ESSS Outline

Newly qualified social workers, supervision and child protection

Annelies Allcock
8 April, 2019

Introduction

This Outline explores how newly qualified social workers can be supported in their first year, with a focus on effective supervision and preparation for child protection practice.

About the evidence presented below

We searched for academic research and grey literature using a wide range of concepts covering: newly qualified social workers, social work education, social work skills, and supervision. We concentrated on academic research in the field of social work in relevant databases (e.g. ASSIA), as well as the Iriss National Social Services Search and SCIE Social Care Online.

Our search revealed recent interest in both the experiences of newly qualified social workers and the role of social work supervision. We selected key examples primarily from Europe and Oceania, however research in these area is ongoing. Of particularly relevance is the five year longitudinal study of NQSWs in Scotland currently being conducted by Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Dundee. The Scottish Social Services Council is also piloting a supported and assessed year for NQSWs. The forthcoming evaluation of this pilot will provide invaluable insight into this topic.

Accessing resources

We have provided links to the materials referenced in the summary. Some materials are paywalled, which means they are published in academic journals and are only available with a subscription. Some of these are available through the The Knowledge Network with an NHS Scotland OpenAthens username. The Knowledge Network offers accounts to everyone who helps provide health and social care in Scotland in conjunction with the NHS and Scottish Local Authorities, including many in the third and independent sectors. You can register here. Where resources are identified as 'available through document delivery', these have been provided to the

original enquirer and may be requested through NHS Scotland's [fetch item service](#) (subject to eligibility).

Where possible we identify where evidence is published open access, which means the author has chosen to publish their work in a way that makes it freely available to the public. Some are identified as author repository copies, which means the author has made a version of the otherwise paywalled publication available to the public. Other referenced sources are pdfs and websites that are available publicly.

Background

The transition from student to social worker is a complex process, and the first year after qualifying is widely recognised as being extremely important for social workers ([Grant et al. 2014](#)). The success of this transition depends on developing practitioner competence in key elements of a role, combined with a sense of confidence in their own ability ([Carpenter et al. 2015](#)). Newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) require quality induction, supervision and other workload management strategies to support the transition to social work practice ([Hunt et al. 2017](#)). Findings from Tham and Lynch ([2017](#)) illustrate the vulnerability of new practitioners, as well as emphasising the importance of workplace induction and the provision of adequate support in their new professional roles.

It is widely accepted that learning on the job is a key component of developing social work practice skills; as stated by Jansen (2018) "[t]he full extent of being a professional is not possible to understand unless you are fully engaged in the professional conduct with all the responsibilities it entails". Political pressures often mean that employers need NQSWs to practice effectively with a large number of cases, as soon as possible ([Carpenter et al. 2015](#)). The development of dedicated programmes to support NQSWs in their first year aim to both support workplace learning and

to quickly increase capacity. The introduction of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) in England was shown to improve the self-efficacy of participants (Carpenter et al. 2015), however the programme is not without its limitations. An early evaluation of the ASYE in adult services identified key issues related to workload management, protected development time, and the availability of suitably experienced supervisors (Berry-Lound & Rowe 2013).

Identity and practice

Social work education in Scotland has been described as "generic in content and purpose" (Grant 2017), and specialisms are developed in employment through practice. While many NQSWs experience political and organisational pressures to be "frontline ready", both in expertise and emotional intelligence, the literature illustrates an ongoing process of learning and development (Beddoe et al. 2018, Hunt et al. 2017). As stated by Beddoe et al. (2018) social work students "were remarkably consistent in their belief that graduating was the start of their lifelong learning in their social work career, therefore not the end of education".

NQSWs enter a challenging professional world that has become increasingly characterised by managerialism, insecure employment arrangements, and generic job roles (Moorhead 2019). In addition to adjusting to a new workplace, graduates often find themselves navigating new tensions related to their professional identity (Hunt et al. 2017). Internal pressures, such as a lack of visibility in multidisciplinary teams (Moorhead 2019), as well external influences, for example, public criticism of social work practice (Hunt et al. 2017), can generate uncertainty in an already uncertain time. Over half of the respondents in an ongoing study on the experiences of NQSWs in Scotland identified a lack of respect and value from other professionals as a key obstacle to their developing professional identity (Grant et al. 2017). Many individuals work hard to counteract these obstacles, and professional values, standards and ethics are seen as a core component of overcoming these barriers (Hunt et al. 2017, Moorhead 2019, Yu et al. 2016). However, recent

findings show that it is increasingly difficult for social workers to engage with these values in an environment where they are hampered by a lack of resources, high case and administrative loads and inadequate opportunities for structured reflective practice (Ravalier and Boichat 2018).

