

# WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY 2024 ESSAY COMPETITION



Download the new  
Reflective Supervision  
Guide here



## SWU is proud to feature the winners of our annual SWU Assignment essay competition

Competition marked by a Panel including:

Lynne Gargiulo - Trade Union Official, Advice and Representation  
Officer for SWU and BASW

Rebecca Austin - Social Worker and SWU Executive Council Member

Professor Jermaine Ravalier - Head of School of Health and Social Care  
Professions at Buckinghamshire New University

The criteria: a 750 - 1000 word assignment with the following title:

***Why does reflective supervision matter in  
social work? How does it support social  
worker wellbeing and practice?***

Who could take part: Social Work Students undertaking an Undergraduate  
or Post Graduate Social Work Degree in the UK or a Social Work Apprentice

The prize: Four prizes of £500



SWU Social  
Workers  
Union  
Austerity Action Group



SWU Social  
Workers  
Union  
Campaign Fund



SWU Social  
Workers  
Union  
Union Contacts



Talk to SWU Social  
Workers  
Union  
workplace issues webinar

# BUEN VIVIR

shared future for  
transformative  
change

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY  
19TH MARCH 2024  
#WSWD2024



www.ifsw.org

# Why does reflective supervision matter in social work? How does it support social worker wellbeing and practice?

Adeola Ojora - University of York



Reflection and supervision are frequently used terminologies in social work practices, and they are often portrayed as essential due to evidence that they help in the development of professional skills and competence (Wonnacott, 2012). However, the impact of reflective supervision on the wellbeing of social workers is not as commonly discussed (Beddoe and Maidment, 2015; Strumm, 2022); there is also a lack of understanding around its implementation in the profession (Ravalier et al., 2023). Reflective supervision provides a structured safe space for social workers to process their thoughts and emotions whilst also enhancing their professional development and practice (Ingram, 2013). This is a collaborative process that should occur in regular organised sessions with their manager or supervisor (Chiller and Crisp, 2012). This essay will explore the importance of reflective supervision in social work and how it impacts social workers' wellbeing and practice.

Social work is a profession that often involves dealing with challenging circumstances and high levels of stressful situations, requiring critical thinking and effective emotional regulation skills (Thompson, 2024). As a result, reflective supervision is required to give social workers the safe space to communicate their emotions and concerns (Ingram, 2013). Unfortunately, in recent years, reflective supervision has been replaced with procedural supervision in many social work agencies, with the aim of supervision being to ensure that administrative targets are met (White, 2015). However, a major issue with procedural supervision is that it ignores the reflective part of supervision, with the overriding concern being on risk management (Kadushin and Harkness, 2014). However, the pressure and stress of risk management combined with inadequate support leads to feelings of isolation, which has a negative impact on the mental health and overall well-being of social workers (Griffiths et al., 2018). As a result, the practical and emotional support provided through reflective supervision can help ensure that social workers do not feel isolated in their practice; this is essential to help social workers build and develop the resilience needed when dealing with risk management and complex situations

(Hemmington and Vicary, 2023). It also helps to minimise the negative impacts of high levels of stress and isolation on their wellbeing, such as the risk of burnout - a prevalent issue in the social work profession (Curry and Epley, 2020; Frieiro-Padin et al., 2021).

However, many social work practitioners believe that burnout is unavoidable in the profession (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018). This is a controversial and rather problematic viewpoint. For example, it can be acknowledged that the nature of the social work role often requires emotional work with people who have experienced trauma, and professionals can be affected when exposed to the traumatic experiences of service users, resulting in emotional exhaustion (Wilson, 2016). This can exacerbate stress levels and makes burnout more likely (Wilson, 2016). However, while such circumstances increase the risk of burnout in the profession, it should not be assumed that burnout is a foregone conclusion. The physical and mental wellbeing of social workers can be supported by introducing effective preventative workplace practices such as reflective supervision, which can help reduce the risk of burnout (Ravalier, 2019; Mack, 2020; Iosim et al., 2021).

In addition to developing resilience and improving wellbeing among social workers, reflective supervision enables social workers to improve their practice and professional competence through continuous learning and self-awareness (Wonnacott, 2012), which is especially important given their responsibility to work with vulnerable groups in society and address issues of social justice through advocacy and professional interventions (Farkas and Romaniuk, 2020). This can be achieved through reflective supervision as it allows social workers to receive continuous support by encouraging them to seek feedback from their colleagues and supervisor to improve their practice (Ravalier, 2019). This constructive feedback is necessary to help social workers build confidence in their abilities and to help enhance their professional development and practice so that they can provide high quality services to service users (Rankine, 2017).

