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Navigating social work student fieldwork supervision: A collaborative auto-ethnographic experience of social work field supervisors in South Africa, Zimbabwean and Eswatini

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ABSTRACT

Fieldwork supervision is a critical component in the professional training of social work students. This discusses the experiences and reflections of three social work field supervisors, each representing Eswatini, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. The article's main aim is to share the lived experiences of fieldwork supervisors, identify the challenges and successes of fieldwork supervision, and provide a comparative analysis of fieldwork supervision across the three countries. The article arises from a qualitative collaborative autoethnographic method of research. This method offered authors an opportunity to reflect on their personal and lived experiences as field supervisors to social work students in various settings and enabled them to make meaning of those experiences collaboratively. The main findings are that there are unique socioeconomic and political conditions that influence the execution of fieldwork supervision and that the Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic was impactful on social work fieldwork by increasing anxiety and mental health challenges for students and supervisors. The article concludes by emphasising the value of social work fieldwork in preparing students for practice and the need for continued support and development of fieldwork supervision, and calls for culturally competent supervisor training, improved supervision infrastructure, and Afrocentric integration in social work curricula.

KEY TERMS: collaborative autoethnography Eswatini, fieldwork supervision, social work, South Africa, supervisors, students, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork supervision is critical for social work students as it allows for the application of theoretical knowledge in real-world situations. Fieldwork also refines existing interpersonal and problem-solving skills that students bring from their families and communities, strengthening their readiness for professional engagement. The article begins with a background on the importance of fieldwork supervision within the social work profession. Through the analytical collaborative autoethnography methodology, authors reflect on their personal experiences as social work field supervisors. The article then discusses the reflections and provides recommendations on how student fieldwork supervision can be improved. Among other recommendations, the article stresses the need to develop culturally sensitive and adaptable approaches to social work fieldwork supervision. This article uniquely contributes to social work scholarship through a comparative, collaborative autoethnographic lens across three Southern African contexts, foregrounding Afrocentric perspectives on fieldwork supervision rarely examined in existing literature.

BACKGROUND

Fieldwork supervision is a crucial aspect of professional training in various fields, including social work, education, and healthcare (Chogugudza, 2009; Dziro, 2013). Similar to other professions in social, human, and health sciences programs offered by higher education institutions, the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree involves a theory and a practice component. The practice component of the BSW, known as field instruction or field placement, is therefore an integral component of social work education (Dhemba, 2012). The fundamental importance of field practice in social work education is that it enables student social workers to integrate social work theory into practice and explore field practice opportunities (Amadasun, 2021). Building on this, fieldwork supervision serves as a dynamic learning space where students and supervisors co-construct knowledge and derive new theoretical insights from community interactions. Moreover, field placement in social work provides the opportunity for social work students to develop their professional identity as social workers and to internalise the social work role (Wilson & Flanagan, 2021). Student supervision during field placement becomes a critical discourse to guide, support, and educate social work students on practice-based learning.

Academic and agency field supervisors become the most important component in field practice as they provide much-needed supervision to students during field practice. Sunirose (2013) mentions that field supervisors supervise students, enabling them to develop core social work skills and competencies. Poggenpoel (2018) explains that the role of the field supervisor is to create a conducive environment for students' learning, development, reflective thinking, and the creation of awareness of historical and cultural relativity. However, though the roles of field supervisors might be well-articulated, the challenges in the field and the organisational demands have adverse effects on how they may affect students' learning experience during the field practice period. Organisational social work supervision has transformed to take on a surveillance role to the organisational demands and consequently emphasises the administrative function over support and educational functions (Wong et al., 2023; Gumbi et al., 2024). As a result of such challenges within social work organisations, students may find themselves preoccupied with assisting their field supervisors achieve their accountability targets, which might compromise the purpose of field practice. Hence, this skewed application of supervision may be viewed as a systematic error that causes a lack of trust, poor social work identity development, and impedes the growth of student social workers (Saltiel, 2017; Wong et al., 2023).

