Shulman (1993; 1995), Middleman et al. (1985), Hawkins et al. (1989), Morrison (1993) and Brown et al. (1996) being significant contributors. Kadushin’s (1992a) ‘Supervision in Social Work’, (Third Edition), is generally recognised as a seminal text, both in this country and internationally (Payne, 1994; Bennie, 1995).

Often supervision in social work and other settings will tend to focus solely upon what the worker has done and what they need to do next. It is understandable that both supervisor and worker might prefer to focus on actions, or planning actions, because this

maybe easier to look at (being both more tangible and less unsettling) than what may be underlying the worker's actions. Looking at the worker's actions is, however, a very good place to start in supervision: i.e. 'Tell me what you did...'. But if supervisors stop there, or go enthusiastically into planning what the worker might do next, they may leave untouched the key to understanding the way the worker works. They may ignore the processes underlying the actions and how these are influenced by the worker's own attitudes, values, beliefs, assumptions, etc. Until workers understand something of this, it is difficult for them to change in ways, which enable them to work more effectively with their clients (Turner, 1995:130).

According to various authors (Tsui, 2005; O'Neill, 2004) and research carried out by Sinclair and Gibbs (1998), supervision should be provided on a regular and reliable basis. It should involve mutual trust and an awareness of issues of authority and responsibility. It should provide support and an opportunity to express feelings and to go 'below the surface' in the analysis of problems and situations. It should address particular issues, which workers identify as problematic, including facing pain, anxiety, confusion, violence, and stress. Its content and process should be anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory, with a professional development focus of empowerment. It should focus on learning.

Practice Reality

In practice, there may often appear to be a gap between what should happen and what actually does happen in professional social work supervision. Areas of discrepancy, which will hinder professional development, include:

- The unavailability of supervision
- The abuse of power, for example where the dissemination of information is controlled or supervision is used to exercise the supervisor's power or control as

negative power, for instance by blocking, restricting, or by punishment (Grimwood and Popplestone, 1993)

- A lack of emotional or feeling support: ‘Supervisors often cut off from the pain in clients’ lives. The worker, unable to share and thereby receive support from her line manager, is left on her own with the loss and grief of her clients’ (Hammer and Statham, 1988, in Grimwood and Popplestone, 1993: 47)
- A lack of acknowledgement and support in issues connected with violence: often as workers, we are left to deal with fears of and responses to violence as our personal responsibility rather than being offered support and the opportunity for reflection, process and analysis in supervision.
(Lishman, 1998 in Adams, Dominelli & Payne, 1998).

Morrison, (2001; 2003) has written about the blocks to good supervision and the components that enable a supervisee to gain from supervision. These are listed as –

What are the blocks to good supervision?

- Poor Relationship between supervisee and supervisor
- Lack of understanding
- Inconsistency, lack of continuity
- Poor communication and listening skills
- Lack of motivation, enthusiasm and interest
- Defensiveness

What are the components that enable a supervisee to gain from supervision?

- Being listened to
- Being asked the right questions
- Feeling valued and affirmed
- The focus being kept on the supervisee
- Looking at the possibilities, shifting the thinking, reframing
- Open-ended question
- An ability to stay with a situation, slowing down the process

(Morrison, 2003)

Supervision Standards in Ireland

There are no specific standards on the provision of supervision to social workers, including Probation and Welfare Officers, in Ireland. While supervision's importance within social work is at least anecdotally accepted, there is less than effective back up from widely applied concrete guidelines and standards. The National Social Work Qualification Board has published 'An Induction Framework for Newly Qualified and Non-Nationally Qualified Social Workers' (2004). The NSWQB (2004: 23) states that:

'supervision is a centrally important issue to social work, and its role is widely acknowledged within the profession. For example, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers notes that supervision is of fundamental importance to social workers, in that it addresses both safety and accountability in practice. Line managers can use supervision to monitor work, to guide the social worker, to assess the progress of the caseload and to determine training needs. For the social worker who is being supervised, supervision provides an opportunity to seek guidance from a more experienced colleague, to inform the supervisor about caseload progress, to obtain emotional support and to assess training needs. Additionally, it can facilitate the provision of culturally appropriate support and assistance for social workers who are taking up employment in Ireland for the first time'.

Between the supervisee and the client, there is a worker-client relationship, as well as a professional helping relationship. It is governed by a professional code of ethics and by agency policy (Tsui, 2005). According to the Irish Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics (IASW, 1995): -

'The social worker must strive for objectivity in professional practice. Constant development of self-awareness will continuously build upon knowledge and skills to maintain and enhance standards of professionalism' (Principle 2, Principles of Social Work Practice).

As Tsui (2005:43) writes 'effective client outcomes are... the ultimate objective of social work supervision'.

Supervision can provide important assistance in helping social workers to continue to develop and build on their skills. Lishman (1998) states that professional development may be hindered by the unavailability of supervision. It is therefore a crucial element in the induction process, and should be integrated into any induction programme for newly

qualified and non-nationally qualified social workers. However, it should also be noted that supervision is a central component of a social worker's day-to-day work that transcends the induction period.

According to NSWQB (2004: 24), supervision should aim to fulfil the following functions:

1. To help employees monitor and manage their workload
2. To encourage the continuing education of the social worker
3. To impart policy development to employees
4. To provide employees with emotional support
5. To encourage staff development.

Functions of Supervision and Dual Focus of Supervision:

Richards and Payne (1990:12) identify three basic functions of supervision;

- “The management function: ensuring that agency policies and practices are understood and adhered to; prioritising and allocating the work; managing the workload; setting objectives and evaluating the effectiveness of what is done.
- The educational function: helping staff to continue to learn and to develop professionally, so that they are able both to cope with societal and organisational demands and to initiate fresh ways of approaching the work, according to changing needs.
- The supportive function: enabling staff to cope with the many stresses that the work entails.”

Morrison (1993) added a fourth function:

- The mediation function: This involves ‘the establishment of healthy feedback mechanisms from the organisation to the individual and equally important from the individual to the organisation’.

O’Neill (2004:21) writes in relation to Morrison’s fourth function that:

‘It could also be viewed that if the other three functions are successfully incorporated into the process and practice of supervision then mediation is automatically subsumed throughout and not a separate or distinct function’.

Morrison says these four functions are interdependent (Morrison, 1993: 19):

‘You cannot perform one function effectively without the others. An exclusive emphasis on the managerial will leave the supervisee feeling that you are only interested in checking up on them, or worse that you are just watching your own or your agency’s back. This form of supervision can be called the ‘agency hygiene’ approach. Conversely an exclusive emphasis on staff care will not ensure that the agency task is done and can lead to the supervisee feeling that she or he is ‘on the couch’. The agency is not a staff welfare association or a centre for personal therapy. Few supervisory tasks fall exclusively within any one of these four functions’.

Professional Supervision is first of all consultation – consultation with someone who knows the area of work in order that it can be done better. Supervision is often seen as having two different, but connected purposes. The first is that of ensuring that the worker being supervised is aware of and can implement the policies, procedures and day-to-day requirements of the job; that he/she knows the fundamental underlying theoretical principles inherent in good practice and can link these principles to his or her own work practice. Accountability and learning are key issues here: accountability to the agency and the ongoing learning of greater skill and more effective practice in the work.

The second purpose is more complex, and requires considerable skill and training to do it safely and competently. This type of supervision is becoming a requisite for anyone working with people at a personal/emotional level such as psychotherapy, social work, counselling, and community work. This aspect of professional supervision involves the examination of the worker-client relationship; the feelings and the motivations of the worker and how the workers own history, needs, and inclinations interfere with or influence what goes on in the relationship. It asks and invites the worker to examine his/her own prejudices and feelings for the client and the client’s life situation. It examines the workers own needs in regards to the client and looks at how it might be in conflict with the needs of the client. It encourages self-awareness and keen consciousness of personal process.

Seen in this way, supervision is a protection for both client and worker – for the client because the imbalance of power can leave him or her open to subtle and not so subtle forms of abuse. It is protection for the worker because he/she can endeavour to make explicit what might be out of his/her awareness but still operating at an unconscious level. It insures therefore that the work is carried out in an ethical and professional manner. It is therefore both enriching the quality of the client/worker relationship, which is core to the work, and supportive to the worker at a very real level.

Supervision is a two way process, a contract that carries with it responsibilities for both parties – the supervisor and the supervisee. Increasingly the expectations of the people who use social services and the community at large are rising. It is now possible to begin to see the emergence of clearly stated standards of care and quality customer service. There can be no doubt that staff supervision provides the mechanism for determining individual levels of competence, promoting anti-discriminatory practice and tackling problems (Williams, 1993 cited in Morrison, 1993).

Richards and Payne (1990) state that supervision is based on:

- Knowledge of the agency's functions, policies, resources and constraints;
- Professional judgement regarding risks, needs and resources of service users;
- Knowledge about human behaviour and ambivalence;
- Capacity to use authority, recognising the different sources of authority and power;
- Recognition of the processes of change, both for individuals and organisations, and capacity to work with those processes;
- Understanding about perceptual processes and especially the role of anxiety and prejudice in distorting perception.

In summary and as referred to in the Introductory chapter, O'Neill (2004) suggests that supervision should have a dual focus, (1) operational and (2) developmental. The operational focus is centred on the task of the work and on the tasks of the specific role and responsibilities of the individual. The developmental focus is based on the person

who carries out the task and tasks. This ensures attention to the person; thereby facilitating their greater self-awareness and objectivity (O'Neill, 2004:30) Overlap between both foci must exist to ensure that the functions of accountability, support, and learning are met.

Benefits of Supervision

Morrison (1998; 2001) illustrates the benefits of effective supervision (Morrison, 2001: 19) and the consequences of poor supervision (Morrison, 2001: 21). Effective supervision benefits the four major stakeholders, which Morrison lists as:

1. Benefits for the agency
 - Clearer communication both up and down
 - Improved standardisation
 - Improved staff consultation processes
 - Increased pride in the organisation
 - Lower rates of turnover, sickness, complaints
2. Benefits for staff
 - Role and accountability clear
 - Boundaries clarified
 - Confidence enhanced
 - Focus on user
 - Learning needs identified
3. Benefits for service users
 - Worker clearer, more focused and prepared
 - More observant of users' strengths, needs and risks
 - More consistent service
 - More able to involve user
4. Benefits for collaborative working
 - Role clarity for the worker

- Identifying appropriate expectations of others
- Ensuring worker communicates and listens to other agencies
- Appreciation of different roles, challenging stereotyping
- Assist in mediating conflicts with other agencies, or negotiating over resources.

(Morrison, 2001:19)

Inadequate supervision results in role confusion, which becomes highly problematic in an inter-agency context. Deficits in supervision have also been a persistent theme in child protection and mental health inquiries. While the concept of supervision is mainly associated with the social work profession, it is suggested that all those involved in social care would recognise the need for structured opportunities to reflect on practice, judgements, feelings, roles, and the experience of working together (Horwath & Morrison, 1998: 112).

The Practice of Supervision

In an ideal situation, workers come to supervision bringing a piece of their work to explore with the supervisor. The supervisor enables workers to examine their perceptions of it and understand it more fully, especially their own functioning within it. Workers then leave with a clearer view of themselves and their work and, as a natural consequence of this, are in a better position to see how to take the work forward. However, because supervision takes place in the context of a relationship between the supervisor and the worker, where there are two people's needs and perceptions involved, this ideal process can all too easily become distorted. Often difficulties arise because of 'the supervisor's need to be loved, admired, trusted, and remembered with affection [by the worker]' (Alonso, 1985: 86). These desires are natural enough in all of us but, unless recognised and managed, they can prevent the supervisor from supervising effectively: for example, they may cause supervisors to come out of their legitimate role and become a friend, or an expert to be looked up to and advised by (Turner, 1995:130).

