
EPRA International Journal of **Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook**

SJIF Impact Factor(2019): 6.124

Volume: 6 August - July 2019-2020

FIELD WORK IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: A CONTEMPORARY OUTLOOK

Mr. Pradeep B.S

*Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Davanagere University, Davanagere, Tholahunase, Davanagere,
Karnataka 577002, Karnataka, India*

Dr.D.Srinivasa

Department of Studies in Social Work, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Mysuru-570006, Karnataka, India.

ABSTRACT

Field work practice is a vital component of social work education. It consists of accumulating knowledge in different situations. It is a dynamic process of observing, amassing, implementing creative and innovative ideas. Positive field work supervision, based on principles of adult learning is vital to the integration of theory and practice during the field work experience. Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Development or social work is a form of professional service to the people, comprising a composite of knowledge, skills, attempting at assisting them, as individuals, groups or communities for attending satisfying relationship and standards of life in accordance with particular needs, wishes and capacities and in harmony with those community. The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. Field work practice in social work is a comprehensive, student-friendly guide for those beginning their first social work field experience. The article examine the most questions, concerns and problems students encounter in their field practicums and provides them with essential information for completing the field experiences successfully. The role of field work as an integral part of the training for professional social workers has to be recognized by all concerned so that the best effort is made by the student, the school and the agency to provide such learning opportunities to the student which will have a carryover effect in his professional career field work.

KEYWORDS: *Epistemology, Social work, Field work, Human Behaviour*

PROLOGUE

Field work training makes the students employable and confident to face the interviews and challenges in professional practice. Social work has its roots in the struggle of society to ameliorate poverty and the resultant problems. Therefore, social work is intricately linked with the idea of charity work; must be understood in broader terms. Increasingly, schools of social work are calling on their students to recognize that

international issues touch the practice of all social workers, and it is essential that they be cognizant of, and responsive to, the effects of globalization. The concept of charity goes back to ancient times, and the practice of providing for the poor can be found in all major world religions. Social work as a profession and a social science committed to the pursuit of social justice, to quality of life, and to the development of the

full potential of each individual, group and community in a society.

Social work is a practice profession and an academic discipline that recognizes that interconnected historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors serve as opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development. Structural barriers contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The development of critical consciousness through reflecting on structural sources of oppression and/or privilege, on the basis of criteria such as race, class, language, religion, gender, disability, culture and sexual orientation, and developing action strategies towards addressing structural and personal barriers are central to emancipatory practice where the goals are the empowerment and liberation of people. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion.

The social change mandate is based on the premise that social work intervention takes place when the current situation, be this at the level of the person, family, small group, community or society, is deemed to be in need of change and development. It is driven by the need to challenge and change those structural conditions that contribute to marginalization, social exclusion and oppression. Social change initiatives recognize the place of human agency in advancing human rights and economic, environmental, and social justice. The profession is equally committed to the maintenance of social stability, insofar as such stability is not used to marginalize, exclude or oppress any particular group of persons.

Social development is conceptualized to mean strategies for intervention, desired end states and a policy framework, the latter in addition to the more popular residual and the institutional frameworks. It is based on holistic biopsychosocial, spiritual assessments and interventions that transcend the micro-macro divide, incorporating multiple system levels and inter-sectorial and inter-professional collaboration, aimed at sustainable development. It prioritizes socio-structural and economic development, and does not subscribe to conventional wisdom that economic growth is a prerequisite for social development.

A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Being a global profession, education for social work takes place in most of the countries in the world. It has an outreach of around 3000 schools of social work in over 114 countries in the world (Garber 2000; Midgley 2001; IASSW 2000). Besides the regular social work, International social work is taught in schools of social work and cross-national cooperation between training programs is common practice (Hokenstad & Kendall, 1995, Cox and Pawar 2006). Global definition of social work profession facilitates 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 (IFSW 2014). The social work professionals from the west and from the third world countries who were trained in the western countries attempted to develop theories, knowledge and models and started to apply them in the third world countries. But the socio-cultural milieu and indigenous aspects of the third world countries did not match those of

the west. Midgley (1981) argued that western ideas, technologies and institutions replicated in the developing countries were actually to serve the interests of developed countries and establish a new colonialism in a more subtle and effective way in order to have power over them.

