

Social Work - A Practice Based Profession

SnehaChandrapa*

Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Sardar Patel University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat

Dr. AnkurSaxena

Professor of Social Work, The M.S. University, Vadodara, Gujarat

Abstract

Social Work Profession has spanned many decades and has evolved tremendously over those decades. It is passing through a very critical period mainly because of rapid and startling alterations through the globe. In the 21st century, globalization leads to changes that challenge social work practice and social work education. In India, the social work education has completed more than seven decades. As a discipline of study in the university department and affiliated, private, government colleges and deemed universities, social work has established its own mark. Social work is an international profession and similarly social work education internationally has always embraced both academic and practical components. Social work education exists within the national education systems of all the country, but the content, the pedagogy, and the practice may differ from one country to another. Social work education comprises of a theoretical component taught in the classroom and field- based education involving integration of the academic aspect and practice. It can be said that theory without practice is empty and practice without theory is meaningless. Field work practicum is the heart and soul of social work education and social work profession. Fieldwork, which is also known as field instruction, field placement, field education, practicum or internship is therefore an integral component of social work education. The present article throws some light on Field Work Practicum in Social Work - its Role and Importance in Social Work Education and Training, Field Work Supervision, etc.

Keywords: Field Work, Social Work Education, Supervision

1. Introduction

“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. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels” (IFSW, 2014).

In the scholarly world Social Work is viewed as a practice-oriented profession as well as an academic discipline which recognizes that interconnected historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors provide opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development. Structural barriers lead 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 religion, class, language, gender, race, 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 seeks to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion (International Federation of Social Workers).

India is very fortunate to have a good beginning of professional Social Work under the leadership of Sir Clifford Manshardt, the founder director of its first school of Social Work, now popularly known as Tata Institute of Social Sciences at Mumbai. This visionary personality enunciates that professional training in Social Work stands for soundness of essential principles of education, for flexibility of method and for a working relationship with the whole professional field that will give both perspective and depth to its educational program (Manshardt, 1985)².

1.1. Development of Social Work Education and Practice in India

In India, professional social work owes its origin to a short-term training course on social service organized by the social service league at Bombay. The training course included those men and women who were willing to volunteer them for social service. Till that time social workers did not get any salary of remuneration for their work. It was simply a social service to the needy people guided by the principle of humanity. Later on, the Tata School of Social Sciences was established in the year of 1936 in Bombay. The institute started a course of professional training in social work (Bhattacharya, 2011). The following decade after the establishment of this institute was known as dormant period as no institution was set up from 1936 to 1946. The year 1947 saw the

emergence of the Indian Conference of Social Work (ICSW), which remained to be the first and most serious national organization of social workers in India. It must be pointed out that the first real initiatives and movement to more organized social welfare by state were greatly envisioned, influenced and channelized by the ICSW through the associations it stood for. In the same year, another school of social work known as Delhi School of Social Work was established.³

Currently, Social Work is taught in more than two hundred institutions of Social Work in the country. Most of these institutions function as a part of the university system. They impart theoretical knowledge necessary for developing a perspective on social work and provide training in methods of social work practice. In addition, they are looked upon as places where theory building/refinement in relation to social work practice takes place. As such, they constitute the primary stage for recognizing the nature of relationship between theory and practice in social work.⁴

1.1.1. Field work practicum in social work education:

In Social Work, fieldwork means on-field training process that the students undergo along with classroom teaching. There are different components of the fieldwork practicum that are continuously supervised and evaluated. In Social Work, fieldwork is not simply about understanding different aspects of the society but to develop and execute intervention strategies for on-field practice. Fieldwork gives to a Social Work curriculum the indispensable opportunity to provide supervised practice in the application of theoretical methods of the discipline so that the students are able to practice effectively with human beings in different social situations (Kapoor 1961)

As Hepworth and Rooney and Larsen (2002) observe, fieldwork engages the student in supervised social work practice and provides opportunities to marry theory and practice. Hamilton and Else (1983) who view field work as, “a consciously planned set of experiences occurring in a practice setting designed to move students from their initial level of understanding, skills and attitudes to levels associated with autonomous social work practice.”