Moreover, with few field supervisors who have received training in supervision, most supervisors tend to rely on the supervision experience they acquire from their supervisors and working with clients (Saltiel, 2017). Banks, Tuggle, and Coleman (2021) assert that the students' training, supervision, and critical mechanisms to support the profession remain vague when field supervisors lack clarity about their responsibilities. This might impact the abilities of field supervisors to provide professional supervision to social work students. Therefore, providing training to field supervisors becomes important to equip and provide clarity and support. The aim of the article is threefold: (1) to amplify the lived experiences of social work field supervisors about field practice in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Eswatini; (2) to identify challenges and success that currently exist in student field supervision across the two countries and (3) provide a comparative analysis based on the unique strengths these two countries have so that social work field practice can be improved.

Fieldwork practice in the context of South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Eswatini

The BSW qualifications offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (South Africa), Women's University in Africa (WUA) (Zimbabwe), and University of Eswatini (UNESWA) (Eswatini) are internationally, regionally, and nationally recognised qualifications. As a nationally recognised profession, each country has specific national legislation, such as the Children's Protection and Welfare Act 6 of 2012 (Eswatini), Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (South Africa), and Social Workers Act [Chapter 27:21] (Zimbabwe) that

regulate the social work profession. Furthermore, as an internationally recognised profession, social work education and training offered by these institutions should reflect the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training as developed by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 2020. The IFSW and IASSW (2020) mandate that the social work professional qualification must expose social work students to the social work context and practice.

Field placement in the South African context

In the South African context, for student social workers to practice, they must “register at the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), which is a statutory body that regulates social service professions in terms of the Social Service Professions Act (110 of 1978), as amended” (Lombard & Wairire, 2010:101). Supervision in South Africa has been found by Botha (2002) to be highly unpredictable, non-standardised, non-routine, and imperceptible, amongst other things, which led to the Department of Social Development (DSD) and SACSSP (2012) jointly formulate a supervision framework for the social work profession in South Africa. The DSD and SACSSP (2012) provide for the mandate, requirements, and ethics for student social workers’ supervision during field practice. Although there is widespread agreement about the value of supervision, there is very little literature that examines what it is about the process of supervision that helps the student to learn (Wilson & Flanagan, 2021). The discourse of social work supervision at the practice level in South Africa has been found by various scholars, such as Engelbrecht (2013), Gumbi et al. (2024), Sithole (2020), Gumbi (2021), and Mathonsi and Makhubele (2016), mostly managerial rather than professional.

The DSD and SACSSP (2012:39-40) mandate that “there must be a memorandum of understanding between higher education institutions and organisations providing practice education placement for student social workers, specifically about the roles and responsibilities, practice education programme, infrastructure, and communication channels and protocol”. The different universities, through their respective departments of social work, must develop memorandums of understanding with different agencies where student social workers can be placed for field practice. In preparation for field placement, universities should ensure that field supervisors are provided with adequate training on critical aspects of student supervision, expected outcomes of field practice, and the importance of field practice to student social workers. For field supervisors to be eligible to supervise students, they must be social workers with a minimum of three years of experience and should have attended a comprehensive supervision course (SACSSP & DSD, 2012). The training of field practice supervisors is critical in ensuring that in provide the student with the necessary support, opportunities to reflect and discuss cases, and professional development (Gumbi et al., 2024; Joubert, et al., 2013). Furthermore, the training of field supervisors also helps to strengthen the much-needed collaboration between the academic staff and the field social workers.

Field practice in the Zimbabwean context

In Zimbabwe, fieldwork supervision is an essential component of student learning and professional development. The Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe (CSWZ) oversees fieldwork supervision, ensuring students and novice social workers receive adequate guidance, and approves fieldwork placement sites, ensuring they meet standards for quality training under the Social Workers Act [Chapter 27:21]. (Matsika et al., 2014). CSWZ also sets ethical and practice standards for social workers, guiding their fieldwork activities. By regulating and guiding social work fieldwork, the CSWZ promotes quality practice, protecting the public and upholding the profession's integrity. Supervisors offer support, feedback, and mentorship, helping learners navigate challenges and achieve their goals.

Fieldwork supervision in Zimbabwe is crucial as it enables practical application of theory, fosters professional development and cultural competence, provides mentorship, and ensures quality assurance in meeting professional standards and ethics (Muchinako & Muridzo, 2015). In Zimbabwe, fieldwork supervision is applied in various settings (Mupedziswa & Mushunje, 2021). Supervisors support students in social work, education, healthcare, and community development by enhancing skills in assessment, teaching, project management, and community engagement through fieldwork and guidance. The continued emigration of experienced social workers to the diaspora has left a seniority gap (Mwapaura et al, 2022; Mwapaura & Saidi, 2025). Moving beyond Western-centric models, the CSW now integrates indigenous wisdom and community-based healing into its framework (Mwapaura et al., 2024).

