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# ASSESSMENT OF SUPERVISEE CONFIDENCE TO INITIATE DISCUSSION OF HARM WITH FIELD SUPERVISOR

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ASSESSMENT OF SUPERVISEE CONFIDENCE TO INITIATE DISCUSSION  
OF HARM WITH FIELD SUPERVISOR

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Gino Armando Navarrete

June 2017

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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

An imbalance of the power differential between supervisee and field supervisor has led to a complex issue during field supervision such as an inability to initiate discussion of harm. The purpose of this study was to educate students on harm in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their field supervisor, and steps that can be taken by MSW students to assess confidence to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisors. It was hypothesized that MSW students receiving an educational training on harm in field supervision will have more confidence to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisors. A quantitative one-group pretest-posttest study was designed for this research study. Also, pre-test and post-test surveys were distributed to participants, and an educational training powerpoint on the significance of harm during field supervision was implemented between the pre-test and post-test surveys. A paired differences t-test was used to assess for changes in MSW student confidence to initiate discussion of harm with field supervisors. The results of this study indicated that MSW students were not more likely to discuss harm with their field supervisor as a result of receiving an educational powerpoint on the importance of discussion, so this study failed to reject the null hypothesis. This study assisted with informing MSW students about the possible repercussions, and the importance of not informing their field supervisors that they were harmed. In addition, future MSW students would be

informed about alternatives to discuss harm by their field supervisors if one does not feel safe to do so with their own field supervisors.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family for their support while I attended college once again to complete a life goal I set out 5 years ago to obtain my master's degree. First, I want to thank my loving wife for her willingness to support my decision to return to college to pursue a higher education as well giving birth to our beautiful daughter Victoria. To my daughter whose smiles and laughter are contagious and whose energy level is infinite to lift me up from days of fatigue. Finally, my mother whom gave birth to me, and who raised me to become the great young man she wished I would become. I show my appreciation.

Additionally, I would like to give thanks to two social work professors who helped me grow as a professional social worker during these past two years. First, I would like to show my appreciation to Dr. Erica L. Lizano for her motivation and willingness to provide continued support throughout the completion of my courses and research project. Also, I would like to recognize Dr. Armando Barragan for his contribution addressing our cohort's everyday stress concerns first prior to beginning lecture. Additionally, Dr. Armando Barragan deserves my appreciation for helping me to become confident that my research idea from day one was achievable.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to wife and daughter who without I could not have been motivated to have made it this far in my education. Through my wife's efforts to drag me away from school work to find some time for fun and family, I show my sincerest appreciation, love, and admiration. In addition, it is every father's ambition that one day his children will follow in his footsteps, so I too hope that my daughter and future children will be motivated towards a path of higher education to become lifelong learners. Also, I would like to thank my extended family for which I could not have without their support attended this program for the past two years. Although I have spent many years discovering who I have become and what I want to do, I feel that I have finally reached a new path in my life now that I have decided to end my college life and begin my life as a lifelong learner.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION OF HARM IN FIELD SUPERVISION

#### Introduction

This chapter explains the reason for field supervision, and the roles and responsibilities for each member in the supervisory alliance. Additionally, the problem statement explores what can occur as a result of a weak supervisory relationship if a healthy relationship has not formed between MSW student and field supervisor. However, the focus of this chapter as well as the remainder of this study pertains to the perceived harm of the MSW student by their field supervisor. Furthermore, this chapter ends by stating the purpose for this study, its significance to social work practice, and the hypotheses

#### Problem Statement

Field supervision within the scope of human services is a necessary practice for the supervisee when dealing with ambiguous and complex human issues. For that reason, it is imperative that supervision is mandated during an MSW student's educational training as required by the Council of Social Work Education. The role of the field supervisor is to provide direct feedback, focus on personal growth, identify strengths and challenges, and create student learning plans (Council on Social Work Education, n.d.). On the other hand, the supervisee is responsible for exploring conflictual feelings, exercising critical

thinking skills, and being open to feedback (Council on Social Work Education, n.d.)

Although each member in the supervisory relationship bears many responsibilities to ensure effective practice with the client, it is critical that the relationship between both members form a strong alliance. For example, Kilminster and Jolly (2000) stated the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is the most significant element to effective field supervision. Likewise, Bordin (1983) reported a supportive supervisory alliance facilitates positive outcomes. Furthermore, it was reported that a strong alliance leads to a positive satisfaction in field placement for the MSW student (Kanno & Koeske, 2010).

In contrast, a weak supervisory alliance results in non-disclosure which can impact the supervisee's knowledge, skill development, and professional growth. According to Pisani (2005) 97.2% of supervisees who do not disclose information use avoidance tactics or view supervision as not helpful to their professional growth. Yourman and Farber (1996) found 90% of supervisees withheld or distorted information for fear of evaluation. A possible reason may be that supervisee's view supervisors as gatekeepers to the professional world which creates a sense of fear and anxiety. Additionally, Pisani (2005) reported 55% of supervisees do not disclose the quality of their supervision with their field supervisor because of the fear of not receiving a passing grade. This is further supported by a 66% nondisclosure rate in which supervisee's discussed

problems in field with someone other than their field supervisor (Ladany, Hill, Corbett, & Nutt, 1996).

