



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FIELD WORK IN THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

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### **Abstract:**

*Field work is an important part of social work education, which gives students the chance to get practical experience, enhance their skills, and apply their academic knowledge to real-world situations. A key component of social work school is field work, which is also referred to as an internship or practicum. It serves as a link between the theoretical knowledge students learn in the classroom and real-world application. This paper delves into the crucial role that field work plays in social work education and how that role affects the professional growth of those who want to become social workers. It also looks at how field work helps people learn through experience, improves their ability to acquire skills, helps people from their professional identities, and increases their general competence as social workers. The qualitative aspect of the paper is entirely derived from secondary data gathered from websites and journals.*

**Keywords :** *Interdisciplinary, Effectiveness, Teaching, Learning Process.*

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### **Introduction:**

Clifford Manshardt launched the first social work school in India, the "Sir Dorabji Tata School of Social Science," in Bombay in 1936, marking the official start of professional social work education in the country. Since, then it expanded quickly and widely across the nation, becoming one of the most sought-after professional education streams in existence today. Obtaining a professional education is distinct from earning a degree from another academic programme. While the latter are primarily intended to introduce the student to a theoretical comprehension of the topic through class and library research, the former require applying theoretical knowledge. Practical training is one of the most important component. In a variety of academic disciplines, including medicine, engineering, law, education, and business management, the application of ideas to practice is crucial domains. Although a person can learn engineering or medicine

from books, they are only considered to be qualified professionals when they can treat patients or create structures like roads or buildings. Thus, developing practical skills is highly valued in professional education. Undoubtedly, a professional lacking in skills could not be any more valuable to their client than one possessing both knowledge and skills. Thus, it is evident that in the practice of a profession, both knowledge and skills are important. Social work that emerged from a philanthropist or do-goodness activity became increasingly a professional activity in the 20th century. It is a practice profession and responds to the problems arising out of realities faced by individuals, groups and communities in the society. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has expanded it to state social work as the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities; enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favourable to this goal.

(NASW, 1973 p.4). Thus, social work is a problem-solving process as well as a response to need(s). The term "problem" in social work refers to psycho-social dysfunction, which occurs when a person's or a system's need is unfulfilled and they are unable to overcome the obstacle on their own. An essential and distinctive quality of any profession, but especially the social work profession, is the capacity to correctly and creatively integrate the components of knowledge, values, and skills in the aiding situation. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social work (IASSW), (2004) states that "social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context. Thus, social work education was emerged to give people who desired to work in the field of social work.

Social work education seeks to assist students in gaining an in-depth understanding of the theories and methodologies essential for attaining the objectives and goals of social work. Through this educational process, students develop a comprehension of the principles, concepts, policies, and procedures that form the foundation of the social work profession.

- **Social work education:**

It is designed to help students in gaining profound insights into the theories and methodologies essential for accomplishing the objectives and goals of social work. This educational process equips them with a comprehension of the principles, concepts, policies, and procedures that form the foundation of the social work profession.

- **Knowledge:**

means the confident understanding of a subject with the ability to use it for a specific purpose. In this context, it pertains to the grasp of fieldwork

practice, its vision, and its intended objectives.

- **Skill :**

refers to "the practice component that brings knowledge and values together and converts them to action as a response to concern and need." (Johnson, 1995).

- **Values:**

refer to core ideals about what is beneficial or important (Barsky, 2010).

- **Field work Supervision:**

It is referred as the oversight of a student on field work practicum by a more experience practitioner who holds the responsibility to guide the student through the placement, providing a measure of support and advocacy, facilitating learning opportunities that address student learning needs, evaluating practice development and assessing work performance. (Maidment, 2001a).

- **Field work educator/instructor:**

This refers to the individual in the setting where the student is placed who provides day-to-day practicum guidance and support to the student, and establishes the tasks that are to be assigned to the student. He facilitates student's learning in practice setting. (Doel, 2010) This term varies in the literature from field instructor to student supervisor to practice teacher or practice educator. Faculty liaison is the liaison between the agency, the student, and the program, is responsible for the academic component of the practicum, and submits the grade for the practicum. It is generally the faculty person of the school of social work

- **Field work co-ordinator:**

Refer to the person employed/designated by the school of social worker to oversee the placement of students in a field work agency/setting. This role may include preparation of students for field work, the approval of field work contracts, the grading of

student assessment and debriefing the students at the completion of field practicum.

