

Strengthening the Social Work Supervisory Framework in Indonesia: A Call for Professional Accountability

Background

With the support of UNICEF, the Indonesian Social Work Consortium (KPSI) convened a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on social work supervision as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen professional accountability and service quality in Indonesia (KPSI & UNICEF Indonesia, 2025). Supervision constitutes a crucial element of professional social work practice, particularly in services involving survivors of violence and other vulnerable populations. It functions not only as a mechanism for quality assurance, but also as an ethical safeguard, a platform for professional development, and a source of emotional support for frontline practitioners (Susilowati et al., 2020; Yuliani, 2021).

Despite the legal mandate articulated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2019 on Social Workers, which recognizes supervision as an integral component of professional practice, this misalignment has compromised the professional guidance system. Consequently, it limits the social worker's capacity to ensure the safety, dignity, and best interests of the child inherent in survivor-centered service delivery (Wismayanti et al., 2021)

Recognizing this structural gap, the FGD brought together academics, practitioners, and policymakers to critically examine prevailing supervision practices, identify systemic challenges across policy, governance, and workforce capacity, and articulate strategic directions toward a supervision framework grounded in victim-centered principles and professional accountability. In addition to field-based consultation, the proposed framework is informed by a selective review of peer-reviewed scientific literature and relevant policy documents on violence, victim-centered services, and social work supervision in Indonesia. This dual foundation ensures both conceptual rigor and contextual relevance in the policy directions advanced.

Objectives

The Focus Group Discussion was designed to provide a structured and reflective forum for examining the current state of social work supervision in Indonesia. Specifically, the discussion sought to map existing supervision mechanisms across government and service institutions,

identify systemic gaps in policy, implementation, workforce capacity, and governance, and examine promising supervision practices currently emerging in the field. Through this process, the FGD aimed to generate strategic and context-sensitive recommendations to inform the development of a national social work supervision framework aligned with human rights principles, child protection standards, and professional accountability.

Key findings:

Participants unanimously recognized supervision as a core quality assurance mechanism in social work practice, particularly in upholding ethical standards, ensuring alignment with the best interests of clients, and maintaining quality and consistency in case handling. However, despite this shared understanding, participants emphasized that supervision in practice remains largely administrative. Opportunities for reflective dialogue, professional guidance, and emotional support are limited, constraining supervision's potential as a space for learning, ethical deliberation, and professional growth.

A critical finding across institutions was the persistent conflation of supervision with Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). Supervision is frequently conducted using the same instruments as M&E, embedded within hierarchical authority structures, and oriented toward compliance rather than professional development. This structural overlap has reduced supervision to a bureaucratic function, undermining its educative and supportive roles. Participants stressed the importance of clearly distinguishing supervision from M&E, emphasizing that supervision should prioritize professional development, reflective practice, and client protection, while M&E should focus on program accountability and performance measurement.

Participants further agreed that effective supervision comprises three interdependent functions: administrative, educational, and supportive. The administrative function relates to compliance with standard operating procedures, documentation, and case reporting, while the educational function encompasses case consultation, skills development, and continuous learning. The supportive function, providing emotional support and preventing burnout was identified as the weakest yet most urgently needed, given the high emotional burden faced by social workers handling complex and traumatic cases.

Supervision capacity across public institutions was found to be severely compromised by a critical shortage of qualified supervisors. Participants identified long-term recruitment restrictions,

an aging workforce approaching retirement, limited career mobility for non–social work graduates, and uneven qualifications among existing supervisors as key contributing factors. Reported supervision ratios, such as one supervisor overseeing more than 20 institutions, render meaningful and sustained supervision structurally unfeasible. Without urgent workforce regeneration, participants warned that supervision risks remaining symbolic rather than functional.

Despite these challenges, participants identified several promising practices currently implemented in the field. These included the Case Conference Model facilitated by the Ministry of Social Affairs through STPL, which enables interdisciplinary reflection and shared decision-making, as well as peer supervision initiatives in DKI Jakarta that strengthen collegial learning and psychological resilience. While both practices demonstrate significant potential, participants noted that they remain fragmented, lack formal standardization, and have yet to be integrated into a coherent national supervision system.

Taken together, these findings underscore a strong consensus on the urgency of developing a national social work supervision framework. Participants emphasized the need to formally define supervision as a professional obligation, establish minimum supervision standards, standardize instruments and mechanisms, clarify supervisory authority across governance levels, develop certification and training pathways for supervisors, and integrate effective NGO-led practices into public service systems.

Strategic Recommendations

Based on the collective reflections and discussions, the FGD recommended a set of strategic actions to strengthen social work supervision in Indonesia. These include the development of a National Social Work Supervision Framework, the clear institutional separation between professional supervision and administrative monitoring, and the establishment of standardized supervision instruments. Participants further highlighted the importance of creating structured certification pathways for supervisors, investing in workforce regeneration, and systematically integrating supervision into child protection and broader social service systems.

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