Field work supervision in the Eswatini context

The profession of social work is new in Eswatini. Social work was first introduced in Eswatini in 2014 and is currently being offered by two institutions of higher learning, namely, the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and the Eswatini Christian Medical University (EMCU) (Dhemba & Nhapi, 2020). The infancy of the profession in Eswatini has presented a plethora of challenges, all of which negatively impact social work as a practice and, by extension, the quality of social welfare service delivery (Mohapi, et al., 2022). It can be argued that social work

in the Eswatini context is a discipline without practice. This sentiment is echoed by Dhemba and Nhapi (2020), who postulate that the employment and practice patterns of social workers in Eswatini are quite opaque. This unfortunate reality is further exacerbated by the absence of a social work regulatory body to standardise social work practices and ethical conduct in the country (Mohapi et al., 2022).

Customary in many global states is registering students in their second year of study as student social workers to a social work council in preparation for fieldwork practice. In contrast, social work students in Eswatini commence their fieldwork practice without being affiliated with any social work regulatory body, and this continues throughout their professional practice as fully qualified social workers. This background to social work practice in Eswatini thus informs all the other functions of the profession, especially supervision (Baikady, 2022). In the Eswatini context, there are very limited agencies for students to engage in fieldwork, given that social work is relatively new. Eswatini social work students are not placed for their practice-based training, but instead are the ones who apply for internship placement in government and non-governmental agencies whose core mandate is the psychosocial and socio-economic welfare of the citizens of Eswatini.

Common in most social welfare agencies in Eswatini is the existence of a wide knowledge and practice gap regarding the supervision of student social workers and qualified social workers already practising in the field. In Eswatini, there are two generations of social workers. The former refers to social workers who practised before social work was introduced as an academic discipline in the country (Dlamini, 2020). A majority of first-generation social workers do not possess the relevant social work qualifications; those who do, obtained them whilst already practising as social workers and out of fear of redundancy once the first group of social work students graduated. The latter refers to the first intake of social workers to graduate from Eswatini institutions of higher learning with social work qualifications (Bimha, 2019). Second-generation student social workers practice fieldwork under the guidance and supervision of first-generation Social Workers. From this, a disconnect is witnessed. The students' academic experiences tend not to correlate with practical experiences during their fieldwork, specifically the practice of supervision.

With the dawning new era of seasoned academics in the field, as well as newly trained social work professionals eager to make their mark in the profession, social work practice in Eswatini quickly matches the quality of the academic aspect of the profession. In 2022, qualified Social Workers joined forces to establish the first-ever Social Work regulatory body in Eswatini, the Eswatini Social Services Professionals Association (ESSPA). Although the association is not yet fully functional and operational, this first step in regulating the profession is a step in the right direction. The retirement of some of the old Social Workers who were set in their ways of doing things has opened up a new avenue for young, dynamic, and qualified professionals in the Social Work field.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative collaborative autoethnography (CAE) was employed in this study as the sole methodological research approach. As an autoethnographic qualitative research method, the CAE is understood as involving studying oneself autobiographically while also analysing the sociocultural context with other researchers working together to interpret the data collected (Lapadat, 2017). The qualitative CAE research method offered researchers the unique opportunity to reflect on their personal or lived experiences as field supervisors to social work students in field practice in various settings and enabled them to make meaning of those experiences collaboratively. Motloung and Mzinyane (2023) view the basic building blocks of the CAE as (1) collaboration, (2) autobiography, and (3) ethnography. Chang (2013:113) explains that "autoethnographic data can be gathered in a variety of ways: recalling, collecting artefacts and documents, interviewing others, analysing self, observing self and reflecting on issues about the research topic". As this study has been conducted in the African context, the CAE aligns with the Afrocentric ways of doing, where storytelling and collaboration form part of ways of knowing and doing. Mzinyane et al. (2024:45) argue that the "CAE aligns with Afrocentrism because it emphasises collaboration and interconnectedness".

