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Toward Understanding the Training Needs Of Canadian Field Instructors

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study examined the training needs of Canadian field instructors (N = 58), their perceived barriers to training, and their most pressing supervision challenges. Field instructors responded to an online survey sent through placement coordinators at English-language schools of social work across Canada. Participants reported feeling "somewhat confident" in the field instructor role, and almost 40% reported not receiving any training prior to engaging in the role. Time was overwhelmingly cited as a barrier to field instructor training. When training occurred,

participants reported it was mainly through their workplace or independent reading. Thematic analysis of an open-ended question regarding participants' most challenging aspects of providing field instruction elicited the following themes: (a) student challenges, (b) organizational challenges, and (c) field instructor challenges. Implications for field instructor training are offered.

Keywords: field nstructors; training; Canada; online survey

The field instruction component of social work education is critical to the overall development of social work students' readiness for practice. As such, field instruction has long been recognized as one of the most impactful aspects of preparing social work students for work in the social work field (Fortune et al., 2001; Kadushin, 1991). In addition to learning to apply theory to practice in a real-world setting, with support, students learn to "think like a social worker" and to function in community organizations through their field practicums (Bogo, 2010). Similarly, field instructors (FIs) provide an opportunity to "give back" to the profession, enhance their knowledge, mentor students, and teach social work skills, which can enhance their own practice (Finch et al., 2019).

Field instructors must establish a trusting and empathic instructor–student relationship (Bogo, 2010 as this is the primary means for teaching and learning (Bogo, 2015; Bogo et al., 2022). Within this collaborative relationship, FIs can provide feedback and coaching on direct client intervention (Bearman et al., 2013). However, FIs must also function as gatekeepers for the profession by identifying and removing students who are professionally unsuitable (Furness & Gilligan, 2004; Singh et al., 2021). The need to remove ill-prepared and professionally unsuitable students from the profession is juxtaposed paradoxically against social work's values and commitment to helping and success. To manage this juxtaposition, FIs need formal supervisory training when faced with challenging student situations. The purpose of the present study is to determine the training needs and challenges of Canadian FIs.

Literature Review

The Need for Field Instructor Training

Field instructors face numerous personal or organizational challenges when fulfilling the mandate of their role. Personal challenges may relate to FIs' difficulty with providing constructive feedback to students and, more significantly, failing practicum students when they do not meet the expected outcomes (Bogo, 2006; Finch & Taylor, 2013; Hill et al., 2019; Luhanga et al., 2014). This may be particularly challenging for new FIs. Field instructors often have relatively little knowledge about providing effective field education (Miehls et al., 2013), which can lead to challenges in the FI–

student relationship, such as FIs being overly flexible and accommodating (Killen Fisher et al., 2016).

Organizational challenges brought on by the current neoliberal focus on social services may curtail FIs' ability to provide effective supervision. Documented challenges include high caseloads and complex cases, decreased financial resources, funding uncertainty, limited workload relief, challenges balancing field instruction with occupational obligations, funder demands for productivity, and fewer social workers able or willing to fill the role of FI, especially for students with little practice experience and limited skills (Domakin, 2015; Drolet, et al., 2021; Ferns & Moore, 2012). In addition, time and resources for professional development and training are often limited due to busy and conflicting schedules (Miehls et al., 2013).

Some field instruction challenges relate specifically to the student and to student readiness. These challenges, as identified by some FIs, include emotional immaturity, poor interpersonal relationship skills, resistance to constructive feedback, boundary breeches, concurrent familial and employment responsibilities, and accommodation needs, as well as problems regarding time management skills, egocentric personalities, punctuality, dress code, poor work ethic, and unresolved personal issues (Brear et al., 2008; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Hill et al., 2019; Sowbel & Miller, 2015; Sussman et al., 2014; Tam et al., 2017). It may be that these additional challenges increase the burden on FIs' already taxed internal and external resources and their ability to provide effective supervision. These challenges are particularly significant due to the difficulties faced by schools of social work in locating and securing social work placements (Drolet et al., 2021).

Field Instructor Training

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) surveyed 206 BSW and MSW program field education directors and coordinators to better understand differences between the administrative structures, staffing, and functions of social work field education across social work programs in the United States. This study determined the need to address challenges in field instruction and FI competence. Results showed that most participants (83%) expected field teams to provide FI orientation, while 66% indicated they provide FIs with professional development; however, the nature of this professional development and training was not explored (CSWE, 2015). In 2020, this survey was adapted for the Canadian context and sent to 43 social work programs in Canada to determine the state of social work field education in Canada. Findings from this latter survey indicated that student dynamics, heavy workloads and a lack of resources negatively impact field education programs in Canada (Drolet, 2020). Dettlaff and Dietz (2004) conducted a focus group (N = 4) with FIs to explore their training needs. Participants identified key skill areas essential for effective field

instruction, namely, determining the best methods of supervision, emphasizing teachable moments, and integrating theory with practice. In terms of training methods, participants indicated that small group activities, discussions, and mentoring opportunities would be of considerable value to their learning needs.