While it has been argued that reflective supervision in social work practices provides numerous benefits, including supporting social workers in their overall well-being, and advancing their practice. It should also be acknowledged that reflective supervision alone is insufficient to achieve these aims (Eaves-Simpson et al., 2018). This is because the increasing implementation of neoliberal and bureaucratic ideologies in the managerial aspects of the social work profession frequently results in lack of funding, unmanageable caseloads, and insufficient support for social workers; this often has a negative impact on social workers' well-being and practice, and it may compromise the effectiveness of reflective supervision (Rankine, 2018). For example, unmanageable caseload makes it difficult for social workers to have the time needed for reflective supervision; it can also cause the quality of supervision to deteriorate (Turner-Daly and Jack, 2017). This often has a negative impact on their practice because they may be unable to provide the needed holistic intervention and support to each service user due to the overwhelming number of cases (Laird et al., 2018); this exacerbates burnout and could lead to reduced quality of care for service users (Travis et al., 2016). Therefore, in addition to reflective supervision, social work organisations and practitioners should always push for policy changes that prioritises social workers' well-being and provide opportunities for them to advance their practice, such as manageable caseloads, adequate funding, and supportive organisational structures.

In conclusion, this essay has highlighted the importance of reflective supervision on social workers' well-being; this includes reducing the risks of unmanageable stress, isolation and burnout, as well as providing the space for social workers to effectively express their feelings, concerns, and develop resilience when dealing with difficult and complex cases. Furthermore, this essay has highlighted the importance of reflective supervision in improving social work practices because it allows for the development of professional competence, self-awareness, and continuous learning through personal reflection and constructive feedback from supervisors and colleagues. However, this essay has also underlined the importance of combining reflective supervision with structural improvements that address bigger systemic concerns affecting the profession, such as manageable caseloads, adequate funding and supportive organisational structures.

## References

- Beddoe, L. and Maidment, J. (Eds.). (2015). *Supervision in Social Work: Contemporary Issues*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.
- Chiller, P. and Crisp, B.R. (2012). Professional supervision: A workforce retention strategy for social work? *Australian Social Work*, 65 (2), 232-242.
- Curry, A. and Epley, P. (2020). It Makes You a Healthier Professional: The Impact of Reflective Practice on Emerging Clinicians' Self-Care. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 58 (2), 291-307.
- Eaves-Simpson, T., Robinson, J.L. and Brown, E. (2018). Is reflective supervision enough? An exploration of workforce perspectives. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 39 (4), 478-488.
- Farkas, K.J. and Romaniuk, J.R. (2020). Social work, ethics and vulnerable groups in the time of coronavirus and Covid-19. *Society register*, 4 (2), 67-82.
- Friero-Padin, P., Verde-Diego, C., Arias, T.F. and González-Rodríguez, R. (2021). Burnout in Health Social Work: an international systematic review (2000–2020). *European Journal of Social Work*, 24 (6), 1051-1065.
- Griffiths, A., Royse, D. and Walker, R. (2018). Stress among child protective service workers: Self-reported health consequences. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 90, 46-53.
- Grootegoed, E. and Smith, M. (2018). The emotional labour of austerity: How social workers reflect and work on their feelings towards reducing support to needy children and families. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 48 (7), 1929-1947.
- Hemmington, J. and Vicary, S. (2023). *Making Decisions in Compulsory Mental Health Work*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ingram, R. (2013). Emotions, social work practice and supervision: An uneasy alliance? *Journal of social work practice*, 27 (1), 5-19.
- Iosim, I., Runcan, P., Dan, V., Nadolu, B., Runcan, R. and Petrescu, M. (2021). The role of supervision in preventing burnout among professionals working with people in difficulty. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19 (1), Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/1/160> [Accessed 2 May 2024].
- Kadushin, A. and Harkness, D. (2014). *Supervision in Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Laird, S.E., Morris, K., Archard, P. and Clawson, R. (2018). Changing practice: The possibilities and limits for reshaping social work practice. *Qualitative Social Work*, 17 (4), 577-593.
- Mack, B.M. (2020). The resiliency-focused supervision model: Addressing stress, burnout, and self-care among social workers. *Advances in Social Work*, 20 (3), 596-614.
- Rankine, M. (2017). Making the connections: A practice model for reflective supervision. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 29 (3), 66-78.
- Rankine, M. (2018). How critical are we? Revitalising critical reflection in supervision. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, 20 (2), 31-46.
- Ravalier, J. (2019). Psycho-social working conditions and well-being in UK social workers. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 49 (2), 371-390.
- Ravalier, J.M., Wegrzynek, P., Mitchell, A., McGowan, J., Mcfadden, P. and Bald, C. (2023). A rapid review of reflective supervision in social work. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 53 (4), 1945-1962.
- Strumm, B. (2022). Reflection for well-being: the reflective practice experiences of social workers employed in global development. *Reflective Practice*, 24 (2), 238-250.
- Thompson, N. (2024). *Understanding social work: Preparing for practice*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Travis, D.J., Lizano, E.L. and Mor-Barak, M.E. (2016). 'I'm so stressed!': A longitudinal model of stress, burnout and engagement among social workers in child welfare settings. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 46 (4), 1076-1095.
- Turner-Daly, B. and Jack, G. (2017). Rhetoric vs. reality in social work supervision: the experiences of a group of childcare social workers in England. *Child and Family Social Work*, 22 (1), 36-46.
- White, V. (2015). Reclaiming Reflective Supervision. *Practice*, 27 (4), 251-264.
- Wilson, F. (2016). Identifying, preventing, and addressing job burnout and vicarious burnout for social work professionals. *Journal of evidence-informed social work*, 13 (5), 479-483.
- Wonnacott, J. (2012). *Mastering social work supervision*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