It holds the maxim that “There is no better method than learning by doing”. Field work practicum in social work is a medium through which student translates the theoretical knowledge taught in the classroom into practice. Thus, the field work practicum assists the student to get acquainted with the real field situation and to attain experiences about the pain and pleasure of the same.

The Review Committee on Social Work Education in India (1978) has evolved specific objectives of field work training in social work education. The major objectives of field work practicum in social work education are as under:

1. To develop professional skills through practical learning, apply acquired knowledge for the study of relevant facts, analysis of the problems and selection of appropriate means towards the solution of those problems.
2. To develop the skills for solving the problems in work at the micro level (individual, family and groups) and change at the macro level (community, social system including social institutions and wide range processes).
3. To provide concurrent opportunities for the integration of classroom learning, field work practice and vice versa (feedback mechanism for both field work practice and classroom learning)
4. To develop the skills required for professional practice at a particular level of training.
5. To objectively develop professional attitude involving impartiality and non-judgmental attitude.
6. To develop professional values and commitments, such as respect for human dignity and worth, right to participation and self-determination compatible with a better society.
7. To develop an awareness of self and one's professional ideas

1.2. Components of Field Work Practicum

The fieldwork practicum that students undergo includes multiple components. The components are orientation programme, concurrent fieldwork, rural camps & study tours, block placements.

1.2.1. Orientation Programme

In Social Work, students come from different disciplinary backgrounds and, therefore, require orientation to the field. The orientation programme is aimed at making the students familiar (coming from different disciplines) about the fields of social work practice. Orientation Programme includes series of activities such as group activities and exercises, guest lectures from social work practitioners, and visits to voluntary organizations and open communities.

1.2.2. Concurrent Fieldwork Placements

Concurrent fieldwork includes placements of students in different organizations that work on different issues or problems in the society, or in communities directly. The institutional settings include organizations working on human rights issues, organizations working with the homeless and street children, organizations working with the disabled, hospitals, etc. The community-based placements mostly include those areas where the marginalized

sections of the population are settled such as urban slums or village outskirts.

1.2.3. Rural Camp and Study Tours

Most of the institutions of Social Work, especially those located in urban areas, organize rural camp/s as a part of fieldwork training. The camp is usually organized for a week, in which students are taken to a village setting where they learn different skills. Students conduct outreach activities such as village mapping, *shramdan*, and participatory rural appraisal. Through the camp students get to know about the problems of the villagers, the reasons behind them, the possible intervention strategies for solving them, and the role of the social worker in the intervention process. Rural camps are useful, especially for those students who come from urban background as they have no or a minimal exposure to village life and the problems of villages. Apart from the rural camp, a few institutions also organize study tours for the students in their areas of specialization outside the region where the institution is located.

1.2.4. Block Placement

At the end of the master's programme, the students are required to undergo a period of continuous fieldwork placement in an institutional or a non-institutional setting. The duration of this block placement varies across institutions and is generally between thirty and sixty days. The block placement is seen as a part of the final training process before the students formally start working as social workers. It has been observed that many students who go for their block placement in institutional settings end up working in the same place post-block fieldwork.

In nutshell, fieldwork practicum in Social Work forms an integral part of the education and training of students. It begins with the orientation programme and ends with the block placement. The supervised concurrent fieldwork is the core component of fieldwork training and carries maximum weightage in the evaluation of the students' performance in fieldwork practicum.

1.3. Field Work Supervision & Its Importance In Social Work Education

The concurrent fieldwork placement of students schedules either in an institutional (voluntary organizations/agencies) setting or in a non-institutional setting (urban and rural communities). In case of institutional setting, the supervision of the students is done at two levels. At the first level, each student is allotted a fieldwork supervisor from the institution of Social Work i.e. a social work educator. At the second level, the student is allotted a supervisor in the agency where s/he is placed.

