



The Scope of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Supervision of Social Workers

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers seems to be a growing area of research, however, little to no literature focuses on the scope of the use of ICTs in supervision both nationally and internationally. Global research suggests that the increased use of ICTs in the supervision of social worker gives rise to a number of concerns such as ethics and the potential factors that impede on the supervisory process. These factors influence social workers experience of the use of ICTs in their supervision. Thus, with little to no insight into this phenomenon in a South African context, this study aimed to gain an understanding of the social workers experience of the scope of ICTs used in their supervision at social work organisations in the Western Cape.

The research adopted a qualitative approach. Furthermore, the researcher employed descriptive and exploratory research designs in order to gain an understanding of social workers experiences of the scope of ICTs used in their supervision as little to no research exist on this topic in a South African context. The research participants were recruited practicing social workers in the Western Cape that has experienced the use of ICTs in their supervision. These participants were recruited through means of non-probability sampling methods, specifically the purposive technique. The data collection process involved interviewing seventeen participants by means of a semi-structured interview via MS Teams. A thematic content analysis approach is employed to analyse the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. This research report contains two literature chapters. The first literature chapter conceptualises ICTs in the social work organisations and practice as well as the use of ICTs within social work organisations and practice. The second literature chapter conceptualises ICTs within social work supervision as well as describes the use of ICTs in social work supervision. These literature chapters serve as the foundation of chapter four which was an empirical study, presenting the data collected from the research participants and analysing their narratives in the context of the existing body of knowledge. These generated findings presented in the empirical study enabled the researcher to make and present conclusions and recommendations regarding the scope of ICTs used in social work interventions and supervision. The key conclusions deduced from this study is that ICTs are used in both social work interventions and supervision and that the frequency, types and experiences of the use differs depending on a number of factors. These factors include the potential factors impeding on the supervisory process, both the supervisor and supervisors' level of professional identity and ethical concerns. Thus, social work organisations need to take a more transformational

approach, adopting new innovative ways of ensuring high quality services to services users. Social workers and supervisors must also undergo training to learn how to effectively and ethical use ICTs in supervision in order to ensure professional development and ultimately high-quality services rendered.

OPSOMMING

Die gebruik van Inligtings- en Kommunikasietegnologie (IKT) in supervision van maatskaplike werkers blyk 'n groeiende navorsingsgebied te wees. Tog fokus min plaaslike en internasionale literatuur en navorsing op die omvang van die gebruik van IKT in supervisie van maatskaplike werkers. Internasionale navorsing dui daarop dat die toenemende gebruik van IKT in supervisie van maatskaplike werkers 'n aantal kwessies na vore bring, soos etiek en die potensiële faktore wat die supervisieproses kan belemmer. Hierdie faktore beïnvloed die ervaring van maatskaplike werkers met die gebruik van IKT in hul supervisie. Dus, met min tot geen insig in hierdie verskynsel in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks, het hierdie studie ten doel om begrip te verkry van die ervaring van maatskaplike werkers ten opsigte van die omvang van IKT wat in hul supervisie benut word.

Die navorsing was kwalitatief van aard. Verder het die navorser beskrywende en verkennende navorsingsontwerpe gebruik om begrip van maatskaplike werkers se ervaringe met die omvang van IKT te ontwikkel, aangesien min tot geen navorsing oor hierdie onderwerp in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks bestaan nie. Die deelnemers aan die navorsing was praktiserende maatskaplike werkers in die Wes-Kaap wat die gebruik van IKT in hul supervisie ervaar het. Hierdie deelnemers is deur middel van 'n doelbewuste nie-waarskynlikheidsteekproefmetode gewerf. Die data-insamelingsproses het bestaan uit semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met sewentien deelnemers deur middel van via MS Teams. 'n Tematiese inhoudsanalise-benadering is gebruik om die data wat tydens die semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude ingesamel is, te analiseer. Hierdie navorsingsverslag bevat twee literatuurhoofstukke. Die eerste literatuurhoofstuk konseptualiseer IKT in maatskaplikewerk-organisasies, sowel as die gebruik van IKT in maatskaplikewerk-praktyk. Die tweede literatuurhoofstuk konseptualiseer IKT in maatskaplike werk-supervisie en beskryf die gebruik van IKT in maatskaplikewerk-supervisie. Hierdie literatuurhoofstukke dien as die grondslag van hoofstuk vier, wat die empiriese studie rapporteer van deelnemers se narratiewe en dit binne konteks analiseer. Die bevindinge wat in die empiriese studie aangebied word, het die navorser in staat gestel om gevolgtrekkings en aanbevelings te maak oor die omvang van IKT wat in maatskaplikewerk-intervensies en supervisie gebruik word. Die sleutelgevolgtrekkings van hierdie studie, is dat IKT in beide maatskaplikewerk-intervensies en -supervisie gebruik word, en dat die frekwensie, tipes en ervarings van die gebruik verskil, afhangende van 'n aantal faktore. Hierdie faktore sluit in die potensiële faktore wat die supervisieproses kan belemmer, sowel as die vlak van professionele identiteit en etiese kwessies in supervisie. Dus moet maatskaplike werk-organisasies 'n meer

transformasionele benadering aanneem deur nuwe innoverende metodes te aanvaar om gehalte dienste aan diensverbruikers te verseker. Maatskaplike werkers en supervisors moet ook opleiding ontvang om te leer hoe om IKT effektief en eties in supervisie te gebruik, ten einde professionele ontwikkeling en uiteindelik hoë gehalte dienste te verseker.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASW	Association of Australian Social Work
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
DESC	Department of Social Work Ethical Screening Committee
DSD	Department of Social Development
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
IFSW	International Federation of Social Work
NASW	National Association of Social Work
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professionals
ICTs	Information and Communications Technologies

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE

Supervision is an internationally accepted activity in social work and is defined by its support, administrative, and educational functions to ensure that social workers render services of a high standard to their client systems (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Engelbrecht (2019), a local South African author, defines supervision according to its brief, operationalisation, and scope. The *brief* of supervision is a collection of the mandate and policies, which regulates the functions of supervision. *Operationalisation* of supervision refers to structured sessions with predetermined timeframes based on adult principles, appropriate practice perspectives, theories, models, methods, and activities. The *scope* of supervision is determined by the professional working supervisor-supervisee relationship, supervisor roles and the context of the work environment (Engelbrecht, 2019). Thus, supervision is an essential activity that takes place between a practicing social worker and a social work supervisor. For the purpose of this study, a social worker refers to an individual who is registered with the South African Council of Social Services (SACSSP), in terms of chapter 2, section 17 of the Social Service Professions Act, 110 of 1978 as amended in 2012 (Department of Social Development, 2012). According to the Department of Social Development (2012), a social work supervisor refers to an individual with the appropriate qualification and experience, and to whom responsibility and authority is delegated to supervise practicing social workers. The policy guidelines of the SACSSP stipulates supervision as a mandatory practice for all social workers in South Africa (SACSSP, 2005).

Preceding to the novel COVID-19 pandemic, information and communication technologies (ICT) has modified professional fields, including the social work profession and associated supervision globally (Fang, Mishna, Zhang, Van Wert & Bogo, 2014; Berzin, Singer & Chan, 2015; Barsky, 2018; Reamer, 2018). Pink, Ferguson and Kelly (2021:1) commended for instance that "...the use of digital media and technologies has impacted social work for several years, the Covid-19 pandemic and need for physical distancing dramatically accelerated the systematic use of...digital practices". In the same vein, according to Chan and Holosko (2016), ICT

refers to the utilisation of different types of technologies that allows for information exchange and the integration of telecommunications. ICT is an extensional term for Information Technology (IT) that emphasises the role of unified communication and technological convergence (Kondra, 2020). The umbrella term ICT thus encompasses any communication devices such as radios, televisions, cell phones, computers and network hardware, as well as the different types of network services and appliances that accompany them, such as video conferencing, distance learning or supervision (Kondra, 2020). This digital revolution has transformed social systems and, within a social work context, ICTs provide a new way of dealing with human inequalities and the ability enhance social development (López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018).

In addition, the fourth industrial revolution refers to the interconnectedness of technologies to relieve human tasks (Ayinde & Kirkwood, 2020). The concept *Fourth Industrial Revolution* was first introduced by a team of scientists who developed a high-tech strategy for the German government (Kagermann, Lukas & Wahlster, 2011). The fourth industrial revolution is the continuation of the automation of traditional manufacturing and industrial practices, therefore the reduction of human effort or involvement in processes by means of implementation of a broad range of technologies. The fourth industrial revolution thus involves the integration of large-scale machine-to-machine communication (M2M) and the Internet of things (IOT) to increase automation, improve communication and self-monitoring, and to produce smart machines that can identify and analyse issues without human involvement (Moore, 2018). Hence, this fourth industrial revolution has a definite impact on how social services are delivered, but not necessarily why they need to be rendered (Ayinde & Kirkwood, 2020). Within this context, Hawkswork, Berriman and Goel (2018), conducted a survey which highlighted the risks of robots taking over human jobs in the business sectors such as transportation and storage within the UK. However, the possibility of robots replacing welfare workers in the social work profession is slim as social work relies on the establishment of human interactions and relationships. Therefore, the fourth industrial revolution has not had a major transformative impact on the social work profession, until the Covid-19 pandemic affected most work spheres across the globe.

A field of computer science called artificial intelligence (AI) is devoted to building intelligent machines that are capable of carrying out activities that ordinarily call for

human intellect (OpenAI, 2023). The word "artificial" denotes that the intelligence exhibited by these machines is not innate; rather, it was created and programmed by humans. AI systems are designed to mimic cognitive processes including perception, learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and the ability to grasp natural language. AI's ultimate objective is to create machines and algorithms that can duplicate, improve, or even outperform human intellect in a variety of fields. There are two primary forms of AI namely Narrow AI (Weak AI) and Artificial general intelligence (general AI, often referred to as Strong AI). Thus, narrow AI is restricted to the field it was built for and is intended for certain tasks only. Examples include recommendation engines, self-driving cars, virtual assistants like Siri and ChatGPT. Whereas, Artificial general AI, is the ability of AI systems to comprehend, learn, and carry out any intellectual work that a person can such as automated work systems (OpenAI, 2023). Although AI has the potential to significantly impact the social work profession in various ways, both positive and challenging, the impact thereof on the profession is unknown due to its recent development. Furthermore, the impact of the fourth industrial revolution on social work, as well as on the management and supervision of social workers is not well researched, hence the utilisation and scope of ICTs within the context of social work supervision is unknown.

To present, the social work profession has experienced some challenges in adapting to the digital environment as described by López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós (2018); this is owing to the many administrative and ethical challenges associated with social work (Goldkind, Wolf & Jones, 2016). Some of these ethical challenges includes maintaining confidentiality and privacy of clients and practitioners, and a potential shift in managing professional boundaries (Bradley, Hendrivks, Whiting & Parr, 2011). During the Covid-19 pandemic and its lockdown, social distancing periods in South Africa, social workers, who were considered essential workers in the country, were required to render many of their services online using ICTs (SACSSP, 2020). Thus, in South Africa, the utilisation of ICTs in the forms of asynchronous and synchronous methods became essential in the daily practices/activities of social work organisations (SACSSP, 2020). SACSSP provided ethical guidelines for social workers in South Africa regarding the shift to ICTs to render their services, also known as e-social work. According to the SACSSP (2020), e-social work refers to the primary use of

electronics to render social services (compare López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018; Goldkind *et al.*, 2016).

Thus, it is evident that even though the role of ICTs in social work has been explored within both the local and global context, little to no research on ICTs in the supervision of social workers and the experiences in the reorganisation of social work services during the Covid-19 pandemic has been conducted. The work of Mo (2021), based in Hong Kong, is one of the few recent research outputs in this context. Subsequently, even though ICT has been utilised all over the world in the supervision of social workers during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is scant global research findings available on this topic, even though the digital environment impact requires social workers to become more specialised in the use of ICT (López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018). Within this context, the scope of ICT in supervision refers to types of ICT, usability of certain types of ICT, the compatibility of ICTs with the functions of supervision, and ethical dilemmas emanating from the use of ICT (Cf. Engelbrecht, 2019).

Therefore, as a point of departure, it would be essential to establish the current scope of ICT in supervision of social workers in social work organisations, in order to pose relevant recommendations towards effective transformation of supervision functions, aligned with the potential use of ICTs (Mo, 2021).

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although supervision of social workers in South Africa is mandated, based on the Social Work Amendment Act 52 of 1995 and the Supervision Framework (Department of Social Development & South African Council for Social Service Profession, 2012), and well defined by South African scholars such as Engelbrecht (2021), the scope of ICT in the supervision of social workers is unknown within the current times of the 4th industrial revolution and Covid-19 pandemic (Engelbrecht, 2021). The researcher used search engines such as Google Scholar, Microsoft Bing, Yahoo, Baidu and Yandex to search for research on the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers, and little to no research and literature exists, despite the fact that supervisors of social workers all over the world (Mo, 2021) and also in South Africa (SACSSP, 2020) are making use of ICTs, during the times of the Covid-19 pandemic. ChatGPT generates responses for the use of ICTs in social work practice and supervision. However, these

responses are not based on academic literature. Thus, this indicates a gap in the contemporary body of social work supervision knowledge, therefore indicating the importance of the current research study.

Nevertheless, the supervisor's knowledge and application of online platforms during supervision directly impacts on the quality of the supervision. However, due to a lack of organisational resources and lack of time for many supervisors in South Africa (Chibaya, 2018; Brandt, 2019; Wynne, 2020), it may be highly likely that training of local supervisors to utilise ICTs during supervision of social workers did not occur at many social work organisations. This could directly impact the current supervision of frontline social workers and the quality of services rendered to their client systems. Hence, in light of the increased demand of social work and social work supervision to transform towards the incorporation of different ICT platforms and techniques (Goldkind *et al.*, 2016) it would be essential to empirically investigate the scope of the use of ICT in the supervision of social workers in South African social work organisations in order to explore and describe what is, what it can be, and what it ought to be.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Flowing from the rationale and problem statement, the following research questions will be considered:

- i. What types of ICT do supervisors utilise in supervision of social workers and how are they using it?
- ii. How do social workers experience the identified types of ICTs in their supervision?
- iii. How do the identified types of ICTs promote the functions of supervision in terms of support, education, and administration?
- v. What do social workers recommend in terms of the scope of ICTs to enhance their supervision?

1.4. AIM OF RESEARCH

Based on the formulated research questions, the goal of this research study is to gain an understanding of social workers' experiences regarding the scope of ICT in their supervision.

1.5. OBJECTIVES

To reach the aim of the research, the following objectives are formulated:

- i. To conceptualise ICT and describe its potential scope within a social work organisational context.
- ii. To analyse the functions of supervision within the context of the potential scope of ICT in South African social work organisations.
- iii. To empirically investigate the scope of ICT in the supervision of social workers within their organisational contexts.
- iv. To make conclusions and present recommendations regarding the potential scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers to appropriate role players such as social work policy makers, the SACSSP, social work organisations (including supervisors and supervisees) and social work training institutions.

1.6. THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

This study will draw on the body of knowledge of the functions of supervision by renowned primary international authors such as Kadushin (1976), Kadushin and Harkness (2002) and Tsui, (2005), and local authors, such as Botha (2002) and Engelbrecht (2019). In addition, this study will also draw on Eriksons' (1968) Developmental Theory of Professional Development and the Domestication of Technology as coined by Silverston & Eric (1992).

There are three basic functions of supervision that has been introduced as early as in 1907 namely, educative, supportive and administration. These functions are interdependent and essential in mutually constructive decision making for the supervisees, supervisors, organisations and service users (Wynne, 2020). This study will explore how the scope of ICTs are utilised to achieve the objectives of supervision by focusing on the execution the three functions of social work supervision. This will include researching the frequency, types, and nature of ICT's supervisors utilise to execute the administrative, educative, and support functions of social work supervision. This theoretical departure on supervision of social workers will be based on the work of primary scholars, both within an international (Middleman & Rhodes, 1985; Hardcastle, 1991; Cf. Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Tsui, 2005; Bluckert, 2008) and local contexts (Cf. Botha, 2002; Engelbrecht, 2019).

Academia has been utilising the concept of information and communication technologies since the 1980s (Melody & Mansell, 1986). ICTs have led to transformative changes across professional fields (Bradley, Hendricks, Lock, Whiting & Parr, 2011). According to Bender and Dykeman (2016), the increased utilisation of ICTs in higher education resulted in the utilisation of ICTs in social work educational programmes, yet little is known about supervision of social workers utilising ICTs. Due to the lack of research on ICT in supervision *per se*, this study will draw on literature on ICTs in social work, which focuses on both the utilisation of ICTs in social work education and social work intervention (Gates, Ross, Bennett & Johnson, 2021; Pink, Ferguson & Kelly, 2021). This literature will be contextualised within the realm of social work supervision in order to bridge the literature gap of the utilisation of ICTs in social work intervention and education, and in the supervision of social workers.

The Development Theory of Professional identity will be drawn upon in order to understand the scope of ICTs used in the supervision on social workers. The developmental theory of professional identity serves as the core basis of the interactional processes that occurs between the supervisor and the supervisee (Engelbrecht, 2019). ICTs are integrated in all aspects of society, including the social work profession and social work supervision (Foeday, 2011). Thus, ICTs has modified the way in which supervisors and supervisees interact and the manner in which supervision takes place. In order to effectively adapt to the transition between traditional face-to-face supervision and the use of ICTs in supervision, both social workers and supervisors must be aware of the strengths and challenges in using ICTs in supervision, they must be motivated to establish their professional identity and take ownership for continuing their education. Thus, the scope of ICTs utilised in supervision of social workers must be understood in terms of the development theory of professional identity.

To expand the understanding of the scope of ICTs utilised within the supervision of social workers, this research will furthermore draw on the Domestication Theory to understand how social workers and supervisors tamed technology in order to suit their work tasks (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021). ICTs are created for specific purposes; however, the implementation thereof can be for a different purpose than that for which it was intended. Thus, it is important to understand how social workers and supervisors have tamed technology in order to achieve organisational goals.

Thus, since ICTs have been utilised in the social work profession prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, even though accelerated by the pandemics' lockdown and social distancing periods, the above-mentioned theories and perspectives will give an understanding to the scope of ICTs used in social work supervision.

1.7. CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The core concepts associated with this research study has been defined above in the rational of the study and will not be conceptualised as a separate section in this proposal.

1.8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The section below focuses on the research methodology that was adopted for the ethical and effective execution of this research study and shed light on the following: the research approach, research design, sample, instrument for data collection, data analysis, and data verification.

1.8.1. Research approach

A qualitative approach was utilised to achieve the research objectives of this study. The primary aim of qualitative research is to provide an increased understanding of a situation, context or people from the participants viewpoint and researchers position as being "...in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018:41). Thus, in broad terms, a qualitative approach refers to research that conveys participants experiences, perceptions and the meaning they attach to it (Fouché, 2021a). This subjective approach is highly appropriate to this study, as there are unknown elements, and the researcher aims to gain a broader understanding of the scope of ICTs used in the supervision of social workers. This research approach is commonly utilised in the social work field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rapid social change gives rise to the preference of the qualitative approach as it provides new ways of understanding complexities of social life and context and its demands for new knowledge and practice perspectives. The Covid-19 pandemic and its national lockdown periods drastically changed peoples' experiences within society and brought about new complexities to social life (López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018.). For example, in social work, a shift from traditional face-to-face supervision to digitalised supervision occurred, and this resulted in many challenges (López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018). Thus, this research approach enabled the researcher to identify, understand

and explain the scope of ICTs utilised in the supervision of social workers from the experiences of social workers. A qualitative approach is concerned with exploring, understanding and describing realities from the bottom up (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

This research study furthermore utilised both deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning refers to the researcher moving from general theories to the specific conclusions (Fouché, 2021a). Deductive reasoning was employed as the researcher conducted a literature review first through analysing existing literature and theories on the topic, which enabled the researcher to draw specific conclusions about the scope of ICTs utilised in the supervision of social workers. Inductive reasoning refers to the movement from specific observations to general inferences about the researched phenomena (Fouché, 2021a). After the empirical study was conducted, inductive reasoning was utilised to establish a detailed set of themes in order to infer and formulate general recommendations (Fouché, 2021a). For example, the researcher was able to make recommendations on which ICTs are effective in executing the functions of supervision or that a combination of ICTs and face-to-face supervision is more effective than sole online supervision. This approach was effective and appropriate for the objectives of this study as social workers' experiences was explored, analysed, interpreted, and compared to existing literature in order to draw appropriate conclusions and recommendations about the scope of ICTs utilised in the supervision of social workers.

1.8.2. Research design

This research study contains both exploratory and descriptive research designs, hence an exploratory-descriptive study. Exploratory research is utilised to gain an initial understanding, insight, and to explain a phenomenon, situation, community or an individual (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Thus, because utilising ICT is a new and currently common practice in supervision and a poorly explored field in South Africa, exploratory research was utilised (Fouché, 2021b). The exploratory research design was utilised to explore the lack of knowledge of the scope of ICTs used in the supervision of social workers, thereby gaining an understanding of this phenomena in terms of the functions of supervision. The utilisation of the exploratory research design equipped the researcher with adequate background knowledge to formulate a research problem (Fouché, 2021b).

After the research problem was identified, the problem was described more accurately by means of descriptive research (Neuman, 2014). Descriptive research displays an image, detailing the situation, social setting or relationship (Neuman, 2014). In descriptive research the researcher begins with a topic that is well-defined and conducts research to accurately describe it (Fouché, 2021b). For this study, the topic has been well defined and demarcated in the rationale and problem statement of the study. Descriptive research allowed the researcher to learn about how and why ICTs are utilised (thus the scope) in the supervision of social workers.

Exploratory and descriptive research designs were utilised simultaneously to achieve the objectives of the research study and to gain an understanding of the scope of ICT in the supervision of social workers.

1.8.3. Sample

Sampling refers to selecting a portion of a population as representative or possessing the characteristics of the entire population (Sarantakos, 2012; Stangor, 2015). Thus, a sample is considered as a representative of a specific population (Royse, Thyer & Padgett, 2015). It is important for the researcher to understand the concept on representativeness and its relation to generalisability (Engel & Schutt, 2016). Generalisations can only occur if it can be undertaken that the observations for the sample subjects would also be the observation for any of the other subject groups in the population (Strydom, 2021). A sample consist of a subset of a population considered for the actual inclusion of a research study (Grinnel & Unrau, 2008). The two main reasons for sampling are feasibility and responsiveness (Sarantakos, 2012). Sampling is also cost and time effective (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). It was impossible for the researcher to interview every frontline social worker in South Africa that received supervision via ICTs. Thus, a sample was selected through non-probability sampling, specifically because this was a qualitative study and generalisation of the findings was not the primary goal, but merely and understanding of the scope of ICT in supervision of social workers. In non-probability sampling, the odds of selecting individuals are not known because the researcher does not know the population size or members (Gravetter & Larry, 2016). Thus, the type of non-probability sampling that was utilised is purposive sampling. Purposively sampling refers to sampling that is solely based on the judgement of the researcher (Grinnel & Unrau, 2008; Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2005). A qualitative researcher searches

for individuals who have experience in the topic that is studied (Strydom, 2021). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this research study as the participants met the identified criteria for inclusion and have the necessary knowledge and experience to make a meaningful contribution to the study.

To adhere to the preceding exposition on the sampling of the research, the researcher utilised a sample of 17 social workers that have worked as frontline workers during the Covid-19 pandemic and its lockdown periods, as this is the time where South African supervisors were more likely to utilise ICTs in supervising social workers. The participants were recruited from the researcher's professional social work network, from various organisations. The contact details of these potential participants to the study, was available to the researcher on her personal digital devices. The researcher's professional network included social workers at the various organisations that the researcher had contact with, as well as other social workers from the researcher's social and work-related circles. Since the researcher was interested in their opinions and experiences as frontline social workers in a social work organisation environment, the participants engaged in both their personal and professional capacities as social workers who are members of the social work profession. Information about the social work organisation was thus not the primary aim of the study, but rather to have gained an understanding of the social workers' lived experiences. Thus, the researcher did not require permission from the social workers' respective organisations or place of employment as the social workers acted as participants independent from their organisations and not as employees of a specific organisation.

These potential participants in the researcher's professional network were contacted telephonically for screening purposes by the researcher to determine whether they met the criteria for inclusion, hence, if any types of ICTs were being used in their supervision. Furthermore, during this telephonic call, the researcher obtained their willingness to participate, conveyed the necessary information regarding the study to and discussed consent. Potential participants who agreed to participate in the research, were required to read and sign a consent form as an indication of agreement to the conditions with which the study was conducted. The consent forms were sent to the participants by the researcher via email. The participants were required to send the signed consent form back to the researcher prior to their interviews. The

researcher decided to include social workers as participants to the study, instead of social work supervisors, as the researcher was particularly interested in the social workers' experiences of the use of ICTs in terms of the functions of supervision and their recommendations.

The 17 participants that were purposively selected from the researchers' professional network, met the following inclusion criteria:

The participant had to:

- be a registered frontline social worker;
- work at any social work organisation in South Africa;
- have experienced face-to-face supervision;
- have experienced any form of ICT in supervision;
- be willing to participate in their personal capacity (thus not representing any organisation);
- be willing to share their experience of ICT in supervision in English.

1.8.4. Instrument for data collection

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher utilised interviewing as the method of data collection. An interview refers to a social relationship designed to exchanged information between the participant and the researcher (Voutsina, 2018). The interviews were conducted online via MS Teams for cost and time effectiveness. MS Teams transcribed the interviews with the participants, contributing to accuracy and saving the researcher the time and effort of transcribing manually. According to Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown (2016), online communication methods for the purpose of research provide opportunities for engagement with participants in a less time- and financial-consuming way. The researcher undertook the necessary steps to ensure that confidentiality was maintained according to the Interim ethical guidelines for social workers in South Africa regarding technology supported social work services (SACSSP, 2020). Interviews were scheduled and agreed upon at times that best suited participants. The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview to collect data (See annexure 1), with the emphasis on open questions, which encapsulated the research questions formulated in this proposal. A semi-structured interview is a flexible instrument that provides a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perceptions (Geyser, 2021). This instrument acknowledges the participant as the

expert and allows for flexibility in direction when additional aspects are introduced (Geyser, 2021). The interview schedule contained specific open-ended questions relating to supervision and the utilisation of ITCs within supervisions. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded using the MS Teams recording function for accurate data collection purposes. Thus, after receiving permission from the participants to record the interview, the researcher selected the recording function, and the interviews were automatically recorded and transcribed. The recording and transcribing functions of MS Teams were tested before the researcher proceeded with the interviews in order to ensure that these functions deliver accurate transcriptions of the participants responses. The researcher conducted the interviews in English with participants who are English speaking, as this formed part of the participants criteria for this study. Thus, the collection of data encompassed the scheduling and conducting of semi-structured interviews on a digital platform, whilst simultaneously taking down notes based on the participants' responses.

1.8.5. Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of reviewing, refining, and transforming data with the goal of locating useful information, informing conclusions, and supporting decision-making (Brown & Kudyba, 2014). The primary objective of a qualitative study is to generate findings through reducing a magnitude of raw collected data, separating important from trivial information, identifying patterns, and creating a framework for communicating the true meaning of the data (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021). Thus, data analysis refers to transforming data into findings. Qualitative researchers have the obligation of attending to a process of meaning-making and representing its participants (Schurink *et al.*, 2021).

Qualitative data analysis is a two-folded process which firstly consist of preliminary data analysis during the data collection process and secondly of rigorous data analysis (Schurink *et al.*, 2021). This two-fold approach allows for the effective dealing with the large volume of data produced in audio-recordings and interview transcripts. A thematic approach to analysis and interpretation was followed in the qualitative research, with the aim of comprehending the meaning of the profound experiences of participants (Schurink *et al.*, 2021). Thematic analysis is an interpretative approach and can be described as the process of identifying themes and patterns across a set of data, relating to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher

followed a six-phase data analysis process as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2013) which will be discussed in detail below.

1.8.5.1 Transcribing the data

The researcher recorded the responses of the interviews by means of audio-recording function of MS Teams and jotting down notes for transcription purposes. The researcher also selected the transcription function on MS Teams which automatically generated written transcriptions of the interviews whilst the researcher was conducting them. Thus, reading the transcripts was the first data analytical step in the researcher's process.

The researcher read the automatically generated transcriptions generated by MS Teams directly after each interview, as at this time, the information was fresh in the researchers' mind, ensuring the accurate collection of data. This was a necessary and important step as MS Teams transcriptions were not always accurate due to accents amongst other factors. Thus, during the stage of reading the transcriptions and listening to the recordings of the interview, it allowed the researcher to edit transcriptions where necessary. Transcriptions contained the accurate narratives of participants as responses to the open-ended questions posed through the semi-structured interview. As per the work of Mero-Jaffe (2011) a denaturalised approach was taken, thus excluding irrelevant information to the research study and inaudible verbal cues in order to ensure concise transcriptions. It was important for the researcher to use the framed research questions to determine which information was significant or trivial. The automatic transcriptions generated by MS Teams was time effective. Listening to the recordings and reading and editing the transcriptions contributed to the objectivity of the research.

1.8.5.2 Data familiarisation

Data familiarisation also known as data immersion, involves replaying the audio recording and rereading the transcriptions in order to become familiar with the content (Schurink *et al.*, 2021). The primary aim of data familiarisation is to make analytical generalisations and formulate provisional analytical objectives through questioning the data and research questions (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017). The words used by participants were critically evaluated in the context of participants' own unique vocabularies in order to encapsulate what they were actually saying. Hence, Braun &

Clarke (2013) stated that the researcher should actively and analytically think about the real meaning of the data. This phase allowed for the first step in the coding process called code identification (Schurink *et al.*, 2021).

1.8.5.3 Coding

Coding refers to the process of associating meaning to the data of interest (Saldaña, 2021). An initial understanding of the text and code identification allows for coding, code clustering, theme development, and pattern description. Codes are the building blocks for themes, clustered themes, and formulate patterns of meaning, which has an underlying central concept called categories (Schurink *et al.*, 2021). Coding may be applied line-by-line, sentence-by sentence or a whole text if needed. The researcher assigned colour codes based on the researcher's understanding of what was read. Colour coding was done by highlighting a piece of text in a particular colour and attaching a meaning or number to each colour.

1.8.5.4 Theme development

This phase includes identifying patterns and formulating codes into themes. During this phase, the researcher identified important themes and reoccurring ideas with regards to the ICTs used in the supervision of social workers. The research questions assisted the researcher in determining what was important with regards to code clustering (Terry *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the researcher utilised the five formulated research questions to aid in the process of developing themes.

1.8.5.5 Data interpretation

During this phase, the researcher identified and described patterns through categorisation. Patterns are explanatory as they provide themes with a sense of meaning and explain how the data represents this meaning. The aim of this phase is quality control. Here, the researcher reviewed the identified themes in relation to the coded data and research questions, and determined if they required further moulding, clarification or if they should be rejected as the story told by the themes should answer the research questions. Therefore, this reviewing process resulted in adjustments of themes and the development of further analyses (Terry *et al.*, 2017). The researcher also developed typologies to assist in the establishment of conceptually linking of different themes (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016). Part of the interpretation phase is literature control. Literature control explains and fills the gap in knowledge with the

study's contribution. As explained previously, in South Africa there are little to no literature on ICTs used in the supervision of social worker, thus, the findings of this study will bridge that gap through a literature control.

Guba & Lincoln (1994), introduced a four-dimensional criterion assessing the quality of qualitative data:

1.8.5.5.1 Transferability: It refers to the extent to which a qualitative researcher's findings can be applicable to different contexts, thus transferring findings of a specific study to different context, situation or study (Schurink, Schurink & Fouche, 2021). Transferability refers to the importance of building discipline, reflexivity, and reliability in the inquiry process, enabling the use of the study/ findings in other contexts (Tracy, 2013). The research implications for practice, resulting from this study, includes what and how ICTs are used in the supervision of social workers, and what provisions are needed in organisational supervision policies.

1.8.5.5.2 Dependability: It refers to the consistency of the study's findings over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The dependability of a qualitative study is evaluated by examining the evidence of the research process as it is documented (Schurink *et al.*, 2021). This was achieved through accurately analysing and documenting the findings in a research report.

1.8.5.5.3 Confirmability: It refers to the importance of a self-critical stance of the researcher's own preconceptions and a need for continuous reflexivity (Leavy, 2018). Confirmability captures the essence of reliability and objectivity simultaneously (Schurink *et al.*, 2021). The researcher achieved confirmability through explaining how the participants responses were interpreted, through quoting their responses in Chapter 4 of the research report and indicating how recommendations and conclusions were formulated from their responses.

The researcher reported on her objectivity through the course of the study by means of a reflexivity report attached to the research report (Annexure 5). Reflexivity refers to the researcher's awareness of their potential influence on the study (Haynes, 2012; Dogson, 2019).

1.8.5.5.4 Credibility and Authenticity: Credibility refers to the process of ensuring that potential participants for the research study were appropriately identified and

accurately described (Schurink *et al.*, 2021). Creditability can be achieved through a thorough data collection process where the data collected are sufficient with high potential for analysis (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2018). The researcher ensured credibility by selecting a sample appropriate to the purpose of the research study and by collecting relevant and useful information from the participants that could be thoroughly analysed for accurate and appropriate conclusions and recommendations to be formulated.

1.9 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethics can be defined as a set of moral principles that is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents (Strydom & Roestenberg, 2021).

To ensure ethical rules and boundaries were adhered to within this research study, participants were initially telephonically contacted on their cell phones of which the researcher already had their cellular numbers as they were recruited from the researcher's professional network. After verbally agreeing to participate in the research study, the researcher emailed each of the participants an informed consent form, a written document which explained the purpose, nature, procedures, potential benefits, and consequences of the study, which they were required to sign voluntarily (Annexure 2). Prior to requesting that the potential participants sign the informed consent form, the researcher telephonically discussed the form with the participants after emailing it to them, highlighting aspects such as confidentiality and the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time. This was done prior to the data collection process. Confidentiality in the context of using ICTs to obtain the relevant information from the participants were highlighted and thoroughly explained. Voluntary participation was the centre of concern.

The researcher sought ethical clearance from the Department of Ethical Screening Committee (DESC) of the Department of Social Work and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Stellenbosch University. Due to participants' participation in their personal capacity, the researcher did not have to obtain permission from their respective organisations of employments. The study was considered low **risk**, as the research participants were frontline social workers who have experienced face-to-face

supervision as well as supervision utilising ICTs, and the only discomfort participants may have experienced, was the time that they spent participating in the research. Therefore, the interviews were scheduled at times that did not interfere with the participants' work. The researcher and participants also agreed and conducted the telephonic interviews in a place that was private without interference, and outside of earshot of other people. The participants were not considered a vulnerable group as they were professionals who merely shared their experiences on the research topic. Nonetheless, this research study was based on the following ethical principles:

1.9.1 Non-maleficence

Non-maleficence implicates no intentional or unintentional harm to participants and to be fully aware and sensitive to the possibility or any potential harm that participants may experience during the study (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). In this context, harm includes physical, psychological, and social abuse, as well as legal jeopardy (Neuman, 2014). Thus, the researcher was extremely sensitive towards all participants' emotions and the nature of what they are articulating; and continuously evaluated this during the course of the study (Strydom & Roestenberg, 2021).

1.9.2 Voluntary participation

In order for this study to have been considered good ethical research, it required voluntary, unforced decision of participants to participate in the research, being fully knowledgeable about the consequences involved, if any (Rubain & Babbie, 2017). Thus, the researcher ensured that participants' information was not utilised in this research study without their full, unforced agreement to participate and participants were also allowed to discontinue their participation in the study at any point, should they have decided to no longer want to be a part of the study (Strydom & Roestenberg, 2021).

1.9.3 Informed consent

Informed consent refers to potential participants being well informed about the research study before giving full consent to participate. The researcher offered information that included the goal of the study, expected behaviour, duration of participants involvement, the procedures to be followed, possible advantages and disadvantages of the study, potential dangers participants may be exposed to, as well as the credibility of the researcher (Stangor, 2015; Babbie, 2016)

1.9.4 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity refers to the researcher not asking and presenting any of the participants personal information that will allow others to recognise or identify them. Anonymity also includes that no one should be able to identify the participants after the study, including the researcher. On the other hand, confidentiality refers to how participants' personal information is managed. It requires data collection, analysis, storing, and reporting, and this should be done in such a manner that participants cannot be traced (Mertons & Wilson, 2012). All the information regarding the research collected from the participants, was stored on a password protected computer and backed up in one-drive cloud to which only the researcher had access to.

The researcher is registered with the South African Council for Social Services Professions and was therefore obligated to apply confidentiality and protect the information that participants disclosed to the researcher.

1.9.5 Debriefing

Debriefing is a process whereby participants voluntarily request feedback regarding the results of the study from the researcher (Strydom & Roestenberg, 2021). The researcher discussed debriefing when discussing consent with the participants to ensure that it is voluntary and available upon request. The researcher also debriefed every participant at the end of each interview. Due to this being a low-risk study that excluded focusing on emotions, the likelihood for external debriefing was minimal, therefore, this service was not necessary unless requested.

1.10 REFLEXIVITY

Since the researcher is also a recent social worker graduate, she has characteristics in common with the study sample group. As a result, the researcher always tried to be impartial and objective in her interactions with the participants and in the presentation of her findings. See annexure 6 for the reflexivity report.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Identifying and discussing limitations is a fundamental aspect of maintaining the integrity, credibility, and transparency of research findings (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the researcher was unable to generalise the findings as the goal of the study was simply to gain an understanding of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers. Although the goal of the study was not to

generalise the findings, the findings may be generalised within context. Another limitation involved little to no literature availability on the topic, especially in a South African context. However, the researcher drew on international literature and adopted literature on social work intervention to a supervision context in order to gain an initial understanding of the scope of ICTs used in the supervision of social workers. Additionally, the researcher experienced the recruitment of participants challenging as they are overwhelmed by high caseloads and therefore found it difficult to find time to avail themselves for the data collection process. This resulted in a prolonged data collection process. However, the researcher was flexible and conducted the interviews at the times that were convenient for participants.