Research in this area has continued to find more information to support the idea that supervisees may have reasons to be fearful or be anxious about entering an alliance with their field supervisor. For example, Nelson and Friedland's (2001) study found that supervisors frequently threatened to withhold evaluations or letters to the supervisee's academic department. In another study, it was found that 12.4% of supervisees were harmed in their current relationship with their supervisor (Ellis, 2010). In this same study 27.4% respondents reported they were harmed by another supervisor at their agency, 36% had already received harmful supervision, and 51.5% of supervisees were formerly harmed during their educational training. Therefore, it is not surprising that the supervisee may withhold information because they may become anxious or fearful within the context of field supervision.

A significant issue found in the research literature was that ethical guidelines and core principals set forth by the NASW and CSWE were available to social work professionals, but they were not followed by field supervisors. A possible concern for researchers is that policies in place to protect the supervisee are ambiguous. Jacobs (1991) further supports this notion through his statement that the NASW Code of Ethics does not apply to the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Jacobs (2001) further promoted the confusion of supervisee protection as to whether NASW core principles even

“apply to students or whether a student is considered a client, colleague, or friend in this context” (p. 134). Another potential concern for supervisees may be because most policies and rules that govern social work practice are designed to protect the clients rather than the supervisee. A legal repercussion that Ellis (2010) reports is that large occurrence rates of harmful supervision are a legal liability for agencies, educational institutions, and clients. Yet, reports of harmful supervision during a supervisee’s educational training continue to occur. Ellis (2001) argues that “Our ethical standards are founded on a core principal: do no harm” (p. 403). Prolonged avoidance in identification and discussion of this sensitive topic will maintain a “toll on human suffering,” and promote the progression of ethical violations through the form of learned harmful behaviors or passivity through role modeling in harmful supervision (Ellis, 2010, p. 109).

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to assess MSW student’s confidence to initiate discussion of harm with field supervisor. It was hypothesized that MSW students receiving an educational training on harm in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their field supervisor, and recommendations that can be taken by MSW students were more likely to be empowered to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisor. It was necessary to study this phenomenon because research in this area is limited. Discussion of this area of research was difficult to explain to all those involved in the action of harm, those affected by the harm, and those that remain passive

through non-disclosure. The statistical data generated by studies starting from the early 90's until now indicates that harm in field supervision has gradually continued despite the consequences.

The research method used is a quantitative study with a one-group pretest-posttest design. This study employed the same self-administered survey given to respondent's pretest and posttest. An educational training powerpoint was provided to respondents after the pre-test had been completed. Since time was limited to conduct this study, this study's design was chosen to conduct the study during a one-time meeting.

The intent of this study was to inform those in organizational positions to revise or create clear guidelines in regards to harm when working with supervisees because they are the future social workers. Ultimately, the outcome depends not only the supervisee's abilities to develop during their educational training, but it depends on the capability of the supervisor as gatekeeper to help guide the supervisee into a competent and professional social worker. More importantly, harmful supervision has the possibility to negatively impact the client in which supervisee's have been given the responsibility to advocate on behalf and ensure their safety. The development of harm to a client can arise from role modeling the behaviors of their supervisors

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study can help bring awareness to MSW students who enter the supervisee role by educating them about the potential harms in supervision that



may occur when in field placement. The identification of types of harm from supervisee could possibly help to decrease the rates in which harm occurs, and have the potential to increase the supervisee's understanding to address harm to prevent future harm. Furthermore, this study can help agencies perceive the importance of harm that may occur during field supervision to develop preventative measures to avoid legal litigations.

Likewise, the data collected from this study would inform California State University San Bernardino Department of Social work of its contracted field supervisor's level of commitment to promoting student professional growth. The reason being that a common pattern found in the literature is that some supervisors have been viewed as uncommitted to developing a strong relationship with their supervisee due to the inability to meet the needs of the supervisee (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001). This information can be used to assess the commitment of potential field supervisor candidates to build strong alliances. Also, understanding of this knowledge will assist with finding the balance of identifying a right fit for the supervisee's placement and under whose supervision and guidance.

It was hypothesized that MSW students receiving an educational training on harm in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their field supervisor, and recommendations that can be taken by MSW students would have more confidence to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisor?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter contains research related to reasons why harm may arise as well as perspectives from the field supervisor and supervisee about supervision. In addition, considerations to mediate conflicts for both supervisee and supervisors are discussed. Examination of perceptions from the field supervisor and supervisee will assist with a better understanding of the complexity of maintaining a healthy alliance. Subsections within this chapter will explain models and theories used to help guide the concepts of supervision

#### Supervisory Competency

Traditionally, the view of field supervisor is someone who has a set of skills, behaviors, experience, and attitudes that are distinct from those who practice (Brashears, 1993). Though the field supervisor encompasses many roles (teacher, enabler, educational, mediator, and administrator), the field supervisor is required to shift roles appropriately to meet the supervisee's needs (Brashears, 1993). Additionally, the field supervisor is responsible for maintaining a working relationship within a safe supervision context. However, current field supervisors have large client caseloads, complex client issues, and more responsibility to meet the demands of the profession. The amount of work and expectations required to do their job is exacerbated when a field supervisor

decides to enter a supervisory relationship with an MSW student. Ensuring the supervisee adequately learns and applies knowledge and skills during training adds even more work for the field supervisor with an insufficient time to devote to each work-related area. For instance, Ellis (2010) reported 30.3% of respondents report they do not receive an acceptable or required amount of time in supervision which could potentially harm both the supervisee and the client.

### Insufficient Supervision

More importantly, research has drawn attention the issue of inadequate social workers in the role of field supervisor. Since most agencies or organizations require social workers to have either a state license or sufficient background experience in the field to supervise, it is left up to those in administration to designate the field supervisor role to someone administrators feel is qualified. Another issue Woods (2005) points out is that the state fails to perform background checks to identify whether applicants for state licensure have sufficient experience in supervision to perform the role effectively.

