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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Practice Challenges Among Social Work Mitigation Specialists and Interprofessional

Supervision Methods

by

Nicole D. Jackson

MSW, Georgia State University, 2012

BA, Spelman College, 2008

Project Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

November 2019

Abstract

Social work supervision is a core component of the social work profession that is often absent for social workers in interprofessional teams. In capital defense practice settings, social workers are hired as mitigation specialists to work as members of the legal team. Informed by systems theory, the purpose of this action research study was to explore the practice challenges of social work mitigation specialists (SWMS) and how an interprofessional-focused supervision approach could be applied to resolve those issues. Six SWMS employed with capital defense agencies in Georgia and Texas were interviewed. Using a thematic coding analysis, several key themes emerged: (a) role navigation, (b) ethical dilemmas as practice challenges, (c) increased competence, and (d) team cohesion as dynamics that will improve with the implementation of an interprofessional-focused supervision approach. These findings provide understanding as to how supervision can be tailored to guide SWMS and other social workers in interprofessional settings. Recommendations for future research involve developing supervision guidelines for social work practice in interprofessional settings. Adhering to these suggestions might provide insight as to how interprofessional teams can work collaboratively, improving practice approaches and interventions to alter systems of service delivery and client outcomes. This provides the opportunity to effect social change by impacting individual practitioners and clients, as well as organizations, systems, and from a political perspective.

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Dedication

This body of knowledge is dedicated to my family who have supported me with a Godly love throughout this entire process. And, to my clients and colleagues who have gifted me with experiences to sew into the development of skill and greater impact.

My Sister, my baby-- nose. Your support in the form of sisterly advice, baby-sitting, venting sessions and embracing hugs that energize my spirit are simply cherished. You mean so much more than you know.

Jasmine, my cousin, friend, and the one who has pushed for academic and professional attainment with me since day one. I did it but the true celebration begins when you cross this line with me! We've shared this dream for a long time--we are on our way to another level of greatness!

I want to express gratitude to everyone who has contributed to my journey, both directly and indirectly. It is now time for me to pay it forward as I support you in your dreams and engage in service to those for whom I have been prepared.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Supervision is the pathway through which clinicians develop skills and competencies purposed to enhance practice; however, poor conceptualization and application of supervision limits its effectiveness (Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick, & Ellis, 2008). Kanno and Koeske (2010) highlighted the effects that inadequate supervision has on social work professionals. The quality of supervision directly impacts a social worker's level of professional preparedness and performance outcomes. Additionally, profession-specific supervision limits the worker's professional capacity. When working in an interprofessional environment in which professionals collaborate to provide clients care, it is necessary to incorporate a range of professional components in supervision to prepare social workers to thrive in practice (Bogo, Paterson, Tufford, & King, 2011).

In capital defense teams, social workers are hired as members of an interprofessional legal trial team to defend persons accused of capital murder. This role is referred to as a mitigation specialist (MS). During the course of the team efforts, social work mitigation specialists (SWMS) are often confronted with circumstances that are better addressed with professional supervision; however, supervision frequently a lacking privilege in many legal settings (Hicks-Pass, 2013). Although these issues may be social work in nature, decisions made must incorporate all professional aspects of the case (Andrews, 2012; Supplementary Guidelines, 2008). It is unclear what is the best supervision approach to address the practice challenges of SWMS.

In this qualitative action research study, I sought to provide a foundation for advancing social work supervision (SWS) practices. Through the examination of

challenge experienced by SWMS, application of practice theory, a review of social work professional standards, and an understanding of how these concepts fit within the interprofessional capital defense framework, I provided a perspective of this unique practice. This information will advance the social work profession and provide understanding as to how research methods may be employed by communities to produce positive social change.

Problem Statement

Although researchers correlate quality SWS with greater health and practice outcomes among professionals (Robinson, 2013), social workers continue to lack this necessary guidance globally. Hair (2013) reported the existence of growing concerns about the waning availability and decreasing quality of supervision among the international community of social workers. Ladany, Mori, and Mehr (2013) also highlighted the findings of problematic, counterproductive, harmful, and unethical clinical supervision among human service professionals through empirically-based research.

Although scholars in regions such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom have concentrated on inadequate supervision, research of this nature is limited in the United States. This subject matter is scarce in discussions relating to supervision for social work practice in capital defense legal teams and what approach is most effective in addressing supervision needs in this practice area. The SWMS frequently face conflict in practice that challenges professional standards as they seek to meet client needs. Despite this concern, there are little data on the need for the supervision of SWMS.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The SWMS works as a member of an interprofessional team to legally defend an individual accused of capital murder. In this process, the SWMS is tasked with assisting legal counsel in identifying mitigating themes in a client's life and developing a theoretical basis for trial strategy. The Supplementary Guidelines (2008) of the American Bar Association (ABA, 2003) state that the MS must be able to "illustrate and illuminate factors that shaped and influenced the client's behavior and functioning" (p. 683). The MS must be trained in understanding how biopsychosocial, economic, and political influences impact a client's life.

Although the ABA does not require the MS to be a social worker, the responsibilities of this role are naturally engrained in the social work profession and course of training (Andrews, 2012). Social workers are often hired to fulfill this role. The ABA's designation of the lead attorney as case supervisor, as opposed to a trained social worker, deviates from the acknowledgement and fulfillment of the social work professional standards put forth by the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008). The focus of the criminal justice system is on the defendant; whereas, social workers concentrate on the wellbeing of the person labeled as the defendant (Mason, 1991). Although policies have shifted the focus of programs within the justice system to focus more on rehabilitation, the notion that incarcerated persons are offenders first, has remained a constant theme (Payne & Welch, 2015). Consequently, SWMS are left responsible for prioritizing legal practices and values against social work ethical standards.

Social work professionals use supervision is a mechanism to manage practice dilemmas. Milne et al. (2008) characterized supervision as an avenue for clinicians to develop professional competencies. The relationship between a senior and junior practitioner provides an opportunity for junior practitioners to receive guidance related to practice challenges. This missing relational element is an obstacle for SWMSs in this practice setting. Although social work professional benefit from supervision provided by like-professionals, profession-specific supervision limits a professional's ability to work optimally within interprofessional teams. The interprofessional supervision framework emphasizes the incorporation of all participating disciplines, enabling the sharing of knowledge to form new approaches to working with clients (Beddoe & Howard, 2012).

The goal of this qualitative action study was to explore the necessity of supervision for SWMS and to assess the appropriateness of an interprofessional-focused supervision approach to resolve practice challenges. The research questions for this study were the following: What practice challenges do SWMS believe would benefit from supervision? Additionally, what are SWMS perceptions about whether an interprofessional supervision approach would adequately address experienced challenges? Answering these questions will advance understanding about the challenges of social workers in this practice sector and provide a foundation for future studies in identifying best practices for this specialty.

Nature of the Doctoral Project

A qualitative action research framework was used to guide this investigative effort. This design accommodates flexibility in the research process and is favorable for

gathering data reflective of a range of experiences, useful for effecting change among the target community (Stringer, 2007). Morgan, Ataie, Carder, and Hoffman (2013) conducted three separate studies with varying demographics to explore dyadic interviewing as an appropriate method for qualitative research and revealed that dyadic interviews yield data that reflect social interaction and in-depth narratives, remaining consistent with the focus of qualitative data.

To investigate social work practice challenges in capital defense and the relevance of specific SWS techniques, I conducted narrative interviews with SWMS. This data collection method was implemented from an action research approach, intended to model a process of change within the identified organization. Although research questions were identified, action research presents the opportunity for researchers to understand an issue from the perspective of the community, develop a plan of action, and evoke change. As I engaged with the target community, my primary role was to listen and facilitate a process of change. The data collected in this process were examined through a thematic coding analysis. I organized the qualitative data into groups, further enabling the identification and reporting of patterns within the data set (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Significance of the Study

Stemming from research on the benefits of SWS, I sought to emphasize the necessity of supervision for SWMS and explored the usefulness of an interprofessional supervision approach to resolve practice challenges. Social work supervision functions as an administrative, educative, and supportive mechanism through which social workers are held accountable and expected to align their practice with the policies, ethics, and

standards governing their employing organization (Beddoe, 2012). Supervision and collegial support were found to be the only significant theme to correlate with practitioner resilience (Beddoe, Davys, & Adamson, 2014). Social workers attribute supervision to their ability to cope with work-related stressors which ultimately improves their practice abilities.

An investigation of the concept of SWS within the capital defense revealed the importance of its application. The information from this investigation may be used to assist nonsocial work professionals in the capital defense sector to understand how social workers may optimize personal and professional outcomes, as well as how this directly relates to legal aspects of the case. Greater competency may then translate to the incorporation of required SWS within the ABA guidelines.

This knowledge should not be limited to changing policies relating to SWS, as it has the ability to transform the social work discipline, the professionals who work within this sector, and society through social change. As individual workers develop awareness and understanding of their role within the systems they work, they may alter their perspective of professional development—the manner in which their work is performed and the tools needed to achieve its execution for clients and the community. The adoption of this outlook establishes new standards for the profession from a practice, policy, and research standpoint.

This investigative effort may encourage scholars to build upon these findings to identify theories to guide interprofessional teamwork. Integrating such findings into practice will alter the way social work students are trained and the quality of services that

are rendered. As social work professionals grow in knowledge, clients and the communities served will also be transformed through processes of social change. Close attention to practice efforts that affect client outcomes may lead to the bridging of gaps between professionals, the community, and clients served. These elements provide an indication as to how information and research may be applied to solve problems.

Theoretical Framework

Newell (2001) characterized systems theory (ST) as a given structure that possesses its own self-organizing behaviors; thus, each facet is different from the sum of its parts, and it is limited in functionality without all parts. According to ST, social workers must engage in alignment with professional team members to enhance practice outcomes. All professionals within an interprofessional team must understand how each role and professional standard(s) impact team outcomes. An understanding of the social worker position within capital defense teams and incorporating elements to address the professional needs of social workers in alignment with legal standards will improve practice, team functionality, and outcomes for clients.

Systems Theory: Social Work and Interprofessional Practice

Referred to as interprofessional teams, the concept of incorporating the social work role into a range of professional settings has evolved into a popular and demanding practice. The Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative (CIHC, 2010) described interprofessional collaboration as "a partnership between a team of health providers and a client in a participatory, collaborative and coordinated approach to shared decision-making around health and social issues" (p. 11). This definition has been generally

accepted, as many nations and governments have focused professional practices on the provision of services across sectors. Although these teams may be comprised of a range of professionals, the incorporation of social work has been of particular interest for interprofessional teams (Glaser & Suter, 2016), as their skillsets are highly valuable and adaptable for meeting the needs of clients.