## Why does reflective supervision matter in social work? How does it support social worker wellbeing and practice?

Isabel Lockwood - Manchester Metropolitan University



Using the Four Layered Practice Model as a theoretical grounding, this essay will begin by exploring the importance of reflective supervision in social work, particularly in interpersonal relationships. It will then consider how this impacts wellbeing and practice. The essay concludes that, in a climate of neoliberalism and funding cuts, reflective supervision is crucial to bear witness to the challenges and restrictions social workers often face and allows social workers to better support the communities they work with. This essay will focus on the purpose and value of reflective supervision, for social workers themselves, their colleagues and the communities they work with.

Reflective supervision is a key tenet of social work. It allows space for accountability and criticality, which can be difficult for Social Workers in their demanding

and sometimes hectic roles.

Reflective supervision allows practitioners to focus their development on specific areas that are challenging them, continue their professional development, and to align their practice with their values (Rankine, 2017). In a climate of neoliberalism; increasing demands and decreasing resources, supervision provides a space to consider political and environmental factors, as well as validation and acknowledgement to the restricted positions Social Workers are often placed in. This shows how reflective supervision is a point of grounding, and a place to develop understanding of the social worker's inner world, outer or social world, and how their positionality interacts with those they work with (Frederick et al 2020). Furthermore, it makes social workers

accountable to their actions and decisions, and allows them the space to discuss their thought processes and decision making. This accountability is particularly important when considering unconscious biases, and implementing anti-racist practice. Critical reflection and questioning of the practitioners perceptions of the people who they work with, especially those who are racialised as Black and Brown, is very important to ensure they are working respectfully, with integrity and with understanding of the (sometimes multitude) of power dynamics they hold (Dominelli, 2018).

This personal accountability and consideration of power is then further strengthened through reflective supervision providing a space for analysis and challenging of how structural oppressive systems manifest in our interpersonal relationships. For example, how microaggressions and stereotyping can be present in social work. Linking socio-political factors into the social worker's individual practice is a key tenet of supervision. This is especially important in a neoliberal and highly individualised workplace and wider culture; supervision can provide space for relationship building and can help develop relationship based practice. This counteracts the 'relational austerity' that is sometimes manifested by target driven and bureaucratic social work management (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016). Finally, reflective supervision matters because it ensures accountability, not solely for interpersonal interactions and decision making, but the conduct of the social worker themselves. Their professionalism, reliability, ability to listen, to give and receive criticism, and many more important social work skills and values, can be explored in supervision, which strengthens not only the social worker but those who they work with.