Fitting in to their new workplace seems to be a key concern for NQSWs, and evidence points to pressures to amalgamate quickly. For example, in a three year longitudinal study of NQSWs in Aotearoa New Zealand, respondents reported they were considered to be fully competent practitioners by their second year of practice, carrying a full workload with restricted time for critical reflection and analysis (Hunt et al. 2017). A study conducted by Manthorpe et al. (2014) found that the workplace context encountered by NQSWs had considerable bearing on whether they feel appropriately prepared, or not for their work. A more recent study from Aotearoa New Zealand found that social work students felt "cautiously ready" for practice, with many feeling apprehensive about whether they would be able to meet the needs of a new agency and its service users (Beddoe et al. 2018). In particular, there was concern about employer expectations, high caseload numbers, stretched agencies, and unreasonable targets.

A study looking at NQSWs in criminal justice roles in Scotland found that NQSWs who arrive at their new roles with pre-employment experience of the setting (i.e. through practice placements) are more likely to report being prepared for practice (Grant 2017). Colleagues are also seen as a valued source of informal help and support during the first year of practice (Grant et al. 2014). Preliminary findings from an ongoing longitudinal study of NQSWs in Scotland suggest that support from other workers is "a primary source for professional advice, guidance and emotional support" (Grant et al. 2017).

Supervision

Due to the complex nature of personal and professional demand experienced by NQSWs, graduates require supervisory support not only to expand their confidence in practitioner knowledge and skills, but also for the emotional dimensions of the journey (Beddoe et al. 2018). Good graduate supervision is

also shown to affect NQSWs engagement with their work ([Manthorpe et al. 2015](#)). Beddoe et al. ([2018](#)) suggest embedding reflective supervision that is separate from case management to "ensure that there is time and space allowed for safe reflection on practice challenges". There is some evidence that good supervision practices are already being facilitated in the UK; NQSWs recently reported that their supervision was more frequent, longer, and more helpful when compared with more experienced workers ([Wilkins & Antonopoulou 2019](#)).

Supervision in social work has been receiving increased research attention, and there are signs of a shift from procedural models to appreciation of more reflective approaches of supervision ([Patterson & Whincup 2018](#)) . While some studies suggest that it may be possible to balance these priorities ([McPherson 2016](#)), there is a growing discourse calling for the two roles - manager and supervisor - to be separated in order to preserve the supportive function of supervision ([Bartoli & Kennedy 2015](#)), and evidence from practice suggests that social workers could benefit from from this split of duties.

A recent study conducted by Wilkens et al. ([2017](#)) found that case discussions in child and family social work operated primarily as a mechanism for management oversight and provided limited opportunities for reflection, emotional support or critical thinking. Similarly, in research looking at NQSWs in criminal justice roles, Grant ([2017](#)) found that disproportionate emphasis is placed on workload management during professional supervision sessions where learning needs and emotions are often underplayed. A survey of 315 social workers from UK local authorities found that supervision primarily provided management oversight and accountability, however the small number of practitioners who received regular group supervision and those who received supervision more frequently said it helped with a much broader range of things ([Wilkins & Antonopoulou 2019](#)). Alternative models of supervision might also benefit this group; the action learning model, for example, has been suggested to support critically reflective practice ([Patterson 2017](#)).

Child protection

Working effectively with populations that experience various kinds of disadvantage and trauma requires that child and family practitioners have highly diverse and sophisticated knowledge and skill sets (Frederico et al. 2016) Guidance from the Scottish Social Services Council (2016) outlines requirements for NQSWs to dedicate at least five days to training and learning focussed on identifying, assessing and managing risk to vulnerable groups.

In addition to formal training, some evidence highlights the importance of a learning environment that gradually introduces graduates to more and more advanced aspects of the professional conduct (Jansen 2018). Research conducted by Jansen (2018) also found that NQSWs in child protection services reported a lack of knowledge related to their work. While this is related to lack of experience, they may also lack information about progress in casework, procedures for co-operation with other professions or juridical matters. This is consistent with findings from Grant et al. (2014) showing that NQSWs ranked knowledge of legislation and procedures as being the most useful information during their first year of practice.