Glaser and Suter (2016) explored the actual experiences of social workers as they work with other professionals in a health care setting. Glaser and Suter suggested that, although social workers held a positive view of this work, there were concerns relating to the full integration and collaboration of the social work role. This concern stemmed from the perspective of participants reflecting a lack of understanding of social work ideology from other professionals on the team. Social workers also highlighted communication as a key component of the team's work (Glaser & Suter, 2016). The application of ST in this practice approach would facilitate the competence required for all professionals to work cohesively within the team.

Suter et al. (2013) emphasized the dependence that interprofessional collaborations have on the application of organizational and systems theories. Communication, motivation, negotiation, and culture are all common focuses of organizations with varying professional components. Weinstein, Morton, Taras, and Reznick (2013) explored the significance of teaching successful teamwork to law school students to promote the understanding of teamwork: clear goals, leadership, shared commitment and participation, mutual respect, open communication, collaborative environment, on-going team evaluation, member competence, external support and

recognition, stages in the team process, forming, norming, storming, reforming, and performing. Through grouping students and placing them in interprofessional scenarios, Weinstein et al. found that students attributed their training in teamwork to improving their communication, time management, delegation, and problem-solving.

As social workers seek to collaborate with other professionals, there must be a focus on understanding the role and professional practices of each team component to facilitate successful outcomes. This logic applies to this project, as it informs the development of research questions by establishing an understanding that SWMS work as a part of a greater system. The research questions were framed to seek resolutions to practice problems, encompassing all aspects of the greater working system. I gathered information pertaining to the experiences of participants (understanding their role within the legal team, challenges, and professional needs) to determine the best methods for supervision. Employing ST also provides a foundation for understanding why SWS is needed in this professional sector and how it can be applied as social workers practice within capital defense legal teams.

Values and Ethics

The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) is an ethical guide for practice by which social workers should adhere to protect themselves, as well as the clients they serve. Although there are various aspects of this guide that correlate with this practice issue, there are two social work practice values that must be highlighted: social justice and competence. The social work discipline focuses on ensuring the fair treatment of marginalized populations, calling for social workers to challenge the injustices that clients may endure. The practice

of SWMS encompasses this value, as they work to ensure that clients receive a fair trial in the justice system. Although this is the overall goal of the profession, SWMS must also combat injustices that the client may face as a result of team dynamics. Exploring the incorporation of adequate SWS may address practice conflicts that relate to client injustices.

The value of competence directly relates to this study because this value requires that social workers practice within their skillset and also seek to enhance knowledge to better serve clients (NASW, 2008). Supervision serves as a core element of professional development in the social work discipline (Coleman, 2003). The absence of competence in capital defense teams limits the SWMS' professional capacity in addressing practice conflict and advancing their expertise as it pertains to understanding how to align their practice with legal justice ideology. Limited understanding inhibits the outcome of their work with the team and outcomes for clients. An investigation as to how to address this practice concern supports the goal of the NASW Code of Ethics and advances the social work profession.

Review of Professional and Academic Literature

To gain an understanding of social work practice and the SWMS role, I performed a comprehensive search of current literature. Targeted sources were published between the years 2012 to 2017; however older sources were referenced to provide historical context when applicable. Social work databases such as SocIndex and PsycInfo were accessed through the Walden University Library website. The Academic Search Complete database was used to focus on interprofessional perspectives. Within these

searches, I used the following search terms: *capital defense, law, social work, social work supervision,* and *interprofessional teams* to reflect components of the study.

Social Work Practice and Professional Standards

The NASW (2017a) defined social work practice as consisting of

social work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following

ends: helping people obtain tangible services; counseling and psychotherapy with

individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups provide or

improve social and health services; and participating in legislative processes. The

practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior;

of social and economic, and cultural institutions; and of the interaction of all these

factors. (para. 1)

This definition expresses the range of roles social workers may fulfill and systems they may serve within. Despite working in a micro, mezzo, or macro capacity, the NASW Code of Ethics is a set of professional standards that governs the behavior and practices of social workers.

History of the NASW code of ethics. Although ethics have been a focal point of social work, the profession has experienced a shift in ethical perspectives throughout its evolution. The original NASW Code of Ethics was published on October 13, 1960, and it saw a series of revisions to reflect the modern-day code, last revised in 2008 (NASW, 2017b). Many revisions of the NASW Code of Ethics were prompted by response to shifting social, political, and economic climates throughout the years (Payne, 2002).

Reamer (1998) highlighted the stages that impacted the development of the discipline: morality period, the values period, the ethical and decision-making period, and the ethical standards and risk management period. These periods transitioned from a focus on the moral behaviors of clients, to the modern-day perspective that promotes high standards of practice among professionals. A present-day understanding of the issues social workers face in practice has led to sustainable growth within the profession, promoting responsible decision making and positive outcomes (Reamer, 1998).

Current NASW code of ethics. The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) highlighted the core values of the profession: service, social justice, dignity and worth of person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence that are defined by the social work ethical principles. Each of these values and principles are applicable to any given social work practice circumstance and must be followed when social workers are faced with practice dilemmas. I will review and operationalize the core values of the social work profession.

Service. Social workers are expected to assist people in need by addressing the social problems they are enduring (NASW, 2008). This professional standard requires that social workers act in the best interest of the client, neglecting any personal bias or self-motivating factors. In addition, social workers are expected to serve at the professional level in which they have been trained, while incorporating other helpful resources to assist in the process.

Social justice. Professionals within the social work practice are called to challenge social injustices, focusing on oppressed and vulnerable populations. Although

there is an infinite number of populations that require this source of advocacy for various reasons, the main goal of this core value is to promote cultural sensitivity (Garran, Kang, & Fraser, 2014) and equal treatment for all populations. This value encompasses the acceptance of diversity, awareness, inclusion, and understanding of all groups. Integrating social justice into practice is often a difficult concept for social workers to incorporate into practice because there is a lacking consensus about how to define multicultural education, cultural competence, and diversity (Garran et al., 2014). Despite varying understandings, fighting for the equal opportunity and fair treatment for all humans may serve as a template on how to incorporate this value into practice.

Dignity and worth of the person. Social workers are to treat everyone with respect—in consideration of their values, circumstances, choices, and desire to enhance their capacity and opportunity within the greater community (NASW, 2008). Social workers seek to protect and promote each client's rights to quality life, in addition to his or her right to self-determination. No person should be disparaged, but rather encouraged by their strengths and ability to proactively be an agent of change in his or her own circumstances.

Importance of human relationships. Social work professionals understand the importance of human relationships and how the nature of those relationships may be used to achieve changes (NASW, 2008). Social workers rely on a network of professionals and resources to achieve a desired outcome. Recognizing how to establish relationships and professional networks can be crucial to the quality and achievement of client and practice outcomes.

*Integrity***.** Social workers are expected to behave honestly and responsibly (NASW, 2008). Social workers frequently face professional challenges that challenge integrity (Banks, 2010). As social workers engage in practice, it is essential to honor commitments to their organization of employment and clients, despite any personal beliefs (Jedynak, 2014). Maintaining integrity includes upholding all professional and organizational standards, in addition to acting in the best interest of the target client population (NASW, 2008).

Competence. Social work professionals provide services within the scope of their training and seek to enhance knowledge through consultation of resources and other trained professionals when needed (NASW, 2008). Additionally, social workers are expected to engage in continuing education to maintain professional licensure(s) and seek contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

Social Work Supervision

The role of a social work supervisor is to manage and support junior practitioners by providing direction and setting standards (Caras & Sandu, 2014). The goal of this process is the development of new skills, promoting personal and professional growth for the supervisee. Although many agree that this relationship serves as a benefit to both the supervisor and supervised, opponents suggest that it has also proven to be problematic, compounding the load of an already stressful profession (Falender, Burnes, & Ellis, 2013). SWS is a core component of the social work discipline and is considered among best practices.

History. The concept of SWS traces back to the early 1900s. Pioneers of the

profession were modeled after the three components of established supervision frameworks that continue to serve as a foundation for its implementation: administrative, educational, and supportive (Coleman, 2003). The administrative element emphasizes the completion of agency-oriented tasks that correlate with organizational policies and requirements. The educational component, also recognized as clinical supervision in social work, mimics a learning relationship, in which the supervisee learns therapeutic skills and knowledge related to client interaction. The supportive aspect of supervision concentrates on the individual wellbeing of the supervisee and managing job-related stress (Coleman, 2003).

Scholars have focused on the transition of SWS throughout its years of existence. Although scholars have adopted various approaches to evaluating its changing course, most agree that changes in SWS directly correlate with the culture of the profession. Tsui (1997) highlighted the development of social welfare and the professionalization of the social work discipline as two contributing factors of change. Tsui further dissected the course of SWS into five stages: administrative roots of SWS (1878-1910), the change of the context of supervisory training and emergence of a literature base (1911-1945), influence of practice theory and methods (1930s-1950s), debate between interminable supervision and autonomous practice (1956-1970s), and back to administrative function in the age of accountability (1980s-1995). Tsui explained that early functions of the SWS concept was modeled after a case work format and transitioned to focus on self-directed practices. A more contemporary focus of licensing and accountability refocused SWS on

administration, as organizations sought to increase the quality of services through policies and organizational values.

O'Donoghue and Tsui (2015) presented the changing states of SWS, focusing on an evaluation of its application in practice. O'Donoghue and Tsui cited several studies that provided a foundation for their research. Harkness and Poertner (1989) found that the supervision process focused more on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, rather than client outcomes. This is contrast to the argument of Tsui (1997), maintaining that organizations were forced to focus on the effectiveness of services, as funders demanded this priority.

Bogo and McKnight (as cited in O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2015) revealed the diminishing role of SWS. From this, Bogo and McKnight (as cited in O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2015) recommended that future scholars focus on the development of valid and reliable instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of various supervision models. Nevertheless, O'Donoghue and Tsui (2015) found that there is an existing awareness and knowledge base concerning the development of SWS and the importance of its application to oversee cases and to regulate how social workers are impacted by their work. Furthermore, O'Donoghue and Tsui (2015) revealed that SWS encompasses the provision of emotional support and that trustworthy SWS relationships positively impacts work-related stress and job satisfaction among social workers.