The Four Layered Practice Model demonstrates how reflective supervision supports social worker wellbeing and practice on many levels. Developing understanding of and care for the self, the first point on the model, is a core part of social work practice and wellbeing. Reflective supervision supports the wellbeing of practitioners as it helps them implement self care strategies, especially in order to respond to their feelings and experiences around a certain issue. This can connect to their own values and culture, to help them understand their emotions and response. Self care strategies are crucial, to ensure social workers can exercise their boundaries, and implement rest and community outside of their professional role. This is especially important due to the high risk of

burnout among social workers (Bressi & Vaden, 2017). Reflective supervision supports social workers practise because it provides space for social workers to learn, grow, make mistakes and reflect on their successes. Offering a second opinion and critical questioning of decision making can help strengthen the social workers practise and make the practise more aligned to the needs and determination/wishes of the service user. Finally, continuing professional development is facilitated in reflective supervision and can be catered to what the social worker wants to improve upon. This is hugely important in maintaining a good quality of practice for service users, and for strengthening the organisation the social worker is in. Having cohesive and productive relationships with colleagues is facilitated by this private time and space to vent frustration, discuss and resolve disagreements, if needed.

To conclude, this essay explored the importance and value of reflective supervision in social work, especially regarding its impact not just on the social worker but on the people in the ecosystem they work within. Especially in a climate of neoliberalism and funding cuts, reflective supervision provides a space of acknowledgment and allows for someone to bear witness to the challenges and restrictions social workers often face. This fosters resilience in social workers allowing them to be stronger in their roles, despite the restrictions they face.

## References

- Bressi, S.K. and Vaden, E.R. (2017). Reconsidering Self Care. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 45(1), pp.33-38. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-016-0575-4>.
- Dominelli, L. (2018). *Anti-racist social work*. London: Palgrave.
- Frederick, J., Spratt, T. and Devaney, J. (2021). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Social Work: Relationship-based Practice Responses. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 51(8). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa155>.
- Hingley-Jones, H. and Ruch, G. (2016) "Stumbling through"? Relationship-based social work practice in austere times', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 30(3), pp. 235-248. doi: 10.1080/02650533.2016.1215975.
- Rankine, M. (2017). Making the connections: A practice model for reflective supervision. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 29(3), p.66. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11157/anzswj-vol29iss3id377>.

## *Why does reflective supervision matter in social work? How does it support social worker wellbeing and practice?*

**Naomi Winniffrith - Oxford Brookes University**

Social work is a profession that affects us emotionally. At the heart of all social work is a relationship between a social worker and a person, or group of persons, experiencing a problem who will often be facing acute distress. Reflective supervision has to provide a containing space for the social worker to recognise and analyse their emotional reactions that arise within this relationship in order to make clearer and more balanced decisions and conclusions about their work. This helps the worker to feel supported and to use these feelings constructively and professionally for the benefit of their clients.

It is vital that we acknowledge the intense anxiety and uncertainty that comprises the everyday experience of social workers (Ruch 2005) made worse by high caseloads, lack of resources and support (Ravalier et al 2023). Professionals, particularly those with personal experience of trauma, can experience a conflict between acknowledging their personal experiences and a perceived notion of professionalism which denies the role of emotion (Mackay 2023, Mckeown and Yeung 2023).

Social work as a profession has struggled with its attitude to the role of emotion, with a tendency to ignore or minimise its importance in its historic battle to be recognised and valued alongside other professions (Mantell and Scragg 2023). However, without emotional support, workers can be overwhelmed by the impact of their work, which in turn leads to adopting defensive positions such as emotional numbness, othering and splitting as a way to distance themselves from difficult feelings leading to blaming or lack of empathy (Mantell and Scragg 2023). Reflective supervision is a way of supporting social workers to value, recognise and integrate both intuitive and analytical ways of thinking (Munro 2020). It helps to develop reflective skills at a deeper level which combines both technical knowledge and awareness of feelings and motivations, including unconscious processes, as well as understanding and challenging the power dynamics at play in the relationship (Ruch 2009).