Training models have been developed with a diverse range of foci, including the application of attachment theory to the instructor–student relationship (Deal et al., 2011); student developmental stage models (Deal & Clements, 2006); developmental relational approaches (Deal et al., 2011); use of contracts and process recordings (Abramson & Fortune, 1990); and mutual aid models (Finch & Feigelman, 2008). In-person training of FIs predominates the research literature (Ayala et al., 2014); however, completion rates can be a challenge and can have serious implications on the quality of instruction (Parga & Doyle, 2020). As such, online training appears to be a viable option to increase participation rates and facilitate access to training and professional development. In a survey of FIs (N = 208) from four different universities in the US, Dedman and Palmer (2011) found that 66% of participants indicated they "definitely would" or "might" participate in online FI training.

Research demonstrates that training can increase FIs' level of competence. Karpetis and Athanasiou (2017) undertook a case study that adopted a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the process and effectiveness of a psychodynamic-informed training seminar for field supervisors of undergraduate social work students (N = 20). The sessions included supervisory training in four day-long seminars focusing on analysis of the student's process-recorded interviews with the client; the relationships formed between the student, the supervisor, and the field practice manager; brief virtual scenarios (vignettes) of field practice problems; and a videotaped supervision session. After the implementation of the training, participants reported an increase in their confidence and competence to provide field instruction.

Training can also increase FIs' use of reflective practice. Shea (2020) found that after a six-session training series on reflective supervision strategies, FIs reported increased use of these strategies in their own field supervision practices. Training and can also be particularly effective for new FIs. Gourdine and Baffour (2004) evaluated a competency-based training program for new FIs in a Master's of Social Work (MSW) program. Four months after the training, FIs reported an increase in their competence with respect to integrating skills-based knowledge into students' practicum experiences, their ability to socialize students to the profession, and their ability to manage the student experience effectively.

Field Instructor Training in Canadian Schools of Social Work

In Canada, the type, duration, and content of field instruction varies significantly

across educational institutions. Some schools of social work have in-person training, while other schools have developed online modules. Still others rely solely on manuals to guide FIs. None appear informed by the needs identified by FIs themselves.

In order to help address some of the challenges that exist with respect to the pressures on field practicums in Canada, Ayala et al. (2014) explored the role of online learning in training FIs. A convenience sample of FIs (N = 33) was interviewed via telephone to explore the perceptions of their role, sources of support, and training needs. While all participants indicated that training and support is important, only 49% indicated engagement in training. While many participants cited faculty (47%) and other FIs (46%) as good sources of support, the most common type of support identified was the faculty's field education manual (57%). Participants identified key factors that facilitated participation in training, which included free registration, competency credits, focusing on relevant social work training topics, and agency support. They found that while participants preferred face-to-face learning, the scheduling, workload, and geographic challenges of their work made online field instruction a viable option to help address their need for training and support.

The Canadian Field Challenge Survey was a national online survey of students, FIs, and field coordinators (N = 155) focused on the challenges of social work field education (Drolet et al., 2021). In general, participants identified the following challenges with respect to field placements: lack of or ineffective communication between students and supervisors; competition for placements; lack of preparation, support, and training; balancing multiple roles and responsibilities, and equity, diversity, and inclusivity challenges. Interestingly, when asked about perceptions of accessibility and training in the field education setting, 46.5% of respondents did not respond to this question, potentially suggesting that these issues could be a challenge. Only 21.7% of participants indicated they had access to training that made them feel prepared for their role in the field setting.

Bogo et al. (2022) administered an online survey to students and FIs across Canada to capture their perspectives on how the pandemic impacted their field placement experiences. Field instructors reported learning new skills and having been provided with some training to navigate the use of technology (84.6%). Interestingly, there was a disparity between students' concerns about adequate learning and FIs' concerns about their ability to support students virtually, suggesting that navigating this new modality of technology in both placement and supervision is an area in need of training and exploration.

Few schools of social work include field instruction or supervision courses across the curriculum to prepare undergraduate and graduate social work students to eventually become FIs (Killen Fisher et al., 2016). In preparation for our study, we conducted

a scan of supervision courses in 33 Canadian universities with accredited, English-language social work programs (Bachelor's of Social Work [BSW] and/or MSW), and found that only 12 offer courses on leadership or supervision. Of these 12 programs, three offer BSW supervision courses as electives, seven offer MSW electives, and only two have mandatory MSW courses. Only eight programs have courses which do not exclusively teach these concepts and skills but mention supervision in their course descriptions. Two universities have streams offering a specialization in supervision. Overall, there is a lack of clinical supervision training at the BSW and MSW levels, and graduates of Canadian schools of social work appear to be left largely unprepared for the FI role.

