

The Effects of Superior Supervision on Social Workers' Professional Efficacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of superior supervision on social workers' professional efficacy in social welfare organizations. This study collected survey data from social workers, and statistically analyzed the effects of Kadushin's three functions of supervision affecting social workers' professional efficacy. Among the three functions of supervision (administrative, educational, and supportive), the mean of supportive supervision is the highest of all. The means of four subcategories of social workers' professional efficacy are high in client support efficacy, practice theory efficacy, practice skill efficacy, research efficacy, in descending order. According to the results of regression analysis, the regular provision of supervision affects both practice theory efficacy and research efficacy. Another finding is that educational supervision has significant effects on all the four subcategories of professional efficacy. Finally, this study emphasizes the importance and immediate necessity of supervision to strengthen social workers' professional efficacy.

Keywords: *Administrative supervision, Educational supervision, Supportive supervision, Supervisor, Supervisee*

1. Introduction

In spite of the importance of supervision in social welfare organizations, very little research, however, has focused on the empirical effects of supervision influencing social workers' professional growth and job performance. Previous studies, mainly focused on the actual conditions and functions of supervision, found that supervision significantly affects organizational effectiveness, and that superior supervision is indispensable in social welfare organizations [1]. However, they did not explain the concrete relationships between supervision and social workers' professional capacity.

This study empirically analyzes the effects of supervision on social workers' professionalism. In order to measure social workers' professionalism, some foreign studies used social workers' professional efficacy [2], and several Korean studies found the validity of professional efficacy as a measure of social workers' confidence in professionalism such as problem-solving capacity and job accomplishment. Based on the results of previous studies, which found that superior supervision is connected directly with social workers' job performance in human service organizations, this study empirically analyzes the effects of Kadushin's three functions of supervision on social workers' professional efficacy.

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2. Theoretical background

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is a self-confidence in utilizing professional skills under particular circumstances [9]. From this definition, social workers' professional efficacy means job preparedness to apply knowledge and skills and to have self-confidence and belief in effective intervention capacity in the field of social welfare practices [3]. Some studies on the professional efficacy in the field of social welfare analyzed the major factors of supervision affecting social welfare professional efficacy, and examined social welfare students' professional capacity by using the Social Work Self-Efficacy Scale (SWSE) [4]. Using this measure, other studies analyzed the effects of learning organization and social work practicum supervision affecting social welfare self-efficacy [5].

Supervision has focused on the social workers' professional growth and detailed technical intervention in the process of practices with clients. Recently the focus of the attention has moved to the educational, supportive, and administrative functions of supervision [6]. Administrative function of supervision supports social workers' job environments; educational function of supervision helps social workers have professional competence; supportive function of supervision minimizes work overload and increases job satisfaction [7].

Previous studies on the supervision focused on the theory-based concepts of supervision, the importance of supervision in the process of social welfare practices [8], the preceding factors affecting supervision [9], and the resultant factors influenced by supervision [10]. The studies on the effects of supervision largely focused on the frequency and quantity of supervision provision affecting social workers' self-efficacy, burnout, and job attitude. These studies on the frequency and quantity of supervision, however, have a limitation that they explain little of the effects that the quality and substance of supervision affect social workers' professional efficacy [11].

3. Research purpose and method

The main issues of this research are as follows: Issue 1: What is the level of professional efficacy that social workers perceive? Issue 2: What is the level of the three functions of social welfare supervision? Issue 3: What are the effects of social welfare supervision on social workers' professional efficacy?

This study collected data from social workers who were working at the stratified sample of community welfare centers located in Seoul City. Among 96 community welfare centers in Seoul City (members of Korean Social Welfare Center Association), each of 25 centers were selected randomly from 25 districts. Survey questionnaires were distributed to the 21 welfare centers that accepted the research request. This study collected 229 questionnaires and used the sampling data for the purpose of statistical analysis.

This study measures supervision by using the three functions (administrative, educational, and supportive) of supervision measures (Kadushin, 1992; Middleman & Rhodes, 1985) that was used in the Whang's study [12]. All items of supervision measure are 5-point scale. The study measures Social Work Professional Efficacy using by Choi and Yum's validity test (2009) of Holden, Meenaghan, Anastas, and Metrey's Social Work Self-Efficacy Scale (SWSE) [13]. Four subcategories of the social welfare professional efficacy measure include practice theory efficacy (11 items), practice skill efficacy (10 items), client support efficacy (4 items), and research efficacy (3 items). All 28 items of efficacy measure are 100-point scale.

This study conducted the analysis of data by using PASW 18.0. General characteristics of respondents were analyzed by descriptive statistics. The effects of supervision on professional efficacy were analyzed by hierarchical regression method.