1.12 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The research report consists of five chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction on the research and research methodology. Chapter two conceptualises ICTs and described its potential scope within the context of South African organisations. In the third chapter, the function of supervision is analysed in terms of the scope of ICTs. This is followed by the fourth chapter – an empirical investigation of the scope of ICTs in the supervision of social workers. Chapter five presented appropriate conclusions and recommendations regarding the scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUALISATION OF ICTs WITHIN A SOCIAL WORK ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first objective of this study is to conceptualise Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and describe its potential scope within a social work organisational context. This chapter will specifically focus on the use of ICTs in social work practice within a social work organisational context. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to define ICTs, to conceptualise ICTs within a social work context, to discuss the use of ICTs within social work organisations in terms of its elements, administration, management and in terms of its management functions. In addition, this chapter will also describe how, why and when ICTs are utilised by social work practitioners within social work organisations. Furthermore, it will explore how ICTs are used to render social services and how “online” services impact the helping relationship. Lastly, this chapter will explore the ethical aspects posed by using ICTs within a social work practice, specifically focusing on the code of ethics, competence, and professional development, access to ICTs and other related ethical concepts such as consent, confidentiality, privacy, and boundaries.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING ICTs

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an umbrella term that encompasses all digital methods that creates, stores, manipulates, and shares information (Hill & Shaw, 2011; Kondra, 2020). These digital methods include computer hardware and all kinds of peripherals, as well as the software and networks used to store, process and communicate information (Hill & Shaw, 2011; Kondra, 2020). Furthermore, it also includes digital broadcasting and mobile telecommunication technologies. The above-mentioned definition encompasses all standard software applications that are utilised on telephones and personal computers in homes and workspaces, as well as the internet, word processing, presentations, and emails to mention a few (Hill & Shaw, 2011; Kondra, 2020; West & Health, 2011).

A common way of conceptualizing ICTs is to regard them as tools that can be useful for a variety of jobs. An ongoing pattern exists, which is that newly developed ICT tools

are applied to existing tasks. These newly developed ICT tools are applied in a manner that results in existing tasks being completed quicker and more efficiently; thus, modifying old ways of doing things (Hill & Shaw, 2011). This relates to the purpose of the fourth industrial revolution as mentioned in the previous chapter, to connect technologies in order to relieve human tasks (Ayinde & Kirkwood, 2020).

ICTs connect service users with each other as well as to the internet and its associated virtual spaces. These include synchronous modes of interpersonal interactions in real time such as videoconferencing as well as asynchronous modes that does not require simultaneous usage such as emails and text messages (Bryant, Garnham, Tedmanson & Diamandi, 2018). The use of ICTs gives rise to “the network” society, which is a contemporary form of social organization and practice where “virtuality becomes an essential dimension of our reality” (Castells, 2010:18). A network society consists of people who belong to and participate in virtual communities, hosted by social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram, who are enabled through web pages such as emails in such a manner that overlaps with non-virtual communities (Bryant *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, Bryant *et al.* (2018) states that to argue between “real” and “virtual” society is non-sensical as the boundaries and characteristics between the two are increasingly intermeshed.

Types of ICTs influence how users interact and communicate (Mishna, Bogo, Root, Sawyer & Khoury-Kassabri, 2012). Webcams are a medium for visual and audio communication and provides the closest approximation to face-to-face interactions. Specialised videoconferencing can enhance this mode through the inclusion of technologies such as online white boards, break-out rooms, and online documents that can be viewed by all. Smartphones provide an opportunity for audio, textual, visual communication between users as well a means to creating, sharing, and storing videos and photos (Bryant *et al.*, 2018). The core principle of ICTs involves the enablement of its users, to access information without geographical restrictions (Bryant *et al.*, 2018).

The evolution and permutations of ICTs have transformed the geographical, temporal and spatial nature of communication and access to information. It has also transformed the ways in which users can connect and communicate using verbal, textual, and visual mediums. Therefore, ICTs provide a wide range of potential

applications to bridge the graphical and resource divides between urban and rural areas (Bryant *et al.*, 2018). For example, ICTs provides a cost-effective solution to deliver services to remote areas in order to reach vulnerable groups as it is able to overcome social isolation and resource deprivation (Bryant *et al.*, 2018). An example of a new ICT tool is ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning language model that can process and produce language that is human-like. Numerous applications, including chatbots, language translation, and content creation, may be made using this technology (OpenAI, 2023). As a result, ChatGPT is a shining illustration of how ICTs are altering how we engage with information and communicate.

2.3 CONCEPTUALISING ICTS WITHIN SOCIAL WORK

Historically, social workers and social work organisations have been resistant to adopt ICTs in their practice (Gillingham, 2015). In the 1990s, the reluctance of social workers to adopt ICTs within their practice was referred to as computer phobia and the primary focus was exploring ways to promote social workers' computer use (Neugeboren, 1996). However, Gillingham (2015) reported that at the time, many social work organisations across the world utilised some form of ICTs to record data about service users and their service activity. Generically, these ICTs were known as Electronic Information Systems, or Client or Management Information Systems (Gillingham, 2015). Hence, since a decade ago, there has been an increase in the use of ICTs within social work organisations. However, research publications describing the use of ICTs within social work organisations, or a social work context are meagre (as alluded to in chapter one). Therefore, this study aims to bridge the knowledge gap that exists in relation to whether ICTs are used in social work organisations and the supervision of social workers, as well as the scope of its use.

Information and Communications Technologies has crept into the social work profession and accordingly, its practice, resulting in the development of new opportunities and challenges (Mishna *et al.*, 2012; Reamer, 2013; Lopez, 2014; Hill & Ferguson, 2014). For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the utilisation of ICTS in the form of video conferences/calls for example via Zoom increased globally under social workers in order to combat the spread of the Covid-19. Different terms have been established to conceptualise the use of ICTs within social work, including online -, virtual -, digital -, tele -, cyber – and electronic social work, as well as internet intervention to mention a few (Hung & Fung, 2021). These terms mean that social

services are rendered through the utilisation of computers, smartphones, video technology, and other methods of communication. Through information acquisition, transmission, and the storage of data, social workers are able to provide information to the public, deliver services to service users, and gather, manage and store information about service users. It also allows social work supervisors to educate, supervise and train social workers (NASW, ASWB, CSWE & SWA, 2017). When the researcher asked ChatGPT whether ICTs are used in social work practice, the generated response indicated the ways in which ICTs can be used in social work practice (Annexure 3).

The social work profession holds communication and relationship at its core although these aspects are becoming increasingly envisioned as virtual experiences (Turner, 2011; Bonifati, 2012). The theory of domestication may assist in contextualising how social workers adopted ICTs to assist in supporting their interventions and client interactions (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021). The term domestication originates from domesticating wild animals; thus, the domestication theory is a framework used to investigate how technology is tamed by its users (Sørensen, 2004). The process of domesticating wild animals is a two-folded process which involves animals adapting to the human world while simultaneously, humans and their respective lifestyles being influenced by the animal (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021). Similarly, in the process of “taming” technology the user is being influenced by the technology itself, as well as altering the technology it to fit their individual needs (Beker, Hartman, Punie & Ward, 2006). Huusken and Vakkari (2012) have been researching the altering of ICTs to avoid rigid systems and to be suitable for everyday practice. This alteration of digital systems can be viewed as a “workaround” to handling information systems that are suitable for the tasks they are intended to support (Røhnebæk, 2014). This may be referred to as domesticating digital systems, creating meaning and making them suitable for everyday practice. This highlights the flexible aspect to ICTs where users may navigate them in a way that was not intended by the designer of the system. Furthermore, domestication theory includes a bottom-up approach in which the relationship between technology and society is mutually constituted. In this way, social work as a profession influences technology and technology influences social work.

There are two approaches to ICTs in social work, namely a technology-led approach and a practice-based approach (Hill & Shaw, 2011) A technology-led approach results

in social work being primarily understood considering the aims of ICT developers and is evaluated in their terms. For example, PowerPoint is intended for the use of presentations. Thus, a technological approach would mean that social workers only utilise it for its intended purpose. Whereas a practice-led approach starts with social work and not with ICTs. For example, Facebook was intended as a platform to use for socialization purposes. However, social workers and respective social work organisations utilise Facebook to create awareness of social problems and the services that is rendered by the social work organisations. In a practice led approach, the theory of domestication is applied to use ICT tools in ways that is aligned with the social work profession, its principles and values. Thus, social work is the focus, and ICTs are only used to simplify social work tasks.

2.4 ICTs IN SOCIAL WORK ORGANISATIONS

An organisation refers to an entity such as a company, an institution or an association that consists of two or more people with a specific purpose. In South Africa, social work organisations provide developmental welfare services aimed at improving the lives of their service users and include public organisations (government) and private organisations, such as non-governmental organisations (NGO's), community-based organisations (CBO's), civil society organisations (CSO's), and non-profit organisations (NPO's) (The Department of Social Development & South Africa Council for Social Service Professions, 2012; Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). NGO's, CBO's and CSO's are generally referred to as NPO's. An NPO refers to a trusted association that was established for public purposes and whose income and property is not distributed to its members except as compensation for their services rendered (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). Social work organisations can also broadly be referred to as social or human service organisations.

2.4.1 Elements of social work organisations

Taylor and Felten (1993) describes four interdependent elements as inherent of social work organisations. Firstly, social work organisations comprise of individuals with unique attributes such as skills, needs, motivations, expectations, and values. Secondly, they are guided by organisational norms and culture. Social work organisations have the potential for change with specific outcomes for individuals, groups, families, and communities. Finally, social work organisations contain an economic element determining its fiscal sustainability. The key role players in social work organisations are determined by the structure of the organisation. These key role players may include professionals, support staff, volunteers, and service users, and in the case of NPO's they may also include governing bodies such as a board or committee (Hughes & Wearing, 2013; Pretorius, 2020).

2.4.2 Management and administration in social work organisations

The social work profession and its associated organisations are not immune to the developments and impact of ICT tools. Due to the emergent and contingent nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, social workers at their respective organisations had to improvise by adopting ICTs, in order to confidently identify risks and provide intervention. Social work administrators and managers had to make the decision of whether social organisations would be closed during the Covid-19 lockdown period, or whether they would operate under specific conditions and establish those conditions. Social work management can be defined as a set of systems and processes designed to assist employees achieve organisational and individual goals (Lewis, Packard & Lewis, 2012). In social work organisations, management differs from administration. Management operates at the executive level and implement the directives of the administrators in their day-to-day tasks in order to achieve organisational objectives and goals (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019; Pretorius, 2020). Thus, administration can be regarded as governing, top level, determinative function, whilst management has an executive function (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019; Pretorius, 2020). In this scenario, determinative refers to the act of determining what should be done or giving instructions on what needs to be done. Whereas executive refers to carrying out the work that had been identified and instructed to be done (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019; Pretorius, 2020). It is within this broad context that the use of ICTs is being operationalised.

In South Africa, social workers were considered “essential workers” during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, as they render services that people cannot live without. Therefore, most social work organisations continued to operate but throughout the strict lockdown conditions. Administrators who determine national policies, determined the conditions in which all essential services including social services would be rendered throughout the pandemic. These policies included national restrictions and social distancing policies. Thereafter, management, which includes social work managers and managerial boards decided to transition to the primary use of ICTs in service delivery in order to adhere to national policies of social distancing whilst simultaneously continuing the rendering of social services. In addition, professional social workers decided on the type of ICTs to utilise depending on need of the client, in order to continue the delivery of their services.

2.4.3 Management Functions

In order for social work managers to carry out the instruction directed from social administrators to use ICTs in social service organisations during the ongoing pandemic, managers had to utilise the functions of management, namely, planning, organizing, leading, and control (Fayol, 1949; Chibaya, 2018; Nel, 2019). Planning refers to deciding organisational goals and objectives as well as the process of how the goals will be achieved (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). Planning is considered a primary function of management (Botha, 2002 DuBrin, 2012; Nel, 2019). For example, the goal of social work organisations was to continue to render services of high quality during the pandemic. Social work administrators and managers then decided to utilise ICTs such as WhatsApp and Zoom to assist in the continuation of social services to its service users.

After the planning process, organising is important to ensure that plans are transformed into reality (Nel, 2019). Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (1995) refer to organizing as the process of arranging and allocating work, authority, and resources amongst the employees of an organisation in order to attain organisational goals. Thus, in the case of transitioning to the primary use of ICTs, social work managers had to organise after planning. For example, this organising entailed ensuring that all social workers and their service users have access to computers and secured internet connections. It could also entail offering training to social workers on the effective utilisation of ICTs in their intervention with their service users.

Leading is the third management function, referring to the launching of social work tasks and the completion of these tasks in order to achieve organisational goals (Cronje, Du Toit & Motlatla, 2004). In terms of the use of ICTs in social work, managers should ensure to adopt a leadership role in the context of rendering services with ICTs. This may entail utilising ICTs during social work supervision and undergoing training to become competent in using ICTs to execute their tasks as this may set an example to social work practitioners to becoming competent in using ICTs with their service users.

Control is the fourth and last management function. Control refers to narrowing the bridge between the planning and the actual achievements of the social work organization (Nel, 2019). In other words, a quality check must be completed to ensure that employees are meeting a pre-determined standard in order to achieve organisational goals (DuBrin, 2012). For example, in this context, managers can review social workers' reports to determine whether social services rendered using ICTs are also of a high standard such as expected from face-to-face interventions. This will assist in determining whether training or other support is required to render services of high-quality using ICTs.

2.5 THE USE OF ICTS IN SOCIAL WORK ORGANISATIONS

Organisationally, social workers are being encouraged to accept the rules and new digital processes (Reamer, 2015). The professional mission of social work requires social workers attention to new kinds of civic and political participation, as well as new means of grouping, mobilisation, and collective action, all of which have the internet as their natural advocate. To actively participate in experimenting with novel kinds of communal support, such as advocacy and advertising, at all organisational levels, there is a need for a significant commitment (Gadotti, 1993).

From the preceding exposition, it is thus clear that social work organisations in many contexts, including the South African context, are using ICTs, specifically to communicate with each other and with service users, and as their central file and statistic depository or store. In large social work organisations, it is no longer sensible for information to be stored on hard drives of individual computers (Hill & Shaw, 2011). Advances in networking resulted in a common practice which entails utilising a central file store that can be accessed by any authorised user from any computer on the

network and even over the internet. This indicates reliable systems for backup and allows for information to be shared rapidly within and across organisations. The implication of this is that social workers no longer need a personal office computer, they are able to share computer terminals (hotdesking), and work from home which have become a common practice during the Covid-19 pandemic (Hill & Shaw, 2011). The introduction of centralised file storage (for example cloud storage) also corresponds with the management goal of increasing efficiency. According to Hill and Shaw (2011), research findings of more than a decade ago, social workers have experienced the introduction of electronic ways of recording and processing their day-to-day tasks to be distracting at best, and frustrating and unhelpful at worst. However, more contemporary scholars have indicated the increased use of ICTs within social work organisations, contributing to the ease of use (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021; Gillingham, 2015). Therefore, the use of ICTs in contemporary social work practice will be discussed next.

2.6 THE USE OF ICTS IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (2014) defines social work as follows:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”

To operationalise this definition, social workers had to adapt their practices as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021). The lockdown period that ensued as a result of the spread of Covid-19 involved schools and universities terminating face-to-face learning and moving their classes to digital platforms, employees from both public and private sectors working from home where possible and restaurants, bars, gyms, beaches and most public spaces closing (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021). The lockdown of many countries was aimed at combating the spread of the Covid-19 virus. However, it was not without negative impact. The Covid-19 pandemic along with its associated lockdowns and social distancing resulted in

increased rates of unemployment, and the isolation of vulnerable children and families amongst other devastating factors (NAV, 2020; Aasback & Røkkum, 2021). This posed extensive challenges on the social work profession and its workers while at the same time limiting opportunities for traditional face-to-face interventions as stipulated by social distancing guidelines. Thus, social workers were forced to find innovative alternative solutions in their practices to give effect to the global social work definition, which contributed to the increased use of ICTs within social work practice (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021), thereby provoking social change. Furthermore, ICTs can be used as a tool to empower vulnerable groups. Hence, adopting the use of ICTs to continue rendering services of high quality to vulnerable groups amid a pandemic is aligned with the primary objective of social work.

Evidently, social work as a profession and scientific discipline has survived social transformations during the Covid-19 pandemic whilst providing solutions to the problems of our society and adapting to triumph social changes and resulting dynamics (Barrera-Algarín, Sarasola-Sánchez-Serrano & Sarasola-Fernández, 2021). Social work as a scientific discipline has thus been able to effectively respond to society and its demands. For example, the social work profession has responded to the technological changes brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution by increasing the exchange of information, growing social organisations and community development approaches (Bryant *et al.*, 2018). Social work is a multidisciplinary profession and its service users' needs may range across professions. Thus, the rapid exchange of information across professional fields is required to best serve the holistic needs of service users according to the global definition of social work (Di Rosa, Musso, Dellavalle & Gucciardo, 2018). The Fourth Industrial Revolution and its associated technological advances have allowed for such rapid exchanges in information through the use of ICTs. The use of emails and telephones are examples of some of the ICTs that enable swift information exchange within and between said professional fields.

The use of ICTs in social work practice is therefore not a new phenomenon. Since the 1980's various types of system management tools have been used to assist in organising field notes, keeping track of service users, and supporting case management (Hill & Shaw, 2011). For many social workers globally, utilising ICTs within their practice was a possibility prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic,

however, the social distancing policies transformed the terms of and the need for utilizing these platforms (Aasback & Røkkum, 2021).

One of the defining characteristics of social work, according to its global definition, is that it is a scientific discipline which contains specific similarities to medical science (Barrera-Algarín *et al.*, 2021). Those similarities include that generated theoretical knowledge is applied to interventions in social reality (Barrera-Algarín *et al.*, 2021). For example, social workers integrate theoretical knowledge acquired through their training in social work practice. Therefore, it can be said, that social work as a field of study has the capacity to effectively modulate to the ever-changing needs that research and intervention places on it without losing its core (Barrera-Algarín *et al.*, 2021). The mHealth application In China serves as a good example. This mobile application was first utilised in the medical and public health professions; however, social workers demonstrated its promise to be utilised within the social work profession, in the delivery of behavioural health services (Chow, Pathack & Yeh, 2021). Behavioural health care involves services that addresses all kinds of social and behavioural challenges affecting individuals' health including mental health, social issues, substance abuse disorders, health behaviours, and stress associated physical symptoms (Ratzliff, Phillips, Sugarman, Unutxer & Wagner, 2017). mHealth, in this instance, has been identified as a reliable tool to reach remote populations, and provide behavioural health support and services such as health assessment, treatment, and engaging service users to utilise behavioural health care and social services (Seko, Kidd, Wijer & McKenzie, 2014). mHealth also provides other benefits that may be advantageous to the social work profession such as user friendliness, affordability, cost-effectiveness, flexibility, anonymity and so on (Lee & Harathi, 2016).

Social workers in various fields of social work and their respective organisations can thus use ICTs in multiple ways. These include drawing on databases and utilizing software to use and store information generated from practice (Barrera-Algarín *et al.*, 2021). An example of a database utilisation in the social work profession in South Africa is the National Child Protection Register (CPR). Individuals who have been reported to have harmed a child or children are listed on the CPR and are therefore deemed unsuitable to work with or provide care to children or to provide care. The use of databases and software enables electronic case planning and evaluation, which may be easier, more accessible, and more effective (Christenson, 2019). For example,

child protection social workers may utilise the CPR as part of screening whether an individual is suitable to act as a child's safety or foster parent which assists in their case planning and evaluation.

Furthermore, social workers have used social media as a tool for advocacy, a method of practitioner peer support, and to facilitate client support groups (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013; Sitter & Curnew, 2016; Gandy-Guedes, Vance, Bridgewater, Montgomery & Taylor, 2016; Parker-Oliver, Washington, Wittenberg-Lyles, Gage, Mooney & Demiris, 2015). For example, in South Africa, many social work organisations have Facebook pages that they use as a tool for advocacy. This includes using the platform to educate their virtual communities on social issues such as gender-based violence and in the same vein advocating for the rights of women and children. Social workers can also utilise social media platforms such as WhatsApp to support their service users as it allows for asynchronous communication in different geographical locations. WhatsApp groups are also utilised by social workers to facilitate service users' support groups.

In addition, social workers may use ICTs to determine suicide rating scales and other similar service user assessments available online, setting the program to alert the practitioner via email or text messaging if assessments indicate high risks (Lopez, 2014). Social work organisations have assumed the role of providing service users with technology to utilise. For example, some social work organisations provide internet cafés, where service users can use their internet services and computers (Lopez, 2014). Others offer free Wi-Fi in their buildings for service users to use whilst in waiting rooms (Parrott & Macdoc-Jones, 2008). ICTs are able to decrease the work burden for social workers, which offers a compelling opportunity to get in contact with many people and at a low cost (Chow *et al.*, 2021). Considering the popularity of smartphones, mobile applications can increase social workers' capacity to provide high quality services to their service users (Chow *et al.*, 2021). However, according to Chow *et al.* (2021), no frontline social worker practicing within community settings in China are utilising mobile apps to assist in the service delivery of public behavioural health services. This example is problematic, as there is an existential internationally recognised need for social workers to utilise ICTs in order to improve their service delivery (Ndung'u, 2019). This is illustrated by the call for social workers to utilise ICTs to enhance their service delivery that is coherent with the core professional mandate

of social work to foster social change, social development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

The aforementioned links with a policy document by the NASW and BASW (2005) (United States of America and Britain), which states that social workers should utilise ICTs to educate and mobilise communities to support policies that will be beneficial to individuals and groups; social workers should advocate for the adoption and utilisation of ICTs that will enhance the well-being of communities. However, the use of ICTs in social work practice affects various aspects of intervention such as the manner in which services are delivered and the relationship between the social worker and the service users' systems. Therefore, it will be necessary to explore remote service delivery and the helping relationship in social work in the next sections.

2.6.1 Remote Service Delivery

The use of ICTs may change the way social workers deliver services (Barrera-Algarin *et al.*, 2021), for example, it enables social workers to provide remote services. Remote services in this context refers to social services that are rendered using ICTs. According to Hung and Fung (2021), the use of ICTs to provide remote social services, such as counselling, has a long history and can be traced back to the 1990's with the use of Microsoft Network (MSN) in the US and emails in the 2000s. Furthermore, Hill and Shaw (2011) stated that, at that time, the UK had experienced the most growth and development in online counselling services in terms of remote service delivery. These remote counselling services were either synchronous or asynchronous (Hill & Shaw, 2011).

Remote services provide a number of advantages for service users such as potential anonymity and accessibility in remote and isolated locations (Hill & Shaw 2011; Barrera-Algarin *et al.*, 2021). It also increases social workers' capacity to access resources (Barrera-Algarin *et al.*, 2021). The use of ICTs within social work interventions is relevant to all fields of practice (Pink, Ferguson & Kelly, 2021). For example, within the child protection field, conducting home-visits to determine a child's living environment is common and usually done face-to-face. However, ICTs make it possible to conduct digital home-visits in adverse circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the point is not to replace in-person home-visits with digital home-

visits, but instead to utilise in-person home-visits as a point of departure from which to weave to characteristics and possibilities offered by digital visits (Pink *et al.*, 2021). According to Bryant *et al.* (2018), studies on the therapeutic effectiveness of videoconferencing and other related ICT modes, have shown promising findings in relation to the service users' subjective well-being. These findings showed that online service delivery can be as good as or even superior to face-to-face service delivery (Dunstan & Tooth, 2012; Richardson, 2012; Simpson, Rochford, Livingstone, English & Austin, 2014). Therefore, both digital and face-to-face interventions should be considered as both may be effective (Pink *et al.*, 2021).

2.6.2 The Helping Relationship

The professional relationship between service users and social workers, also known as the helping relationship or social worker-client relationship is an essential aspect of the social workers' professional identity and purpose and is also central to the intervention itself (Rollins, 2020; Gray, Midgely & Web, 2012). Social work values such as transparency, mutual trust, respect, empathy, and displaying an interest in the service users are supportive factors to the helping relationship (Rollins, 2020). Having an effective helping relationship is based on principles such as informed consent, therapeutic alliances, and dialogical relations (IASSW, 2018). Relationship-based practice aims to utilise the helping relationship as a medium to increase the service users' exposure to meaningful, healthy, responsive, and secure relationships. This requires the social worker to utilise empathetic skills and self-knowledge.

The utilisation of ICTs challenges the traditional conceptions or beliefs about helping relationships such as face-to face meetings (Nordesjo, Scaramuzzino & Ulmestig, 2022), as alluded to in the preceding section. Therefore, ICTs have both advantages and disadvantages with regards to the helping relationship. Advantages include the enablement of social workers to establish relationships with groups that are hard to reach. Whereas the disadvantages include the concern with informal meetings, collecting, sharing, and monitoring of information with implications for social work ethics (Reamer, 2013).

Nordesjo *et al.* (2021) conducted a study investigating the way in which research on social work between 2015 and 2020 describe and analyse the significance of digitalisation on the helping relationship. The researchers found some possible

tensions in the use of digital tools and whether these tools have a positive or negative impact on the helping relationship. In another study focusing on the differences between establishing a working relationship online and offline, Van De Luitgaarden and Van Der Tiers (2018), states that using ICTs in the establishments of working relationships hold certain time constraints and that the engagement is limited, straightforward, and brief. Furthermore, they stated that when using ICTs to establish a working relationship, the focus is on the goal instead of building a durable working relationship between the social worker and service user (Van De Luitgaarden & Van Der Tier, 2018; Räsänen, 2015). Conversely, focusing on clinical social work in a digital environment, Reamer (2015), states that the ICTs have contributed to unclear, more fluid, and ambiguous boundaries in the helping relationship. For example, ICTs enable service users to contact social workers outside of working hours thus overstepping professional boundaries.

On the contrary, according to Lopez (2014) as well as Mackrill and Ørnbøll (2019), ICTs can positively impact the working and therapeutic alliance between the social worker and the service user. For example, social workers could use applications with service users in different areas to explore specific goals and aspects of their lives. This correlates with a school-based social work support study by Borlin and Sorbring (2017), who demonstrated how ICTs can contribute to young people experiencing an increase in control in the helping relationship as they an increased ability to communicate on their own terms.

Furthermore, ICTs increases the youths' perceptions of accessibility to social workers, as there is no time, physical, or geographical restrictions as in the case with a face-to-face setting (Borlin & Sorbring, 2017; Chan & Ngai, 2019). This contributes to making social services more accessible to the youth (Chan & Ngai, 2019). In addition, ICTs enable social workers to establish relationships with groups that are usually challenging to form relationships with, such as individuals who are socially withdrawn (Chan & Ngai, 2019; Leung, 2017). ICTs provides a safer space for many to discuss sensitive topics such as sex and suicide. This allows individualised support that is tailored to the unique needs of the service user (Lamberton, Devaney & Bunting, 2016; Callahan & Inckle, 2012).

On the other hand, some scholars indicated that the utilisation of ICTs within social work has created a digital divide, resulting in services offered being less accessible to some targeted groups and individuals (Lee & Kim, 2019; Mishna, Milne, Bogo & Pereira, 2020). For example, elderly people who are not conversant with technology. Therefore, digital skills training may bridge the digital divide as digital literacy is required from social workers and their service users (Lee & Kim, 2019 See Breit, Egeland, Loberg & Røhnebæk, 2020; Lolich, Ricco, Deusdad, Timmonen, 2019).

Thirdly, it has been highlighted that the use of ICTs in social work has resulted in digital surveillance as well as resistance and control. Utilising ICTs during interventions with service users enabled them to record meetings without the social worker's knowledge or consent as a means to resist the power imbalance that exists within the helping relationship. On the other hand, at times, social workers deem it acceptable to use social media to gather information on their service users (Breyette & Hill 2015; Byrne & Kirwan, 2019; La Rose, 2019). This may result in social workers exerting control over their service users and altering their interventions to intervene when their behaviours pose threats.

There is also tension between the role of technology either in the shaping of or being shaped by social work practice (De Witte, Declercq & Hermans, 2016; Gillingham, 2015). ICTs directly impact the type of content of social work interventions (Jeyasingham, 2020). Electronic Information Systems have the tendency to turn social work-based practice into a technology-based practice (Devlieghere & Roose, 2018). Technical difficulties such as malfunctioning computers can therefore negatively impact the helping relationship by creating a distance between the social worker and service user (Räsänen, 2015). To avoid technology-based practice, it is important for digital tool developers and social workers to work together to create digital tools that are tailored to the needs of the social work profession including the social worker and service user. Thus, social workers need to take a more participatory stance in the design process of ICTs (Nordesjo *et al.*, 2022).

With the preceding tensions brought about by ICTs in social work practice, in addition, the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown periods have posed new anxieties and risks on social workers regarding social work tasks such as home visits within the child protection field (Pink, *et al.*, 2021). These risks and anxieties combined

with the potential of ICTs provide new and innovative ways of performing social work tasks. This can be achieved through means of digital technologies and media in which social workers can communicate, acquire, transmit, and store information (NASW & BASW, 2005; Pink, *et al.*, 2021). Social workers have many devices, such as smartphones, smartphone virtual assistants, and media at their disposal to do this (NASW & BASW, 2005). Smartphone virtual assistants are an advanced computer program that simulates a conversation with the people who use it, typically over the internet. Examples of smartphone virtual assistants include Mycroft on Android smartphones and Siri on iPhones and iPads. These platforms enable social workers to coordinate activities, decisions and choices (Barrera-Algarin *et al.*, 2021).

The use of ICTs in social work can thus be perceived as a hybrid form of social work that includes physical interactions instead of solely focusing on virtual or online interactions; in other words, combining both physical and virtual interactions. Pink *et al.* (2021) defined the term digital as not separate from our physical environments or objects and social relationships. They argue that even when social work tasks are carried out entirely through ICTs such as video calls, it is still well informed by what occurs in the physical environment, or work and daily life (Pink *et al.*, 2021). The authors further argue that the use of ICTs in social work should be understood and developed as a hybrid, anticipatory, and flexible practice. Within this context, hybrid means that social work incorporates both digital and physical simultaneously.

In order to understand the emerging relationship between social work and ICTs, one needs to understand the specificity of how people utilise ICTs to improvise in their relationships within the context of continuous changes in daily life. Within this context, Jeyasingham (2020) suggests that social work practice consists of humans, software, and machines that are entangled in social relationships, communication, and sense-making that occurs in contemporary work. Additionally, Pink *et al.* (2021), proposes digital social work as an emergent, hybrid, participatory practice in which specific digital, material and social configurations are continuously reshaped. This can be done through the anticipatory modes that characterise social work as it happens in practice and the regulatory stances of social work as a practice. Therefore, Pink *et al.* (2021), argues for more attention to be placed on the impact of digital media and technologies on the social work profession; and believes that the use of ICTs in social work has greatly benefitted both service users and social workers during Covid-19 lockdowns.

Therefore, ICTs could be a future-ready element of social work practice to assist social workers when working in unprecedented times. However, social work is an ethics-based profession and therefore, ethics of ICTs in social work deserves special attention in the next section.

2.7 ETHICS OF ICTs IN SOCIAL WORK

The utilisation of ICTs within social work organisations has given rise to many ethical challenges regarding related social work concepts such as client informed consent, client privacy and confidentiality, boundaries and practitioner competence (Reamer, 2015). Mishna *et al.* (2012), highlights how the use of ICTs transformed ethics in traditional social work practice. The use of ICTs in social work practice and the advance in technology poses increased challenges to traditional principles of social work that address professional boundaries, ethical and legal issues, and the helping relationship (Bryant *et al.*, 2018).

In 2005, a document was drafted by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) within a North American context, and the British Association of Social Work (BASW) to govern the use of ICTs within social work practice to ensure its ethical and effectual responsibility (NASW & BASW, 2005). Whilst the guidelines stipulated by these documents lays the foundation for the ethical use of ICTs within social work practice, they are not embedded in a process that enables social workers to adapt to the swift pace of ICT evolution (Lopez, 2014).

2.7.1 Code of Ethics

The increased use of ICTs in social work has resulted in new questions with regards to consent, confidentiality, privacy, and data security. In South Africa, the code of ethics for social workers consists of a list of statements describing the standards of professional conduct that social workers must portray and display when executing their daily tasks (SACSSP, 2005). The social work profession has ethical councils and codes nationally and globally. For example, the practice of social work in the UK is governed by the BASW, whereas the practice of social work in South Africa is governed by the South African Council for Social Service Professionals (SACSSP). The purpose of these codes of conduct is to establish ethical boundaries which guide social workers' practice and interactions with their service users.

Several social work professional associations across the world have established ethical guidelines for the use of ICTs within social work (Boddy & Domenelli, 2016). For example, in 2012, the BASW released a policy that “encourages the positive use of social media, to which social workers must apply the values and principles of the Codes of Ethics” (Policy, Ethics & Human Rights Committee, 2012:10). In 2020, the SACSSP released a policy guiding social workers in the use of technology amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the development of these policies addressing the use of ICTs in social work is to guide all social workers when using ICTs to conduct research, provide services, educate learners, perform administrative tasks, supervise, perform editorial or consultation functions, be engaged in peer review of social policy, and perform any other tasks as a social work practitioner (SACSSP, 2005).

The above-mentioned code of ethics does not directly address the use of ICTs; however, it is argued that the ethical principles should be utilised as a framework or guide in the context of ICTs.

2.7.2 Competence and Professional Development

According to the SACSSP (2005), social workers must strive to maintain high standards of competence in their work. They must recognise the boundaries of their particular competencies and the limitations of their expertise. They provide only those services and use only those techniques in which they are qualified by education, training or experience. However, the spread of Covid-19 and the need for social distancing accelerated the use of ICTs in social work, inhibiting social workers from pausing to reflect on whether they have the education, training and experience to utilise ICTs within their practice (Pink *et al.*, 2021). This could result in horrendous risks. Many social workers in various organisations resorted to the use of ICTs in order to continue their interventions without any training. The curriculum for social work programmes also does not teach social work students how to use ICTs during interventions. Thus, social workers had to improvise using the knowledge they acquired from traditional face-to-face interventions and applying it to a digital platform whilst exercising careful judgement to protect their service users.

In terms of professional autonomy, the limited technological knowledge of social workers may also be a challenge. In order for social workers to function effectively, they must learn technology and digital planning abilities; otherwise, they will have to

use technologies that are biased by people outside of their profession as a reference for procedures and value (Di Rosa *et al.*, 2018; Nordesjo *et al.*, 2022). As previously mentioned, this could ultimately lead to a technology-led approach instead of a practice-led approach (see 2.6.2).

2.7.3 Access to ICTs

Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities, a viewpoint that the social work profession holds as a value. Social workers aim to open the doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly those in greatest need (National Association of Social Workers, 2005). However, a challenge currently faced is that not all service users have access to ICTs, which creates an environment of social injustice. Therefore, it would be best ethical practice for social workers to become active in understanding and overcoming the digital divide.

According to *Bryant et al.* (2018), successful incorporation of ICTs in practice requires both social workers and service users to competently adapt and integrate technology and the communication platform it offers into their beings. However, this poses challenges, specifically to the digital divide. The concept “digital divide” refers to the members of society who, for different reasons, are unable to engage in the digital world and maximize the opportunities it offers (*Bryant et al.*, 2018). These reasons may include limited or no access to computers, computer illiteracy, limited access to broadband and data, or simply lack of understanding and awareness of its potential and benefits (*Bryant et al.*, 2018).

In addition, sociodemographic factors also influence the use of ICTs such as race, language, ability, gender, age, employment, level of education, and income (*Bryant et al.*, 2018). Therefore, social workers should strive to ensure access to necessary information, services and resources, equality of opportunity and meaningful participation in decision making for all people affected by adverse conditions (SACSSP Code of Ethics, 2005).

Accessibility should be considered when providing electronic services to vulnerable groups such as those that are home-bound due to being differently abled, the unemployed, the computer illiterate and so forth. Electronic services may be of great benefit to these groups, however, the ICT used to render these electronic services

may need to be adapted to meet the different needs of population groups who are in need of services (Lopez, 2014). This can be done through using enhanced technologies such as page readers, for example, Odiogo (www.odiogo.com) for those with visual impairment and voice recognition technology for those who are unable to type or use a mouse (Lopez, 2014). This can also be done by providing tools to the unemployed who cannot afford the technology required for the utilisation of ICTs in service delivery. Furthermore, training should be provided to service users who require social services but are not computer literate. Social workers should therefore maximise accessibility to ensure that ICTs do not contribute to inequality. The ways in which this digital divide is understood and bridged provokes ethical concerns central to the social work profession to which development and implementation of ICTs will have to respond (Bryant *et al.*, 2018). Within this regard, Shevellar (2017) states that the poorest and most oppressed in society are required to have access and the ability to use ICTs in order to receive services and that this becomes an ethical issue relating to privilege.

2.7.4 Consent, Confidentiality, Privacy and Boundaries

The use of ICTs in the rendering of social services has also resulted in expressed ethical concerns relating to service user privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, and data security (Mattison, 2018; Bryant *et al.*, 2018).

Before rendering services to service users through traditional face-to-face interventions or through using ICTs, social workers are obligated to obtain the service users' informed consent. Informed consent refers to a service user being made aware of all the advantages and disadvantages regarding making a particular decision. In the context of the use of ICTs in social work, it refers to the social worker fully explaining the advantages and disadvantages involved in using ICTs for intervention purposes. "Social workers who provide services via electronic media such as computer, telephone, radio, and television should inform recipients of the limitations and risks associated with such services" (SACSSP, 2020:3). In the case of service users lacking the capacity to give consent to the use of ICTs during interventions, such as the service user being a minor, the social worker should consult the parents or guardians. However, should the intervention be legally mandated, it outweighs the service user's wish for ICTs to be used or not to be used during interventions (Hill & Shaw, 2011).

Service users have the primary right to privacy. Confidentiality must be understood in terms of the service user's right to privacy. The right to privacy is enshrined in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (The Constitution of The Republic of South Africa, 1996). It is premised on two dimensions, specifically, the right against intrusion and the right to confidentiality. Social workers have an ethical responsibility toward their service users' systems. Thus, confidentiality is an ethical standard aimed at protecting the privacy of service users and should be held in high regard (SACSSP, 2005). However, ICT tools make private records readily accessible (Hill & Shaw, 2011). For example, social workers can easily use service user's social media to gather information. This can be considered trespassing in the service user's private space or sphere (Breyette & Hill, 2015; Byrne & Kirwan, 2019). Furthermore, it can also be viewed as violating the service users' right against intrusion.