The researchers made use of self-reflection as a main approach to generating data. Self-reflection allows autoethnographers to focus on their present perspectives on issues related to the research topic (Chang, 2013:114). Researchers used self-reflections to unearth their personal experiences, challenges, and strengths in student fieldwork supervision in different contexts. The self-reflection also served as a premise for the comparative analysis across South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland, which provided opportunities to draw valuable lessons for improving social work field practice supervision. Successful collaboration necessitates clear communication, self-awareness, introspection, and honesty among those involved (Gant, 2022). Researchers, as social workers themselves, affiliated with various institutions of higher learning and social work institutions in these respective countries, employed the CAE without struggle, as being reflective is a critical component of social work education and practice. As a credible and advantageous methodology, CAE lends itself to greater rigour (Lapadat, 2017), especially when research ethics are observed. In employing the CAE as the methodological approach, researchers should ensure that ethical principles such as voluntary participation, autonomy, informed consent, and

confidentiality are observed (ibid). The participation of researchers in this article was voluntary and consensual.

The analytical reflective process began when the authors attended a PhD exchange program in South Africa at the UKZN from the 09th-23rd of April 2024. Two meetings were held in person during the period of the academic exchange, and three other meetings were held virtually with email communication, where insights on the manuscript were exchanged. During the meetings, participants shared personal narratives, identified emerging themes such as supervision challenges and cultural influences, and collaboratively recorded insights in reflective memos, which informed data analysis. Furthermore, authors engaged on how field supervision has been carried out in their respective organisations to get an overview of the nature of supervision existing in each country. As a result, key components of our CAE model in this article include storytelling, intercountry comparison, collaborative reflection, and collaborative analysis. While collaborative autoethnography provides depth and reflexivity, it is limited by subjectivity, small sample size, and the potential for interpretive bias. However, collaborative reflection and transparent memorising mitigated these challenges.

FINDINGS

The findings of this article are based on the reflections of the authors, who are field supervisors for social work students during the field placement, as described in the methodology earlier. The reflections are as follows:

Reflection 1: Author 2

As a social work fieldwork supervisor in Zimbabwe, I have had the privilege of working with students and novice social workers in various settings. My experience has taught me valuable lessons about the importance of cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and resilience in social work practice. One of the most significant challenges we face in Zimbabwe is the limited resources and infrastructure in many communities. This has required us to be creative and resourceful in our approach to social work, often relying on community-based initiatives and collaborations with local organisations. Despite these challenges, I have been inspired by the dedication and passion of my students and colleagues. Their commitment to social justice and human rights has driven them to find innovative solutions to complex problems, such as poverty, gender-based violence, and access to healthcare.

Through my supervision, I have emphasised the importance of cultural humility and understanding the local context. We have worked together to develop culturally sensitive interventions that consider the unique needs and experiences of the communities we serve. Some of the key lessons I have learned include building relationships, fostering trust, embracing adaptability, collaborating with local groups, practising cultural sensitivity, and demonstrating resilience and creativity are key to effective social work.

I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our communities, students, and practice. The pandemic has exacerbated existing social and economic inequalities, particularly in low-income communities. We have seen a significant increase in cases of gender-based violence, child abuse, and mental health concerns. In this context, our role as social workers has become even more critical. We have had to pivot quickly to address the emerging needs, leveraging technology and community-based initiatives to reach vulnerable populations. Despite the challenges, I am proud of the dedication and compassion displayed by our students and social workers.

Reflection 2: Author 1

Student supervision during field practice has never been without its challenges. In my experience, when students come to face the reality that they have to fulfil their field requirements, they panic and become anxious. They fear the pressure of being in the field and working with real clients, which puts to the test what they have learned. Therefore, supervising students during their early days of practice requires understanding, patience, and constant support until they adjust. As a supervisor, I have to prepare students that there will be gaps between what they know and what happens in the “real social work world”. However, the COVID-19 period exacerbated the challenges in student supervision during field practice.