A field supervisor who lacks sufficient training and experience is likely to cause more harm to both the supervisee as well as the client due to lack of competence of the supervisee and guidance by the supervisor. Inadequate supervision occurs when a field supervisor's time is limited to provide supervision, the field supervisor is unqualified, or supervisees placement is unsafe (Holtz Deal, Hopkins, Fisher, & Hartin, 2007). Research has shown that 25% of supervisees indicate they are currently receiving inadequate supervision,

49% reported receiving inadequate supervision by another supervisor, 32.7% stated inadequate supervision was harmful to their clients, and 75% of supervisee indicated that they received inadequate supervision at some point in time in their career (Ellis, 2010).

### Lack of Training

Field supervisors often experience conflict with their supervisees, and whether they have skills or knowledge to manage conflict is unknown. Nelson, Barnes, Evans & Triggiano (2008) report field supervisors receive less training in conflict management, so they rely more on experiences where conflict had occurred and was successful to mediate future conflict with a supervisee. A lack of training may be due to the absence of research focusing on identifying skills to help field supervisors address conflict within the supervisor-supervisee alliance (Nelson et. al, 2008).

Although it is the field supervisor's responsibility to mediate any conflict, it is often the supervisee who takes the initial steps for mediation. This idea is supported by the notion that when a weak supervisor-supervisee alliance is present, "in nearly all instances it was the trainee who initiated the repair activities" (Burke, Goodyear, & Guzzard, 1998, p. 456). Therefore, responsibility is placed onto the supervisee by his or her field supervisor to ensure that supervision continues to progress.

## Potential for Harm

The research literature on harmful supervision has yet to agree on an operational definition which has led to various perceptions of harm in field supervision. For example, several definitions found to describe harmful supervision are bad supervision (Chung, Baskin, & Case, 1998), abusive supervision (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007 & Tepper, 2000), conflictual supervision (Moskowitz & Rupert, 1983), and counterproductive supervision events (Gray, Ladany, Walker, & Ancis, 2001). Because researchers have yet to determine which operational definition they have chosen to describe a harmful event to a supervisee, I will adopt Ellis' (2001) operational definition of harmful supervision for reliability purposes. Harmful supervision will be defined as, "supervisory practices that result in psychological, emotional, or physical harm or trauma to the supervisee" (Ellis, 2001, p. 402). Types of harmful situations that can occur in supervision are: sexual intimacy, use of power for domination and oppression, dual relationship, interpersonal violations, violation or disrespect of boundaries, public humiliation to supervisee, demeaning, overly critical, vengeful attitude, and publicly sexist, racist, ageist, or homophobic against supervisee (Ellis, 2001). More importantly, Ellis (2001) explained that the significant factor of harm to the supervisee by the field supervisor is the effect felt by the supervisee. Also, Ellis posited the effects from harmful supervision can last for a short amount of time, hours, months, or years. In addition, he stated that a supervisee may be effected

in several ways which can include symptoms of psychological trauma, functional impairment, loss of self-confidence, or a decrease in physical health (Ellis, 2001).

A challenge that contributes to ethical violations in supervision is the power that field supervisors hold when entering an alliance with a supervisee. It has been found that despite a set of ethical rules or guidelines set forth by ethic committees, field supervisors continue to misuse their power. Ellis (2010) reported that “12.4% of supervisee’s have been harmed in their current relationship with their supervisor, 27.4% supervisee’s confirmed that they had been harmed by another supervisor, 36% had been receiving harmful supervision, and 51.5% of supervisee’s had been formerly harmed during their educational training” (p. 109). Also, it was reported that 67 % to 71% of supervisees have experienced more than two conflictual or counterproductive experiences in supervision (Ellis, 2001).

An essential component to abuse of power is the power differential in the alliance. The power differential can evoke psychological, physical, emotional, or trauma experiences to the supervisee which are characterized by the field supervisor’s actions or passivity (Ellis, 2001). Various studies in the field of harmful field supervision by researchers have identified concerning results. For example, Unger (1999) identified that 15% of supervisees in his study were traumatized in field supervision. In addition, Nelson et. al found that 50% of supervisees had a conflict or had been harmed by the same field supervisor (Ellis, 2001). This shared concern is further supported in Gottlieb, Robinson, &

Younggren (2007) a study which reported that 14% of agency employees knew an ethical violation where a power differential was present between field supervisor and supervisee, but they did nothing to resolve the issue. Furthermore, it was found that neither individual or group field supervisions were exempt from harmful supervision (Ellis, 2001).

The effects of a harmful supervision relationship are counterproductive to the development of a professional social worker. For example, negative effects that may occur from withdrawing from the alliance due to harmful supervision may be due to safety issues, development of self-doubt, self-blame, and a decrease of self-efficacy as a professional (Ellis, 2001). Not only could developing issues within the supervisee occur in the present, but other health and personal issues could arise after an event of harmful supervision. For instance, Nelson and Friedland (2001) found that “50% experience extreme stress, 30% to 46% developed health problems, 23% encountered sexual-related issues in supervision, and 8% left the profession.

Because supervisees are in a role where they can be taken advantage of due to power differential, critical evaluation, and vulnerability through psychological, physical, and emotional harm, the supervisee is not without will or instinct to do what is ethically moral. Gottlieb et. al (2007) stated “supervisees need to become informed consumers for supervision services and feel more empowered to advocate for themselves and their peers” (p.247). However,

Gottlieb et. al (2007) also pointed out that supervisees face barriers to consult with such services when safety is an issue which research has yet to address.