Another ethical concern with the use of ICTs within social work practice is that of professional boundaries. Boundaries are an essential aspect of the helping relationship, therefore, failing to maintain these professional boundaries poses ethical risks (Kellen, Schoenherr, Turns, Madhusudan & Hecker, 2015; Reamer, 2015; Mishna *et al.*, 2020). For instance, social workers who invite service users to their personal social media accounts or who are not aware that their accounts are visible to everyone violate professional codes and the risk of self-disclosure to service users who experience difficulties maintaining boundaries themselves. Social workers who fail to maintain professional boundaries and distance with service users also risk poor judgement that may be harmful towards the service users.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is evident that social workers have been utilising ICTs and that the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown and social distancing periods accelerated the use. It is also clear that the use of ICTs in social work and social work organisations have many benefits such as rendering services to isolated groups as well as continuing services under adverse circumstances. However, it is also clear that these benefits are not without challenges. Various challenges are evident with the use of ICTs in social work, including but not limited to ethical challenges due to the lack of training, as well as sparsity in the literature relating to the use of ICTs specifically with reference to the South African context. Thus, in order to ensure the appropriate and effective use of ICTs in social work, social workers should undergo

training, social work organisations must embrace the opportunities that ICTs offer by modifying old ways of work, and ethical policies should be made clearer and more specific in order to guide social workers in the use of ICTs with their service users. This chapter has set the context of the use of ICTs in social work as a profession. Consequently, the following chapter will focus on an analysis of the functions of supervision within the context of the potential scope of ICTs in South African organisations, in order to research the second objective of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISION AND ICTs WITHIN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK ORGANISATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to define social work supervision. In addition, it will analyse the functions of supervision in the context of the potential scope of ICTs in South African social work organisations. It will start by defining supervision in social work, conceptualising the use of ICTs in supervision as well as describing the scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers by analysing the functions of supervision. Furthermore, this chapter will describe the scope of ICTs on the potential factors impeding on the supervisory access as well as explore how the use of ICTs in supervision can minimise the impact of these potential factors.

3.2 SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK

Supervision is an integral aspect of the social work practice process. The Charity Organization Society movement in North America and Europe gave rise to social work supervision in the nineteenth century (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). The influence of prior scholars, researchers, practitioners, social work organisations, and professionalisation of social work has shaped twenty-first century social work supervision (O'Donoghue 2015). Because it was initially primarily concerned with ensuring that the resources and funds of social work organisations used to assist service users were accounted for, supervision was initially seen as administrative with the primary tasks being overseeing volunteers and later paid works (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Davys & Beddoe, 2016; Khosa, 2022). In the 1930's, Robinson (1936), associated supervision with social casework and conceived it as an educational process comprising administration, teaching, and assisting. This was due to a number of practitioners receiving training at the time (Tsui & Ho, 1997; Khosa, 2022). Supervision thus became a pillar of casework practice, inextricably linked to the casework method of social work (Rabinowitz 1987; O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021). The first course in supervision was taught by Mary Richmond in the United States of America (USA) as a result of the development of educational function of supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019; Khosa, 2022). From the 1950s to the 1970s, supervision was called into question by the notion that professional social workers,

like other professionals, should practice autonomously and consult their peers when they needed advice or support, rather than having continuous career-long supervision. As a result, during this time period, more seasoned practitioners would supervise newly qualified social workers for a predetermined period (O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021; Khosa, 2022). This was done to strengthen the responsibility of social work services provided within organisations. Thus, alongside administration, the educational function of supervision emerged. Thereafter, practitioners had to engage in autonomous practice and consulting peers on cases (Tsui & Ho, 1997). Peer group supervision and case consultation emerged during this time period, complementing traditional organisational supervision (Rabinowitz 1987; O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021). Furthermore, supervisors were expected to provide emotional support to practitioners who experienced job frustration, giving rise to the development of the supportive function of supervision (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). This account of the international development of supervision evidently gives rise to the three main functions of supervision namely, administration, education and support. These functions will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The empirical groundwork for social work supervision theory and practice in North America and most parts of the world was laid by researchers in the 1970s. Kadushin (1974), undertook the first nationwide survey of social work supervision, which resulted in the development of the first descriptive overview of supervisory practices, processes, and obstacles. In addition, Munson (1975) conducted the first empirical doctoral thesis on social work supervision, examining the structural, authority, and teaching models of social work supervision. It was discovered that supervisors with authority derived from competence had a larger influence on their supervisees than those with power derived from agency sanction (Munson, 1975).

During the 1980s and 1990s, social work organisations were dominated by a managerialist and cost-cutting environment (O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021; Khosa, 2022). This impacted social work supervision, resulting in it becoming an accountability process, with the administrative or managerial function being emphasised through contracts, task completion, and job performance (Engelbrecht 2015, O'Donoghue 2015). During this period, serious questions were posed regarding whether supervision was beneficial to practitioners, their respective organisations, as well as their clients. According to O'Donoghue and Engelbrecht (2021) studies that

addressed these issues concluded that: a) supportive supervision may decrease psychological stress, and relieve burnout and job dissatisfaction among frontline social workers (Himle, Jayaratne & Thyness 1989); b) when the supervisor attended to workload demands, supportive supervision could improve worker morale; and c) supervision focused on client problems led to improvements in clients' generalized contentment and client satisfaction. As a fundamental component of professional social work, supervision has been connected to the practice, growth, and well-being of the professional social worker (Engelbrecht 2010, O'Donoghue 2015).

These developments influenced the practice of supervision in South Africa. Using the work of Tsui and Ho (1997), as a loose framework, Engelbrecht (2010) identified several historical periods that influenced the evolution of supervision in South Africa. The 1960s and 1970s was period known as the emerging and predominantly administrative years. Pieterse (1961), who conceptualized supervision in a group environment, implied that social workers were already subject to individual supervision as a form of administrative practice. A few years later, Du Plessis (1965) urged for the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions to take on both the administrative and instructional aspects of oversight. Following this, several academic pieces on supervision appeared in *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, a professional publication for social workers (Barette, 1968a; Barette, 1968b). These writings entrenched supervision in administrative practice along hierarchical lines, but they also showed an emerging understanding of education as a second role of supervision. A turning point in the evolution of supervision in South Africa occurred at the start of the 1970s when the official definition of supervision was included in the *Definitive Dictionary of Social Work*. This definition of supervision, which did not clearly include any functions of supervision, described it as a procedure through which a supervisor may assist social workers in executing their professional duties as effectively as possible (Vaktaalkomitee vir Maatskaplike Werk, 1971). Botha (1971) introduced the different functions of supervision namely, administration, education, and consultation. Other prominent scholars substantiated this conceptualisation of supervision drawing from North American scholars, with these conceptualisations still being used in South Africa today (Dercksen, 1973; Smit, 1972; Hoffman, 1976; Engelbrecht, 2019).

During the 1970s and 1990s, known as the period of integrated supervision functions and escalation of the knowledge base, Kadushin (1976), introduced the supportive

function of supervision. As a result, the relevance of the support function of supervision was recognized in the work of Botha (1985), which stated that the support function is fundamental to the educational model for effective supervision. This laid the foundation for the training and practice of social work supervision in South Africa. A supervised field teaching component of students' studies in supervision was already required by several South African institutions in 1985 when the first postgraduate supervision programmes were introduced. The work of Pelser (1988) finally proved that supervision was endorsed in South Africa with a solid theoretical and practical base.

During the 1990s and 2010 a period known as times of change, Engelbrecht (2010) observed an increase in academic theses on supervision. At the end of the millennium, more burning social issues arose such as service delivery, resulting in supervision becoming less favoured as a research topic. During this period, South Africa experienced a new political dispensation and welfare system focusing on service delivery whilst simultaneously resulting in a "brain drain" (Engelbrecht, 2006). This "brain drain" was a result of social workers increasingly migrating to other countries and other professions to such an extent that the profession was declared a scarce skill by the South African government (Engelbrecht, 2006; Department of Social Development, 2006). Furthermore, this resulted in almost an equivalent number of experienced social workers in supervisory positions as newly qualified social workers, leading to the deterioration of the supervisory experience (Engelbrecht, 2019)

From the year 2010 onward, known as the period of the emergence of national managerial measures, the National Department of Social Development (DSD) partnered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) and attempted to renew supervision practices by establishing a Supervision Framework for South African social work (Engelbrecht, 2019). The goal of the establishment of the Supervision Framework was to promote effective supervision for social service trainees and professionals in order to ensure competent, professional social work practices (DSD & SACSSP, 2012).

Due to the development and influence of ICTs as well as the ensuing globalization, the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century saw tremendous change on a worldwide scale (O'Donoghue 2001; O'Donoghue, 2003; Engelbrecht & O' Donoghue,

2021). During this time, pagers, the personal computer, email, voicemail, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, the internet, and the World Wide Web were all introduced to social workers and supervisors (O'Donoghue 2003; Engelbrecht & O'Donoghue, 2021).

In the above section, the researcher discusses the key global and national developments in social work supervision over the last five decades and how it gave rise to the three main functions of supervision. The following section will conceptualise ICTs within the scope of social work supervision.

3.3 ICTs IN SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION

It is crucial to comprehend the context of ICT and the concept's historical development while conceptualising supervision in social work. Therefore, before defining social work supervision, it was first necessary to outline its global development. It has been stated that it is difficult to specify exactly what supervision of social workers comprises. Although there is not a universally accepted definition of social work supervision, Kadushin (1976) defines it as the process by which a supervisor performs administrative, educational, and supportive tasks while interacting positively with a supervisee. A person conducting supervision is called a supervisor and must have more knowledge and skills than the social worker who is being supervised (Brashears, 1995; Department of Social Development, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2019). The person being supervised is called a supervisee; in this context the supervisee is a practicing social worker (Yuliani, 2021). The term supervision is derived from the Latin word "*super*" meaning above and "*videre*," meaning to watch or to see (Yuliani, 2021). Thus, a supervisor oversees the quality and responsibility of the work of others. This definition highlights the historical administration function of supervision, by stating that work performed at the lower level can be acknowledged qualitatively or statistically (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

The Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012:11), which is specific to the South Africa, defines supervision as an "interactional process based on distinct theories, models and perspectives on supervision whereby a supervisor with the required experience and qualification and to whom authority is delegated, supervises a social worker." Although the definition has received criticism for failing to recognize the importance of supervisors' tacit knowledge, it does refer to various levels and stages

of social workers' professional development, which is distinctive and not distinguishable in other international or local definitions (Engelbrecht, 2021). Furthermore, supervision may be considered an activity executed in an effort to prepare newly qualified social workers by equipping them with the social work tools required to deliver services of high quality (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2010). Moreover, supervision in social work can be defined as a process whereby knowledge and skills are transferred from experienced workers to inexperienced workers (Yuliani, 2021). Social work supervision is a two-way contact between a supervisor and a supervisee that includes a teaching-learning, supporting, and administrative process (Yuliani, 2021).

The short-term objective involves improving social workers' capacity to work more effectively and thereby directly affecting long-term goals. The aim is to be effective in providing services to service users according to the mandate given by the community to the organisation in which the social worker function. According to Morrison (1993), the purpose of supervision is to provide assurance that: 1) social workers get clarity about their roles and responsibilities; 2) Provide encouragement to social workers so that the goals of their profession are achieved; 3) Improve the quality of service provision to service users; 4) Encourage professional development and provide personal support. The objective of supervision is to improve humanitarian services by monitoring the work performance of social workers and aiding them in experiencing professional growth and development (Yuliani, 2021). Furthermore, the objective of supervision is to develop professionalism and independence in social work practice (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that supervisees carry out their tasks and are also responsible for providing supervisees with assistance to carry out these tasks. Thus, supervision is used to monitor, direct, and guarantee that social workers are doing their duties effectively (Caspi & Reid, 2012). Thus, the overarching objective of social work supervision is intended to assist social workers in mobilising their skills and expertise in order to carry out their work efficiently and effectively.

However, supervisors often cannot directly observe what supervisees are doing. Thus, a tool is required to monitor the activities executed by supervisees. In social work, these tools may include process notes, written reports or technology used to conduct supervision (Yuliani, 2021). As previously mentioned, during the late 1990s and the

first decade of the 21st century, ICTs were introduced to social work supervision. During this time, social workers and their supervisors were introduced to pagers, mobile phones, computers, email, voicemail, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, the Internet, and the World Wide Web (O'Donoghue 2003). Undoubtedly, the arrival of the personal computer, computer servers, and database software had the greatest influence on social workers and supervisors (O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021). Since then, ICTs have become an integral part of our daily lives, transforming how and where supervision occurs (OpenAI, 2023). The use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers is considered an emergent field in social work practice (Reamer, 2015).

Supervision that is rendered through ICTs has been coined as remote supervision, tele-supervision, and cyber supervision to mention a few (Mo, 2021). The use of ICTs in social work supervision is a rapidly evolving area, with new technologies continually emerging. Remote supervision occurs when the supervisor and supervisee are not present in the same place or when one of them is employed at a remote location (Rousmaniere & Renfro-Michel, 2016). Tele supervision is the practice of supervising by email, phone, or video conference (Brandoff & Lombardi, 2012). The use of synchronous and asynchronous technology in supervision is known as cyber supervision (Barnett, 2011).

As stated in the previous chapters, ICTs refers to the telecommunications integration and information sharing using a variety of technologies (Chan & Holosko, 2016). ICTs has revolutionised the way supervisors and supervisees interact. With the advancement of video conferencing, instant messaging, and online collaboration tools, the traditional supervisory relationship has been transformed into a more dynamic and interactive process (Mo, 2021). For social workers, ICTs can be used to enhance the supervisory relationship and improve service delivery.

One of the most significant benefits of using ICTs in supervision is that they enable remote supervision. In situations where face-to-face supervision is not feasible, such as during a pandemic or when social workers are located in different regions, videoconferencing tools can facilitate remote supervision (Mo, 2021; OpenAI, 2023). This can save time and reduce travel costs, making supervision more accessible and efficient (Watson, 2016). Another benefit of using ICTs in supervision is that they can facilitate more frequent check-ins and feedback. Electronic communication tools such

as messaging apps, email, and teleconferencing can enable supervisors to provide both synchronous and asynchronous feedback and support to social workers (Luke & Gordon, 2016). This can enhance the quality of supervision and improve the social worker's professional development. ICTs can also be used to enhance the documentation and tracking of supervision. Case management software programs can help social workers organise and manage their caseload. These tools can be used to track progress, set goals, and share information with supervisors. This can enhance accountability and transparency in the supervision process. By enabling researchers to search for and access the work of and collaborate with international colleagues, ICT developments in the 21st century have arguably also advanced supervision scholarship on a global scale (O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021).

The researcher has conceptualised ICTs in terms of the scope of supervision. In the following section, the researcher will elaborate on how ICTs are used in supervision.

3.4 THE USE OF ICTs IN SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION

ICTs can be useful tools for social workers in the supervision process. In this section, the researcher will draw on the functions, processes, methods, and activities of supervision to operationalise the scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers. Furthermore, the researcher will also draw on the potential factors impeding on the supervisory process as well as how the use of ICTs in supervision may possibly combat these factors.

3.4.1 Functions of supervision

The three functions of supervision, according to Magnussen (2018), are to (1) help social workers (supervisees), (2) advance social work, and (3) regulate social work. As initially defined by Kadushin (1976), this idea corresponds with the three primary functions of supervision, namely: administration, education, and support (Yuliani, 2021).

3.4.1.1 Administrative function of supervision

Social work supervision has traditionally placed more focus on the administrative function of supervision. (Khosa, 2022). The administrative function of supervision can be defined as all the management tasks and functions executed by the supervisor in relation to the supervisee's work (Engelbrecht, 2019). Historically, the administrative function of supervision was affirmed in practice to enable practitioners to render more

effective services and to ensure that supervisees' work is professional and in compliance with organisational and statutory norms (Tsui, 2005; Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019; Engelbrecht, 2021; Khosa, 2022). The administrative function of supervision is mainly focused on management processes and reporting. This function is focused on appropriately implementing organisational policies. Social workers are provided with specific objectives in order to understand the context of the organisation in which they work, enabling them to execute their tasks effectively and correctly (Kadushin, 1992; Engelbrecht, 2014). Whilst executing this function, the supervisor takes on a middle management role, as they are expected to participate in the formulation of programs and policies, ensuring employee development, and establishing standards for service delivery (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2010; Khosa, 2022).

The supervisor, as a manager, must acquire knowledge and abilities in the fields of organising, planning, developing human resources, and evaluating programs and supervisees (Jacques, 2019). The supervisor is ultimately accountable for both their own performance as well as that of their supervisees (Chibaya, 2018). Additionally, the effectiveness of the supervisor's unit or team is frequently used to gauge supervisory success (Akesson & Canavera, 2017). Although initially owed to the organisation, this accountability ultimately serves to guarantee the success of service users and communities (Akesson & Canavera, 2017; Chibaya, 2018; Khosa, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of administrative supervision is to promote accountability between the practitioner and the organisation, and between the organisation and the practitioner with the goal of serving the service users' best interests (Jacques, 2019; Akesson & Canavera, 2017; Chibaya, 2018; Khosa, 2022).

The social work supervisor has the responsibility of executing certain tasks to fulfil the responsibilities of the administrative function of supervision. These tasks will be described in the following section as well as how ICTs can be used to execute these tasks.

3.4.1.2 Tasks in administration supervision

Supervisory tasks in executing the administration function of supervision includes:

(a) Staff recruitment and selection

Ideally, supervisors are involved in formulating a criterion for hiring staff as they are aware of the type of employee required in the unit or team. Supervisors should also

participate in the interviewing process as well as provide recommendations which must be carefully considered as they understand the demand of the role or position (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Jacques, 2019). Most social work organisations use ICTs to create advertisements used to recruit staff such as Flyer Designer or Adobe Express. In addition, supervisors in social work organisations also utilise ICTs to recruit staff as they post advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook. Furthermore, ICTs such as ZOOM are used in the interviewing process of selecting suitable potential staff members. Moreover, a contemporary way of recruiting staff is to post an advert on platforms that deals with recruitment in South Africa such as Career24 or LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com>). Applicants create profiles on these websites and apply for interested vacancies accordingly. Furthermore, social work organisations that owns websites, advertise vacancies on their websites along with the requirements, steps to be taken to successfully complete the application, and contact details of IT specialists should they experience technical difficulties whilst completing the job applications online. In South Africa, examples of these includes The Department of Social development (<https://www.westerncape.gov.za/>) and Community Keepers (<https://communitykeepers.org/>).

(b) Induction of workers

Supervisors should discuss the functioning of the unit or team, how it fits into the organisation at large, as well as define the respective supervisor and supervisee roles (Khosa, 2022). Effective practice depends on this, which may be impaired in African countries and rural areas communities where social workers and social work supervisors are stationed far apart (Jacques, 2019). ICTs allows for supervision between supervisees and supervisors that are not in the same geographical location (Mo, 2021; OpenAI, 2023). For example, supervisors can utilise ICTs such as ZOOM (<https://zoom.us/>), MS Teams (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-za/microsoft-teams/>) etc in the induction of workers, especially with workers located in rural areas or with whom they do not share a geographical location. The aforementioned ICTs allows for both verbal and visual communication between the supervisee and supervisor without sharing the same geographical location. During the induction or orientation period, the supervisor orientates the supervisee on the organisational policies and context. A lot of information is shared with the supervisee during this time that may be overwhelming. The above-mentioned platforms also provide the supervisee the

opportunity to record the session with the supervisor that he or she may revisit later if needed.

(c) Developmental work planning, assignment and delegation

Supervisors are responsible for planning, assigning, and delegating work across supervisees in a fair yet challenging manner (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). This is done to ensure that they cope and develop but ultimately to ensure the benefit to the service user (Chibaya, 2018). Supervisors can assign tasks to supervisees, establish due dates, and monitor progress using various ICT applications, including Asana (<https://asana.com>), Trello (<https://trello.com>) and Basecamp (<https://basecamp.com>). Using these tools, tasks, projects, and communication can all be managed from one place. Overall, ICTs can assist supervisors with planning, delegating, and assigning work to supervisees by providing them with tools for project management, communication, collaboration, and performance management (OpenAI, 2023). By leveraging these tools, supervisors can enhance their efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity.

(e) Monitoring and evaluation of practice

Supervisors have the important, highly administrative function of monitoring and evaluating the work of supervisees in a positive and discrete manner. For effective practice and successful service user outcomes, ongoing monitoring, and routine formal evaluation are crucial (Silence, 2017). After a certain amount of time has passed, a formal evaluation should be carried out in accordance with established standards that the practitioner is familiar with and to which they should be free to participate while performing their duties. The exercise's emphasis should be on performance rather than the worker as a person, and it should be a sincere assessment of both strengths and flaws carried out in a setting of mutual respect and trust. Additionally, staff members should be involved in developing the evaluation criteria to foster a sense of ownership and a conviction in the reciprocity of benefits for the organisation, service users, and communities (Jacques, 2019).

ICTs offer social work practitioners and supervisors' tools and resources to enhance their professional practice. Examples of ICTs that social work supervisors can use to monitor and evaluate the practice of their supervisees include online platforms, video conferencing tools, mobile applications, and electronic records. One of the benefits of

using ICTs for monitoring and evaluating social work practice is that they allow supervisors to observe the practice of their supervisees remotely (Sezer & Bröchner, 2019). Online platforms and video conferencing tools, for instance, enable supervisors to connect with their supervisees virtually and observe their practice in real-time. This can be particularly useful in situations where face-to-face supervision is not feasible. By observing the practice of their supervisees remotely, supervisors can provide feedback, guidance, and support in a timely and efficient manner. ICTs thus bring the social workers practice into supervision and allows for monitoring and evaluating.

Another benefit of using ICTs for monitoring and evaluating the supervisees practice is that they enable supervisors to collect and store data electronically. Electronic records and mobile applications, for example, allow supervisors to keep track of the progress of their supervisees and record their practice activities. This can help supervisors to identify patterns in their supervisees' practice and monitor their progress towards meeting their professional goals. Electronic records also provide a secure and efficient way of storing confidential service user information, which is essential in maintaining ethical practice. ICTs can also facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge between supervisors and supervisees. Online platforms and mobile applications, for instance, can be used to share resources, best practices, and research findings. This can aid in enhancing the knowledge and skills of supervisees, enabling them to provide high-quality services to their service users. Sharing information and knowledge through ICTs can also foster a collaborative and supportive supervisory relationship between the supervisor and supervisee, which is essential to the professional development of the supervisee.

Hence, ICTs can be a valuable tool for social work supervisors to monitor and evaluate the practice of their supervisees as it brings the supervisees' practice into supervision. ICTs enable supervisors to observe practice remotely, collect and store data electronically, and facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge. However, it is important for social work supervisors to balance the benefits and challenges of using ICTs for supervision and ensure that ethical principles are upheld in the use of ICTs for supervision.

(f) Supervision policy

The organisation's supervisor acts as a change agent during the duration of the administrative supervision, implying for change to the benefit of all rather than purely for the sake of change. Humans naturally resist change, which is correlated with needs for stability, loyalty, and security. Kurt Lewin created the notion of force-field analysis in 1952 (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) by adapting Newton's third law of motion which states that for every action there is an equal and opposing action. This means that the more resistance you create to change, the more resistance you will generate. For example, in the context of utilising ICTs in supervision, many seasoned frontline social workers who grew up without technology might not feel at ease using them (Mo, 2021). Therefore, trying to implement change at the individual or organisational level, such as introducing the use of ICTs in supervision, will result in resistance that can only be managed by addressing what is causing the deadlock, such as the inability to work technological devices.

Additionally, groups or organisations experience change in four stages: shock, protective withdrawal, acknowledgement, and adaptation and change (Jacques, 2019). When the fourth stage is reached, there is improved communication and a greater likelihood of arriving at a mutually beneficial solution. For example, when organisations decided to shift to using ICTs to provide supervision services during the Covid-19 lockdown, these seasoned workers may have experienced shock, whereafter they may have indicated that they wish to continue with traditional in-person supervision. Recognition might have been given to the fact that their inexperience with the use of ICTs may have influenced their resistance to shifting to using ICTs in supervision; whereafter they may have started attending training on how to use ICTs and engaging in participating in the process of ICT use in supervision. Their opinions about the use of ICTs in supervision may have changed or the organisation's supervision policy may have change to make provision for the use of ICTs in supervision. This change benefits the worker (as a new skill is learnt), the organisation (ICTs allows for more efficiency) and the service user (the use of ICTs in supervision can result in improved service delivery).

(g) Supervision Reports

Ideally, supervisors must formulate a schedule of supervision sessions in advance. This may be a challenging task in some African settings, where supervisees are

stationed at remote areas (Jacques, 2019). However, supervisors must make every attempt to formalise this process. Furthermore, when preparing for supervision sessions, the record of previous sessions must be reviewed and addressed. With the use of ICTs increasing in supervision, the challenge supervisors in remote areas experience in calendarising supervision sessions in advance have been addressed as ICTs such as computers, Microsoft Word and email can be used to create these calendars as well as to distribute them without sharing the same geographical location as the supervisee. In addition, the contents of each supervision session must be recorded under the following headings assessments, planning, communication etc. This ought to be organised according to the date, rating, supporting information, and agreed-upon actions that would advance the desired result. The use of ICTs such as computers and MS Word make it easy for supervisors to record in person supervision sessions. Supervisors and supervisees may use the transcribing function of MS Word to record supervision sessions. This function allows the supervisee or supervisor to dictate relevant information that they wish to have recorded as evidence of the supervision session whilst having the application generate a written document. These MS Word documents then can be saved in folders on a computer to aid in organising records of supervision sessions that are saved according to the aforementioned heading and also easily accessible.

Supervision sessions that are conducted using ICTs can also be recorded and organised accordingly. For example, when using MS Teams to conduct a virtual supervision session with a supervisee, the supervisor can video record the supervision session which can serve as evidence of the session and can be saved and organised according to the above-mentioned headings. Alternatively, the supervisor may use ICTs such as ZOOM or MS Teams to conduct a supervision session with the supervisee and have it be audio recorded by the application. The supervisor can have the application transcribe this audio recording and generate a written document that can be organised and saved according to the above-mentioned headings.

Every social work organisation should have a policy for recording information, such as topics discussed during supervision, the supervising activity, and worker data that should be in a personnel file (Jacques, 2019). ICTs have made it possible for these personnel files to be saved online for instance on Drives. In cases of organisation

buildings burning down or experiencing flooding, these online personnel files that are saved to cloud-based drives would be of great benefit.

(h) Moderation of records

Supervisors should routinely evaluate the case and project files of their supervisees. Before being presented to legal authorities or other required bodies, official reports should be reviewed by the supervisor (Engelbrecht, 2021). In circumstances where practitioners are stationed far from their supervisors and electronic communication technologies are not available, such processes may be jeopardized (OpenAI, 2023). Currently, most social workers use ICTs to write their reports especially reports that are meant for court. However, ICTs offers easier and time friendlier ways in which social workers can write their reports. For example, instead of typing out reports, social workers can use the dictate function on Word and dictate while the application types the report for the social worker. Furthermore, applications such as Grammarly, has made it easy for social workers to identify and correct their grammatical errors instantly whilst generating the written report. Thus, in instances where social workers and their supervisors do not share the same geographical location, reports are sent via email, the supervisor reviews the report and sends it back to the supervisee indicating the necessary changes or approving it for submission to court.

ICTs can be used by social work supervisors to moderate records, ensuring that they are accurate, complete, and up to date. One of the ways in which social work supervisors can use ICTs for record moderation is by using electronic records management systems. These systems enable supervisors to access records electronically and track any changes made to them. This can help supervisors to identify any discrepancies or errors in records and take appropriate action to correct them. Electronic records management systems also provide a secure and centralised location for records, making them easily accessible to authorised personnel. Supervisors can also use ICTs to ensure that records are being maintained in accordance with professional and legal standards. For instance, supervisors can use electronic reminders or alerts to remind supervisees about the need to document certain aspects of client interactions or update records in a timely manner. This can help to ensure that records are complete and accurate and can be used to inform decision-making and support the provision of services.

Furthermore, collaborative platforms or cloud-based storage systems can be used for record moderation by the. These platforms enable supervisors and supervisees to collaborate on the creation and maintenance of records in real-time. This can assist in ensuring that records are complete and accurate, and that important information is not overlooked. Collaborative platforms also provide a mechanism for feedback and communication between supervisors and supervisees, which can help to identify areas where records may need to be updated or revised. However, it is important to note that the use of ICTs for record moderation also has some limitations and challenges. For instance, the use of electronic records management systems or cloud-based storage systems may require additional training or resources. Also, the use of collaborative platforms may pose challenges related to confidentiality and privacy, which need to be addressed to ensure that ethical principles are upheld in the use of technology for record moderation.

In conclusion, ICTs can be used by social work supervisors to moderate records, ensuring that they are accurate, complete, and up to date. By using electronic records management systems, collaborative platforms, and electronic reminders or alerts, supervisors can ensure that records are being maintained in accordance with professional and legal standards. However, supervisors need to be mindful of the limitations and challenges of using ICTs for record moderation and ensure that ethical principles are upheld in the use of technology for supervision.

(I) Performance Appraisal

Regularly scheduled, impartial evaluations of supervisees' work ought to be formulated around specific, attainable benchmarks (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). For learning to be ongoing and developmental, results must be systematically presented to supervisees in a clear and positive manner (Haynes, Corey & Moulton, 2003). The process needs to be collaborative, including input from both the supervisor and supervisee. Even in the industrialised world, there has not been much standardisation of evaluation practices in the social service professions, and this is especially true in the African contexts, although there is not much solid publish information to back up this claim (Haynes, Corey, & Moulton, 2003),

In social work, supervisees' personal traits are closely related to their professional aptitudes thus, supervisors must learn to distinguish between the two as competently

as possible. Depending on the needs of the organisation, the nature of the activity, and the viability of the timeframe, formal procedures can be used on a quarterly, biannual, or annual basis (Jacques, 2019). Remote villages in Africa pose logistical challenges to the professionals stationed there as well as to their supervisors working from a distance. Evaluation in these circumstances is not always possible *in situ* and may only be done at sporadic intervals. If peer supervision is used, formal evaluation may need to rely both on the accuracy of the practitioner and other professionals.

ICTs can be used by social work supervisors to enhance the performance appraisal process by means of collecting performance data electronically. This can be done using electronic forms or software that allows supervisors to track and record the performance of their supervisees over time. By collecting data electronically, supervisors have easier access to performance data and can use it to identify patterns and trends in the performance of their supervisees. This can help supervisors to provide more informed and objective feedback during the performance appraisal process. Another way in which ICTs can be used for performance appraisals is by using video conferencing tools for performance reviews. Video conferencing tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams enable supervisors to conduct performance reviews remotely, which can be particularly useful in situations where the supervisor and supervisee are in geographically separated. Video conferencing tools also allow supervisors to record performance reviews, which can be used for future reference or as evidence in the case of any disputes or challenges. ICTs can also be used to facilitate self-assessment by supervisees.

Online platforms or mobile applications can be used by supervisees to assess their own performance against agreed upon goals or standards. This can provide supervisors with valuable insight into the self-perception of their supervisees and help to identify areas where they may need additional support or training. In addition, ICTs can be used to facilitate feedback and communication between supervisors and supervisees. Email, messaging apps, or video conferencing tools can be used to provide feedback on performance, ask questions, or clarify expectations. This can help to ensure that feedback is timely and frequent, which is essential for performance improvement and development.

However, it is important to note that the use of ICTs for performance appraisals also has some limitations and challenges. For instance, the use of electronic data collection tools may require additional training or resources. Additionally, the use of video conferencing tools for performance reviews may pose challenges related to internet connectivity, or privacy and confidentiality. Thus, ICTs can be used by social work supervisors to enhance the performance appraisal process within certain parameters. However, supervisors need to be mindful of the limitations and challenges of using ICTs for performance appraisals and ensure that ethical principles are upheld in the use of technology for supervision. In a study on supervision and ICTs, Mo (2021) states that it is critical for supervisors to choose evaluation techniques that support the accomplishment of e-learning outcomes in order to evaluate e-supervision and e-learning results.

Due to an emphasis on the administrative function of supervision, research has indicated that there is a lack of organised supervision in social work practice in South Africa (Vetfuti, Goliath & Perumal 2019; Engelbrecht, 2013; Engelbrecht, 2021). This is mostly because supervisors are too busy to supervise; they either attend meetings or seminars or are distracted with administrative responsibilities instead of helping social workers assure good service delivery (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). Therefore, the function of supervision must be executed concurrently, rather than focusing solely on the administrative function of supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019; Engelbrecht, 2021; Yuliani, 2021).

The administrative function of supervision as well as its associated tasks has been analysed in the above section. Thus, the next section will be focusing on analysing the educational function of supervision within the context of ICTs.

3.4.1.3 Educational function of supervision

Supervision is a formal and continuous process of providing professional support and learning for frontline social workers (Engelbrecht, 2014). These practitioners are supported in developing their knowledge and skills through regular discussion, sharing with experienced supervisors, and getting feedback and advice (Botha, 2002; Goodyear, 2014). According to Kadushin (1992), supervision entails both educating and assisting the supervisee in learning the information they need to complete their job. Thus, the educational function of supervision involves increasing the supervisee's

capacity, in order to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Budeli, 2018; Yuliani, 2021). This is important in order to ensure the effectiveness of service delivery. Continuous staff development and related practices like coaching and mentoring are examples of the educational functions of supervision since they give supervisees the knowledge, abilities, and values necessary to execute their jobs effectively (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Tsui, 2005; Bluckert, 2008; Engelbrecht, 2021).

However, it is important to differentiate between educational supervision, staff development, and in-service training (Gleeson, 1992; Kadushin, 1992; Yuliani, 2021). Staff development involves in-service training and educational supervision and includes all methods an organisation may use to improve the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of its entire workforce. The term in-service training describes a particular type of staff development (Kadushin, 1992; Yuliani, 2021). A defined set of organisational employees who have the same job classification or work tasks receive organised, formal training. The general educational requirements of a group of workers are taken into consideration when in-service programs are prepared *a priori*. Everyone in the group can use the general information. In educational supervision, training is tailored to the needs of a single worker with a specific caseload, specific challenges, and a need for an individualised education program (Yuliani, 2021). Through the educational function of supervision, supervisors are responsible for assisting social workers explicitly or collectively execute the broad knowledge and information received from in-service training (Kadushin, 1992; Yuliani, 2021).

The supervisor is required to evaluate supervisees' work performance, keep track of it, and look for any areas where it might be improved upon while executing the educational function (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Thus, they ought to be respected as authorities in their fields. This implies that supervisees should be able to turn to the assistance of the supervisor at any time and that supervisors should have the appropriate theoretical background, knowledge, and abilities to demonstrate that they are experts (Botha, 2002; Engelbrecht, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2019). Therefore, ongoing professional development is essential for social work practice, and supervisors should set an example by staying abreast with the latest developments within the field. This will maintain the supervisees' interest in the field.

According to Kadushin (1992:135), at the time, all supervisory post job descriptions include these listing functions: “instruct workers in acceptable social work techniques,” “develop staff competence through individual and group conferences”, “train and instruct staff in job performance.” In a South African context this holds to be true even today (Annexure 4). Educational supervision and clinical supervision are used synonymously. It focuses on teaching knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for the performance of clinical social work tasks through a detailed analysis of the supervisee’s interaction with the service user.

ICTs can be used by social work supervisors to enhance the educational function of supervision, by providing new and innovative ways of delivering educational content and facilitating learning (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). For example, one of the ways in which social work supervisors can use ICTs to execute the educational function of supervision is by using online learning platforms or educational software. These platforms can provide access to a range of educational resources, including articles, videos, and interactive modules. This can be particularly useful for providing learning opportunities outside of regular supervision sessions or for providing additional support on specific topics or areas of practice. Supervisors can also use ICTs to facilitate reflective practice and self-directed learning by supervisees. Online journals, blogs, or social media platforms can be used by supervisees to reflect on their practice, share their experiences, and receive feedback from their supervisors and peers (OpenAI, 2023). This can aid in the promotion of critical thinking, self-awareness, and professional development.

Additionally, supervisors can use ICTs to execute the educational function of supervision by using video conferencing tools or webinars to deliver training or educational content. This can be particularly useful for providing in-service training on specific topics as well as executing the educational function of supervision remotely by individualising the content of the in-service training to the specific needs of the supervisees who are in different locations. Video conferencing tools also provide opportunities for interactive learning, allowing for discussion and feedback between supervisors and supervisees (Goodyear, 2014; Cf. Oterholm, 2009). Supervisors can also use ICT tools such as online chat platforms and video conferencing to facilitate group supervision sessions. These ICT tools can be used to bring together groups of supervisees to discuss cases, share experiences, and receive feedback from their

peers. This can assist in promoting collaborative learning and can provide supervisees with the opportunity to learn from each other.

It is evident that ICTs can be used to promote staff developments as it provides tools for both in-service training and the educational function of. However, it is important to note that the use of ICTs in the execution of the educational function of supervision has limitations and challenges. For instance, the use of online learning platforms or video conferencing tools may require additional training or resources. This may be particularly problematic in third world countries such as South Africa where social work organisations lack the needed resources for effective service delivery. Furthermore, the use of social media or other online platforms for reflective practice may pose ethical challenges related to confidentiality and privacy, which need to be addressed to ensure that ethical principles are upheld in the use of ICTs for supervision.

3.4.1.4 Significance of Educational Supervision

A very important aspect of a supervisor's duties and actions is educational supervision. Considering that it raises social workers' self-awareness in connection to their jobs, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) (2010), interprets educational supervision as a crucial part of the worker's professional growth. The supervisee is given the ability to recognize excellent practice from bad through the educational function. In other words, the supervisee is given the tools to better comprehend their service users and to become more conscious of their own behaviours and reactions to service users (Khosa, 2022). Furthermore, supervisees gain insight into the dynamics of their interactions with their service users by taking their practice into supervision and dissecting it with their supervisors (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). For example, ICT tools such as video conferencing allow the supervisee to video record their interview with the service users and play the video recording for the supervisors in supervision. This allows both the supervisee and supervisor to analyse the interaction and determine whether it is good or bad practice as well as what the areas of development may be. Therefore, according to Kadushin (1992), educational supervision ought to give supervisees the capacity to act in a variety of circumstances and at various levels. To fulfil the demands of each supervisee, educational strategies should be aligned with each supervisee's unique learning style (Khosa, 2022).

In addition to sharing knowledge and skills about social work with supervisees, helping supervisees advance professionally is one of the three largest sources of satisfaction for supervisors (Kadushin, 1992; Kadushin, 2014) explains that two of the three main sources of satisfaction for supervisees relate to the educational function, the first of which entails being assisted in dealing with problems related to caseloads, and the second being assisted to develop into a professional social worker. Two of the three primary reasons why supervisees are satisfied with supervision are related to educational supervision: "My supervisor helps me in coping with challenges in my work with my service users" and "My supervisor assists me in my growth as a professional social worker" (Kadushin, 1992: 138). This has been confirmed more recently in a South African study where it was reported that supervision is significant because social workers require supervisors "from whom they can receive direction and to whom they can look for support" (Silence, 2017:100). This emphasises both the educational and supportive function of supervision, ultimately demonstrating the importance of educating supervisees through instruction and directives. Additionally, it was agreed upon by both supervisors and supervisees that one of the two most crucial goals of supervision is to ensure the professional development of the supervisee by increasing the production of knowledge and the development of competencies. (Kadushin, 1974; Kadushin, 1992; Riva & Ratsika, 2015).