EPISTEMOLOGY OF FIELD WORK IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Extreme empiricism leads to the abandonment of empiricism. It leads to a form of skepticism, granting existence only to the existentially observed, as phenomenology does, or it turns to epistemological doctrines that posit realities behind observable reality, i.e., to various forms of rationalism. Fieldwork practicum is associated essentially with training for social work practice it discusses the different meanings attached to social work practice. Having discussed the meaning of social work practice, the chapter then highlights the difference between the meanings of fieldwork as understood in the social sciences and in Social Work before discussing the details of the fieldwork component in Social Work. Then the chapter seeks to examine the different components of fieldwork practicum in Social Work, the supervision process, and finally the evaluation of fieldwork practicum. The next section then discusses the importance of fieldwork training in Social Work including the learning of the students, the challenges that they face on the field, and the impact that it has on their development as trained social workers. A lot of challenges that students face in their fieldwork training pertain to the differences of opinions between the academicians and practitioners. Thus, the subsequent section highlights the debate between the academicians and practitioners in Social Work with respect to their roles, and how they affect the relationship between theory and practice in Social Work. Finally, the last section discusses the connections and contradictions between the classroom knowledge and the field-based knowledge in Social Work.

Social work is a academic discipline that seek to improve the quality of life and subjective well-being of individual, groups and communities through research, policy, community organizing, direct practice, crisis intervention, and teaching for the benefit of these affected by social disadvantages such as poverty, mental and physical illness or disability, and social injustice including violations of their civil liberties and human rights. Based on this comprehensive definition it can be understood: a) social work is professional service, b) it is based on scientific knowledge and skill in human relations, c) focuses on self-realization of an individual, group and community, d) carefully developed methods and processes are applied, e) art of networking between various resources, f) target group scope includes an individual, group and community, g) scientific method of helping people to help themselves, h) different skills, methods, tools and techniques are deployed to solve the problems of the people, i) benefits disadvantaged sections of the society, j) applied knowledge from interdisciplinary disciplines, and improves quality of life of people.

SIGNATURE PEDAGOGY IN SOCIAL WORK

Concurrent practice learning in which the profession socializes its students to perform the role of practitioners. Field work helps the students to connect and integrate theory and practice. Field work education is systematically designed, supervised, coordinated, and evaluated based on the criteria by which students demonstrate achievement of their

competencies. It is an ongoing learning of practice with an opportunity to develop intervention skills in reality situation. Social work is a practice profession. It does not confine only to classroom learning. The review committee on social work education (1978) has mentioned the following objectives of field work: i) development of professional skills through learning to use knowledge for the study and analysis of problems and selection of appropriate means to solve them; ii) development of skills in problem-solving at macro to micro levels; iii) integration of classroom learning with field practice; iv) development of skills required for professional practice at the particular level of training; v) development of professional attitudes, values, and commitment; and development of self-awareness and professional idea.

Based on the reflections of educators and students we may classify social work practice at three levels. These include: (i) micro-level, (ii) mezzo-level, and (iii) macro-level. There are different ideologies that predominantly guide social work practice at each level. Also, at different levels there are different methods of social work practice that take primacy in the field. However, the predominance of a particular ideological position or a method of social work practice does not imply that other ideological positions or methods of social work practice are of no use at that level.

Micro-level social work practice is individualistic in orientation and therapeutic in nature. At this level, the social worker deals with individuals or groups, comprising of individuals, facing similar problems. But, at the same time individualistic practice highlights causative economic, political, and social factors that give rise to problems at the micro-level.

At the mezzo-level, social work practice is focused on a larger collective, namely, community. Predominantly, the social worker applies community organization (a method of social work practice) to address the concerns raised by people in the community. While engaging in community work, the social worker also develops knowledge about the rights of people and deliberates on the macro-interventions to realize these rights. Thus, at this level, the practice is either therapeutic or critical in nature or both.