Gottlieb et al. (2007) recommended that supervisees empower themselves by “obtaining a copy of their agency’s policy and procedural manual, be familiar with the complaint process, recognize APA code of ethics of rules and regulations, know thyself and recognize uncomfortable situations to engage in open discussion when possible, if discussion is not permissible then seek conversation and sharing of feelings with others (supervisee, staff, or faculty) to help come up with solutions, if safety is an issue then consult with (national, state, local ) psychological associations, warranted caution for identified boundary crossings which can lead to boundary violations (harmless boundary crossings, excessive touching, needless self-disclosure, inappropriate attire or jokes, efforts to gain approval by offering friendships, gifts, or special treatment), and documentation of any such occurrences listed previously should be documented” (p. 246).

This study used Ellis’ (2001) operational definition of harmful supervision to increase reliability. Not only did this study incorporate information conceptualized from previous studies, but this current study has taken previous studies and used the information as an educational intervention approach. The purpose of this study hypothesized that MSW students receiving an educational training on harm in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their



field supervisor, and steps that can be taken by MSW students are more likely to be empowered to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisor.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Although some supervisee's experience harmful supervision, supervision is driven by theories and models that are intended to sustain a working relationship as well guide the supervisor to attend to supervisee needs. Ellis (2010) reported that supervision theories are effective in the identification of interaction issues, needs of issue, and needs of the supervisee. However, Putney, Worthington, & McCullough (1992) noted that the theoretical model implemented by the field supervisor determines the supervisee's perception of the supervisor's model, role, and focus.

The process of supervision is complex due to the dynamic changes that occur in the relationship. Since the supervisee's experiences are constantly changing due the progression of their own development, it is salient for the supervisor to be congruent with the supervisee's development to effectively address the supervisee's needs, questions, and concerns (Stolenberg, 2005). Supervision theories and models have been discussed to show their significance and efficacy for guiding supervision.

First, the Working Alliance Theory (Bordin, 1983) is applicable to supervision because its similarity on the emphasis of goals, tasks, and bond that occur between supervisor and supervisee. Woods (2005) points out that goals must be agreed upon at the initial supervision session by both members of

supervisory relation in addition to agreement on tasks to reach mutually acknowledged goals. Furthermore, this theory highlights the emotional bond which is necessary to ensure the continuation of supervision sessions. This theoretical model is useful for the field supervisor as well as supervisee because it assists with understanding the direction and process of supervision (Woods, 2005).

Secondly, the Integrated Developmental Model of Supervision (IDM) was created to allow field supervisors to identify progression shift in supervisee development. This model helps capture supervisee changes over time as a sequence of different levels of the supervisee (1-3). This model has been tested in quantitative studies to identify the relationship between types of supervision structure and self-efficacy of the supervisee (Leach, Stolenberg, McNeil, & Eichenfield, 1997; Stolenberg, 2005; Tracey, Ellickson, & Sherry, 1989).

### Summary

This study was designed to educate students on harm in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their field supervisor, and steps that can be taken by supervisees to assess confidence to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisors. Discussion of field supervisor competence, insufficient supervision, and lack of training are factors in which harm can occur in field supervision. Also, the lack of an agreed upon operational definition for harm that occurs in supervision has resulted in confusion. Even though harm in supervision is relatively new to supervision research, it is a

necessity that research has an agreed upon definition of harm in supervision. Although not all supervisees experience instances of harm, they are in a learning role to initiate discussion of harmful supervision events with their field supervisor or with someone else they trust. The working alliance theory and the integrated developmental model were used to explain the supervisee's self-efficacy as assessed by the strength of the alliance. Knowledge of helpful tips to encourage supervisees to mediate conflict in supervision were provided to empower and encourage supervisees to gain experience and skills needed for professional growth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter contains information as to how this study is designed and implemented. This study was designed to address whether informing students on identification of harm that can occur in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their field supervisor, and steps that can be taken by supervisees to assess confidence to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisor. The sections discussed in this chapter are the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

#### Study Design

This is an exploratory study because there was limited research due to its sensitivity to discuss this topic in the social work and mental health literature. This research project employed a quantitative approach. Also, an educational training powerpoint on the significance of harmful field supervision was presented to participants between the pre-test survey and post-test survey.

Prior research on this topic used similar study designs to increase reliability. This study utilized current reliable surveys devised by previous researchers to increase confidence of its use with this population under study. A

group administered modified survey assisted with obtaining a larger number of participants to assist with feasibility and time constraints.

Although a group survey is appropriate to address this study's question, it is not without consideration such as the possibility of bias respondent answers due to researcher comments, variance of answers between groups, or forcefulness to participate and complete the survey. Because a one-group pretest-posttest design was adapted, the ability to generalize outside of the MSW student body was compromised.

### Sampling

The purpose of this study was to inform students on harmful field supervision through an educational training powerpoint to assess their confidence to initiate discussion of harmful events with their field supervisor. This study employed a convenience sampling method of currently enrolled graduate students from the Masters of Social Work Department at California State University, San Bernardino. Approval from the School of Social Work IRB sub-committee was obtained to conduct this study.