4. Result

4.1. Descriptive statistics of major variables

73% of respondents are women. The proportion of full time(87%) and college graduate (70%) is relatively high. The average age is 30, and total work experience is 44 months. The averages of three functions of supervision are supportive supervision (3.86), administrative supervision (3.78), and educational supervision (3.73). That means that supportive supervision is the highest, while educational supervision is the lowest. The averages of social welfare professional efficacy are client support efficacy (76.17), practice theory efficacy (67.74), practice skill efficacy (66.79), and research efficacy (62.17), in descending order.

4.2. Result of regression analysis

In Table 1, Model 1 examines the effects of age, supervisor certificate, and supervision regularity on practice theory efficacy. The result shows that regular provision of supervision affects practice theory efficacy. Model 2 adds three functions of supervision to the model 1. The statistical analysis indicates that educational supervision has statistically significant effects on the practice theory efficacy.

Table 1. Effects of supervision on practice theory efficacy

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	t	β	t
Gender (Male=1)	.088	1.322	.072	1.109
Supervisor Certificate (1=Level 1)	.007	.110	-.022	-.337
Supervision Frequency (Regular=1)	.207	3.075**	.134	1.946
Administrative Supervision			.113	.846
Educational Supervision			.273	1.997*
Supportive Supervision			-.167	-1.496
R ²	.053		.112	
Adjusted R ²	.040		.087	
Constant	62.83		44.53	
F	3.998		4.447	
F Sig.	.009		.000	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

[Table 2] examines the effects of supervision on practice skill efficacy. The result of the analysis shows that educational supervision has statistically significant but relatively small effects on the practice skill efficacy.

Table 2. Effects of supervision on practice skill efficacy

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	t	β	t
Gender	.101	1.498	.082	1.252
Supervisor Certificate	-.024	-.349	-.063	-.944
Supervision Frequency	.093	1.364	.017	.251
Administrative Supervision			.036	.267
Educational Supervision			.362	2.639**
Supportive Supervision			-.159	-1.398
R ²	.020		.091	
Adjusted R ²	.006		.066	
Constant	64.548		42.454	
F	1.454		3.565	
F Sig.	.228		.002	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 shows that effects of supervision on research efficacy. Model 1 indicates that regular provision of supervision has statistically significant effects on the research efficacy ($p < .01$). The analysis shows that educational supervision has positive effects on the research efficacy. In contrast, however, supportive supervision has negative effects on the research efficacy.

Table 3. Effects of supervision on research efficacy

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	t	β	t
Gender	.034	.506	.029	.455
Supervisor Certificate	.076	1.129	.042	.640
Supervision Frequency	.176	2.630**	.128	1.833
Administrative Supervision			.118	.893
Educational Supervision			.362	2.679**
Supportive Supervision			-.367	-3.334***
R ²	.042		.115	
Adjusted R ²	.029		.090	
Constant	53.247		41.109	
F	3.190		4.647	
F Sig.	.025		.001	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

According to [Table 4], male have significant effects on client support efficacy. The result of analysis shows that educational supervision has positive effects on the client support efficacy.

Table 4. Effects of supervision on client support efficacy

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	t	β	t
Gender	.167	2.493*	.148	2.252*
Supervisor Certificate	.027	.404	-.004	-.065
Supervision Frequency	.033	.489	-.036	-.515
Administrative Supervision			.002	.015
Educational Supervision			.298	2.181*
Supportive Supervision			-.079	-.709
R ²	.030		.083	
Adjusted R ²	.017		.057	
Constant	71.295		52.287	
F	2.286		3.323	
F Sig.	.080		.008	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5. Conclusion and implications

The purpose of this study is to analyze the actual effects of social welfare supervision on social workers' professional efficacy. According to the results of hierarchical regression analysis, (1) regular provision of supervision affects practice theory efficacy and research efficacy, (2) contrary to the conventional understanding, male social workers have higher client support efficacy than female social workers, (3) educational supervision have significant effects on all four subcategories of professional efficacy (practice theory efficacy, practice skill efficacy, client support efficacy, research efficacy), (4) supportive supervision has negative effects on research efficacy.

Based on these research findings, this study proposes several ways to enhance social workers' professional competence as follows. First, the system of regular supervision should be established to support social workers' professional growth. Second, though the three functions of supervision (administrative, educational, supportive) cannot be separated, the importance of educational supervision should be strengthened more to enhance social workers' professionalism, including the application of diverse learning techniques and the learning organization. Third, as this study found that supportive supervision has negative effects on research efficacy, supervisors should seek a balanced development between three functions of supervision. Though supervisor and supervisee need to have close relationships, the more important aim of supervision is to support social workers' professional growth. Finally, the quality and substance of supervision is more important than the regularity and quantity of supervision. Supervisors should have a firm belief that social worker's professional competence cannot be secured without professional supervision provided in the process of social welfare practices. While this study focused on the functions of supervision, further studies are expected to focus on the diverse factors affecting the quality and process of supervision and social worker's professional competence in the future.

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