A great deal has been said and written in social work and related professions about ‘enabling’ and ‘empowering’ clients, but it seems that much actual practice does not reflect this, and that a dependency model is still common. Supervision is one way of enabling greater autonomy in social workers themselves. The chances are that they will then be better able to help their clients towards greater autonomy too (Turner, 1995: 136). Effective supervision (Brown and Bourne, 1996) is certainly crucial in keeping a workforce functioning effectively, all the more so if it is linked to a comprehensive system of staff appraisal, staff development and staff care (Mullender & Perrott, 1998: 72).

In relating burnout to the social work profession, and particularly to those working with survivors of abuse, Hopkins uses the term ‘secondary abuse’, because “the themes of powerlessness, stigmatisation, betrayal and sexuality - commonly identified as features of the child's experience, may also be experienced by social workers working with the victims (1992:149). This experience has serious implications for social work practice because it begs the question, ‘how ethical is it to have emotionally wounded people caring for the abused?’ Jean Moore argues, ‘to allow a social worker to carry a case of child abuse without sensitive, structured and scheduled supervision is not only risky but downright dangerous. This is because abusive families 'beam out' powerful forces that can entrap and immobilise a worker, as a result of which children can become endangered. Supervision in cases of child protection is vital’ (2000: 55).

Approaches and Models of Supervision

The majority of literature published on social work supervision is devoted to approaches or models of supervision (Tsui, 1997a; 1997b). Munson (1993: 21) asserts that there has been a proliferation of approaches and models of supervision in recent times, which is due to a practice theory explosion whereby over 130 different theories of social work practice are competing for use. One result of this theory explosion and the proliferation of supervision models and approaches has been a call for a cessation on new supervision models (Rich, 1993). Within the literature a number of classifications have been made of

the various types of approaches and models (Tsui et al., 1997; Rich, 1993). Two of these classification systems appear to capture the themes found in the literature. The first system is that of Tsui et al. (1997: 187), which argues that supervision models or approaches focus on one or a combination of the following five elements:

- a) practice theory
- b) the structures and functions of supervision;
- c) the structure of the agency;
- d) the interactional process between the supervisor and supervisee; and
- e) feminist partnership approaches.

The second system, that of Payne (1994), is more simplistic and conceptualises supervision approaches on a continuum, with managerial approaches at one end and professional approaches at the other. Payne (1994: 44) argued that in social work supervision, either the managerial or the professional aspect is dominant. Payne (1994: 44) also asserts that authors generally distinguish between the two aspects, but differ in their emphasis and in the importance of each aspect.

Morrison provides a theoretical model, based on clear anti-discriminatory principles, with challenging practical checklists, and exercises, which focus on problem solving and developments. Morrison, (1993: 1) suggests that ‘the task of the supervisor, at any level in the organisation, at its simplest is to get the organisation’s job done through the staff s/he manages. The role of the supervisor is thus:

‘...embedded within both the management system and the professional practice system, as a key element in each, and an essential link between the two systems’
(Bunker and Wijnberg, 1988).

Supervision within Probation Work:

In the context of probation work, there appears to be relatively little written material on the subject of professional supervision. According to Davies (1988: 9), ‘a historical glance back within the [probation] service suggests that many of the problems we are still struggling with have their roots embedded in service history’. He writes that the first

supervisors provided for the service were magistrates. ‘At this stage supervision of probation officers’ work had not evolved, but clearly magistrates were being offered control, in a broad sense, of the development of the service’ (Davies, 1988:10). In 1909 and 1920 government committees in the United Kingdom considered the possibilities of a supervisory grade of officer (Davies, 1988). On both occasions, it was deemed unnecessary. However as probation work in courts grew over the following years the cries for a supervisory grade became stronger. This was partly because the probation service as an organisation was growing and the case for managers became stronger simply due to the organisation’s size. In 1935, a committee set up to review social work in court found that ‘there was a lack of direction, order and supervision within the service’.

They wrote of the need for ‘radical changes in the organisation’ (Davies 1988: 12). The 1935 committee also recommended the use of senior probation officers though the roles and tasks of the grade were never made explicit. The revised probation rules of 1949 (cited in Davies, 1988:14) attempted to do this. They suggested the following:

1. the duties to be performed by a senior probation officer shall include supervision and advice upon the work of probation officers, and in particular a senior probation officer shall organize the office work and the distribution of work between probation officers, and examine and advise upon the manner in which they keep their records and the manner in which their working time is used.
2. it shall be the duty of a senior probation officer to examine and certify for payment the expense claims of probation officers and the disbursement of and accounting for monies entrusted to them in connection with their duties.

During the 1950s, the British probation service continued to grow, professional practice developed strongly along the individual counselling, 'casework' mode and within a hierarchical structure. In 1961, the grade of Assistant Principal Officer was introduced. The Morison Committee in 1962 recognised the development of service professional practice and the development of the line management system.

The Morison Report moved the supervisory role away from administration to casework consultancy (Davies, 1988: 15). Davies (1988: 18) writes in relation to the Morison Report that 'for supervisory grades in the probation service the administration and inspectorial functions could obviously not be disregarded entirely. This meant that supervisory grades were required to balance these components'. Some confusion arose about the role of supervisory grades due to Morison. This confusion became even greater in the few years following Morison as the casework technique gained ground. As Davies (1988: 19) comments, 'it became standard practice in both social services and probation departments to talk about supervising newly-trained entrants to the service, moving on to consultancy when the officer was confirmed in post and felt to be an experienced professional'. This echoes the debate in the general social work literature on the issue of 'interminable supervision versus autonomous practice,' referred to earlier in this chapter.

By 1966, concern was being expressed about the vagueness of the role of supervisory grades. The National Association of Probation Officers' Working Party, according to Davies (1988: 20) published a report and suggested that senior probation officers had three main areas of responsibility:

1. Organisation and administration
2. Casework supervision
3. Carrying a caseload.

King, in 1969, expanded this to:

1. Direct casework
2. Administration
3. Teaching
4. Consultation

5. Evaluation.

Davies (1988: 21) points out that ‘the development of the probation officer and senior probation officer roles allowed the Home Office to suggest “It would be a reasonable objective to provide effective casework supervision for all officers”.’ During the 1970s personal evaluations and teamwork became areas of concern, and principal officers became known as chief officers. The development of policy was one of their tasks including supervision of their officers (Davies, 1988).

Supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service

The Probation and Welfare Service is a national service with around 320 professional grade staff providing a service to courts and custodial institutions and child detention schools. For several decades the Service has been organised into operational levels with Senior Probation and Welfare Officers functioning as local managers and team leaders. Groups of teams are further organised into regions, managed by Assistant Principal Probation and Welfare Officers. The Service is part of the Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform (Dack & Geiran, 2003; Geiran, 2005).

The researcher was unable to find anything written on the development of the supervision process within the Probation and Welfare Service, apart from Dack and Geiran (2003).

Skehill (1999: 127) writes about the development of probation in Ireland:

‘As late as 1958, probation officers employed under the Dublin Probation Service comprised primarily of volunteers from charitable organisations...It was not until the role of probation and welfare was taken over by the Department of Justice, and the first trained probation officer was employed in 1961, within the newly established Probation and Aftercare Service, that the formative space for the expansion of probation social work was established’.

Dack & Geiran (2003: 4) have pointed out that ‘the historical development of probation work in Ireland has paralleled the British experience to a great extent’. Similarly, van

Kalmthout and Derks (2000) provide brief descriptions of the history of probation work in many of the European jurisdictions, including Ireland. Geiran (2005:82) writes that 'probation in Ireland and Britain has its shared roots in charitable voluntary work, which became professionalised over time. 'In 1969, following a review of the Service it was decided to appoint a principal probation officer, three senior probation officers and twenty-seven probation officers' (Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985, cited in Geiran, 2005: 92). That phase of development appears to mark the 'arrival' of the Probation and Welfare Service as a modern, professional, national probation agency as we know it today, within the criminal justice system.

In 1996, the introduction of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) was identified as a critical element in the Strategic Management Initiative within the Irish Civil Service, according to Dack & Geiran (2003:5). The underlying rationale behind the introduction of the system was a perceived increase in customer demand for improved services and increased accountability. PMDS provides a standardised framework for 'the direction or overseeing of performance' (the Collins English Dictionary definition of supervision), across a wide range of government departments and agencies, which allows for mutually agreed objectives and performance standards (Dack & Geiran, 2003: 5).

Dack & Geiran (2003: 5) point out that:

'given the history of supervision in the Probation and Welfare Service, grounded in the social work profession, it could be argued with some justification that the Service was ahead of many other parts of the Civil Service in embracing the new orthodoxy'.

The Probation and Welfare Service does not have an overarching written policy on professional supervision per se, with the result that where supervision takes place it may or may not link the management of professional practice with the business goals of the organisation. PMDS therefore throws down a challenge to traditional supervision. In this regard, Dack & Geiran (2003: 6) state:

‘The operation of the PMDS suggests that the needs of all stakeholders are germane to the working of the supervisee, the Probation and Welfare Officer. When supervision is an agency wide activity, integrated into the strategy of the organisation, informing the training and development needs of the agency and the individual practitioner, feeding back through management the concerns of practitioners, then the supervisory relationship allows for the development of the reflective organisation. Furthermore accountability for practice is not based solely on individual discretion but becomes an organisational and managerial responsibility’.

A Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) circular (September 2002) for Promotion to Senior Probation and Welfare Officer (DJELR, 2002) states under Job Description the requirements of a Senior Probation and Welfare Officer in relation to supervision:

‘Commitment to regular supervision with each officer on the team combining direction in case management with assisting staff to developing a variety of skills and generally supporting and motivating them in their work’.

Although there is limited reference to supervision, in the context of that understood within professional social work, in official documents within the Probation and Welfare Service, clearly there is an expectation that such supervision is provided and as Chapter 4 will outline, it is carried on to a greater or lesser extent.

Conclusion:

The literature review outlines the development of staff supervision within social work and probation practice. The functions and benefits of staff supervision have been made explicit. The review has highlighted the lack of guidelines in relation to the process of

supervision both within social work practice in general and probation practice in particular. Supervision is therefore critical to the quality of services delivered to vulnerable groups, the development and sustaining of staff and to the very life of social care organisations. It is an essential managerial and professional activity for everyone in a social care organisation. Supervision is not just for practitioners. However, this is an era, which is seeing major changes in the nature of public sector management. Legislation has resulted in structural and philosophical changes in Health, Education, and Social Services leading to a re-casting of the managerial task. The watch- words of 'economy, efficiency, and effectiveness' have signalled the arrival of the business ethos in the helping professions. The pace of such changes, coupled with constant and acute resource problems have made it hard for even the most committed of supervisors to sustain supervision to reasonable standards. In addition there are questions among some senior managers, especially those from outside a social work background, about the meaning and value of supervision. In short the future of supervision as currently understood in the social work and related human services literatures, especially within some large social care organisations, is under threat.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction:

The aim of this piece of research is to investigate, describe, and assess professional supervision within the Irish Probation and Welfare Service. It will attempt to define what effective supervision is within the Probation and Welfare Service and how it can benefit the four key stakeholders –

1. Service users
2. Staff
3. The agency and
4. Collaborative working. (Morrison, 2001).

This chapter outlines the methodological process undertaken to achieve this objective. The research design and strategies used in gathering and analysing the data are described. The ethical issues and limitations encountered during the research process are also illustrated.