### Data Collection and Instruments

The independent variable, an educational training powerpoint on the significance of harm in field supervision was given between the pre-test and the post-test. The values of the independent variable were nominal, dichotomous. The dependent variable is scored on a confidence scale to initiate discussion of

harm with field supervisor. The dependent variable values were measured at an interval level. Quantitative data was collected through the pre-test and post-test surveys distributed in class to MSW students at California State University, San Bernardino on February 21, 2017.

The strengths of administering a survey included collecting data from a large participant group, quick delivery return of survey, low cost, multiple measurement of variables, and the ability to assess various social issues. Potential issues that can occur were coerced feelings to participate, bias responses from participants, and false responses on items were considered. To receive genuine responses from participants, the researcher emphasized voluntary consent, identified question items that may lead to bias responses, and informed voluntary participants that honest answers are needed to avoid error in results.

The researcher devised a survey from two research instruments to collect data. First, the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI)-Trainee version was used to assess trainee's perception of the bond between supervisee and field supervisor (Efstation, Patton, & Kardash, 1990). The WAI-trainee version has an internal consistency reliability of .91, and its external consistency validity has a "negative relationship with supervisee role conflict and role ambiguity" as well as a "positive relationship with favorable supervisory racial identity interactions" (Ladany, Ellis, & Friedlander, 1999, p.449). In addition, Teppers' (2000) Abusive Supervision measurement was used to assess for acts of active or passive abuse. This

instrument has an internal consistency reliability of .79

### Procedures

The study was conducted in the Social and Behavioral Sciences building at California State University San Bernardino campus in a reserved room with computer access. Permission from Social Work Department Administrative Support Coordinator was needed for room availability (approximately 50 Minutes room reserved) during the Winter Quarter. The time reserved to conduct the study occurred during a lunch period as stated on the flyer containing information on date and location of the study as well as incentives for participation. Computer access was required to implement educational intervention using powerpoint to display field supervision information such as: harm that can occur in field supervision/statistics, what students can do to prevent harm, reasons (positive & repercussions) to initiate discussion of harm with field supervisor(s), and considerations and tips for MSW students to use while in field supervision.

Researcher began by distributing informational flyers to MSW classes. Due to some unforeseen circumstances with the facility that were out of the control of the researcher, there were some minor changes to the process. When it was time to implement the research study, participants were informed of the purpose of study. In addition, researcher provided an informative introduction statement to retain voluntary consent from participants and stated appreciation for their participation. Participants were informed that if they chose not to participate at any time then they could leave the survey blank or leave the survey

incomplete and return the survey to the researcher. Once consent had been received, participants were informed that three small bags were to be passed among them containing a small cut out of the numbers 1-50. Participants were informed to randomly pick a number out of the small bag, and he or she were to write down the same number on both the pre-test and post-test surveys for researcher to measure responses between both surveys after the study was completed. Once all the participants randomly picked a number, the pre-test surveys were distributed. When researcher obtained all completed pre-test surveys, the educational training intervention was introduced through verbalization only since the researcher was unable to log into the facility's computer. After the educational training intervention was completed, a post-test survey was distributed to participants. Once participants completed the post-test surveys, researcher collected all post-test surveys. Next, time was allotted to address participant questions or concerns about the survey. Once questions and concerns had been addressed, researcher expressed gratitude for participation. Participants were then informed that food, soda, and chips were available in the back of the room.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

To protect participant rights to give consent to participate in this study, the researcher had given a standard introduction statement that expressed gratitude for participation, emphasized researcher's independence from sponsorship, and allowed participants a chance to ask questions about the surveys. In addition,



individuals were informed to leave each survey blank if they chose not to participate at any time during the study. Next, participants were informed that the post-test and pre-test surveys would be under lock and key. Lastly, participants were informed that only the researcher has access to results, and that the surveys will be destroyed after data input is complete on 4/15/17.

### Data Analysis

Given that the independent variable was nominal, dichotomous and the dependent variable was interval, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was utilized to analyze data. Responses for each item on the pre-test & post-test survey was entered on SPSS as well as demographic information containing gender, age, and ethnicity. Each variable was analyzed to display tables and figures for this report.

### Summary

This research study investigated whether informing students on harmful field supervision through an educational training would increase the MSW student's confidence to initiate discussion of harmful events with their field supervisor. Since this study's design is a quantitative study, the utilization of a group administered survey assists with feasibility in regards to accessibility and time constrains. Furthermore, steps to ensure voluntary consent were highlighted to increase the odds for honest responses. Finally, proposed precautions by researcher to maintain confidentiality were discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the results of the statistical analysis implemented. This chapter over all will include a description of the sample, use of descriptive statistics, and an analysis of the data using inferential statistics. The first section will describe the demographics of the sample, and the next section will report the mean and the range of scores between Time 1 and Time 2.

#### Presentation of Findings

##### Descriptive Statistics

There was a total of 23 participants in this study in which data was collected from 2 surveys (pretest & posttest). All the participants included in this study were current MSW students. As seen in Table 1, more than half of the participants identified as female (N=22, 95.6%) and only one individual identified as male (N=1, 4.3%). To be inclusive of gender identities an option to select “other” was provided, however none of the participants identified as other. The differences between the number of females to males was found to be disproportionate in this study. Also, the age of participants was broken down into age groups. The age groups identified in the study were 21-29 (N=18, 78.2%), 30-39 (N= 4, 17.3%), and 50-59 (N=1, 4.3%). Additionally, three-fourths of the participants were under the age of 30. Participant ethnicities identified in this

sample were American Indian/ Alaskan Native (N=1, 4.3%), Asian/Pacific Islander (N=2, 8.6%), Black/African American (N=1 4.3%), Hispanic/Latino (N=12, 52%), and White/Caucasian (N=5, 21.7%). Additionally, an option to select multiple ethnicity identification was provided (N=2, 8.6%). As is seen in Table 1, half of the participants identified with Hispanic/Latino than any other ethnicity.