Study Objective

Previous national studies have examined the personal, organizational, and student-focused challenges facing Canadian FIs that necessitate the need for training. However, these studies did not examine the type of training FIs received prior to becoming an FI, or the preferred topics to be included in FI training. The present survey offers participants a comprehensive list from which to choose for these areas. Field instructors need easily accessible programs to develop and enhance competence in providing field instruction and preparing the next generation of social workers. This survey adds to the existing literature on the training needs of Canadian FIs along with the barriers to meeting those needs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What training do Canadian field instructors access?
2. What barriers do Canadian field instructors face in accessing training?
3. What are the most challenging aspects of supervision for Canadian field instructors?

Methodology

Research Design and Recruitment

This study utilizes an online survey research design and methodology. The first author received Research Ethics Board approval from their university for all study procedures. Participant recruitment occurred through field placement coordinators at English-language schools of social work across Canada. An email was sent to all field placement coordinators requesting they forward information about the study, a consent form, and a link to an online survey to their current roster of FIs. The survey was emailed four times between December 2020 and April 2021. Participants self-selected and received a $10.00 online Amazon gift card for their time. A total of 58 FIs across Canada engaged with the survey.

Survey Design

The survey was developed using REDCap, a secure, web-based survey distribution platform, and included a mix of six multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions (see Appendix). The multiple-choice questions focused on their confidence as an FI, training they received to become an FI, topics that would be helpful to include in an FI training program, and barriers to completing FI training. The two open-ended questions asked participants to outline the most challenging aspects of providing field instruction as well as their motivation to provide field instruction. Results regarding the latter, open-ended question on FI motivation are being reported in a separate manuscript. The survey also contained demographic questions. The first author designed the initial draft of the survey and requested feedback from the coauthors, all experienced FIs. Revisions occurred until consensus was reached.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS software. Frequency tables and cross-tabulations were used to explore the demographics of the sample and the distribution of responses to survey questions. Qualitative data, obtained from the short-answer questions, were analyzed manually by two team members. Reflexive Thematic Analysis is a data analysis method that identifies patterns of meaning and is appropriate for use with questionnaires (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This six-phase process involves familiarization with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the results. Participant responses were first read by two team members independently for the data familiarization process. Both members used descriptive coding to categorize each response, which then led to the development of initial themes based on identifying common elements in the codes. The two members then met to review and discuss these initial themes. We first examined the themes for commonality and mutual agreement, which led to some themes being regrouped. We then discussed the removal of other themes when there was an insufficient number of participant responses to support the themes. Decision-making at this stage occurred through consensus. Themes were then refined and named to capture the essence of participant narratives.

Credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data was maintained by sending out the survey on four separate occasions across Canada as a means of prolonged engagement with potential participants, examining all transcripts during the data analysis phase, and providing thick description of responses (Nowell et al., 2017). With regard to positionality, the research team has significant experience within field education. Some members of the research team have worked as faculty field liaisons within their respective schools of social work, while two members have been field instructors for multiple students, and one team member is an assistant dean for field

education. The team members can relate to participant responses and have experienced some of these same challenges at their respective schools of social work.

Results

Sample Description

Fifty-eight FIs engaged with the online survey. Participants represented six Canadian provinces and one territory, with the largest number (32.1%) practicing in Ontario (see Table 1 for participant characteristics). Given that there are 10 provinces and three territories in Canada, the survey is not nationally representative and is missing participant data from the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island as well as the territories of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. There is, however, some representation in western Canada (British Columbia, Alberta) and eastern Canada (Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Labrador) as well as central Canada (Ontario). Respectively, one third of participants held an MSW (n = 17), BSW (n = 17), or Bachelor of Arts (n = 17); however, these were not mutually exclusive categories. Community mental health was the most endorsed sector of practice, chosen by approximately one-quarter of FIs (n = 14). However, more than a third of respondents (n = 21) also indicated they work in other sectors of practice; the not-for-profit sector and various community-based support services were listed most frequently. The largest group of respondents (n = 23, 41.1%) were early-career FIs (1–5 years), while the least experienced FIs (i.e., 0–1 years) were the smallest group, representing 14.3% of the sample (n = 8).