This type of reflective supervision can support effective practice in a number of ways; supporting wellbeing through managing the emotional impact of the work

and supporting capacity for reflexivity which enables practitioners to incorporate different perspectives, learn from mistakes, and challenge biased thinking (Ravalier et al 2023). However, it is also the case that research in this area is very difficult to critically evaluate as there is no settled definition of what reflective supervision is, how effective it is and what impact it has on service users although there is more evidence that reflective supervision can support practitioner wellbeing (Lees and Cooper 2021, Wilkins 2017). What is often presented as reflective supervision in a social work context leaves very little space for analysis of feelings and focuses much more on managerial oversight of work (Wilkins et al 2017) which can become so onerous and stressful it can even have negative effects on social worker wellbeing and retention (Beddoe et al 2022). There is also evidence that reflective supervision is not happening regularly or in some cases at all (MacAlistair 2022).

Despite inconsistencies in implementation and practice, social workers are clear about the importance of regular reflective supervision that is “meaningful, supportive and developmental” (Ravalier et al 2023) and which can help them manage emotional complexity and ethical dilemmas, enabling improved self-care by internalising the experience of supportive relationships with others in a reflective space (Curry and Epley 2022).

To be effective, reflective supervision needs to work with a theoretical model which helps workers to understand and process their feelings. Supervision has to provide containment of strong emotions that might arise and may be projected onto them by service users who in turn are often experiencing unbearable feelings. Without a safe space to disentangle this complexity, it is likely that a social worker will be unable to keep the service user in mind with a clear focus. The origins of these ideas are psychodynamic recognising the importance of projection, transference and countertransference but it is important that this is not seen as some rarefied or overly complex process but just a way of bringing “unthought knowledge and feelings to awareness...through supervisors providing emotionally attuned listening and support.” (Ferguson 2011 p200).

A key part of social workers' core competencies in terms of professional behaviour is a skilled use of self as part of their interventions (BASW PCF 1). This cannot be achieved without support to fully accept all the parts of oneself that are brought into play in an emotionally charged social work encounter. Finding a way to use the insight given to us by recognising strong emotions is not easy. In child protection settings where management of risk is paramount it is tempting to reach for certainty instead of curiosity and empathy (White 2015). Skilful containment and utilisation of emotional responses to social work relationships may require both a disruption to the normal ways of doing things and expert leadership (Watts 2022). Practitioners can struggle to find a way to bring their feelings to light fearing that this may be unprofessional or too personally revealing of a private self which they may defend against exposing (Mckeown and Yeung 2023).

Yet despite these difficulties the rewards of attending to the emotional impact of our work through reflective supervision that is attuned, containing and fully supporting the work of deep reflection are great. The benefits to staff are well documented and reflected in increased well-being and staff retention. Although there is need for more research on the impact on service users there is a strong case to be made that reflective supervision supports social workers in their aim to create empathic and collaborative relationships and to fully appreciate and assess risks. Without this safe space workers can become paralysed and inactive due to becoming psychologically and emotionally overloaded. However, if we, as social workers, can bring as much of our client relationships into our supervisor relationships as possible, we will be able to learn and grow, and in time enhance our capacity for self-reflection outside of the supervisory space.

## References

BASW [Social worker \(PCF\) | BASW](#)

Beddoe, L. et al. (2022) "Supervision in child protection: a space and place for reflection or an excruciating marathon of compliance?" *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(3), pp. 525-537. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2021.1964443>.

Curry, A. and Epley, P. (2022) "It Makes You a Healthier Professional": The Impact of Reflective Practice on Emerging Clinicians' Self-Care," *Journal of Social Work Education*, 58(2), pp. 291-307.

Ferguson Harry (2011), *Child Protection Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Lees and Cooper (2021) "Reflective practice groups in a children's social work setting - what are the outcomes, how do they work and under what circumstances? A new theoretical model based on empirical findings," *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 35(1), pp. 93-109. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2019.1700494>.

MacAlister Josh (2022) The independent review of children's social care - Final report, Available at [Independent review of children's social care - final report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Mackay Tanya, (2023) "Lived Experience in Social Work: An Underutilised Expertise", *British Journal of Social Work* (2023) 53, 1833-1840 <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad02>

Mantell and Scragg, (2023) *Reflective practice in Social Work* Sage publishing

McKeown, M.-H.L. and Yeung, E.Y.W. (2023) "Deepening Our Understanding of Reflective Practice in a Safeguarding Child Protection and Welfare Context," *Practice*, 35(2), pp. 153-167. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2022.2038124>.