Due to the absence of training at social work organisations, it was found on two separate occasions, in two distinct national surveys conducted in the United States of America that educational supervision was necessary. Children's Bureau (1976: 72) states that "frequently the front-line supervisors are the primary source of in-service training. In the second study, Shyne (1980:31) reported that the highest number of the caseworkers, precisely, 75% "were depending on in-service training and supervision to acquire information and skill needed for the position". This is further emphasised by Silence (2017:96) in a South African study on the significance of supervision in the Department of Health in the Western Cape, where participants reported that they require supervision for "Better service delivery, better allocation of work so that it's more manageable." This demonstrates the dependence of supervisees on supervision over time, in order to gain planning skills necessary to execute their work tasks more effectively.

The researcher has conceptualised the educational function of supervision in the scope of ICTs. In addition, the researcher conceptualised the significance of the educational function in social work practice. Thus, in the following section, the supervision process as part of the educational function of supervision and the scope of ICTs within this context will be discussed.

(a) The supervision process

According to the developmental theory of supervision, a supervision process should have progressive steps. These steps are established by the organisation's concept of supervision, which may be ongoing supervision or supervision aimed at fast advancing the supervisee to an independent level (Engelbrecht, 2019). A secondary goal of supervision aimed at advancing the supervisee to an independent level may merely be to terminate the supervision. However, the supervision process is interminable, hence the supervision process is a cyclical process. In addition, the nature of the supervising process is also influenced by various supervision theories, models, and perspectives (Cf. Engelbrecht, 2019). Consequently, a strengths-based supervision approach involves a cyclical process, which is operationalised by means of particular responsibilities.

The cyclical supervision process involves six phases and their associated tasks. The first phase is *Engagement* and the first task in this phase involves creating an inventory of job competencies for the supervisee (Engelbrecht, 2019; Khosa, 2022). An inventory of jobs competencies document refers to a document that stipulates the knowledge, skills, and values a supervisee requires to deliver services of a high standard to their service users (Engelbrecht, 2019). Ten job-specific abilities have been established by Engelbrecht (2012), which can be altered to match a range of circumstances. These competences offer a collection of independent standards that can be utilised to formulate supervisory outcomes as well as to evaluate and track work performance. According to the organisation's vision, goal, service plan, and specific assignment of the supervisee, the inventory of job-specific competences provides a common language for the organisation to specify practices in a user-friendly manner.

While online supervision can provide many benefits, there are also some potential challenges that can impact the engagement phase of the supervisory process,

including technical difficulties and distractions and the ability to establish rapport between the supervisor and supervisee (Mo & Chan, 2023). Technical difficulties, such as poor internet connection or malfunctioning equipment, can disrupt the flow of the supervision session and interfere with the ability of the supervisor and supervisee to engage effectively (Dymond, Renzaglia, Halle, Chadsey & Bentz, 2008). Hence, more attention may be required to engage online, as opposed to establish rapport and a conducive work alliance and interactional relationship. Online supervision can also be vulnerable to distractions, such as notifications from email, social media, or other online platforms. This can make it challenging for the supervisee and supervisor to focus on the task at hand and to engage fully in the supervision process, which is needed to establish a trustworthy relationship in the supervision dyad (Cf. Shulman, 2021).

The second phase is *assessment* and involves conducting a personal development assessment of the supervisee (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). The competencies that are stipulated on the inventory job-specific competencies and that allow the social work practitioner to provide effective services in a particular work situation are the basis for a personal development assessment of a supervisee. The primary purpose of the personal development assessment is to gather data in order to create a register of learning requirements, assets, and competencies that should be actively addressed in a personal development plan and future supervision sessions (Engelbrecht, 2019; Khosa, 2022).

ICTs can be used in various ways during the assessment phase of supervision. For example, online assessment tools can assist supervisors and supervisees in identifying areas of strength and areas for development (OpenAI, 2023). These tools can range from standardised assessments to self-assessments and can be completed remotely. In addition, supervisors can use video conferencing and recordings of the supervisee's practice to assess their skills and provide feedback. This can be particularly helpful in situations where supervisees and supervisors do not share geographical locations resulting in the supervisor being unable to observe the supervisees practice in person. These tools allow the supervisor to observe the supervisee's practice in real-time and provide feedback in a timely manner (Goodyear, 2014; Reamer, 2013). Furthermore, online surveys and questionnaires can be used to gather information from the supervisee about their strengths, weaknesses, and

areas for improvement. These tools can be completed remotely and can provide valuable data for the assessment process. Overall, ICTs can be a valuable tool for supervisors during the assessment phase of supervision, as they can provide remote access to a range of assessment tools and streamline the process of setting goals and objectives for the supervisee's professional development.

The third phase is *planning* and involves formulating the personal development plan. Based on the personal development assessment, a personal development plan is a tool (which may take the shape of a matrix) that clearly identifies challenges (learning or developmental needs) in order of importance (Engelbrecht, 2019). The supervisee's personal development plan outlines what they will learn (such as specific outcomes pertaining to specific competencies), how they will learn it (such as specific supervision activities in supervision sessions, indicating methods and techniques, and opportunities for demonstration), and how they will be evaluated (for example, what should be demonstrated by the supervisee) (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). In order to fit the supervisee's learning style and complement the supervisor's educational practices, the process of constructing a personal development plan should be shared with the supervisee. However, the supervisor must oversee the structuring, monitoring, and assessment of the plan.

ICTs can be used during the planning phase of supervision by using Online goal-setting tools, such as Trello (<https://trello.com>) or Asana (<https://asana.com>) to create and manage goals for the supervisee. These tools allow supervisors to collaborate with their supervisees, track progress towards goals, and provide feedback in real-time. In addition, ICTs can provide access to a wide range of online learning resources, including webinars, online courses, and instructional videos. These planning ICT tools can ease the workload of the supervisor in terms of monitoring the progress of the supervisee according to the supervisee's individual work plan. Hence, supervisors can use these resources to provide targeted learning opportunities for their supervisees that align with their professional development goals. Moreover, supervisors can use video conferencing platforms to provide virtual coaching and mentoring to their supervisees (Cf. Kanz, 2001). This allows for more flexibility and can facilitate ongoing support and guidance throughout the planning phase. Furthermore, and specifically, collaborative online platforms, such as Google Drive or Microsoft Teams, can be used to create and share documents related to the supervisee's work plan, including

timelines, resources, and progress reports. These platforms facilitate collaboration between the supervisor and supervisee in the process of *constructing* the personal development plan as well as provide a centralised location for all relevant information.

The fourth phase is *contracting*, during which both the supervisor and supervisee comes to an agreement about the nature of the supervisory relationship, activities and methods that will be utilised throughout the supervision process (O'Donoghue, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2019; Khosa, 2022). The supervision contract is normally a written document and signed by both the supervisor and the supervisee, indicating an understanding and agreement. ICTs can be used during the contracting phase of supervision. For example, video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom or Skype, can be used to conduct virtual meetings between the supervisor and supervisee during which terms and conditions of the supervisory relationship are established (Kanz, 2001). This is particularly useful if the supervisor and supervisee are geographically distant or if in-person meetings are not possible due to scheduling conflicts or other constraints. In addition, collaborative online platforms, such as Google Drive or Microsoft Teams, can be used to share documents related to the contract, such as the supervision agreement or performance evaluation forms. This facilitates collaboration between the supervisor and supervisee and ensures that both parties have access to the same information. Electronic signature software, such as DocuSign or Adobe Sign, can be used to sign and share the supervision agreement or other relevant documents electronically. This eliminates the need for paper-based documents and reduces the administrative burden associated with managing physical documents.

The fifth phase is *implementation*, where supervision sessions are conducted (Chibaya, 2018). Supervision sessions are structured learning scenarios that follow a predetermined agenda and have a specific aim or set of results that are based on the supervisee's personal development plan (DSD & SACSSP, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2019). The goal is to promote the worker's work-related knowledge, skills, and values by providing opportunities for the supervisee's development, strengths, and competencies through critical reflection (Engelbrecht, 2019). The same phases and techniques that social workers utilised in general interviewing, are used in these supervision sessions. These supervision sessions can be conducted using ICTs such as MS Teams, Zoom, telephone, or email to mention a few (Mo & Chan, 2023). It is important that the ICT tool selected to conduct supervision compliments the aim of the

supervision session and allows for the execution of its associated tasks. It is also important for the supervisor to take the supervisee's learning style into consideration (Cf. Shulman, 2021) when selecting an ICT tool to conduct supervision to ensure the achievement of the aim of the session and ultimately good practice. This will be elaborated on in sections towards the end of this chapter.

The sixth phase is *evaluation*, where the supervisor evaluates the supervisee's work performance in accordance with their personal development plan. This phase allows both supervisor and supervisee to reflect on the attainment of set outcomes and stipulations in the supervisees personal development plan as well as to identify future development needs (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). This results in a new cycle in the supervision process being launched with a newly defined personal development plan and supervision contract. ICTs can be used during the evaluation phase of supervision (Mo & Chan, 2023). For example, online surveys, such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms, can be used to gather feedback from supervisees about their satisfaction with the supervision process and the effectiveness of the supervision sessions. These surveys can be distributed electronically, making it easy for supervisees to respond at their convenience. These surveys can furthermore be both qualitative and quantitative in nature, with the benefit that its graphical expositions can be composed to visually illustrate the effectiveness of supervision sessions, as experiences by both the supervisor and supervisee (and service users if they are incorporated in feedback regarding the supervisee's service rendering). Video recording and playback technology, such as Zoom or Skype (which are easily to operate on mobile phones/personal computers), can be used to record supervision sessions and play them back for review and evaluation. This allows supervisors and supervisees to review the session and assess its effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and reinforce positive feedback.

Electronic performance monitoring tools, such as Trello or Asana, can be used to track the progress of the supervisee's work and evaluate their performance over time. This allows supervisors to identify patterns and trends graphically in the supervisee's performance and provide targeted feedback and support as needed. Electronic goal setting and tracking tools, such as SMART Goals (<https://weekdone.com/smart-goals-software>) or MyGoals (<https://mygoals.co/>), can be used to set and track goals for the supervisee's professional development. This facilitates ongoing evaluation of the

supervisee's progress and helps the supervisor provide targeted support and feedback.

The cyclical nature, phases, and associated tasks of the supervision process is emphasised. However, the process can proceed in one or more phases simultaneously and the tasks associated with the various phases are flexible. For example, the assessment and planning phase can occur simultaneously as the supervisor and supervisee may formulate the personal development plan as the supervisor is conducting the personal development assessment. The ICTs as described above can thus contribute to the flexibility of the supervision process, since the same ICT tools may be used in different phases of the supervision process for different purposes.

The supervision process along with its phases and associated tasks that allows for learning and building the supervisees professional and personal capacity has been conceptualised in the scope of the use of ICTs in supervision. Next, the researcher conceptualised the supervision methods within the scope of the use of ICTs in supervision.

(b) Supervision methods

The supervisor has the option of using either individual or group supervision, much like in social work intervention (Engelbrecht, 2002). There are times when peer monitoring is also considered a method of supervision if this is contracted with the supervisee. Many supervisors combine several supervision techniques in both individual and group supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019). Individual supervision tends to be the favoured method in South Africa, while group supervision is seen in a similar light to general staff development. Pure staff development should not be regarded as supervision as it does not take the dynamics of supervision into account.

ICTs can be used in individual supervision to facilitate communication between supervisors and supervisees. Supervisors can use email or messaging apps (such as WhatsApp) to provide feedback or to schedule supervision sessions (Goodyear, 2014; Mo & Chan, 2023). Video conferencing tools can also be used to conduct supervision sessions remotely, which is particularly useful when supervisors and supervisees are in different locations (Kanz, 2001; OpenAI, 2023). Additionally, supervisors can use online platforms to provide learning resources or to share relevant articles or research

with their supervisees (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). ICTs can be used in group and peer supervision to facilitate communication and collaboration among supervisees (which is thus a form of peer supervision). Online chat platforms or video conferencing tools can be used to bring together groups of supervisees to discuss cases, share experiences, and receive feedback from their peers and supervisors (Cf. Oterholm, 2009; Reamer, 2013).

Overall, the use of ICTs across different supervision methods (individual, group or peer supervision) can enhance communication, facilitate learning, and improve the quality of supervision. However, it is important to ensure that the use of ICTs is appropriate, ethical, and aligns with the values and principles of supervision. Additionally, training and support may be necessary to ensure that supervisors and supervisees are comfortable and competent in using ICTs to enhance their supervision practices.

(c) Supervision activities

In South Africa, three supervision activities have been identified, namely, coaching, mentoring, and consultation (Cloete, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2012; DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Despite having overlapping foundations, procedures, aims, elements, and competencies, these activities are fundamentally distinct from one another (Engelbrecht, 2021). Consultation means that experienced social workers simply need feedback on specific practice concerns, whereas coaching is characterised by high levels of teaching, and mentoring entails actions in supervision through identification, internalisation, and imitation (Engelbrecht, 2021).

ICTs can be used to support coaching, mentoring, and consultation in social work supervision in several ways. Some of the key ways in which ICTs can be used to facilitate these activities include video conferencing tools such as Zoom or Skype, and can be used to facilitate virtual coaching, mentoring, and consultation sessions. This can be especially useful when face-to-face meetings are not possible. Supervisors can use online resources such as webinars, e-learning courses, and online forums (thus an online network or community of supervisees) to provide coaching and mentoring to their supervisees. This can provide an opportunity for supervisees to learn from experts in the field, access resources that may not be available locally, and engage in ongoing professional development (Mo & Chan, 2023). There are a growing number of online platforms (such as Facebook) that can be used to facilitate coaching

and mentoring in social work supervision. These platforms provide a virtual space for supervisors and supervisees to engage in ongoing dialogue, exchange feedback, and receive support and guidance.

Overall, the use of ICTs can help to expand the reach of coaching, mentoring, and consultation as activities in social work supervision, making it more accessible and convenient for both supervisors and supervisees. However, it is important to ensure that the use of ICTs does not detract from the personal and relational aspects of the interactional supervision, and that there is still a focus on building strong relationships between supervisors and supervisees (Luo & Yeh, 2012; Mo & Chan, 2023). The next section conceptualises how ICTs can be used to execute the supportive function of supervision.

3.4.1.5 The supportive function of supervision

The supportive function of supervision is performed in order to provide motivation so that supervised social workers experience job satisfaction and preserve job stability when dealing with service user's trauma or burnout (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Botha, 2002; Tsui, 2005; Peled-Avram, 2017; Pretorius, 2020). The aim of the support function in social work supervision is to assist social workers in increasing their job satisfaction and work motivation whilst executing their work tasks (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019; Yuliani, 2021). According to Kadushin and Harkness (2014), supportive supervision aims to improve employees' psychological well-being by reducing their chance of experiencing stress and burnout and assisting them in managing their workload. Social work environments typically lack extrinsic rewards like high wages and opulent workspaces (Alpaslan & Scheck, 2012). Thus, intrinsic considerations like the 'feel-good' benefits of the work itself and being treated with respect and admiration by the organisation are what drive motivation and dedication. Thus, according to Beddoe (2017), social workers may advance their careers through supportive supervision. The emotional and social support they receive from supervision also helps them improve reflective social work practice.

The optimal form of supportive supervision strengthens ego defences while empowering the employee to control stress and pressure from both their professional and personal lives (Pretorius, 2020). Restoring emotional balance, boosting adaptation to adversity, reviving faith, and minimising anxiety are all the supervisor's

responsibility (Engelbrecht, 2019). In theory, supportive supervision represents the perennial philosophical problem of caring for the caregiver, given that service users' circumstances can be a cause of stress, particularly in the African contexts (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Stamm, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2019). Personal ties and the workers' understanding of their function as helpers may deteriorate under such circumstances (Coetzee & Klopper, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2019). These difficulties are prioritised in affluent countries because supervisor practice includes providing emotional and psychological assistance, however this may not always happen in practice in African countries. While social service organisations understand the administrative need for supervision, they frequently overlook the supportive component (Engelbrecht, 2019; Pretorius, 2020; Khosa, 2022).

ICTs can be used to enhance the supportive function of supervision, providing supervisors with additional tools to support their supervisees, since communication between supervisors and supervisees may be enhanced. Messaging apps, email, or video conferencing tools can provide regular, real-time, and ongoing communication between supervisors and supervisees, facilitating the provision of emotional support and guidance (Mo & Chan, 2023). This can help to maintain open communication channels and ensure that supervisees feel supported and valued. ICTs, such as WhatsApp text or voice messaging with the proper emoticons to depict emotions, can be utilised to improve peer support among social workers. Emojis are often exhibited as tiny, vibrant graphics that, for example, depict different facial emotions. They are made to express feelings and provide context or tone to text-based communication, enabling supervisees to communicate more successfully online. In order to improve communication, offer feedback, and especially help the supervisee, emojis may be utilised in the supervision of social workers in the following ways (OpenAI, 2023):

Emojis can be used by social workers and supervisors to convey their feelings or mood during conversations. For instance, a manager may use a thumbs-up or cheerful face emoji to show support or approval, or a sad face emoji to show worry or empathy. Furthermore, emojis can also be used as non-verbal clues in written communication to express tone or meaning. They can offer clarity and assist avoid misunderstandings. For example, a wink or tongue-out emoji might signify humour or light-heartedness, ensuring that communications are understood accurately. They may be used to quickly offer feedback or judgment on particular projects or

assignments. When highlighting areas that need work, supervisor may use a warning or caution emoji instead of a tick or star to indicate completion or perfection. Emotional support and inspiration can be put across by means of emojis. To express gratitude for a job well done or to provide assurance through trying circumstances, a supervisor might send an emoji thumbs-up or heart. Emojis can also encourage social workers to consider their own feelings or experiences, which will help them to reflect on themselves. Deeper self-awareness and self-expression are possible when a supervisor requests that a social worker select an emoji that best expresses their emotions in a certain circumstance. Lastly, emojis can be used in supervisory meetings as icebreakers or discussion starters to foster rapport. A welcoming and approachable attitude may be created by exchanging an emoji that is relevant to a common interest or an ongoing event.

It is crucial to remember that the usage of emojis in supervision should be context-appropriate, depending on the supervisor and social worker's established rapport, and consistent with their communication preferences. Emojis should not be used to substitute genuine conversation and professional discourse but rather to advance understanding and connection as a tool in the supportive function of supervision.

Online discussion forums, social media platforms, or video conferencing tools can furthermore bring together a homogeneous network of social workers to discuss challenges, share experiences, and to receive emotional support from peers. This can help to create a supportive and collaborative work environment that promotes learning and professional development.

In the section above, the researcher analysed the supportive function of supervision within the scope of ICTs by defining supportive supervision and describing how ICTs can be used to execute it. The following section will discuss the reasons for the supportive function of supervision being essential to the well-being of both the supervisee and the service users.

(a) Emotional and psychological stress

Social workers and other social service professionals provide services to a variety of service users, including children who require care and protection, people with disabilities, families affected by HIV/AIDS, and abused and abusive people of all ages (Wagaman, Geiger, Shockley, & Segal, 2015; Engelbrecht, 2019). The unfiltered

emotional and moral reality of social work can expose practitioners to excessive stress that, if not considered and integrated in response, may push workers into defensive patterns that are detrimental to their own and service users' interests (Kim & Stoner, 2008; Healy, Meagher & Cullin, 2009). For social workers in Africa, this presents significant difficulties in rural locations where supervisors are frequently absent and therefore unable to assist practitioners in analysing the emotional and moral realities of their job and effectively incorporating them into their decision-making (Engelbrecht, 2019).

Additionally, experienced workers in developing nations run the risk of becoming integrated into and identified with the bureaucratic practices of the organisation, whether such presumptions are accurate or not. When there is no outlet for these emotions and psychological pain, such as counselling or supportive supervision, it can negatively impact the performance of the social worker as well as the organisation (Engelbrecht, 2019). Pines and Maslach (1978) define burnout as a phenomenon of physical and emotional overload caused by job stress, which leads to a poor self-concept, unfavourable attitudes toward work, and a loss of attention and sentiments toward service users. Symptoms of burnout includes feeling physically drained, being more susceptible to colds, tension headaches, digestive challenges, and sleeping disorders amongst other factors (Figely, 2002; Portnoy, 2011; Coetzee & Klopper, 2010). Supervisors of social workers must be cognisant that there are occasions when social workers lose their enthusiasm for their jobs, and this should be addressed immediately (Yuliani, 2021).

In addition, the use of ICTs in social work practice and supervision can also lead to burn out. ICTs are frequently described as a two-edged sword (Diaz, Chiaburu, Zimmerman & Boswell, 2012; Ďuranová & Ohly, 2016). This is due to the always-on connection that ICTs such as mobile devices provide which may negatively impacts social workers health and holistic well-being (Hislop, Axtell, Collins, Daniels, Glover, & Niven, 2015; Kossek, 2016; Gadeyne, Verbruggen, Delanoeije, & de Cooman, 2018). The continuous connection to work may create an avenue that allows supervisors to continue work-related communications before or after the organisations stipulated working hours. In addition, it can also allow for hostile work-related communications outside of working hours and environments.

On the other hand, using ICTs in supervision especially in Africa, where in some cases supervisors and supervisees do not share the same physical offices and therefore cannot have face-to-face supervision may be beneficial (Mo & Chan, 2023). In such a context, supervisors may utilise ICTs that makes provision for videoconferencing such as MS Teams or Zoom in order to distinguish both verbal and non-verbal cues when executing the supportive function of supervision. In addition, supervisors can refer their supervisees to online counselling services or other online mental health resources when needed (OpenAI, 2023). This can provide additional emotional support and ensure that supervisees have access to the resources they need to cope with the emotional demands of their work. Furthermore, supervisors can provide their supervisees with access to a myriad of online resources related to self-care, stress management, and emotional wellbeing. This can help to promote self-care practices among social workers and ensure that they have the tools they need to manage the emotional demands of their work.

It is essential, as noted above, that while ICTs can provide additional tools for emotional support, they should not be seen as a replacement for face-to-face communication or human connection – or interactional supervision as intended by Shulman (2021). Additionally, supervisors should be mindful of ethical and legal considerations when using ICTs to provide emotional support to their supervisees, such as ensuring that communication is secure and confidential (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007; Mo & Chan, 2023). The next section focuses on the factors that impede the supervisory focus and how the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers can lessen the impact of these factors.

3.5 POTENTIAL FACTORS IMPACTING ON THE SCOPE OF THE UTILISATION OF ICT IN SUPERVISION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

During the assessment stage of the supervisory process, there are a number of factors that have the potential to affect how supervision can be identified. For the supervisor to be able to effectively support social workers, they must understand and take these factors, impacting the scope of ICT on supervision, into account with empathy (Engelbrecht, 2019). This remains true for both traditional and ‘e-supervision.’ Although the use of ICTs in supervision may contribute to a new set of potential factors impeding the supervisory process, little to no research exist on whether ICTs require new and additional supervision models, theories, perspectives, skills, challenges,

processes, activities, and functions to mention a few, as well as how the use of ICTs in supervision impacts these concepts.

The scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers gives rise to a new set of potential factors hindering the supervisory process (Mo & Chan, 2023). According to Driscoll and Townsend (2007), online text messages are open to cultural misinterpretation because of the absence of visual clues. Moreover, delays in receiving real time voice or text responses affects the flow of communication. It is important to write clearly when using emails, texts, or social media to convey a message. It is necessary to ensure that the receiver is clear about the meaning of the written message. If there is a misunderstanding of the message, immediate clarification is needed. Sometimes the text may be interpreted incorrectly by the reader because they have their own preconceptions (emanating from differences in the understanding of articulated texts). Mo (2021) highly recommends the development of e-supervision skills and e-supervision processes as the current discussions about this topic is scarce in research literature. The researcher will draw on the potential factors impeding on traditional supervision as coined by Engelbrecht (2019) and conceptualise it in terms of ICTs.

3.5.1 The developmental theory of professional identity

Based on the work of theorists such as Erickson (1968), the developmental theory of professional identity was coined. In order to support the scaffolding of supervisees' critical thinking in their professional performance, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is built on the principles of developmental theory. A developmental model of supervision was developed by Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth (1998), emphasizing on the supervisee's awareness, motivation, and autonomy.

Typically, the developmental theory in a supervision context describes progressive stages on growth of a supervisee's professional identity from beginner to intermediate and eventually advanced level.

Table 3.1. Engelbrecht's (2019) developmental stages of professional identity in supervision adopted to the use of ICTs in supervision.

Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Motivation		
High feelings of anxiousness brought on by the need to acquire knowledge and experience are what primarily motivates supervision.	Due to practical realities, expectations, and the complexity of the task, supervision motivation might change.	The development of a professional identity leads to a consistent drive for supervision.
Autonomy		
Depends on supervision in order to execute work responsibilities.	Has conflicting feelings about needing supervision and assurance to execute work responsibilities.	Is self-assured, self-directed, and aware of when to seek supervision when necessary for their job.
Awareness		
Limited awareness of competencies and difficulties in the workplace and a tendency to rely on outside sources for possibilities of continuing education.	Determine professional skills, weaknesses, and possibilities for continuous education.	Takes responsibility for continued education and is aware of their strengths and weaknesses in the workplace.

Because social work is considered a scarce skill in South Africa, social workers at social work organisations tend to remain in the beginning to intermediate stages of

their professional development rather than reaching an advanced stage (Engelbrecht, 2012). This phenomenon is brought on by the rapid promotion of social workers with promise and the right profile to supervisory positions, particularly when it comes to supervising students during field experience. As a social worker's years of experience cannot be used to interpret the developmental theory of professional identity, it must be understood in terms of advancement based on factors like motivation, autonomy, and awareness (see Table 3.1.).

Adapted to the context of the scope of the use of ICTs in supervision, a social worker who operates at an advanced level of professional identity is someone who keeps abreast with the latest developments within the field. The increased use of ICTs in the social work supervision is considered a fairly new phenomenon (Mo, 2021). Thus, such a social worker would be aware of the policies and guidelines that must be adhered to for the effective use of ICTs in supervision. In addition, such a social worker will also take ownership of their training in the effective use of ICTs in supervision. However, in South Africa, it is possible that many supervisors do not possess advanced professional identities where elements of ongoing education are essential components (Engelbrecht, 2019). This could imply that many supervisors in South Africa are not abreast with scope of use of ICTs in supervision and are not undergoing training.

The professional development of social workers and their supervisors can be significantly influenced by ICTs. These ICTs can be used to facilitate access to a wide range of online learning platforms and resources, including online courses, webinars, podcasts, and videos. These resources can aid in social workers and their supervisors staying abreast the latest research, theory, and best practices in the field, and to develop new skills and knowledge. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter can be used to connect social workers and their supervisors with other professionals in the field, and to access and share information and resources. This can aid in their professional development. ICTs can be used to facilitate online mentoring and coaching relationships between social workers and their supervisors, and between social workers and more experienced professionals in the field. This can provide a valuable source of guidance, support, and feedback, and can help social workers to develop their skills and knowledge, ultimately advancing their professional identities. Furthermore, ICTs can be used to facilitate online peer support groups,

forums and networks for social workers and their supervisors. These groups can provide a safe and supportive environment for social workers to discuss challenging cases, share experiences, and seek advice from their peers which may result in the attribution on competencies and the advancement of professional identities.

Overall, the use of ICTs can help to support the professional development of social workers and their supervisors and ensure that they have the skills and knowledge needed to provide high-quality services to their service users (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). However, it is important to ensure that the use of ICTs does not detract from the personal and relational aspects of professional development, and that there is still a focus on building strong relationships between social workers and their supervisors, and between social workers and their peers (Mo & Chan, 2023). In light of the developmental stages of professional identity, it is however important that supervisees take ownership of their own development and identity (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). If supervisees and their supervisors are not inclined to transformational learning, in terms of their motivation, autonomy and awareness, they may not realise the benefits of the scope of ICTs in supervision and may continue with traditional modes of supervision (OpenAI, 2023). A transformative professional identity of supervisors and their supervisees may thus serve as a platform to accelerate the integration of ICTs in supervision.

In the section above, the researcher conceptualised the Developmental Theory of Professional Development within the context of the scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers. The researcher also analysed how ICTs can be used to advance the professional identities of social workers and their supervisors. Since there are many factors that may potentially impact the supervisory process and the supervisees development, it is appropriate to explore the role that ICTs play in the scope of utilising adult educational principles supervision of social workers.

3.5.2 Adult education principles

The ground-breaking work of Knowles (1971) serves as the foundation for adult educational principles put forth by Kadushin (1985). Adult educational principles are an integral aspect of social work supervision and therefore must be considered, especially whilst executing the educational function of supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019; Khosa, 2022). In Engelbrecht (2019), it was asserted that at the time adult education

was typically not covered in the curriculum of training future social workers, and as a result, supervisors may lack knowledge in this area. This may be a hinderance to the supervision process and the supervisees development depending on previous methods of teaching and learning is improper and might not produce the desired results. This is due to all people being unique and having unique ways and environments in which they learn best and thrive. Therefore, in order to provide supervision that increases the capacity of social workers to execute their tasks effectively, supervisors must evaluate how supervisees learn best and tailor make educational content and strategies to suit the learning needs of supervisees. Supervisors should also be aware that supervisees are autonomous and self-directed; what they require is a favourable learning environment for them to be motivated and passionate. In addition, the supervisee should be regarded as a participant in the supervisory relationship. This can be accomplished by enabling supervisees to set their own goals, agree on their learning speed, and engage in the supervising session schedule preparation.

The use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers can play an essential role in the application of adult education principles, especially whilst executing the educational function. To apply adult principles in supervision, ICTs can be used to provide the supervisee access to self-paced, personalised, collaborative, evaluative, and continuative learning (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). For example, ICTs can provide supervisees access to affordable or free online courses, webinars and e-learning platforms which can be accessed anytime from anywhere. These affordable or free courses, webinars and e-learning platforms provide supervisees with the opportunity to independently develop their own professional identities, thus taking responsibility and ownership for their own learning and development, and gaining the needed skills and knowledge required to render services effectively by staying abreast with the latest developments in the profession (OpenAI, 2023).

ICTs allows for these learning opportunities to be tailored to the supervisee's interest, learning style, and pace. Thus, taking into consideration how the supervisee learns best and providing learning materials according to those specific learning needs and interests. In addition, supervisees can engage with these learning platforms at their time of convenience and at their own pace. Collaboration and e-community (network) learning can assist supervisees. ICT tools such as discussion forums, online group

projects, and social media platforms facilitate collaboration, communication, and community learning amongst supervisees can aid supervision (Mo & Chan, 2023). These collaborative ICT tools can be used in group supervision as supervisees are usually part of a team, since the needs and challenges of service users are usually multi-dimensional which requires the assistance of experts across professional fields. The above-mentioned ICT tools allows for group supervision to take place, for the supervisee to learn different views, and most importantly, to render appropriate services effectively to service users.

In conclusion, ICT can facilitate the application of adult education principles by facilitating access to individualised, self-paced, collaborative, and lifelong learning possibilities. The following section will conceptualise and consider the educational strategies of supervisors as well as the learning styles of supervisees within the scope of the use of ICTs in supervision.

3.5.3 Supervisee learning styles and supervisor education strategies

The work of Kolb (1973) is typically the foundation for learning styles in supervision. In the context of supervision, Kolb's concept of learning preferences can be understood as follows: Convergers, who favour practical applications; divergers, who favour taking a variety of viewpoints; assimilators, who connect well with theoretical models and abstract conceptualisations; and accommodators, who prefer to interact directly with reality and the world.

In the context of using ICTs in supervision, the supervisor must ensure that the platform used to execute the educational function of supervision accommodates the supervisee's respective learning style. For convergers, supervisors can utilise videos as it can portray how theoretical knowledge is applied to a practical, real-life setting. In the case of divergers, supervisors can utilise ICTs such as Zoom to conduct group supervision as it allows for videoconferencing in which multiple people can engage with each other and share their perspectives, giving supervisees access to multiple perspectives of the same scenario. In the case of assimilators, the supervisors can utilise PowerPoint presentations in executing the educational function of supervision as it allows for displaying of the theoretical knowledge. In the case of accommodators, supervisors can use ICT tools that allows for synchronous interaction such as discussion boards, online group projects, and social media platforms as it allows the

supervisee to have real time, immediate and simultaneous interactions. Although examples of learning styles can be viewed as merely a situational pattern of learning behaviour, they can provide the supervisor with guidance on how to approach the supervisee's learning and how to adapt educational strategies in a concerted attempt to help the supervisee grow and become more independent (Engelbrecht, 2019).

To summarise, ICTs can complement a supervisee's learning style; and supervisors can improve learning results by adopting ICT tools that correspond to the supervisee's desired learning style (Stebnicki & Glover, 2001). After analysing learning and educational strategies in the context of ICTs, it is fitting to analyse the blockages in the learning process within the context of ICTs.

3.5.4 Blockages and Power Games of Supervisors and Supervisees

Blockages in supervision can be attributed to prior supervisory experiences, defensive coping mechanisms, issues with power, role conflicts, role fulfilment and organisational restrictions that influence both the supervisor and the supervisee (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006). Power games could develop from several blockages.

In his landmark study on the games people play in supervision, Kadushin (1968) introduced the idea of power games as they manifest in social work supervision. Bernes (1964), as primary author, defines games as a recurrent collection of interactions, frequently repetitive, outwardly rational with a concealed purpose. Due to considerations like the fear of appearing incompetent, these games may be seen as symptomatic patterns of how supervisees and supervisors react to stress and anxiety (Engelbrecht, 2019). A lack of trust and agreement is the foundation of power games. Hence, the purpose of power games is to influence the 'opponent' by changing the nature of the relationship, equating power, and taking control of the environment.

Examples of supervisees games include "if you knew Dostoyevsky like I know Dostoyevsky" (testing the supervisors' knowledge outside her field of expertise) and "So what do you know about it" (claiming to know more than the supervisor) (Engelbrecht, 2019:169). In the context of using ICTs in supervision, supervisors may show incompetency's in their use of ICTs if they are not technologically competent and do not receive appropriate training on how to effectively use ICTs in the supervision of social workers. Research has shown that supervisees in general are younger and more technologically savvy than their supervisors (Engelbrecht 2019). They may

engage in the power games with supervisors in the context of technological fortitude. In this instance the supervisor may play a game such as “I’m really one of you” (proclaiming against policies or regulations of the organisation) (Engelbrecht, 2019:269). In this example, the organisational supervision policy may stipulate the use of ICTs in supervision and the supervisor may not be technically competent; he or she may engage in the above-mentioned power game in order to obtain sympathy or build an alliance with the supervisee about his or her technological incompetency’s.

Furthermore, ICTs can play a role in power games and blockages between supervisors and supervisees in a variety of concrete and observable ways. The following may serve as examples: firstly, if supervisors use ICTs to micromanage their supervisees, it might foster distrust and animosity. This could result in supervisees feeling as if they are not trusted to complete their work independently, which can lead to them being less motivated and productive. Secondly, supervisors can utilise ICTs to communicate their expectations to supervisees as well as to provide feedback on their work (Mo & Chan, 2023). However, if this communication is not clear and consistent, it can lead to confusion and misunderstandings, which in turn can lead to blockages and power games (Mo & Chan, 2023; OpenAI, 2023).

Overall, while ICT can be a useful tool for communication and collaboration between supervisors and supervisees, it is critical that it be used in a transparent, respectful, and supportive manner (Kasworm, Rose & Ross-Gordon, 2010). This can aid avoiding power games and blockages and instead foster a positive and productive working relationship. Furthermore, supervisors can effectively combat power games by simply refusing to participate in them (Tsui 2005; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Finally, when power games are recognised and professionally addressed, they stop.

3.5.6 Structural and Organisational Issues

The supervisor does not always have control over how well the supervisees perform when they are under their supervision. It is likely that despite the supervisor’s best efforts, structural and organisational issues may hinder supervisees’ performances (Engelbrecht, 2019). In accordance with research by Engelbrecht (2012), structural and organisational supervision challenges such as a lack of resources, excessive workloads, and poor employment circumstances for both supervisees and supervisors can occasionally determine how supervision is executed. These issues might result in

"open door" policies or "on the run" supervision, which are both crisis-driven and not really supervision in the traditional sense (Engelbrecht, 2019:164; Chibaya & Engelbrecht, 2022:520).

These interactions between a supervisor and a supervisee are founded on unstructured advice or guidance, and they may also cause supervision to be reduced to a one-dimensional control function where both the supervisor and the supervisee are held accountable (Engelbrecht, 2019). Work demands, a lack of resources, and poor employment circumstances are recurring hard realities and obstacles in social work as a result of neoliberal and resultant managerial practices (Narsee, 2013; Joseph, 2017). If an organisation does not prioritise supervision, structural and organisational problems will always prevail and hinder supervision from enabling social workers to thrive (Pullen-Sansfaçon, Spolander & Engelbrecht, 2012).

In South Africa, due to a lack of resources, many social work supervisors are responsible for supervising more than one office of social workers, and an unmanageable number of supervisees – sometimes, together with a workload consisting of rendering frontline services (Engelbrecht, 2021; Cf. Mo & Chan, 2023). For example, in the NPO sector, one organisation may have different offices, with supervisees in different areas. As a result, many social work organisations do not have a supervisor physically present at all of their different offices, resulting in social workers not having in person access to their supervisors on a daily basis. In order to provide supervision to supervisees, supervisors are required to travel to the respective offices at which their supervisees are located or vice versa. However, the use of ICTs in supervision has made it possible for supervisors to provide supervision to supervisees without sharing a geographical location (Kanz, 2001; Mo & Chan, 2023). Thus, saving travelling time and costs, reducing strain from this resource deprived social work organisations. Using ICTs in supervision also enables supervisees who do not share the same office as their supervisors to have daily contact with supervisors, if need be, for instance, if a crisis arises that a supervisee does not trust their own skill set, knowledge, and experience to effectively and appropriately resolve (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010; Cicco, 2011).

Another example includes a social work organisation that does not have the resources to train both their supervisors and supervisees on effective use of ICTs in supervision,

thereby running the risk of hindering the supervision process that consist of the use of ICTs and ultimately service delivery. However, ICTs have made it possible for both supervisors and supervisees to receive online training that can be completed at their own pace with some even being free. This will equip both the supervisor and the supervisee with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively engage in the use of ICTs in supervision and achieve identified outcomes. In South Africa, there are great discrepancies between the need for social services and the resources available to provide these services. ICTs proved to modify old ways of completing tasks by providing easier, less time-consuming methods. Supervisors in South Africa therefore have the responsibility of staying abreast with innovating ways completing work tasks in order to minimise the demand and pressure brought about by structural and organisational issues.