Table 1

*Participant Characteristics (*N = *58)*

Demographic characteristics	% (*n*)
Province	
Alberta	10.7 (6)
British Columbia	19.6 (11)
Newfoundland and Labrador	25.0 (14)
Nova Scotia	10.7 (6)
Ontario	32.1 (18)
Yukon	1.8 (1)
Missing	(2)
Education completed [a]	
PhD	3.4 (2)
MSW	29.3 (17)
MA	12.1 (7)
BSW	29.3 (17)
BA	29.3 (17)
College	15.5 (9)
Sector [b]	
Hospital	12.1 (7)
Elementary/high school	1.7 (1)
University/college	8.6 (5)
Private practice	3.4 (2)
Children's mental health	5.2 (3)
Community mental health	24.1 (14)
Rehabilitation/case management	3.4 (2)
Child protection	10.3 (6)
Management/government	1.7 (1)
Family health team	1.7 (1)
Criminal justice system	8.6 (5)
Long-term care	3.4 (2)
Gender-based violence sector	3.4 (2)
Other	36.2 (21)
Years in current position	
0-1 year	14.3 (8)
2-5 years	41.1 (23)
6-9 years	23.2 (13)
10+ years	21.4 (12)
Missing	(2)

[a] Categories are not mutually exclusive.
[b] Examples of "other" include community-based social work, community engagement and development, social planning, and research

With respect to field instruction, approximately 47% (n = 26) of the sample had between one and five years of experience (see Table 2 for field instruction characteristics). A large portion of FIs supervised between zero and two students (87.3%, n = 48), with a similar portion of the sample (82.8%, n = 48) supervising BSW students. The majority of respondents (57.1%, n = 32) indicated they felt "somewhat confident" as FIs.

Table 2

*Field Instructor Characteristics (*N = *58)*

Field instructor characteristics	% (*n*)
Years as field instructor	
< 1 year	18.2 (10)
1–5 years	47.3 (26)
6–10 years	9.1 (5)
11+ years	20.0 (11)
No experience	5.5 (3)
Missing	3.4 (2)
Students supervised at one time	
0–2	87.3 (48)
3–5	9.1 (5)
6+	3.6 (2)
Missing	(3)
Education level of students supervised [a]	
BSW	82.8 (48)
MSW	32.8 (19)
Other: University	19.0 (11)
College	20.7 (12)
Confidence as a field instructor	
Extremely confident	41.1 (23)
Somewhat confident	57.1 (32)
Not confident at all	1.8 (1)
Missing	1.7 (1)

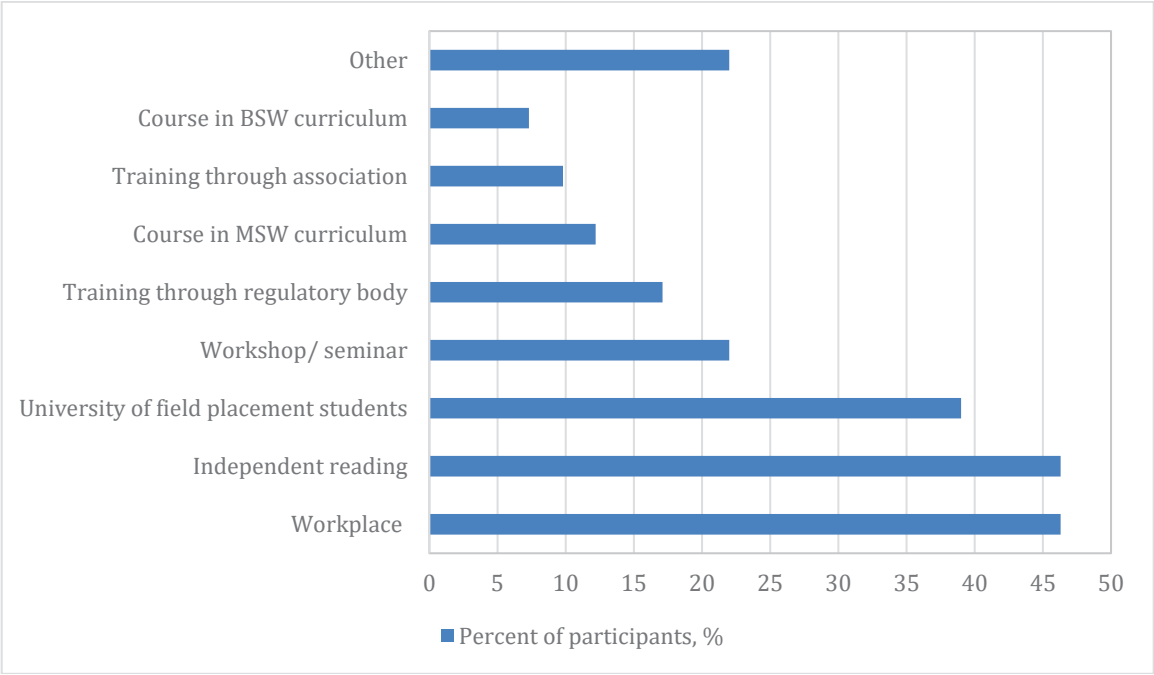
[a] Categories are not mutually exclusive

Types of Training Accessible to FIs

In terms of accessing training, almost 71% of the sample (*n* = 41) received some form of training prior to their start as FIs, mainly in the form of independent reading or training through their workplace. Only a small number of participants indicated having had training through their BSW or MSW curriculum or through a provincial regulatory body or association (see Figure 1 and Table 3 for the types of training).