SWS focus on what practice models are good to guide developing social workers and how those methods impact client outcomes (Dan, 2017; O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2015). Although an administrative focus continues to guide SWS, a balance between

accountability and worker support will be beneficial for the development of social work

practice. O'Donoghue (2015) recommended that scholars should examine the structure of

SWS, the reasons for its implementation, and evidentiary practices.

Discussion of benefits and opposition to social work supervision. Although the

continuous advancement of SWS research and methods support the benefits of SWS, the

scholarly debate of its pros and cons continue. Kadushin (as cited in Tsui, 1997) argued

13 reasons in support of why social work supervision should be retained. Each of these

reasons fell under the umbrellas of political accountability and organizational control, to

correlate with the nature of social work and educational function of SWS or the support

of workers.

One of the most common supports for SWS is the impact it has on worker

resilience. Characterized as a concept that focuses on the exploration of strengths to

identify potential solutions in adverse situations, Beddoe et al. (2014) explored the impact

that SWS has on a worker's ability to manage work-related stressors. Beddoe et al.

revealed that, although resilient practitioners assumed a responsibility for their own

wellbeing, they attributed the development of those skills to supervision. Team and peer

support were also noted as factors that contributed to the well-being of practitioners; thus,

it is recommended that these methods are used to complement the supervisory

relationship, not replace it. Beddoe et al. also highlighted the importance of regular social

work meetings for practitioners in interdisciplinary teams.

Chiller and Crisp (2012) also supported allocating resources towards supervision

because it is a main factor in social worker retention. Chiller and Crisp revealed that the

workers felt SWS helped with the management of stress, education, and the development of skills, which they were able to apply to their practice. Manthorpe, Moriarty, Hussein, Stevens, and Sharpe (2013) suggested that supervision for new social workers affected their practice engagement. Managers frequently stress over providing sufficient supervision for junior level workers. Manthorpe et al. suggested more structured support for newly qualified social workers. In addition, greater emphasis should be placed on determining the effectiveness of supervision provided by managers.

Caras and Sandu (2014) also supported notions in favor of SWS. Caras and Sandu stated that SWS is an essential element in the management of staff in social service organizations. Key functions of SWS were viewed as a source of peer review, support for assimilating new practitioners into their role and culture of the organization, as well as a mechanism for advancement for more experienced social workers (Caras & Sandu, 2014). The quality of services rendered to clients is directly dependent on the level of professional development within an organization; professional development is attributed to the quality of supervision that is provided to practitioners.

There is little information in opposition of SWS. Carpenter, Webb, and Bostock (2013) determined that, although there was some evidence that effective supervision is associated with job satisfaction and an increased ability to manage caseloads and job stressor, studies claiming the benefits of SWS were based on weak evidence. Researchers did not suggest that the proper implementation of SWS negatively impacts supervisees.

It is imperative to highlight the essential components that facilitate a successful SWS process. Beddoe (2017) suggested that SWS is "a practice that is expected to model

effective relationship building, the sensitive giving and receiving of feedback, and the careful management of power and difference" (p. 88). Ladany et al. (2013) found that effective supervisors focus on developing a solid supervisor-supervisee relationship and mutually agreed upon goals.

Ellis et al. (2014) expounded upon the definition of essential components of SWS and operationalized duties of a good supervisor. Ellis et al. stated that supervisors must possess the appropriate level of competency for clinical supervision and remain aware of their limitations, provide evaluative feedback to the supervisee in a respectful manner, promote and invest in the supervisees wellbeing and professional advancement, be attentive towards multicultural and diversity issues that may arise in the supervision relationship and in cases work, and acknowledge and address the boundaries that exist within the supervising relationship. These components are impossible to achieve if the supervisor is not competent in the professional practices of the supervisees.

The Interprofessional Collaboration Approach

The term interprofessional, although differentiated from multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and trans-disciplinary, all follow a similar collaborative model. For this investigation, the definition for interprofessional collaboration was adopted from Hogston and Marjoram's (2007) characterization of the multidisciplinary team approach: a collaborative process among groups of individuals with varying professional backgrounds, working towards a common outcome for the provision of services. This model is most often employed in health care, social service, and educational settings; however, it may be exercised in less traditional settings, such as the legal and corporate

fields. Much of the existing literature focuses on the health care setting and occasionally included the experiences of social workers.

Within recent decades, interprofessional collaboration has received greater attention, as it is considered essential to the provision of quality clinical care and maximizing outcomes for users of service (Fulmer, 2016). Ndoro (2014) found that interprofessional collaboration has advantages relating to professional competence, the quality of care provided to patients, and decision making relating to care. Findings in studies conducted among pediatric, geriatric, and oncology patients were also identified (Llewellyn-Jones & Pereira, 2016; Prades, Remue, van Hoof, & Borras, 2015; Tricco et al., 2014). Although improvements were recommended relevant to team processes, each study concluded that the interprofessional approach advances practice outcomes.

In addition to the health care setting, teams providing mental health services also have benefited from the interprofessional approach (Evans et al., 2012; Ndoro, 2014). A common thread exists among all: it is recommended that future studies focus on team processes and components that contribute to the effectiveness of interprofessional collaboration. Ndoro highlighted components that the National Health Service (NHS) England introduced as the 6C's for health care professionals: care, compassion, competence, communication, courage, and commitment. Each of these elements enhance the team working alliance, which impacts the ability to achieve intended goals. Nic a Bhaird et al. (2016) revealed that a lack in clarity in goals and undefined roles of team members hindered the collaborative process among mental health interprofessional teams.

In 2007, Shaw, Heyman, Reynolds, Davies, and Godin explored factors that limited the interprofessional collaborative process in a qualitative study. This investigation revealed conflict, such as "boundary clashes, communication failures, stereotyping by one profession of another, exclusion of patients from effective engagement in their treatment, uninformed decision-making, disrespect and the existence of a collectively reproduced blame culture," (p. 15) led to a failure to achieve collaboration across professionals. It should be noted that higher-ranking medical professionals have more positive outlook on the success of the team process than non-medical professionals. In a more recent study, which focused on elements that strengthen the interprofessional collaborative process, Chatalasingh and Reeves (2014) found that situational team leadership which promotes direction and coaching, support and delegation, as well as the ability to adapt to the needs of the team led to more positive outcomes. Problem-solving and the ability to manage shifting clinical situations were also noted as positive qualities.

Studies in this area provide much evidence of needs for improvement. While collaborating professionals have the ability to optimize outcomes, a shift in how this approach is implemented is necessary. Moreover, an interprofessional way of thinking is essential to the success of this practice approach (Beddoe & Howard, 2012). This includes a change in personal perspectives as well as adopting solutions which respect all professional ideologies incorporated into the team process. A "more prevalent" ideology, such as medical ideology, in the healthcare setting inhibits the function of

interprofessional teams (Barr, 2013; Bitter, van Veen-Berkx, Gooszen & Amelsvoort, 2013).

Social workers in interprofessional teams. In addition to the increasing use of interprofessional teams across a wide range of settings, the inclusion of social workers as members of these teams has also gained greater acceptance. Social workers add a critical component of holistic care that considers psychological, social and emotional factors that may not be incorporated if they were not present (Craig, Bejan, & Muskat, 2013; Herod & Lymbery, 2002). The unique role that social workers fulfill in multidisciplinary teams is an indication that their experiences may be perceived as the same.

Glaser and Suter (2016) sought to expound upon this limited body of knowledge by examining the relationship between scope of practice, role clarity, respect for professional ideology, and interprofessional collaboration in an acute healthcare setting. This qualitative secondary data analysis found that the social workers included in the sample had an overall positive perspective of the team process and focus on meeting the needs of patients. Team meetings and conferences were perceived as tools which contributed to effective communication. On the other hand, researchers discovered two factors that negatively impacted job satisfaction among the sample population: social workers were not always permitted to apply their full set of professional skills and social work ideology fully accepted and valued by other professionals on the team (Glaser & Suter, 2016).

Results from Craig and Muskat (2013) also support the notion that social workers often face challenges in the healthcare setting. This qualitative study, which sampled

social workers in an urban hospital setting, revealed that social workers categorized their roles based on their perception of value in the workplace. For instance, an interpretive description analysis determined that social workers commonly viewed themselves as a broker, challenger, and firefighter. These labels reflected a more valued role. Other labels such as janitor and bouncer correlated with lesser values roles. A discussion of these varying roles indicates a blurred understanding of the social work position. Further breakdown of these results revealed that undefined roles correlated with higher burnout rates (Craig & Muskat, 2016).

In a 2012 study, the experiences of social workers involved in interprofessional community work focused on environmental sustainability yielded contrasting results. Schmitz, Matyok, Sloan, and James (2012) discovered that including social workers in efforts which focus on addressing global issues such as economic development, conflict transformation and peace building, is a natural process. A social worker's role in this work was perceived as an expansion of their skillset, adding value to the interprofessional process. The natural marrying of these professionals may have correlated with the shared ideologies they follow. This organic union of professions can be credited towards a mutual understanding and respect for other disciplines within the team (Khalili, Hall & DeLuca, 2014; Schmitz et al., 2012).

The state of research concerning the experiences of social workers in interprofessional teams is limited; however, research directly relating to social workers as members of capital defense teams is virtually non-existent. Much of the existing research echoes a call for social work education to focus on preparing social work students to

work effectively with other professionals. Though Taylor, Coffey, and Kashner (2016) state that trained social workers already possess the skills to work successfully within interprofessional teams, perhaps social work education should focus more on specialized skills to work more congruently within interprofessional teams. While social work education promotes a systems-centered thinking and other skills which facilitate a functional teamwork environment, having a competent understanding of the ideologies of collaborating professionals is a core element of successful interprofessional teamwork (Khalili et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2016).

The specialty area most relevant to this research investigation is forensic social work. The U.S. National Organization of Forensic Social Work defines forensic social work as a discipline related to legal factors and litigation in both criminal and civil matters (National Organization of Forensic Social Work, 2010). The nature of this specialty requires that social workers partner with professionals within the courts, law enforcement, mental health and more, to achieve better outcomes for clients. The expertise of social workers is welcomed in this area because there is an inherent need to understand the intersection between individuals and environment (Sheehan, 2016). This factor increases the complexity of the working process, effecting the notion that a greater emphasis must be placed on accommodating the needs of social workers as they engage in interprofessional teams.