The importance of supervision in child protection is also emphasised in the evidence we reviewed (Bartoli and Kennedy 2015). Given the focus on supervision for supporting NQSWs, questions are raised about whether it is fair, or even possible, for supervisors to be responsible for the development of new graduates, safeguarding children, and the administrative duties required by their organisation. There is a significant gap in the literature around the support required for individuals to perform all three of these functions, or whether there are other approaches that could be adopted by workplaces to ease these demands. Patterson (2017), suggests that the action learning model can support critically reflective practice for both supervisors and supervisees, which could potentially address some of the constraints currently faced by supervisors.

Evidence

Preparing for practice

This section draws together a broad range of evidence looking at preparedness for practice, professional identity, and working conditions. The literature illustrates the complex and overlapping factors that influence the experiences of NQSWs. Good supervision ([Grant et al. 2014](#)), the support of colleagues ([Grant 2017](#)) and protected caseloads ([Hunt et al. 2017](#)) are frequently offered as solutions to reduce these pressures, however the demands on both supervisors and agencies make these challenging to implement.

Beddoe L et al. (2018) [Readiness to practice social work in Aotearoa New Zealand : perceptions of students and educators](#), *Social Work Education*, **37(8), pp.955-967 (paywalled)**

This study looked at curriculum documents from 8 social work programmes, and the authors conducted focus group interviews with 35 students and 27 social work educators. Both final year students and their educators had doubts around their readiness to practice, with students raising concerns around the complexities they may encounter, such as the demands of supporting service users with multiple multifaceted issues. Students and educators were also worried about the resources and climate of the organisations they were entering, particularly high caseload numbers, stretched agencies, and unreasonable targets. The authors conclude that the profession in Aotearoa New Zealand should explore the benefits that could be afforded in a programme to support new graduates.

Berry-Lound D & Rowe V (2013) [Evaluation of the implementation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) for Skills for Care](), HOST Policy Research (pdf)

This is an independent evaluation of the ASYE, which involved a combination of desk research, online surveys for both NQSWs and supervisors participating in the programme, and case studies from selected employers. The report covers a wide range of different elements of the ASYE, including promotion, delivery and assessment as well as identifying key benefits and issues with the programme. Overall, the main benefit of the programme identified by NQSWs and supervisors was the development of professional confidence. Key issues included workload management, protected development time and training provision for supervisors.

Carpenter J et al. (2015) [Developing the confidence and competence of newly qualified child and family social workers in England : outcomes of a national programme](), British Journal of Social Work, 45(1), pp.153–176 (paywalled)

During the three years of this study, data were collected from over 2000 social workers who had participated in the NQSW programme. The authors employed a longitudinal repeated measures design with three cohorts of NQSWs as participants, who were compared with a 'contrast' group. The aim was to assess how self-efficacy changes over the course of a programme designed explicitly to enhance the confidence and competence of NQSWs. The findings suggest that NQSW programme participants gave higher total self-efficacy ratings when compared to the contrast group. Within the programme participant group, the following observations were made:

- Older NQSWs tended to be more confident
- Prior experience was associated with higher self-efficiency at the start of the programme, but this had largely disappeared by the end
- Role clarity was a strong predictor of self-efficacy
- Job satisfaction was also associated with self-efficacy

Grant S (2017) [Learning on the job? Exploring first-year experiences of criminal justice social workers in Scotland](), *Probation Journal*, 64(10, pp.33-49 (open access)

This article reports the results of a survey of 32 NQSWs working in a criminal justice role in Scotland. The findings suggest that new staff felt well-prepared for practice, but many felt employers failed to provide adequate support and development opportunities. Key points include:

- The majority placed significant value on support and guidance from colleagues and peers, often in preference to what they got from managers
- Overall experiences of induction and supervision were reported with significant variation across Scotland
- For many NQSWs, supervision sessions seemed to be dominated by over-emphasis on caseload management, rather than professional development
- Many NQSWs appeared to receive few structured opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through activities and training designed for their status as degree-level graduates
- For many NQSWs, the emotional toll of working with offenders was significantly underplayed by social work managers

Grant S et al. (2014) [Readiness for practice of newly qualified social workers: evaluation study for the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)](), Glasgow Caledonian University (pdf)