- **Placement agency:**

Refers to the organization/community where social work students are based for their field work practicum.

- **Orientation Programme:**

An orientation program plays a crucial role in the social work profession, serving as an essential component in the on boarding process for new practitioners. This program provides a structured introduction to the organization, its values, policies, and the broader context of social work practice and also familiarizes new practitioners with the diverse communities they may serve and the specific services offered by the organization which is vital for tailoring interventions to meet the unique needs of clients.

- **Concurrent field work:**

Concurrent fieldwork, sometimes referred to as concurrent placement or field education, is an essential part of social work education in which students complete academic coursework in addition to receiving practical training. For social work students, this concurrent fieldwork is crucial since it provides a number of advantages that support their entire professional growth. Students who work in the field in addition to their academic studies get opportunity for practical, hands-on learning. Additionally, it gives students a place where they may actively improve their abilities under the supervision of experienced practitioners. It involves supervision by experienced practitioners, providing students with guidance, feedback, and mentorship. This relationship supports their professional development and helps them navigate the challenges of social work practice.

- **Rural camp:**

It offers practical, hands-on learning opportunities for social work professionals and students. By interacting directly with rural populations, practitioners can put their academic knowledge to use in practical settings, which improves their ability to solve problems and broadens their comprehension of the intricacies of rural life. Social workers can carry out in-depth asset mapping and needs assessments in rural areas by being on the ground. Social workers can create interventions that are contextually and culturally relevant by drawing on the knowledge they receive from working at rural camps. During rural camps, forming connections and learning about the background of the community helps to ensure that social work programmes are long-lasting. As a result, rural camps are an important part of social work practice and offer both professionals and students life-changing educational opportunities. They play a pivotal role in promoting community engagement, cultural competence, and the development of effective, context-specific interventions that address the unique challenges of rural life.

- **Study Tour:**

Comprehending global challenges is becoming more and more crucial for social workers. Study tours give practitioners a worldwide perspective on social concerns, enabling them to make connections between local problems and more significant global trends and encouraging a sense of accountability for tackling these issues more broadly. Following these encounters, social workers frequently come away feeling inspired, motivated, and with new insights that can improve their job and dedication to the field. Study tour-based experiential learning makes social workers more flexible, culturally aware, and

globally aware practitioners, which benefits the profession. Study tours are therefore essential to the professional growth of social workers.

- **Summer placement Training:**

For social work students, summer placement training is crucial since it is a life-changing and essential part of their study.

Students get priceless experiences and abilities from this summer break practical training that greatly aid in their growth as capable and successful social work practitioners. Students work under the supervision and guidance of experienced professionals throughout their summer placement. Thus, a crucial component of social work students' education is their summer placement training. It advances their professional and personal development in addition to improving their practical abilities. The experiences gained during this period are instrumental in shaping future social work practitioners.

- **Field work conferences:**

Fieldwork conferences play a crucial role in the field of social work. Conferences provide a supportive environment where social workers can connect with peers facing similar issues, share coping strategies, and provide mutual support. This peer learning is invaluable for maintaining emotional well-being and resilience. In summary, fieldwork conferences are essential in social work as they contribute to the ongoing development of practitioners, facilitate knowledge exchange, build professional networks, and provide a platform for addressing the evolving challenges in the field. Attending these conferences is an investment in the continued growth and effectiveness of social work practice.

**Field Education:**

The social work profession is by its very nature dynamic, requiring a careful balancing act between theoretical understanding and real-world application. Social work, as a field dedicated to solving societal issues, needs practitioners who can not only comprehend the intricacies of social structures and human behaviour, but also effectively use their knowledge in treatments. Field work, also known as practicum or internship, is a crucial part of social work school since it shapes future practitioners' identities, skills, and attitudes. It becomes evident that practical training is an essential component, especially in the fields of education, business management, engineering, medical, and law. In these fields, it is critical to be able to translate abstract concepts into real-world scenarios. Simply reading about engineering or medicine, for example, does not make someone a professional; true qualification is achieved when they can actively treat patients or construct structures like roads and buildings. Hence, the emphasis on developing practical skills is highly significant in professional education.