The use of ICTs in supervision can furthermore lead to a decrease in structural and organisational issues in social work organisations in several ways. ICTs can facilitate communication between different departments and staff members, overcoming silos and barriers to collaboration (Reamer, 2013; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010). This can also assist to prevent information silos and increase overall efficiency by ensuring that everyone has access to the data they need to carry out their jobs. Furthermore, ICTs can automate workflows and procedures, which streamlines administrative operations and minimises paperwork. This could help free up staff members' time so they can work directly with their service users or other more crucial tasks. ICTs may also be used to better manage data, increasing its accuracy, accessibility, and security. By doing so, you may minimise mistakes and improve decision-making by ensuring that crucial information is available when it is needed. Regardless of where staff members are located, ICTs may be leveraged to offer them online training and possibilities for professional development. The general performance and morale of the team may be enhanced by ensuring that everyone has access to the same chances for learning and advancement. ICTs may also be used to evaluate performance and pinpoint areas that need work. This can assist to ensure that employees are carrying out their responsibilities successfully and efficiently, and that organisational objectives are being reached.

In conclusion, by using ICTs to overcome structural and organisational issues, social work organisations can improve their overall performance and effectiveness.

Additionally, ICTs can help to reduce costs, improve data security, and provide staff members with greater flexibility and work-life balance. In the above section, the researcher conceptualised the structural and organisations factors such as a lack of resources impeding on the supervisory process and how the use of ICTs in supervision may overcome those identified factors. The focus of organisations also plays a role in how supervision is executed. Thus, the following section focuses on the way in which ICTs can promote effective supervision practices in a learning organisation with a supportive culture.

3.5.7 Organisational investment in a learning and support culture

In a Canadian study by Globerman and Bogo (2003), it was discovered that social workers' primary motivations for "going the extra mile" despite time and other resource limitations were an organisation's own support and commitment to providing a service, even when outside of its direct area of responsibility. It was further determined that the organisation's investment in fostering a culture of learning, encouraging ongoing professional development among employees, and educational supervision were crucial factors relating to both its own and the employees' dedication. Hence, the many components of supervisory practice cooperate and promote one another for the benefit of the service user (Engelbrecht, 2019).

It can then be deduced that social workers and social work organisations that has a learning culture would be more open to learning about the use of ICTs in social work supervision and take responsibility/ownership for their own transformative learning in this new phenomenon. For example, ICTs can promote a learning culture within organisations in several ways. ICTs can be used to provide online training and educational resources to staff members, allowing them to learn at their own pace and on their own schedule (Bernard and Goodyear, 2019). This can include e-learning modules, webinars, and virtual classrooms. Online learning can assist in ensuring that staff members have access to the latest research and best practices, regardless of their location, thus always staying abreast with the latest developments in the field and providing high quality services. Additionally, ICTs can be used to facilitate collaboration between staff members, promoting ongoing learning and sharing of knowledge (Goodyear, 2014; Oterholm, 2009; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010). This can include online platforms for sharing ideas and feedback, virtual meetings, or social media groups. Collaboration can help to ensure that staff members learn from

one another, share best practices, and work together towards shared goals (OpenAI, 2023).

ICTs can be used to monitor staff members' performance, identifying areas for improvement, and promoting ongoing learning and development. This can include performance management software or online performance evaluations. Performance monitoring can help to ensure that staff members receive regular feedback on their work, and that they are supported in their ongoing learning and development, thus promoting a learning culture. In addition, ICTs can be used to manage knowledge within the organisation, ensuring that important information is easily accessible to staff members. This can include online databases, wikis, or intranets. Knowledge management can help to ensure that staff members have access to the latest research and best practices, and that they are able to learn from the experiences of others within the organisation.

Overall, the use of ICTs can help to promote a learning culture within organisations, ensuring that staff members are able to learn and develop in a way that is flexible, accessible, and collaborative. The next chapter focuses on how the supervisory relationship affects the supervisory process and how the use of ICTs in supervision can enhance the supervisory relationship.

3.5.8 The supervisory relationship

The supervisory relationship between supervisors and supervisees is a critical component of social work practice, as it provides support, guidance, and professional development opportunities to the supervisee (Wright & Griffiths, 2010). With the increasing use of ICTs in social work supervision, there are many ways in which ICTs can enhance the supervisory relationship. Driscoll and Townsend (2007) recommended that both the supervisor and supervisee come to an agreement in advance on the confidentiality, documentation, and timing of the use of ICTs in supervision. Mo (2021) states that this preparation facilitates the development of online supervisory relationships. Furthermore, Han Mo (2021) suggested four factors that promotes the development of the online supervisory relationship. These factors include: (i) digital literacy and usability, which can lower anxiety and boost trust in the working alliance - all factors that encourage the creation of online supervisory relationships (Webber & Deroche, 2016); (ii) a mutual appreciation for the time and

effort put forth in online supervision, which is necessary for the supervisory relationship to remain intact (Kasworm *et al.*, 2010); (iii) supervisors who respond quickly and asynchronously can boost supervisees' satisfaction with online supervision (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010); and (iv) displaying professional skill in helping supervisees, promoting self-reflection, and accurately assessing supervision outcomes (Cicco, 2011).

Gender, ethnic, and cultural difficulties must also be accounted for when examining working relationships in an online supervisory practice (Mo, 2021; Mo & Chan, 2023). It is obvious that the role of cultural dimension has a considerable impact on the supervision of social workers in the setting of South Africa's diverse cultural composition (Engelbrecht, 2019; Cf. Mo & Chan, 2023). As they are influenced by factors like class, religion, and regional differences, cultural differences between supervisors and supervisees in this situation may result in divergent conceptions of the world and work-related concerns (Hofstede, 2001). It is possible to identify a wide range of cultural differences that have an impact on supervision, including variations in how people perceive and act on power dynamics, decision-making processes, interpersonal relationships, negotiations, and accomplishments, as well as differences in how people approach their work and relate to their environment, gender roles, and individual and group centeredness (Cf. Engelbrecht 2019).

Supervision often involves cross-cultural issues, and it is necessary for supervisors to develop cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and supervise in a culturally appropriate manner (Burkard, Johnson, Madson, Puiit, Contreras-Tadych, Kozlowksi, Hess & Knox, 2006; Engelbrecht, 2006). Deane, Gonsalvez, Blackman, Saffioti and Andresen (2015) emphasised the importance of cultural competence when matching a distance supervisor and supervisee. Additionally, Mo (2021) advises that more research regarding the use of ICTs in supervision should be done in non-Western nations. These nations face particular challenges because of their distinctive cultures, laws governing cyber security, and attitudes toward data privacy and confidentiality. Priya *et al.* (2018) advises supervisors utilising ICTs to be cautious about the content they plan to communicate with their supervisees. Sensitive words like mentioning a service user's name or personal information, an organisation's internal data, or criticism of the government or policies must be avoided in several nations (HNQQ, 2013). The self-reflection of supervisors towards supervisees who come from different

cultural backgrounds may facilitate supervisory professional development. It may also have a positive effect on strengthening supervisory relationships (Mo, 2021).

The role that genders disparities may have in supervision is closely tied to the function of cultural aspects. In South Africa and social work, women make up the majority of the social work workforce, specifically in middle management and supervisory roles. These women brought feminine traits that are appreciated in supervision to the social work setting, like fostering relationships and teamwork (Bradley, Engelbrecht & Hojer, 2010). The diverse aspects of femininity and masculinity are defined by intracultural distinctions such as country, ethnicity, religion, generations, and class because gender is a social construct (Engelbrecht, 2019).

Insensitivity to cross-cultural issues and concerns around gender, racial, and cultural differences create problems in the supervisory relationship which in turn impacts the effectiveness of supervision (Bryne & Hartley, 2010). This may be especially important to consider when matching a distance supervisor and supervisee. For example, when matching a male supervisee with a distant female supervisor, the supervisor may undermine the supervisee as he equates him being male to being more competent than his female supervisor or more competent in using ICT tools in supervision, which may create a supervision power hierarchy.

It is thus essential that the use of ICTs in supervision are helpful and not harmful in the enhancement of the supervisory relationship. ICTs can enhance the supervisory relationship by providing opportunities for more frequent and ongoing communication between supervisors and supervisees. For example, instant messaging or email can be used to address minor issues or questions that arise between supervision sessions. This ongoing communication can help to build trust and rapport between the supervisor and supervisee, leading to a stronger and more effective supervisory relationship (Mo & Chan, 2023). Another way that ICTs can enhance the supervisory relationship is by facilitating greater collaboration and sharing of resources. Online platforms, such as shared document folders or online forums, can be used to share relevant resources, such as research articles or training materials, which can enhance the supervisee's knowledge and skills. This collaboration can also provide opportunities for the supervisor and supervisee to engage in dialogue and reflection on the resources, further enhancing the supervisory relationship. Additionally, ICTs

can be used to provide greater support and feedback to the supervisee. For example, track changes and comments on reports of supervisees, video recording and analysis tools can be used to record and review supervision sessions or supervisees' individual, group, or community interventions, allowing supervisors to provide relevant, direct feedback and providing opportunities for greater transparency and accountability. This feedback must be considered to ensure that the supervisee is benefiting from the supervisory process. Although ICTs can be used to promote the supervisory relationship, the unethical use of ICTs in the supervisory relationship can break down this relationship, hindering the supervisory process, the supervisees professional development and ultimately service delivery. Thus, it is appropriate to analyse how the unethical use of ICTs in supervision impedes on the supervisory process by analysing ICT-enacted abusive supervision.

3.5.9 ICT-enacted abusive supervision

Tepper (2000), coined the concept of abusive supervision and it has caught the attention of many researchers since then (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Thau & Mitchell, 2010; Lian, Ferris & Brown, 2012; Lian, Diaz, Chiaburu, Zimmerman & Boswell 2014; Kacmar, Whitman & Harris, 2016). Abusive supervision is defined as the supervisees' perception of the extent to which supervisors engage in hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours on a consistent basis, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2016). Furthermore, the perception of supervisees of the supervisors' use of ICTs to engage in hostile communications can be defined as technology-enacted abusive supervision (Valle, Carlson, Zivnuska, Harris & Harris, 2021). According to Valle *et al.* (2021) one can distinguish between traditional conceptualisations of abusive supervision and technology-enacted abusive supervision due to the inescapability of the medium. ICTs broadens the supervisor's sphere of influence, allowing the supervisor to maintain a constant, uninterrupted stream of abusive communication and harassment even after hours (Hislop *et al.*, 2015; Kossek, 2016; Gadeyne *et al.*, 2018).

The immediate psychological consequence of experiencing abusive supervision involves job dissatisfaction, employee resistance, distress, and loss of self-esteem (Burton & Hoobler, 2006; Tepper, 2007; Martinko, Harvey, Brees & Mackey, 2013; Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017). Research on abusive supervision has explored the effects of verbal abuse such as public ridicule, explosive outbursts, and intimidation as well as non-verbal abuse such as withholding valuable information,

displaying silent treatment, and breaking promises (Tepper, 2000; Zellars, Tepper & Duffy, 2002; Aryee, Chen, Sun & Debrah, 2007; Harris, Kacmar & Zivnuska, 2007). In addition, researchers found the experience of abusive supervision to result in adverse behavioural outcomes such as increased aggression, deviance, and work-family conflict (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Carlson, 2012; Valle *et al.*, 2021).

Valle *et al.* (2021) views ICT-enacted abusive supervision as a specific subset of abusive supervision. This is due to ICT-enacted abusive supervision specifically focusing on the supervisors' use of ICTs to engage in hostile communication with the supervisee. The type of abusive behaviours may be similar to in person abuse such as public ridicule, explosive outburst and withholding information, however, because these abusive behaviours occur through ICTs as a medium, they may be less predictable than traditional in-person abusive supervisory communications. This is because it exists in the public (online) domain and may fit into a prevalent "cancel culture". The word "cancel culture" has a murky history that is difficult to pinpoint, but in the early to mid-2010s it rose to prominence and started to be used in everyday speech (OpenAI, 2023). Prior to subsequently expanding to larger debates, it was largely employed in social media situations. Cancel culture is a contemporary internet phenomenon in which people or organisations call for the boycott or public shaming of a person, organisation, or institution. Typically, this occurs in response to allegedly objectionable behaviour or contentious utterances. It entails the widespread use of social media platforms to disparage and isolate people, frequently leading to harm to their reputations, the loss of job possibilities, or social exclusion. This may be a direct result of abusive supervision.

Abusive supervision is a serious issue in the workplace, and it can have a negative impact on the mental and emotional well-being of supervisees. In contrast, and a positive result, is that ICTs can be used to assist supervisees in overcoming abusive supervision in a number of ways. ICTs can be used to provide anonymous reporting mechanisms for supervisees who are experiencing abusive supervision. This can include online reporting platforms or anonymous feedback forms. Such platforms can help to empower supervisees to report abuse without fear of retaliation, allowing organisations to address the issue in a timely and appropriate manner. ICTs can be used to provide supervisees with access to support networks, including employee assistance programs, online counselling, or peer support groups. Such networks can

help supervisees to cope with the emotional impact of abusive supervision and provide them with the resources they need to overcome it. Training and education in the recognition and manner in which address abusive supervision can also be facilitated with the use of ICTs amongst supervisees. This can include online training modules, webinars, or virtual classrooms. Such training can help to empower supervisees to recognise abusive behaviour and take appropriate steps to address it. In addition, ICTs can be used to keep accurate and detailed records of supervision activities, including feedback and performance evaluations. These records can provide evidence of abusive behaviour, helping to hold supervisors accountable and ensuring that the issue is addressed appropriately (OpenAI, 2023).

Overall, the use of ICTs can assist supervisees in overcoming abusive supervision, providing them with the resources they need to cope with the emotional impact of such behaviour and take appropriate steps to address it. However, in the absence of the knowledge that ICTs can assist supervisees in overcoming ICT-enacted abusive supervision, supervisees may engage in emotional labour surface acting to deal with its effects (Valle *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it is appropriate to analyse emotional labour surface action in the context of the use of ICTs in supervision.

3.5.9.1 Abuse and emotional labour surface acting

The Conservation of resource theory (COR) suggests that social work supervisees exposed to ICT-enacted abusive supervision may have to deploy energy resources in order to manage their reaction to the abuse. Valle *et al.*, (2021), argue that this deployment of energy likely takes the form of emotional labour due to the management or alteration of emotion when carrying out one's work. For example, emotional labour occurs when a social worker is forced to display job-appropriate emotions that conflict with his or her true feelings. Thus, having to mask one's internal state requires emotional labour surface acting. This emotional labour surface acting is an extension of harmful supervision, as identified by Wynne (2020) in her South African study on the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers. For example, when a supervisor engages in ICT-enacted abusive supervision, the supervised social worker must find a way to hide any anger or resentment they may feel towards the abusive supervisor and remain calm on the surface (and online) in order to preserve the supervisory relationship. The supervisee may thus appear to be helpful and cheerful online when he or she may actually be feeling frustrated.

Therefore, it is suggested that supervisees who experience ICT-enacted abusive supervision are likely to engage in emotional labour surface acting in order to manage their resulting negative emotions, which may result in emotional exhaustion.

3.5.9.2 Abuse and emotional exhaustion

Brotheridge and Lee (2002) concluded that the labour associated with the attempt to conserve resources amid threats was taxing psychologically and physiologically. Evidently, this resource depletion assists in explaining findings that suggests that the effort involved in emotional labour surface acting is associated with low job satisfaction, somatic complaints and increased levels of burnout (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011). In the context of online customer service workers, the same results have been replicated, indicating that the emotional labour surface acting involved in online customer service is associated with job burnout (Ishii & Markman, 2016).

This section focused the possible impact that the unethical use of ICTs in supervision may have on supervisees as well as the opportunities offered by ICTs to effectively deal with this potentially negative impact. Therefore, the next section focuses on ethics of the use of ICTs in supervision.

3.6 ETHICS OF ICTs IN SUPERVISION

ICTs have become increasingly prevalent in social work supervision, providing supervisors and supervisees with a significant range of benefits, including improved accessibility, communication, and collaboration (Mo & Chan, 2023). However, the use of ICTs in supervision raises numerous ethical concerns that must be carefully considered and addressed. These ethical concerns include maintaining service users' and social workers' confidentiality, privacy, and professional boundaries; provision for the use of ICTs in supervision in supervision policies; social workers access to ICTs and the training of social workers and supervisors on effective use of ICTs to achieve organisational goals (Andrew, 2012; Parkinson & Loue, 2015; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). These ethical concerns will be discussed below.

3.6.1 Policies and guidelines

Supervisors must be aware of their obligations and how to create reasonable expectations for the use of ICTs in supervision (Mo, 2021). In South Africa, the Supervision Framework provided employers of social workers with detailed instructions on what should be included in a supervision policy, including information

on the ratio of supervisors to supervisees, a statement on non-discriminatory practices, requirements for a performance management system, and techniques for resolving conflicts (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Despite this, social work organisations in this context focus their supervision policies on management components of monitoring and some do not have supervision policies at all (Engelbrecht, 2015; Parker, 2017; Ornellas, 2018; Khosa, 2022).

The use of ICTs in supervision must be subject to appropriate accountability and oversight, including clear policies and procedures for the use of such ICTs (Parkinson and Loue, 2015). Many existing guidelines abroad, including the NASW (National Association of Social Workers of the USA, 2017), BASW Social media policy (British Association for Social Workers, 2018), and Ethics and practice guideline- social media, information and communication technologies (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2016), clearly outline the procedures and standards for online supervision. However, many countries lack their moral norms and regulations for the use of ICTs in the management of social workers (Reamer, 2015). Without these criteria, it is left to each supervisor and supervisee to assess the risk involved in each supervision strategy (McAdams & Wyatt, 2010). Therefore, supervisors across the world are urged to review the policies on the use of ICTs in social work supervision, where appropriate (Mo, 2021). They must ensure that appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place to ensure that the use of ICTs is align with the values and principles of social work practice. There is also an urgent need to standardise the use of ICTs in supervision in specific contexts in order to minimise the risks and to keep practice safe (McAdams & Wyatt, 2010; Mo, 2021).

3.6.2 Consent, confidentiality, privacy, and boundaries

Supervisees must provide informed consent to the use of most ICTs in supervision, including an understanding of the potential risks and benefits of such technologies (Carlisle *et al.*, 2017). Supervisors must ensure that supervisees have the opportunity to ask questions and fully understand the implications of using ICTs in supervision. In addition, the use of ICTs in supervision can pose significant risks to confidentiality and privacy, particularly in relation to the transmission and storage of sensitive information. Social work supervisors must ensure that appropriate security measures are in place to protect confidential information, such as secure servers, encryption, and password protection (Brandoff & Lombardi, 2012; Vaccaro and Lambie, 2007). Furthermore, the

use of ICTs can blur professional boundaries, particularly in relation to the use of social media or other personal communication channels. Social work supervisors must ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained, and that communication is conducted in a professional manner on appropriate platforms (Mo & Chan, 2023).

Overall, social work supervisors must ensure that appropriate measures are in place to protect confidentiality and privacy, ensure informed consent and maintain professional boundaries. The ethical use of ICTs in supervision can enhance the quality of supervision and promote positive outcomes for supervisees while ensuring that the principles and values of social work practice are upheld.

3.6.3 Access to ICTs and training

The use of ICTs must be accessible and equitable for all supervisees, regardless of their technological proficiency or resources. Currently, there has not been much effort put into training supervisors to effectively and ethically use ICTs in the supervision of social workers (Mo, 2021). The use of technology for daily communication is becoming more and more common among supervisors. However, it is advised to provide training and supervision for people who are unfamiliar with using new technologies (Graf & Stebnicki, 2002; Mo & Chan, 2023). Because they are unfamiliar with the advantages and disadvantages of using each type/tool of ICT, supervisors need to receive specialised training in using these systems in order to make plans to lessen the impact of these disadvantages on their supervision (Mo, 2021).

In addition, some supervisees may value face-to-face interactions. Thus, the use of ICTs must be culturally sensitive, accounting for the cultural beliefs and values of supervisees (Mo & Chan, 2023). Social work supervisors must ensure that the use of ICTs does not compromise the cultural safety of supervisees and that appropriate accommodations are made to ensure cultural competence. Therefore, social work supervisors must ensure that appropriate training and support are provided to ensure that all supervisees are able to participate fully in the supervision process. In addition, the effective use of ICTs in supervision requires both supervisors and supervisees to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and training to use these technologies effectively and responsibly. Therefore, it is important for both supervisors and supervisees to undergo training to learn how to effectively use ICTs in supervision (Andrew, 2012).

More specifically, training can help supervisors and supervisees to develop the necessary technical skills to use ICTs effectively in supervision. This includes the ability to use video conferencing software, messaging platforms, and other digital tools, as well as the ability to manage data and information effectively. Training can also help supervisors and supervisees to understand the features and functionalities of different ICTs, enabling them to choose the most appropriate technologies for different functions of supervision (Stebnicki & Glover, 2001). Thirdly, training can help supervisors and supervisees understand the ethical and professional considerations associated with the use of ICTs in supervision (Parkinson & Loue, 2015). This includes issues around confidentiality, privacy, and security, as well as issues around appropriate professional boundaries as previously mentioned. Training can also help supervisors and supervisees to understand the potential risks associated with the use of ICTs in supervision, including the risk of miscommunication, misinterpretation, or unintended consequences. Thus, according to Mo and O' Donoghue (2018), e-supervision skills include immediate response, preparation, questioning, clarification, listening, and empathy. In addition, the questioning skills involved are frequently used to clarify messages and explore deeper meanings, feelings, and opinions behind messages. Supervisors must be sensitive to contextual factors and ask further questions to clarify the situation facing the supervisee.

Furthermore, training can help supervisors and supervisees to develop the necessary communication and collaboration skills to use ICTs effectively in supervision (Andrew, 2012). This includes the ability to communicate effectively through digital media, as well as the ability to work collaboratively with others using online tools and platforms. Training can also help supervisors and supervisees to develop strategies for managing conflicts or misunderstandings that may arise during the use of ICTs in supervision (Mo & Chan, 2023). Training can help supervisors and supervisees to develop a shared understanding of the goals and objectives of supervision, and how ICTs can be used to support these goals. This includes understanding the role of ICTs in promoting learning and development, as well as the role of ICTs in supporting ongoing communication and collaboration between supervisors and supervisees. Finally, training can assist supervisors and supervisees to develop a shared understanding of the challenges and limitations associated with the use of ICTs in supervision (Lund & Schultz, 2015). This includes understanding the potential barriers

to the use of ICTs, such as technical difficulties or accessibility issues, as well as understanding the potential limitations of ICTs in terms of their ability to support certain functions of supervision.

Thus, training and access to ICTs is essential for both supervisors and supervisees to effectively and ethically use ICTs in supervision.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is evident that the use of ICTs in supervision of social workers may be more helpful than harmful. However, the myriad of tools and ethical complexities brought about by the massive scope of ICTs in supervision beg for empirical research, which will be reported on in the following chapter. In this chapter, the researcher analysed the functions of supervision namely, administration, education, and support within the context of ICTs. This was done by conceptualising supervision and its functions and analysing how supervisors can execute these functions whilst using ICTs during supervision with supervisees. Even though it is evident that ICTs are used in supervision and can be used to execute these main functions, little to no literature exists on how supervisors use ICTs to execute the functions of supervision, especially in a South African context. Therefore, this chapter aimed to discuss and analyse the use of ICTs in the execution of the functions of supervision, thus bridging the gap in literature. It is evident that the use of ICTs has many benefits such as connecting supervisees with highly skilled, qualified, and experienced supervisors and learning opportunities such as access to ChatGPT. It is also clear that ICTs offer supervisees supportive measures and access to psychological resources such as online counselling. Furthermore, it is evident that ICTs can modify and reduce the frequency of administrative tasks for both supervisors and supervisees through the use of different technological tools. However, it is also clear that the use of ICTs in supervision are not without disadvantages such as technology-enacted abusive supervision, where supervisors use ICTs as a medium to abuse their supervisees. Thus, it is important to ensure that the use of technology is appropriate, ethical, and aligns with the values and principles of social work practice.

To conclude, supervisors should be aware of which ICTs best execute which function of supervision. Thus, both supervisors and supervisees must take a more proactive approach in recommending designs of ICTs that enable supervision to allow

supervisees to thrive and that minimises the potential factors that may impede supervision. Therefore, the next chapter empirically investigates the scope of ICTs utilised in supervision within a South African organisational context.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE SCOPE OF ICTS USED IN THE SUPERVISION OF SOCIAL WORKERS BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK ORGANISATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The fourth objective of this study is to empirically investigate the scope of ICTs in the supervision of social workers within their organisational contexts. The results and findings of the empirical investigation will be discussed and presented in this chapter. Chapter one of this study has provided the reader with a detailed background on the potential use of ICT tools in social work supervision. It furthermore expanded on the goals and objectives of the study, as well as the research methodology used to conduct the study. Chapter two expanded the reader's understanding of the use of ICT tools in social work and social work organisations in both a local and global context. Whereafter chapter three analysed the functions of supervision within the context of the potential scope of ICT in South African social work organisations. It also analysed potential constraints on the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers.

Using the framework provided by the preceding chapters as a basis, chapter four will present the findings of the empirical investigation and thereby expanding on social workers' experiences of the use of ICT tools in their supervision at respective social work organisations in the Western Cape. To facilitate a thorough extension of the findings from participant interviews, the findings will be presented in graphs, tables, themes, sub-themes, categories, and relative narratives.

SECTION A

This section will provide a brief overview of the research methodology employed to conduct this study and present some reflections. Chapter one provides a more thorough explanation of this research methodology.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section will review the research approach, research design, sampling methods, data collection, and data analysis that were employed to conduct this research.

4.2.1 Research approach

The research objectives of this study were accomplished using a qualitative approach. Research that transmits participant experiences, perceptions, and the meaning they assign to it is referred to as using a qualitative approach (Fouché, 2021a). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this study methodology is often used in the field of social work. This research approach was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the scope of ICTs used in the supervision of social workers. Furthermore, this afforded the researcher the opportunity to investigate and assess specific meanings, attitudes, descriptions, and experiences with supervisors in relation to NQSWs' preparation for practice.

Additionally, both deductive and inductive reasoning were used in this research investigation. Deductive reasoning is the process by which a researcher moves from broad ideas to specific findings (Fouché, 2021a). Deductive reasoning was used as the researcher first completed a literature analysis of the body of knowledge and theories on the subject, which allowed the researcher to come to particular findings concerning the use of ICTs to the supervision of social workers. Moving from individual observations to broad conclusions about the phenomenon under study is known as inductive reasoning (Fouché, 2021a). Following the completion of the empirical investigation, a thorough collection of themes was established using inductive reasoning, from which broad conclusions and suggestions could be drawn (Fouché, 2021a). This enabled the researcher to gain a broad understanding of the scope of use of ICTs in supervision in a South African social work organisational context.

4.2.2 Research design

This research study is an exploratory-descriptive study which combines both explorative and descriptive research designs. Exploratory research is used to obtain

an understanding and a preliminary explanation of a phenomena, circumstance, community, or individual (Blaikie, 2010). Descriptive research paints a picture of the circumstance, social context, or connection (Neuman, 2014). When conducting descriptive research, the researcher starts with a clearly defined topic and undertakes studies to adequately explain it (Fouché, 2021b). Therefore, an exploratory study design was used since using ICT in supervision is a new and prevalent practice, and because this is a new area of interest with little fundamental knowledge (Fouché, 2021b). The descriptive research design was also appropriate as it allowed the researcher to learn about how and why ICTs are utilised (thus the scope) in the supervision of social workers.

4.2.3 Sampling methods

Due to this being a qualitative study and the researcher was interested in gaining an understanding of the scope of ICTs in social worker supervision rather than generalising the findings, a sample was chosen using non-probability sampling. The odds of choosing a particular person are unknown in non-probability sampling since the researcher is unsure of the population's size or the number of participants (Gravetter & Larry, 2016). Purposive sampling was used as the non-probability sampling technique. According to Grinnel and Unrau (2008) and Monette Sullivan and DeJong (2005), intentionally sampling is defined as sampling that is purely dependent on the researcher's judgment.

The participant had to meet the following criteria for inclusion:

- be a registered frontline social worker;
- work at any social work organisation in South Africa;
- have experienced face-to-face supervision;
- have experienced any form of ICT in supervision;
- be willing to participate in their personal capacity (thus not representing any organisation);
- be willing to share their experience of ICT in supervision in English.

Since South African supervisors were more likely to use ICTs to supervise social workers during the Covid-19 pandemic and its lockdown periods, the researcher used a sample of 17 social workers who had served as frontline workers during these times.

Data saturation was reached after the researcher concluded the seventeenth interview as enough data has been collected and the reflections became repetitive. Thus, the researcher concluded the data collection process after interviewing 17 participants. Participants came from a variety of organisations and were recruited from the researcher's professional social work network. The researcher had access to the contact information of these possible study participants on her personal digital devices. In addition to other social workers from the researcher's social and professional circles, the researcher's professional network also includes social professionals from the many organisations with which the researcher interacts. The participants took part in the study in their individual and professional capacities as members of the social work profession because the researcher was interested in their perspectives and experiences as frontline social workers in the setting of a social work organisation. As a result, the researcher did not need approval from the social workers' employers or relevant organisations. The researcher telephoned these prospective members of her professional network to conduct a screening process to see if they fit the requirements for inclusion. Additionally, during this telephone contact, the researcher asked participants whether they would be interested in participating in the study, provided them with the pertinent details about the study, and discussed consent. As opposed to social work supervisors, social workers were chosen as study participants because the researcher was particularly interested in social workers' opinions and experiences with the use of ICTs for the purposes of supervision.

4.2.4 Data collection

The researcher chose interviewing as the data collecting strategy due to the qualitative nature of the study. According to Voutsina (2018), an interview is a social interaction where the subject and the interviewer are expected to share information. For cost and time savings, the interviews were performed online using MS Teams. The interviews with the participants were transcribed by MS Teams, improving accuracy and saving the researcher the time and labor of human transcription. In accordance with the Interim ethical guidelines for social workers in South Africa addressing technology-supported social work services (SACSSP, 2020), the researcher took the appropriate precautions to guarantee that confidentiality was preserved. Interviews were planned and agreed upon at times that worked best for participants. The interviews were taped with the participants' consent in order to get reliable data. There is a recording feature

in MS Teams which the researcher used, and the interviews were automatically recorded and transcribed after obtaining consent from the participants. Before the researcher started the interviews, the recording and transcription features of MS Teams were checked to make sure that the participants' replies would be correctly captured and transcribed. The researcher performed the interviews with the participants in English as that was a requirement for participation.

4.2.5 Data analysis

Through the audio recording feature of Microsoft Teams and taking notes for transcription, the researcher captured the replies from the interviews. Additionally, when conducting the interviews, the researcher chose to use MS Teams' transcription feature, which automatically produced written transcripts of the interviews. In order to ensure accurate data collection, the researcher examined the automatically generated transcriptions produced by MS Teams immediately after each interview. At this point, the material was still fresh in the researcher's mind. This was a crucial and required step because, among other things, accents might sometimes affect the accuracy of MS Teams transcriptions. In order to become comfortable with the material, data familiarisation, sometimes referred to as data immersion, entails playing back the audio recording and reading the transcriptions again (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021). The words used by participants were scrutinized in the context of their own distinctive vocabularies in order to capture what they were truly expressing. Based on how well the researcher understood what was read, colour codes were assigned. When using colour coding, text was highlighted in a certain colour, and each colour had a meaning or number associated with it. In relation to the ICTs utilised in the supervision of social workers, the researcher discovered significant themes and recurring concepts during this phase. Furthermore, the researcher used categorisation to find and identify trends throughout this phase. The researcher examined the discovered themes in connection to the coded data and research questions and decided if they needed more shaping, clarification, or rejection since the story the themes tell should address the research questions. The researcher also created typologies to aid in the conceptual tying together of various topics (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016).

SECTION B

This section will provide the participant particulars of the frontline social workers who participated in this study and whose responses were analysed for the purposes of this study.

4.3 PARTICIPANT PARTICULARS

Information regarding the participants include the years of experience as a practicing social worker, their field of service, the types of services they render as frontline social workers. This information is essential, as the goal of the study was to gain an understanding of social workers' experiences of the use of ICTs in their supervision. Furthermore, these participant particulars enabled the researcher to fully understand the participants responses and to analyse them accordingly.

4.3.1 Individual employment particulars

This section describes the research participants in terms of their years of experience as practicing social workers, the type of organisation they are employed at, their field of service and the type of services they are responsible for rendering at their respective organisations. This enabled the research to analyse the responses of the research participants in context, which, in turn, will allow the reader to understand the narratives and the analysis thereof further on in this chapter.

Table 4. 2 Participants individual employment particulars

Participant	Years of Experience	Type of Organisation	Field of Service
Participant 1	3	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 2	2	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 3	2	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 4	8	Government	Health services
Participant 5	7	Private practice	Child protective services
Participant 6	2	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 7	5	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 8	7	Government	Child protective services
Participant 9	3	Private practice	Education
Participant 10	5	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 11	15	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 12	3	Non-governmental organisation	Child protective services
Participant 13	5	Non-governmental organisation	Homeless services
Participant 14	5	Non-governmental organisation	Immigration services
Participant 15	6	Non-governmental organisation	Immigration services
Participant 16	8	Non-governmental organisation	Homeless services
Participant 17	7	Non-governmental organisation	Health services

4.3.2 Years of experience

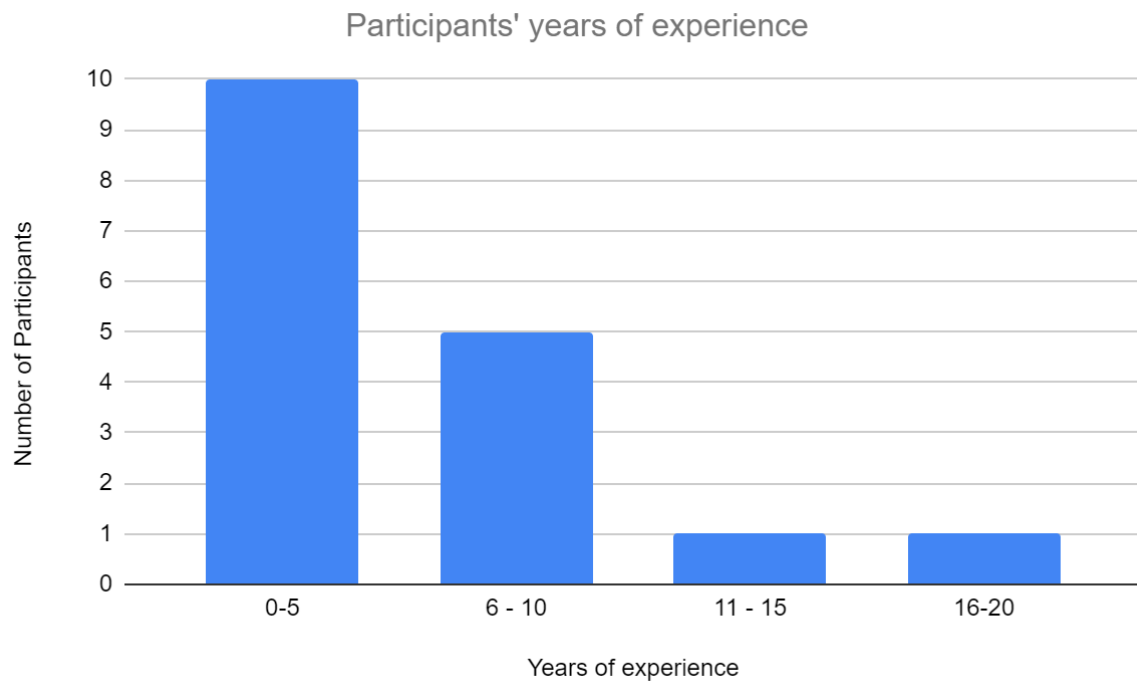


Figure 4. 1. Participants years of experience as practicing social workers (n=17)

According to chapter 2, section 17 of the Social Service Professions Act ,110 of 1978 as amended, a social worker is a person who has registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Ten participants have experience that ranges between 0-5 years, five participants have 6-10 years experiences, one participant has 15 years of work experience, and another has over 18 years of experience (Figure 4.1.). The participants' years of experience assisted the researcher in understanding how far back ICTs were introduced in supervision. Furthermore, the participants' years of experience can also indicate their age which contributes to their openness toward to the use of ICTs in their supervision as well as their ease of use, ultimately affecting their experience of the use of ICTs (Engelbrecht, 2019). A limitation of this study is that the researcher did not collect information regarding the age of participants.

4.3.3 Percentage of participants in different social work fields

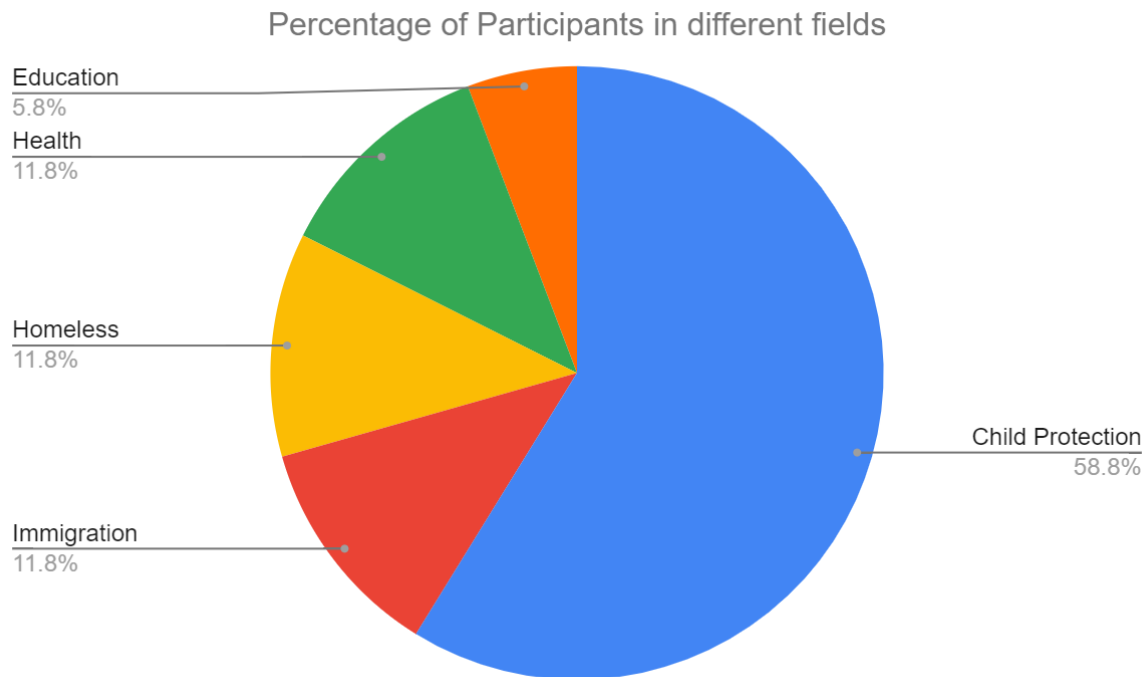


Figure 4.2. Percentage of participants practicing in different social work fields (n=17)

The research participants were employed in different fields of social work. Ten (59%) of the participants were employed at child protection organisations (Figure 4.2.). This indicated the majority of participants worked in child protection. This concurs with South African research that suggests that child protection is the biggest field in social work nationally (Strydom, Spolander, Engelbrecht & Martin, 2017). Two participants (12%) were employed in the immigration field, two (12%) in the homeless sector, two (12%) in the health sector and one (6%) in the education sectors. This means that the research participants were employed in five different social work fields, this contributed to the researchers understanding of the scope of ICTs used in supervision across these fields. However, due to most of the participants being employed at a child protection organisation, the narratives mostly reflect the experiences of the use of ICTs in supervision at child protection organisations.