Theoretical Approach:

The paradigm that this research will be rooted in is Interpretivism. Interpretivism states that we cannot predict human behaviour. Individuals think and act, they do not just react. This paradigm focuses on how social life is produced. The interpretivist paradigm denies there is an objective reality independent of the frame of reference of the observer. Reality is mind dependent and influenced by the process of observation. Interpretivism does not therefore concern itself with the search for broadly applicable laws and rules, but rather seeks to produce descriptive analyses that emphasise deep, interpretative understandings of social phenomena.

The interpretivist paradigm thus generally leads to the use of qualitative research methods

that enable the researcher to gain a descriptive understanding of values, actions and concerns of the subjects under study. The approach emphasises validity, possibly at some cost in terms of reliability and representativeness (Rouncefield, 2004). The researcher found that this approach was the most appropriate for this study as the aim was to participate in exploratory and inductive research. This research was intended to be an exploration of the multiple perspectives, meanings and ideas that probation officers as individual actors attach to the events around them and which influences their actions and motivations.

Method of data collection:

The study is based primarily on two data gathering instruments: (1) a questionnaire and (2) taped interviews.

1. The questionnaire included four sections:

Section A, posed some general questions on the usage and frequency of supervision within the participant's workplace.

Section B was presented in the form of rating scales. In this section participants were asked to rate their opinions on supervision on a five-point scale.

Section C posed some demographic questions and questions regarding participants' length of time in employment in Probation and Welfare and their academic qualifications.

Section D allowed for any additional comments to be added by the participants.

The choice of predominantly closed questionnaires was deemed appropriate to gather factual information that could be correlated and responses compared. Some open questions were included in order to establish the personal opinion of the participants regarding the circumstances in which they believed supervision proved to be beneficial or not.

2. In line with the researcher's intention to acquire supervisees' and supervisors' views on supervision, data from the quantitative questionnaire were supplemented by semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews with two Probation and Welfare Officers and two Senior Probation and Welfare Officers.

The choice of in-depth, semi-structured interviews was made as opposed to other possible options such as in-depth structured or unstructured interviews. Structured interviews were deemed to be too restrictive to the freedom of the participants' responses. Data that might have been gleaned from such interviews were in fact recovered by the use of questionnaires. One could argue that the risk in posing pre-prepared questions might be of leading the participants' responses. Posing questions that were broad in nature would counteract this possibility in the semi-structured interviews.

In order to facilitate this no time limit was placed on the length of the interviews. They varied in length from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. The interview guide posed three general questions on professional supervision, the first to elicit the respondent's understanding of the practice ('What is your understanding of supervision?'), the second question on the participant's recent experience of supervision ('What is your recent experience of supervision as a recipient or provider?'), and finally their aspirations and expectations of supervision ('What do you want from supervision as either recipient or provider?') Time was allowed at the end of the interview for participants' general comments about supervision.

Individual face-to-face interviews were chosen as being the most appropriate for this research. The advantages of this approach are that follow up and contingency questions may be asked by the researcher and assurances on anonymity can be given throughout the interviews. Both Probation and Welfare Officers and Senior Probation and Welfare Officers were interviewed, mixed by gender, levels of experience and qualifications. In other methods, for example focus groups, participants may not be as open about their thoughts due to the presence of others who may influence their responses to questions. Both the questionnaire and interview schedules are attached as appendices to the dissertation.

Sampling

Robson (2002) states that sampling refers to the process of selecting a portion of the population as a representation of the entire population. The sample consists of the entities that make up that population within the Probation and Welfare Service. All Senior Probation and Welfare Officers and Probation and Welfare Officers in the Probation and Welfare Service Headquarters, in Dublin were identified as the target population for this research. This is because this office contained the greatest number and range of Officers (forty in total, Seniors and Probation and Welfare Officers) working in different settings and areas of the city, but based in one location and with ease of accessibility for the researcher.

Two Senior Probation and Welfare Officers and two Probation and Welfare Officers were selected for the purposes of the study for interview. In a qualitative study of this type, sample sizes tend to be small. There was a mix of gender, experience, and age within the limitations of the small sample. Access was negotiated through the researcher's supervisor, an Assistant Principal Probation and Welfare Officer who was familiar with this piece of research.

Data Analysis

Gathering information for this research used both primary and secondary research methods. Ordinal quantitative methods of data analysis were used to compile the information gathered from the questionnaires. An ordinal ranking scale was used to gain insights into participants' attitudes and beliefs on staff supervision.

In the qualitative interviews, open-end questions have advantages of flexibility and depth. The respondent has the opportunity to explain his or her answer in detail. 'Open-end items are especially useful for measuring complex attitudes for which standardized scales are not available' (Mark, 1996). 'The goal of this is to enhance general knowledge about complex events and processes' (Mark, 1996).

Constant comparison between the data collected and concepts created helped to formulate the findings. Particular attention was taken to ensure that the findings were not influenced by the opinions of the researcher. In order to facilitate this, each interview was audio taped in its entirety. All tapes from the interviews were transcribed verbatim without the inclusion of any subjective indications of the mood or intonation of either the respondent or interviewer. Subsequently the tapes were again replayed. On this occasion the tapes were listen to, to ensure accuracy in the transcripts. The researcher manually coded and themed the responses which involved the reading and re-reading of the transcripts until important topics and themes were identified, which are known as ‘sub-categories’. Through further careful readings, irrelevant or repetitive material was removed. Common themes were similarly identified between some ‘sub-categories’, and consequently they were combined into one. This process was repeated a number of times. While this analysis may be seen as editing vast amounts of data, it nevertheless should not be seen as reductionist in nature. Rather it should be seen as a constructive process whereby the responses to the questions facilitated an understanding of the topic of the research.

Ethical Considerations

It was the researcher’s hope that research participants would willingly participate in the study. Participants were informed about the study and any potential risks that may occur and benefits they may gain by participating in the research were outlined. The participants were allowed to terminate their participation in the study, at any time. Confidentiality was ensured and maintained at all times and any sensitive information that arose was protected. Anonymity and privacy was maintained also. Interviewees’ permission was sought to tape the interviews. They were assured that this was only done to capture all of their comments and that the transcripts would not be used for any other purpose. Interviewees were debriefed afterwards. All respondents¹ were given the opportunity to discuss, with the researcher, any issues that may have come up for them

¹ Respondents refer to both participants who answered the questionnaires and those who were interviewed.

while completing the questionnaires as a contact number was supplied and interviewees were given the same opportunity.

Limitations of the Study

This will be small sample study within the Probation and Welfare Service. Therefore the results cannot be generalised beyond the research population. Caution is required even to generalise the results more widely than the research sample within the Probation and Welfare Service itself and due to the qualitative nature of part of the research. The findings will also be reported perspectives and the practice of staff supervision will not be directly observed.

In essence the main limitation of this research is that the procedures and findings presented rely on the integrity of both the researcher and the participants for their credibility. The literature accessed, deals with supervision in the context of generic social work and more specifically Child Protection work, (for example, Morrison, 2003, O'Neill, 2004, Tsui, 2005). As this research is being conducted on the Probation and Welfare Service, it will be difficult to source information relating to this agency due to the lack of official documents on staff supervision. This in turn highlights the need for this piece of research to be conducted, given the dearth of relevant research in this area. The researcher anticipated that there would be some difficulty in coding the responses to the in-depth interviews, because of the format and nature of the information gathered, which required further consideration by the researcher.

Conclusion:

This chapter has outlined the data collection methods used for the purpose of assessing supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service in Ireland and its benefits. For the purpose of this research both a quantitative questionnaire and a qualitative semi-structured interview approach were used to gather data from the respondents. The data generated was be collated and key themes were be established. These themes will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter introduces the most salient findings from the questionnaires and the interviews.

The findings are introduced under the following themes: -

1. Demographic information on those surveyed
2. Frequency and types of supervision
3. Definitions and understandings of the function of professional supervision
4. Role and Place of Supervision Within the Agency
5. The benefits of supervision
6. Skills important in professional supervision
7. Recent experiences of supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service
8. Role and Place of Supervision for Clients
9. Experiences of Agency Policy
10. Aspirations and expectations of supervision

Respondents to the questionnaires will be referred to as *participants*, while those interviewed will be referred to as *interviewees* 1 – 4. This format will be used consistently throughout this chapter. The word respondents will refer to both participants and interviewees.

Forty questionnaires were sent out to Probation and Welfare Officers and Senior Probation and Welfare Officers; twenty- one questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher, a response rate of just over 50%.

Demographic Information in relation to participants:

Sixteen participants were basic grade Probation and Welfare Officers, while 5 participants were Senior Probation and Welfare Officers.

16 of the participants were on permanent contracts, while 4 were on temporary contracts, 1 participant failed to comment on this. 11 of the participants were female and 10 participants were male.

Chart 4.1 Age Range of Participants

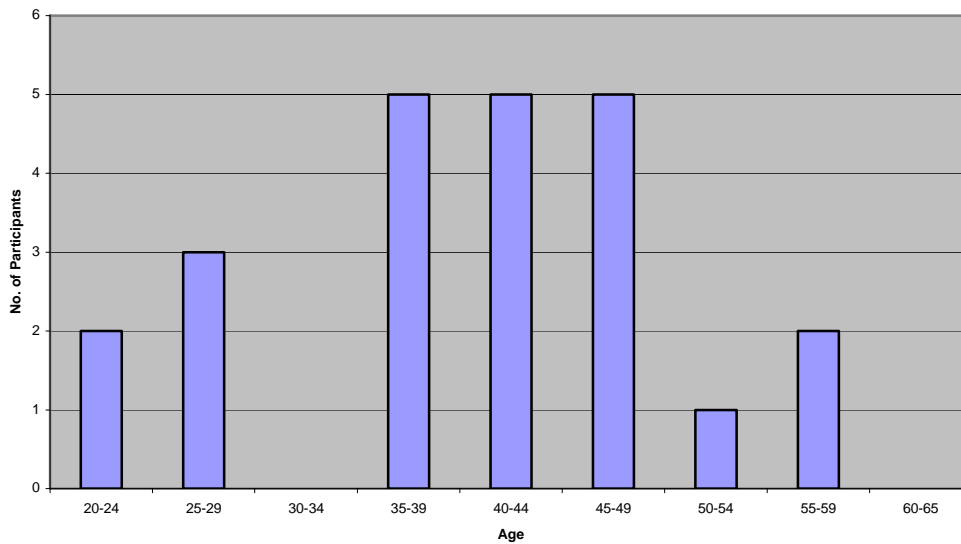
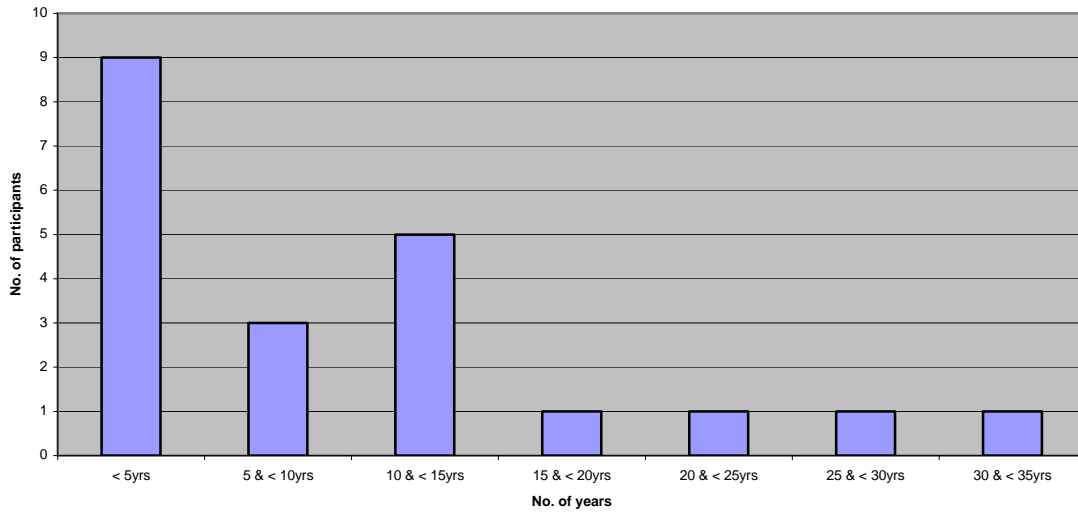
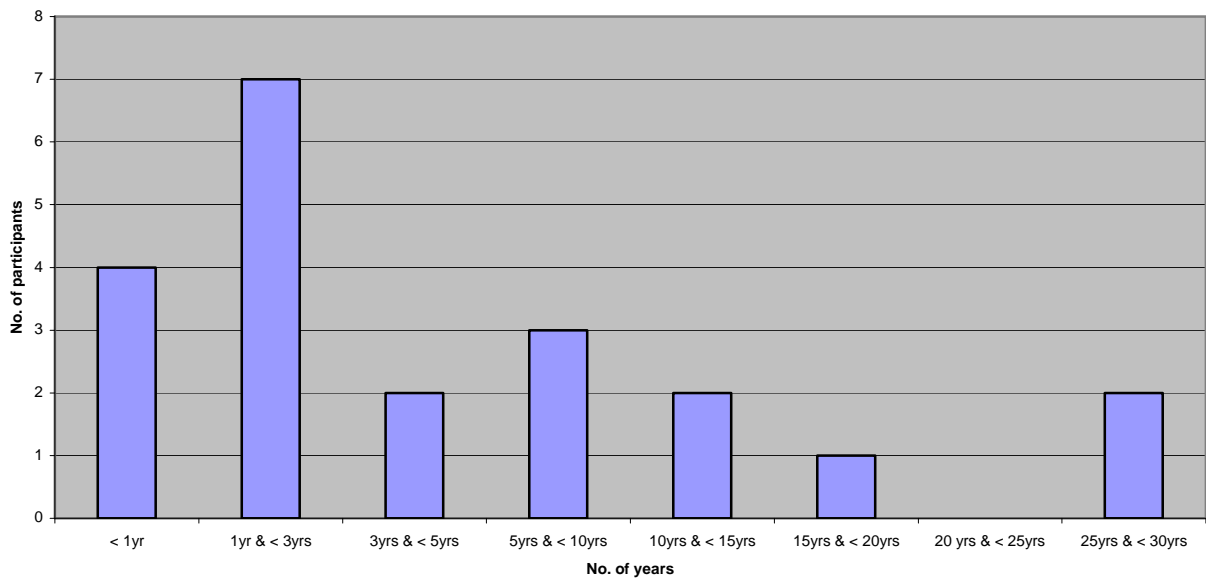


