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Fieldwork Practicum and Social Work Students: Views and Challenges

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Abstract

Social Work is a professional subject having combination of both fieldwork and theoretical learning not only in classroom but also in the field settings. It is an essential component of Social Work Curriculum. Fieldwork practicum separates Social Work from other Social Science subjects. It helps students to apply theories, strategies and models learnt in the classrooms in the field through interventions and other social work techniques or methods. That motivates students or social workers to develop their ideologies, intervention strategies in a way to make a change in the society. Field Work in Social Work requires the active participation of fieldwork supervisors or educators as well as the active engagement of students. According to Mehta, D. V.-

The functions for which fieldwork must prepare students are:

1. *Rendering direct services.*
2. *Planning, policy development and administration related to service delivery.*
3. *Engaging in evaluative research in order to improve, change and develop knowledge and skills in the delivery of services.*
4. *Supervision, training and education of personnel required for manning the programmes and services.*

The above are some important reasons that makes fieldwork practicum as a main component of Social Work and due to which it becomes more fruitful and reliable in the term of Social Work theoretical concepts into real life applications for Social Workers.

The main objective of the study is to examine not only views and expectations but also focuses on forms and challenges faced in the management and application of fieldwork in social work among social work students. The study is descriptive in nature and based on quantitative and qualitative data both.

Keywords: Fieldwork, Challenges, Applications, Social Work, Supervision etc.

Introduction

Fieldwork is the Reality check of the students skills that they have learnt during their classroom in real life situation which gives social work student a professional touch up in a way to know. What are the challenges and factors hidden behind any problem? Why does it arises? and How to tackle it? Among all, the social problems that they met in their field settings during their fieldwork. It exhibits the skills that make a student know; which one and how to implement any of the theoretical concepts that they have learnt in their classroom for a particular situation.

As per the definition of Hepworth and Rooney & Larsen (2002) 'Fieldwork engages the student in supervised Social Work Practice and provides opportunities to marry theory and practices.'

In short it is a form of community service that occurs under the direct supervision of a social worker in a social service agency.

According to Hamilton and Else (1983), 'Fieldwork is 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 is very important to put all the theories and learning into practice in the real life situations that we have learned in the classrooms as a part of preparing students as a professional social worker. Which requires a lot of determination, enthusiasm, academic strength and also field based skills and knowledge. In the wordings of Shardlow and Doel (1996:6), 'these two contexts for learning about social work practice, class and field work need to be integrated, complementary and mutually consistent'.. 'the

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Challenge for the student and the agency supervisor, is to make this a reality'.

As per Kaseke (1986: P.55), 'Fieldwork is an instrument of socialization since it prepares students for a future role as a social work practitioner'.

As per Safari (1986), 'In the Field the student/trainee comes into contact with the needy people, their problems, their reaction to the problem and their attitude towards social workers and thus the social work student discovers his/her ability/capacity to work. It is a process to make them responsible people and enhances them as a component of humanity.

Components of Fieldwork Practicum

1. Orientation Programmes, in a way to get familiarizing students regarding fields of social work practice.
2. Concurrent Fieldwork Placement, in order to place students voluntarily in various organizations that work on different issues directly in the society/communities.
3. Rural Camp and Study tours, to conduct outreach studies like Campaigning, Village Mapping, and spread awareness on various sensitive issues through social work intervention process in different settings.
4. Inter-Agency Meet
5. Block Placement etc.
6. Observation visits and Social work research.

Objectives of Fieldwork Practicum

1. Integration of Classroom learning and knowledge with field Practice
2. Learning of Role as Social work personnel in social work agencies
3. Field work Learning and Professional Development
4. Learning and development of professional and communicational skills, attitude, practice and delivery of service.

Supervision of Fieldwork

Based on Two Levels-

1. Fieldwork Faculty Supervisor Allotment from the Department (from the Institute)
2. Agency Supervisor (where the student placed for their fieldwork)

Related studies

1. Descriptive study done by Dhemba, J. (2012) on 104 social work students and 32 agency supervisors from three institution reveals that there is,
 - a. No manual, any indication or interaction between social work institutions and agency supervisors.
 - b. Most of the agency supervisors have a non-social work background.
 - c. No training or orientation prior to the commencement of fieldwork.
 - d. There is a lack of funding of activities related to fieldwork.
 - e. Lack of allowance for fieldwork to the students.
 - f. Lack of visitation by Faculty supervisor to the agency.
2. As per the article of Eleni Papouli (2014), clears that students are generally motivated and ready to learn when they are in a safe, respectful

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environment and are given meaningful opportunities to practice their skills, values and ethics and participate as well as contribute in the process of learning. For that Faculty supervisor/agency supervisor/field educators have to be well aware about significant learning theories and socio-cultural theories to learn.