Figure 1

Types of Training Accessed by Participants



More than 20% of respondents indicated having other types of training. The most common responses in this category were related to having work experience in the field, including teaching and supervising staff, students, and volunteers, as well as work experience and personal supervision. The types of training indicated by the participants were not associated with any of their characteristics.

Barriers to Accessing Training

With respect to barriers to accessing training, time (77.3%, n = 45) was overwhelmingly identified by respondents. Less than a third of respondents cited organizational support (29.3%, n = 17) or quality of training (22.4%, n = 13) as barriers. Other barriers were listed by very few respondents. Investigation of the relationship between participant characteristics and the barriers they indicated found that less experienced FIs were more likely to choose accessibility of training as a barrier (τ_c = .27, p = .037). No relationship with other FI characteristics was found.

Table 3

*Field Instructor Training (*N = *58)*

Training characteristics	% (*n*)
Field instruction training prior to becoming a field instructor	
None received	29.3 (17)
Received	70.7 (41)
Provider of field instruction training received (*n* = 41) [a]	
Workplace	46.3 (19)
Independent reading	46.3 (19)
University of field placement students	39.0 (16)
Workshop/seminar	22.0 (9)
Training through regulatory body	17.1 (7)
Course in MSW curriculum	12.2 (5)
Training through association	9.8 (4)
Course in BSW curriculum	7.3 (3)
Other [b]	22.0 (9)
Barriers to completing field instructor training [c]	
Time	77.6 (45)
Organizational support	29.3 (17)
Quality of training	22.4 (13)
Accessibility of training	12.1 (7)
Computer/internet access	3.4 (2)
Privacy	0 (0)
Other	3.43 (2)
N/A	6.9 (4)
Endorsed training topics	
Providing constructive feedback	70.7 (41)
Communicating student failure	58.6 (34)
Responding to students who are struggling	55.2 (32)
Trauma-informed field instruction	56.9 (33)
Emotional regulation	51.7 (30)
Application of theory to practice	50.0 (29)
Observation of practice and debriefing	50.0 (29)
Cultural safety	50.0 (29)
Triggers, transference, and countertransference	48.3 (28)
Ethical issues	46.6 (27)
Planning orientation	44.8 (26)
Power and privilege	44.8 (26)
Online supervision	44.8 (26)
Conducting pre-placement interview	41.4 (24)
Application of critical social work/social justice	43.1 (25)
Establishing standards/best practices	41.4 (24)
Mental health challenges	41.4 (24)
Microaggressions	41.4 (24)
Time management	41.4 (24)
Student–field instructor relationship	37.9 (22)
Racial aggressions	37.9 (22)
Liaising with post-secondary institutions	32.8 (19)
Managing accommodations/accessibility requests	31.0 (18)
Multicultural supervision	29.3 (17)
Ending the field placement	24.1 (14)
Group supervision	24.1 (14)
Other [d]	8.6 (5)
Topics endorsed (/20)	*M*=9.12
	SD=5.69

[a] Categories are not mutually exclusive for the 35 participants who received training. Percentages are based on this subgroup for this characteristic.
[b] Other examples of training received include school's field manual, mentoring from other FI, supervision course.
[c] Categories are not mutually exclusive.
[d] Other examples of topics include Pride community support, Indigenous cultural safety

Most Challenging Supervisory Topics

On average, participants checked roughly nine from the proposed list of 20 topics (M = 9.12, SD = 5.69). The top training topics chosen were providing constructive feedback (70.7%, n = 41), communicating student failure (58.6%, n = 34), responding to struggling students (55.2%, n = 32), trauma-informed field instruction (56.9%, n = 33), and emotional regulation (51.7%, n = 30). The full list of topics is provided in Table 3. Chi-square tests of independence and correlational analyses were conducted to investigate whether there is a relationship between FIs' characteristics and the most challenging supervisory topics. Being a less experienced FI was associated with choosing the topics of providing constructive feedback (τ_c = -.30, p = .006) and communicating student failures (τ_c = -.36, p = .001), while more experienced FIs indicated the topic of online supervision as challenging for them (τ_c = .28, p = .016). No relationship with other FI characteristics was found.

Qualitative Results

In response to an open-ended question about the challenging aspects of providing field instruction, respondents' concerns were grouped into three themes: student challenges, organizational challenges, and FI challenges.

Student Challenges

Participants cited a multitude of challenges related to social work students including "students with limited critical thinking abilities" (participant #9), "students who need extra assistance with day-to-day guidance (i.e., they don't manage their own schedules well, they need direction for each task on a daily basis)" (participant #56) and "I travel often and it is difficult to provide supervision to students who are not overly independent" (participant #11). Participants cited minimal skill sets as another challenge. One participant (#5) shared,

> I struggle when the student that I have is at a more beginning level. The placement I provide is more advanced and it can be overwhelming to try to find experiences that scaffold a student if they are coming to the placement with minimal experience.