The report comprises a systematic literature review as well as the findings of an online survey of 572 newly qualified social workers in Scotland, and subsequent focus groups. The results related to readiness for practice show that NQSWs felt most confident around areas of inter-professional working and accountability, and felt least confident in aspects of managing resources and recommending outcome-oriented action. Key findings related to support in the first year of employment include:

- Almost all respondents felt they benefited greatly from good supervision when it was provided and where it dealt with more than the day to day case management issues
- Many participants felt that shadowing more senior colleagues was hugely beneficial to the development of skills needed by professional social workers
- Inconsistencies in the frequency and quality of both supervision and induction were found across Scotland
- A significant proportion (around 37%) of NQSWs stated that their workload was not protected, however the majority of respondents (54.1%) received some form of protection from particular areas of social work practice such as child protection, sex offenders and adult protection

Grant S et al. (2017) [Newly qualified social workers in Scotland: a five-year longitudinal study](), *Scottish Social Services Council* (pdf)

This interim report presents findings from the first stage of a five- year longitudinal study exploring the experiences of NQSWs as they progress in their careers. Methods of data collection include annual repeat-measure online questionnaires, focus groups, in-depth interviews and participant observation. Key findings include:

- Around 36% of participants in this study reported having a protected caseload, and the majority of NQSWs said they felt workloads were manageable and appropriate to their level of expertise
- The majority of NQSWs who participated in this study (76%) received some for of formal induction, which might comprise: shadowing and observation; visits to internal colleagues and external agencies; corporate induction; and reading organisational policies and procedures
- The majority of NQSWs report regular experiences of supervision, typically on a monthly basis, described by participants as practical

(96%), supportive (81%), and focussed on workload management
(72%)
- NQSWs felt that professional identity could be strengthened through improved public understanding of and value for the social work role, improved inter-professional understanding and value, and improved opportunities for professional development and career progression

Hunt S et al. (2017) [Transition to professional social work practice: the first three years](), *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 19(2), pp.139-154 (author copy)

This article presents the findings of a longitudinal research project that followed the employment outcomes of one cohort of Bachelor of Social Work graduates in Aotearoa New Zealand for three years. An anonymous, semi-structured, online survey was used to provide both quantitative and qualitative data. The results show that by the second year of practice, these respondents were taking on the workload of an experienced social work practitioner with widely varied levels of support. By the end of their third year in practice, they reported that they had found little opportunity to apply their critical analytical academic skills to consider the wider social system in practice. Further, the graduates' confidence in their cultural competencies also gradually decreased over the three-year period. The findings also suggest that when organisations invest in structured individualised induction, quality supervision, ongoing CPD, and effective mentoring, the payoff is social workers who feel valued and emotionally equipped to withstand the pressures of practice.

Moorhead B (2019) [Transition and adjustment to professional identity as a newly qualified social worker](), *Australian Social Work,* 72(2), pp.206-218 (paywalled)

This research project was undertaken with 17 newly qualified social workers in Australia, and involved three in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant across the first 12 months post qualification period. The findings revealed that the participants were not only focused on learning how

to perform the duties and functions of their job-role, but also how to locate and enact an overarching professional identity within their organisational setting. The participants focused on how professional values and standards influence who they are, how they practice, and also how professional and personal identities relate to each other.

Ravalier J & Boichat C (2018) [UK social workers: working conditions and wellbeing](#), Bath Spa University (pdf)

This report presents the findings of a survey of 3421 social workers, including 1953 respondents working in child and family services. While participants were at all stages of their career, there are a number of recommendations to improve working conditions in order to reduce stress and staff turnover in the workplace. These include:

- More social work staff to help with caseloads, or, alternatively, more cases which are co-assigned between social workers and support staff
- Social workers should be co-assigned to working the most difficult cases, which may be an effective way to support NQSWs
- A reduction in administrative tasks by reducing the amount of paperwork, and reducing the repetition of paperwork, for which IT support and resources can play an important and useful role
- Greater support for social workers from within their employing organisations, such as providing reflective supervision
- Hot desking, while sometimes necessary due to lack of space and the transient nature of the role, is still a distinct stressor and workers should be offered a fixed desk space where practicable

Tham P & Lynch D (2017) '[Lost in transition?'– newly educated social workers' reflections on their first months in practice](#), *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(30), pp.400-411 (open access)

The present longitudinal study follows 12 Swedish social work graduates from university and over their first four years in practice. The study provides an insight into how newly educated practitioners may experience the transition from university to the world of work and considers how they can be prepared and supported to meet the challenges of practice within contemporary work contexts. The students were first interviewed just prior to leaving university. This paper captures the reflections of these students after four months in practice. Feelings of unpreparedness, unorganised, or even 'chaotic' perceptions of the workplace and uncertainty about the future were emergent themes, particularly among new practitioners employed in social services. The findings illustrate the vulnerability of these new practitioners and the importance of workplace induction and the provision of adequate support in their new professional roles.

