

A STUDY OF THE INTEGRATION OF FIELDWORK AND THEORY IN THE MSW COURSE

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Introduction:

Fieldwork plays an integral role in the education of Master of Social Work (MSW) students providing practical experience that complements the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom. The integration of fieldwork and theory is essential for developing

competent social workers who can apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios. This research aims to explore how effectively MSW students integrate fieldwork experiences with theoretical learning, the challenges they face, and the benefits of this integration in their professional development.

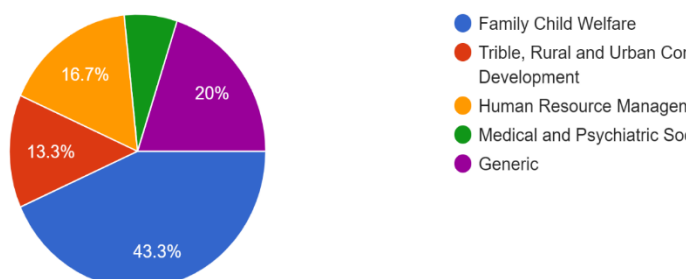
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Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand how MSW students perceive the relationship between fieldwork and theory in their academic curriculum.
2. To examine the methods used by students to integrate field experiences with classroom knowledge.
3. To identify the challenges faced by students in applying theoretical concepts during their fieldwork placements.

Research Methodology:

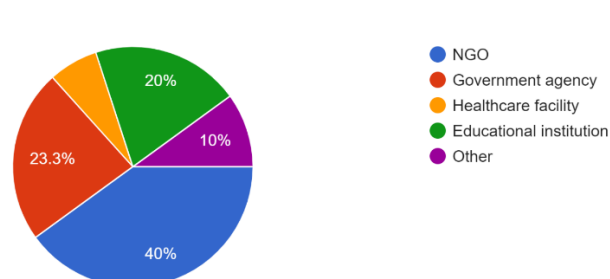
- **Research Design:** This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data from MSW students.

Fieldwork Specialisation in the MSW Program:


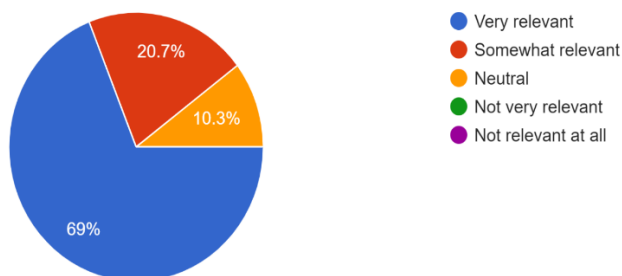
- **Sample:** The study sample includes 58 MSW students from Dept of Social Work Pune Campus SNTD Women's University, selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants have completed both fieldwork and relevant theoretical coursework.

Data Collection:

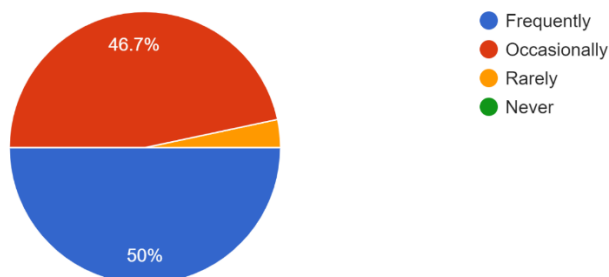
1. **Questionnaires:** A structured questionnaire was distributed to students to assess their perceptions, challenges, and strategies for integrating fieldwork and theory.
2. **Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of 15 students to gain deeper insights into their experiences and the effectiveness of the integration.

Fieldwork Placement Agency:


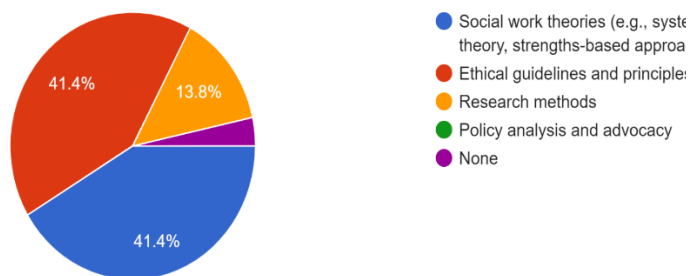
The Theoretical knowledge relevant to fieldwork experiences:



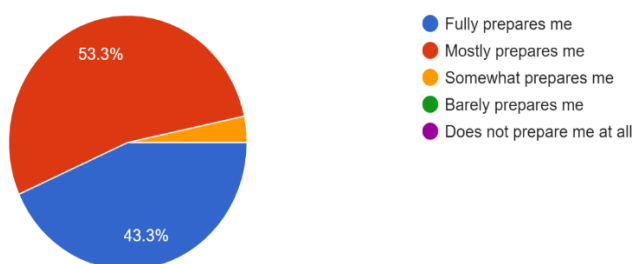
Apply theoretical concepts during fieldwork:



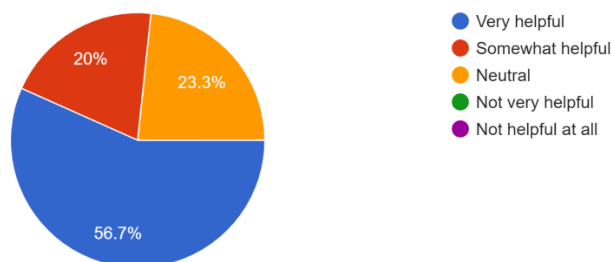
Theoretical aspects most applicable to fieldwork:



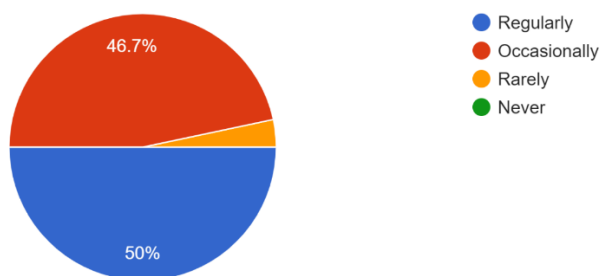
MSW curriculum prepare to link theory with practice during fieldwork:



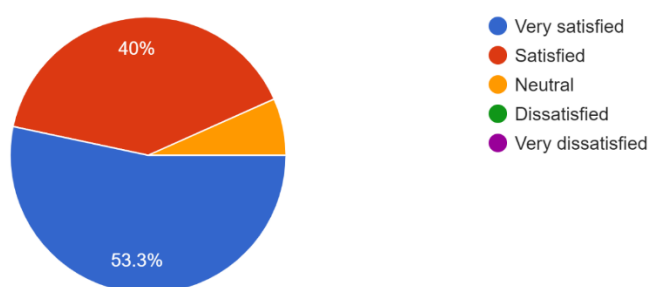
Role of Field Supervisor in helping to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings:



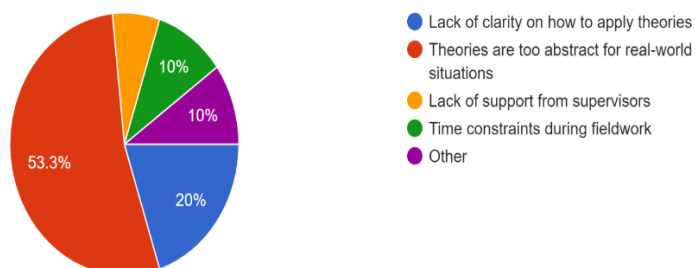
Discussion theoretical concepts with field supervisor during supervision meetings:



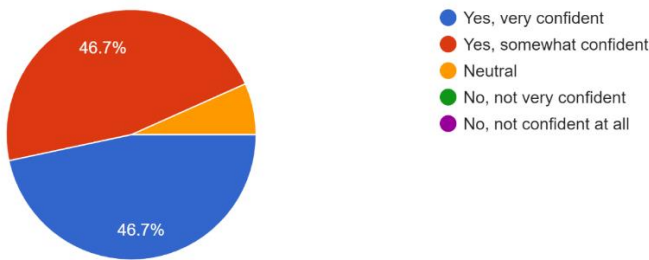
Field Supervisor support and feedback provided to theory application:



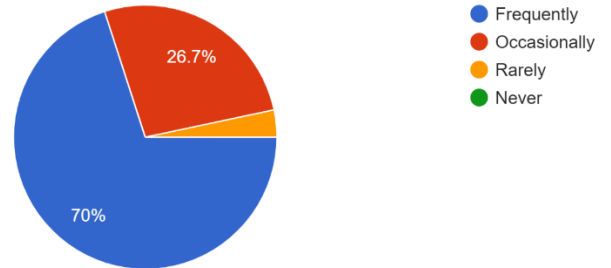
Major challenges faced in applying theory to fieldwork:



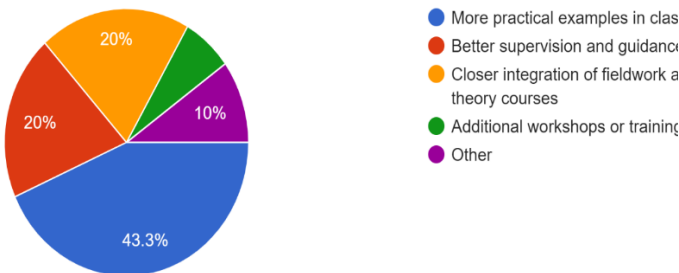
Confident level in bridging gap between theory and practical:



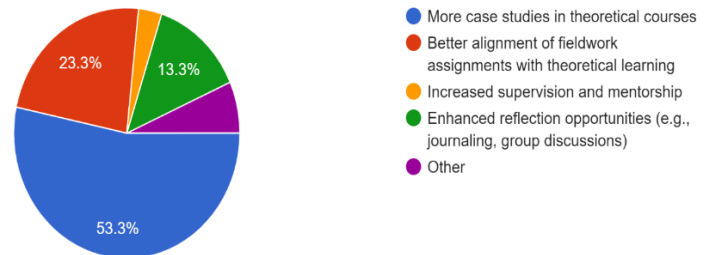
Course encourage for reflection on fieldwork experiences:



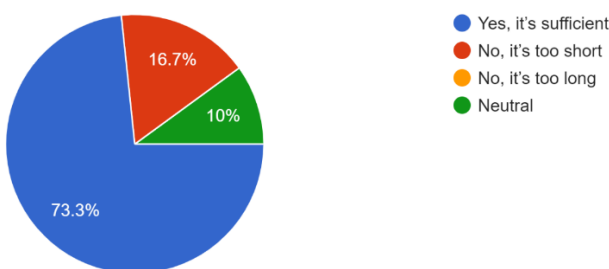
Teaching methods to apply theoretical knowledge during fieldwork:



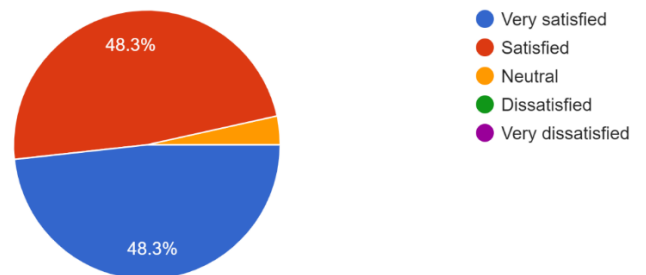
Curriculum could be improved to better connect theory and practice :



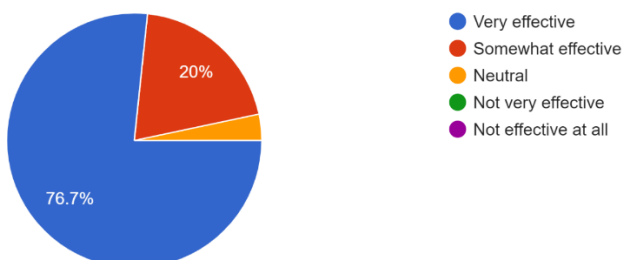
Duration of fieldwork is sufficient to apply theoretical knowledge effectively



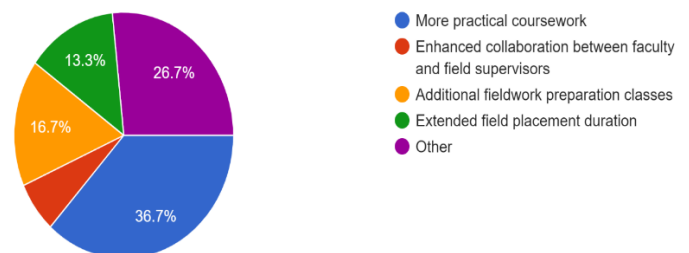
Satisfaction overall balance between theory and fieldwork:



Classroom discussion in preparing for fieldwork application:



Recommendation to improve the integration of theory and fieldwork:



Major Findings:

- ❖ **Strong Perception of the Importance of Integration:** 83% of students acknowledged the essential role of fieldwork in understanding and applying social work theories, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between field practice and classroom learning. Students noted that fieldwork provided a real-world context for understanding theoretical concepts, particularly in areas like case management, community practice, and group work.
- ❖ **Reflection and Supervision as Key Tools for Integration:** 81% of students found reflective journals and supervision meetings to be the most effective tools for integrating fieldwork and theory. These methods allowed students to critically evaluate their field experiences and link them to theoretical frameworks. 60% of students reported that classroom discussions and case presentations further supported the integration, allowing them to connect theoretical knowledge to practical challenges encountered in the field.
- ❖ **Challenges in Applying Theory to Practice:** 26.7% of students faced difficulties in directly applying theoretical concepts to complex real-life social issues during fieldwork. This was often attributed to a disconnect between academic theory and the realities of field practice, such as bureaucratic constraints and limited resources in social service organizations. - Many students highlighted that some theories were perceived as abstract or outdated, making them challenging to implement in modern social work settings.
- ❖ **Supervision Gaps:** 22.7% of students reported inadequate or inconsistent supervision during their fieldwork placements, which hindered their ability to effectively integrate theoretical knowledge into practice. Supervisors were sometimes unavailable or not sufficiently knowledgeable about the theoretical content of social work education.

- ❖ **Benefits of Integration for Professional Development:** 70% of students indicated that integrating fieldwork and theory significantly enhanced their professional competence, particularly in critical thinking, problem-solving, and intervention strategies. Students reported feeling more confident in their ability to assess social issues holistically and to apply multidisciplinary approaches to real-world social work scenarios.
- ❖ **Improvement in Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills:** The majority of students demonstrated improvements in critical thinking and the ability to link theory with practice after consistent reflection and analysis of their field experiences. This led to a deeper understanding of social work interventions.
- ❖ **Impact on Future Career Preparedness:** Students expressed that the integration of fieldwork and theory contributed to their professional preparedness, with 37% stating that it made them feel more equipped to handle the complexities of social work practice post-graduation. Fieldwork placements gave students the opportunity to experiment with theoretical models, allowing them to identify which approaches were most effective in various contexts.
- ❖ **Curriculum Relevance:** 36.7% of students felt that the MSW curriculum needed to modernize some theoretical components, ensuring better alignment with contemporary social work practices and the diverse needs of the communities they serve.

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