SECTION C

This section presents the themes, sub-themes and categories that were identified through the data collection process. All participants' narratives have been italicised.

4.4 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

This research study generated four themes and associated sub-themes and categories which is illustrated in the table below.

Table 4.3. Themes, sub-themes and categories

Themes	Sub-Themes	Categories
Social work interventions	The use of ICTs	Types
		Frequency
		Online interventions
		The use of
		The experience
		Hybrid practice
Supervision	Face-to-face supervision	Frequency
		Not prioritised
	Face-to-face Functions	Administrative supervision
		Educational supervision
		Supportive supervision
	Changes in supervision	Before Covid frequency and use
		Hybrid supervision
		Face-to-face supervision

	ICTs in Supervision	Types during Covid-19
		Types after Covid-19
		Face-to-face supervision
		The use of
		Educational supervision
		Supportive supervision
Recommendations	Administration	Online systems
		The use of ICTs
	Education	Online in-service training
		Use of ICTs
		Training
	Support	Use of ICTs

The researcher used both sub-themes and categories to dissect the participants responses and to provide structure to how the narratives were quoted, analysed, and compared to the existing body of knowledge. The primary identified themes in this research study includes social work interventions, supervision, and recommendations. Within each narrative quoted under the sub-themes, key words and phrases were underlined to highlight its association to the identified themes.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Social work interventions

Little to no research exists on the use of ICT tools in social work interventions with service users. Thus, participants were asked to describe if and how they have used

ICT tools in interventions with service users before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown periods as well as the types of ICT tools used.

4.4.1.1 The use of ICT tools

Participants were asked to describe their use of ICT tools in intervention with service users before the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown periods. Thus, all responses were based on their personal use of ICT tools in interventions with service users. Many participants were able to describe the type of ICT tools used as well as the frequency of ICT used in intervention with service. These two concepts were categorised together as they describe the use of ICTs in interventions with service users before the Covid-19 lockdown. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 4: "So before Covid... most of the time I was just using emails because we had face-to-face you know. I wouldn't say we used much of the other ICT tools...we had a high physical presence in the communities, dealing with clients face-to-face and attending meetings and trainings physically."

Participant 5: "I really think Covid sort of forced us to do it. I mean, social work can be quite an outdated profession...we might have done like a meeting online or we might have done like a phone call, but pre-Covid we barely used it."

Participant 15: "Before Covid, it was obviously less...just follow up calls to the client to check up on them...But primarily, we would see people in the office or in homes. So, it was just really follow up questions, or for assessments with clients who live outside of Cape Town. When we used our telephones, it was just like to relay a quick message... But it wasn't the main way that we contacted our clients."

Participant 17: "There wasn't much before the Covid-19 besides your general recording on your laptop, your emails that you have to run through and send and meetings with stakeholders, you had to set up a telephone appointment or they come into just to book an appointment.... we use telephone for checking up with clients, for reminder of appointments."

Participant 7: "I didn't use WhatsApp, but emails definitely. So, there are clients that have access to emails and then they would prefer you to contact them via emails. Others don't, so you would rather do a phone call, normal phone call."

Participant 8: “Besides calling? No”

Participant 14: “No, before Covid we were using WhatsApp, phone calls and face to face”.

Participant 16: “Before Covid, we had our walk-ins, physical interviews, physical contacts etcetera. We used our telephones, WhatsApp and social media as well If we can't get hold of you and then obviously emails.”

From the above narratives, it is evident that the participants used some form of ICT tools in their interventions with service users. However, the narratives indicate that the use of ICT tools in intervention with service users was utilised minimally before the Covid-19 lockdown. Therefore, although participants used ICT tools in intervention with their service users prior to the lockdown, the frequency of use of ICT tools in intervention with service users before the Covid-19 pandemic was relatively low. According to Gillingham (2015), historically, social workers have been resistant to adopting ICTs in their practice. The narratives prove this by illustrating the minimal use of ICT tools in social workers interventions before the Covid-19 lockdown, which refers to the years preceding 2020. Furthermore, it is evident from the above-mentioned narratives that most social workers' primary contact with service users before the Covid-19 pandemic was face-to-face, although they would use some form of ICT tool with service users. This confirms the research of Gillingham (2015), concluding that many social work organisations across the world utilised some form of ICTs to record data about service users and their service activity. Thus, the frequency of use and types of ICT tools used in interventions with service users were limited before the Covid-19 lockdown period.

The ICT tools used before the Covid-19 lockdown in interventions with service users includes the telephone, WhatsApp, and emails. However, the telephone was the dominant ICT tool used in interventions with service users before the Covid-19 lockdown period. This could be due to a number of factors such as social workers not being aware or skilled at using the range of ICT tools available, the telephone being one of the oldest, most common and accessible type of ICT available. Other factors include competence in using ICT tools in interventions, workers, and service users not having the resources to engage through other ICT tools, or because the functions of the telephone were most appropriate for the intervention it was used for. This poses

questions as to why social workers in a developing country in the year 2020, where the use of ICT tools is common practice in everyday life and across fields, only used ICT tools in a limited way and frequency in social work interventions before the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Participants were asked to describe whether they have used ICT tools with service users in interventions during the Covid-19 lockdown periods as well as the types of ICTs used. Some participants described that during the Covid-19 lockdown, they resorted to primarily using ICT tools in interventions with service users for the continuation of services. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 5: "It was exclusively, the only way we could do anything with our clients. I don't think I saw anybody face to face... There was a shift in terms of my practice to have more online resources available that I could then share and distribute because you couldn't see people face to face."

Participant 7: "You had to make use of phone calls in order to get work done... you couldn't get out to speak to your clients face to face."

Participant 14: "During Covid-19, it was not the first to face. So, most of the time we used WhatsApp and telephone calls."

Participant 15: "So all our social work assessments, we were doing via phone. We would use the work cell phones, whether it was a direct call or WhatsApp call. So, we...would do our case management without seeing the clients and make decisions..."

It is evident from the narratives above that ICT tools became their primary medium used to render services during the Covid-19 lockdown period for many participants. This means that many participants shifted from office face-to-face interventions before the pandemic to primarily using ICT tools and working remotely in order to continue services whilst simultaneously adhering to national restrictions. It appears that this shift in the use of ICTs in interventions with service users during the Covid-19 lockdown period is hugely owed to the lockdown itself and the national restrictions including social distancing policies that were operationalised in the Western Cape, South Africa. These narratives concur what was found by Aasback and Røkkum (2021), as they suggest that the use of ICTs in interventions with service users was a

possibility before the Covid-19 lockdown, however, the lockdown period changed the need for using ICTs in social work interventions. According to Barrera-Algarin and Sarasola-Sanchez-Serrano (2021), ICTs makes remote service delivery possible as it allows communication between people who does not share the same geographical location. Thus, the participants resorted to using ICTs to ensure the continuation of services when face-to-face interactions were limited during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Other participants identified the different types of ICT tools used in their interventions during the Covid-19 lockdown period. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 2: “We have an office phone so we would use WhatsApp to communicate with our clients and then also some prefer sending emails...as well as a telephonic conversation.”

Participant 7: “Well, mostly I was using telephone calls... I managed to do group work for those clients that were able to contact on MS Teams. During Covid they bought a phone for the office in order for us to get in contact with our clients via WhatsApp.”

Participant 5: “Zoom became the big thing...WhatsApp video calls and then we would make resources online and distribute it. So, we would make like an info graphic and distribute it...Especially because I work therapeutically, I would maybe like create a box of therapeutic toys and techniques and then ship those to people and then video call them and explain to them how they could use that. Canva was a big one, then also Pinterest and downloading things and then sharing them, a lot of Ted talks that you would get from YouTube and then you would share those with people or like a podcast.”

Participant 9: “There was a lot of telephonic counselling. In fact, it was the only means of counselling at the time. I used e-mail but most of the time, my interventions had to be done via the phone. and then we also had an online learning platform where clients can submit their homework.”

The participants also reported using a wide range of ICT tools in interventions with service users during the Covid-19 lockdown period. These include telephones, cell phones, WhatsApp and all its respective functions, Canva, Pinterest, Ted talks, podcasts, YouTube and so on. Thus, considering the narratives of participants regarding their use of ICTs in interventions with service users before and during the pandemic, it is evident that the types of ICT tools used during the Covid-19 pandemic with service users during interventions has increased. The use of ICTs in social work has been conceptualised using a variety of words, including internet intervention, online, virtual, digital, tele, and cyber social work, to name a few (Hung & Fung, 2021). These phrases signify the delivery of social services using technology such as computers, cell phones, video technologies, and other forms of communication. The narratives posed by the participants confirm that ICT tools are used in interventions of service users as well as the type of tools used in interventions. The narratives therefore substantiate literature regarding the type of ICT tools used in the social work interventions.

Other participants described how they made use of ICT tools in interventions with service users during the lockdown period as well as their experience thereof. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 13: "During Covid we had an emergency helpline, so clients will call the landline and in there would be referred to the emergency cell phone number and then. From there they would be put on a waiting list and then my supervisor would give us the names and numbers of the clients. We would then try to call them, if we didn't call, then we would WhatsApp them or WhatsApp call them."

Participant 17: "It hasn't been easy to reach clients during the lockdown besides WhatsApp. But I saw it also useful cause we created WhatsApp groups. It was also useful in terms of setting up schedules and meetings."

Participant 6: "...most of my clients didn't have an e-mail address..."

Participant 1: "We were provided with a document that allowed us to be able to go out despite the risk of Covid... So, this is a very difficult time to practice, to make contact to, to, to provide services, it was a difficult time for the service user. They were very frustrated. I had to many a time, teach them how to switch

the cameras around cause many a time I asked them, can you just show me what the home looks like, move the camera and instead of them switching the camera and showing me the home, they would walk around with the camera still facing to them trying to show the home. So, I had to train them. It was a very difficult, stressful time. The clients were not prepared, the clients were literally unprepared to meet me halfway because they did not have the resources, or they were not trained to do it. You know, a lot of times our clients, they are raised by first generations. So, the grandparents are taking care of third generations, and they only know how to clean, cook, farm and stuff like that. They don't know what it is to switch the camera around. I vividly recall one interview where I requested that one of my clients just send me a picture of the court order that I provided them because rain has actually affected my court order as I was walking in, so the stamp was null, and void and she sent me like 15 pictures of her face instead of the page. So, then I had to video call her, and then the data ran out and then I had to buy her data and then I voice noted her... So it was this whole thing and the reality of that was that I was extremely exposed cause I was not provided with a work phone. So, despite the fact that a few months later when I was back at the office, clients called me non-stop at 8:00 o'clock in the evening, 6:00 o'clock in the morning. They respectfully didn't know how to abide by working times and for me I defended quite a few of them, especially the nice old ladies, because I would block clients. I had a set list, every day I had an alarm that went off that said right block off these six numbers, you know, because they would call at any random time, and they will. There were complaints, you know, the social worker didn't attend to me. And then afterwards you find out no, but you can't call her at all for 6:00 in the morning. So, it was difficult, and it was a very, very difficult time and um as new as I was in the field, I was very goal orientated, you know, I wanted to prove myself. So, I sat through a lot of strain. Only to find out afterwards it was not necessary. I was working alongside colleagues that have been there for five years, who did minimal work because they did not want their privacy to be invaded. You know what I mean?"

Additionally, the above narratives illustrate that social worker experienced challenges with the use of ICT tools in interventions with service users during the Covid-19

lockdown periods. These challenges include clients lack of access to ICT tools, ease of use, blurring of professional boundaries, and confidentiality concerns (see Chapter 2). At the time, many service users did not have access to ICT resources, workers used their personal devices in intervention with clients, clients were not literate in the use of ICT tools. Furthermore, Bryant, Garnham, Tedmanson and Diamandi (2018), stated that a prerequisite for the use of ICT tools in interventions with service users is both the service user and the social workers ease of use. Factors such as access, computer illiteracy, and age impact the ease of use of ICT tools (*Bryant et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the use of ICTs in the rendering of social services has also resulted in ethical concerns relating to service user privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, and data security (*Bryant et al.*, 2018; Mattison, 2018;). The above-narratives state that social workers used their personal devices in order to render services to clients during the pandemic. They mentioned the applications used on their personal devices such as WhatsApp etc. WhatsApp allows for written, audio, and visual communication. This means that the clients' personal information was available to the study participants on their personal devices, which substantiates the confidentiality and privacy concerns raised in theory regarding the use of ICTs in service provision (Reamer, 2015). The narratives also stated that the use of ICTs in interventions with service users during the Covid-19 lockdown period led to service users contacting the participants before and after working hours substantiating the literature regarding the blurring of professional boundaries with the use of ICT tools (Kellen, Schoenherr, Turns, Madhusudan &Hecker, 2015; Mishna *et al.*, 2020; Reamer, 2015). The narratives in this study substantiate the literature indicating that the participants experience challenges in the use of ICT tools during social work intervention largely due to the constraints on the part of the services users with specific reference to access and ICT literacy.

Participants were asked to describe their use of ICT tools in intervention with service users after the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown periods. Some participants indicated that after the Covid-19 lockdown, interventions with service users are primary conducted face-to-face. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 1: "Primarily, I meet clients face to face. For me, I prefer it, but I can resort to virtual meetings quite often with clients that are equipped."

Participant 3: “There’s a shift to more face to face, but it also depends for me on the case.”

Participant 7: “I’m back to face-to-face group work.”

Some participants have resorted back to conducting their interventions primarily face-to-face due to the ability to conduct face-to-face interventions with the lifting of lockdown restrictions, service users lack of access to ICT resources, and service users and participants competence and ease of use. Mo (2021), suggest that if social workers do not understand the benefits of using ICTs in interventions with service users, they will resort back to face-to-face interventions.

Other participants reported that the frequency of use of ICT tools in interventions with service users has decreased compared to during the Covid-19 lockdown period. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 13: “It’s not as much as it was during Covid, but now I see them face-to face every day, so there’s no need for me to be using any tools ICT tools like a primary level but more as a secondary level.”

Participant 17: “Not as openly and as regularly as it was during COVID...with clients.”

Other participants described that the frequency of ICT tool use in intervention with service users after the Covid-19 national restrictions have been lifted, has decreased compared that seen during the national restrictions. This may be as a result of social workers being comfortable and accustomed to conducting interventions face-to-face, being able to conduct interventions face-to-face, ethical concerns regarding access to information when using ICT tools, and confidentiality and boundaries.

Some participants identified the type of ICT tools they used in intervention with service users during the Covid-19 lockdown period. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 2: “So obviously we still using our WhatsApp with our clients. I think, also using the telephone as well to get in touch with clients. I think that’s also a big part of getting a hold of someone that we use in the office and then still using emails as well.”

Participant 6: "After Covid...the ICT tools currently used is WhatsApp, emails, and we still use the laptop for videos, not with the projector this time, but I have shown it on my laptop and then I have a few clients that prefer e-mail communication and then telephonic communication as well."

Participant 12: "We do panel meetings via Zoom call or MS teams. So that's working well. Then in terms of clients we do have a business cell phone and I add them on their because it just makes it easier, I WhatsApp them."

Participant 16: "If the event requires seeing the physical person behind the telephone, we would use Zoom or Teams. Then obviously we still use the telephone, we still use our emails. We also on WhatsApp, we also on Facebook. We still continue with those things."

The rest of the participants reported to be using a hybrid practice after the Covid-19 lockdown period. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 5: "So predominantly things are still done online. I'm still a firm believer that some techniques like therapy I think has to take place in person. I'm very glad we shifted therapy back to face-to face, especially with the children, because I do play therapy, we have to do that in person. The counselling I think we can still keep it online and that I still do offer as an alternative. The platform I use is Google meet, Zoom and Teams and WhatsApp video calls. I'll use WhatsApp messages, voice notes, we'll still use WhatsApp in its whole and then if we're both Apple users, then we can use FaceTime on either our computer or our cell phone."

Participant 8: "We still use telephones but if you really want to get the person the best way to do it is face to face."

Participant 9: "So after Covid it's more hybrid. During Covid, we couldn't be face-to-face. But now even though we are allowed to have face-to-face contact, we can still choose to make use of ICT tools. I am definitely making use of WhatsApp and all communications at my organisation is via e-mail. So, the organisation has a cashless system where parents can purchase things for the kids like tuck shop food. We use MS Teams still. But my intervention is now mostly face-to-face. And if I want to do a needs assessment, previously I would

have gone out with questionnaires and sit down. Now I just send a Google form with questions and clients would respond to that, so yeah, I do think like it's easier now, you know, so."

Participant 14: "Yes, we still continue to use it. Now we're using like a mixed... we have a face-to-face and then we also have the electronic or online one. It did help because now I have the knowledge and the skills so I can go for both. Same with our clients, they also learned something about WhatsApp, something about electronic communication. So now if you compare before Covid and then now me as a professional learnt something and then my client also learnt something so both benefitted. Yes, we are using WhatsApp."

Participant 15: "Indeed so coming back post-Covid, so we obviously gone back to the office, we see clients face-to-face now. Now we are more willing to say, OK, if you can't come, let's book it for a telephonic session..."

From the narratives above, it is clear that after the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions has been lifted, most participants resumed to face-to-face contact as their primary form of intervention with service users whilst still using some form of ICT tool in intervention, therefore a hybrid practice. This could be a result of participants learning the benefits of using ICT tools in intervention. In fact, one of the above-stated narratives indicates that the use of ICT tools in intervention with service users has led to the participant gaining more technical skills. This corresponds with the developmental theory of professional identity as the participant continued their education and professional development by learning how to effectively and ethically use ICT tools in intervention with service users (Engelbrecht, 2019). Since the participants resorted back to face-to face interventions but still uses some types of ICT tools in their interventions with service users, they are engaging in a hybrid practice. This concurs with Pink, Ferguson and Kelly (2021), suggesting that both face-to-face interventions and the use of ICT tools in interventions must be considered equally effective. Pink *et al.*, (2021) further suggests that the use of ICTs in intervention is not aimed at replacing traditional face-to-face interventions but to incorporate the benefits of ICTs and face-to face interventions. This is also confirmed by studies that demonstrated the remote service delivery can be equally effective or even superior to face-to-face service delivery (Dunstan & Tooth, 2012; Richardson, 2012; Simpson, Rochford, Livingstone,

English & Austin, 2014). Both the narratives and literature stipulate how a combination of face-to-face and ICT tools can be used in social work interventions. Therefore, the narratives substantiate the literature.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Supervision

4.4.2.1 Face to face supervision

Participants were asked to describe the format and frequency of their supervision prior to the Covid-19 lockdown. It has been stated that it is difficult to specify exactly what supervision of social workers comprises. There is no universally accepted definition of social work supervision, as such, a variety of responses were expected. These narratives are reflected below:

Some participants described the frequency of their supervision before the Covid-19 pandemic. See the narratives below:

Participant 12: “So the frequency it was more or less once a month because that’s as per our contract states, that we meet once a month.”

Participant 16: “Before Covid, it was physical and it was on a quarterly basis, every three months.”

Participant 14: “Before lockdown, we had supervision, every two weeks.”

Participant 8: “Before the lockdown, we had a quarterly supervision session which is compulsory. Then we would have like a case discussion on Fridays. But it will be like a whole team. So, we would have face to face supervision per quarter.”

In the narratives above, participants describe the frequency of their supervision before the Covid-19 lockdown period. The participants supervision frequencies before lockdown all differ. This could be accounted for by their difference in years of experience as practicing social workers. According to the developmental theory of professional identity, social workers who operate at the beginner level are more dependent upon their supervisors and supervision than social workers operating at an advanced level. Social workers that operate at an advanced level are self-assured and seeks supervision when necessary (Chibaya; 2018; Engelbrecht 2019). Thus, all social workers operate at different levels and the frequency at which they require

supervision is dependent on the level at which they function. Therefore, the narratives of the participants are coherent with literature.

Others described the format of their supervision before the Covid-19 lockdown. See narratives below:

Participant 4: “Our supervisor had an open-door policy because she understood how busy it is to do child protection. But we made it a point to have once a month to have a formal supervision session where we would have an agenda that me and her decided on, the time and where it would. During supervision we would discuss personal matters if there's any, we will discuss clients, maybe difficult cases that I'm struggling with that she can maybe give advice on, and we will discuss group work or things that we are still planning. I would do the minutes and then after supervision I will provide it to her.”

Participant 15: “The format is a personal check-in firstly and then case discussion on any cases that joined and then getting some guidance from the supervisor on any other issues you want to discuss. It was face to face before Covid.”

Participant 17: “Oh well it was in person...and then we have like debriefing sessions, we all sit as a team and then go through debriefing sessions and then if you need individual debrief or whatever with your supervisor, then you schedule a session.”

In the above narratives, the participants described the format of their supervision sessions before the Covid-19 lockdown period. The format of both group and individual supervision sessions are described in the narratives above. For individual supervision sessions participants indicated that they would have an agenda that was decided upon by both the supervisee and the supervisor and a stipulates time and location where the supervision would be conducted. Furthermore, the above narratives indicate that the supervision session firstly involves a personal check which is followed by case discussions. According to Engelbrecht (2019), the supervisory process has six stages. Implementation is the fifth stage of the supervisory process and is operationalised through supervision sessions (Chibaya, 2018). According to DSD and SACSSP (2012) and Engelbrecht (2019), supervision sessions are planned

learning situations with a preset agenda and a clear goal or set of outcomes based on the supervisee's personal development plan. The narratives indicate that participants had formal supervision sessions with predetermined agendas, thus agreeing with the definition of supervision. Furthermore, the narratives indicated that the participants had both individual and group supervision sessions prior to the Covid-19 lockdown. Engelbrecht (2019) suggests that supervisors are able to choose which supervision method to engage in, whether individual or group supervision is most suitable to execute the agenda the same way social workers may choose to engage in individual or group sessions with their service users. The information gathered from the participant interviews that as is stated in the literature, participants engaged in both individual and group supervision sessions prior to the Covid-19 lockdown period. The narratives also indicated that the information discussed during these supervision sessions were written down. According to Jacques (2019), every social work organisation should have a policy regarding the recording of information discussed during supervision and the supervision methods used as is the case in the participants responses in this study.

Other participants expressed how supervision sessions are not prioritised in social work organisations. See narratives below:

Participant 13: "So before Covid, it was face to face in the office about every second week. We tried to have it every second week, but it basically ran down to whenever we remembered to and whenever we had time, because the field event that I was working in was also very fast-paced. Supervision was not really that high on the priority list, but when it was necessary, when there was a difficult case or so on, then we would have supervision, but it was mainly um face-to-face and you can say about once a month."

Participant 15: "It's always scheduled once a week. But things come up and doesn't always happen that way, but it's always scheduled for once a week and it's an hour long. I think that's pretty standard. The format is a personal check-in firstly and then case discussion on any cases that joined and then getting some guidance from the supervisor on any other issues you want to discuss. It was face to face before Covid."

Participant 5: “So maybe when like pigs fell from the sky I would have supervision, you know. And if I did, it was like atrocious, I felt like I could have supervised me better. I think I pre-Covid it was maybe like once every three months.”

Other participants indicated that supervision is not prioritised at their respective social work organisations and that they would not always have their scheduled supervision as planned due to a variety of circumstances. These circumstances are referred to as the factors that impedes on the supervisory process such as structural and organisational issues such as high caseloads and organisational cultures that does not promote supervision (Engelbrecht, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2019; Engelbrecht & Chibaya, 2022). From both the narratives above and the literature, it is clear that poor work conditions such as extreme workloads of both the supervisor and supervisee negatively impacts the supervisory process (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). The narratives above also indicate that when supervision occurred, it was not effective, and that the supervisee felt that she could do a better job supervising than her supervisor. This corresponds with literature that suggest that South African supervisors are not operating at an advanced level of professional identity and therefore, they are unable to provide their supervisees with the guidance and support that they require to fulfil their work tasks (Engelbrecht, 2019). Research further suggests that supervisors be respected as authorities in their fields as supervisees should be able to turn to their assistance at any time, and that supervisors should have the appropriate theoretical background, knowledge, and abilities to demonstrate that they are experts (Botha, 2002; Engelbrecht, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2019). The above narratives imply that the supervisor was not competent in assisting in the execution of work tasks. Therefore, both the narratives and literature agree that supervisors should have more experience, skills, and knowledge than supervisees in order to effectively assist them (Engelbrecht, 2012; DSD & SACSSP, 2012). The narratives also highlight that supervision is not prioritised and that there are factors such as high caseloads that impacts the frequency and effectiveness of supervision. This correlates with the potential factors impeding on the supervisory process (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). Thus, if these potential impeding factors are not swiftly attended to, it might result in stunted professional growth and development of social workers, low quality

services, social workers feeling overwhelmed, job-dissatisfaction, and eventually burnout. Thus, the narratives substantiate the literature.

4.4.2.1.1 Face-to-face supervision and functions of supervision

Participants were asked to elaborate on the face-to-face experience of supervision before the Covid-19 lockdown period, specifically in terms of the administrative, educational, and supportive functions of supervision.

Participants indicated that their supervision was predominantly administrative. See the narratives below:

Participant 5: "I feel like we can skip support and education because that was like the zero. It was like hardly any of that. It was very much like pick a case read, through the case file, this is what I think you should do. Just like very superficial. And I think that's also a problem because you become so invasive with your clients, they are people to you, they've got a story, you understand their story, you sort of holding them in your arms in that case file. But to your supervisor, they're just a file, one of the files that they worked through. There's no support, there's no education. So, if you're working from admin, it's literally paper and pen. So, then it's easy to separate yourself from it. It's the same reason why I think most people don't want to do online because I think online is more intimate. You often see the background of the person's home; you see their dog walking in the background. So, I think having online often you almost are invited into people's homes, you can see background looks like, you can see if they're watering, they plant or if they plant is dying slowly week after week after week. So, you become more involved in their home."

Participant 13: "Administrative was basically the main focus of individual supervision sessions...And then majority of the of the supervision session would then be administrative, case files, case management, all of that..."

In the narratives above, the participants indicated that their supervision was largely administrative. They indicated that they hardly experienced the educational and supportive function of supervision as the focus was always on administrative tasks. According to literature, supervision was initially solely focused on the administrative tasks with the educational and supportive functions only later accepted as part of the

supervision process (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Davys & Beddoe, 2016; Khosa, 2022). In addition, Engelbrecht (2019) further suggests that South African social work organisations do not regard the importance of the educational and supportive function as their focus are on administrative tasks. This is confirmed by the above narratives of social workers in the Western Cape that indicate that their supervision is largely administrative.

Other participants described how they experienced the educational function of supervision. See the narratives below:

Participant 8: “The supervisor would here and there update you on and the opportunities to upskill yourself, attending trainings, policy trainings, cause our organisation is big on trainings so most of the supervisors will present that information to you because they also believe in hierarchy. It’s like a top-down strategy that they are using.”

Participant 13: “It was helpful in the role I was fulfilling at the organisation. There wasn’t really a lot of education. Education usually happened in a group setting or during group supervision which was every month or every second month.”

Participant 15: “Also in terms of education, she always checks in to see what your developmental needs are at the moment and then makes sure we get training or exposure in the things that we say are our developmental needs.”

The above narratives indicate that supervisors had the responsibility of enquiring what the developmental needs of the supervisees are and then enabling training that will address and develop those identified needs. In-service training is a specific kind of staff development where a specific group of organisational personnel who share the same job description or duties undergo planned, formal training (Kadushin, 1992; Yuliani, 2021). When in-service programs are created in advance, the general educational needs of a group of employees are taken into account (Yuliani, 2021). The above narratives concur adult education principles regarding ensuring the trainings are tailored made to the needs of supervisees (Engelbrecht, 2019). Furthermore, literature suggests that supervisees largely depend on their organisations and supervisors to send them to training and that they do not embark on continuing their education on their own (Engelbrecht, 2019). It has further been suggested that

supervisors are the number one source of education for many (Children's Bureau, 1976; Shyne, 1980). Therefore, because the narratives indicate that supervisors are responsible for ensuring that supervisees continue education it substantiates literature regarding supervisors being supervisees primary source of education. Furthermore, the narratives above indicate that some supervisors at social work organisations takes into account supervisees developmental needs and interest when offering opportunities to further their education. This ties in with literature that suggests that supervisors must take into account adult learning principles, supervisee learning styles, and supervisors' educational strategies in order to ensure that educational content is offered in ways that suits the learning style and developmental whilst executing the educational function of supervision (Kolb, 1973; Engelbrecht, 2019; Khosa, 2022). The narratives indicates that the developmental needs and interest of some participants are taken into consideration in furthering their education and therefore it affirms the literature.

Other participants described how they experienced the supportive function of supervision. See the narratives as follows:

Participant 10: "Also I can tell her exactly where I'm at. Um, so yeah, she would support if I had to like, like if I feel I need to have a day off where I just can't sleep. And you know what? Take care of myself. Then she would encourage that as well also."

Participant 8: "If there's any backlogs, what is the plan on ensuring that you're going to update it and what support do you need from them especially let's say you have court cases or challenging cases, it differs from supervisor to supervisor cause my current supervisor would go with you to for example, meet a difficult client and try to find out what is it that they don't understand...."

Participant 9: "In person or face to face, she would not look at me. She would just be writing everything I'm saying on the supervision process note like she'd be writing verbatim. Everything I said, which is a good thing, but I felt like I'm being interrogated instead of it being a conversation..."

In the narratives above it is clear that the different participants experienced the supportive function of supervision differently. Some felt supported by their supervisors,

while others felt an absence of interest or sincerity in the emotional support supervisors are required to provide supervisees through operationalising the supportive function of supervision. According to the narratives, this is due to how the supervisors operationalised the supportive function of supervision. Participants that experienced supervision to be supportive explained that their supervisors would encourage them to take care of themselves as well as to support them with difficult clients in order to minimise the impact on the supervisee. According to literature, the supervisor executes the supportive function of supervision to offer motivation thereby encouraging job satisfaction and reduce high turnover rates as a result of service user trauma resulting from dealing with difficult service users (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Botha, 2002; Tsui, 2005; Avram, 2017; Pretorius, 2020). This coincides with the above narrative that describes how the supervisor supports the supervisee with difficult clients. Additionally, according to Kadushin and Harkness (2014), the aim of the supportive function of supervision is to assist in improving employees' psychological well-being, which is clearly not the case, as demonstrated in the last narrative.

4.4.2.1.2 Changes in supervision

Participants were asked to elaborate on whether their experiences of supervision (compared to supervision prior to lockdown) has changed during lockdown.

Participants compared their supervision before the Covid-19 lockdown to their supervision after the restrictions has been lifted. See narratives below:

Participant 4: "Yes, it changed because of the lockdown we were not able to have formal or face to face supervision. So yes, it did change, and it made us more reliant on ICT tools like WhatsApp, emails, MS Teams and Zoom and all those kinds of things that we were not even trained for. We were never trained to work on Teams and Zoom, we just had to figure it out. We had no choice but to figure it out."

Participant 15: "I couldn't just walk into an office and have a discussion, but we had more schedule supervision via Zoom during that time than had face-to-face supervision before Covid. Because the group supervision was literally every morning which is more than we do now, now its once a week. So, the support was big, and we needed it a lot."

In the above narratives it is evident that the use of ICT tools in the supervision of social workers has increased during the Covid-19 lockdown period. Furthermore, it is clear that during the Covid-19 period supervisors and supervisees had to rely on ICT tools to conduct supervision as face-to-face interactions were prohibited by national social distancing policies during the lockdown. This is substantiated by Mo (2021) and Mo and Chan (2023), who identified that the use of ICTs in supervision is becoming more common amongst supervisors. It is also clear from the narratives that due to the unprecedented circumstance of the Covid-19 lockdown, in order to ensure the continuation of supervision, the participants and their supervisors engaged in the use of ICT tools in supervision without prior training. Scholars suggests that both social workers and their supervisors undergo training on how to effectively and ethically use ICTs in their supervision (Graf & Stebnicki, 2002; Parkinson & Loue, 2015). In addition, Stebnicki and Glover (2001) suggests that both supervisors and supervisees should undergo specialised training informing on the advantages and disadvantages of using each type of ICT tool in supervision, enabling them to select the most suitable ICT tools to execute the different functions of supervision. Therefore, the acknowledgement of the need for training in the use of ICT tools are substantiated in both the narratives and literature. From the above narratives, social workers scheduled supervision has increased during Covid due to higher work demands and not being able to have face-to-face “on the run” supervision or “open door policy” approaches to supervision due to remote working. This is substantiated by literature that indicates that the key advantages of using ICTs in supervision is that it allows for remote working, increase accessibility, allowing for more frequent communication between supervisors and supervisee (Goodyear, 2014; Kanz, 2001; Reamer, 2013). Thus, looking at the narratives, ICT tools allowed the participants to work remotely, have supervision remotely, and enabled more frequent communication between supervisors and supervisees.

Participants were asked to elaborate on whether their experiences of supervision (compared to supervision prior to lockdown) has changed after lockdown.

Participants reported to having hybrid supervision sessions after the Covid-19 lockdown and national restrictions had been lifted.

Participant 8: “Yes and no. Because after the restrictions has been lifted, the supervisors were still not comfortable with sitting with the numbers, so the supervisor would have MS Teams group supervision sessions. But she conducted individual supervision face to face.”

Participant 12: “Not really, I think it's still more or less the same. It's just now that we meeting physically. But like I said, she's still available on WhatsApp, so I can still send her message and she'll respond when she has time, or I can call her so it's more or less the same. We're just not doing the Zoom or the MS Team meetings anymore. It's now more face-to-face interaction.”

Participant 15: “So now we are back to 100% face to face. Occasionally when someone has to stay home because of a mild sickness, they're not too bad and they still want to have the supervision and they'll have done so via Zoom. Otherwise, we're back to 100% to face-to-face supervision. So, it is as good as it's always been. But we had more supervision during Covid, but now I could like literally walk into that office for the support that I need like case by case literally. So, in Covid it was more structured. It was difficult to be as random as you are in the office. So, it was more structured but now I can just walk in.”

Supervisors are currently engaging in a hybrid supervisory practice with their supervisees, conducting face-to-face supervision, however, also resort to the use of ICT tools such as MS teams in supervision in instances where face-to-face supervision is not viable. The way supervisors and supervisees communicate and collaborate has been transformed using ICT tools in supervision, resulting in the supervision process becoming more dynamic and engaging as a result of the development of video conferencing, instant messaging and other ICT tools (Mo, 2021). Remote supervision is one of the most important advantages of employing ICTs in supervision. The use of ICT tools can assist with remote supervision in circumstances where in-person supervision is not possible, such as when social workers do not share the same geographical location as their supervisors (Mo, 2021; OpenAI, 2023). The ability to provide more regular check-ins and feedback is another advantage of using ICTs in supervision as they can help supervisors give social workers both synchronous and asynchronous feedback and assistance (Luke &

Gordon, 2016). This can make supervision more accessible and effective by saving time and money on trip expenses (Watson, 2016).

Due to the participants continuing to use ICTs in their supervision in times where face-to-face supervision is not possible or when they urgently need to contact their supervisors for example in times of crisis when they are not sure how to intervene, it confirms research suggesting that the use of ICTs allows for more frequent communication between distant supervisors and supervisees (Mo, 2021). The participants and their supervisors may also have discovered the benefits of using ICT tools in supervision such as saving time and travelling costs as stipulated in the literature above and therefore, they continue to use ICTs even in cases where face-to-face supervision is possible.

Other participants reported to moving back to traditional face-to-face supervision. See the narratives below:

Participant 16: "After Covid it become better much better because we also rotating supervisors. So, after Covid I had a new supervisor, we have face-to-face supervision, we could still carry on quarterly basis supervision. Also end of year, we all can get together with other shelters as a group and physically interact, meet each other, and exchange what our knowledge etcetera in one house. We can also carry on continuing with ICT tools where need be."

Participant 12: "...We're just not doing the Zoom or the MS Team meetings anymore. It's now more face-to-face interaction."

Participant 15: "...Otherwise, we're back to 100% to face-to-face supervision. So, it is as good as it's always been."

It is clear from the narratives above that some of the participants and their respective supervisors have resorted back to traditional-face-to-face supervision after the lockdown due to participants valuing face-to-face.

4.4.2.2 ICTs in supervision

Participants were asked to describe whether their supervisors used any ICT tools in their supervision during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Some participants identified the types of ICT tools used in their supervision during the Covid-19 lockdown period. See the narratives as follows:

Participant 3: “All the software on the laptop was obviously used and through e-mail communication and they were. I’ve had video calls supervision and that was normally done through Zoom at the time as well as phone calls and WhatsApp.”

Participant 16: “Yes, the supervisor made use of Zoom, WhatsApp and the telephone call.”

Participant 16: “We mostly used Zoom.”

Participant 8: “And that’s when supervision started being on WhatsApp.”

It is evident from the narratives above that ICT tools were used in the supervision of the participants before the Covid-19 pandemic. The type of ICT tools that were used before the Covid-19 lockdown in their supervision includes, Zoom, WhatsApp, telephone, Email and laptops to mentioned a few. This is substantiated by research that suggests that ICT tools have been introduced to social work supervision since the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century (Yuliani, 2021). According to Mo (2021), supervision that is conducted using ICTs has been coined remote supervision; tele-supervision; cyber supervision to mention a few. Tele-supervision is the practice of conducting supervision through the use of email, phone, or video conference (Brandoff & Lombardi, 2012). Additionally, cyber supervision refers to the use of synchronous and asynchronous technology in supervision (Barnett, 2011). The narratives confirms that the participants have experienced the use of both synchronous and asynchronous ICT tools such as emails, telephones and Zoom in their supervision, therefore both tele-supervision and cyber supervision.

Participants were asked what type of ICT tools their supervisors currently use in their supervision.

Many participants were able to identify the type of ICT tools that are currently used in their supervision. The narratives are as below:

Participant 2: "The same tools are being used, e-mail, telephone, WhatsApp and yeah sometimes Zoom when you have training or something like that, but yeah."