Chart 4.2 Length of Service in PWS



5 of the participants were assigned to the District Court Team, 5 to Circuit Court Teams, 6 to the Youth Justice Team and 5 participants were involved in other service operations.

Chart 4.3 Length of time at current grade



6 of the participants were in their current post less than one year, while the majority of participants had been in their current assignment between one and three years. Just one participant had been in their current post for over three years.

Table 4.1 Qualifications of Participants (n= 21)

Bachelor of Social Science Degree	12
Other Primary Degree or Diploma	6
Postgraduate Degree (Social Science)	4
Postgraduate Diploma (other than Social Science)	2
Masters in Social Work	5
Masters Degree (other than Social Work)	4
CQSW/ NQSW or equivalent	13

As will be evident from Table 4.1 above, a number of participants had one or more qualifications, for example a primary degree and then a postgraduate degree.

The Four Interviewees

Interviewee 1 is a Female Probation and Welfare Officer (PWO), aged between 20 –24, who has a Bachelor of Social Science. She has worked in the Probation and Welfare Service (PWS) between one year and three years, having previously worked as an access worker in the Health Board.

Interviewee 2 is a Male Senior Probation and Welfare Officer (SPWO), in the Service between 5 and 10 years, who has a Masters Degree in Social Work, and who stated he had:

‘about five years experience as a main grade Officer, three in an Institution, two on [a] court team’.

Interviewee 3 is a Female Senior Probation and Welfare Officer, (SPWO), has a Masters Degree in Social Work. She has *‘been a senior, which is a managerial role since May 2002 and ... joined the service in 1994’*. She had a variety of different jobs before joining the PWS, working in child guidance and child protection among others.

Interviewee 4 is a Male Probation and Welfare Officer (PWO), whose main training is *‘a social science degree, a social work qualification’*. He works *‘on the Circuit Court team’*. His previous experiences have included child protection and fostering.

Training in Staff Supervision

(Insight in this provided by the two Senior Probation and Welfare Officer interviewees)

Neither of the Seniors interviewed have had formal training in Staff Supervision, though both are providing supervision to their teams.

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) stated:

‘I am providing supervision; I have a team of seven officers, I would say that the only training, formal training, I have ever received in supervision is as a practice teacher for taking students. So that would be the main training I would draw upon as a supervisor’.

Interviewee 3, (SPWO) when asked about previous training in providing supervision stated: *'No, not any formal education or training in supervision'*. She draws on previous placement experiences *'and having taken a student'* when providing supervision.

Neither interviewee 1 or 4 were providing supervision. However, **interviewee 4** (PWO) had undertaken some formal training in supervision in the past but not within the Probation and Welfare Service.

Frequency and Types of Supervision

57% (n =12) of all participants stated that formal supervision was used on their team. Again 57% (n=12) of all participants stated that informal supervision was used on their team. 90% (n =19) of all participants wrote that one-to-one supervision was used while 19% (n=4) stated that group or team supervision was used. One participant said that supervision has been by an external consultant and one other participant stated that supervision was *'a continuum from formal to informal, group and one-to-one, not a sole category'*.

100% (n=5) of Senior Probation and Welfare Officers who participated, stated that they were providing formal one-to-one supervision, 80% of Seniors (n=4) stating that they provided supervision on a monthly basis. 95% (n= 20) of all participants stated that they were receiving supervision while just one participant (4.75%) stated that they were not receiving any formal or informal supervision. 81% (n=17) of all participants stated that they received supervision once a month, while one participant (4.75%) received

supervision once every few weeks and one participant (4.75%) stated that he received supervision '*once every 3 months, maybe*'.

Formal one-to-one supervision

Many of the participants in answering the questionnaires indicated that formal supervision was essential, for example as **Participant #4** states:

'I would regard formal supervision as essential to good practice. I have had some informal supervision when I have requested it'.

Interviewee 1 (PWO) stated that she receives supervision once a month. **Interviewee 4** (PWO) stated '*supervision is happening quite a lot and I think... like I go to my supervisor for advice quite often – that is supervision ...*'. He did not comment on the exact frequency of his supervision sessions.

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) stated that he meets his manager once a month and:

'it's very much around how I'm performing and responsibilities towards my post. It is very much answerable to management.'

He feels that his current supervision '*doesn't address my own professional development*'.

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) added that:

'I would have formal supervision with everybody on the team once a month and at the end of that meeting we would organise our next meeting'.

Interviewee 3 (SPWO) stated that her supervision '*is fairly regular*' but added *but*

'it's not something that we say well it's the first Monday of the month – we're sitting down for an hour'.

Informal supervision

Participant #33 wrote:

'Feel I can get access to advice /supervision (within reason) if I need it outside of scheduled sessions'.

Interviewee 1 (PWO) noted that her supervision:

'is formal and informal, we have it once a month, and then we have it whenever we want just to go in and have a chat with him as well'.

Interviewee 4 (PWO) said that he felt there was little difference between informal and formal supervision. He commented:

'it would be called informal but it is quite a formal discussion. So you know I had a conversation yesterday, it wasn't a set meeting but I went to my supervisor and we talked for an hour. That to me was a formal, very good supervision session but it had not been planned. It could fall under somebody's label as informal. I would certainly say there is very regular informal supervision and there is very regular formal supervision'

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) said that he could provide informal supervision almost daily ranging from *'5 minutes to 40 minutes'*.

Interviewee 3 (SPWO) stated that she consults with her fellow colleagues and Seniors for different perspectives on issues and feels that is a more of informal supervision.

Definitions and Understandings of the Function of Professional Supervision

All the Senior Probation and Welfare Officers in answering the questionnaires said that support and learning were part of their supervisory sessions with their team members. Three of the five Seniors stated that they addressed accountability during their sessions also. One Senior said he discussed casework with his supervisees.

90% (n=19) of supervisees (which includes both Seniors and main grade Probation and Welfare staff) stated that support was discussed during their supervisory sessions. 52% (n=11) of supervisees stated that learning needs were addressed and 62% (n=13) noted that accountability formed part of their supervision. One Officer wrote that goals and practice priorities formed part of supervision sessions.

Another noted that case management was discussed and another that supervision was about meeting the Service Mission. 9.5% (n=2) of main grade officers said that work, procedures, and good practice were discussed.

The interviewees raised some interesting points in relation to defining and understanding supervision's function.

Interviewee 2, (SPWO), *thoughts on the role of supervision were:*

'to support people because we do deal with quite some disturbed and disturbing people, difficult challenging individuals'.

He was that this function in supervising officers was *'to support them in their work'* and to make sure *'that people are meeting their standards'*.

Interviewee 3, (SPWO), stated that she believed the function of supervision to be two-fold:

'in relation to support around cases and looking at the issues that are arising in cases and developing a sense of what it is for them or how the case is affecting them'.

She felt that ‘reflection, support, and minding and professional development’ were central pieces to this. She stated that the other function was in relation to ‘responsibility and accountability’.

Both Senior Officers refer to support and accountability as functions of supervision.

Interviewee 1 (PWO) stated that she thought the role of supervision:

‘is to make sure that you are doing your job properly’ and that ‘you are being made accountable for your actions’.

Interviewee 4 (PWO) replied on being questioned about supervision’s function, that it:

‘is to support the worker in performing his duties effectively. And also to support the worker as an employee’.

Role and Place of Supervision Within the Agency

The functions of supervision

The functions outlined in the findings tended to be operational focused rather than developmentally focused. This indicates conflict with the emphasis on the supportive function outlined in the previous section. Supervision was outlined to be a managerial function, with a focus on the task of the officer’s role and job. For example,

- 95% (n=20) of all participants agreed or strongly agreed that supervision was a useful tool in probation practice while just one participant (4.75%) disagreed.
- 81% (n=17) of participants’ felt that supervision was centred on case management and

- 81% again agreed that supervision allows a supervisor to give feedback to the supervisee.
- 76% (n=16) felt that supervision is used to manage staff.
- 38% (n=9) of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that supervision allows you to give feedback to the Probation and Welfare Service, while two participants (9.5%) disagreed that supervision allowed you to bring your own issues to the fore and
- Also, 33.3% (n=7) of participants neither agreed or disagreed with this statement. 57% (n=12) of participants felt that supervision teaches you better ways to cope with difficult situations. However, 33.3% (n=7) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, while two participants (9.5%) disagreed with this statement.

Internal provision of supervision

Interviewee 3, a Senior herself, felt that supervision should be provided by Seniors and Assistant Probation and Welfare Officers within the agency:

‘in terms of discussing cases, or discussing work issues, and making decisions, it would need to be my line manager and he’d need to be aware of what I am doing and we were in agreement and that we are set on the same priorities’.

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) stated that he would go to his fellow Seniors for support and advice rather than his Assistant Principal Probation and Welfare Officer and felt that his current supervision did not help him to manage work related stress. He noted that:

‘No I would say the best support I get would be from fellow seniors or from people on my team even’.