The World Bank has characterised South Africa as the most unequal society in the world. This implies that social work and education are relevant in be context-specific and relevant in addressing local issues. With other communities extremely under-resourced while others are well-resourced, this creates challenges for student interventions and requires supervisors to be dynamic in supervision. After COVID-19, student field supervision took another unexpected turn, and it has been marked by different learning opportunities and challenges. COVID-19 was a “gamechanger” in how we were used to field practice. The sudden COVID-

19 regulations impacted how agencies functioned, as most senior social workers were advised to work from home because of being at high risk, which affected the supervision of students. Moreover, in different agencies, there were rotations of social workers because of the lack of infrastructure, and COVID-19 imposed restrictions. Students had to work from home and receive supervision using virtual means. This was a positive development in the profession; however, it brought a lot of anxiety to us as supervisors and to the students themselves. There were high levels of mental health challenges to both field supervisors and students, and no insufficient support was provided. Though the COVID-19 period has passed, online learning continued to be part of learning at our university, which brought challenges in terms of students mastering skills needed for working with clients.

Reflection 3: Author 3

It would be a great disservice indeed to reflect on my fieldwork supervision experiences through the lens of a supervisor without looking back at my fieldwork supervision experience as a social work student... From practical experience, through witnessing my supervisor making social work come alive right before my eyes and her allowing me to practice, make my mistakes, and learn from them, I gained newfound respect, appreciation, and affection for the practical aspect of the profession. This experience has been the foundation on which I based my fieldwork practice with my colleagues.

At the first meeting, during orientation, I always insist that we refer to each other as colleagues. This is my attempt to dismantle the already existing power dynamic that deems me as a supervisor superior to them as students, something that is not entirely a reality because I learn from them as much as they learn from me. I want them to have a voice. I thrive daily on training independent thinkers who do not fear themselves or the power they possess within themselves to make tremendous changes in their field of practice. Granted, they make mistakes, but is that not the whole point of learning? Final-year students in any academic discipline tend to be engaged in an external and internal battle with themselves at this point in their degree. The quality of fieldwork supervision they receive has the power to shape the future social work professionals they become in the future.

In the four years since I started practising as a fully licensed social work professional in a hospital setting, I have had the pleasure and privilege of being a field supervisor to six cohorts of students from both the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and the Eswatini Medical Christian University (EMCU). The first half of the year is usually dedicated to the intake of social work students from EMCU, and the other half of the year is allocated to students from UNESWA. Initially, the institution accepted four students per institution each year, but due to the high number of students who apply for placements in contrast to the limited agencies that can receive them and offer proper supervision, the number has increased to six. The healthcare institution has a total of two qualified social workers who function to provide psychosocial and socioeconomic services to in and outpatients, as well as the health institution's 12 community health clinics. Social work in a hospital setting normally receives a huge interest from aspiring student social workers, primarily because there is no one set of psychosocial issues of focus, and they get first-hand experience working in a multidisciplinary team with other professionals. From practice, I focus on the support function of supervision with students, while my colleague, who is also my supervisor, focuses on the administrative function of supervision. We both take turns with the educational function because we specialise in different fields of practice and with different psychosocial issues.

Comparison: Commonalities and Differences

The collaborative reflections reveal that fieldwork supervision in Southern Africa is an act of innovative survival. Through balancing the administrative need for requirements with the human need for empathy and support, these supervisors are not just teaching social work; they are shaping a resilient future for the profession amidst systemic inequality and post-pandemic transitions.

Feature	Zimbabwe	South Africa	Eswatini
Primary Context	Community-based & Resource Scarcity	Extreme Inequality & Virtual Shifts	Hospital Setting & Multidisciplinary
Student Experience	Creative resourcefulness in low-income areas	High anxiety and mental health struggles	Internal battle with professional identity
COVID-19 Effect	Pivot to technology for GBV and child abuse	Sudden shift to virtual; "Working from home"	Increased intake due to limited agency space
Commonalities	Reliance on	All three report high	All three struggle with

	community/local collaborations; Emphasis on resilience and cultural humility.	levels of student anxiety and the need for a "supportive" supervision function.	limited infrastructure and the "theory-practice" gap.
Differences	Focuses heavily on <i>external</i> resource mobilisation.	Focuses heavily on the <i>digital/virtual</i> transition and mental health.	Focuses heavily on <i>internal</i> power dynamics and professional role-playing.

Major lessons

Supervision must prioritise the supportive function (emotional holding) during the early stages of placement before focusing heavily on the educational or administrative functions. Effective social work in Southern Africa requires cultural humility, an ongoing process of self-reflection, and learning from the community and the students themselves. While technology offers learning opportunities, it can also hinder skill-mastery if not balanced with face-to-face interaction. The digital divide remains a barrier to social justice in education. To create independent thinkers, supervisors must intentionally reduce the power gap. This fosters a safe environment where students feel empowered to make mistakes and learn from them. Supervisors and students in these contexts must be extraordinarily creative. Resilience is not just a personal trait but a professional requirement for practising in the Global South.