3. According to the review study done by Naveen Kumar G Tippa & Sangeetha R Mane (2018) published in *Innovare Journal of Social Sciences* entitled 'Problems and Prospects of Field Work Training in Social Work Education: A Review' revealed that "there is a lack of proper content for fieldwork training, lack of proper fieldwork manual and guidelines, lack of healthy competition, lack of practical oriented faculty members, lack of fieldwork literature etc. are the main challenges of fieldwork among social work students which leaves social work students in a confused situation during their whole academic year." They classified these problems in three categories: school specific, student specific and agency specific.
4. Article published by Christine Craik (2019, pp. 129-132) on 'Social Work Education: Challenges and Opportunities' published in the *Journal of Australian Association of the Social Workers (AASW)* stated that a social work student faces a lots of challenges educational due to lack of literature, concerned research and specific guidelines and manual, financial, social as well as some psychosocial and ethical challenges during their fieldwork.
5. During COVID Pandemic (2020) like situation Social Workers puts their best efforts to serve the society but during that time they also faced various problems most probably financial problems, social support, health issues, suitable safety equipment, proper guidance and supervision from their supervisors due to Lockdown. But, here one thing is clear that 'the medium of fieldwork may change but the purpose of fieldwork will never change. As per the article 'Ethical challenges for Social Workers during COVID-19: A Global Perspective' published by IFSW revealed that creating the suitable condition for ethical practice is a biggest challenge in the fieldwork in social work during the pandemic like situation. (<https://www.ifsw.org/ethical-challenges-for-social-workers-during-covid-19-a-global-perspective/>)

Objectives of the study

1. To study the views, expectations and problems faced by Social Work students regarding training at fieldwork.
2. To study the status of coordination and understanding among fieldwork supervisor and supervisee.
3. To study the attitude of students towards application of theory into practice.

Hypothesis

There is a Lack of communication between Fieldwork Faculty as well as Agency Supervisors and

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Social Work students regarding fieldwork situations, due to this the social work student suffers.

Methodology and Experiences

Research Design

The study was descriptive in nature so that Descriptive Research Design has been selected for this purpose.

Area of the Study

The department of Social Work of one of the famous State University located in the Capital of State Uttar Pradesh has been selected as an area of study.

Source of Data

Both the primary data and secondary data sources have been used.

Findings and Discussions

Table No.- 1

Type of Work allotted by Agency

Type of Work	Percentage
General office work i.e. Registration, Sitting on counter etc.	40.00
Campaigning/Awareness Programs etc.	50.00
Case work/Interaction with patient	10.00
Total	100.00

As per the findings of the table no. 01, regarding the type of work allotted by the Agency clears that most of the students (40.00 percent) have involved in general work like- sitting on the counter, registration, interaction and campaigning etc. They don't like sitting on the counter or doing registration. While 50.00 percent students were satisfied with their work like campaigning, workshops etc, that they have allotted by the agency.

Table No- 02

Status on achieving required social work competencies by existing system

Status	Percentage
Yes	90.00
No	10.00
Total	100.00

As per the conclusion of the above table no. 02 it is very clear that 90.00 percent of students believe that the current existing system of fieldwork is enough to achieve the required social work competencies.

Table No- 03

Freedom from supervisor to experiment with innovative ideas on fieldwork settings

Status	Percentage
Yes	90.00
No	10.00
Total	100.00

Table no. 03 emphasized that 90.00 percent of the students replied positively on the question whether their supervisor allowed them to implement their innovative ideas on fieldwork settings or not. While 10.00 percent respondents don't have freedom like this

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Table No - 04

Grievance Redressal system and Issues

Status	Percentage
Yes	30.00
No	70.00
Total	100.00

On the question of Grievance Redressal System 30.00 students replied positively that their department has a grievance redressal committee. While 70.00 percent among them replied negatively for the same.