Another said, "since I am not a teacher, when students need to work on fundamental skills, that is challenging (like writing) because I do not know how to help" (participant #6).

Contrary to students' lack of independence are concerns "when students feel too certain or confident about their skills and are not open to suggestions" (participant #27) and "students [who say] you are wrong, where you then need to reference sources or seek confirmation from liaison from the University. I find that a conflict

management assessment is helpful for students to complete so they can be more aware of how they engage in conflicts/disagreements" (participant #29).

Multiple participants noted the challenge of connecting theory to practice. One participant (#3) shared, "students really don't have a good knowledge base and don't know how to connect theory to practice. I believe this is because most professors don't actually practice out in the community." Others referenced "connecting theory to practice" (participant #22) and "helping students square what they have learned in the classroom with what they experience in their placement. Often students are taught by instructors who have limited practice experience and who cannot make this connection for students in the classroom" (participant #14).

Other concerns raised were lack of motivation (participant #56), limited critical analysis (participant #10), students not representing the client population (participant #10), and students' limited life experience (participant #10). One participant (#33) noted mental health challenges: "The social work students that enter my placements have had significant mental health issues preventing them from finishing their placements—in fact, I have yet to have a student finish a placement with me." Another participant (#59) cited professionalism: "assisting students with development of the professionalism they require for work on site."

Organizational Challenges

Some participants (n = 16) noted that the major challenge related to the organization is time. Lack of time impacts meeting the needs of students. One participant (#8) shared, "My workload is immense. I can get caught up in what I have to do and forget to keep the learning needs of the student on my task list"; another participant (#47) shared, "time to support/mentor students"; and a third participant (#52) said, "having the time to meet constructively." Participants noted the relationship between lack of time and workplace expectations. One participant (#17) shared, "time to prepare and guide students in addition to meeting caseload and employer expectations," while another participant (#28) explained, "time management in workplaces/environments that do not provide accommodation for the additional workload of taking on placement student: same expectations, caseload, quotas." Participants also noted "managing my regular workload and the workload of managing the student can sometimes be extremely busy" (participant #30), and "balance of supervision and full-time employment demands" (participant #50).

Field Instructor Challenges

The final theme relates to challenges specific to the FI. Participants (n = 9) noted providing feedback to students as a challenge. Participants used varied terms

regarding this issue, including "constructive feedback" (participant #16), "negative or constructive feedback" (participant #40), and "critical feedback" (participant #25). One participant (#45) summed up the challenge by stating, "I find giving difficult feedback the most challenging and it depends on students…easier to supervise those open to supervision and wanting to learn."

Discussion

This mixed-methods survey sought to examine the perspectives of Canadian FIs on the training they access, the barriers to accessing this training, and the most challenging aspects of supervision. The first research question concerned the training accessed by FIs. The study found that independent reading and training through their workplace were the top methods by which FIs gained knowledge of supervision processes. It is possible that these two methods of training are linked, in that FIs may attend a supervision training through their workplace, which may lead to independent reading to further explore and understand new concepts and theories. However, it may also mean that in the absence of other training being offered or paid for, FIs must take responsibility for their own learning. This is reminiscent of the concept of *responisibilization*, which reinforces that it is the individual FI who is responsible for their training. Responsibilization refers to delegating the acquisition of a task to the individual without instructing them on how to carry out the task, and is a key feature of neoliberalism (Kelly & Caputo, 2011). Moreover, it is also not clear if the independent reading is current, authored by someone knowledgeable of supervision, available through university databases, or simply information found online.

Training offered through the university was the third most popular training accessed by FIs. This is a hopeful finding, in that universities are not just placing students but taking the responsibility to offer training for the ultimate good of the student. By comparison, few FIs noted that training in providing supervision was offered through their BSW or MSW program, or through their provincial association or regulatory body.

Of concern is that almost 30% of the sample reported having no training whatsoever prior to commencing the FI role. This translates into a profound lack of preparedness to engage undergraduate and graduate students for several hundreds of hours of supervision and to manage challenges that may arise during this process. This initial finding may also relate to a subsequent finding that over half the sample (57%) reported feeling "somewhat confident" in the FI role. Without training in supervision and field instruction, that FIs would not have a sense of mastery of the supervision process is understandable, and this finding echoes previous studies (Killen Fisher et al., 2016; Miehls et al., 2013).

The second research question focused on the barriers faced by Canadian FIs to accessing training. Time was the major factor mentioned, while almost a third of respondents stated organizational support was also a factor. This finding is ironic in that if organizations supported social workers to be FIs, perhaps they would have more time. These findings support previous research (Domakin, 2015; Ferns & Moore, 2012; Miehls et al., 2013) and show that FIs continue to experience similar challenges. These findings also speak to the long-recognized constraints imposed by neoliberalism, including excessive caseloads, long hours, and high turnover (Lavalette, 2011), which reduce time available for training. Lack of time to access training in supervision can also impact the quality of the supervision, and may even pose a danger to clients and social work students practicing outside their scope of competence.

