

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PRACTICE OF GROUP SUPERVISION

Mrs LJV Thabathi (M.A.) is a student, Department of Social Work, University of Pretoria, and Mrs SC Mamasela is a senior lecturer, Department of Social Work, University of Pretoria

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to enhance the appropriate utilisation of group supervision, which was under-utilised in this part of the country (Northern Province). The end product of the study was a proposed framework for the practice of group supervision.

GROUP SUPERVISION DEFINED

Group supervision is a regular meeting of a group of supervisees with a designated supervisor for the purposes of furthering their understanding of themselves as clinicians, or their clients or of service delivery in general, and who are aided in their endeavour by their interactions with each other and with their supervisor in the context of the group process (Bernard & Goodyear, 1989:72).

According to Kadushin (1992:404), group supervision or a supervision conference group is a formed group with a structure, a task and an agenda. It is the use of a group setting to implement the responsibilities of supervision.

For the purpose of this study group supervision is a scheduled supervisory conference between the supervisor and supervisees for the purpose of achieving specific goals. It is an effective vehicle for teaching content which workers need as members of the group. It is valuable because it gives workers the opportunity to grapple together with some of their common problems.

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS GROUP SUPERVISION

Individual supervision affords an opportunity for in-depth discussion and face-to-face contact with the supervisor without distractions, and a possibility to consider a supervisee's needs and personality attributes. Group supervision, on the other hand, fosters a shared pursuit which promotes group involvement and learning, besides diluting hierarchical distinctions. However, in both individual and group supervision a supervisor's role, style, skill and orientation can influence the supervisory process (Parihar, 1983:5).

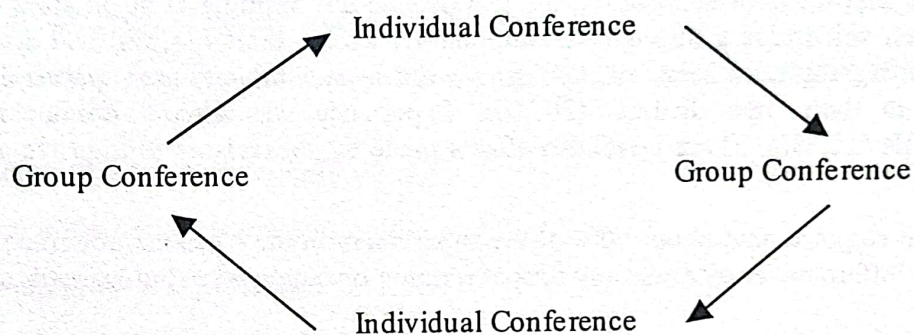
According to Ford and Jones (1987:96-98), group supervision has advantages in that experiences are shared in a way that members can learn from the experiences of others as well as examine concepts from different perspectives. As opposed to individual supervision, in group supervision the supervisees are able to differ with the supervisor and prevent him/her from imposing his/her values, perceptions, methods and prejudices on the supervisee.

Compared to individual supervision, the group setting helps resolve conflict between the supervisor and supervisee in a personality clash. Supervisees find it easier to accept criticism from a fellow member. The group provides the worker with opportunities to occupy other roles in the setting instead of just being a learner. It provides the supervisees with an opportunity to understand group dynamics and to enhance their ability to cope with group situations.

In addition, Hawkins and Shoet (1989:95-97) mention other advantages of group supervision. According to them, it is economical in terms of time, money and expertise. It provides a supportive atmosphere of peers for trainees to learn from each other. It allows the supervisees the benefit of receiving reflections, feedback, sharing and inputs from their colleagues as well as their supervisor.

According to Kadushin (1992:417) there is a circular flow from individual conferences to group conferences to individual conferences (See Figure 1). Since the same supervisor is generally responsible for both the individual and group conferences, the two different procedures can have unity and continuity. The supervisor has the responsibility of determining how each approach can best be used to further the learning needs of individual supervisees.

FIGURE 1
CIRCULAR FLOW OF SUPERVISION CONFERENCES



Method

The ultimate goal of this study was to develop a framework which would help clear the uncertainties of supervisors in applying group supervision as one of the primary methods of supervision.

The study was conducted in the Northern Province. The population consisted of 50 supervisors of the Department of Health and Social Welfare - Social Work Services in all the regions: Lowveld, Northern, Southern, Western, Bushveld, Central and Bushbuckridge.

