

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF FIELD WORK TRAINING IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Social work students generally considered field work training as the most important component in their professional education. In social work curriculum, practice and knowledge (theory) are two integral components in the curriculum, and yet they are often regarded as separate and so some extent antithetical (the “theoretical” vs. the “practical”). A unique feature of fieldwork training is that training and practice take place in the same place. Hence, students are not learning “about” a practice as is the case in classroom instruction but learning “in” practice. Field placement is one of the most exciting and exhilarating parts of a formal social work education. It is also one of the most challenging. More than anything else, it requires students to look inside themselves and examine themselves as future social workers. However, most of the time, the students will feel better equipped for their professional career after finishing their practicum. The field work goal is to develop the student’s competence in the practice of social work. Field education is an experiential form of teaching and learning that takes place in a service setting. Field work practices offered the most opportunity to understand the requirements of the people in the background of prevailing cultural traditions and values and thereby, offered opportunities to indigenize practice. It also gave opportunities for innovation. Thus, the present paper highlights and reviews on the challenges and prospects of field work training in Social Work education.

Keywords: Problems, Prospects, Challenges, Field work training, Social work.

INTRODUCTION

The term “fieldwork” may be described as gaining experience by utilizing knowledge and developing the skills to deal with the problems of human beings. The dictionary of sociology defines fieldwork as “social survey or process of collecting primary data from a population distributed geographically.” Social work education started in the form of apprenticeship by the charity organization society of America and was initiated to impart training in social work as a profession in the year 1898. This organization started social work education for providing training to newly recruited employees. The nature of training was only practical and not theoretical. It was just a 5-week programme for the practical training of the newly recruited employees; the method of training was also simple in nature, i.e. observation of the work performed by their senior employees during office hours in practical situations. There were neither theory classes conducted for the purpose, nor was there any assessment of the recruit’s performance, based on theoretical understanding of the concerned field or job. Thus, social work education emerged out of practical field training. The credit goes to Mary Richmond, one of the officials in the charity organization, for projecting the concept and ideas of social casework and social work education. She is, therefore, known as the pioneer or mother of social casework and the organization is considered to be the successful projector of social work education [13]. A few definitions of fieldwork training in social work education as defined by professional scholars are given under:

1. Fieldwork in social work education means any kind of practical experience in a social organization or agency, if this experience has been deliberately arranged, for the education of the students who are undertaking the courses partly or wholly designed for those who intend to become social workers.
2. Fieldwork in social work education is a guided interactive process between a student and a social life situation. In this, social work as a profession has an abiding and deep concern that needs to be addressed, remedied, improved or changed for a fuller (a richer) development of human environmental potentials.
3. Fieldwork in social work is carried out in and through social welfare agencies and communities, where the student learns skills, tests out

knowledge according to an educational plan. The whole programme is student and field specific. Fieldwork training is a supervised practice of student social worker under the guidance of a trained social work educator or field personnel. It has been defined as educationally sponsored attachment of social work students to an institution, agency, or a section of community in which they are helped to extend their knowledge, understand and experience the impact of human needs. Such an experience is deliberately arranged on a whole or part time basis.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN FIELDWORK TRAINING

The schools of social work in India face many problems which begin with the evaluation of their performance. The problems can again be classified into three specific groups, viz., schools specific, student specific and agency specific. The major problems of the schools of social work in India in general and impact on training are as under:

School specific problems

1. Finding suitable agencies and developing them as workshops for the students of social work education thereby restricting the scope of fieldwork training.
2. Lack of practical-oriented faculty, due to which the schools are not in a position to impart training in social work education in a professional and practical sense.
3. Lack of suitable content of fieldwork training due to which the training cannot be imparted as per the expectations of professional social work.
4. Lack of a fieldwork manual, due to which students are often confused as to what kind of work is to be carried out in the agencies during the training period throughout the academic year.
5. Dearth of literature on fieldwork, due to which students are unable to understand the concepts clearly from a practical point of view.
6. Lack of the required work culture in the schools due to which fieldwork is not practised rigorously.
7. Lack of healthy competition in the field due to which the schools are not able to maintain a standard of fieldwork training in social work education.