Munro (2011) The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report - A child-centred system Available at: [Munro-Review.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Munro, E. (2020) *Effective child protection*. 3rd edition. London: SAGE.

Ravalier, J.M. et al. (2023) "A Rapid Review of Reflective Supervision in Social Work," *The British Journal of Social Work*, 53(4), pp. 1945-1962. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcac223>.

Ravalier et al, (2023) "Social Worker Working Conditions and Psychological Health: A Longitudinal Study", *British Journal of Social Work* 53, 3818-3837

Ruch, G., Turney, D. and Ward, A. (eds.) (2018) *Relationship-based social work : getting to the heart of practice*. Second edition. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Ruch, G. (2009) *Post-qualifying child care social work : developing reflective practice*. London: SAGE.

Ruch, G. (2005) "Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: holistic approaches to contemporary child care social work," *Child & Family Social Work*, 10(2), pp. 111-123.

Watts, R. (2022) "Letting go of 'the way things are done here': from reflection to disruption in local authority social work," *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 36(2), pp. 241-256. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2022.2058921>.

Vicky White (2015) "Reclaiming Reflective Supervision" , *Practice*, 27:4, 251-264, DOI: 10.1080/09503153.2015.1048055

## **Why does reflective supervision matter in social work? How does it support social worker wellbeing and practice?**

**Sana Sultana Doctor - Staffordshire University**



"Be the change that you wish to see in the world." This iconic quote by Mahatma Gandhi, a pioneering social worker and activist leader in India, resonates deeply with the ethos of social work for me as an Indian. It reflects the core of commitment and development that defines this field. Reflective supervision is crucial for social workers to understand their experiences, refine skills, and maintain physical and mental health, enabling them to continue being the change they wish to see in the world. This essay discusses the significance of reflective supervision and how it benefits social workers' practice and well-being.

To commence with an important point that is enhancing professional competence and gaining skills. It calls for reflective supervision to encourage ongoing professional growth. It encourages vital reflection among social workers, allowing them to identify strengths and areas for growth, such as exploring strategies and gaining fresh perspectives in challenging family cases. Research indicates that social workers who participate in reflective supervision on a regular basis claim to be more efficient and satisfied in their jobs (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). Another significant deal is the issue that social workers often face ethical dilemmas, including confidentiality issues and moral behaviour, which require them to address these issues with their supervisors. Social workers may research ethical frameworks to solve these issues in a secure environment with reflective supervision. This approach not only helps their choice-making be more transparent, but it also reaffirms their dedication to moral principles (Turner & Lucas, 2021).

Fostering Emotional Durability is also the key. It is unthinkable to undervalue the emotional cost of social work. Reflective supervision offers a safe space for

social workers to go with their feelings and experiences. Receiving this support is key for achieving emotional strength (Davys & Beddoe, 2010). Recent data from a survey conducted by BASW (Working conditions and wellbeing of social workers Summary of surveys 2020-22), across the UK revealed alarming statistics regarding burnout among social workers. For example, 24% admitted to experiencing emotional distress, such as crying or feeling unwell due to work-related issues at least once a week, with half of social workers considering leaving their positions as a result. Furthermore, nearly 40% reported experiencing high or severe levels of personal or work-related burnout, while 69.4% felt overwhelmed by increased pressures. This highlights the urgent need for effective interventions to support social workers in managing their emotional well-being (BASW, 2022).

This raises up discussion of how reflective supervision impacts wellbeing. As mentioned above, social workers may face burnout and pressure while working. Reflective supervision can help social workers manage burnout and pressure, reducing fatigue and stress (Wonnacott, 2012). Regular discussions about work-related pressures and emotional support from supervision can help handle psychological burdens and reduce stress.

Reflective supervision holds a significant personal impact on me, stemming from my volunteer work with an NGO dedicated to promoting girls' education in India. Hence, I can understand the importance of reflective supervision. As a volunteer I firsthand encountered the multifaceted challenges that marginalised communities face in accessing quality education. Even with the group's relentless efforts, we occasionally ran into almost insurmountable difficulties.