Contracting supervision out

Just one participant who answered the questionnaire offered an opinion on external supervision. She stated that she believes that:

'external supervision is essential to ensure sound professional practice as well as for the professional / personal benefit of the supervisee. As I believe there exists a lot of fear / territorial thinking around this, unfortunately, this Service probably has a long way to go'.

Interviewees were given the opportunity to consider external supervision and the consultation provision. Two of the Officers interviewed felt that supervision provided by external consultants could be of benefit to the Probation and Welfare Service.

Interviewee 3, (SPWO) stated that contracting supervision out:

'might be useful for people as well because there can be a conflict between people's professional development around their handling of a case as a worker and a practitioner and concerns their line manager might have about cases'.

Interviewee 2, (SPWO) felt that:

'around the developmental needs I would have no problem for somebody external or somebody within the organisation as long as it very much wasn't geared towards the business of the day but very much around the process of being supervised or the process of providing supervision to a large professional team'.

There is some agreement that providing external supervision would be beneficial but the Seniors indicated that they would want the management role kept separate.

However, one of the interviewees felt that external supervision would not be of benefit.

She (**interviewee 1**, PWO) asserts that:

'No I think it's a good that it's your senior because that his role, to supervise. I mean that's what he is there for. I think he has, should have the most insight and the most knowledge into what you need and you know the, he would have drafted the team business plan and stuff so he knows exactly what you are meant to be doing'.

The Benefits of Supervision

The benefits as a Supervisee

71% (n=15) of participants stated that supervision was of benefit to them, three participants (14%) of officers stated that supervision was of no benefit to them as supervisees while one officer wrote that she did not know if supervision was beneficial to her. Other comments from the questionnaires in relation to the benefits of supervision included that supervision makes *'the manager and the service accountable for the work of the supervisee'*. Four of the participants, (19%) mentioned that it helped to manage workload stresses, provides feedback on cases and helps *'people to develop as professionals.'*

One participant felt that supervision provides *'links to academic, theoretical discourses'*. Another participant felt that beneficial supervision *'depends on the relationship with one's supervisor'* and that this relationship can impact on the quality of supervision provided and experienced.

The majority of participants agreed with the sentiments of **Participant #11** who stated that supervision provided a space:

'to examine practice and organisational issues, to look at professional development needs, and to receive feedback'.

'Guidance' was also mentioned by participants #32 and #33. Other participants mentioned benefits in relation to issues of *'accountability and responsibility'*. One (#15) stated that supervision was a *'Locus for personal/ professional development'*. Also the majority of participants felt that supervision provided a place to discuss *'caseload management'*.

Four of the participants, 19% (n=4) of all surveyed, were negative in their comments of the current status of supervision within the Service. One participant felt that supervision *'would be beneficial if I got it'*. Another participant said that in its current form it was not of benefit and other wrote that his *current experience of supervision is "am I getting the job done?"*

Another (#27) felt that supervision was not provided at a level she required and if she *'wants to discuss a particular dilemma it would be up to me to raise it'*. She stated that there was *'no sense of challenge or attention to professional competence or development'* and that supervision was *'more a discussion of work arrangements'*.

The benefits as a Supervisor

Four of the five, that is 80% of Senior Probation and Welfare Officers who completed the questionnaire, noted that supervision was of benefit to them as Supervisors. Only one Senior stated that it was not of benefit. None of the participants offered up any explanations for their answers.

Of the two Senior Probation and Welfare Officers (SPWO) interviewed, **Interviewee 2** stated that the feedback he gets from his supervisees is that *'they find supervision beneficial'*. However, he did recognise that he would *'need ongoing development and training in supervision'* as he had not received any formal training.

Interviewee 3 (SPWO) stated that supervision was where she would:

'also learn from the people [she] was supervising' and it provided a space to build *'on our experience as a team'*.

Skills important in Professional Supervision

The predominant theme, which emerged from respondents, was that the skills that were thought to be important in supervision were those associated with effective interpersonal and counselling relationships (e.g., listening, empathy, and communication skills).

During the interviews three of the four interviewees were asked about skills.

Interviewee 2(SPWO) felt that '*basic interviewing skills*' and '*being flexible*' were important skills.

Interviewee 3 (SPWO) felt that both parties have to be willing to engage in supervision and agree the boundaries of the session. She felt that you '*can not force somebody to discuss things at a depth where they are not interested in discussing them*', and that supervision '*has to be an agreed relationship*'.

Interviewee 4 (PWO) felt that seniors '*should have the ability to listen, actively*' and the '*ability to understand the difficult experiences of work*'. He felt that communication skills and empathy were important in this role of supervising, '*as well as supporting people to do the job better*' and maintaining standards but doing this in '*a supportive and realistic way*'.

Neither of the Seniors interviewed had received formal training on supervision practice.

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) stated that:

'what I try to do is transfer some of the basic principles of being a practice teacher, if that can be transferred into being a senior. I think that a lot of the functions are quite similar; I think there is a lot of common ground there. So I try and draw upon that experience as much as possible'.

Recent Experiences of Supervision

Recent experiences of supervision within the Service seem to be on a continuum from extremely negative (e.g. *'Supervision is rarely at the level I require'; 'experiences of supervision being abused and used to intimidate staff'*) to very positive (e.g. *'current supervision is excellent'*). Many of the participants said that they also received informal supervision. Participants mentioned that supervision *'enables a fresh opinion on a case'*.

One participant mentioned that the introduction of PMDS into the Probation Service:

'has improved the level of supervision here and given it more of a focus on supervisee's personal support and progression'.

Participant #34 felt that supervision was a useful means of assisting in *'caseload management as it clarifies goals and priorities in casework'*.

Participant #15 wrote that it was difficult to see if your feedback during supervision was taken seriously by Supervisors and how these *'comments are incorporated into wider agency agenda. In other words, is PWO a passive recipient or a real contributor'*?

Participant #20 felt that supervision *'can be very beneficial if used appropriately'*. However, he *'had negative experiences of supervision being abused and used to intimidate staff – very demanding and abusive'* and added

'However, it has to be said that a minority can use it negatively and as a tool in which to demoralise and intimidate colleagues. Dread of a supervision session where one to one control wastes the safety net of the team. Can be very intimidating if there are issues'.

Participant #27 felt that employees of the service did not bring with them skills from other *'Social Work agencies where time for supervision was set aside fortnightly and attention given to professional and personal development'*.

During the course of the four in-depth interviews, different experiences of supervision were noted, ranging from one interviewee's positive experience, experiences of just case management and workload discussion.

Interviewee 1 (PWO) felt that her supervision:

'is just going through the caseload, it's just going through each case and anything else that comes up, maybe training. Learning needs or...'

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) asserts that his current supervision, by his line manager is:

'very much around how I'm performing and responsibilities towards my post. It is very much answerable to management – that would be my experience of how I'm supervised'.

He felt that his 'current experience [of supervision] doesn't address [his] own professional development'.

Interviewee 3 (SPWO) stated that she currently does not have formal supervision in the definition of it stated above. She stated that supervision is *'talking about cases with my line manager'*. She requires his input on different perspectives or if there is *'something I've over looked in relation to the advice or the direction I have given to officers on cases'*. She also felt that her current supervision was *'about broader issues such as sharing information with other agencies and what general policy and procedural guidelines there are there'*. She describes the process as consultative and *'checking out that we are operating within those perimeters and within agency guidelines'*.

Interviewee 4 (PWO) asserted that presently he is quite happy with his supervision:

'In the most recent it is very supportive, practical and not very intrusive'.

However, this interviewee did point out that in the past within his career in the Probation and Welfare Service, that he:

'experienced supervision that was harassment and very negative and undermining. It did not acknowledge my skills and it was undermining and did not acknowledge my experience and sometimes I firmly believe [the supervisor] was telling me to practice in a very bad way and unhealthy way'.

Role and Place of Supervision for Clients

85.5% (n=18) of participants said that supervision was of benefit to their clients.

However 14% (n= 3) disagreed with this statement.

Of those interviewed, only **interviewee 4** (PWO) mentioned clients and that supervision practice can at times mirror practice with service users. He stated:

‘I believe that the organisation reflects some of the way that we deal with clients’.

Experiences of Agency Policy

In relation to written policy guidelines on the usage of supervision within the agency, there was some ambiguity and lack of knowledge around this. As stated in the literature review there are no written agency guidelines on supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service.

- 28.5% (n=6) of officers stated that there were guidelines
- 19% (n=4) of officers stated that there were no guidelines and
- 47.5% (n=10) of officers stated that they did not know whether guidelines existed or not.

One participant did not answer this question.

Of those interviewed, **Interviewee 1** (PWO) felt that practices vary from team to team within the Service due to a lack of written policies on supervision. She felt:

‘Yeah I think because you hear of people who have changed from teams to teams that, maybe like, they find it different and I think that’s very worrying for the service because I think they should have uniform supervision between the whole service’.

Interviewee 3 (SPWO) stated that:

‘Well there have been policies, I think, drawn up around supervision and general suggestions around supervision at times, and there have been various formats ...

format which would have been suggested that might be a useful format for supervision by looking at issues in terms of case issues and team issues so on and so forth'.

Aspirations and Expectations of Supervision

Some of the more critical comments about current supervision in the Probation and Welfare Service, included that participants required '*more support by [their] supervisor*'. A number of participants felt that supervision should be prioritised within the Service and it is '*a key task for managers*'. **Participant #39** felt that supervision should be provided on '*a group level or team level, i.e. a team should work together, for each other and as a unit, sharing and supporting*'. He felt that there was '*an over emphasis on accountability and covering your self*' and that the team element should be incorporated more within the Service.

Many of the participants, including **Participant #27**, felt that:

'Supervision should be given a more central role, and there needs to be concerted effort to promote the professional development of staff'.

Also a number of participants mentioned that supervision should not be pushed aside if other issues arise, including one who pointed out that these '*appear to be the first appointments to be changed or cancelled when SPWO's diary becomes over burdened*'.

Participant #39 felt that training of supervisors needed to be considered:

'Are there interpersonal skills/ coaching training, man management training, training of 'team concept'.

He felt that if the Service was to deliver an effective service that '*getting the most effective response from your team individually and collectively*' was required through the use of supervision.

Another participant felt that *'an agenda allocating time to personal and professional support, case discussion, and reflection, then workload management'* was required within the Service, which she had experienced in other Social Work agencies, while another (#39) added that:

'placing more emphasis on individual and teamwork, and encouraging people to have an interest and praise those allowing initiative and innovation' would be beneficial within supervision.

One of the final questions asked of the four interviewees was how they would like supervision to operate within the Probation and Welfare Service. This evoked a variety of responses from the interviewees. Some of their comments follow.

General

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) felt that when Senior Probation and Welfare Officers are appointed that providing supervision *'is explicit, that is, part of your brief and this is a responsibility you have'*. However he stated that the other side of that responsibility is *'the agency responsibility to train and support people in their role as a supervisor'*.

He felt that supervision particularly of those *'without social work qualifications or social work experience where the notion of supervision might be quite foreign to them'* was important and that supervision should be introduced during *'the induction period or initial training'*. He felt that the importance of supervision should be shown during this period as *'important to you as a worker and important to you in your own professional development as well and [to] the agency and the recipient of the service'*.

Structures

During interview, officers were asked what structures would help to improve the quality of supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service.