Reed and Rohrer (2000) explored the forensic social work experience through the lens of a field education/capital mitigation project in which social work students worked as members of a capital defense team. While the intent of this project was to illustrate

increasing opportunities for social workers to engage in changing practice environments,

there were several lessons that may be highlighted from the venture. As cited by Reed

and Rohrer, scholars Grossman, Levine-Jordano and Shearer state that capital defense

mitigation is an area in which workers often experience strong emotions towards the

client and also anxiety relating to their professional responsibility. It was suggested that

field supervisors establish a framework to assist students to acknowledge and cope with

these challenges, and to optimize their work with clients and their team.

   Sheehan (2016) reports in a case study, which explored the experiences of

forensic social workers in Australia, that many participants expressed needing enhanced

knowledge in core areas relating to forensic social work (mental health and legal system).

More specifically, participants described the need to make adaptations to their existing

practice skills to incorporate an awareness of how mental health and the justice system

intersected with their practice responsibilities.

   While forensic social workers engage in multiple roles involving the mental

health and justice settings, serving as a SWMS is limited to a specific setting—working

as a member of capital defense teams to defend individuals accused of capital murder.

After the reinstatement of the death penalty in the U.S. in 1977, the U.S. Supreme Court

eventually determined that *mitigating factors* should be considered by jurors in

determining a life or death decision for defendants found guilty of capital murder. This

provision of law, made in 1978, allowed jurors to consider presented biopsychosocial

factors in a client's life that deemed them less worthy of the death penalty (Reed &

Rohrer, 2000). This practice has now evolved into what is known contemporarily as the mitigation phase of a death penalty trial.

Today, professionals, referred to as an MS, work within an interprofessional legal trial team to defend an individual of capital murder. While the engagement of a social worker is not required by the ABA, the governing body of legal practice, this is an ideal placement for social workers due to their skillset (Andrews, 2012). Though the social work ideology directly aligns with the concept of mitigation, social work values are not a primary concern within this legal-based field. The ABA's designation of the lead attorney as the case supervisor often presents problems in practice for SWMS. The differing ideologies of the legal and social work fields often leave team professionals focused on conflicting elements of the case, though intending to achieve the best outcome for clients. While SWS supervision is a provision within traditional social work settings to assist professionals in managing practice challenges, the same is not true for SWMS. As plainly explained in the literature, while supervision is beneficial, the provision of supervision by professionals who do not possess the knowledge of social work competencies is quite harmful (Ladany et al., 2013).

Summary

The professionalization of the social work profession has called for the incorporation of policies and provisions, such as SWS, to inform practice efforts for the benefit of workers and service users. The occurrence of dilemmas that arise in interprofessional practice settings, where social workers are engaged, may add complexity to social work practice; however, the presence of SWS supervision serves as

a favorable solution. Research suggests that when non-social work professionals were trained concerning social work competencies, they were more encouraged to take the time to explore the strengths of the social work student and tailor the learning experience towards their individual needs (Hicks-Pass, 2013). While this does not meet the standard for professional SWS, it is an indication that supervision for social workers in interprofessional teams is beneficial to the social work practitioner, building stronger team alliances, and optimizing outcomes for service users.

Though the research does not specifically encompass the experiences of SWMS, the data clearly illustrate the need for clarity regarding social work practice in interprofessional settings. Social worker knowledge and skills are highly valued when working with service users; however, achieving intended outcomes requires adequate training and support. The intention of this research study was to explore the necessity of supervision for SWMS and to further assess interprofessional supervision as an appropriate method to address practice challenges.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

Social workers who work as MS in capital defense teams often face practice challenges that threaten their ability to achieve social work practice standards. These problems often arise as a result of differing professional ideologies within the collaborative partnership. Due to the limited research efforts that suggests solution to this practice challenge, in this qualitative action study, I further explored this issue. Following an action research approach, I interviewed SWMS from separate capital defense organizations in Texas and Georgia, seeking to discuss practice challenges and views on whether interprofessional supervision will adequately resolve these challenges. Application of this research approach allows the researcher to act as a facilitator, with professionals within this practice setting formulating resolutions to the practice challenges they are experiencing. Data were analyzed according to a thematic analytical process from which I identified patterns to produce a descriptive interpretation of the raw data. Ethical procedures are also discussed within this section.

Research Design

Social workers who engage as capital defense MS are challenged with balancing social work values along with other professional competencies and methods of practice. This process is often difficult to manage, requiring supervision that upholds social work values and acknowledges other professional knowledge. To address the gaps in research concerning this practice problem, I sought to reveal the practice challenges of social workers within this interprofessional setting. I also explored whether an interprofessional supervision framework adequately addressed the identified practice challenges.

A qualitative research design implemented within an action research framework guided the execution of this research. As a member of this professional community, I worked with fellow SWMS to investigate challenges within the profession and how those challenges may be addressed. Action research is an investigative process that enables people to identify solutions to issues that they regularly face. In this process, the community engages in a cyclical investigative process that enhances knowledge and the group's ability to function (Stringer, 2007). This research method determines the direction of the study, as the community is the driving force in identifying the issue, developing a plan of action, and execution of steps for change.

Qualitative research, sometimes referred to as real-world inquiry, is a favorable method for asking questions about social and psychological aspects of life (Camic, Yardley, & Rhodes, 2003; Robson, 2011). Through conducting face-to-face interviews, researchers can gather information from the setting in which it was solicited. Though not targeting information relating to participants' personal life, the research questions involved learning about the personal experiences of MS's as they engaged in their professional role. Interviewing participants enables researchers to maintain control over the session, while providing the flexibility for participants to be descriptive in their responses (Morgan et al., 2013). In addition, interviewing presents the opportunity for social interaction, which enables researchers to build a rapport with participants and observe nonverbal behavior, which adds depth to the experience (Garbarski, Schaeffer, & Dykema, 2016). This is common in action research, as participants tend to identify with others within their community. The action research focus of this project was met through

interview discussion and my focus on partnering with other professionals to address the obstacles they experienced as they engage in their professional role.

Methodology

Prospective Data

I conducted a 60-minute maximum, audio-recorded, face-to-face interviews with each SWMS who consented to participate in the study. All data relevant to addressing the research questions were gathered within this setting. During each interview, I asked questions intended to gather information reflective of the participants' practice challenges while working within an interprofessional team setting. Additionally, in the interview discussions, I explored the challenges of practice within this setting and how an interprofessional-focused SWS may address those practice issues.

Individual interviews were chosen as the primary source of data collection because SWMS employed within the capital defense agency do not work in a central location. The organization decentralized its office, and it had multiple locations throughout the state of Georgia. Due to the nature of the position, SWMS are constantly traveling and work according to their own schedule; therefore, it would have been difficult to plan a single focus group that would accommodate the needs of the target participants. A focus group format would have served as an obstacle to gathering the number of participants necessary to acquire a quality set of data.

Participants

To qualify as a participant in this investigation, individuals were required to possess a social work bachelor's (BSW) or social work master's (MSW) degree.

Participants were also required to be employed with an identified capital defense organization, working as a full-time capital defense mitigation specialist position for a minimum of 6 months. The indicated degree requirements and tenure of employment were necessary to ensure that the participants possessed knowledge of social work practice standards and values, as well as a range of experiences within this professional sector.

A purposive sampling method was employed for this investigation. This method was most appropriate because it enabled me to target participants based on characteristics and in alignment with the objectives of the investigation. I solicited the participation of at 10 SWMS from a capital defense organization. I contacted the administrative staff of each organization via phone. In this conversation, I introduced myself and stated my intentions as it related to this project. The purpose of this conversation was to obtain the proper procedures for research approval within the organization. Once approved, I made a request for the administrative staff to e-mail a letter of inquiry to all SWMS who were employed with the organization. The first six who responded and provided informed consent were approached as participants. Following a preliminary discussion to confirm their qualifications and propriety for inclusion into the study, potential study participants began the informed consent process. Any potential study participant who failed to meet all of the qualifications for inclusion was excluded.

Instrumentation

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, I did not use an existing tool for data collection. I followed an original 16-item, semi structured qualitative interview schedule.

During the qualitative interview process, I expanded on the set of questions reflected in

Appendix A; however, all discussion reflected the nature and purpose of the study. The

set of questions began with the collection of demographic information, such as level of

education, the number of years that the participant had been practicing, and other

elements that may impact the professional experiences of the participant.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings of each interview served as the primary source of data. The use

of audio recordings addressed issues relating to objectivity. The use of audio recordings

also minimized interviewer bias, maximized credibility, and more accurately reflected

what the participant was communicating within the data set.

Audio recordings were transcribed after each interview and subsequently

analyzed according to a thematic coding process. This process assisted in the

identification of major concepts within each interview, as well as patterns and themes

across interviews. The data were analyzed within Microsoft Excel, indicating the

question asked and the answer provided by the participant. The content and substance of

responses was scrutinized for their relativity to the research questions. Performing this

increased the validity of research findings. Responses determined to be irrelevant to the

investigative questions were coded and omitted from the data set.

I generated codes based on the information shared by the interviewee. I then used

the highlighting function within the Microsoft Excel program to pinpoint this information

and make notes indicating the code. Common themes and categories were highlighted in

a color-coordinated fashion. I also used a function within Microsoft Excel that helps to

identify when the interviewees used the same words or patterns in their responses. The identification of themes among the sample population contributed to my ability to confirm findings in future research.

When all data were transferred to Microsoft Excel in the appropriate fashion, I interpreted the data. This interpretation will assist consumers of the research investigation in understanding how capital defense mitigation practice experiences may impact the role of a social worker and how that phenomenon connects with the need for adequate supervision. Although all data collected were directly related to the SWMS experience, the interpretation of these results presented the opportunity for me to connect the experiences of the participants to the broader social worker interprofessional setting. This dissection of shared experiences between practice settings increases the degree of transferability and the extent to which research findings may be considered applicable to other social workers who work within interprofessional settings.

Once the data were analyzed, I packaged the results and presented them in a written form to the professional community. It is expected that the professional community will implement recommendations from the findings and incorporate them into organizational policies. The community can decide to adopt, refine, and/or reject the plan of action until they are able to develop a process and solution that addresses their practice issue and achieved the desired change. Feedback from the community contributes to the credibility of the data, as participants were able to confirm or negate the data as a reflection their experiences.