Mailed questionnaires were used as a research tool and the findings in this study were based on the 30 returned respondent questionnaires.

Of the 30 respondents in the research 26 (86,7%) were females and 4 (13,6%) were males. This finding suggests that social work is predominantly a female profession.

The investigation revealed that most supervisors have been in their supervisory positions for 3-5 years, and the lowest percentage (4%) had assumed a supervisory role for 15 and more years.

TABLE 1
TRAINING ACQUIRED AS SUPERVISOR

THE TRAINING ACQUIRED AS SUPERVISOR	NUMBER OF SUPERVISORS	PERCENTAGE
No training at all	2	6,9
Self-training through literature study	7	24,1
Formal training in an institution e.g. University, College	4	13,8
Self-discovery as a supervisor in your district	6	20,7
In-service training in your organisation	8	24,2
Experience	3	10,3
Other, specify	0	0

Table 1 reveals that 6,9% of supervisors did not receive any training at all in supervision, some (24,1%) did their self-training through literature study, while others (24,2%) had done in-service training in their organisation. It was also evident in the study that there are supervisors who made self-discovery in their own districts (20,7%). Experience was also a teacher in acquiring supervision skills (10,3%). There were also efforts made by supervisors to improve academically (13,8%).

The table above suggests that about 60% of the supervisors in the Northern Province Department of Health and Welfare never received any formal training on supervision but learned on their own.

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE PRACTICE OF GROUP SUPERVISION

TRANSITION FROM SOCIAL WORKER TO SUPERVISOR

It is important for the Department of Health and Social Welfare in the province to keep its human resources position in perspective. This will assist the social worker to be promoted as soon as his or her turn comes as a list will be compiled quarterly to enable the supervisor to know who is due for assessment and promotion.

After identification, the workers need to be evaluated to establish if they are suitable candidates. This could be done as follows:

- Conducting a need assessment;
- Compiling a list of requirements in accordance with the needs assessed, i.e. development of a training schedule;
- Training for all the supervisors on all aspects of supervision. It should not be taken for granted that all social workers can be supervisors, therefore they need to receive training;
- Feedback, evaluation and retraining should also be considered seriously.

It is recommended that group supervision be regarded as an important method of supervision with a structure, membership (size), duration, setting, group atmosphere, agendas, culture, norms, cohesion, boundaries, power and authority well expressed. Districts should be well structured and there should be equal distribution of social workers to be supervised.

Group supervision functions

All the functions of group supervision – for example, administrative, educational, supportive, motivational, personality enrichment and modelling – are very important. The Provincial Department needs to contract institutions or individuals to empower the supervisors in their expected roles and the function which they need to exercise in their day to day contact with their supervisees. Knowledge about the different functions will make supervision more effective and efficient.

The educational function involves a planned, systematised process, based on a teaching-learning cycle which consists of:

- Establishment of areas of **learning need** based on a formal, criteria-based assessment;
- Formulating and organising **content**;
- Planning and implementing teaching-learning **strategies**.

Evaluating the outcome of the process is the next step.

The administrative function is aimed at ensuring a well-structured work environment for the worker. The functions include:

- Recruitment and selection of staff;
- Inducting and placing the worker;
- Work assignment and planning;
- Monitoring and work review, and evaluating work;
- Co-ordination and facilitation;
- Administrative buffer, mediator, advocate and change agent;
- Acting as a channel of communication (Kadushin, 1992:77).

The supportive function is primarily concerned with the psychological well-being of workers in the agency so that they can render an effective and efficient service to clients. It focuses on:

- Decreasing stress that interferes with performance and increasing motivation and intensifying commitment enhancing performance (Kadushin, 1992:228);
- Promoting job satisfaction;
- Reducing stress to counteract burnout (Kadushin, 1992:225-292).

Basic principles for creating a supportive environment include (Munson, 1983:209):

- Facilitating insight;
- Have interest in worker (empathy not sympathy);
- Acceptance: creating a climate permitting free discussion of feelings;
- Autonomy (Holloway & Brager, 1989:112);
- Openness: willingness to share feelings of inadequacy and failure;
- Exploration and mistakes and elaboration by supervisor;

- Administration and educational support by supervisor;
- Good role model.