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) stated that:

‘if senior management are anxious that as good as possible service is delivered and if staff are to be supported in what can be a very challenging and stressful job that there is, that that responsibility comes down the line’. He felt that *‘what is essential is to supervise staff and supervision with particular reference to supporting people, developing people, and encouraging people’.*

Interviewee 3 (SPWO) expressed the view that supervision *‘needs a more central place’* but felt resources played a part in this. She stated that she thought *‘there has been some initial policies drawn up’.* She also stated that guidelines around where students within the service fit in, in terms of supervision and *‘in terms of the business process of the service’.*

She felt that the PMDS process illustrated that supervision be provided *‘every 4 to 6 weeks’.*

Interviewee 4 (PWO) stated that *‘there may be some standards that should be aimed for – common standards’.* He stated that if people were:

‘aware of what is expected of them, that they are given the information to do the job, that they are given the necessary supportive relationship and acknowledgement and respect which supports them in doing the job’, it would be of benefit to all.

However, he stated that this *‘would require a huge, a huge change in the organisation’.*

When asked to elaborate on this, he replied '*Brain surgery! I believe that the organisation reflects some of the way that we deal with clients*'. He stated that '*Managers need to get real!*' and that guidance on policy needs to come '*from the top down*'.

Interviewee 2 (SPWO) concluded his interview by adding some final comments. He stated that he had had valuable placement experiences as a social work student and what he 'gained from that would be that the supervisor was concerned about me and about my work and about my professional development'. He stated that as a Probation Officer starting off, 'in 3 years I think I had supervision twice' and then before being promoted to Senior had 'excellent supervision' which he draws upon now. He felt that in the relatively short time of his employment, of several years, within the Probation and Welfare Service 'there is quite a disparity there in experience'. He stated that 'that has implications' for a Service which is not huge. He said that officers' opinions on supervision 'must reflect back' to management and 'there has to be some sort of consistency along the line' despite Seniors' idiosyncrasies. He stated that if the Service was to operate at its optimum level, and calling itself 'a professional social work agency or as a professional agency in the criminal justice system that support and that development must be made available to' all Officers. He also added that within the Service 'your greatest resources are your staff', and they need to be valued and appreciated for the Service to continue to develop.

Conclusion

The findings were presented under a number of headings. They indicate that supervision was being provided to the majority of respondents and was meeting two of the three functions outlined by Richard and Payne (1990) in the majority of instances. However, there was some ambiguity on the definitions, understandings and agency guidelines on supervision. The majority of respondents also felt that supervision was beneficial though required a more central role within the Probation and Welfare Service. Overall, the findings presented indicate the absence of a shared understanding of professional supervision amongst the participants. The findings indicate that there is an absence of formal Service structures and guidelines around staff supervision. The next chapter will discuss these findings and the final chapter will draw on these findings to draw conclusions and make some recommendations for the Probation and Welfare Service.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the main research findings under the following themes -

1. Definitions of professional supervision
2. Functions of supervision
3. Role and Place of Supervision Within the Agency
4. Skills important in supervision
5. The benefits of supervision
6. Recent experiences of supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service
7. Role and Place of Supervision for Clients
8. Experiences of Agency Policy
9. Aspirations and expectations of supervision

Definitions of Professional Supervision

What is apparent from the research findings is that the Probation and Welfare Officers as a group defined supervision from wider perspectives than the Senior Probation and Welfare Officers did. However, despite this difference it is also clear that the organisational, situational and personality perspectives were the most dominant with the interactional and contextual perspectives being quite minor. One implication of the dominance of the first three perspectives is that professional supervision was mainly defined in terms of its content. Munson (1993:14) asserts that each of these three perspectives relates specifically to content drawn from the agency, the work itself and the persons involved. Whereas the interactional perspective relates specifically to the process

and the contextual perspective relates to the interaction between persons and the environment (Munson, 1993). The dominance of the organisational, situational and personality perspectives highlights that the respondents were more aligned with those in the literature who construct professional supervision in terms of its functions (Kadushin, 1992a; Middleman et al., 1985), as opposed to those authors who are more process oriented (Munson, 1993; Hawkins and Shohet, 1989; Brown et al., 1996; Rich, 1993). A further point of interest was the concept and theme of safe practice, which appeared in 57% (n=12) of participants' definitions. Morrison (1993) particularly highlights this theme. He believes that supervision provides protection to vulnerable groups (including staff and clients) and that without it they would be at greater risk of professionally dangerous practices.

Functions of Supervision

The literature does not have any clearly agreed concept of the main functions of professional supervision. The most commonly accepted construction of the main functions is Kadushin's (1992a: 23) 'administrative, educational, and supportive' functions (Tsui, 1997a; Shulman, 1993; 1995; Payne, 1994; Shulman, 1993). Rich (1993:150-151) reviewed twenty-six authors' differing constructions of the functions of clinical supervision and developed an integrated model of clinical supervision. He asserted that the functions of clinical supervision were 'facilitation, staff development, staff socialization and service delivery'. Rich (1993) defined the facilitation function as fostering a work environment that encourages creative thinking, autonomy, communication and increases staff competence. The staff development function involved a training/teaching environment in which skill learning is encouraged and opportunities for skill development and growth were provided. Staff socialisation was the process by which new and existing direct care staff were integrated and socialised into the desired set of organisational and professional values, ethics, standards and culture. Finally, the service delivery function involved assuring the ethical and competent delivery of client services in accordance with the organisation's and the profession's standards.

There was disparity between the Senior Probation and Welfare Officers interviewed who both referred to support and accountability as functions of supervision, and the Probation and Welfare Officers interviewed, one who mentioned support as a function and the other who mentioned accountability as a function. None of the interviewees mentioned education as a direct function of supervision.

Overall, the functions identified by the participants in the present study, though not uniform in their presentation, do appear to fit within the broad functions outlined by Kadushin (1992a) and Rich (1993).

Role and Place of Supervision within the Agency

Internal provision

In terms of the provision of supervision the findings indicate that there was no consistency or standard method of providing supervision. The provision of supervision seems to rely on individual Senior Probation and Welfare Officers' or Assistant Principal Probation and Welfare Officers' commitment to provide it. However, the majority of respondents stated that they were receiving formal one-to-one supervision once a month and Seniors Officers generally indicated that they were providing supervision once a month.

Contracting supervision out

External supervision emphasises the role of ensuring safe practice and the provision of supervision as a service to agency personnel by external consultants. At present, external supervision is not widely provided to the Probation and Welfare Service, except to a small number of officers in specialist posts (e.g. those working on Sex Offender Treatment Programmes). Such supervision or consultation is also provided to professionals in other similar agencies and professions such as Domestic Violence Social Workers, and certain Psychotherapists. The literature indicates that external supervision

is provided in some areas of British and American Probation Practice (Tsui, 2005; Morrison, 2001, Davies, 1988). However, it can be noted from the literature (O'Neill, 2004; Tsui, 2005) that external supervision is of lesser importance in the overall scheme of professional supervision practice than internal one-to-one supervision.

Skills important in Professional Supervision

The research literature generally indicates that professional supervision is considered to be of prime importance to practitioners and supervisors in terms of facilitating professional development, and providing support, safety and accountability (Shulman, 1995; 1993; Payne, 1994; Kadushin, 1992, 1992a; 1992b; Rich, 1993; Morrison 1993; Beddoe, 1997a).

In these terms the findings outlined above are consistent with those presented in the research literature. Effective interpersonal and counselling relationships were skills thought to be important as well as basic interviewing skills.

However, in answering this question, both Senior Probation and Welfare Officers interviewed stated that they had not received any training in the provision of staff supervision. As previously stated, O'Neill (2004: 13) notes that if a supervisor attempts to recreate the positive experiences of his or her past supervision, or is determined to avoid the negative aspects they experienced, it does not guarantee effective supervision. Tsui, (2005: preface) also states that there is a difference between staff supervision and student supervision and supervisors should not have to rely on their experience of being practice teachers to provide effective professional supervision, as was the situation among those interviewed.

The Benefits of Supervision

The majority of respondents felt that supervision was of benefit to them. However, Morrison (2001:18) points out that 'supervision only improves outcomes for clients

(users), and only adds value for staff, if certain key conditions for its effectiveness are met. These include

- Clarity of purpose
- Psychological safety
- Positive modelling by the supervisor
- User-centredness
- Skills and knowledge enhancement.

It could be suggested from the findings that these conditions are not inherent or at least not universal, within the Probation and Welfare Service. As a result, supervision may be of limited benefit to the Probation and Welfare Staff, in its current form. It raises the question of the quality of supervision rather than simply whether or not supervision actually takes place.

Recent Experiences of Supervision

O'Neill (2004:27) has noted that 'it is important to remember that the functions of supervision are interdependent and that very seldom will the task of supervision fall exclusively into any one of these areas'. The supervisor at all times holds responsibility for ensuring that each component of the supervisory process is not overlooked.

As O'Neill (2004:28) adds

'Support without learning becomes a crutch
Accountability without support is just "check-listing"
Learning without accountability does not necessarily lead
to improved practice at either individual or organisational level'.

As the findings indicate, recent experiences of supervision within the agency are of differing standards. There is a notable lack of consistency in the process and content of supervision along with the frequency of it. Many respondents indicate that they had differing experiences under different Seniors, which indicates the ad hoc basis on which supervision is provided within the Service. Recent experiences also indicate, that for the majority of respondents, supervision focuses on the accountability function and is operationally focused.

Role and Place of Supervision for Clients

There would appear to be no clear link between what the participants have stated about the role of supervision in relation to clients and the literature which emphasises supervision's role and place for clients in terms of assuring the quality of practice, protecting them from unsafe, discriminatory and unethical practice (Brown et al., 1996; Kadushin, 1992a; Morrison, 1993). Only one respondent mentioned the benefit of supervision for clients.

It is important to bear in mind that 'if supervision is focused on practice in isolation to its context it contributes to the system remaining closed' (Corcoran, 1999 cited in O'Neill, 2004:31). The context in which supervision takes place and the context of the work should be based on the needs of the specific client group (O'Neill, 2004:31). Only one relevant study was found in the literature search. This study, conducted by Harkness et al (1991 cited in Harkness, 1995), involved clients in the supervision 'loop', and stressed that client satisfaction with services increased when the supervision of workers was focused upon the client's problems and the worker's interventions.

Experiences of Agency Policy

The lack of structured training and development for those in the present study with supervisory responsibility (SPWOs) has contributed to an ad hoc development of supervision practice. Supervisors have frequently had to rely on their own experiences as supervisees to inform their subsequent role as supervisor. This appears to be supplemented by experience with student practice supervision. This in turn, often leads on the one hand to the supervisor attempting to recreate the positive experiences of supervision she or he may have received, or on the other hand, being determined to avoid the more negative aspects of their own supervision for their supervisee. Unfortunately, neither of these approaches, in isolation, guarantees effective supervision (O'Neill, 2004: 13).

The findings indicate some confusion around the existence of an agency policy within the Service. To date no such policy on supervision exists within the Probation and Welfare

Service, apart from the recommendations in the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) guidelines. However, these are general Civil Service performance management guidelines and do not address the four main functions of social work supervision as outlined by Morrison, 2001. In this regard, Morrison (1993) stresses the importance of agency supervision policies and an organisational commitment to it. He does this through reference to a number of major reports on supervision in the child protection field in the United Kingdom, which revealed serious organisational problems in regard to policy implementation.

As Morrison, (2001:22) states:

‘Given the pressures on agencies, if supervision is to be properly embedded, a clear policy linked to standards on supervision is essential. Without such a policy, supervisors are left to rely on their personal and professional authority rather than on organizational authority’.