In addition to the different elements that address the rigor of this study, the action research-oriented approach contributed to the authenticity of the investigation. I, a trained SWMS, gathered information based on the personal experiences of those who were interviewed. My interest in this professional community, understanding of complex issues within this setting, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders speaks to the legitimacy of data, findings, and recommendations to build on new found knowledge. Although my professional interests may be considered a benefit in this research, my position also had the potential to impact the research process without intention. To address this, I maintained a reflective journal to express any personal perspectives or biases that may have surfaced throughout the research process. To this point, I ensured that I maintained a neutral perspective in the collection of data and documentation of findings.

Ethical Procedures

Various ethical practices were employed to ensure the protection of all participants and myself throughout the course of this research inquiry. When potential participants expressed interest and involvement in the research investigation, they were e-mailed a consent form and asked to review and sign. The potential participant was also invited to contact me via phone with any questions or concerns they may have about the study or consent form. When the potential participant developed an understanding of the research investigation and the nature of their involvement, they were asked to sign, date, and e-mail a copy of their form back to me. When I obtained the participant's signature, I

signed the form and e-mailed the participant a copy of the signed consent form to retain for their personal records.

Due to the nature of the study design, I was able to ensure the confidentiality of participant information. Participants were informed that their voluntary participation can be withdrawn anytime they feel uncomfortable and/or want to exit the study for any other reasons, without explanation. I explained to participants that although the research may be relevant to their professional role, and their supervisor will be aware of their participation, the information that they share will be kept confidential. Also, although I have a professional connection to potential study participants, I do not hold any supervisory or managerial role in our professional relationships.

At the time that participants consented to their involvement, they were assigned a number that was labeled on their consent form. I was the only party who was aware of that number, as the consent forms were kept in my possession until the completion of the study and destruction of data. The number was only be referenced for name if I needed to contact a participant to clarify a response or for follow-up questions. The assigned number was used to keep data organized during the data collection and analysis processes.

All paper data (consent forms and interview notes) were stored in my possession in a locked file cabinet. All electronic data were stored on a USB drive that remained in my possession throughout the entire research process. When the research findings are disseminated, I will refrain from using any names or identifying numbers, as well as the agency in which the participant was employed. Five years after the completion of the

study, I will shred all paper documents and delete all electronic data relevant to the study. This policy is in accordance Walden University guidelines.

Summary

I implemented a qualitative research design within an action research approach to investigate practice concerns relating to the social worker experience and SWS within the capital defense teamwork setting. I conducted face-to-face interviews with a six experienced SWMS to investigate the challenges that are experienced within this interprofessional setting and how an interdisciplinary-focused SWS framework may be incorporated to address issues. The professional community actively participated in a process intended to identify the practice obstacle, establish a plan of action to resolve the issue, and implement steps for change. Data yielded from this investigation were analyzed according to a thematic coding system, and then interpreted for their application to social work practices within this setting and other interprofessional setting in which social workers engage. To ensure ethical protection of the researcher and all participants, procedures involving informed consent, confidentiality, and secure storage and data management were conducted.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

The intent of this study was to investigate practice challenges experienced by SWMS and to further explore the appropriateness of an interprofessional-focused supervision approach to address those challenges. I sought to answer these questions: (a) What practice challenges do SWMS believe would benefit from supervision? (b) What are SWMS perceptions about whether an interprofessional supervision approach would adequately address practice challenges?

The duration of all interviews, in-person and telephone, were between 35 minutes and 1 hour. Each participant who agreed to a face-to-face interview met with me at a public coffee shop. Each interview was recorded with the iPhone voice memo application. The interviews that were conducted over the phone were recorded with Google voice software. Recordings from both software programs were transferred via e-mail to my Walden University e-mail address and then saved on a USB drive. After all of the recordings were saved, I transcribed each interview and saved a copy of the transcription with each recording. At the conclusion of data collection, I organized the data set and implemented thematic coding techniques for analysis.

In this section, I will review data analysis techniques, including data collection, recruitment, and validation procedures, and limitations that occurred during the course of the investigation; and findings, including descriptive statistics, relevance to the research questions, and unexpected findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

I collected data over the course of a 2-month period. In initial research efforts, I focused on data collection from a capital defender agency in Georgia. All of the respondents who were interviewed responded within a 3-week period. The response rate for the agency was low, finally counting four participants from this agency. The second agency included in the data set, a capital defense agency in Texas, yielded two responses. These participants responded within a 2-week period.

I began data analysis by examining the transcriptions of each interview recording. I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that organized the data into question/answer format. This was done for each participant. At the completion of this stage, I further dissected the data, organizing the participant responses by categories and themes.

Excel was the only software used in data analysis. All interview questions and answers were first divided into two categories. These categories were determined by which research questions the interview questions addressed. I sifted through each participant response and highlighted frequently used words and paralleling concepts to create categories. For example, the category "liaison" was created as a function of the SWMS role. This encompassed answers like "I connect clients with their community and family," "I build relationships with the client, family, and greater network," and "I involve everyone in the case and determine relevance." Responses were coded by words or phrases and then grouped according to the idea that it conveyed. In the final step of data analysis, I further grouped the identified concepts into overall themes, according to which research question the information addressed.

Validation Procedures

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of the data reported and findings, each interview was audio-recorded. During each interview, I reflected on participant responses for clarity and summarized information to gain understanding. I also encouraged each participant to add anything that was not discussed and to ask additional questions at the conclusion of each interview. In the transcription phase, the record was checked by replaying the audio recording, matching the typed data. During data analysis, I was sure to use explicit language from each participant to accurately convey the information being shared, as suggested by Stringer (2007).

Dependability and Confirmability

To ensure dependability and confirmability, I received oversight from a capstone chair and committee members. Additionally, the entire research investigation process was documented including study design, data collection procedures, handling of data, analysis, and presentation of findings. Documentation also reflects reasoning for the development of themes and data interpretation. Finally, all records were preserved and will be maintained in accordance with Walden University research guidelines.

Transferability

I focused on social workers who were employed as MS in capital defense teams. Although I encompassed a specific community, the population represents social workers on various levels of training and experiences, as well as different geographical regions. The scope of this study, focusing on practice challenges and supervision for social

workers in interprofessional teams, can be applied within other interprofessional settings because, as indicated by Craig, Bejan, & Muskat (2013) and Craig & Muskat (2016), these experiences are not unique and may be arise across settings (Additionally, the design of this investigation was guided by ST. This theoretical basis has been accepted as a basis for team functionality, as its principles may be adapted to a multitude of settings (Glaser & Suter, 2016).

Validity

Multiple measures were taken for validation during the interview and data collection phases. I personally collected all data. There were no secondary sources included in the data set. Once the audio recordings were transcribed, all transcriptions were scrutinized to ensure its relevance to the research topic. All information I reported was in direct correlation to the topic discussed.

Limitations

The data collection phase endured a few setbacks: low response rates and extended time. Due to a low response rate from the first agency, I was required to request approval to conduct and include research from an additional agency. This approval phase added additional time to the data collection phase. The second agency also yielded a low response rate. Although somewhat expected, I was challenged by the work schedules of the participant pool, which impacted the scheduling of individual interviews.

Findings

The data collected from interviews conducted with six SWMS revealed information relevant to the experiences of social workers employed as MS and the

perception of how adequately an interprofessional-focused supervision approach would address practice issues. To maintain consistency and clarity throughout the investigation, I developed themes in accordance with the research questions. Themes that addressed RQ1, focusing on SWMS professional challenges, included ole navigation and ethical practices; RQ2, which explored the application of interprofessional-focused supervision, included increased competence and team cohesion.

Demographics

Each interview initiated with demographic questions. The total sample size was *N* = 6. I asked a series of demographics questions. All of the participants were employed as full-time SWMS at the time of data collection. The total sample size was split evenly between the indicated classifications of work experience. Categories were labeled as entry-level, quantified by serving 1 to 2 years in the mitigation role; midlevel indicated as 3 to 4 years of experience; and experienced categorized as SWMS who had served in the role for 5 years or more.

One participant was trained as a social worker at the bachelor's level, while the remaining participants had received a master's degree. Of those, one had received a master's degree, four were licensed at the LMSW or LCSW level. Of the total sample, two were entry level, serving 1 to 2 years in social work practice, while four had been in the field for at least 5 years.

Themes

RQ1: Practice challenges. This theme emerged as a focal point of the research investigation. Each participant discussed their experiences relating to fulfilling the

SWMS role. Although several aspects of this were shared, each interview focused on the difficulty of navigating role and the emergence of practice dilemma at some point during the discussion.

Theme 1: Role navigation. Directly answering RQ1, all six participants revealed their thoughts about how difficult it was to enter the MS role as a professionally trained social worker. Participant 3 described this in a personal experience by stating:

Yeah, I think the one thing that, you know, certainly sort of has hit the surface frequently is when we go into homes and we're interviewing clients, families and other lay witnesses. We definitely see things that I think, you know, call the social workers enough to need to do something about, you know, whether it's just abject poverty or neglect or what could become considered of use and things like this. And we have to constantly sort of refocus our work to, get what we need, which is mitigation information.

Participant 5 also described a similar difficulty in describing the value of social work principles in the MS role, yet having to dishonor that in an instance:

The good thing about [the organization] is they're very client centered, so it does allow us to really build a good relationship with the client. Um, I would say that I definitely am supposed to be the one to build maybe like the best rapport with our clients to kind of see where clients are coming from as well as their family members and build relationships with family members as well and pretty much any, anyone that we interview. . . So, we had one case where, um, our client was offered LWOP or life without parole and they had a feeling that the family may,

would probably, I guess, cause issues with that if we were to tell them, our clients'

family. Um, so we were, we were directed to basically not tell this family and we

weren't, we were told not to tell them that the plea was going to happen or what

was going to take place or anything… it was really hard knowing that like the

family members may have a difficult time going to see our client after the plea

taken place. Um, so it was hard to kind of separate like, okay, well this is for the

greater good of the overall case. However, it was still hard to like not be able to

tell the family even though we all knew like, like I believe that the family could

definitely trump, you know, the case in like mess it up as far as the plea, But it

was just really hard, like not like not knowing that our client, whenever he took

the deal that he was going to be, other than like his legal team, that he was not

going to have necessarily any family support there.