Social work education program has established three main goals which are compatible with a continuum of education for social work practice:

- 1) To impart students with the knowledge, skills, values, and ethics which will help to prepare them for beginning professional generalist social work practice. More precisely, this refers to the training of generalist social workers who are dedicated to lifelong learning and development as professionals, and who possess the skills necessary to collaborate with a range of clientele sizes in a variety of agency contexts, including those that specialise in serving the underprivileged and other vulnerable groups.;
- 2) To educate students to become competent

practitioners working with a variety of clientele and advocates for people who might otherwise be taken advantage of or subjected to discrimination; and

- 3) To prepare students for advanced specialized practice.

### Field Practicum:

Field practicum involves experiential learning, where students cultivate their professional identities and merge their knowledge and skills while being supervised by the practitioners (Noble, 2011). Serving as a 'Signature Pedagogy' in social work education, field practicum is crucial for orienting students to the practitioner role and plays a vital role in integrating theory and practice. This mandatory component of formal social work education encompasses practical training within a community/agency setting under the guidance of a field supervisor, also known as a practice teacher.

A field practicum designates an essential component of professional social work education that involves hands-on experience inside a social organisation or agency. Its goal is to develop real-world practice situations where students may apply the theoretical knowledge and concepts they have learned in the classroom and from literature to the real-world problems they will face during their practicum. Through the practical application of ideas, concepts, and particular behavioural practices in a real-world field experience, practicum-derived learning enhances academic education. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 2004, social work derives its methodology from a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge obtained through research and practice evaluation,

which includes local and indigenous knowledge specific to its environment. Consequently, social work education emerged to cater to individuals aspiring to work in the social work field.

The Education Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), states that "the purposes of social work education are to prepare competent and effective professionals; to develop social work knowledge and to provide leadership in the development of service delivery systems" (CSWE, 2001, p. 5). It means that social workers are not only expected to be informed about relevant theories, but they must also apply these theories to practice so that unfavourable conditions in the society can be ameliorated.

Council of Social Work Education (CSWE, 2008) has termed the field experience in social work education as "Signature Pedagogy" because it "represents the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students to perform the role of practitioner." Signature pedagogy emphasizes the social work practice behaviours of thinking, performing, and acting with integrity (Shulman, 1999). In simple words, field education component is the primary venue in which social work students are socialized to be professionals (CSWE, 2008). According to the Second Review Committee of UGC on Social Work Education (1978), 'Field work in social work education is a guided interactive process between a student and actual life situation in which social work as a profession had an abiding and deep concern and which need to be remedied, improved or changed for a fuller development of humanenvironmental potential. Field education is systematically designed, supervised, coordinated, and evaluated based on criteria by which students demonstrate the achievement of program competencies. ((CSWE, 2008: 8)



**Conclusion:**

Despite seven decades of the existence of the social work education program, the profession and professional education still grapple with an identity crisis compared to other professions, primarily stemming from a lack of public recognition.

The significance of field work in the social work profession is undeniably profound, contributing to the holistic development of competent and empathetic practitioners. Through this experiential learning process, students bridge the gap between theory and practice, gaining insights that textbooks alone cannot provide. The integration of theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience not only solidifies their understanding of social work concepts but also instills a sense of resilience and adaptability crucial for navigating the unpredictable nature of social work practice.

As the social work profession evolves to meet the ever-changing needs of individuals and communities, the role of field work remains paramount. It is through these immersive experiences that social work students become not only academically proficient but also socially conscious, culturally sensitive, and ethically grounded professionals. Field work, therefore, stands as a transformative force, shaping the future of social work by producing practitioners who are not only well-equipped with knowledge but are also compassionate agents of positive change in the lives of those they serve. In the continuum of social work education, field work is the bridge that connects learning with action, theory with practice, and potential with profound impact. So, Field practicum is an integral component of Social Work Education. It is considered to be 'learning by doing'. A meaningful fieldwork placement enhances the students' understanding of the social work profession and the nature of the problems addressed by the profession itself. Learning, therefore, takes place at

various levels, that is, intellectually, emotionally and practically.

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