DISCUSSION

Fieldwork supervision in Southern Africa is profoundly influenced by the region's socioeconomic and institutional contexts. Supervisors often navigate challenges such as limited resources, high caseloads, and inadequate infrastructure, which impact the quality of supervision (Dhemba & Nhapi, 2020; Mupedziswa & Mushunje, 2021; Mwapaura et al, 2022). Gumbi et al. (2024) emphasise the necessity for supervisors to balance administrative, supportive, and educational functions amidst these constraints. Additionally, the scarcity of qualified social workers in certain areas necessitates innovative supervisory approaches to ensure effective field education (Mupedziswa, 2021; Mzinyane et al., 2024).

The diverse cultural, traditional, and linguistic landscapes across Southern Africa require supervisors to adopt culturally sensitive and Afrocentric approaches. Mugumbate (2020) and Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2020) advocate for integrating Indigenous knowledge and community-centred practices into supervision. While Zimbabwe has made progress with collaborative community-based models, such culturally grounded approaches remain limited in South Africa and Eswatini. Deliberate adoption of Afrocentric frameworks, such as the Community-Centred and Culturally Sensitive (CCdC) Model, could enhance the relevance and effectiveness of supervision in these contexts.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in fieldwork supervision. Harris (2023) highlights the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to bridge geographical gaps and facilitate remote supervision. While this shift offers new opportunities for reflective learning, challenges related to digital literacy and unequal access, particularly in rural areas, persist. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure equitable and effective supervision.

The emotional and mental well-being of both students and supervisors remains central to effective supervision. Gumbi (2025) underscores the importance of acknowledging the emotional labour inherent in social work practice. Supervisors must implement support mechanisms to manage stress and prevent burnout, fostering resilience and professional growth. Such approaches ensure that fieldwork supervision not only develops competent practitioners but also nurtures their holistic well-being.

CONCLUSION

The collaborative reflections reveal that fieldwork supervision in Southern Africa is an act of innovative survival. The aim of this analysis was threefold: (1) to amplify the lived experiences of social work field supervisors about field practice in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Eswatini; (2) to identify challenges and successes that currently exist in student field supervision across these contexts; and (3) to provide a comparative analysis based on the unique strengths these three countries possess so that social work field practice can be improved. This process has provided valuable insights into the similarities and differences in fieldwork experiences. Overall, the findings highlight the critical importance of social work fieldwork supervision in preparing students for professional practice and the urgent need for continued support and development of supervision models to address emerging challenges and opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To sustain this resilience, there is a critical need for key stakeholders, including government bodies, academic institutions, and social work agencies, to:

- Conduct Comprehensive Comparative Analyses: Stakeholders should move beyond localised anecdotes to facilitate large-scale comparative research of social work fieldwork supervision across different countries and contexts. Understanding regional variations in Southern Africa is essential for developing standardised yet flexible best practices.
- Develop Culturally Sensitive and Adaptable Approaches: Supervision models must be decolonised and localised. Stakeholders must move away from Eurocentric pedagogical frameworks to embrace indigenous knowledge systems and adaptable approaches that reflect the unique socio-economic realities of the Southern African context.
- Prioritise Supportive Supervision for Mental Health: Recognising the "field panic" and trauma-informed nature of the work, agencies must provide structured supportive supervision. This includes formal pathways for addressing student anxiety and mental health challenges, ensuring that supervisors themselves are also supported through peer-mentorship programs.
- Foster Collaboration and Partnership: There must be a deliberate strengthening of the "triad" between social work educators, field supervisors, and students. By fostering these partnerships, institutions can ensure that the curriculum remains relevant to the field while supervisors receive the pedagogical training necessary to enhance student experiences.
- Implement Innovative and Technology-Based Solutions: To bridge the gap created by resource scarcity and distance, stakeholders should invest in digital infrastructure. This involves developing technology-based solutions such as virtual simulation labs or remote supervision tools that are designed to address the specific challenges of low-bandwidth environments without compromising the quality of skill-mastery.

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