Role navigation was thought to be challenging for novice SWMS, as social work

skills are valuable to the MS role, yet encouraged to forget when legal aspects of the case

are deemed priority. As a SMWS that had been in this position for a year at the time of

the interview, Participant 1 explained that social work was central to capital defense but

had already experienced a time in which it was necessary to choose mitigation over social

work:

I think at its heart, capital defense is…follows social work values… I think that

that it is an essential value. . . So, for example, I had a client who wrote a letter,

he's just like, he's very attention seeking, but he wrote us a letter back in the

winter, saying that he was going to kill himself on his birthday, which was in

January…As a social worker I have an ethical responsibility to take this

seriously… And the lawyers really, they were really afraid that if I went to him

and expressed to him how serious this was, they were really concerned that I

might do something that would put him in a suicide cell and suicide smocks on

suicide watch and lose his trust in us. And so basically what happened was they

went to him, the attorneys went to him and they're like, don't ever say anything

about suicide to [her]ever, that was their way of handling it.

Participant 4, as a more experienced SWMS engaged in reflection, admitted that

help navigating social work and the MS role in the beginning of their professional tenure

would have been beneficial. Participant 4 stated,

I would say, and this is just based on personal issues that I've had, but, and so, so

it may not be applicable to everybody, but this is how I learn and what would

have helped me earlier in this work it's just certain, certain guidelines that merge

social work guidelines with mitigation guidelines. It's been my experience that

because everything is case by case…but there's no real guidelines to help you

merge the two. So, I mean something, something like that would have been

helpful so that way we're not figuring out every, every step of the way…

Collectively, all participants reported the experience of having to choose-a-side as

a challenging part of their professional role, ultimately requiring them to perform

a degree of navigation through the role for which they were hired and the

profession for which they were trained. This not only poses a professional

challenge, but potentially a practice dilemma in many cases

Theme 2: Ethical practices. This theme emerged as SMMS discussed the difficulty of balancing the duties of a MS with the professional identification of a social worker. Although major highlights of this theme correlated with practice challenges, I deemed it necessary to contribute separate discussion to ethical practices, as it was essential to the social work profession and aims of this study.

There was a collective understanding among more experienced participants that although social work ideology is valued within the capital defense setting, legal ideology must dominate team work and decisions. The participants revealed the difficulty that this presents. Participant 3 stated,

> In fact, that's what the mitigation investigation [is], and the social workers in the team. That's why, you know, we make it a habit to hire folks with those backgrounds because we do that and those ideologies do have to be upheld. However, you know, at the end of the day if it comes down to, you know, if something is legal duty versus social work obligation, the legal duty will be upheld…while we use our social work skills and training, definitely the legal ethics and um, and duty sort of takeover. I don't want to say, yeah, I guess. I mean they, they sort of supersede what, you know, what needs to happen on these cases because we do work within the court of law. And so that actually does dominate the work here… In a sense, you have to keep your blinders on and go, no, I'm not here to deal with this child's like…

Participant 6 echoed this:

[social work is] Pretty highly valued because [organization] understood that social workers inherently are pretty good at drawing out that like holistic narrative…that legal focus of the case is, is always a priority. It definitely dominates over any, any real decision or any real outcome you can have on the case… Ok, so whenever I was in school, they talked to a whole lot about like termination of clients. Right?...I know that that's a big deal in the, in the code of ethics. And I know it's a big deal for social workers that have a very strict way of terminating, you know, you've got to make sure your clients in the right place and all of this kind of stuff. Right? Well our job is to get to termination pretty quick. Um, and you know, I've had clients before that are visibly depressed or you know, they have mental health issues or whatever and we terminate through a plea or through some sort of waiver and then that's that if we get a waiver on one day and I haven't seen my client in a week or two, I'll, I won't ever see him again. And so, I haven't actually terminated. Um, and that's just kind of the way it is. And then it's onto the next one. Um, you know, I don't see clients after a plea and that's not really a positive um, termination process.

Participant 4 shared a perspective of reflecting on ethical practice:

Um, yeah, just as far as learning how to work with people and what learning how to work with people and how the hold myself as a, as a professional. So then, you know, in this job, because we're getting so much, I guess bad information sometimes, you have to think of creative ways to make those people comfortable in sharing that information. And so, then they may, we may do in this like, like

prime example, you know, if we have a mother that or mother whatever that is

hard to speak to, we may take them out for and get a sandwich. But, you know, in

a, in a community sense of community social work, job, I wouldn't ever buy

anything for my clients because that would be unethical.

RQ2: Application of interprofessional-focused supervision approach. Themes

were developed in correlation with the research questions. In seeking to understand

practice challenges among SWMS, I considered solutions to challenges experienced

within this profession. All six of the participants responded that an interprofessional-

focused supervision would provide an aspect of guidance to the issues that were

discussed. All participants claimed that this supervision method would increase

understanding and functionality within the team.

Theme 1: Increased competence. The most frequent response given about how an

interprofessional-focused supervision approach would help SWMS included the concept

of understanding, though participants expressed this in different ways. Participant 1

shared that an interprofessional-focused supervision is something they have been exposed

to and explained its usefulness by stating:

But I think it is really useful to have someone who is aware of everyone's roles on

the team and can kind of be like, well, when dealing with this issue, like this is

how the attorney is going to view it. You're a social worker while you're going to

view it. Just want to let you know about their perspective... I think that would be

really cool and maybe that's already something that's of happening at least on

these two cases…But in those meetings, you know, it is the full team with the fact

investigators and attorneys, myself and everybody and, and I do think that she's

really good at understanding where everyone is coming from and making sure that

all the voices are heard.

Participant 2 shared,

I think where, where it would be helpful to have those two married is when there

was some sort of A conflict or B like just ethical dilemma that involved

something legal that I didn't fully understand… So, I guess sometimes when,

when things are hinging on like a particular legal thing and sometimes it gets so

complicated and having not been to law school I don't understand it and I think in

those cases it might help me understand why a decision was the best…

Participant 5 shared,

Um, I definitely think it would help just because a lot of the times I don't, I won't

agree with what they're doing or they won't necessarily agree with what I'm doing

just because just because of the lack of knowledge of why we're doing what we're

doing. So yeah, it would definitely help. If they were able to explain to me why

they're doing what they're doing, then maybe then it makes more sense to me

versus when I'm seeing it solely from a social work point of view. Definitely like

having an attorney's perspective or supervision that that does help.

Theme 2: Team cohesion. Some participants in favor of an interprofessional-

focused supervision approach also communicated that a better understanding of each

person's perspective would contribute to optimizing the functionality of the team.

Participant 3 made a bold statement, in claiming that supervision is a necessary

component of the mitigation role and insisted that encompassing all aspects of capital

defense is helpful in supervision, as it has been practiced within the agency. This has

ultimately increased understanding among all team members to work as a unit.

Participant 3 stated:

> I don't think any one of us that does this work could have done mitigation
>
> investigation without social work supervision… we really do need an
>
> interprofessional-focused supervision in the sense that we are working with
>
> lawyers… We started, you know, we meet once a month as mitigation for
>
> mitigation meeting and doing that, those meetings, as I've mentioned, we have
>
> outside speakers come in and present about whatever issue, but we have one
>
> lawyer a month come, you know, a different lawyer every month come and talk to
>
> us about sort of their approach to mitigation or their approach to a legal case or
>
> their area of legal of the legal work. And so what we've done is we started
>
> incorporating specific, you know, we incorporated lawyers, which is, and we
>
> often have fact investigators kind of answered questions that we, we don't know,
>
> stuff that we're not trained in that we don't really even actually do, but we need to
>
> understand why the fact investigator would do what they do to better understand
>
> how it impacts the mitigation on the case. And so definitely mitigation meetings
>
> have become much more interprofessional.

Participant 4 stated:

> I think it would definitely enrich because the main reason we have
>
> interdisciplinary teams is because everybody brings different things to the table

and so by me learning what you bring and what your specialties are, it's not going

to do anything but make my understanding better what you're doing. So, I as a

social worker coming in, I do know some quote unquote law or understand the

court system, but I'm not going to know every motion. I'm not going to know why

you're doing A instead of B, why you're filing this motion instead of that motion.

I'm not going to understand all of that because I don't have a law degree. So, and

then you know, you may need certain mitigation. It's in my experience sometimes

they need certain mitigation issues in order to argue a motion. And so, in order for

me to understand what you need for me and how we can work better, serve the

client, I need to have a better understanding of why you're making certain

decisions.

Participant 6 also supported this:

 I don't think that in my, in my view, I guess it couldn't hurt. Like if he's got, you

know, all of this holistic focus right now you've got to do the legal side of things

while attending to the social work side of things. And then you have to understand

these all these different experts and understand all of these different personalities,

whatnot. And so, I mean, I think it would be absolutely beneficial for the whole

team, especially in this work because it's not a traditional social work role you

have to have, while you might have all of the skills and ability of a social worker,

you're not actually really acting as one.

In addition to discussion regarding the application of an interprofessional-focused

supervision approach, I further explored which elements of supervision SWMS

considered most helpful. Findings from this inquiry revealed several significant themes which may provide additional direction for the provision of supervision within the participating agencies and other capital defense teams. Social work mitigation specialists prefer that the supervision provided to them meets the following conditions: (1) is provided by someone who possesses a clinical social work background, (2) the supervisor is experienced as a MS, (3) can incorporate legal and investigative perspectives in their practice guidance, (4) is detached from the case being consulted, and (5) encourages an informal, open-door policy in which supervisees feel respected, and comfortable being open and honest about their challenges. Participant 1 stated

> I think what is most helpful is just knowing that someone else knows what's going on and what I'm doing and can offer a measure of guidance or often I feel more comfortable talking to my supervisor about ideas that I have that I may not necessarily bring to the team yet. So that's helpful to kind of bounce things off of her to get her feedback because she's also been doing this for 11 years. I've been doing this for one. And so there certainly are times in which I'm thinking I didn't agree with what that attorney said, am I just not in the right mindset yet for capital work? Or um, you know, there, there are times in which the way that I work might be different than the way the other team members work and having issues adjusting to that and I'll go to her and just kind of be like, what should I do here?...And so I think it's helpful just to kind of have someone else validating what I'm doing.