At the macro-level, social work practice is predominantly, critical in nature and involves the application of social action and social work research as methods of social work practice. The social worker is engaged in a political process of organizing people to alter the oppressive structures in the society. The aim is to bring about a social change by empowering people.

The fieldwork training process is called fieldwork practicum in Social Work. It comprises of different parts. Broadly, these include; orientation programme, concurrent fieldwork placements, rural camps, study tours, inter-agency meets, and block placement. The most prominent and continuous of all the components is the concurrent fieldwork placement. The students are placed in two different, institutional (voluntary/agency organization) and non-institutional (community) settings during the two years of the master's programme. The fieldwork placements are continuously supervised by an educator who also plays the role of a fieldwork supervisor in Social Work. Fieldwork supervision includes two important components, namely, (i) individual conference, and (ii) group conference. Individual conferences facilitate in developing a one to one relationship between the fieldwork supervisor and the supervisee/student. It helps the students to express the learning and the challenges

faced by them in the field. Consequently, it helps in integrating classroom learning with field practice and vice-versa.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

University Grants Commission has broadly classified social work practice learning in to nine types of opportunities. These opportunities are designed to develop practice competencies from that of being a beginning learner to that on the road of mastery for choices of intervention strategies, methods, skills and techniques to bring about change. Learning is aided through observation, analysis of social realities and experience of participation in designing and providing social work intervention. Learning opportunities in social work practicum include orientation, visits, structured experienced laboratory, rural/tribal camps, study tours, workshops, concurrent practice learning, summer placement and block placement.

Orientation: The agency field instructor will facilitate the student's orientation and induction into the agency, providing a bridge from classroom to field learning. The process of acquainting new students with the existing learning environment so that he/she can relate quickly to his/her new surroundings.

Visits: A visit bestows an exposure to and understanding of the services provided in response to people needs. Any amount theoretical orientation will not be able to give the new students the real "feel" of the nature of work. When they join the MSW programme, the students will have their own ideas, expectations and wishes. More often than not, they are unrealistic and ill-informed. Even if they seem to understand the social problems in the society, they have minimal knowledge about problem solving strategies available in the community. Unless they see some agencies related to welfare, education, developmental, health, mental health, and industries, they are not in a position to understand the methodologies of service delivery.

Observation: Observation bestows an exposure to and understanding of the services provided in response to people's needs. Students need to know the organizational structure of agencies, staffing pattern, programmes, delivery mechanism, nature and clients and their problems, relationship between the agency and the community, sources of funding, problems faced and the ways and means adopted to overcome them etc.

Structured experience laboratory- is class room activity, to provide in the games/activity. Form the involvement of self in various practice skills. These laboratory experience are designed in small groups to encourage participation, sharing of the experience and aid in examining learning and application skills.

Concurrent practice learning—ongoing learning practice is an opportunity to develop intervention skills in reality situations. This entails learning social work practice for two, or two and a half days or its equivalent, each week of the semester. The learners may be placed in agencies or in communities to initiate and participate in direct service delivery.

Workshops: Skills Development- Help learners acquire skills for situations encountered during practice and acquire skills for intervention. These may be for problems/concerns, issues or situations like, work with alcoholics, HIV-AIDS affected persons, adolescents for life skills development, you for leadership development and couples for marital relationship and enrichment, work with elderly.

Rural/Tribal camps:- Provide opportunities to experience rural life, analyze rural dynamics and observe the functioning of local self-government and voluntary organizations. This experience aids peer participation in planning for activities for own group and those for local people. It also help develop skills carry out, evaluate and report the experience.

Summer Placement:- Provides an opportunity to experience day-to-day work in a setting. The learner gets involved with direct practice with the client system and with the ongoing management operations of the setting. The time frame recommended for this experience is about three weeks, after the first year of the post graduate programme.

Block Placement:- Enables learners integrate learning and generate newer learning by participating in the intervention processed over a period of 4 to 6 weeks continuously, in a specific agency. Usually, block fieldwork is provided at the end of the two-year programme. Some educational institutions offer such an opportunity at the end of the third or the prior to the examinations of the fourth semester.