Table. 1 Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample

		N (%)
Gender	Male	1 (4.3%)
	Female	22 (95.6%)
Age	21-29	18 (78.2%)
	30-39	4 (17.3%)
	50-59	1 (4.3%)
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1 (4.3%)
Ethnicity	Asian/Pacific Islander	2 (8.6%)
	Black or African American	1 (4.3%)
	Hispanic	12 (52.1%)
	White/Caucasian	5 (21.7%)
	Multiple Ethnicities	2 (8.6%)

## Inferential Analysis

Analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to examine the significance in variable scores between Time 1 and Time 2. For the sake of brevity only the variables which rejected the null hypothesis will be discussed, for any non-significant findings (See Table 2 in Appendix C).

This researcher hypothesized that MSW students receiving an educational training powerpoint on harm in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their field supervisor, and recommendations that can be taken by MSW student supervisees were more likely to be empowered to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisor. However, through analysis using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test, it was found that this study's hypothesis was not supported.

However, the following significant findings represent recommendations for supervisees to perform when arriving to a new field placement (See Table 2 in Appendix C). A Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test revealed that item 29 "Ombudsperson available for consult" with Time 1 (M=2.60) and Time 2 (1.85) with a ( $p \leq .05$ ) would be a resourceful person to consult with as needed. Also, item 30 "Familiarity with APA Ethics Code & State Board Rules and Regulations" at Time 1 had a (M=2.0) and Time 2 (M=1.4) with a ( $p \leq .05$ ) which showed that MSW students may refer to their professional code of ethics as well as to state regulations for ethical dilemmas. Another significant finding was item 34

“consultative resources: national, state, & local psychological associations” was found to be significant from Time 1 (M=1.9) and Time 2 (M=1.61) with a ( $p \leq .05$ ). Another variable studied between Time 1 and Time 2 that was close to reaching significance was item 27 “Requesting a copy of the agency’s policies and procedures with Time 1 (M=1.6) and Time 2 (M=1.3) with a  $p = .06$ . (See Table 2 in Appendix C).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter seeks to elaborate on this study's significant results using previous findings found in this area of research. Additionally, the limitations of this study, and the recommendations provided for social work practice, policy, research was discussed. Likewise, insightful consideration for researchers interested in this area of research are mentioned. Finally, summarization of this study's findings, and the urgency to address harm perceived in field supervision was explained.

#### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine if MSW students receiving an educational training on harm in field supervision, potential repercussions if harm is not discussed with their field supervisor, and recommendations to be taken by MSW students would result in an increase of confidence to initiate discussion of harm with their field supervisor. The results of this study indicated that MSW students were not more likely to discuss harm with their field supervisor as a result of receiving an educational powerpoint on the importance of discussion, so this study failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Although the study's main hypothesis was not supported by the study findings, this research study was able to identify significant findings regarding

options available to MSW students for empowering themselves to act prior to perceived harm or after being harmed by their field supervisor. For instance, MSW student's most chosen resources to process perceived harm by their field supervisor were to speak with an ombudsperson available for consult, refer to APA Ethics Code & State Board Rules and Regulations, and use consultative resources at the national, state, and local psychology associations instead of initiating discussion of harm with their field supervisor. Also, requesting a copy of the agency's policies and procedures was another option that MSW students also thought of choosing although this finding was not a statistically significant one. Also, it should be noted that the importance of consultation and referring to one's own professional code of ethics builds professionalism, competence, and empowerment to advocate for oneself. As Gottlieb et. al (2007) stressed that "supervisees need to be informed consumers of supervision services and feel more empowered to advocate for themselves and their peers (p. 247).

This study was also able to identify MSW student perception of closeness to their field supervisor. The findings from this study demonstrated that a few MSW students reported that their field supervisors "act too friendly". Although the results failed to reject the null hypothesis, a change of responses during the post-test had occurred after the educational intervention was implemented. This is consistent with past research indicating ambiguity regarding multiple relationships (Gottlieb et. al, 2007). However, research reminds us that as professionals assisting with students in a learning role we must adhere to ethical

guidelines. Additionally, Ellis (2001) points out that as licensed clinical social workers overseeing future social workers they need “to have the supervisee’s best interest in mind” (p. 402

### Limitations

In this study the term harmful supervision was used despite an agreed definition of harm perceived by the MSW student due to either intentional or unintentional harm acted upon by the field supervisor. Another limitation was having a small sample size. Since this study had a small sample size, this affects its ability to generalize its findings. Additionally, participants gender is disproportionate with a ratio of males:1 to females: 22. In addition, the ethnic composition of the sample was mostly comprised of Hispanic/Latino which also affects this study’s ability to generalize to the rest of the social work student population. Lastly, due to some unforeseen circumstances with the facility that were out of the control of the researcher, there were some minor changes to the process which may have affected the study’s results.

### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

Since the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) mandates that accredited social work programs place MSW students where there is a licensed clinical social worker, interviews assessing a supervisor’s ability to maintain professional boundaries should be discussed thoroughly. Though this study’s results could not conclude a significant finding to supervisor acting too friendly,



participant responses were very close to rejecting the null hypothesis. As seen in the literature involving multiple relations or boundary crossings, a field supervisor acting more as a friend rather than someone in an evaluator role increases the risks for boundary violations later in the future. Also, research warrants caution because “supervisory relationships entail power differentials and create unique vulnerabilities for supervisees” (Gottlieb et. al, 2007, p. 242). This finding may further support the notion that field supervisors need to be aware of the messages they are sending to their supervisees through their verbal communication and behaviors.