Participant 2 also shared a similar perspective

So, I kind of had her to balance those kinds of things off of until I felt comfortable

making the decision on my own. Um, and even stuff like, just any judgment

call...Um, but yeah, so I got to just kind of like talk through things like that with

her about like, hey, this is something that's standing out to me. Do you think this

is worth pursuing? Or, and so to me, like I think in any, I would imagine in any

type of work, but certainly in mitigation, like being able to have someone to go to

for that kind of thing is crucial in the beginning because so much about mitigation

is like creative thinking… And I think if you want to empower people to learn to

think that way you have, they have to be able to have a sounding board and

someone who's been doing it a little bit loud.

Participant 3 stated

Um, for me personally, it's always been understanding mental health and all its

nuances, learning team work with, you know, vast majority of our clients and

people in the criminal justice system have mental health issues and so learning to

defend them despite their limitations or really understanding their limitations and

then learning to work to fight them is what supervision I think has been most

helpful to me. Really just sort of learning to maneuver through social work,

social work ethics versus legal, you know, ethics are obligated and that's a

common question that we have to grapple with. I'm trying to square the, you

know, those, you know, those sorts of practices that we are raised with and social

work schools and then coming here and understanding while we have social work

backgrounds, we're not operating as social workers were actually operating as

mitigation investigators. And so, learning to figure out which hat to wear when takes a good deal of supervision and you know, and sort of learning as you go.

Participant 4 stated

Having someone that understands, that's done the work and understand how these issues can come up. Um, I've also had supervision outside of [agency] while working here just for, just to obtain my license to get extra hours for supervision and they don't really understand the clientele that we deal with. They don't see it the same way. Um, they don't look at the world the same way as we do. So, someone that supervision in this work, they're gonna understand how to move about as a social worker with also having that and also having that, um, the, the legal aspects that you need in the back of your head.

And though Participant 5 had never experienced supervision from a social worker, they were able to share what elements have been most useful in the supervision that has been provided. Participant 5 stated

Um, well first of all, he able to help me take a step back and kind of look at the big picture. I feel like a lot of times I'm just so entrenched in our case, just within it all and it's overwhelming, but then like he definitely helps me to just kind of take a step back and relax. Um, and he, he just able to break down like different problems for me and just lead me in the right direction.

Participant 6, who solicits outside of their employing agency also shared their perspective:

Yeah, that's [advice from clinical social workers] really helpful because they're very experienced and knowledgeable too. It's a different perspective than somebody who's just like the theoretical side of psychology. So I talked to the theoretical side people and then I talk to, you know, the, the clinical social work types who are kind of putting all that into practice and mix them both and kind of see where it would be beneficial for our work because I know that you have to run a lot of the traditional things that you learned through this weird capital defender filter, right? Because it's not always going to play out exactly how it's supposed to.

Unexpected Findings

The majority of findings from this research investigation align with existing research relevant to social workers that work within interprofessional team settings. However, there were some unforeseen themes which emerged from the data. Though SWMS perceived their role to include serving as the team's mental health advisor, five participants admitted to not being confident about their knowledge relating to mental health. Paralleling this finding, a portion of the sample understood competence to be an aspect of practice dilemmas within this practice setting.

Additionally, and though social work values are thought to be essential to capital defense mitigation work, it was thought that employing only social workers to occupy the full MS staff within a single organization would be harmful, as it could limit the mitigation perspective. For example, Participant 6 mentioned, it is beneficial to have professionals like journalists and anthropologists as a part of the mitigation team. This

thought may stem from the understanding that mitigation is not about being a social worker, though the skillset is valued and widely used. SWMS explained that they cannot wear the hat of a social worker when they serve in the role of a MS because they are not hired to be a social worker. The law has to dominate the professional motive because the ultimate responsibility is to obtain desired results for the client's legal case, which is governed by the court of law.

Lastly, four out of six participants expressed, though not explicitly stated, the NASW *Code of Ethics* practice standard 1.02 Self-Determination goes against the goal of the SWMS role and the goals of this professional setting. The goal is not to do what the client thinks is best, but rather to obtain an outcome that is less than the punishment of death. Though this is clearly understood and accepted, participants admitted to struggling with this aspect of their role.

Summary

Findings of this investigation reveal that social work principles are engrained in capital defense mitigation. Social workers are commonly hired for this role, as they are expected to exercise the skillsets gained from education and practice experiences. Despite this, SWMS are challenged with balancing their role as a MS with their professional SW value-base, often leading to ethical practice dilemmas. This challenge exists because their duties as MS and the legal function of the capital defense team must dominate teamwork and decisions-making.

In addition to this, SWMS accept the implementation of an interprofessional-focused supervision approach as resolution to managing these practice issues. The data

suggests that it is preferred that the supervision provided to them meets the following conditions: (a) is provided by someone who possesses a clinical social work background, (b) the supervisor is experienced as a MS, (c) can incorporate legal and investigative perspectives in their practice guidance, (d) is detached from the case being consulted, and (e) encourages an informal, open-door policy in which supervisees feel respected, and comfortable being open and honest about their challenges.

This revelation of findings supports the need for SWS, and more specifically, an interprofessional approach to not only help navigate these dynamics, but to also optimize the potential of SWMS. It is understood that their skills should be molded into the MS role; however, achieving this is not always clear for novice SWMS. Additionally, SWMS seek to have a greater understanding of case-specific legal decisions. Sharing this perspective will enhance their knowledge and ability to work within this legal-focused setting; ultimately advancing the team's ability to operate with greater cohesion.

These results produce an aspect of evidence-based knowledge that should not be overlooked. Information such as this not only advances the specific role of SWMS but can help to guide the practices of social workers who serve as interprofessional team members and the greater social work discipline. The future of social work education, practice, and theoretical perspectives rely on expounding upon knowledge like this investigation to ensure adherence to ethical practice standards and the delivery of quality service to all populations served.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

In this action research investigation, I explored the practice challenges of SWMS and what supervision approach could best address those challenges. I intended to not only highlight the experiences of these professionals, but reveal how they may reach their optimal practice potential. I found that SWMS were challenged with balancing the demands of their professional role and maintaining the integrity of social work practice standards. The implementation of an interprofessional-focused supervision approach will address SWMS practice challenges and facilitate greater cohesion within capital defense teams.

I found several factors: (a) social work ideology is central to the capital defense MS role; (b) it is essential to the work of SWMS specialists to receive professional guidance to assist in balancing their professional responsibilities and ethical obligations as social workers, especially when new to the field; and (c) an understanding of each professional perspective within the team will facilitate the development of greater competence. Professionals who are trained in social work skillsets often advance into this area of work because social work values serve as a model for practice to reach desired goals. SWMS rely on their skillset to be successful in this field and much of that success is attributed to SWS, a named best practice.

The findings of this study correlate with existing research. Caras and Sandu (2014) promoted the notion that SWS is essential to the social worker role, professional development within the organization, and outcomes. In addition, Manthrope et al. (2013) and Caras and Sandu both highlighted SWS as a necessity for the success of entry-level

social workers, as it assists them in acclimating to the organization and their respective

roles. This is supported by a main theme that emerged in this investigation, as entry-level

SWMS expressed that it was challenging to adapt to the MS role.

Knowledge acquired from this inquiry may be applied to micro, mezzo, and

macro level practices. The results provide insight about how to improve individual

practice, the incorporation of social work professionals in teamwork and organizational

settings, and the development of supervision guidelines and education of future

professionals. The application of these extensions will be explained within the following

sections: (a) application for professional ethics in social work practice, (b)

recommendations for social work practice, (c) impact on social work practice, and (d)

implications for social change.

Application for Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

The findings of this study provide context to advance guidelines set forth in the NASW

Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) that address interprofessional teamwork, Ethical Standard

2.03 Interdisciplinary Collaboration. This standard highlights that clients benefit from

clinical collaboration. Although the NASW addresses interprofessional teamwork and

encourages clinicians to engage in cross-discipline efforts, it is vague and fails to

acknowledge questions concerning the protection of clients and licensed professionals

when their work clashes with other professional obligations and ideologies. This lack of

guidance correlates with issues that emerged in the data and directly related to the Code

of Ethics: competency and social justice.

Competency

The NASW Code of Ethics called for professionals of the social work discipline to practice competently, only engaging in areas in which they are knowledgeable and equipped to handle. Competency emerged as a theme in this data set, as SWMS were expected to fulfill duties that they are not always equipped to perform. This was evident in responses relating to the areas of supervision that the participants considered to be most helpful. As instructed by the Code of Ethics, when a professional does not feel competent in the area in which they are working, they should seek supervision. However, SWMS often lack this accommodation. If professionals are expected to align practice efforts with the expectations of the ethical code, clinicians must receive basic professional accommodations, regardless of their practice setting. According to Caras and Sandu (2014) and my findings, SWS builds professional competency and is essential to the SWMS role. These professional dynamics carry risks, as it stunts the professional growth of SWMS and could cause harm to clients.

Social Justice

Social workers are expected to challenge social injustices on behalf of the vulnerable populations that they seek to serve. Although this is the overall goal of capital defense teams, questions arise when SWMS understand that the social injustice(s) their client is facing has to fall second to the legal boundaries of the case. SWMS must abide by the focus of their professional role as a mitigation specialist, neglecting to address challenges that are potentially harmful to the client. The notion that social workers may be required to ignore their professional value-based and wellbeing of the client is an

injustice within itself, trickling down to a vulnerable population that suffers. In addition to clients, professionals are challenged within themselves, debating as to whether they are making the best decisions from and ethical context, as well as considering the wellbeing of the client.

Impact on Professional Ethics

I found a need for social workers who work within interprofessional teams to receive the same supervision accommodations as those in social work settings. Although the Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) made recommendations to social workers about seeking supervision when practice questions arise, these solutions are most relevant in social work professions. When social workers practice outside of a traditional setting, they are left to navigate the difficult question of how social work practice principles fit within their professional role and responsibility. Research that finds resolve for these nontraditional practice dilemmas are imperative to the social work discipline, the work of professionals within this field, as well as how social work is integrated into other systems. It is imperative for leaders in the field of social work to collaborate with interprofessional teams, specifically capital defense teams, to educate and propose regulations for best practices that elevate the quality of practice ethics and protect social workers and clients. Ensuring adequate supervision for social workers can achieve that.