Aspirations and Expectations of Supervision

In the literature, the aspirations and expectations of supervisors and supervisees has a significant place. Brown et al. (1996:51-52) and Morrison (1993:27) consider the clarification of aspirations and expectations as central to the establishment of effective supervision, whereas Munson (1993: 40-41) lists rights and expectations that supervisees and supervisors should have. He argues that only through open realistic expectations of supervision can both supervisors and supervisees optimise the opportunities that it provides. The respondents in this present study have illustrated that they would like to see staff supervision allocated a more central role within the Probation and Welfare Service. It was expected by the respondents that the agency would support staff supervision through the provision of sufficient resources, guidance, and training of supervisors. It could be said that an organisational culture, which supported staff supervision, was desired by respondents. As O’Neill (2004:56) writes:

‘The culture of the service will impact on the effectiveness of supervision and equally effective supervision can strongly influence the culture of the organisation. When the main functions of supervision ... are embedded in the daily fabric of the workplace it provides a safer, more satisfying environment which thus impacts positively on the quality of care and service’.

As O'Neill (2004:57) continues:

'The components of effective supervision ... need to be firmly valued and established in the overall culture of any organisation if supervision is to be used as a positive and constructive resource. Training of supervisors is more likely to be effective when it includes focus on and challenges the cultural dimension of the service'.

The evidence from the present research is that the Probation and Welfare Service does not have an organisational culture, which clearly promotes effective staff supervision universally and effectively.

Conclusion

The literature review, the findings, and the above discussion all lead to some similar conclusions. The respondents in general expressed the view that supervision had much to offer the Probation and Welfare Service. They have identified a number of factors, which may hinder the development of supervision, including lack of agency policy and structures on the process and content of supervision; and lack of written contracts. These conclusions will be discussed in the final chapter along with recommendations for the Probation and Welfare Service in relation to professional staff supervision.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The aim of this research was to investigate and examine professional supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service. Irish literature for this topic was difficult to access in any quantity, so the researcher used mainly British and American literature (Davies, 1988; Morrison, 2001; Tsui, 2005) along with a generic text on supervision in Ireland (O'Neill, 2004). The international literature on professional supervision clearly demonstrates a consensus view that supervision is hugely important for social work and social service organisation to work at an optimum level that benefits its staff, the agency itself, the service user and collaborative working (Morrison, 2001; O'Neill, 2004, Tsui, 2005).

Judging from the response rate to the questionnaires (50%) and the enthusiasm, interest and depth of thinking demonstrated by those interviewed during this research it seems fair to conclude that the subject of staff supervision in the Probation and Welfare Service is considered an important one. This research does not prompt the author to startling new conclusions but it may assist to clarify some issues and provide some suggestions to benefit the four stakeholders as described by Morrison (2001) within the Probation and

Welfare Service. The conclusions and recommendations are likely to raise more questions on this topic.

Main Findings

1. The findings indicate a lack of a shared understanding of professional supervision amongst the respondents, and possibly more widely in the Service.
2. The definitions of supervision evident in the responses of those surveyed and interviewed, focus more on the content and functions of supervision rather than its process and context.
3. The functions identified showed little shared or common agreement other than that of case management and some significant interest in the support function, whether it was supplied or not.
4. The skills identified as important in supervision by respondents were generally those ascribed to effective interpersonal communication.
5. The findings indicate that there is neither a consistent form of delivery of supervision nor a standard method of provision experienced by the respondents.
6. The findings identify a lack of framework in relation to the supervision process.
7. The findings also indicate that respondents felt good supervision aids good practice and is of benefit to all stakeholders as outlined by Morrison (2001). The consequences of ineffective supervision referred to, included bullying, lack of professional development opportunities, and lack of support, which ultimately affected the work practice of the supervisees.

Supervision, as part of an overall framework for professional practice development, recognises, in a tangible way, staff as the major resource. It allows them time and space to re-focus on their overall task in an accountable and supportive context. It facilitates the identification of areas of their practice, which need further development and can thus re-charge their batteries (O'Neill, 2004: 11).

Recommendations

1. In terms of their implications, these findings signal a need for the Probation and Welfare Service to educate its staff in both
 - a. the functions, processes and theory of staff supervision and
 - b. the process and content of effective supervision.

2. *The findings suggest that the Service does not have a culture in which staff supervision is a common and shared experience. This research recommends that a Service-wide policy and standards be drawn up, incorporating the relevant parts of PMDS, and be implemented. The policy needs to be set within the context of the defined purpose and function of the Service. It should provide a clear, realistic, working framework for the use of supervision, its content, and process. The expectations, roles, and responsibilities of the supervisor, the supervisee, and the organisation must be clearly outlined and explicit (O'Neill, 2004).*

3. *As the findings have indicated, Seniors appear to be relying, to a significant degree, on their past experiences of their own supervision and on their practice teacher training to supervise their staff. However, Tsui (2005: preface) writes that while some of the major principles of fieldwork supervision of social work students in their practicum can be applied in the area of staff supervision, that 'staff supervision differs greatly from student supervision as it involves complicated organisational dynamics, hierarchies of administrative authority, and multiple accountabilities to various parties inside and outside a human service organisation'. It would be of benefit to all stakeholders that an education and training programme based on the theory and practice of supervision, accessing literature on professional supervision in the Social Services, be set up. The delivery of effective supervision in an organisational context demands skilled, insightful supervisors with a strong appreciation of the complexities of the specific work environment, who are themselves participating in regular, effective supervision. Training for the supervisor must take account of attitudes and values*

as well as skills and knowledge and needs to be understood as a process rather than as an event (O'Neill, 2004:60).

4. *The findings have also indicated that supervision, in the Probation and Welfare Service, tends to be more operational focused rather than a full dual-focus. A recommendation of this research is that staff supervision has a dual focus – an operational and a development focus (O'Neill, 2004).*

5. *Line management at all levels should be involved in reviews of staff supervision. As Davies (1988:144) recommends:*

'The roles and responsibilities of staff at all grades should be clear, together with the role of team meetings. It is particularly important that boundary lines and accountability issues are clarified and agreed at all levels'.

6. *The findings also suggest that supervision is provided on an ad-hoc basis within the Service. This research strongly asserts that supervision contracts, written agendas and recording sheets are introduced across the Probation and Welfare Service.*

Gast and Taylor (March 2004) developed a supervision contract for Probation Staff in the United Kingdom. They state that

'The contract must clearly state the ground rules; especially where the boundaries lie and what will and will not be discussed about individuals. The focus will include the way the [supervisors and supervisees] work together and how this relates to the outcome of the intervention'.

The agenda should include items up for discussion covering the four functions of staff supervision (Morrison, 2001). The agenda should be the joint responsibility

of the supervisee and the supervisor. Without an agreed agenda, supervision risks drifting and becoming a “chat” or being focused solely on the most recent event or concern, neither of which reflects the most effective use of staff supervision (O’Neill, 2004:66).

The recording sheet should record all decisions made and with whom the responsibility lies for dealing with these decisions. It should also note the date for the next supervision session and be signed by both parties. The value of recording is twofold. It provides a framework of accountability for both supervisor and supervisee and secondly, reviewing records after a certain period of time can provide a valuable learning experience (O’Neill, 2004).

Future Research Areas

Tsui (1997a; 2005) emphasises that the actual practice of supervision has been difficult to obtain empirical data on, because it is embedded in an organisational context that is not conducive to direct participant observation. There is a strong need for researchers to conduct qualitative studies that explore the functioning of social work supervision in order to build improved theoretical models of social work supervision. Also the findings suggest that a Probation and Welfare Service wide research project on this topic is needed, perhaps using this present research as a pilot.

Conclusion

In summary, the following can be identified as contributory factors to why Professional Supervision is deemed necessary:

- Professional Task – the professional dimension to a discipline requires recognition, structure, and monitoring.
- Accountability – Practitioners must be accountable and held accountable for **what** they do and for **how** they do it. Employers need to have structures in place, which facilitate this process.
- Inquiry Reports – Inquiries, into service deficits and abuse in the past, identify the absence of regular, formal Supervision for a range of staff in the health and social services sector and related fields. The recommendations of these reports strongly advocate its responsible availability and use. Evidence of learning from the gaps and mistakes of the past must be seen to be integrated into responsible practice.
- Workers are recognised as a vital resource – Investment in human resources of services can aid staff retention and is recognised as beneficial for effective and improved delivery of services.
- Continued Professional Development is perceived now more than ever as a necessary component for practitioners at all stages of their career.
- Duty of Care and recognition of demanding work – *the employer must provide supports and structures to enable staff to work in demanding and potentially stressful working environments.* (O'Neill, 2004:12)

The major implications of this study identify that staff supervision needs to be given more priority within the Probation and Welfare Service if it is to benefit all the four major stakeholders: i.e. the Service user; Staff; the agency and collaborative working (Morrison, 2001). The implications signal a journey ahead, which contains significant, though achievable, challenges. As Davies (1988:148) concludes:

‘If the [probation] service uses staff supervision imaginatively; if it is used to encourage new ideas; if it is used to encourage an exchange of views and involve staff at all levels in the future directions of the service; if staff feel the supervision they receive is relevant to their task and to their aspirations for the service; if they

feel supported by their managers in their efforts, then the service will remain healthy. The service will remain lively, pioneering a range of responses to offending that command respect from all sections of the community’.

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Websites

<http://audgen.gov.ie>

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Appendix A

Address of Researcher

16th Nov. 2004

Mr. Sean Lowry,
Principal Probation and Welfare Officer,
Probation and Welfare Service,
Smithfield Chambers,
Smithfield,
Dublin 7.

Dear Mr. Lowry,

My name is Sinéad O'Connell. I am a final year Social Work Masters student in Trinity College. As a requirement of this course I have to submit a thesis. My chosen topic for this is Professional Staff Supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service. I developed an interest in this area of practice while on one of my Masters practice placements with the PWS Dublin Circuit Court team and also while working as a Locum Probation and Welfare Officer, within the Bridge Project, during the past summer (2004), both of which were very positive experiences for me. My thesis supervisor is Mr. Vivian Geiran, APPWO, who is aware of the thesis proposed.

I intend to look at the role that professional staff supervision plays in probation practice and probation officers' experience of this. I would also hope to perhaps generate a draft framework for a model of supervision that could be of benefit to the Service. A copy of my completed thesis would be provided to the PWS. It would be my intention as part of this research, with your approval, to circulate a short survey questionnaire to a research sample of PWOs and SPWOs in the Dublin area. In order for me to complete my thesis on schedule, this fieldwork would need to be carried out in early 2005.

I realise that as this thesis may have potential implications for the Service, your permission is required in order to conduct the survey. I hope you will be in a position to grant my request and await hearing from you, at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,

Sinéad O'Connell

Appendix B

To all SPWOs and PWOs in Smithfield Chambers.

RE: Research on Staff Supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service

Dear Participant,

My name is Sinéad O'Connell. I am a final year Social Work Masters Student in Trinity College, Dublin. I plan to undertake a research project to assess the practice of staff supervision within the Probation and Welfare Service.

The aim of the study is to define what effective supervision is within the Probation and Welfare Service and how it can benefit (1) Service users (2) staff (3) the agency and (d) collaborative working.

The present questionnaire may be supplemented by data from a number of in-depth interviews with a sample of staff members. Please be assured that the questionnaire is not an inspection of staff's work. Confidentiality is assured. The questionnaires have been allocated a coded number. This is standard research practice and is purely to monitor returns and to follow up unreturned questionnaires. Individual staff or teams will not be identified in the final thesis.

The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The questions are predominantly closed and can be answered by ticking or numbering boxes. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. The validity of the findings depends on staff's honesty and openness.

I appreciate that you are being asked to take time from an already busy schedule to complete this questionnaire and thank you in anticipation for your help and co-operation.

Sinéad O'Connell

17 February 2005

**PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO MR VIVIAN
GEIRAN, APPWO, 4TH FLOOR, SMITHFIELD FOR
COLLECTION BY 16th MARCH 2005.**

Appendix C

Supervision in the Probation and Welfare Service – Sinéad O'Connell

Reference No:

This questionnaire is designed to seek the opinions and ascertain experiences of Probation and Welfare Officers on the process of supervision. It is completely confidential. Please take the time to complete the questionnaire.