Yu N et al. (2016) [How good is good enough ? exploring social workers ' conceptions of preparedness for practice](#), *Social Work Education*, 35(4), pp.414–429 (paywalled)

This study examined the question: 'How do social work practitioners construct preparedness for practice?' The responses of 25 survey participants suggest that social work practitioners generally expect new graduates to have 'moderate'-level skills across the different practice areas, although a small but notable number of supervisors expect new graduates to have general work preparedness at a 'developed' level. In addition to having a clear understanding of and identification with professional values, purpose and ethics, the eight interview participants spoke of the importance of empathy and the ability to work within a multidisciplinary organisational environment.

Supporting supervision

This section explores the tensions between managerial and supervisory duties in contemporary social work supervision, and how it relates to new social workers. Examples from child and family services contexts are included in a separate section below.

Kettle M (2015) [Achieving effective supervision](#), Insight 30, Iriss (website)

Key points from this evidence summary include:

- Supervision is an essential component of practice in social work and social care, not just for frontline staff, but at all levels in an organisation
- Effective supervision provides a safe space for workers to reflect on their practice, as well as to develop skills and knowledge
- The delivery of supervision is heavily dependent on the organisational context
- While the evidence base on supervision is limited, the available evidence points to good supervision being associated with job satisfaction, organisational commitment and retention of staff
- The dynamics of supervision can be extremely complex, and delivering effective supervision is a skilled task which requires support and training for supervisors

Manthorpe J et al. (2014) [The 'making' of social workers: findings from interviews with managers of newly qualified social workers](#), *Practice*, 26(2), pp.97-111 (paywalled)

This paper reports on interviews with 23 line managers which asked about their experiences of managing NQSWs. The findings highlight the difficulties of managing teams with high proportions of NQSWs, and identify the impact of low staffing levels, creating a vicious circle of lack of support and high turnover. The interviews also suggest the value of a social work approach to management, in which working with NQSWs and indeed more experienced

social workers is seen to require the execution of social work skills, both in understanding and supporting the work, but more specifically in supporting new social workers.

Manthorpe J et al. (2015) [Content and purpose of supervision in social work practice in England: views of newly qualified social workers, managers and directors](#), *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(1), pp.52-68 (author copy)

This paper uses data from a longitudinal study in England, which involved three online surveys of NQSWs, an online survey of directors, and face-to-face interviews with 23 social work managers. Findings suggest a tapering of supervision for social workers as they become more experienced, however the overall level of supervision appears to be both limited and variable. NQSWs appreciated supervision from managers, and this affects their engagement with their work. Managers reported pressures of time in providing sufficient supervision, and it appeared to be focused mainly on case management and performance issues, rather than developing reflective or reflexive practice, or helping to put theory into practice.

O'Donoghue K et al. (2018) [Constructing an evidence-informed social work supervision model](#), *European Journal of Social Work*, 21(3), pp.348-358 (author copy)

This paper reviews research articles on social work supervision published from 1958 to 2015, and proposes an evidence-informed social work supervision model based on this evidence. A total of 130 articles were analysed with regard to how they may be applied to supervisory practice. From this analysis, five key areas were identified:

- Supervision consists of administrative, educative, and support functions, and the ways these functions are enacted depends on the context
- When supervisors help supervisees with their work and professional development as well as provide them with social and emotional

support, they are more likely to be satisfied and effective in their work, committed to the organisation, and be well psychologically

- A supervision relationship that is characterised by trust support, honesty, openness, the ability to collaboratively navigate power relations as well as respect for social and cultural differences is important
- The supervision process tends to be formal and mirrors the social work helping process
- Focused attention on the client's problems in supervision is more likely to result in better client outcomes

Patterson F (2017) [A good fit: the contribution of action learning to supervision practice](#), *Social Work Education*, 36(1), pp.48-61 (author copy)

This article highlights the potential benefits of integrating action learning sets within post-qualifying training for managers. The structures and principles of action learning translate effectively into both group and peer supervision, and the dual benefits of this approach are identified as:

- Supervisors can use this approach to support critically reflective practice, bolstering the developmental and supportive functions which are sometimes squeezed within line management supervision
- Supervisors can also commit to their own professional development and reflective management practice by engaging in action learning with a group of peers

Patterson F & Whincup H (2018) [Making the transition from practitioner to supervisor: reflections on the contribution made by a post-qualifying supervisory course](#), European Journal of Social Work, 21(3), pp.415-427 (author copy)

This paper highlights some learning points from a post-qualifying module in professional supervision, identifying both intended and unanticipated benefits of the course, which include:

- Time and space to think about the different elements of supervision, and to consider how these translate into day to day practice
- Opportunity to explore the complexity of the supervisory task, while learning from and with peers, which can be an important part of making the transition in professional role and identity
- Increase feelings of confidence and competence for supervisors, including a renewed commitment to reflection and returned focus on people who use services

Wilkins D & Antonopoulou V (2019) [What does supervision help with? A survey of 315 social workers in the UK](#), *Practice*, **31(1), pp.21-40 (author copy)**

This article reports on a survey of 315 social workers from UK local authorities. While most respondents reported that supervision helps primarily with management oversight and accountability, the results also highlight the benefits of more frequent supervision and regular group supervision. Of the 315 practitioners who responded to the survey, 49 were NQSWs, and the results show that this group rated their supervision as more helpful when compared with more experienced workers. However, NQSWs also reported more frequent and longer supervision sessions than more experienced colleagues, suggesting that NQSWs may feel their supervision is more helpful simply because it is more frequent.

Child protection

Supervision, particularly in the context of child protection, is sometimes seen as both the 'fall guy' for all that is wrong in social work and as well as the all-encompassing 'holy grail' to fix it ([Bartoli and Kennedy 2015](#)). However, there is limited evidence linking supervision with outcomes, either for practice or for children and families ([Wilkens et al. 2017](#)). The evidence below looks at how both practitioners and managers experience supervision, and also includes an initial investigation on how supervision can influence outcomes for families (see [Wilkins et al. 2018](#)).

Bartoli A & Kennedy S (2015) [Tick if applicable: a critique of a national UK social work supervision policy](#), *Practic*e, 27(4), pp.239-250 (paywalled)

This conceptual paper looks at the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) supervision policy from 2011 in the context of debates about social work and supervision in child protection practice. Key points include:

- Child protection social work is characterised by uncertainty and risks, and therefore, social workers need supervision that nurtures them through the emotional density they may experience
- The quality of supervision is dependent on a safe and mutually respectful relationship where practitioners can address their emotional wellbeing in a private, safe and confidential place and where time is given to learning, development and guidance
- Supervision as a social work practice goes beyond a tick box exercise and can only function well when all the systems of administration, education and support are skilfully brought together by one person

Frederico M et al. (2016) [A consortium approach for child and family practice education](#), *Social Work Education*, 35(7), pp.780-793 (paywalled)

This article looks at an Australian child protection course designed for frontline practitioners with approximately two years' experience in the field. This course was designed to facilitate access to experts working across direct

practice, management and leadership and policy-making context in child protection. Graduates reported feeling an improved sense of professional identity and hopefulness, improved skill levels and greater capacity for inter-professional working and knowledge sharing as a result of their involvement in their courses.

Jansen A (2017) ['It's so complex!': understanding the challenges of child protection work as experienced by newly graduated professionals](#), *The British Journal of Social Work*, 48(6), pp.1524–1540 (open access)

The study focuses on the daily lives of newly graduated professionals in child protection services. Twelve graduates agreed to take part and these were interviewed three times over a period of fifteen months. The first interviews took place within a year after graduation. Four aspects of the participants' accounts of their daily work were found to be prominent:

- Carrying out many different tasks during a day was common and a single case would involve a multiplicity of chores; the number, speed and entanglement of the tasks sometimes seem to be overwhelming
- Uncertainty and unpredictability was a part of daily work; in child protection services it is often difficult to figure out both what is going on and what the best response is to what is going on
- Multiple tasks, roles and concerns, joined with uncertainty, makes evaluation and decision making difficult, participants reported a lack of consensus among colleagues, between social workers and their clients, and between the professions involved in a case
- Emotional strains were a common experience, including feelings of great responsibility, and fear of making the wrong decisions, in addition to potential resistance from clients