The third research question concerned the most challenging aspects of supervision. Participants reported numerous concerns, which fall into three broad domains: student, organization, and FI. Student challenges include minimal skill levels, lack of independence, overconfidence, and mental health challenges. This finding is consonant with the research literature on the challenges of students in field placements (Brear et al., 2008; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Hill et al., 2019; Sowbel & Miller, 2015; Sussman et al., 2014; Tam et al., 2017). Organizational challenges mentioned included balancing workplace expectations with meeting the needs of students. Most participants did not appear to receive workload relief when concurrently taking on placement students. This is again reflective of the neoliberal imperative which devalues social work skills and emphasizes doing more with less (Morely & Dunstan, 2013). The final challenge related to the FI concerned providing constructive or negative feedback to students, potentially due to the impact on or loss of the supervisory relationship, or students who are simply unwilling to accept or consider constructive feedback. This challenge could relate to a lack of or insufficient training to help FIs meet the expectation of giving constructive feedback, or a lack of focus on how to give constructive feedback within the field instructor role. It is ironic because research has shown that social work students want constructive feedback on their performance, and are dissatisfied with receiving only positive feedback (Tufford et al., 2019).

It is interesting to note that participant recruitment for this study took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the majority of student placements were virtual due to physical distancing protocols. However, few FIs in the study commented on the challenges of virtual placements. This speaks to the resilience of FIs, many of whom had to quickly adapt to a virtual placement model.

Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this study. First, participants were

voluntary and self-selected. Second, the researchers did not have direct access to FIs but relied on placement coordinators at schools of social work across Canada to send the recruitment email, which may have limited participation in the study. Third, while the demographic portion of the survey asked participants to indicate their province or territory, it did not further delineate if they resided in an urban, suburban, rural, or remote center. Fourth, the online survey may have excluded potential FIs in rural or remote parts of Canada who have intermittent or insufficient internet bandwidth, or are not comfortable completing responses in an online format. Fifth, as noted in the quantitative and qualitative responses, FIs experience ongoing time pressures, and this may have limited participation in the survey. In addition, it is possible that only participants who had time or for whom field supervision was of particular relevance or importance participated in the study, potentially contributing to a sampling bias. Sixth, in the survey we did not inquire about participants' perceptions of the level of resource intensiveness of the accompanying institution, and how this may impact the training offered to FIs. Finally, individual interviews could have garnered more in-depth exploration of the topics in question.

Implications

These implications are drawn from the FI training literature in conjunction with participant responses to the online survey. They are provided with the intention to assist field practicum sites to meet the training needs of FIs.

Consider Virtual Field Instructor Training

In the continued absence of workload relief resulting in time limitations, online FI training may be a more viable way for FIs to access needed training. This is particularly true for FIs in rural and remote locations, where travel and inclement weather are often barriers to attendance at in-person training (Unger, 2003). It is likely that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many educational institutions shifted to online platforms for teaching delivery (Wahab, 2020), online training of FIs may be more accepted.

Incorporate Pedagogical Training on Supervision in the BSW and MSW Curriculum

Undergraduate and graduate social work education are ideal entry points to introducing and expanding on concepts regarding field instruction and supervision. This study has shown that these avenues appear to be missed opportunities, given that few study participants received training in this area during their formal social work education. The Canadian Association of Social Work Education's (CASWE, 2021) *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* stipulate that "social work students have opportunities to consider their potential contribution to social work education

through future service, such as becoming field instructors/supervisors" (p. 13). While competition for space in the social work curriculum is an ongoing reality, to meet the accreditation standards, these discussions could naturally occur during and following field placements.

Encourage Constructive Feedback Throughout Social Work Education

Social work students are generally hesitant to provide their peers with constructive feedback throughout the broad array of micro-, mezzo-, and macro-focused courses. Given the possibility of seeing and working with their peers in the future, the potential negative effect on these relationships is simply a risk many students are not willing to take. However, the hesitation to provide constructive feedback appears to carry into the supervisory relationship. Social work educators are poised to help students manage this discomfort and push themselves to provide constructive feedback. Doing so will acclimatize students to the importance of including their voices in the process, and to the role of accepting and integrating constructive feedback in their future professional development.