More importantly, policy dictates how actions are to be appropriately addressed which warrants discussion. This notion is ever significant when dealing with issues that arise in the social services field. However, previous research has found that despite policies in place to protect individuals already employed by agencies, the same cannot be said for MSW students in their field placements. For instance, Jacobs (2001) argued that not all policies designed to protect individuals in the workplace “apply to students or whether a student is considered a client, colleague, or friend in this context” (p. 134). Although this present study was only able to identify one MSW student who perceived himself/herself to have been harmed by their field supervisor, a continuation of events where an MSW student had perceived themselves to have been harmed by their field supervisor continues to be reported in the literature. Often these incidents are investigated which may or may not result in a suspension or

permanent loss of licensure for field supervisors. For these reasons, it is important for agency policy makers to revise their policies to be inclusive of students in learning roles to protect individual's rights as well for agencies to avoid liability for an employee's actions. As Ellis (2001) stated, "Our ethical standards are founded on a core principle to "do no harm" (p. 403)

### Future Research

Future studies examining this area of research should study MSW student perceptions of choosing which term best describes intentional or unintentional harm by their field supervisor. This idea best fits because it is the supervisee's perception of whether they felt that they were harmed or not based on the field supervisor's behavior or communication. Furthermore, Ellis, Berger, Hanus, Ayala, Swords, & Siembor (2014) stress that "we need to agree upon definitions of harm and bad that are specific to clinical supervision" (p. 436). Also, a larger sample size that includes more males, and a more ethnically diverse sample is needed to improve generalization. Furthermore, future researchers should assess for time differences at a greater length using similar measures of identifying reasons to initiate discussion of perceived harm by the MSW student from their field supervisor. For instance, starting from the first quarter of a MSW program in the foundation year until the end of the last quarter of the MSW program during the advancement year in hope of finding significant differences between time, agency placement, and field supervisors.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study did not find a cause-and-effect relationship to initiate confidence to discuss perceived harm of the MSW student by their field supervisor as a result of the educational training provided. However, this study was able identify alternative solutions to resolve an occurrence or non-occurrence of perceived harm for MSW students. Additionally, the data collected from this study could support previous findings that relationships between MSW students and their field supervisors may be too friendly than professional which further supports the need for agency policies to be revised to protect MSW students. Even though many rules and regulations have been built to protect both individuals involved in supervisory relationships, continued identification of such harmful occurrences and strategies of prevention is needed for social work practice to attain an ideal of professionalism. Additionally, Nelson et. al (2001) stress that “surveys that address the prevalence of conflict or harm in supervision would inform the field about the scope of the problem and urgency of the problem” (p. 394). It is this study’s findings as well as those found in previous studies pertaining to the identification of harm and conflict found in social work practice that will assist professional social workers to think more cautiously about making more ethically sound decisions when entering a supervisory relationship.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino  
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
APPROVED 1/30/2018 VOID AFTER 1/29/2018  
IRB# SW1724 CHAIR [Signature]

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Social Work

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine confidence rates to discuss harm occurred during supervision with field supervisor. The study is being conducted by Gino A. Navarrete, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Erika C. Lizano, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine MSW student confidence to initiate discussion of harm during supervision with field supervisor.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked of a few questions on their experience with field supervisor during supervision.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete both surveys. In addition, a 12-15 minute PowerPoint presentation will be completed.

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, participants will be provided with an incentive (Pizza, Soda, Chips).

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Lizano at (909) 537-5584.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfsu Library Scholar Works database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2017.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place an X mark here

Date

909.537.5501

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University - Bakersfield - Channel Islands - Chico - Dominguez Hills - East Bay - Fresno - Fullerton - Humboldt - Long Beach - Los Angeles Maritime Academy - Monterey Bay - Northridge - Pomona - Sacramento - San Bernardino - San Diego - San Francisco - San Jose - San Luis Obispo - San Marcos - Sonoma - Stanislaus

APPENDIX B  
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instrument is a modified version of the following sources:

Efstation, J. F., Patton, M. J., & Kardash, C. M. (1990). Measuring the working alliance in counselor supervision. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 37(3), 322.

1. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement. I am comfortable working with my field supervisor. Use a scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.
2. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement. My supervisor and I have a good working relationship. Use a scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral/neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.  
  
Items number 3, 4, 5, and 6 were created by author.
3. Have you ever felt (anxious, experienced a loss of self-confidence, noticed a decrease in physical health, or extreme stress) during supervision with your field supervisor?
4. Have you ever felt (anxious, experienced a loss of self-confidence, noticed a decrease in physical health, or extreme stress) after supervision with your field supervisor?
5. Have you ever felt that you were harmed by your field supervisor?

6. Would you feel comfortable having a discussion with your field supervisor explaining how you were harmed by him/her?

Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of management journal*, 43(2), 178-190.

7. Have you ever experienced any of the situations by your field supervisor?  
If yes, please indicate by filling in the correct response. Use a scale where  
1=Cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me, 2=He/she  
very seldom uses this behavior with me, 3=He/she occasionally uses this  
behavior with me, 4=He/she uses this behavior moderately often with me,  
5=He/she uses this behavior very often with me, 6=N/A if never  
experienced.