The motivational function entails the willingness to do something as determined by the action's ability to satisfy some need for the individual (Robbins, 1982:276). Motivation comes both from inside and from outside. It depends on the willingness and ability of the worker to provide services to the clients. The performance of the worker is the result of motivation, ability, and the availability and quality of items necessary for the work assigned. Factors affecting motivation are:

- Characteristics of the person (Abels & Murphy, 1981:97);
- Job characteristics (Lowery, 1985:78);
- Work environment characteristics;
- Supervisor's characteristics.

The modelling function is a process of observational learning; the model acts as a stimulus for similar thoughts, attitudes or behaviours on the part of another individual who observes the model's performance (Kanfer & Goldstein, 1986:66).

It involves copying from another person (Pelsler, 1988:179) or identification with the supervisor, which heightens the workers' motivation to learn (Kadushin, 1992:201). According to Pelsler (1988:205), the four components of the modelling process are: attention, retention (remembering, internalising and mastering skill), motorial reproduction (practice what you observe) and motivation (feedback, positive reinforcement).

The personality enrichment function involves the personalities of both supervisor and the supervisees. The characteristics or traits include: the way one looks, thinks, acts, feels, all of which are products of interacting genetic and environmental influences.

Personality can be enriched by the encouragement of workers when they are ambitious, decisive, optimistic, patient and willing to assume greater responsibilities (Kadushin, 1985:39).

A sound appraisal system is essential. It must be objective and be geared towards improving the supervisees' self-esteem to enable them to work effectively. Supervisees who are recommended for their good performance and are promoted to higher ranks find satisfaction in their work and their performance can be taken to greater heights.

Feedback can help identify the next step in the change process. It clarifies steps already taken and evaluates them to eliminate possible barriers to goal achievement (Freeman, 1985:5).

Personalities can be enriched through orientation of supervisees, individual or group supervision, consultation, in-service training, lectures, case presentation, role playing, self-development, game exercises, problem solving, staff meetings, field trips, exchanges, research, informal social functioning, periodic individual evaluation and continuous education.

METHODS OF GROUP SUPERVISION

The discussion method or self-report is a component of all other methods and is a primary means by which learning is established as having taken place (Ford & Jones, 1987:83). Supervisees in the group relate to the supervisor what has been happening in their different work situations. Feedback is then received not only from the supervisor but also from peers. The supervisees are then empowered with a multiplicity of ideas to handle situations that were previously difficult to handle.

Role playing and modelling: Role playing is a method for learning that enables supervisees to practice their social work skills in a simulated situation. Emphasis is on social work skills learned during the role playing and not on the acting skills. Modelling provides supervisees with more relevant clues than verbal description. It enables supervisees to imitate a variety of skills.

Co-working and co-therapy allow for joint discussions. Direct experience is gained by both supervisor and supervisee. The supervisee feels protected by the presence of the supervisor. The use of various supervision methods and techniques enhances the quality of supervision. The choice of any supervision procedure goes hand in hand with the supervisees' learning goals.

AIDS IN GROUP SUPERVISION

Documentation and Reports: Written records have great value. There should be a particular recording format. This enhances the evaluation process of the supervisor for individual supervisees in the group. It is essential for the supervisor to be sensitive to unique levels of functioning of each supervisee.

Audio and videotapes make it possible to re-enact what may not be directly observable. Retrieval of both visual and aural cues is essential. The supervisor is afforded the opportunity to observe directly *in absentia*.

PHASES OF GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

Each group supervision session goes through a number of phases: the initial encounter, the middle and the final phase. Supervision sessions provide the formal context for teaching and learning. Different authors see the stages differently. For the sake of this study, the research suggests the following six stages.

Entry phases

House rules should always be set at the beginning of each and every session. These may include switching-off of cell-phones, punctuality, respect of others' views, use of languages, and any expectations for the day or session or sessions to follow.

Empathy is the key for this stage. The goal is to sensitise oneself to the concerns, feelings and issues not so easily communicated. A rapport is built up between the supervisor and the group and among group members themselves. It is a stage where people can get to know each other. They are enabled to identify group leaders and can know whom to associate with. A sense of basic trust is built. This stage marks the cornerstone of the whole session, as its success means success of the whole session. It requires a lot of planning and preparation for the supervisor to facilitate the process as well as the active participation of the members.

Descriptive stage by the group members

The group members play an active role. The supervisor is less active during this stage. The supervisees are now less anxious. They may fluctuate between dependence and autonomy and between being over-confident and overwhelmed. Hawkins and Shohet (1989:49) believe it is characterised by supervisees being anxious or insecure about their role and their own ability to fulfil it, lacking insight but also highly motivated. The supervisor needs to encourage supervisees, withholding criticism and avoiding reinforcement of any poor practice. Thoughtless questions should be avoided by the supervisors.