Study Tour:- Social work as a profession is practice based. Accordingly, social work education program is incomplete without guided practice learning. This learning is carried out in real life situation of individual, groups, families, communities and organizations. The study tour program provides a meaningful and an important learning opportunity to the social work trainees in particular and teachers/trainees in general.

Social work practicum with nine learning opportunities is designed to provide a variety of opportunities to develop and enhance professional practice skills. The tasks are organized to help the learner acquire beginning skills, practice those already acquired, and master them from simple to complex. The learner is gradually encouraged to becoming an independent worker.

CURRICULUM FRAME FOR EDUCATION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

UGC has laid out guidelines on the instructional content of the curriculum frame the education of social work. It is broadly categorized in to four sets of clusters. First three are the branded domains. Core domain consist of content characterizes the social work profession for its philosophy, ideology, practice, values, ethics, theory and concepts. Supportive domain provides knowledge and skills to backup or assists the core domain. Interdisciplinary domain has relevant theories, concepts from other perspectives from other sciences to help understand and work with social phenomena necessitating change. The fourth cluster is branded as elective content provides optional courses. These three contents meet national and local needs, thrust of the educational institution and/ or learners' interest.

EPILOGUE

The principles and methods of social work are not be taught or learned in the abstract. Social work studies cannot be confined to the intellectual atmosphere and theoretical approach developed in classrooms, but it has to be necessarily augmented by a practical programme of field work. This alone can properly initiate social work trainees in to the field of of social work, with a realistic and 'down to earth' approach to the many problems to be met with in the field. The analysis of the theory–practice relationship in Social Work vis-à-vis

the curriculum, the pedagogy, the evaluation process, and the fieldwork practicum, reveals the central role that ideology plays in influencing this relationship. Social work practice includes a wide range of activities such as individual counseling, generating awareness about social issues, mobilizing resources to meet the needs of a community, and participation in social movements. Professions based on human relationship such as social work must have its knowledge base truly reflecting values, culture, problems of society in which it has to be taught and practiced.

REFERENCES

1. Dilshad, Mohd. (2011) *Integrated Social Work Practice*, Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.
2. Guha, Ratna (2011) *Communication in Social Work*, Centrum Press, New Delhi.
3. Guha, Ratna (2011) *Field Instruction in Social Work*, Centrum Press, New Delhi.
4. International Federation of Social Work (2014) *Global Definition of Social Work*, IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW General Assembly in July 2014, <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>.
5. Jagadish.B, Siddegowda.Y.S. (2014) *Field work in Social Work-Learning by Doing*, Pratheeksha Publications, Jaipur.
6. Khan, Ammar Ahmad (2011) *Training for Social Work*, Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.
7. Salomone A. Frank (1979) *Epistemological Implications of Fieldwork and Their Consequences*, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, *An americal Anthropologist*, pp-1-60.
8. Sam Wai Kam Yu (2018) *The contributions of welfare typologies to international social work practices*, *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*.
9. Singh, Krishna Kant and Ram Shankar Singh (2011) *An Introduction to Social Work*, ABD Publishers, Jaipur, New Delhi.
10. Singh, Suresh (2013) *Modernisation of Social Work Practices*, Centrum Press, New Delhi.
11. Subhedar I. S. (2001) *Field Work Training in Social Work*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi.
12. Garber,R. (2000) *IASSW World Consensus of Social Work Education, 1998-1999* (online), available at <http://www.iassw-aiets.org>, (accessed 10/05).
13. Midgley, J. (2001) *The critical perspective in social development, social development issues*, vol. 23, no.1, pp-42-50.
14. Smalley, R. (1968) 'Social Work Education: A World View', *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, vol. 27, nos 3-4, pp. 339-346.
15. Cox, D., & Pawar, M. (Eds.). (2006). *International Social Work: Issues, Strategies, and Programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, ISBN: 9781412914086.DOI: 10.1177/104973150629703.
16. Hokenstad, M. C. and Kendall, K. A. (1995) 'International Social Work Education', in *National Association of Social Workers, Encyclopedia of Social Work*, pp. 1511-20. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
17. Midgley, J. (1981) *Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World*. London: Heinemann.