Items 8 and 9 were created by author.

8. Did you find the information from the educational training powerpoint to be useful for deciding to initiate discussion of harm with you field supervisor?
9. How confident are you to initiate discussion of harm with your field supervisor? Fill in the space that accurately reflects your response. Use a scale where 1= Extremely confident, 2= Very confident, 3=Somewhat confident, 4= Not so confident, 5= Not at all confident.

Ellis, M. V. (2001). Harmful supervision, a cause for alarm: Comment on Gray et al. (2001) and Nelson and Friedlander (2001).

10. How important are the following aspects you feel to initiate discussion of harm with your field supervisor? Use a scale where 0= not at all important,



1=slightly important, 2=important, 3= important, 4= very important, 5=No opinion.

Item 11 was created by author.

11. Do you feel that you understand the repercussions of not discussing harmful experience (s) in supervision with either your field supervisor or with someone you trust?

Gottlieb, M. C., Robinson, K., & Younggren, J. N. (2007). Multiple relations in supervision: Guidance for administrators, supervisors, and students.

Professional Psychology: Research And Practice, 38(3), 241-247.

doi:10.1037/0735-7028.38.3.241.

12. Please indicate which helpful options you would find most useful to use if initiating discussion with field supervisor is not an option. Use a scale where 1=Very useful, 2=Somewhat useful, 3=Not very useful, 4=Not at all useful.

Items number 13, 14, and 15 were created by author.

13. What is your gender?

14. What is your age?

15. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one)

Created by: Gino A. Navarrete

APPENDIX C  
RELATED SAMPLE WILCOXON TEST

Table. 2 Mean Changes of Scale Items from Time 1 to Time 2 and Significance Levels Related Sample Wilcoxin Test

	Time 1 Mean	Time 2 Mean	P
Item 1	4.17	3.95	0.41
Item 2	4.17	3.95	0.41
Item 3	0.47	0.5	1
Item 4	0.39	0.45	0.56
Item 5	0	0.04	0.31
Item 6	0.95	0.89	1
Item 7	2.43	2.54	0.89
Item 8	2.87	2.9	0.31
Item 9	2.78	2.82	0.56
Item 10	2.78	2.81	0.31
Item 11	2.65	2.95	0.31
Item 12	2.6	2.86	0.31
Item 13	2.43	2.59	0.15
Item 14	2.73	3.04	0.31
Item 15	2.26	2.36	0.31
Item 16	2.6	2.63	0.31
Item 17	2.73	2.9	0.31
Item 18	2.52	3.04	0.15
Item 19	2.6	2.95	0.06

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Table 2. Continued

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Item 20	2.91	2.81	0.49
Item 21	3.08	3.04	1
Item 22	3.08	3.2	0.4
Item 23	3.04	3.2	0.34
Item 24	2.65	3	0.11
Item 25	3.47	3.5	0.88
Item 26	0.89	0.9	0.15
Item 27	1.6	1.38	0.06
Item 28	1.56	1.38	0.08
Item 29	2.6	1.85	0.01
Item 30	2.04	1.47	0.03
Item 31	1.17	1.19	1
Item 32	1.65	1.57	0.78
Item 33	1.91	1.57	0.15
Item 34	1.95	1.61	0.02
Item 35	1.21	1.23	1

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Note. Item 1: I am comfortable with my field Supervisor. Item 2: My field supervisor and I have a good working relationship. Item 3: Have you ever felt anxious during supervision with your field supervisor. Item 4: Have you ever felt anxious after supervision with your field supervisor. Item 5: Have you ever felt harmed by your field supervisor. Item 6: Would you be comfortable with your field

supervisor explaining how you were harmed by him/her. Item 7: My field supervisor ridicules me. Item 8: My field supervisor tells me my thoughts are stupid or feelings are stupid. Item 9: My field supervisor gives me the silent treatment. Item 10: My field supervisor invades my privacy. Item 11: My field supervisor reminds me of my past mistakes and failures. Item 12: My field supervisor blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment. Item 13: My field supervisor expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason. Item 14: My field supervisor has made sexual intimate attempts. Item 15: My field supervisor makes negative comments about me to others. Item 16: My field supervisor tells me I'm incompetent. Item 17: My field supervisor tells me I'm incompetent. Item 18: My field supervisor lies to me. Item 19: My field supervisor acts too friendly. Item 20: How confident are you to initiate discussion of harm with your field supervisor. Item 21: Psychological trauma (sense of mistrust, debilitating fears, excessive shame). Item 22: Functional Impairment (professional or personal life). Item 23: Loss of self-confidence. Item 24: Decrease in physical health. Item 25: Extreme Stress. Item 26: Do you feel that you understand the repercussions of not discussing a harmful experience(s) with either your field supervisor or with someone you trust. Item 27: Requesting a copy of the agency's policies and procedures. Item 28: Familiar with agency complaint process & how to use. Item 29: Ombudsperson available for consult. Item 30: Familiarity with APA Ethics Code & State Board Rules and Regulations. Item 31: Know thyself, be alert of uncomfortable situations, feel free to engage in open discussion. Item 32: Talk to

others (friends, family). Item 33: Share feelings with other supervise(s), faculty, or staff. Item 34: Consultative resources: national, state, & local psychological associations. Item 35: Awareness of boundary crossings (ex. Excessive touching, needless self-disclosure, inappropriate attire or jokes, increased efforts to gain approval through friendship, gifts, or special treatment

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