The results of this study provide an in-depth perspective to how supervision approaches may be adapted to meet the needs of supervisees within capital defense teams. The SWMS in this study sample indicated that consulting with social work supervisors who possess an LCSW but did not have mitigation experience resulted in the

delivery of supervision that was out of context. The supervisors were said to make

suggestions that were not applicable to the SWMS role. Also, the SWMS agreed that

these supervisors "did not get it" when referring to the nature of mitigation and their

clients. This is a significant finding, as it responds to O'Donoghue (2015), who provided

recommendation for future research to focus on the structure of supervision, answering

how and why its techniques are applicable. This research begins to address these

questions directly for SWMS, as greater understating for the professional needs of this

group provides steps for advancement. These steps should not be limited to consider for

this professional sector, as this investigation and its findings demonstrate methods to

challenge the advancement of professional ethics within the field of social work and how

methods may be applied to ensure ethical standards are met in practice.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

The results yielded from this study have the potential to initiate multiple dimensions of

change in the social work discipline. The knowledge gained from this study provide

direction for how SWMS may address professional development and practice needs, in

addition to organizational development. In addition, it suggested that advocacy and

research efforts focus on securing the attention necessary to acquire changes within social

work practice guidelines and policies that govern social work professionals.

Social Work Practices within the Capital Defense Setting

The data acquired for this research investigation were the direct result of

understanding the experiences of social workers employed in capital defense agencies. I

recommend that SWMS begin with their personal practice as a method to express and

obtain the resources necessary to optimize their practice potential. I found that many of the participants neglected their identification as a social worker due to the legal setting in which they worked and role for which they were hired. Although this was understood as a professional adaptation, it was not intentional or desired. Although their skillset is valued, these professionals are operating within a culture in which the social worker role is not understood or defined.

It is important for SWMS to begin to advocate for desired changes within their agency. The discussions may include role identification, contributing strengths and ideas, and the necessary components to achieved desired goals specific to social workers and the mitigation role. Although this may be different for each practitioner, capital defense team, and organization, the provision of an interprofessional supervision will address varying dynamics; however, agencies cannot implement accommodations when there is a lack of understanding. As SWMS use practice experiences to communicate their practice needs, this will begin to facilitate a culture of unity, ultimately impacting practice and agency outcomes. These actions also offer knowledge pertaining to best practices, revealing challenges and successes. These factors illustrate guidance for future research efforts.

Guidelines for Interdisciplinary Practices

It is essential for actions to extend beyond the boundaries of individual practitioners and agencies. The incorporation of practice guidelines within the NASW Code of Ethics to provide a framework for interprofessional practice is also recommended. Social work practitioners are encouraged by the Code of Ethics to

participate in cross-discipline efforts to address client challenges. Guidelines that outline best practice supervision techniques and practice guidelines unique to the experiences of interprofessional settings will serve as a guide for social work practitioners and other professionals who seek to collaborate with social workers. This is necessary to facilitate a culture that complements evolving trends that are reflective of the needs for multi perspective interventions used to address varying layers of client issues. Adopting this approach will guide collaborative professionals towards decision making that incorporate varying perspective, rather than one of priority teams (Barr, 2013; Bitter et al., 2013).

<p align="center">**Impact on Social Work Practice**</p>

Researcher's Practice

Reflecting on my own practice, it is my goal to use this knowledge and future professional licensing to effectuate change in this practice setting. The immediate need is to provide the necessary components of supervision to SWMS. Not only will I seek to provide this service, but also educate other professionals trained at this level to do the same. Although capital defense professionals understand that social workers are trained to perform the duties of this professional role, the full potential, as well as the needs of, social work professional are misunderstood. This can only be resolved with education and action. It is my duty to meet that responsibility.

Clinical Social Work Practice

Supervision is imperative to the work of social workers in all professional settings, stated as a significant theme that emerged from this research. This theme highlighted not only the importance and benefits of SWS, but reveals the ethical

challenges that arise in its absence. Adherence to recommended efforts ignite the call for attention to ensure that social work professionals in all settings are meeting the standards of practice, challenging leaders in the fields to develop regulatory changes to accommodate these needs. This body of knowledge, which provides understanding for field work, has the ability to develop standards with greater relevancy and proposed solutions. This takes steps towards bridging the gap between policy and practice.

Transferability

Although I explored the experiences of SWMS, the applicability of its findings may be considered within a broader context, as social workers are entering other professional realms at high rates (Kanno & Koeske, 2010) and share experiences across interprofessional settings- health care, environmental, and forensic. Understanding that these experiences are common across settings provides evidence that supports the transferability to a greater aspect of clinical social work practice. Although supervision needs may be unique to the clinician, this best practice expands across the social work discipline. An understanding of practice needs is necessary for the provision of adequate supervision (Ellis et al., 2014). This serves as a foundation for professionals both seeking and providing supervision and is essential for all settings in which social work clinicians work.

Limitations

Although I examined the perspective of social workers trained at different levels of the discipline, it was limited in the number of respondents included in the study. The sample also included a specific group of social workers, with the entire population having

spent the bulk of their social work career as a SWMS. Additionally, all participants were SWMS employed with agency; none were private practice SWMS. It was possible that SWMS possessing experiences in other areas of practice and working in private practice would have shared varying perspectives than the participants. These factors limit the generalizability of the study. It is possible that the themes found within this study may not exist among a more diverse participant sample.

Recommendations for Future Research

In preparation for this research investigation, I found that information pertaining to this subject matter is scarce. This study provides a foundation for examining SWS within the capital defense team framework because it raises awareness about what is necessary to gain a more in-depth understanding of this practice issue—examining practice challenges, social work practitioner needs, capital defense team dynamics, and solutions within the context of supervision.

Despite these strengths, this study was limited in diversity among the participant pool and lacks greater depth in to understanding how beneficial aspects of supervision successful tools are to overcoming SWMS and interprofessional practice challenges. I recommend that future research efforts expound on this body of knowledge by sampling a greater population of SWMS and consider the inclusion of all interprofessional social workers. This will provide a depiction of SWMS perspectives and confirm or discredit the notion that interprofessional social workers experience similar challenges across settings. This will provide additional direction for the development of guidelines to

govern interprofessional social work practices and education for collaborating

professionals.

Dissemination of Research Findings

I suggest that the findings of this study are disseminated via presentation and/or

written summary of study highlights. This both accommodates major stakeholders and

provides the opportunity for questions and feedback. Stakeholder reaction to the research

is integral to the research process, as it further enriches the substance of information and

provides authentication. A formal documentation of highlighted findings is essential to

establishing a foundation for understanding, establishing guidelines, as well as

prioritizing and implementing incremental change.

<div align="center">

Implications for Social Change

</div>

Adherence to new knowledge developed from this study has the potential to effect

change among individual practice efforts and how collaborative efforts across sectors are

applied. I highlighted the importance of understanding professional ideologies as

disciplines are integrated to produce client interventions. As professionals are enlightened

in this area, this awareness will encourage the adaptation of practice approaches that

value inclusive elements. Interprofessional-focused work will exceed limits that are

enforced by ideological teamwork challenges.

Implications for research which effect social change begin with the focuses of

research efforts and the engagement of necessary stakeholders to produce new

knowledge. These are not only ventures to gain new knowledge but also ethical ventures

to advance the social work discipline as well as the systems in which they work. As

stakeholders seeks to elevate the integrity of work, this provides a point of investigation, igniting the development and policies with greater relevance and applicable perspectives that not only provoke change for clients, but also within systems of service.

In correlation with the NASW, this research extends beyond the efforts of a single practice effort. This provides guidance as to how individual practice may be enhanced, as well as how organizations with multiple professions may obtain desired outcomes and how guidelines may be implemented to govern these achievements. This provides an example of cyclical change, as each aspect is crucial to improving a systemic operation and producing greater social change for its implementors and consumers.

Summary

The effort of this research was grounded in understanding how social work professionals may work cohesively within other disciplined-focused settings. Its greater purpose is rooted in understating how social work professionals can systematically effect change relevant to how others perceive and understand social work, as well as how this change improves the quality of service delivery. In correlation with the social work discipline and the mission of Walden University, I sought to reach beyond a single profession, but rather to include a diverse set of professional principles to apply critical analysis of a single issue, provide context and understanding, and transform thinking, with the goal of facilitating positive social change. It is the hoped that future endeavors will adhere to this same framework, as it signifies a conscious decision to challenge societal challenges for the greater global good.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Demographics

Professional role: _____

Status of employment

□ Full-time paid
□ Part-time paid
□ Intern/unpaid

Number of years in this position? _____

Level of social work education/training (check all that apply):

□ BSW   □ LBSW
□ MSW   □ LMSW
□ PhD/DSW   □ LCSW

Other certifications? _____

Years in social work practice? _____

Questionnaire

1. What is your definition or understanding of interprofessional teamwork?

2. What is your understanding of how your current professional role (SWMS) fits within the interprofessional framework?

3. How do team decisions align with social work ideology and the legal focuses of the case? Does one dominate the other?

4. What is your understanding and experience with social work supervision?

5. Does this organization provide supervision specifically for social workers? If not, who supervises you? What elements of supervision do you find most useful?

6. How is value for the social work practice exhibited in this organization? Or devalue?

7. What are your professional needs? Are they met within this organization/professional setting?

8. What practice challenges have you experienced? Directly related to social work? Ethical dilemmas or opposing practice ideologies?

9. How do social work practice values (NASW *Code of Ethics)* intersect with your professional role? Any unmet standards?

10. In what ways have you utilized supervision to manage this problem? Did it help? Why, why not?

11. What would you change about the supervision that is provided to you?

12. How could an interprofessional-focused supervision approach enrich your supervision experience? How could it cause harm?

Appendix B: Initial Contact Email

Dear Prospective Participant:

You are invited to take part in a research study about social workers in capital defense teams. This study is being conducted as required for completion of my enrollment in Walden University's Doctor of Social Work Program. I obtained your name/contact information from your Regional Administrative Office.

I am inviting Bachelor's and Master's level social workers who are employed as a capital defense mitigation specialist. Qualifying participants are also required to have worked in this professional role for a minimum of three months.

This study specifically intends to investigate practice challenges experienced by social workers in capital defense settings, and how a specific supervision approach may be applied to address those challenges.

If you are interested and available to participate in an interview, please contact Nicole D. Jackson via email at Nicole.Jackson1@waldenu.edu for any questions, comments and/or concerns.

Thank you in advance,

Nicole D. Jackson
Social Work Doctoral Student
Walden University