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Title:

Navigating Challenges in Social Work Supervision: An exploratory study to strengthen effective supervisory relationships in FSCs

Submission Topic Theme:

Family Services

Submitted by:

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200

Objective

This study examines the dynamics of supervisory relationships (SRs) in Singapore's Family Service Centre (FSC) context. It explores what makes SRs effective or ineffective, the tensions shaping them, and how supervision practices can be strengthened.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three supervisors and three supervisees at a FSC in the eastern region of Singapore. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis and an abductive approach.

Results

Three themes emerged. First, effective SRs were characterized by supervisors' professional competence, psychological safety, responsiveness, supervisees' openness, and two-way communication. Second, ineffective SRs emerged when relational attunement weakened—when supervisors' mood reduced approachability, power was exercised rigidly, or supervisee-related factors limited engagement. Third, systemic and relational tensions shaped SRs, driven by Key Performance Indicators and organizational pressures, emotional demands of FSC work, boundary complexities, and misaligned expectations.

Conclusion

SRs are dynamic, co-constructed, and shaped by relational and systemic factors, particularly within the emotionally demanding and fast-paced FSC context. Strengthening SRs is crucial to support workers' reflective practice and improve service quality.

Implications

Findings highlight the need for structured supervisory competency and training frameworks, intentional role modelling, calibrated workload for supervisors, supervision-of-supervision platforms, and planned onboarding pathways for new supervisors to strengthen SRs.