Participant 3: "Computer, telephone, WhatsApp, haven't done Zoom at all. Currently it's mainly been e-mail, WhatsApp and phone calls."

Participant 5: "Yeah. So, it's just Zoom and WhatsApp video call."

Participants currently experience the use of ICT tools in their supervision, including email, telephone, WhatsApp, and Zoom to mention a few. These are the same type of ICT tools that the participants experienced in their supervision during the Covid-19 lockdown period. According to Caspi and Reid (2012), supervisors have the responsibility of providing assistance to supervisees in order for them to execute their work tasks and overseeing the quality of their work. However, supervisors often cannot directly observe how supervisees are doing due to being stationed far away from each other. Therefore, supervisors require a tool to monitor the work of supervisees, these tools may include ICT tools (Yuliani, 2021). Thus, the literature substantiates the narratives regarding ICT tools being used in supervision to oversee the supervisees work (Mo & Chan, 2023). According to Mo and Chan (2023), this can be done through ICT tools such as emails, WhatsApp, and Zoom. Therefore, the narratives substantiate literature regarding the type of tools used in the supervision of social workers.

Other participants described that they returned to primarily having supervision face-to-face, however, they are using some form of ICT tools in their supervision. The narratives are as below:

Participant 1: "Oh so we do face-to-face. We always try to do it when there is no load shedding because we need to keep updated electronically with reports and contracts and agreements so it's always face-to-face, currently, but...with the laptop open, the laptop would then also sanction the time, so we wouldn't even need to look at the clock or our watches because we would look like we have 5 minutes later, right? We're 10 minutes left. So just face-to-face in a laptop."

Participant 13: "So my supervision now is mainly face-to-face. I think my current supervisor prefers being face-to-face than via Zoom...I feel that we are more comfortable now, logistically if it doesn't work out that we are in the same place at that time, then we can move to online supervision. But now the emphasis is more on face-to-face supervision. However, I do have access to my supervisor via WhatsApp, so I can still check in with her on an ad hoc basis. But yeah, formal supervision sessions are face-to-face."

Participant 14: "Yeah. For the moment we do it face-to-face. We do not use any other ICT tool; we just use it face-to-face because all of us we are in the office."

From the narratives above, it is clear that social workers and the supervisors have returned to primarily conducting traditional face-to-face supervision. However, it is evident that in instances when face-to-face supervision is not possible, or when they need to get into immediate contact with their supervisors, they continue the use of ICT tools. Mo (2021) and Mo and Chan (2023) concur that the use of ICT tools in supervision allows for more frequent check-ins and feedback which enhances the quality of supervision and the social workers professional identity. This is confirmed by the narratives as the participants explained that even though they resorted back to face-to-face supervision, they still use ICT tools to check in with their supervisors.

Participants were asked to describe how the identified ICT tools are used in supervision. Some participants described how their supervisors use ICT tools in their supervision to operationalise the administrative function of supervision. See narratives as follows:

Participant 2: "Emails would mostly be for those formal correspondence and then also for sending your reports. You send the report, she looks through...makes sure of the content before we send that out. So, she would do corrections on MS Word as well with those little reviews or the comments... But recently she has been using the electronic signature obviously, and then she would put it on a PDF."

Participant 5: "I'll send her an e-mail and I'll be like, 'Hi can we supervise this week?', she'll send me three or four timeslots, I'll pick a time and then she just sends me a link and we just log in online and we just talk and I take notes on

the side like either online on my computer or I'll have a notepad next to me that I'll make notes on. If there's no signal or the Zoom 40-minute runs out, then we just both log back in. It doesn't cause us to panic. It doesn't stress either of us out, we sort of just move with it."

Participant 8: "You e-mail your report because remember the supervisor is not always in the office, they have other meetings that they need to attend. So, in order to review your report, you must email it to the supervisor. The supervisor will edit the report and send it to you with comments. You work according to the comments then they send it back to you, they say it's fine print for me to sign or they send it back to you with a digital signature. Then you print then you sign it."

Participants indicated that the use of ICT tools in their supervision involves scheduling and conducting supervision sessions, reviewing reports as well as to receive guidance in times of crisis and emergency. While operationalising the administrative function of supervision, the supervisor must execute certain administrative tasks. These administrative tasks include routinely reviewing supervisees case files and reports, especially those reports required for court proceedings (Engelbrecht, 2021). Another administrative task includes scheduling supervision sessions in advance. According to OpenAI (2023), these administrative tasks can be conducting using ICTs. Participants described how these administrative tasks were executed with ICT tools in supervision.

Some participants described how ICT tools are used in their supervision to operationalise the educational function of supervision. See Narratives below:

Participant 2: "Telephonic or WhatsApp's would be for immediate urgent things. If you need guidance or you are just looking for assistance, you would use telephonic conversation."

Participant 3: "If I need guidance for example this case just came in, I'm not sure what decision to make then I would phone her or WhatsApp to discuss it, especially if there's an emergency where I need to do a removal right away, if she's not at the office, I'll give her a call to explain what is going on, explain my

risk assessment so that she can then either approve the removal in agreement with it, or tell me a different perspective.”

Participant 6: “Whenever I have a difficult situation or I just need to know what's the next steps with a case, then I would phone her, and we would discuss the case telephonically...”

From the narratives above, it is evident that the participants would use ICT tools in their supervision in times of crisis and emergency, when they require quick responses and guidance from their supervisors. Literature suggests that one of the key benefits of ICT tools is that allows for frequent, quick communication. Furthermore, the participants indicated that to operationalise the educational function of supervision, their supervisors would offer them with guidance and instructions required to execute their work tasks. Supervision, according to Kadushin (1992), comprises both educating and supporting the supervisee in gaining the knowledge required to execute their work. As a result, the educational role of supervision entails strengthening the capacity of the supervisees in order to assure the correctness and effectiveness of their knowledge, abilities, and attitudes which is ensuring effective service delivery (Budeli, 2018; Yuliani, 2021). The narratives and research are in an agreement regarding the supervisors offering supervisees the guidance they need to do their work.

Another participant explained that ICT tools are used to operationalise the supportive function of supervision. See the narrative below:

Participant 15: “We use emails and WhatsApp but not to conduct a formal supervision session, just for check ins etc.”

In the narrative above, the participant indicate that ICT tools were used in supervision to operationalise the supportive function of supervision, to check in with the participant and to see how they are doing. According to Beddoe (2017), the emotional and social support supervisors offer during operationalising the supportive function of supervision, may aid in the improvement of social workers engaging in reflecting social work practice and well as to assist them advance in their careers. Furthermore, ICT tools such as messaging apps and email can facilitate in the provision of emotional

support and guidance (OpenAI, 2023). This can assist in the maintenance of open communication channels and ensure that supervisees feel supported and valued.

4.4.2.3 Experience of the use of ICT tools in supervision

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of the use of the identified ICT tools in their supervision. Participants experienced ICT tools at different frequencies in their supervision thus, each participant's response is based on their personal experience of the of ICT tools with their respective supervisors.

Some participants described their experience of the use of ICT tools in supervision in terms of whether it was good or bad. The narratives are as below:

Participant 5: “Good but I think her and I, we knew each other pre Covid.”

Participant 17: “Oh, it was quite hectic I won't lie.”

Participant 12: “I'd say it was a bit difficult.”

From the above narratives, it is clear that participants had varied experiences with the use of ICT tools in their supervision with some having positive experiences while other experiences challenges. According to Engelbrecht (2019), social workers experience of supervision is not always up to the supervisors. There are other potential factors that may impede on the supervisory process and affect supervisees experience of supervision including: organisational and structural issues, the developmental theory of professional identity, adult education principles, supervisees learning styles and supervisors' educational strategies, blockages and power games, the supervisory relationship, and the organisations culture. Research suggests that these potential factors should be identified and addressed swiftly in order to minimise its impact on the supervisory process (Engelbrecht, 2019). Thus, the narratives that indicate a positive experience may indicate that the factors that impede on the use of ICTs in supervision were addressed swiftly. In turn, the negative experiences may indicate that these were factors where not addressed and therefore negatively influenced the participants experience of the use of ICTs in their supervision.

Some participants described whether they preferred face-to-face supervision or the use of ICT tools in their supervision. The narratives are as below:

Participant 2: "I had a very like good experience...I still would prefer face-to-face interactions, especially with supervision, that full supervision specifically..."

Participant 15: "It wasn't bad, it's still did the job. But it's just not the same. I would not prefer that to face-to-face. So, for me it's just support the main process for me. I'm happy as long as the main supervision happens in person."

Participant 9: "But I just feel like because of the type of person my supervisor was, I felt that the online or the telephonic supervision were much better than in person, because in person or face-to-face, she would not look at me. She would be writing..."

From the narratives above different preference in the format of supervision amongst participants were identified. Some participants preferred traditional face-to-face supervision, while others preferred the use of ICT tools in their supervision. There are both advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face supervision and the use of ICT tools in supervision. Participants experiences of face-to-face supervision and of the use of ICTs in supervision informs their preference. Some participants preferred face-to-face supervision because that is what they are accustomed to it. Jacques (2019) suggested that it is human nature to resist change. Therefore, because traditional face-to-face supervision was the norm for some participants, they had a hard time adapting to the use of ICT tools in their supervision. In addition, social workers and supervisors that return to traditional face-to-face supervision may not see the advantages of the use of ICT tools in supervision and they may also not be inclined to transformational learning in terms of their motivation, autonomy, and awareness (Cf. Engelbrecht, 2019; Mo, 2021). Furthermore, it is clear from the narratives that during face-to-face supervision, the participants supervisor was too occupied with the administrative tasks minutes in order to record the supervision session, that they did not make eye-contact with the participant. However, because some ICT tools provide recording functions, when using ICT tools in supervision, the supervisor could make eye-contact with the supervisor as the supervision session would be recorded by the ICT tools, alleviating the supervisor and supervisor from that administrative task. This confirms literature that suggests that the development of modern ICT tools is to reduce human effort (Kagermann, Lukas & Wahlster, 2011).

Other participants described the challenges with the types of ICT tools used.

Participant 8: “Yeah, it was odd, cause WhatsApp I used for family, friends and it is more relaxed. Yes, it was more flexible, and I think that's with everything digital. So, the minute you go digital, it's more flexible because it was not time bound... But MS Teams it removed you know that human element, you know, it felt like you're calling an Uber and they're saying they are 5 minutes away but, you know, that's not the truth. Remember we are social beings, that's why we called social workers. So even though we like contact with the clientele we also want physical contact with the supervisor in order to feel the person is here with you, understands you, feels you, you know.”

Participant 3: “Sometimes Zoom was a little bit frustrating because it was dependent on connection and that would sometimes interfere. There would be lagging and then you would actually just land up not getting to everything that you wanted to because you just get frustrated and you're like okay that's not so important, I'm just going to leave that out.”

Participant 10: “So WhatsApp would just be taking messages, voice notes and calls. We would WhatsApp call for instance when we have a schedule MS Teams meeting but my computer is slow or there's no internet connection which was the biggest problem.”

Participant 11: “If we had many meeting with Teams, that link is time specific? So, it would have for example one-hour right slot and remember there's a lot of people, they have a lot of concerns, they have a lot of questions, a lot of stuff they need to discuss, but it will just cut you down. You know, sometimes before you would complete your sentence it would cut you off. The supervisor also use to rush in order for us to stay within the time slot. So, people felt like supervision was rushed.”

There are many factors that have an impact on social workers' use of ICT tools in their supervision. In turn, there are many factors that determines social workers' experience of the use of ICT tools in their supervision. In the above stated narratives, some participants described the challenges they experienced with the type of ICT tools in their supervision and how it impacted their supervision. These challenges include

time-constraints to certain applications such as Zoom, technical difficulties such as poor internet connections and buffering. Literature recommends training to assist supervisors and supervisees in acquiring common knowledge of the issues and constraints involved with the use of ICTs in supervision. This involves identifying the possible impediments to ICT use, such as technical challenges as well as the potential limits of ICTs in terms of their capacity to support specific supervisory roles. Both the narratives and the literature suggest that one of the disadvantages of the use of ICT tools in supervision is technical difficulties such as poor internet connection. Thus, the literature is substantiated by the narratives.

Others conveyed how written texts resulted in miscommunication in their supervision. See the narratives below:

Participant 3: "I found e-mail communication to be better and although sometimes when you ask certain points on an e-mail they miss certain points, it's like they scan the e-mail and then they just answer generally, but they miss certain specific points that were important for you... Obviously that comes the little bit of miscommunication when you're doing an e-mail or text or something, but we tend to clarify that after a few messages."

Participant 10: "Supervision does not happen via e-mail because it's too much to write, so we would rather call and speak to each other whereas as you have to write down. And sometimes it causes confusion, and you don't understand what the other person is asking and your reply isn't being understood. So that's why if not face-to-face, it's going to be what is it via telephone."

From the narratives above, it is clear that some participants experience miscommunication while using written ICT tools in supervision with their supervisor. According to Driscoll and Townsend (2007), because there are no visual clues, online text interactions such as emails are prone to cultural misunderstanding, and the reader may occasionally misread the information owing to personal biases. Both the narratives and the literature indicate that the use of e-mail in supervision may result in miscommunication. Thus, the literature is substantiated by the narratives. Mo (2021) recommends for the development of e-supervision skills such as clarification in order

for supervisors to identify and effectively address hinderances such as miscommunication.

Some participants described the swift responses that ICT tools allowed them to receive from their supervisors. These narratives are reflected below:

Participant 2: "WhatsApp and the telephone works good...for in the moment when you need an answer, you need assistance or guidance with a case. So that's good. And via e-mails as well, it's nice to have a paper trail noting when you asked something or when you jotted something down to your supervisor being like 'hey this is what's happening', 'This is what's going on', especially for the client that we work for, it's a very important also to have that stuff written down. So having the use of ICT tools really helps you to make sure that you also get your work done, but it also gets the support that you need in the moment."

Participant 15: "ICT tools plays a supporting role in the supervision process and dealing with emergencies because you are not going to wait for another week to have supervision and discuss an emergency with your supervisor. And. Yeah, e-mails allow you to search when you forgotten what happened with that case or whatever, then just go through e-mail and find what you need to find..."

Participant 16: "It's an easy mode of communication, it's an easy mode to get work done as quick as swiftly as possible, it's an easy mode to formulate any report or any piece of job that you want to put on paper, it's easy to just do it on your laptop or even still make a telephone call. It's easy, unlike in the olden days."

Considering the narratives above, it is clear that social workers benefitted from the accessibility that ICT tools offer in their supervision. It is evident that the use of ICT tools in their supervision provided them access to their supervisors in times of emergencies and uncertainties which positively contributed to their service delivery. This means that ICT tools allows for frequent communication between supervisee and supervisor. Thus, this coincides with literature that suggests that ICTs has transformed the way supervision occurs, improving access to, and effectiveness of supervision (Watson, 2016). Furthermore, research suggests ICT tools allow for remote

supervision between distant supervisors and supervisees as it is not bound to time or location. In addition, ICT tools allows for synchronous and asynchronous communication between supervisors and supervisees, allowing for frequent check-ins, support and immediate feedback thus enhancing the quality of supervision, improving the social workers professional development and ultimately improving service delivery which improves service delivery (Goodyear, 2014; Luke & Gordon, 2016; Cf. Oterholm, 2009; Reamer, 2013).

Other participants reported that limited resources at social work organisations have impacted their experience of the use of ICT tools in supervision. The narratives are as follows:

Participant 2: "It's very good to have these tools at your disposal because...won't always be able to get that because our supervisor is also the regional manager of like 3-4 branches. She's not in the office with you at all times. She's driving around. She's also doing trainings, regional manager things she has to do as well."

Participant 3: "I also do think the supervisor is under a lot of pressure and receives so many e-mails, so they might not be fully focused when they receive a specific e-mail from one of the employees because there's 500 other e-mails coming in at the same time."

Participant 17: "They give you a certain amount of data and expect you to work with that certain amount forever."

It is evident that the limited resources such as distant and thinly spread supervisors due to management tasks and supervising multiple offices of social workers, as well as insufficient finances at social work organisations impacted social workers experience of the use of ICT tools in their supervision. Participants described the importance of using ICT tools in supervision as it allows them access to thinly spread, as well as distant supervisors. As previously mentioned, little to no research exist on the potential factors that may impede on e-supervision processes (See Chapter 3). However potential impeding factors impeding on supervision include, the supervisory relationship, structural and organisational challenges, ethical concerns, and the developmental theory of professional identity (Engelbrecht, 2019). In accordance with

research by Engelbrecht (2012), structural and organisational supervision challenges such as a lack of resources, extreme workloads, and unfavourable working conditions for both supervisees and supervisors can occasionally determine how supervision is executed. In a South African context, the supervisor takes on a middle management role and therefore has additional responsibilities besides their supervisory responsibilities (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2010; Khosa, 2022). This means that supervisors are occupied with additional tasks and often supervision is not prioritised. Additionally, South African supervisors are thinly spread and are often responsible to supervise many offices of social workers and are therefore also not stationed at the same offices as many of their supervisees. However, remote supervision is one of the biggest advantages of using ICTs in supervision (Kanz, 2001). ICT tools such as videoconferencing solutions can help with remote supervision in circumstances where face-to-face supervision is not possible, such as when social workers are dispersed across different areas or during a pandemic (Mo, 2021; Mo & Chan, 2023). Thus, because South African social work organisations resources are limited, using ICT tools does not only improve the accessibility between supervisor and supervisee, but it also saves travelling time and costs as well, influencing the social worker's experience of the use of ICT tools in their supervision (Cf. Mo & Chan, 2023; Watson, 2016).

Other participants spoke about their competence and ease of use as well of the competence of their supervisors.

Participant 3: "Sometimes also the explanation that you receive back isn't necessarily what you understand, so it's this back and forth which I sometimes feel is a little bit would be completely avoided if either they read the e-mail properly or you have an in person conversation. So, it wasn't bad, but obviously with technology there is a sense of hiccups... They work for me. I am quite technological savvy, so I don't mind e-mail or quick phone call like I'm comfortable with that 100%. It is sometimes easier. I've only had positive experiences."

Participant 17: "Oh, it was quite hectic I won't lie cause now you needed to understand ICT tools more, download more apps that you need to introduce to yourself and understand. I mean we've used PDF and stuff like that, but not as

much. You needed to be hands on if she wanted something or whatever you need to submit via e-mail obviously the networks, limited data as well."

Participant 5: "So I found it very easy to sort of work online with her. I really enjoyed it. I liked the fact that I can sit and have a cup of coffee with her and if my dog barks, I say to her, really sorry the dog's barking at the moment and she's relaxed with it. So yeah, it worked really well for us."

Participant 6: "Good but I think her and I, we knew each other pre Covid, we studied together, we worked on cases together. So, I sort of, knew her outside of a supervision context. And so, I think shifting online, it wasn't awkward or uncomfortable. It was easy for me to sort of shift online."

Participant 9: "I think it would be harder for people to be supervised if they didn't know who you were and then it's like you pop up on the screen. I mean, you don't know me, so you don't know my sense of humour. So, it can form a barrier to your supervision. But I think if you've got somebody that's young and open and sort of understands the intricacies that sometimes the signal might drop or your face might freeze, you know. Then you're not that scared about it."

Participant 2: "I had a very like good experience cause obviously you have prior experience using ICT tools especially with us being more technology advanced with our age group."

From the above narratives, some participants were able to use the ICT tools in their supervision with ease, while others experienced it to be challenging. In addition, some participants also found that their supervisors experienced challenges in their use of ICTs. This correlates with the developmental theory of professional identity adapted to the context of the scope of the use of ICTs in supervision (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). A social worker who operates at a beginner level will not be aware of the use of ICTs in supervision as well as the policies regulating the use and associated trainings. Such a social worker is dependent on their supervisor for the continuation of their education and for their professional development. A social worker operating at the intermediate level is conflicted about their need for supervision and can identify opportunities for continuation of their education (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). A social worker who operates at an advanced level of professional

identity is someone who keeps abreast with the latest developments within the field. However, in South Africa, it is possible that many supervisors do not possess advanced professional identities where elements of ongoing education are essential components (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019). The increased use of ICTs in the social work supervision is considered a fairly new phenomenon (Mo, 2021). Therefore, the participants who experience themselves and their supervisors to use the ICT tools with ease might be operating at an advanced level whereas, the participants that found using ICT tools in their supervision challenging and who observed their supervisors not being competent in the use of ICTs in supervision, may have not taken responsibility to attend an appropriate training in the effective use of ICTs in supervision. Thus, according to Andrew (2012), both supervisor and supervisee must be digitally literate in order to engage with the ICTs used in supervision with ease. Mo (2021) and Mo and Chan (2023) therefore recommend that supervisors and supervisees undergo training regarding learning how to effectively use ICTs in supervision.

Other participants described how their experience of the use of ICT tools in supervision changed the way they engage with ICT tools.

Participant 8: "Yeah, it was odd, cause WhatsApp I used for family, friends and it is more relaxed. I could not even post naughty statuses anymore, because now there is someone, a professional, that was involved in my group now. So, I was part of it WhatsApp group. I had the personal number for the supervisor for emergency services and if I want to say something on this besides in the group. So, I needed to do a 360 shift from WhatsApp being in my comfort zone to it being this professional messaging way of making contact with my supervisor. It was awkward at the beginning because that's not what I thought WhatsApp was for compared to e-mails. Even with the writing on WhatsApp, you cannot even use, you know, your short version or emojis. So, it changed from instant messaging to a full blown messaging. Yes, it was more flexible, and I think that's with everything digital. So, the minute you go digital, it's more flexible because it was not time bound."

It is clear from the narrative above, that the participant had to change the way they used the ICT tools when they started it in supervision. For example, the participants

described that initially, he used WhatsApp for socialisation purposes, to communicate with his family and friends. However, the use of ICTs in supervision resulted in the participant and supervisor using WhatsApp for supervision purposes. According to Aasback and Røkkum (2021), the theory of domestication may help put into context how supervisors used ICTs to supervise. This theory suggests that ICT tools can be altered to fit its users' needs. According to Huusken and Vakkari's (2012) research, ICTs may be modified to avoid inflexible structures and be appropriate for daily activities. This modification of digital systems can be seen as a "workaround" to managing information systems that are appropriate for the tasks they are designed to serve (Røhnebæk, 2014). This may be referred to as domesticating digital systems, giving them purpose, and making them appropriate for routine use. This emphasizes how adaptable ICTs are, allowing users to utilise them in ways that the system's creator did not envision. Thus, participants and their supervisors used ICT tools such as WhatsApp in their supervision, although WhatsApp was not created to conduct social work supervision, the participants and their supervisor altered it to suit their need at the time which was to conduct supervision. Thus, the narrative substantiates the literature.

Others described how the use of ICTs in supervision impacts the supervisory relationship. See narratives as follows:

Participant 8: "It went more deeper than being a work thing. It became more of I would say social, and family orientated because she would do check-ups and ask, 'Are you feeling any symptoms etc'. So, the supervisor could send me a message anytime of any day when they wanted to. And sometimes it's filtered in on my weekends, she was asking me something on the weekend, on Saturday. So, it changed the whole view of the relationship that I had with my supervisor."

Participant 9: "She was looking at me. She could say certain things that she would not say in the office space when we are there."

From the above narratives it is clear that the use of ICT tools in supervision transformed the supervisory relationship. The narratives above indicated that supervisors would contact participants after stipulated working hours. Research

suggest that the use of ICTs can make distinctions between personal and professional lives more ambiguous, especially when it comes to the usage of social media and other private communication tools (OpenAI, 2023). The narratives substantiate the literature as personal communication tool, for example, WhatsApp was used in the supervision of the participants and supervisors contacted participants after working hours, crossing professional boundaries. The narratives also indicate the use of ICT tools in supervision enabled the supervisor that have frequent check ins with the supervisee. Goodyear (2014), suggests that ICT tools enables frequent and continuous communication between supervisors and supervisees, resulting in stronger and more effective supervisory relationships albeit sometimes to the detriment of the professional boundaries.

Furthermore, the above narratives indicate that some supervisors communicated more freely through the use of ICTs in supervision. According to Rudestam and Schoenholtz-Read (2010), by allowing for more flexibility in the supervision process, ICTs can improve the supervisee-supervisor interaction. Online supervision meetings can be organised at a time that is more convenient for both supervisees and supervisors, saving both money and travel time (Kasworm, Rose & Ross-Gordon, 2010). As a result, it may be less difficult for both supervisees and supervisors to engage in the process and alleviate stress. This is substantiated by the narrative that indicated the supervisor could speak more freely in supervision using ICT tools than traditional face-to-face supervision due to the travelling time saved by conducting supervision online (Mo & Chan, 2023). Additionally, ICTs provides a safer environment, where others are less likely to overhear the conversation, and therefore, if rapport is gained between the supervisor and supervisee, they are likely to engage more freely in supervision (Luo & Yeh, 2012; Mo & Chan, 2023).

4.4.2.4 ICT and supervision functions

Participants were asked to describe whether in their experience, the use of ICT tools promotes or hinders the functions of supervision. Participants described how the use of ICT tools in their supervision promoted the administrative and educational function of supervision but hinders the supportive function. See narratives below:

Participant 3: "I think it promotes the education and admin functions of supervision. I do, however, feel that it takes a hinder on the support.... So,

through utilising those tools for education and the admin part it's like a quick comment on word and track changes and all of that which it makes it a lot easier to get the job done. If I can say it like that. And so therefore I definitely think it promotes it in those two scenes it hinders support because I always see telephone and e-mail when I'm using it in my professional capacity as that a professional tool, so I'm not necessarily going to go and pour my heart out on an e-mail to my manager but because I have to rely on e-mail and WhatsApp and telephone to be able to reach her but I'm not going to reach out to her via that way for a supportive role because I'm someone that needs support in the physical form not through technology.”

Participant 7: “I would say that ICT tools that's used for educational purposes promotes. It also promotes the administration function of supervision. But according to me I would prefer having the person sitting in front of me to see what I'm going through when it comes to support.”

Participant 1: “But the only other thing is that I think especially within the field of social work, face-to-face and eye contact is very important to me. Now, cultural aspects play a role there. I think if my supervisor was male, I would keep a bit of a distance, but I would still look you in the eye and speak right? So, I would say that from an emotional and human standpoint it can hinder a bit because again it is a supervision session...”

In the narratives above, participants described that in their experience of the use of ICTs in supervision promotes the administrative and educational functions of supervision but hinders the supportive function. This is due to participants feeling like the human, physical element is required to support supervisees emotionally. Mo and Chan (2023), that it is critical to make sure that the use of ICTs does not take away from the interpersonal and relational components of interactional supervision and that there is still an emphasis on developing trusting connections between supervisors and supervisees. Both the narratives and the literature indicate a need for emotional support in the supervisory process. The narratives indicate that the use of ICT tools hindered the emotional support in their supervision. Mo and Chan, (2023) concurs that the use of ICTs can impact the supportive function of supervision. Furthermore, the above narratives also suggest that the use of ICT tools provided participants

accessibility to their distant and thinly spread supervisors which they greatly benefitted from generally, but especially in times of crisis or emergencies when they could not rely on their own knowledge. Kanz (2001), suggests that some of the key benefits of ICTs is that it allows for communication between distant supervisors and supervisees. It also allows for frequent, asynchronous communication between supervisors and supervisees which is especially helpful in times of crisis and emergency (Goodyear, 2014; Reamer, 2013).

Other participants described that accessibility ICTs provide them aids in the promotion of the functions of supervision:

Participant 13: "I feel like it promotes because even though my supervisor is not in the same building as me, she's still accessible to me. She is very responsive, so when I send a message she will respond timeously to my request. We also use e-mail but for me I feel like WhatsApp is easier because I always have my phone in my hand. So, it's an informal but also a formal way of communication for us because also. I will WhatsApp my supervisor if I need assistance on something."

Participant 8: "It does not hinder it; it does support cause now you have your supervisor in your pocket. You know you don't need to go stand in the long line in order to speak with the supervisor regarding the case load, it's easier for you to be in contact with the supervisor."

Participant 17: "Using ICT tools is easy access, and it saves a lot of time. So, it does enhance the supervision in that manner whereby even if you are away, we go away for trainings, but still, you can have such sessions where we can see each other and, you know, communicate similarly, like in person."

In the narratives above, it is evident that supervisors experienced the use of ICT tools to increase their accessibility to their supervisor which promoted the functions of supervision. The narratives above indicates that ICT tools allowed participants to have access to supervisors with whom they did not share a geographical location. Kanz (2001), suggest that one of the key benefits of ICT tools it that enables remote supervision. Remote supervision occurs when the supervisee and supervisor does not share the same geographical location, saving time and travel costs and making

supervision more effective and accessible (Rousmaniere & Renfro-Michel, 2016; Watson, 2016). Thus, the narratives support literature regarding the use of ICTs resulting in supervision being more accessible and frequent through remote supervision.

Some participants described the usefulness of ICTs to contact supervisors in times of crisis or emergencies:

Participant 6: "I think it promotes the aspects of supervision because whenever you struggle with something, then there is a way to make contact with your supervisor. It's not that you have to wait until your supervision date. You can get some help immediately or within the same day. So, it's not that you are left alone, and you have to cope on your own. She is there to help you whenever you need assistance."

Participant 12: "It supports. Just for the mere fact that at this point, everyone has WhatsApp. It's difficult when you don't have data, so you're not able to just pop a message at any time or in case of an emergency. But I mean it's there and it's accessible and we both have WhatsApp, so I'd say it's easier for us to communicate."

Participant 15: "I think definitely they do support. There are times, maybe you're doing a home-visit and you just need a quick guidance and then you can just call your supervisor. So, it's definitely supportive and it's quick as well."

It is evident in the above narratives that the participants experienced the use of ICT tools in supervision to be especially useful in times of emergencies and crisis. Reamer (2013), suggest that ICT enables frequent asynchronous communication between supervisors and supervisees which is especially helpful in times of emergencies. Thus, the literature is substantiated by the narratives.

Other participants described how the use of ICT tools in supervision can result in dependence on the supervisor:

Participant 3: "...But I think then because it promotes it, one becomes quite reliant on it and then you lose the element of the face-to-face physical contact of supervision."

Participant 8: “So it makes it easier, on the other hand that is bad as well because that means you can't think for yourself cause every minute that something happens, you want to go on WhatsApp, because you don't want to think, you don't want to apply what you know, you don't apply what you can, so you don't make any effort because most of the time you're relying on what your supervisor has to say because you have instant access to them so that a disadvantage of it.”

Furthermore, participants reported that the use of ICT tools in supervision can also result in an increased dependence on the supervisor, as ICT provides easy access to supervisors, resulting in supervisees consulting supervisors more often and frequently in order to execute work tasks. This may suggest that most of the participants are operating on the beginner level of the theory of professional identity and they are very dependent on supervision and not confident in their own set of knowledge and skills (Engelbrecht, 2019).

Other participants described how the use of ICT tools in supervision can hinder the supervisory process:

Participant 17: “I think using especially WhatsApp, it hinders cause now you no longer have like a limited time dedicated for work time, you can be easily reached, and you expected to answer or to avail yourself... You know, sometimes there are those boundaries that have been crossed while using such ICT tools.”

Participant 14: “It helped a lot, but body language is also very important because during Covid-19 you supervision but it's on a phone and the body language is not there. But in general, I can say it was very positive because there was not any physical contact between each other. So, it was very important and then I didn't feel so alone in those difficult times. I didn't feel alone in South Africa and the outside South Africa as I had a conference with other social workers around the world.”

Participant 16: “It promotes the functions supervision, it does not hinder unless the ICT tools are faulty. Unless you experience a problem, or your system is out of order, or it's affected by load shedding.”

It is evident from the above narratives that some participants experienced a blurring of the professional boundaries within the supervisory relationship with the increased accessibility offered by ICTs and that this had a negative impact on the supervision process. Literature has also stated that the use of ICTs can be a double-edged sword (Diaz, Chiaburu, Zimmerman & Boswell, 2012; Ďuranová & Ohly, 2016), suggesting that this is the result of the always-on connection that ICTs such as mobile devices provide, allowing supervisors to engage in work-related communications outside of organisational working hours. This infringement on personal time may negatively impact social workers health and holistic well-being (Hislop, Axtell, Collins, Daniels, Glover, & Niven, 2015; Kossek, 2016; Gadeyne, Verbruggen, Delanoeije, & de Cooman, 2018). It is also evident from the narratives above that participants experienced technical difficulties such as faulty ICT tools to negatively impact the supervisory relationship. Furthermore, the narratives also indicate that participants experienced challenges with the ICTs used in their supervision such as not being able to observe the body language of the supervisor. This substantiates literature suggesting that both supervisors and supervisees undergo training to learn and understand the features and functionalities of the different ICT tools, enabling them to select the appropriate ICT tool for their intended tasks based on its features and functionalities (Stebnicki & Glover, 2001; Mo & Chan, 2023). Mo (2021) further suggests that both supervisors and supervisees undergo training to develop a common understanding regarding the challenges associated with using ICTs in supervision such as technical difficulties. Both the narratives and literature note the importance in using appropriate ICT tools in supervision such as videoconferencing tools that allows for the observation of facial expressions.

4.4.4 Theme 3: Recommendation

4.4.4.1 Administration

Participants were asked which recommendations they would make in terms of the scope of ICTs to enhance the administrative function of supervision.

Participants recommended that online systems be introduced at social work organisations. See narratives below:

Participant 1: "If everything could be done on a computer, I would advise that. If the office and the staff is competent and technologically equipped to handle

that, then that is the way it should move forward. So, it's not a matter of 'ohm I don't know where this file is', it's there and certain permissions to be given, like a file cannot be deleted. Permissions creates categorisation, so people can be monitored accordingly. For example, if one of our area managers maybe wants to look at my report, she doesn't have to call and say send me a copy of this. She has access to it. She's the area manager."

Participant 2: "I know that in a lot of social work offices we still do everything handwritten and we have the actual case files. So, if we can just start by electronically doing that, I think that will be a big step in the right direction as well because it will just minimise your carbon footprint. Also, God forbid if something happens in the office, you have everything stored. It can also help promote confidentiality, that ethicalness of social work. Everything is just stored electronically, password protected, on a cloud. Only the people that needs to have access have access to that document in those files."

Participant 12: "Having the electronic system that can help with the administration part."

Participants expressed the need for an electronic social work programme or system to be implemented at social work organisations on which their work including client information can be stored. The above narratives recommend that social work organisations adopt a digital, paperless approach. According to research, various types of system management tools have been used to assist in keeping track of service users and supporting case management since the 1980s (Hill & Shaw, 2011). Both the literature and the narratives confirm that ICT tools such as system management tools can be of great benefit in enhancing the administrative function of supervision.

Participants recommended the use of ICTs for administrative tasks in supervision. See the narratives as follows:

Participant 5: "I think if you had a Google Drive, where your organisation was responsible for uploading your documents and you had a format...for your process notes because we each write differently. So, I think if it was online and it was typed, first of all, it's legible because I can't begin to tell you how some

social workers' handwriting looks it, so we need to be able to type it. I think though it also helps with the transition because social work has such a high turnover rate. So now I'm not having to go and read through 40 files and find an archive of files, it's all on the Google Drive. Mr So and so wants to see me, I go into the Google Drive, I look, he doesn't have a file, or he does have a file, let me quickly skim through it. So, it's all there. Nobody can say it's too expensive. It's relatively cheap. So, a Google Drive where everybody can access it, and everybody can get access to the documents, and you can always restore stuff if it gets deleted accidentally or lost. The supervisor can sort of manage it. I think it helps a supervisor to do admin because now the supervisor can sit in their office and can quickly look through the supervisees' top five files and can say, hey, you're missing an informed consent form, you're missing an end report and your process notes aren't up to date. So, I don't know what you're doing, but it's not working, or I read your process note and I barely understood what you were saying. Go in and rewrite it and so in that way, I think it's helping. Then you wouldn't have to ask a client to come and hand in a birth certificate again if it's all online, scan it and have your admin lady do it or tell the students from the university they are responsible for scanning all the documents. So, I think that way it would help in terms of admin."

Participant 6: "And ICT tools will be able to help because then the supervisor can check in via WhatsApp or via e-mail and provide the required documents via e-mail for instance. For instance, the different reports that we use, just to provide a template to say this is the template that we use, and you need to attach these documents to the report just to make sure that you are prepared for when you start delivering services."

Participant 4: "I would recommend for the continuation of the current use of the ICT tools like your WhatsApp and Zoom and MS Teams...in supervision because it's easily accessible and it works. In cases of emergency, when you need advice or guidance or support from your supervisor, then you can access at least one of those tools because it sometimes not always possible to meet up with your supervisor and have a face-to-face conversation. You can discuss your caseloads and the supervisor can provide constructive feedback for the

supervisee. It plays an important role in having an open relationship with your supervisor or open-door policy because of time constraints and high caseloads and fast turnover of clients. It makes it so easy to just have these ICT tools readily available so that you as a social worker can then use it to communicate in effectively with your supervisor.”

In the narratives above, participants recommend a shift away from handwritten, physical administrative tasks to an online system. Participants therefore recommends to social work organisations to shift to incorporating online systems to enhance the administrative function of supervision. For example, participants recommends that supervisors at social work organisations implement social work programmes containing service users case files and all their information making it accessible through permissions granted. Thus, social workers will be able to work and access client information on that system and supervisors can access supervisees work and execute the administrative function with ease. Research suggests that advances in ICT tools have led to a frequent practice of employing a central file storage system that can be accessed by any authorised user from any computer on the network and even over the internet. This suggests dependable backup systems and allows information to be exchanged quickly inside and between organisations (Hill & Shaw, 2011). These methods include software to use and preserve information gained through practice (Barrera-Algarin *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, research suggests that the introduction of central file storage, for example Google Drive as mentioned in the above narratives also corresponds with the management goal of increasing efficiency, thus promoting the administrative function of supervision (Hill & Shaw, 2011). Both the narratives and the literature suggest a digital form of executing administrative tasks to ensure easier to access to client information and supervisees work and to ensure that all data is stored safely.

In addition, the narratives above recommend how the use of ICT tools in supervision can enhance the administrative tasks of orientating new social workers. Literature suggest that supervisors use appropriate ICT tools in the orientation of social worker as the volume of information given is usually large and ICT tools can be used to assist the supervisee in retrieving the information again at a later stage when needed. It also allows the supervisor to offer frequent support to the supervisee (Jacques, 2019; Mo, 2021; Khosa, 2022). Both the literature and the participant the narratives recognise

the importance of the orientation of social workers and suggest the use of ICTs to enhance the process. Furthermore, the narratives above recommend the use of ICT tools in supervision to ensure swift and frequent communication between supervisors and supervisees. Research suggests that ICT tools allow for the rapid exchange of information within and across professional fields (Di Rosa, Musso, Dellavalle & Gucciardo, 2018). The narratives therefore concur with the literature.