Definition: Supervision has been defined as a process where one worker is given responsibility to work with another in order to meet certain organisational, professional, and personal objectives. These objectives include competent accountable performance, continuous professional development, and personal support. (Morrison, 2001)

Section A

This section asks you to answer questions in relation to your own experience of supervision.

1. What type(s) of staff supervision are used on your team?

(a) Formal (b) Informal (c) One to One

(d) Group/Team (e) By external consultant

(f) Other - Please specify _____

The rest of this section relates only to formal, one-to-one supervision provided by Line Managers

In relation to formal one-to-one supervision:

2. Do you provide supervision (a) Yes (b) No

3. Do you receive supervision (a) Yes (b) No

4. How often do you receive supervision (a) not at all (b) once a week
(c) once a fortnight
(d) every three weeks
(e) once a month
(f) other Specify _____

5. How often do you give supervision (a) not at all (b) once a week
(c) once a fortnight
(d) every three weeks
(e) once a month
(f) other Specify _____

6. Are there written guidelines on the use of supervision in the PWS (a) Yes (b) No (c) Don't know

7. (i) In your experience as a Supervisor in the PWS, what areas of practice do you discuss (a) Support (b) Learning
(c) Accountability (d) Other Specify _____

7. (ii) In your experience as a Supervisee in the PWS, what areas of practice do you discuss

(a) Support

(b) Learning

(c) Accountability

(d) Other Specify _____

8. (i) Do you feel that supervision is beneficial

to you as a Supervisor

(a) Yes (b) No

(c) Don't Know

(d) Not applicable

8. (ii) Do you feel that supervision is beneficial

to you as a Supervisee

(a) Yes (b) No

(c) Don't Know

9. Please state reasons for your answer to Q8

10. Any additional comments on your experience of supervision

Section B

This next section involves giving your opinion on a number of questions, which you will be asked to grade using the following scale.

1 = strongly agree

2 = agree

3 = neither agree or disagree

4 = disagree

5 = strongly disagree

Please tick a box after each question to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement.

1. Staff Supervision is a useful tool in probation practice.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Staff Supervision is centred on case management

1 2 3 4 5

3. Staff Supervision teaches you better ways of coping with difficult situations

1 2 3 4 5

4. Staff Supervision offers useful learning opportunities

1 2 3 4 5

5. Staff Supervision allows you to bring your own issues to the fore

1 2 3 4 5

6. Staff Supervision allows you to give feedback to the PWS

1 2 3 4 5

7. Staff Supervision allows your supervisor to give you feedback

1 2 3 4 5

8. Staff Supervision is beneficial to staff

1 2 3 4 5

9. Staff Supervision is beneficial to clients/service users

1 2 3 4 5

10. Staff Supervision is beneficial to the agency

1 2 3 4 5

11. Staff Supervision is beneficial for working collaboratively

1 2 3 4 5

12. Staff Supervision addresses safety in practice

1 2 3 4 5

13. Staff Supervision addresses accountability in practice

1 2 3 4 5

14. Staff Supervision enables you to reflect on your own practice

1 2 3 4 5

15. Staff Supervision is used to instruct staff

1 2 3 4 5

16. Staff Supervision is used to control staff

1 2 3 4 5

17. Staff Supervision is used to manage staff

1 2 3 4 5

18. Do you see any other benefits in supervision

Section C

This next section asks some general information questions in relation to yourself.

1. Grade (tick one) (a) PWO (b) SPWO

2. Current Status (tick one) (a) Temporary Contract

(b) Permanent Contract

(c) Locum PWO

(d) PWO acting up as SPWO

3. Gender (a) Male (b) Female

4. Age (a) 20-24yrs | (b) 25-29yrs | (c) 30-34yrs |

(d) 35-39yrs | (e) 40-44 yrs | (f) 45-49yrs

|

(g) 50-54yrs | (h) 55-59 yrs | (i) 60 or

over |

5. Length of service (a) Less than 5 yrs (b) 5yrs and < 10yrs

in PWS (c) 10yrs and < 15 yrs (d) 15yrs and < 20yrs

(e) 20yrs and < 25yrs (f) 25yrs and < 30 yrs

(g) 30yrs and < 35yrs (h) 35yrs and < 40yrs

(i) 40yrs or more

6. Current assignment in

PWS (please tick one²) (a) District Court team

(b) Circuit Court team

(c) Youth Justice team (d) Other

7. Length of time at

current grade (a) Less than 1yr (b) 1yr and < 3yrs

(c) 3yrs and < 5yrs (d) 5yrs and < 10yrs

(e) 10yrs and < 15yrs (f) 15yrs and < 20yrs

² Tick more than one if applicable.

- (g) 20yrs and < 25yrs (h) 25yrs and < 30yrs
(i) 30yrs or more

**8. Length of time at
current assignment**

- (a) Less than 1yr (b) 1yr and < 3yrs
(c) 3yrs and < 5yrs (d) 5yrs and < 10yrs
(e) 10yrs and < 15yrs (f) 15yrs and < 20yrs
(g) 20yrs and < 25yrs (h) 25yrs and < 30yrs
(i) 30yrs or more

**9. Qualifications (please
tick as many as apply)**

- (a) BSocSc Degree
(b) Other Primary Degree or Diploma
(c) Postgraduate Diploma (soc science)
(d) Postgraduate Diploma (other than soc science)
(e) Masters Degree (Social Work)
(f) Masters Degree (other than Social Work)
(g) CQSW or NQSW or equivalent
(h) PhD or equivalent
(i) None of these

Section D

**PLEASE WRITE ANY OTHER COMMENTS YOU MAY WISH TO ADD IN
CONNECTION WITH THIS STUDY IN THE SPACE BELOW**

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The interview is confidential and should take about 45 minutes to 1 hour. Is that ok?
Can we start off by you telling me a bit about your self and your position in the PWS?

Background Details:

- Gender
- Age
- Brief work history
- Professional education and training
- Education and training in supervision

Understanding of professional supervision:

What is your understanding of staff supervision in terms of the functions of supervision and the role of supervision for you and the PWS?

- Definition and purpose of supervision
- Role of supervision for you and your organisation
- Main functions within supervision
- The skills that are important in supervision
- Processes involved in supervision
- Knowledge of theories of supervision

Recent experience of supervision:

Could you describe your recent experience of supervision as a recipient?

- Current participation in supervision
- From whom do you obtain advice and support?
- Describe the content and process of your supervision.
- Satisfaction and feelings about current supervision. (what's good, what's less than good and why)
- Current supervisor (relationship, experience, training, qualifications, theoretical perspective, model of practice).
- What factors impact on the quality and quantity of your supervision
- The extent to which current supervision improves the quality of your practice
- The extent to which current supervision helps manage work related stress

Could you describe your recent experience of supervision as a provider?

Expectations of professional supervision:

What do you want from supervision as a recipient?

- Agency support (e.g. policy guidelines for supervision)
- Structures (i.e. frequency, agreements, type of supervision, mode of delivery, recording keeping and access to records, confidentiality and evaluation)
- Supervision provided within the organisation or by external consultants contacted from outside of the organisation
- Supervisor to be line Manager, peer or other choice of supervisor
- What knowledge, skills, experience, qualifications would be ideal for you in a supervisor?
- What roles and responsibilities would you want your supervisor to take
- Supervision practice – what would you want the content of supervision to be?
- What process would you want supervision to use

What do you want from supervision as a provider?

How should supervision operate within the PWS?

- *What would help to achieve what you want in terms of structures, agreements, and training of supervisors?*

Participant's general comments about supervision.

(adapted from O'Donoghue, 1998)

Appendix E

FIRST THREE PAGES OF TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW ON 23RD
MARCH 2005 AT 12NOON INTERVIEW WITH SENIOR PROBATION AND
WELFARE OFFICER, INTERVIEWEE 2.

Participant was thanked for agreeing to be interviewed and told the length of interview and shown the interview guide before we commenced.

Question 1:

Ok, I can hear myself through it so it is okay. Am, well the first question I want to ask you is just if you can tell me a bit about yourself and about your position within the Probation Service.

I'm exactly seven years in the Probation Service. Am, last, almost 2 years as Senior so I have about five years experience as a main grade Officer, three in an Institution for young offenders, two on the circuit court team and then I was promoted so this is my second assignment as a Senior.

Right

So, ah, I'm about, about a year and a quarter, in this current assignment.

So, and you are on the circuit court, district court.

Circuit Court before I was promoted.

Right.

Yeah.

Right, and am, and prior to working in the Probation Service, would you have

I did a year in child psy, I qualified as a Social Worker in the summer of '97.

Ok

So am I worked as a social worker in child psy in Dublin for a year before joining Probation.

So you have, so your professional training is, am is in social work...

I have an NQSW and I have a masters degree in social work

Ok, because you are a senior at present you are obviously providing supervision so

I am providing supervision; I have a team of seven officers,

Right and have you ever received formal training in supervision of, ah, your team, or have you ever attended maybe a day course, or something like that or

I would say that the only training, formal training, I have ever received in supervision is as a practice teacher for taking students

Students..

So that would be the main training I would draw upon as a supervisor.

Right, so we'll move on to the second question

Question 2:

Ok well the next question is just about your professional supervision and your understanding of it. so I suppose in terms of the functions of supervision within the Probation Service and the role of supervision, and its role for you and the role for the service, do you see what the role is or what do you think?

Well I think the, ah, the basic role for supervision in probation I would imagine is to support people because we do deal with quite some disturbed and disturbing people, difficult challenging individuals. Am, and because of our reporting relation to the court as well, I would see my, my primary function in supervising officers is to support them in their work. Am there is also the issue of accountability to the service as well and I need to make sure that you know that people are meeting their standards because I have to evaluate people about 3 times a year.

Right, your staff team, you have to

Yes

Ok

There's an initial evaluation at the start of the year, then there's an interim review, and then there's a review at the end of the year. So you know, that would look at officers learning needs, as well as their, you know, responsibility to the job and to the service. So I'd see that as a two-way process and it can be a good tool for supervision.

So just in summary I'd say, it's about supporting staff, it's about being accountable to the agency and finally about ah, individuals, their own professional development as well

Right, ok,

So I'd see those as the three key parts of supervision

And do you feel there are any particular skills that would be important within supervision, perhaps for yourself or for your supervisees

Skills for me, as a supervisor

Yeah, as a supervisor

Am, basically I think the basic skills would be, basic interviewing skills, I would imagine,

Yeah

Being available for people but recognising that people are individuals on the team.

You know I probably have one of the largest teams you are going to get in probation, it's normally 6. I've a team of 7 so it's identifying and realising that everybody on the team is unique and their approach to their work is different, well you know, not different, it's unique for their own professional needs, their own professional development, they're all are unique.

So it's around being flexible, about being open to people.

Ok and would there be any particular, maybe models of supervision you would draw on or ah would you just kind of base it more on the, your own experience of it and draw on that or...

Well very much around agenda and I would encourage people to bring an agenda to supervision

Right, So written agenda or just their own verbal agenda

Well it could be a written agenda or, and if it isn't written in the end we can also write it down so am, in some ways it kinda puts the agenda on the table. So I would ask people what they have before coming into the meeting what's their agenda, what issues they are bringing to the meeting and then I put in whatever issues I believe need to be addressed as well.

Am alright, that's the second question, thanks, and we'll move on

Question 3:

Could you describe your recent experience of supervision as a recipient of it? I am assuming that you are being supervised as well as giving supervision.

I meet my manager once a month and it's very much around how I'm performing and responsibilities towards my post. It is very much answerable to management – that would be my experience of how I'm supervised.