In moments of frustration and doubt, our team turned to reflective supervision as a source of support and guidance. These discussions allowed us a space to share our experiences, swap stories, and arrive up with fresh concepts. We were able to refocus our dedication to the goal while getting fresh opinions through joint thought and debate. (Ingram, 2013)

Additionally, Reflective supervision accelerates individual growth in social work, enabling critical thinking, ongoing development, professional brand enhancement, and job satisfaction, which is excellent for their career development (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). To understand this, social workers who feel competent and appreciated are more likely to continue their work, reducing staff turnover and ensuring reliable client care, while also creating safe spaces for discussions. Providing a private, secure area for thought is a crucial part of reflective supervision in turn promoting candid introspection and open expression of challenges and failures. Employee confidence and morale can be enhanced by providing a safe space for employees to express their feelings and ideas, thereby reducing concerns and encouragement when making judgements (Ruch, 2007).

Several potential benefits of reflective supervision regarding improving practice are explored in the upcoming paragraph. It is now understood that reflective supervision allows social workers to create more informed choices by training them to consider critically over a multitude of topics and viewpoints. Thus, decisions are rendered with more thought and knowledge which finally favours the clients (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). Like that, they could come across a more effective therapeutic method that they weren't aware of by reviewing the matter with their superior. Strategies that work should be permitted to be highlighted via reflective supervision.

Social workers should share their learnings and innovative supervision methods, benefiting both themselves and those they work with through a mindset of continuous growth (Turner & Lucas, 2021). In this scenario, a social worker can enhance their work by learning a new practice from another practitioner, as positive outcomes for clients are reflective supervision's final goal. Superior quality of service depends on social workers that are happier in their roles as they are both knowledgeable and supported. They should have regular reflective management, contribute to superior service quality, and better individual confrontations (Wonnacott, 2012).

In conclusion, reflective supervision is a light of hope in the demanding field of social work. It is not just a practice but a philosophy that empowers social workers to get past barriers and promote reform. Let us commit to fostering a culture of reflection, support, and growth within our profession, ensuring every social worker has the tools to thrive. We are given the capacity to shape a brighter tomorrow for all people if we adhere to reflective supervision as our blueprint. This piece of writing should be concluded with awareness that reflective supervision ought to be a necessity rather than simply being an option.

## References

- Beddoe, L. and Davys, A. (2016) *Challenges in Professional Supervision: Current Themes and Models for Practice*, Google Books. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=K08ZDAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=Beddoe>
- British Association of Social Workers (BASW). (2022). *Working conditions and wellbeing of social workers: Summary of surveys 2020-22*. BASW.
- Hawkins, P. and Shohet, R. (2012) *Supervision in the helping professions*. 4th edn. Maidenhead: Mcgraw Hill / Open University Press.
- Ingram, R. (2015) *Understanding Emotions in Social Work: Theory, Practice and Reflection*, Google Books. McGraw-Hill Education (UK). Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=rMkvEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP10&dq=Ingram>
- Davys, A. and Beddoe, L. (2020) *Best Practice in Professional Supervision, Second Edition : A Guide for the Helping Professions*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Ruch, G. (2007) 'Reflective Practice in Contemporary Child-care Social Work: The Role of Containment', *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(4), pp. 659-680. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch277>.
- Turner, T. (Master certified coach), Whitaker, C. and Lucas, M. (2018) *Peer supervision in coaching and mentoring*.
- Wonnacott, J. (2012) *Mastering social work supervision*. London Jessica Kingsley.

## REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION:

A BEST PRACTICE  
GUIDE



### A CO-CONSTRUCTED GUIDEBOOK ON BEST REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

#### LEAD AUTHORS

PROF JERMAINE RAVALIER (BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEW UNIVERSITY)  
JOHN MCGOWAN (SOCIAL WORKERS UNION)

#### CO-AUTHORS

DR PAULINA WEGRZYNEK (BATH SPA UNIVERSITY) • DR MIRENA DIMOLAREVA (UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN)  
CAROLINE BALD (UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX) • DR PAULA MCFADDEN (UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER) • TERESA COX  
(BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEW UNIVERSITY) • KATE MCGALE • TIFF MCEWEN • GEORGIA SPICER-MANNING



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
NEW UNIVERSITY  
EST. 1891



Download the new Reflective Supervision Guide here

Find SWU on the following:



<https://swu-union.org.uk>



<https://www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/social-workers-union>



<https://www.youtube.com/@socialworkersunion>



[https://twitter.com/SWU\\_UK](https://twitter.com/SWU_UK)



<https://www.instagram.com/socialworkersunion>



[swu-admin@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:swu-admin@swu-union.org.uk)