McPherson L et al. (2016) [Safety as a fifth dimension in supervision: stories from the frontline](#), *Australian Social Work*, **69(1), pp.67-79 (author copy)**

This article discusses the findings from in-depth semistructured interviews with 10 practitioners and 10 supervisors in Australian child and family practice settings. Eight core themes emerged from the interviews, which were:

- Overwhelmingly, both supervisees and supervisors talked about the need for safety within the context of a professional supervisory relationship
- Proactively addressing the emotional impact of work and empowering practitioners was also considered vital for effective supervision
- An effective supervisory relationship was found to extend supervisee learning by promoting safe, critical reflection on practice and performance
- Modelling leadership behaviours was emphasised by supervisors in conjunction with self- regulation and self-awareness
- Values such as integrity and honesty, and a commitment to social justice and natural justice principles contributed to the creation of a safe, mutually-respectful supervisory relationship
- There is the potential for tensions to arise between different functions of supervision, and conflicting demands may make it difficult to keep the child at the centre of the supervisory relationship
- Organisational policy and culture had a significant bearing on perceptions of supervisions
- Participants felt that the wider community lacked understanding of the complexity of work in child and family practice, particularly around the issues faced by vulnerable children and families

Radey M & Stanley L (2018) [**"Hands on" versus "empty": supervision experiences of frontline child welfare workers**](#)**, Children and Youth Services, 91, pp.128-136 (paywalled)**

This study included interviews from selected respondents from The Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF), a quantitative, longitudinal, cohort study of newly-hired frontline child welfare workers. 38 social workers took part in interviews, and approximately half of the respondents considered their current supervisory experiences as "hands on" and cooperative while the remaining half, conversely, described them as "empty" and detached. Findings reflect interactions in four domains: supervisor availability and approachability; consistency of provided information; level of micromanagement; and level of support. Workers, regardless of their experiences, expected supervisors to be available, knowledgeable, micromanagers, and supportive.

Saltiel D (2017) [**Supervision: a contested space for learning and decision making**](#)**, *Qualitative Social Work*, 16(4), pp.533-549 (author copy)**

This article presents some findings from interviews with social workers and their managers drawn from a wider study on how social workers make decisions in child protection work. They suggest that supervision is an important site for evaluating practitioner accounts and thereby constructing knowledge and making decisions about cases against a background of uncertainty and complexity. However, the ways in which these processes were negotiated shed light on supervision as a complex social process with a range of unofficial, tacit functions, embedded in the webs of social actions and exchanges that created and sustained the identities of the practitioners and their teams. What also emerged were the complex skills experienced supervisors developed in challenging and refining practitioner accounts, skills which novice supervisors struggled.

Wilkens D et al. (2017) [What happens in child and family social work supervision?](#) *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(2), pp.942-951 (open access)

This study used an action research method to capture what happens in supervision case discussions between child and family social workers and their managers. A series of four workshops were undertaken with 11 managers from a local authority, in which they identified their supervision priorities as "child- focused, reflective, analytical, emotionally supportive and helpful in terms of practice". However, an analysis of 34 recorded supervision sessions from these managers suggested that the support they currently provide is none of these things; case discussions operated "primarily as a mechanism for management oversight". The authors suggest that this kind of supervision is not the result of poor individual practice, but is produced by a particular organisational context.

Wilkins D et al. (2018) [A golden thread? The relationship between supervision, practice, and family engagement in child and family social work](#), *Child & Family Social Work*, 23, pp.494-503 (paywalled)

This research used paired observations of group supervision and family meetings alongside interviews with parents, to explore the link between supervision, practice, and engagement. 21 families participated in observations of family visits, and of these, 19 gave consent for their family visit to be audio recorded as well as observed. The authors observed a range of skill levels within the supervision discussions and in the meetings with families. Parents reported generally high levels of satisfaction with the service and in relation to their individual worker. But more importantly, the authors found a "golden thread" between certain elements of supervision, more skilful practice, and improved parental engagement. The conditions associated with improved engagement were: respectful curiosity; child and family focus; clarity about risk or need; and support for practice. By focusing on how supervision helps families, rather than social workers, the authors hope to contribute to the developing debate about the effectiveness of supervision in the context of child and family social work.