Clarification stage by the supervisor

The focus is on clarification of facts. The supervisor plays a vital role. This stage is characterised by repetition, reflection and probing. It is the supervisor who attempts to clarify or explain by facilitating the communication process. The supervisees are less active but highly attentive. The aim of this stage is to establish with the supervisees that the supervisor has understood the situation as it is seen by the supervisees and has understood the work they were doing (Ford & Jones, 1987:71).

Evaluation stage

This is a two-way process involving both the supervisor's and the supervisees' evaluations. The supervisor has to analyse information provided by supervisees. Evaluation is to be done first by supervisees to get their opinion and assistance where possible. The focus is on the professional views of supervisees. They have to refer to factual information and the process (how they went about helping their clients). The success of the intervention should be evaluated. Confirmation, acknowledgement and credit should be given to supervisees. In case of differences between the supervisor and supervisees, the evaluation should be done by the supervisor convincingly.

Implementation stage

During this phase the supervisees demonstrate their independence. They have to plan what to do next, not in an authoritarian way but democratically. They should be given an opportunity to indicate their intentions. The supervisor has to reply to and confirm by convincingly motivating why the process has to be undertaken or not.

Ending / Termination stage

Some groups are time-limited, other reach this phase on their own in the learning process. Termination should be planned and should not come as a surprise. Both parties must be ready to terminate. Each session should be terminated in a positive atmosphere. Termination may mean detailing planning for the next session or outgrowing the supervision process. According to Fox (1983:195), tasks in termination include determining when to start terminating, evaluate progress, work out conflict, work through ambivalence, discuss progress, plan to maintain gains and continue growth, and to let go.

It is important to note that subsequent phases are dependent on the previous ones and that there are some overlaps in terms of activities and characteristics amongst the different phases. What is important during the supervision session is to address problems, concerns and difficulties that the supervisees experience.

GROUP PROCEDURES

Time

There is no standard length of time recommended for either treatment or task group meetings. Meeting length should vary according to the needs of the group members (Toseland & Rivas, 1995:166). A session should at least last for an hour and may be extended to two hours when the need arises.

Frequency

Frequency of group meetings should be considered when contracting for group procedures. In general, weekly sessions are recommended for treatment groups, although this does not preclude meeting more often when needed. The frequency of task group meetings depends on the requirements of the task and any time limits or deadlines that need to be considered. The supervisor must also consider how much time each worker can devote to the group (Toseland & Rivas, 1995:166).

Contracting

Contracts usually result from the dynamic interaction of the supervisor and supervisees. The contracting can be for group procedures or for individual member goals. Even though verbal and non-verbal (written) contracts can be used, written contracts are more effective because they help to clarify the group's purpose.

Contract aspects may include: the duration and frequency of group sessions/meetings, attendance requirements, procedures to ensure confidentiality, time, place, meeting places, feedback and evaluation procedures, and the role of supervisors, group members and group leader.

Agendas

Agenda items can be divided into three categories: **information, discussion and action**. The agenda should be accompanied by attachments to explain the agenda items. They should be given to all group members at least four days before the meeting to enable them to familiarise themselves with the business for discussion during the meeting (Toseland & Rivas, 1995:189).

It is also highly recommended that the agenda be drawn up together with the members in the meeting prior to the actual session. Members should also be given the opportunity to make additional pressing items. It is also advisable to stick to time limits in order to finish all the items on the agenda. Confirmation of the agenda before the session begins gives all participants the hope that their items will also be entertained and also facilitates active participation and involvement.

Conclusion

A group supervision session is a good vehicle for teaching content which workers need as members of a group. It is valuable because it gives workers the opportunity to grapple together with some of their common problems.

Group supervision can be a valuable and rewarding experience, but a positive outcome is highly dependent upon the way it is presented, set up and carried out. It requires more preparation and organisation than is realised by supervisors.

According to Kadushin (1985:395–396), group supervision facilitates an attitude of mutuality among members of the unit which carried over into the interaction outside the group session. The opportunity for the sharing of common problems encountered on the job is, in itself, a therapeutically reassuring contribution to individual morale. Through group conferences the individual supervisee develops a sense of belonging to a unit in the agency, a sense of group and professional identity, of group cohesion.

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