Table No.- 05

Problems and Challenges

Statement	Percentage
Issues related to your absence	20.00
Issues related to work allotted by fieldwork supervisor	20.00
Problems related to Expenditure, Misunderstandings with trainees/agency etc	30.00
Other	-
Total	100.00

As per the analysis of Table no. 05 one thing is very clear that the social work students have faced various types of problems and challenges like issues related to absence, issues related to work allotted by fieldwork supervisors or problems or mis understandings with supervisors and trainees due to lack of communication.

Table No.- 06

Response on Supervisory visit

Status/Description	Percentage
Supervisory visits by faculty supervisors to agencies	20.00
Do you Want Supervisory visits by your Faculty Supervisor	60.00
Don't think supervisory visit is necessary	20.00
Base	100.00

According to the analysis of Table No. 06, there were only 20.00 of students replied positively on the question of supervisory visit in a serious situation while 80.00 percent among them clearly stated that their supervisor have not took interest in fieldwork due to that no supervisory visit have been made by them throughout whole session. Apart from that, 60.00 percent among them eagerly wants supervisory visit by their supervisors in a way to get feedback about them as well as for psychosocial support.

Table No.- 07

Challenges Faced by You during Your Fieldwork

Challenges	Percentage
A lot of Work Pressure	40.00
Misunderstandings with Faculty Supervisor/ Agency Supervisors	60.00
Other	Nil
Base	100.00

The conclusion of Table no. 07 stated that the social work students face a lot of work pressure regarding classroom as well as fieldwork practicum. 60.00 percent responds accepted that they have faced various challenges with their supervisors either

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with faculty or agency supervisors due to lack of communication with them. 40.00 Percent of respondents have accepted that lots of work pressure exhibits during fieldwork situations because they have no option to choose anyone of them on priority basis, both are compulsory apart from their personal and familial work/responsibilities.

Table No.- 08
Possibilities of Application of Theories into Practices

Status	Percentage
Yes	40.00
No	60.00
Total	100.00

At about 60.00 percent of respondents have denied the possibility of application of theories in fieldwork practice that they have learnt in classrooms as theoretical concepts. While 40.00 percent of the respondents accepted, there are possibilities of application of theories into practice under some specific conditions.

Table No.- 09
Improvement through Fieldwork practicum in skill competencies

Improvement	Percentage
Communication	60.00
Personality and Professional Development	70.00
Discipline	10.00
Mobilization and Networking	20.00
Other	Nil
Base	100.00

On the question of Improvement through fieldwork practicum in skill competencies the respondents noticed Improvement in Communication Skills (60.00 percent), Personality development and Professional skills development (70.00 percent), emergence of Discipline (10.00 percent) and Skills of Mobilization as well as Networking (20.00 percent) among their own.

Table No.- 10
Best Moment of fieldwork you've experienced on field settings

Statement	Percentage
Community Visits/ Spending quality time with people of different settings	30.00
Help someone through counselling	10.00
Celebrating events with Agency members	20.00
Other i.e. seeing an strike of ASHA Workers	10.00
No any of memorable or best experience	30.00
Total	100.00

Table No. 10 shows the response of the Respondents Best Moment during their fieldwork, they have experienced. We find very interesting responses from them as well. They all are satisfied with quality time they spent with needy people in different settings; they feel good when they help someone

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through counselling etc. which is the best perspective of fieldwork in social work among students.

Expectations of The Respondents

1. Agency should provide them proper knowledge regarding the work allotted to them related to their specialization.
2. Proper exposure to the respondents.
3. Proper guidance from the faculty supervisor during fieldwork.
4. Proper exposure in a way to enhance personal skills like communication, problem solving, personality development etc.
5. The institution should make sure about prior proper communication, adequate information regarding no. of students, timing, period and nature of work before placement of MSW students in any agency.
6. Agency Allotment should be transparent and based on specialization taken by students.
7. Faculty supervisor should ensure visits or meet the agency fieldwork supervisor in a way to supervise and taking feedback for and from their supervisee.
8. Students should be engaged more in relevant practical work on the field rather than official work like registration and sitting on the counter.
9. Fieldwork faculty supervisor and agency supervisor should conduct at least one day orientation or activity based Programme regarding different agencies, settings in which they will place for their case, group and community in short for their fieldwork.