4.4.4.2 Education

Participants were asked for recommendations in terms of the scope of ICTs to enhance the educational function of supervision.

Participants recommended online training. See narratives as follows:

Participant 2: “I know I’ve had trainings for the past two years now, 80% of it was online. So just continuing with that, obviously Zoom is an awesome function where you can have like breakout groups. So instead of where you having groups in a big training session, you can have groups online.”

Participant 5: “I think the CPD system is nonsense because what do social workers do? They spend the least amount of money for the most amount of CPD points. So, nobody’s really growing in the profession in any way shape or form. So, I think having being able to say, you I learned about this really cool technique and I’m going to do a Friday 12:00 o’clock company wide, everyone logs in and I’m going to teach you this technique online. And suddenly then I have 40 people that want to do my online technique and learn something.”

Participant 10: “And maybe we can use Zoom and MS Teams as well for our formal supervision, will have to get used to that. I think a person should just be more open to it because I think that’s where it also starts. We need to be open because the world is changing, and we need to be open. As social workers we are advocates of social change advocates, and we are people that need to be in tune with what’s going on outside. So how can we say we are in tune with outside if inside we are not, you know, reflecting what’s happening in the real world.”

Some participants recommended how ICT tools can be used to enhance the educational function of supervision. See narratives as follows:

Participant 6: “Whenever we have maybe group supervision or individual supervision, then we can still use the laptop for videos or practical ways to implement the skills and then also e-mail because then your supervisor can send you for instance a user manual or some type of tools via e-mail that you can use, that you can physically read through and implement in your practice.”

Participant 5: “The supervisor can say I've looked on the Google Drive. Guess what? Nobody is going to see clients until the process notes up to date. Even get a Google Drive where resources or books are uploaded for supervisees and they know if they go into the Google Drive and they can find like a book on play therapy, a book on attachment, a book on group work, so they can access that. Then the education also online becomes a lot easier because now I don't need say, maybe you can find an article about divorce. The supervisor can say go to the Google Drive, there's a lot of resources there, read them and then come and talk to me about the stuff you don't understand.”

It is evident that the participants are of the opinion that ICT tools can enhance the educational function of supervision. The narratives recommend the use of visual ICTs in both individual and group supervision in order for supervisors to observe the content being taught through educational supervision. Mo and Chan (2023) indicated that supervisors can use videoconferencing tools to provide educational content and training through the execution of the educational function of supervision. Additionally, Kanz (2021) further suggest that this use of ICT tools can enable supervisors to deliver educational content to individuals or groups who are in different geographical locations, enabling interactive learning and thus enhancing the educational function of supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Participants recommended that social work supervisors make use of ICT tools such as Google Drive, Zoom, MS Teams, and laptops to mention a few to enhance the educational function of individual and group supervision. These ICT tools cost money, therefore, the narratives correlate with research that suggests the use of ICT tools in supervision, costs additional resources which is particularly problematic as their organisations are resource constrained (Cf. Mo & Chan, 2023). Furthermore, the narratives above recommend that supervisors provide educational resources available via online platforms for social workers as are required for them to execute their work tasks. Theory on supervisees' learning styles suggests that supervisors must adjust their educational strategies to meet the

individual learning needs of the supervisee best (Engelbrecht, 2019). Thus, the educational function of supervision can be operationalised through the use of online learning platforms where supervisees can access educational resources based on their learning styles and needs (Stebnicki & Glover, 2001). This allows for individual paced learning. Both the narratives and literature concur that the online platforms to access learning materials can enhance the educational function of supervision. Thus, the literature is substantiated by the narratives.

Training on how to effectively use ICTs were recommended to enhance the educational function of supervision:

Participant 17: “Yeah, I think a lot training would be a good and would help us in terms of understanding now how to use it properly and developing programmes. So, training would be good for social workers but at the same time it shouldn't overpower our main goals.”

Participant 6: “...then your supervisor can send you for instance a user manual or some type of tools via e-mail that you can use, that you can physically read through and implement in your practice.”

Furthermore, the participants also recommended that social workers and social work supervisors undergo training to learn how to effectively use ICTs in supervision. This implies that both social workers and their supervisors are not competent at using ICTs in supervision. This correlates with research of Mo (2021) and Mo and Chan (2023), which stated that at the time, little effort was put into supervisors on the ethical and effective use ICT tools in the supervision of social workers. This further confirms that training can help supervisors and supervisees develop the necessary technical skills to use ICTs effectively in supervision, to understand the features and functionalities of different ICTs, enabling them to choose the most appropriate technologies for different functions of supervision and to understand the ethical and professional considerations associated with the use of ICTs in supervision (Andrew, 2012; Mo, 2021; Mo & Chan, 2023; Stebnicki & Glover, 2001).

4.4.4.3 Support

Participants were asked for recommendations in terms of the scope of ICTs to enhance the supportive function of supervision.

Participants recommended the continued use of ICT tools in the supervision of social workers to enhance the supportive function. See narratives below:

Participant 5: "In terms of support and emotional stuff, I think having it online, being able to see somebody in the comfort of their home. Even if you want to do it before work or after work, but being able to say to somebody, listen, go home two hours earlier because your last hour is supervision. So why do you need to sit in your office for the last hour, go home and sit in your space for the next hour, you know. So, you're still doing a full working day, but maybe you get to spend the hour at home rather than spending the hour in the office. So, I think then support becomes better."

Participant 6: "I think maybe via WhatsApp because it is more personal than an e-mail, so maybe just have an informal communication or conversation with the supervisee just to say that I'm just checking in on you. Is there anything you would like to ask there? Is there anything you struggling with? Because I know sometimes when you are starting at a new organisation you are afraid to ask questions, you are afraid to bother the supervisor because you are new, you don't want to provide a perception that you are not capable of doing the work, so you would rather sit back and figure this thing out on your own instead of getting the correct away from the start."

Participant 12: "If it is difficult to meet face-to-face, for instance, if you still want the support function of supervision to proceed with MS Teams and Zoom meetings, which would just ensure that you continue with your supervision. I mean now we have the option of putting your camera on, so it's still gives you the ability to recognise facial expressions and engage maybe not on a physical level, but still be able to engage. So, I don't really have much recommendations. I am not much of a technology person, but I'm getting the hang of it."

Participant 15: "WhatsApp for me is quite supportive in terms of yours checking in on things quickly."

The participants recommend for the continued use of ICT tools in the supervision of social workers. However, they recommend that supervisors select an appropriate ICT tool to execute the supportive function of supervision. This correlates Stebnicki and Glover, (2001) as well as Mo and Chan (2023) that suggested that both supervisors and supervisees undergo training to learn about the functionalities and features of the different ICT tools, to ensure the appropriate selection of ICT tools to operationalise the different functions of supervision.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter aimed to achieve the third objective of this study which involved empirically investigating the scope of ICTs used in the supervision of social workers in an organisational context in the Western Cape. Initially, this chapter discussed and evaluated the research methodology employed during this study. Thereafter, a description of the particulars of the social workers who participated in this study followed. Furthermore, the three themes and their associated sub-themes formulated by the findings of the research was identified and analysed. These themes include social work interventions, supervision and recommendations.

In the following chapter, the researcher will make conclusions established upon the completion of the empirical study and consequently provide recommendations for each conclusion drawn.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this research study was to gain an understanding of social workers' experiences regarding the scope of ICTs used in their supervision at social work organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa. The researcher successfully achieved the objectives as described in Chapter One through: conceptualising ICTs and describing their potential scope within a social work organisational context; analysing the functions of supervision within the context of the potential scope of ICTs in South African social work organisations and empirically investigating the scope of ICTs used in the supervision of social workers within their organisational contexts. The fourth objective of this research study involved formulating conclusions and presenting recommendations regarding the potential scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers to appropriate role players. This will be achieved in the current chapter. The discussion in the empirical study regarding the types, and use of ICT tools in the supervision of social workers; social workers' experiences of the types of ICT tools used in their supervision; their experiences on how the different types of ICTs used promote the functions of supervision, and their recommendations regarding how the use of ICTs can enhance the functions of supervision, enabled the researcher to answer the research questions as stipulated in Chapter One. This contributed to an increased understanding of the potential scope of use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers at social work organisations in Western Cape, South Africa.

The researcher conceptualised the use of ICT tools within social work organisations/practice and supervision in the literature review, enabling the reader to gain an understanding of the knowledge and understanding available. The research drew on different theories such as the developmental theory of professional identity, the theory of domestication, and the theory on the functions of supervision to conceptualise the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers. Considering the literature review and these theories as a point of reference, the researcher formulated a semi-structured interview which was conducted via MS Teams as the data collection process. The researcher analysed the findings from the semi-structured interviews in terms of the existing body of knowledge in the empirical study. The current chapter

will present conclusions and recommendations to social work organisations, social workers, social work supervisors, social work training institutions, and policymakers as a result of the findings generated in the empirical study.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicated in the empirical study, inform the conclusions presented in the current chapter. In addition, the recommendations presented in this chapter will be deduced from the presented conclusions. Thus, this chapter will include a coherent discussion regarding the key findings established by the empirical study and literature, and descriptive conclusions congruent with the themes and sub-themes established in the empirical study. Each theme will have synthesised conclusions followed by recommendations.

5.2.1 Conclusions regarding social work interventions

All participants have made use of ICT tools before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic with service users. Before the Covid-19 lockdown, the frequency and types of ICTs used in intervention with service users was minimal as well as the types of ICTs used. The tools used prior to the Covid-19 lockdown were predominantly the telephone and e-mail. During the Covid-19 lockdown, the frequency of the use of ICTs in interventions increased dramatically, becoming the primary medium through which interventions were rendered. The types of ICT tools used in interventions during lockdown also increased, including the use of videoconferencing tools and the continuation of the use of e-mails and telephones which were also used prior to the lockdown period. However, after the national lockdown restrictions were lifted the use of these ICTs were again decreased, albeit not to the rate prior to the restrictions. This reduction in the frequency of the use of ICT tools is largely associated with workers resuming face-to-face interventions. However, the range of the type of ICT tools used has been maintained and the use of ICTs are more frequent than it was before the Covid-19 pandemic. The restrictions enforced during the lockdown period forced social workers to incorporate the use of ICTs in their practices in order to ensure the continuation of services during that time, as face-to-face interactions and social gatherings were prohibited. However, because the lockdown was sudden and the need to continue services was urgent, social workers did not receive any training on the effective and ethical use of ICTs within social work intervention. The participant narratives indicated that they experienced many challenges during the Covid-19

pandemic specifically pertaining to the use of ICTs with service users to ensure the continuation of services. These challenges included lack of resources, technological illiteracy and ethical concerns. This is often a result of structural and organisational issues such as a lack of resources at South African social work organisations, social workers operating at the beginner level of professional identity, and vulnerable and low social functioning service users. Comparing the narratives with each other and with the existing body of knowledge, there are many factors impacting social workers' experience of the use of ICTs in interventions with service users. Thus, the participants' experiences of the use of ICTs in interventions with service users varied as some had good experiences while others experienced it to be rather challenging. This concurs with global literature that suggests that ICTs are used in social work interventions, however, the use thereof has both benefits, such as remote service delivery, and challenges, such as ethical concerns.

5.2.1.1. Recommendations

- Social workers must be trained on the effective and ethical use of ICT tools in interventions with service users.
- The SACSSP must develop and implement current guidelines and policies for the use of ICTs in interventions with service users.
- Social work organisations must formulate and implement policies and guidelines regarding the ethical use of ICTs in interventions with service users.
- Social work organisations must provide social workers with the ICT resources to engage in the use of ICT tools in interventions with service users.
- The SACSSP must stay abreast of the latest technological advances and continuously review and update policies and guidelines regarding the use of ICTs in social work interventions.
- Social work organisations must stay abreast of the latest technological advances and continuously review and update policies and guidelines regarding the use of ICTs in social work interventions.
- Social workers must stay abreast of the latest technological advances, continuously upskilling their technological abilities and find innovative and ethical ways to incorporate new technologies in interventions with service users.

- Higher educational institutions must incorporate theory on the use of ICTs in service interventions in their coursework.
- Higher educational institutions must incorporate a practical component on the use of ICTs with service users in interventions in the practice education of training student social workers.
- Social workers and social work supervisors must play an active role in the design process of ICTs, specifically developed to execute their work tasks. This is due to social workers knowing best what digital assistance they require to improve the execution of their work tasks.

5.2.2. Conclusions regarding supervision

Before the Covid-19 lockdown, the frequency, format and experience of social workers' traditional face-to-face supervision differed due to their years of experience, their level of professional identity and because supervision is not being prioritised at many South African social work organisations. Social work organisations that have a tendency of not prioritising supervision usually adopt "on-the-run" and "open-door policy" approaches. Thus, social workers practicing at South African social work organisations have a need for a more frequent and effective structured supervision system to ensure their professional growth and development. Social workers in South Africa also have varied experiences with relation to the operationalisation of the functions of supervision. Some participants experienced face-to-face supervision to be beneficial in terms of its functions and others felt that it did not aid to their professional development due to supervision not being prioritised.

Social work supervision before the Covid-19 lockdown was generally face-to-face or in person and their supervision sessions mostly consisted of a personal check-in and then going through case files and reviewing reports; supervision was thus mainly administrative. During the Covid-19 lockdown period, there was an increased use of ICT tools in the supervision of social workers. This allowed for an increase in the frequency of supervision and unstructured communication between supervisors and supervisees. Some participants described how they experienced their supervisors' use of ICTs in executing administrative tasks in order to operationalise the administrative function of supervision. For example, social workers identified that their supervisors used MS Word and its associated track changes features to review their reports and provide them with feedback in order to ensure that it is according to the

prescribed format and contains all the relevant information. Furthermore, participants indicated that their supervisors make use of ICTs such as laptops, online communication platforms, and YouTube videos to show them physical demonstrations of the techniques for instruction of the operationalisation of the educational function of supervision. In addition, the participants indicated that the use of ICT tools in their supervision enhanced the administrative and educational functions of supervision, however, it hindered the supportive function as it removed the human element from the interaction which affected their experience of emotional support. To enhance the supportive function of supervision, supervisors can make use of emojis in written text communication with their supervisees such as over WhatsApp or e-mail, which would allow for additional emotional context and therefore a greater feeling of emotional support. Additionally, these emojis can assist in putting written text in context which may aid in enhancing the human element that participants identified as missing in the use of ICTs in operationalising the supportive function of supervision. After the Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions have been lifted, many participants resorted back to traditional face-to-face supervision, however, they still use some ICT tools in their supervision thereby creating hybrid practice environments.

5.2.2.1 Recommendations

- The SACSSP and National Department of Social Development must revise the national Supervision Framework of 2012 and ensure that social workers receive the stipulated frequency of supervision and update it to include the whole spectrum of use of ICTs in social work supervision.
- Higher education institutions must incorporate theory on the use of ICTs in supervision of social workers in the curricula when training social work students.
- Higher education institutions' practice of educational supervisors must incorporate the effective and ethical use of ICTs in the supervision of student social workers.
- The supervisors at organisations that student social workers report to for their practice education, must incorporate the effective and ethical use of ICTs in their supervision.
- Supervisors must stay abreast of the latest technological developments, and continuously develop their technical skills in order to competently and ethically

incorporate new ICT tools in the supervision of social workers to enhance the functions of supervision.

- Social workers and social work supervisors must play an active role in the design process of ICTs, specifically developed to conduct supervision. This is due to social workers and supervisors knowing best what digital assistance they require during supervision.

5.2.3 Specific conclusions regarding the scope of ICTs in supervision

During the Covid-19 lockdown period, the types of ICTs used in the supervision of social workers included, WhatsApp, MS Teams, and Zoom, the telephone, and email to mention a few. The use of ICTs such as WhatsApp voice notes provided supervisees with quick access to their supervisors as it is quicker than typing a message; this allowed for instant, frequent and smooth flow of communication in the supervisory relationship, which supervisees found especially beneficial in times of crisis or uncertainty. Although acknowledging the benefit of the accessibility ICT tools such as the voice note features on WhatsApp provide, supervisees and supervisors also experienced challenges with the use of these types of ICTs. These challenges included miscommunication of written texts. For example, social workers experienced that when using written texts through ICT tools such as WhatsApp, text messaging or e-mail with their supervisors, their messages would often be misunderstood, owing to incomplete contexts. Social workers also experienced that the use of ICTs blurred the professional boundaries in the supervisory relationship, as supervisors would contact supervisees after hours with work-related concerns, impeding their personal time. This highlights the ethical concerns raised in the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers. Additionally, many supervisees experienced technical difficulties such as poor internet connections, cancellation of supervision sessions due to loadshedding, and rushed supervision sessions due to the time limits on different platforms such as ZOOM's 40-minute sessions. This resulted in rushed, ineffective supervision as social workers were not able to experience the full benefit of supervision owing to the highlighted constraints. Social workers also experienced having easy and frequent access to their supervisors through WhatsApp as, "having their supervisors in their pocket". This may increase the dependence of supervisees on their supervisors, instead of them relying on their own knowledge and skills sets. This may also hinder the professional growth and development of supervisees and taking ownership of

decisions. The availability of knowledge through artificial intelligence (AI) tools, like ChatGPT, enables unlimited access for all supervisees, eliminating the necessity for supervisors to be constantly present for educational supervision. By harnessing ICT tools creatively, supervisees can proactively engage in knowledge acquisition, freeing them from the constraints of relying solely on supervised learning moments by their supervisors. This empowerment in knowledge creation shifts the responsibility onto supervisees, fostering independence and self-driven learning.

Participants furthermore recommended that social work organisations must adopt a digital approach in order to enhance the administrative function of supervision. Currently, most supervisors have physical personal and client files which could get damaged in an unforeseen event. However, if these files are stored online and are backed up accordingly, it will be safe and accessible in unforeseen circumstances. The digitalisation of systems at social work organisations may free up some of both the supervisees and supervisors time, allowing more time for intervention and supervision and thus improving the quality of service delivery. Some participants recommend that both supervisors and supervisees undergo training to learn how to appropriately select an ICT tool based on its functions and the tasks that need to be completed and also in order to ensure the ethical use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers.

With regards to the supportive function of supervision, participants recommended the continuing use of appropriate ICT tools that allows for supportive online interactions. Participants also recommended the continued use of ICT tools in their supervision due to the accessibility it provides them to distant and thinly spread supervisors, which is especially useful in times of crisis or uncertainty. Furthermore, participants recommended that supervisors use ICT tools to fulfil administrative tasks such as orientation of new social workers and reviewing and evaluating reports and service users' files. ICT tools allow for distant supervisors to evaluate and review reports and case files digitally, and provide their supervisees with feedback that aids in their professional development.

With regards to the educational function of supervision, participants recommended that supervisors use online platforms to digitally store educational resources that supervisees can access to enhance their practice. Others recommended that social

workers become more open to using ICTs and to stay abreast with the latest technological developments. This is a characteristic of a social worker that operates on an advanced level of professional identity and takes responsibility for the continuation of their education and professional development. Participants also recommended the continued use of ICTs in service training and in group supervision to operationalise the educational function of supervision. This allows for collaborative learning between social workers who are dispersed and aids in their professional development.

5.2.3.1 Recommendations

- Social work organisations should embrace digital strategies for supervising social workers, as it is evident that this can lead to significant time and cost savings, positioning these organisations at the forefront of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- Significant budget allocations should be directed towards data and ICT equipment for social work supervision by organisations, as this investment can yield substantial long-term financial and quality of service benefits. This includes acquiring licenses for platforms such as Zoom or MS Teams, which can serve as official communication tools for organisations, ensuring seamless online interaction between supervisors and supervisees.
- Thorough effort and time must be dedicated by organisations to formulating policies governing the use of ICTs in supervision practices. These policies should especially address potential ethical challenges that may arise.
- Addressing the issue of after-hours online accessibility and responsiveness of both supervisors and supervisees is specifically crucial, and this matter should be covered comprehensively within the digital policies of social work organisations.
- Organisational digital/ICT policies should align closely with the policies/guidelines and Ethical code set forth by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACCP) to ensure compliance and regulation in the use of ICTs for supervising social workers.
- A noteworthy ICT tool that requires immediate integration into organisational supervision policies is AI, with a specific focus on utilising ChatGPT (which is widely used). It is essential to emphasise that the application of ChatGPT

should be primarily directed towards ideas refinement and language editing, a function that aligns with similar capabilities offered by various platforms. It is crucial to underscore that ChatGPT should not be employed for generating texts entirely from scratch. In this context, it is imperative that both supervisees and supervisors retain authorship over their written communications, ensuring that their individual voices, insights, integrity and professionalism remain integral to the discourse of ICT usage.

- Training sessions should be made available for social workers and supervisors by organisations to ensure their competent and ethical use of ICT tools in the supervision process, focusing on enhancing all aspects and tasks of supervision functions.
- To enhance knowledge sharing and self-directed learning of supervisees, organisations and supervisors could initiate campaigns aimed at building "digital libraries." These repositories could consist of YouTube videos and related material that social workers can access when seeking information on specialised topics. This may aid the educational function of supervision. Additionally, supervisors could for instance create voice or video podcasts covering context-specific subjects needed in the orientation, induction, and training of supervisees.
- Overall, it is recommended that proactive, forward thinking social work academics and practitioners take the lead in establishing think tanks and actions focused on the integration of ICTs in social work supervision within South Africa. These think tanks can lead to policy and guidelines of best practice relating to the incorporating ICTs in social work supervision. Furthermore, the output of these think tanks needs to be information that will allow social workers to stay abreast with global transformations in various spheres of life and human service provision. In the interim, every social worker, supervisor, social work organisation, the national and regional Departments of Social Development, and social work training institutions, should embrace the challenge of staying ahead of times, by ultimately ensuring the delivery of the best services to social work service users in South Africa, which is the ultimate goal of social work supervision.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is evident that social workers have experienced a variety of ICTs used at different frequencies and manners as a means to operationalising the functions of supervision. However, although the use of ICTs in supervision has many advantages, most prominently accessibility, social workers also experienced a number of challenges in their use of ICTs in supervision before, during and after the Covid-19 lockdown. Thus, as a result of the findings of this research study, the following recommendations are made for future research:

- A qualitative study on supervisors' experiences of the scope of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers.
- A qualitative study on social workers experiences on the factors impeding on the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers.
- A mixed-method study on the ethical implications of the use of ICTs in social work supervision.

5.4 KEY FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES

It is evident that most social workers experienced the use of ICTs in their supervision to be challenging. However, some experienced the use of ICTs to positively enhance the supervisory experience such as giving them access to distant supervisors while others experienced it to remove the human element from the supervisory process. Not all Higher education institutions (HEI's) are preparing social workers for the use of ICTs in supervision. In addition, social work organisations are also not preparing social workers and their supervisors for the use of ICTs in supervision, and this gives rise to a wide range of concerns. This unpreparedness for the use of ICTs in supervision amongst other factors such as structural and organisational issues may impede in the future on the supervisory process, affecting social workers' experience of the use of ICTs in their supervision.

The use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers must therefore be encouraged by HEI's, supervisors, social workers, social work organisations, the National Department for Social Development and the SACSSP. The promotion of the effective and ethical use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers must be a collective action and regulated by relevant statutory bodies and professional associations such as the SACSSP. The key findings of the research study are as follows:

- Social workers experienced the use of ICTs in their supervision before, during and after the Covid-19 lockdown.
- Social workers experienced an increased use of ICTs in their supervision during the Covid-19 lockdown period.
- Social workers experience a wide range of ICT tools used in their supervision during and after the Covid-19 lockdown.
- Social workers strongly recommend the incorporation of a diverse array of ICTs into their supervision practices for the future.
- Social workers and their supervisors require training on the ethical use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers.
- Specific governing and regulating policies on the ethical-informed use of ICTs in social work supervision on different levels (e.g. national and organisational) are crucial for the future.

The findings of this research study contribute to the body of knowledge of the social work profession as it establishes the literature pertaining to the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers in a South African context. These research findings highlight the types of ICTs used, how they are used and social workers' experiences of the use in South African social work organisations. Thus, the key findings of the use of ICTs in the supervision of social workers will be distributed to different stakeholders via different ICT platforms as well as by means of a published research article in a local social work journal.

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ANNEXURE 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Biographical Information

1.1 How long have you been a practicing social worker?

1.2 Describe the organisation you are employed at in terms of area (urban, semi-urban, rural), field of service, public or private, and type of services.

2. Social work intervention and the use of ICT before, during and after the Covid-19 lockdown period.

2.1 Describe if and how you have made use of ICT tools in your interventions with service users **before** the Covid-19 lockdown period.

2.2 Describe if and how you have made use of ICT tools in your interventions with service users **during** the Covid-19 lockdown period.

2.3 Describe if and how you are making use of ICT tools in your interventions with service users **after** the Covid-19 lockdown period.

3. Face-to-face Supervision before, during and after the Covid-19 lockdown period

3.1 Describe the format and frequency of your supervision **before** the lockdown period.

3.2 Elaborate on how you have **experienced** face-to-face supervision **before** the lockdown period, specifically in terms of the educational, administrative and supportive functions of supervisions.

3.3 Describe whether your supervisor **used of any ICT tools during lockdown?** (Probe specifically what ICT tools were used and how was it experienced).

3.3.1 Elaborate on whether **your experiences** of supervision (as experienced in question 3.1 and 3.2) changed **during lockdown**.

3.4 Elaborate whether **your experiences** of supervision **changed after lockdown**. (as indicated in question 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3). Motivate your answer.

4. Experience of ICT in supervision

4.1 What types/tools of ICT does your supervisor currently utilise in your supervision?

4.1.1 Describe how are they using each identified tool.

4.1.2 How do you experience the use of the identified ICT types/tools (identified in question 4.1) in your supervision?

4.3 How do the identified types/tools of ICTs promote/hinder the functions of supervision in terms of support, education and administration?

4.4 What do you recommend in terms of the scope of ICTs to enhance the support, education and administration functions of your supervision?

ANNEXURE 2



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information below which will explain the details of this research project. Please feel free to contact the researchers about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are completely satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to decline to participate. In other words, you may choose to take part, or not. Saying no will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part initially. The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research at Stellenbosch University has approved this study (Project ID #: SW-2021-23370]. We commit to conduct the study according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the South African Department of Health Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Studies (2015) and SACSSP

1. WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS STUDY?

This research study is conducted by *Lee-Anca Harris*. The researcher is from the Social Work Department at Stellenbosch University.

2. WHY DO WE INVITE YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

You were approached as a possible participant because you are a practising social worker in Western Cape, South Africa who experienced face-to-face supervision as well as the use of ICTs in supervision.

3. WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT?

The goal of this research study is to gain an understanding about social workers' experiences regarding the scope of ICTs used in their supervision.

4. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to be available for an online interview via MS Teams at a time of your convenience, where you will share your experiences of the scope of ICTs used

during supervision. You are welcome to contact the researcher on 20316828@sun.ac.za should you have any further questions.

5. ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN MY TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

The research study is considered low risk in terms of research ethical considerations (REC). Thus, no harm is predicted throughout the duration of the study or after the completion of the research. You will be regarded as anonymous and unidentifiable, therefore, none of your personal details will be included in the research report. All interviews will be regarded as completely confidential. No harm or discomfort is predicted as this is a low-risk study that does not involve emotion. However, should you experience any discomfort and any point of the interview, you are encouraged to express it, as it will be addressed to your satisfaction.

6. WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

The possible benefits that may result from this study includes the recommendations that will be made to social work policy makers, the SACSSP, social work organisations including supervisors and supervisees and social work training institutions.

7. WILL I BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY AND ARE THERE ANY COSTS INVOLVED?

The researcher is personally responsible for all costs involved for this study. The interviews will be conducted online via MS Teams, and you will be responsible for internet costs on your end. No further costs will be inflicted on you as a participant. Your participation is voluntary, and you will not be compensated for participating.

8. WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO MY INFORMATION?

Any information you share with me during this study and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. All interviews will be conducted privately; however, they will be recorded. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to these interviews' recordings. The recordings and data collected from these recordings will be kept safe by storing all data and information on password-protected devices. Recordings will also be deleted as soon as transcriptions are completed. You and the organisation for which you work will remain anonymous and will be unidentifiable in the research report. Should you be quoted in the final research report, you will be anonymous.

9. HOW DO I MAKE CONTACT WITH THE RESEARCHERS?

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, *Lee-Anca Harris* at 20316828@sun.ac.za , and/or the supervisor *Prof. Lambert Engelbrecht* at lke@sun.ac.za

10. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

If you have questions, concerns, or a complaint regarding your rights as a research participant in this research project, please contact Mrs Clarissa Robertson [cgraham@sun.ac.za; (+27) 021 808 9183] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant, I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form, or it was read to me, and it is written in a language in which I am fluent and with which I am comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and I am satisfied that all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and nothing bad will come of it – I will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I agree that the interview with me can be [video-recorded / audio-recorded].

By signing below, I _____ (*name of participant*) agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by _____ (*name of principal investigator*).

Signature of Participant

Date

DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

As the **researcher**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	I did/did not use an interpreter. (If an interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.)

Signature of Principal Investigator **Date**

Signature of Interpreter (if applicable) **Date**

Permission to have all anonymous data shared with journals:

When this study is finished, we would like to publish results of the study in journals. Most journals require us to share your anonymous data with them before they publish the results. Therefore, we would like to obtain your permission to have your anonymous data shared with journals.

Tick the Option you choose for anonymous data sharing with journals:

I agree to have my anonymous data shared with journals during publication of results of this study

☐ Signature_____

OR

I do not agree to have my anonymous data shared with journals during publication of results of this study

☐ Signature_____

ANNEXURE 3

ChatGPT response


Can ChatGPT be used in social work practice?

Yes, ChatGPT, may be used in social work practice. For instance, it can offer counselling services, link people up with useful resources, and give advice on how to deal with various difficulties. Additionally, ChatGPT may be used to spread knowledge about social problems and increase awareness of significant concerns. It can offer instructional materials and respond to inquiries from the general public. Additionally, ChatGPT may be used to poll participants or analyse social media data to get insights into current societal concerns. This can aid social workers in better comprehending the requirements and experiences of the populations they work with.

Additionally, ChatGPT may be utilised to automate administrative chores including appointment scheduling, reminder sending, and document management (OpenAI, 2023).

ANNEXURE 4

South African supervisory governmental vacancy



**Western Cape
Government**
FOR YOU

HEALTH JOBS
EDUCATION JOBS

BROWSE
SEARCH
NEED HELP?
SIGN UP
LOG IN

Minimum Requirements	Formal tertiary qualification in Social Work (e.g. Bachelor of Social Work) that allows professional registration with the SACSSP; Registration with the SACSSP as a Social Worker; A minimum of 7 years appropriate experience in social work after registration as Social Worker with the SACSSP.
Recommendation	<p>A valid code B driving licence.</p> <p>NB: People with disabilities that restrict driving abilities, but who have reasonable access to transport, may also apply.</p>
Key Performance Areas	Ensure that a social work service with regard to the care, support, protection and development of vulnerable individuals, groups, families and communities through the relevant programmes is rendered; Attend to any other matters that could result in or stem from social instability in any form; Supervise employees: Supervise and advise social workers , social auxiliary workers and volunteers to ensure an effective social work service; Keep up to date with new developments in the social work field; Supervise all the administrative functions required in the unit and undertake the higher level administrative functions.
Competencies	Knowledge of the following: Job related knowledge; Analytic, diagnostic, assessment tools, evaluation methods and processes; Personnel Management; Supervision Framework for Social Workers; Social Work legislation related to children; Social work theory and interventions; Information and Knowledge Management; Protocol and professional ethics; Skills needed: Communication (written and verbal); Proven computer literacy; Organising and planning; Project planning; Psycho social intervention; Report writing; Presentation and facilitation; Analytical and problem-solving; Client orientation and customer focus.
Remuneration	<p>R 432 348 - R 500 715 per annum (OSD as prescribed)</p> <p>Note on remuneration: Cost-to-employer (CTE) remuneration packages for certain occupation-specific dispensations (OSD) are inclusive of all costs related to service benefits or obligations including basic salary, 13th cheque, medical assistance, housing assistance, pension-fund contributions, etc. Where remuneration is not indicated as CTE, employees' service benefits or obligations are funded by the employer.</p>

BROWSE BY CATEGORY
APPLY

ANNEXURE 5

ETHICAL COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER



NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

3 September 2021

Project number: 23370

Project Title: The scope of Information and Communication Technology in the supervision of social workers Dear Miss LN Harris

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 06/08/2021 11:18 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
3 September 2021	2 September 2024

GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (23370) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Budget	Research Project Budget	05/08/2021	1
Research Protocol/Proposal	Harris Research Proposal for REC	05/08/2021	1
Informed Consent Form	Consent Form	05/08/2021	1
Data collection tool	Interview Schedule	05/08/2021	1

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioral and Education Research

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.

The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

As soon as Research Ethics Committee approval is confirmed by the REC, the principal investigator (PI) is responsible for the following:

Conducting the Research: The PI is responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC-approved research protocol. The PI is jointly responsible for the conduct of co-investigators and any research staff involved with this research. The PI must ensure that the research is conducted according to the recognised standards of their research field/discipline and according to the principles and standards of ethical research and responsible research conduct.

Participant Enrolment: The PI may not recruit or enrol participants unless the protocol for recruitment is approved by the REC. Recruitment and data collection activities must cease after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

Informed Consent: The PI is responsible for obtaining and documenting affirmative informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their affirmative informed consent. The PI must give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents, where required. The PI must keep the originals in a secured, REC-approved location for at least five (5) years after the research is complete.

Continuing Review: The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is the PI's responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. Once REC approval of your research lapses, all research activities must cease, and contact must be made with the REC immediately.

Amendments and Changes: Any planned changes to any aspect of the research (such as research design, procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material, etc.), must be submitted to the REC for review and approval before implementation. Amendments may not be initiated without first obtaining written REC approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

Adverse or Unanticipated Events: Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research-related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to the REC within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. The PI must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants.

Research Record Keeping: The PI must keep the following research-related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence and approvals from the REC.

Provision of Counselling or emergency support: When a dedicated counsellor or a psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

Final reports: When the research is completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions), the PI must submit a Final Report to the REC to close the study.

On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits: If the researcher is notified that the research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, the PI must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

ANNEXURE 6

REFLEXIVITY REPORT

The field of qualitative research assigns the ethical responsibility of engaging in the practice of reflection to the researcher in order to enhance the accountability and validity of the researcher and the research study (Mortari, 2015). Reflexivity is defined as a researcher's awareness of how their participation may impact the research process (Dodgson, 2019; Haynes, 2012; Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). It can further be defined as the self-examining action of how the researcher's subjectivity may have influenced the study (Palaganas et al., 2017). Therefore, the researcher should identify and make readers aware of any common distinctions and similarities between themselves and their research subjects (Dodgson, 2019). Researchers can use reflexivity to reflect on their involvement throughout the study process (Ruokonen-Engler, 2016; OpenAI, 2023). The researcher should identify and make readers aware of any common distinctions and similarities between themselves and their research subjects (Dodgson, 2019). Reflexivity has been proposed as a useful method for researchers to reflect on their participation throughout the research process (Ruokonen-Engler, 2016). Using this method, the researcher will respond to the six questions posed by the authors in order to actively participate in reflexivity.

1.What personal experience do I have with my research topic?

After six months into the research process, the researcher found employment as a practicing social worker. During this time the researcher has experienced the use of ICT tools both in practice and supervision. However, the researcher started working as a practicing social worker after the national Covid-19 restrictions has been lifted and therefore the researcher could relate with the participants experience of the use of ICT tools in practice and intervention after the Covid-19 pandemic but not prior. Therefore, the researcher was not fully able to relate with the participants experience of the use of ICT tools both in practice and supervision before, during and after Covid. This contributed to the researchers' objectivity towards the scope of ICT tools used in the supervision of social workers before, during and after the Covid-19 lockdown period.

2.How did I come to study the specific topic in the field?

My academic supervisor suggested the topic of study to the researcher. Before deciding to commence with the topic, the researcher discovered an interest in knowing how social workers and their respective social workers continue service delivery during the Covid-19 lockdown period, given that they work with vulnerable groups. During the Covid-19 lockdown period, I was in my fourth year of study and the university terminated face-to-face learning and we commenced with online learning. There were many challenges experienced as my practice education was discontinued however, I still had to write reports on practice experiences and achieve the outcomes for the year. This sparked an interest in knowing what tools social workers and their supervisors used to continue service delivery and supervision as well as their experiences thereof.

3.What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?

At the start of this research study, I was a newly qualified social worker with no work experience. However, during the course of the study I found employment as a practicing social worker and started experiencing the use of ICT tools in both practice and supervision. At these times, the Covid-19 national lockdown and restrictions has been lifted and I thus only experienced the use of ICTs in practice and supervision after the Covid-19 lockdown. Thus, the similarities that I shared with the research participants is that they as well as myself have experience the use of ICT tools in practice and supervision after the Covid-19 lockdown. The difference between myself and the research participants is that they have experience the use of ICT tools in practice and supervision before and during the Covid-19 lockdown whereas I have not. Thus, I had knowledge and experience of the scope of ICT tools used in supervision after the Covid-19 lockdown. My academic supervisor and myself also used ICTs, specifically WhatsApp for our consultations in order to combat the loadshedding electricity crisis in South Africa as well as the differences in our schedules. This allowed for uninterrupted consultations in order ensure a good quality work.

4.How did I gain access to the field?

I gained access to the field by recruiting participants from my own personal network. Some of the participants are friends, others are colleagues that I met while I was working as a practicing social workers and others was referred to me by these friends and colleagues.

5.How does my own position (age, gender, class, ethnicity, economic status etc.) influence interaction in the field and the data collection process?

During the data collection process, I interviewed participants from different ethnic backgrounds, classes, ages, communication styles and so on. Thus, I had to ensure that these factors do not negatively impact the data collection process. For example, during the data collection stage of the research process I was a newly qualified social worker with nearly two years work experience. Most of the research participants were older than me and had more experience than me, thus I felt nervous and overwhelmed. However, to mitigate potential negative impacts and biases stemming from feeling inexperienced as a social worker and a researcher, I swiftly identified those feelings soon after starting the data collection process and approached the data collection with sensitivity, self-awareness, and an open mindset.

6.What is my interpretation perspective?

Because this was a qualitative study, my interpretive viewpoint was subjective. This became clear as I was analysing the data, as I started either opposing or agreeing with the participants' narratives. This is due to my opinion becoming embedded throughout the study process, rather than being detached or impartial. As soon as I realised this, I was able to critically evaluate my analyses and conclusions, recognizing the factors that influence my perspective allowing me to approach information with a more open and self-aware mindset.