Future Research

This national study offers avenues for further research regarding the training needs of Canadian FIs. As both in-person and online training are currently being used, depending on the institution, future research could randomize FIs to either in-person or online training to determine if one modality is superior to the other. Research could further explore the training needs of urban versus rural FIs in light of specific challenges, such as dual relationships, that may arise in rural environments. As well, given the presence of nontraditional field placements—such as web-based placements, rotational placements of shorter duration, and online counseling services—research could explore the training needs of FIs involved in these particular kinds of placement sites. In addition, given the number of participants who reported engaging in independent reading around field instruction, future research could examine the content of the reading and how FIs apply this learning to their work with students. Finally, while this study centered on FIs, future research could explore the perspectives of placement coordinators in schools of social work to determine their specific challenges when training new and seasoned FIs.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study sought the perspectives of Canadian FIs with regard to their training needs and supervision challenges. While the findings continue to emphasize ongoing student and structural challenges associated with providing field instruction, it is noteworthy that training does occur through a variety of formats.

This study points to the underutilization of the BSW and MSW programs as a means by which beginning discussions can occur on the value of field instruction and the role and scope of the individual FI. However, this situation should improve with the CASWE's (2021) recent imperative to include this learning in undergraduate and graduate social work.

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Appendix

Field Instructor Training: A National Survey of Canadian Field Instructors

Section 1: Field Instructor Role and Access to Training

In this section of the survey, please tell us about your experience as a field instructor in terms of existing training needs and opportunities.

1.1 How confident do you currently feel for the role of field instructor?

- Not confident at all
- Somewhat confident
- Extremely confident
- N/A

1.2 What specific training in field instruction did you receive before becoming a field instructor? (Select all that apply):

- No training
- Workplace training
- Training from the university/college where my field students are studying
- Independent reading materials
- Supervision course in your BSW curriculum
- Supervision course in your MSW curriculum
- Training through your regulatory body
- Training through your association
- Workshop/seminar
- Other (please specify) (text box)

1.3 If you have not received any field instructor training prior to having practicum students, do you think it would be beneficial?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

1.4 What motivates you to provide field instruction? (Text box)

1.5 What are the most challenging aspects of providing field instruction? (Text box)

1.6 In the development of an online field instructor training program, which topics

do you think would be helpful? Select all that apply:

- Liaising with post-secondary institutions (e.g., faculty consultant, field liaison)
- Conducting the pre-practicum student interview
- Managing accommodation and accessibility requests
- Planning the first day of field practicum/orientation
- Establishing standards/best practices
- Ending the field practicum
- Responding to students who are struggling/having difficulty
- Providing constructive feedback
- Communicating student failures
- Application of theory to practice
- Application of critical social work/social justice
- Triggers, transference, and counter transference
- Debriefing observation of social workers and observation of students' practice
- Emotional regulation
- Time management strategies
- Cultural safety/cultural humility
- Micro aggressions
- Racial aggressions
- Mental health challenges
- Student–field instructor relationship (developing, fostering, and overcoming ruptures)
- Group supervision
- Online supervision
- Multicultural supervision
- Ethical issues in field education
- Power and privilege
- Trauma-informed field instruction
- Other (please specify) (Text box)
- N/A

1.7 What barriers might prevent you from completing field instructor training?

- Time
- Computer/internet access
- Privacy
- Quality of the training
- Accessibility of the training
- Organizational support
- Other (please specify) (Text box)
- N/A

1.8 How important would it be for you to receive a certificate of completion from a field instructor training program?

- Not important
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- N/A

Section 2: Demographic Information

2.1 In which province are you located?

- Alberta
- British Columbia
- Manitoba
- New Brunswick
- Newfoundland and Labrador
- Northwest Territories
- Nova Scotia
- Nunavut
- Ontario
- Prince Edward Island
- Quebec
- Saskatchewan
- Yukon

2.2 In what sector do you currently work?

- Hospital social work
- Elementary/secondary school
- University/college
- Private practice/employee assistance
- Children's mental health
- Community mental health
- Rehabilitation/case management
- Child welfare/child protection
- Management/government
- Family health team
- Criminal justice system
- Long-term care
- Gender-based violence sector (shelters/counselling)
- Other (please specify) (Text box)

2.3 How long have you been in your current position?

- 0–1 years
- 1–5 years
- 6–9 years
- 10+ years

2.4 What is your educational background? Select all that apply:

- College diploma, please specify (Text box)
- BA
- BSW
- MA
- MSW, specialization (Text box)
- PhD
- Other, please specify (Text box)

2.5 How many years have you practiced as **a social worker**?

2.6 How many years have you been **a field instructor**?

- No experience
- Less than a year
- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 10+ years

2.7 How many students on average do you supervise **at one time**?

- 1–2
- 3–5
- 6–10

2.8 Over your career how many students have you supervised **in total**?

- 1–2
- 3–5
- 6–10
- 11–15
- 16–20
- More than 20

2.9 What programs do your practicum students typically come from? Select all that apply:

- Undergraduate social work
- Graduate social work
- Other university degree
- College diploma

2.10 Is there additional information you would like to share about field instruction training that you would like us to know? (Text box)