References

Bartoli A & Kennedy S (2015) Tick if applicable: a critique of a national UK social work supervision policy, Practice, 27(4), pp.239-250 (paywalled)

Beddoe L et al. (2018) Readiness to practice social work in Aotearoa New Zealand : perceptions of students and educators, Social Work Education, 37(8), pp.955-967 (paywalled)

Berry-Lound D & Rowe V (2013) Evaluation of the implementation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) for Skills for Care, HOST Policy Research (pdf)

Carpenter J et al. (2015) Developing the confidence and competence of newly qualified child and family social workers in England : outcomes of a national programme, British Journal of Social Work, 45(1), pp.153–176 (paywalled)

Frederico M et al. (2016) A consortium approach for child and family practice education, Social Work Education, 35(7), pp.780-793 (paywalled)

Grant S et al. (2014) Readiness for practice of newly qualified social workers: evaluation study for the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), Glasgow Caledonian University (pdf)

Grant S et al. (2017) Newly qualified social workers in Scotland: a five-year longitudinal study, Scottish Social Services Council (pdf)

Grant S (2017) Learning on the job? Exploring first-year experiences of criminal justice social workers in Scotland, Probation Journal, 64(10, pp.33-49 (open access)

Hunt S et al. (2017) Transition to professional social work practice: the first three years, Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education, 19(2), pp.139-154 (author copy)

Jansen A (2017) 'It's so complex!': understanding the challenges of child protection work as experienced by newly graduated professionals, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 48(6), pp.1524–1540 (open access)

Kettle M (2015) Achieving effective supervision, Insight 30, Iriss (website)

Manthorpe J et al. (2014) The 'making' of social workers: findings from interviews with managers of newly qualified social workers, Practice, 26(2), pp.97-111 (paywalled)

Manthorpe J et al. (2015) Content and purpose of supervision in social work practice in England: views of newly qualified social workers, managers and directors, British Journal of Social Work, 45(1), pp.52-68 (author copy)

McPherson L et al. (2016) Safety as a fifth dimension in supervision: stories from the frontline, Australian Social Work, 69(1), pp.67-79 (author copy)

Moorhead B (2019) Transition and adjustment to professional identity as a newly qualified social worker, Australian Social Work, 72(2), pp.206-218 (paywalled)

O'Donoghue K et al. (2018) Constructing an evidence-informed social work supervision model, European Journal of Social Work, 21(3), pp.348-358 (author copy)

Patterson F (2017) A good fit: the contribution of action learning to supervision practice, Social Work Education, 36(1), pp.48-61 (author copy)

Patterson F & Whincup H (2018) Making the transition from practitioner to supervisor: reflections on the contribution made by a post-qualifying supervisory course, European Journal of Social Work, 21(3), pp.415-427 (author copy)

Radey M & Stanley L (2018) "Hands on" versus "empty": supervision experiences of frontline child welfare workers, Children and Youth Services, 91, pp.128-136 (paywalled)

Ravalier J & Boichat C (2018) UK social workers: working conditions and wellbeing, Bath Spa University (pdf)

Saltiel D (2017) Supervision: a contested space for learning and decision making, Qualitative Social Work, 16(4), pp.533-549 (author copy)

Scottish Social Services Council (2016) Guidance notes for newly qualified social workers (NSQW) (pdf)

Tham P & Lynch D (2017) 'Lost in transition?'– newly educated social workers' reflections on their first months in practice, European Journal of Social Work, 23(30), pp.400-411 (open access)

Wilkins D & Antonopoulou V (2019) What does supervision help with? A survey of 315 social workers in the UK, Practice, 31(1), pp.21-40 (author copy)

Wilkens D et al. (2017) What happens in child and family social work supervision? Child & Family Social Work, 22(2), pp.942-951 (open access)

Wilkins D et al. (2018) A golden thread? The relationship between supervision, practice, and family engagement in child and family social work, Child & Family Social Work, 23, pp.494-503 (paywalled)

Yu N et al. (2016) How good is good enough ? exploring social workers ' conceptions of preparedness for practice, Social Work Education, 35(4), pp.414–429 (paywalled)

If you found this resource useful and would like to use the Evidence Search and Summary Service (ESSS), please get in touch to discuss your needs:

www.iriss.org.uk/esss
esss@iriss.org.uk
0141 559 5057
@irissESSS on Twitter

For all ESSS Outlines see: www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines

The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland: No 313740. Scottish Charity No: SC037882. Registered Office: Brunswick House, 51 Wilson Street, Glasgow, G1 1UZ