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Ethical issues of the supervision of occupational therapy students

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Introduction: Ethical issues of occupational therapy practice are poorly documented. Up to now, no empirical evidence describing ethical issues of supervising occupational therapy students has been generated. Only one article describes ethical issues encountered during clinical training from students' perspective.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to document ethical issues encountered by occupational therapy fieldwork educators in Québec-Canada and how they overcome them.

Method: Husserl's phenomenological method was used to conduct this qualitative research. Twenty occupational therapists were interviewed in a semi-directed, one-on-one phone interview to discuss the ethical issues they face when supervising students. Interviews were recorded on a digital audio tape and fully transcribed. Giorgi's methodological steps have been used to analyze narratives.

Results: Many participants report facing ethical issues when supervising students. As observed in the field of psychology, the results show that the occupational therapist sometimes experiences a conflict of loyalty towards the two vulnerable persons (the client and the student) under his or her responsibility. Specifically, the fieldwork educator experiences a conflict between the client (to whom he or she wishes to offer the best services) and the student (to whom he or she wants to offer a supervision that supports the student's learning and the development of his or her professional skills).

Conclusion: These ethical issues must be addressed to better prepare occupational therapists to deal with these complex realities, which may negatively affect occupational therapy services and clinical supervision if not addressed.