Problems and challenges faced by trainees during their Fieldwork

Lack of Supervisory Visit

According to one of the respondents among all, '*Last semester me fieldwork ke dauran kewal do teachers ne hi supervisory visit kiya tha. Wo bhi tab jab bada panga ho gaya tha. Agency waale hum logo ko le nahi rahe the. Kah rahe the ki aap logo ko bas bhej diya jata hai. Abhi yaha pahle se hi aapke departments ke students bhare huye hain aur ab aap log aa gaye. Hume nahi lena hai aap logo ko. Bas students bhi hyper ho gaye daily ki bhaag-daud se. To thoda maamla serious ho gaya tha..tab humare supervisors ko aana pada unhe samjhane ke liye*'.

Problems related to the behaviour of Faculty Supervisor

Proper management of training of educators/supervisors, orientation programs, budgeting, communication, Grievance Redressal committee etc. is needed.

Because some of the respondents very clearly said that '*The supervisor doesn't take any interest in their fieldwork. They handle all the problems at their level without forwarding it to any Redressal Committee. But we need much more attention, help and cooperation from our supervisors in a way to avoid further problems*'.

Lack of Proper Manual and Problems related to Communication and Technical talk

There is a lack of Proper Communication in between supervisor and supervisee as well as in between faculty supervisor and agency coordinator.

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As per one of the respondents who was placed in an government medical organization for their fieldwork; the organization refused to take them in by saying- 'Yaha Mela laga hai kya.. Jo aap log muh uthaye chale aa jaate hain.' He again included that 'Department se ek letter to issue kiya jata hai lekin usme koi proper information nahi di jaati hai agency ko ki wo hume kis purpose se, kis tarah ki training ke liye, kitne din ke liye bhej rahe hain aur unko humse agency me kya karwana hai etc'.

This shows that there is a lack of proper communication as well as coordination in between the institute and the agency.

Development of fieldwork manuals which covers teaching and learning contents regarding fieldwork is very important. The authorization letter that are handed over to the agency from the institute have not any clear messages..also lack of technical definitions regarding placement, type of training, work, scheduled period, no. of students that all the agencies have an issues regarding this and most important What the institution wants from the agency? Which kind of fieldwork or training to the students they require for their fieldwork.

Problems related to Criteria for selection of Agency

According to one of the repondent, 'Yaha koi criteria hi agency selection ka nahi hai. Koi bhi agency pakda di jaati hai. Mujhe ek government hospital allot kiya gaya hai. Jaha keval hume patient ko dekhne aur registration counter par baithane ka kaam de diya jaata hai. Koi bhi kaarya social work ki field se relevant nahi diya jata hai. Hum itna costly course kya kewal counter par baith registration karne ke liye hi kar rahe hain?'

Challenges Related to Target Area Allotted by Agency for Fieldwork

The department ensures the location of the agency and allotted us near location but in Agency we have a problem with the distance of the target area given to us for fieldwork, there is lack of transportation, and communication modes.

As per one of the respondent, 'Agency fieldwork ke liye target area kaafi door deti hai. Jaha aane-jaane ka koi proper saadhan hi nahi rahta hai. Humara kharcha to badh hi jata hai sath hi sath aane-jaane me time bhi do-teen ghante barbaad ho jaata hai'.

Conclusion

On the basis of above reviews and findings, it is very clear that fieldwork is the backbone of Social Work that differs social work from other relevant subjects or social science subjects.

The responsibility of a supervisor whether it is faculty/supervisor, is to make them aware, self-capable to solve their misunderstandings, confusion, problems and challenges and enhance them up to the next level to face all the situation they

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come across their entire life. In this regard all the respondents were satisfied because they learnt much more things they expected from fieldwork by their own.

Fieldwork among social work is an activity based learning. That enhances their behavioral, educational, intellectual, emotional, academic as well as their professional development. But problem is that the supervisor doesn't take interest in fieldwork.

Fieldwork practicum requires a soft but a disciplined bonding between Supervisor and Supervisee, proper communication between Faculty supervisor and Agency supervisor also in between agency supervisor and supervisee and in this study there is lack of bonding noticed by the researcher during discussion with the respondents.

There is also a need of field visits by faculty supervisor or institution representatives in order to supervise the situation or environment where their supervisee is being placed for their fieldwork; and to check whether it is safe or not for their supervisee.

That also helps to get familiar with the requirements/situation of the agency.

In this study, all the trainees/ social work students eagerly want the supervisory visits from their supervisor during their fieldwork at least once. So, supervisors should ensure field visits during fieldwork in a way to give psycho-social support to their supervisee as well as for feedback from agencies about them.

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