Fieldwork supervision in Social Work occupies a vital position. It enables the students to integrate classroom content with field experience in a meaningful way, and at the same time, acquire performance skills. It serves the very purpose of Social Work education, i.e. to prepare trained and competent social workers who can provide their services to the society. Fieldwork supervision is an educational process that involves direct and individualized educator-learner relationship in which the supervisor judiciously and creatively assumes teaching, helping and administrative responsibilities to provide direction to the learner to promote professional growth and assume responsibilities (Department of Social Work, VisvaBharati, Sriniketan, 2008).

1.3.1. Supervisory Conferences

The process of fieldwork supervision includes two important components through which the relationship between the educators and the students gets strengthened. These are

- i. Individual Conference &
- ii. Group Conference.

According to Thangavelu (1975), regularly scheduled conferences, both individual and group, are essential in the supervisory relationship with joint responsibility (of students and supervisors) for agenda and meaningful contributions to the discussions.

1.3.2. Individual Conference:

The faculty supervisor avails himself for once in a week or as scheduled to instruct the students. The aim of the individual conference is to guide and help the students to integrate theory with practical, develop clear concepts relevant to social work practice. It assists the supervisees to articulate their experiences theoretically, and the supervisors to monitor the supervisees' performance and growth at the field. The supervisor not only focuses on the learning needs of the student, but also identifies the problems that the student is facing in the field, and directs the supervision process accordingly.

1.3.3. Group Conference:

Group Conferences are usually scheduled once a week or every fortnight with about a small group of students with their respective supervisors under whom they are placed (Raj, 1995-96). The group conference involves the participation of both the students and the fieldwork supervisors. They are divided into multiple groups depending upon the number of students and educators in the institution. Group conferences are directed towards broadening the knowledge base of the students through sharing of each others' field experiences. The students develop understanding of connections between different phenomena that are observed and experienced by them in different field situations.

References:

- Bhanti, R. (1995-96). Field work in social work perspective. Udaipur & Delhi: Himanshu Publications.
- Botcha, R. (2012). Problems and challenges for social work education in India: Some Recommendation. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational research*, 1(3): 201-212
- Council on Social Work Education- CSWE (2008): Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards - EPAS, Inc., USA, p. 3-7.
- Dhemba, J. (2012). Fieldwork in Social Work Education and Training: Issues and Challenges in the Case of Eastern and Southern Africa. *Social Work & Society International Online Journal*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://www.socwork.net/sws/article/view/310/651>
- International Federation of Social Workers (n.d.). *Global Definition of Social Work* . Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- Janagambika, M.L. (2010). Handbook of practice education in social work. Delhi: Manglam Publications.
- Manjunath. (2017). Field work practicum in social work education the challenges, pitfalls and practical solutions. *Social Work Foot Prints*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkfootprints.org/social-work-articles/field-work-practicum-in-social-work-education-the-challenges-pitfalls-and-practical-solutions>
- Manshardt, Clifford (1985), Education for Social Work: The Indian Journal of Social Work, XLVI (1).
- Mujawar, W.R. &Sardar, N.K. (2010). Field work training in social work. Delhi: Manglam Publications.
- Nayak, D. (n.d.). *History, Philosophy and Fields of Social Work*. Retrieved from <http://ddceutkal.ac.in/Syllabus/MSW/PAPER-1.pdf>
- Singh, S. (2005). Social work education in India- Major issues and required strategies. In S. Singh &S. P. Srivastava, *Teaching & practice of social work in India- realities & responses* (pp. 1-18). Lucknow: New Royal Book Co.
- Social Work Education:Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Evaluation*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 5, 2015, from http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/16128/9/09_chapter%202.pdf
- Social Work Education: Field Work Practicum*. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/16128/10/10_chapter%203.pdf
- UGC Model Curriculum on Social Work Education (2001): University Grants Commission, New Delhi, p. 98-99, 119 & 152.