



THE STRUCTURES AND FUNCTIONS OF FIELDWORK IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA

*Dr. Mahesh Chougule, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work,
Walchand College of Arts and Science, Solapur*

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Abstract: *In the present article the researcher has discussed about the social work educational settings particularly the field work training and practice. In the present study the research has brought in to light issues of fieldwork and how it is important to understand. The structure and function of fieldwork in social work education has been discussed in the article. The discussion and statements on components, structure and functions of fieldwork in social work education system are the reflections of the researcher. Many of the concepts and references are provided by the researchers which are taken from the reviews of his Ph.D. work. The research article is fully based on the secondary data from the websites, manuals, books and articles. whereas many are the reflections of the researcher and experience of the research while teaching the social work course since from ten years of teaching in the social work education field.*

Key words: *Social work education, field work training & practice.*

Introduction

Social work education should enhance the capacity of the students to be significant layers to built civil society and institutions that would challenge the existing social order and strengthen people to participate in the process of development, Desai (2001). Social work education can play a vital role in developing competency in the performance of social work tasks in the framework of developing economy, the aim of which should be to promote equity and social justice, Desai (2004). Social work education is based on the premise that preparation for professional practice requires a core of knowledge as well as skill in the application of that knowledge, Kerson (1994). The sanction for social work practice is embedded in social work training. As training proceeds, students are accepted to develop commandment to the professional ideals. Only in the transition of knowledge into practice, acquired in the field, does social work education achieve professional justification, Kadushin (1992). So it is important to explore the functions and structure of fieldwork training in social work education.

Structure of Fieldwork Training

Social work education is to promote change, development and to prevent abuse and exploitation to reduce inequalities, to guarantee decent and dignified quality of life. Social work is now passing through a very critical period because of rapid and startling changes through the globe, Roy Sanjoy (2010). Components of social work education basically have three components: 1) classroom teaching 2) research projects and 3) field work training. The courses offered are generally divided into four groups. The first group consists of courses about Indian society, Social structure, history and philosophy of social work and Social problems; the second group relates to the study of Human growth and development; and the third group includes courses on methods of social work working with people such as social casework, social group work, community organization, social welfare administration and social work research; and the fourth group is composed of specialized pedagogy usually offered during the second year of training; and students are expected to concentrate on one of the specialization they acquired.

The curriculum designed in mid-fifties by Tata Institute and the Delhi School is followed by other institutions and the structure of the curriculum is more or less the same and it is continued to be followed. But both these institutions had modified their curricula considerably in the late sixties and the early seventies. Basically, the main pattern is what existed in American social work education in the early sixties. While at the Tata Institute, most courses continue to be labeled on the American model, the Delhi School has attempted generic terms as method of working with people instead of the traditional titles as social casework, social group work and community organization, Desai (2000). In most of other institutions, the traditional terminology is widely followed, and even where new terms have been introduced, the basic teaching material which is primarily American, has remained the same. In addition to the courses, almost all institutions either require or provide opportunities to their students to complete an individual or group research project report based upon some type of field data. Over the years, this requirement has moved from the mandatory level to the optional level especially during the seventies and again in nineties social work research project is been made mandatory. All the institutions without any controversy recognized field work as an important part of social work education. The Field work programme generally includes concurrent field work, block placement, study tours and an annual rural camp. During the two semesters most institutions have observational and unstructured type of field work for about 15 hours a week, the students are either placed in agencies or in open communities as a field work agencies. The last two semester's field work is somewhat more structured and specialized and is usually related to the student's specialized are of interest as chosen at the time of admission, however in some institutions specializations are allotted from the first two semester but they follows the same pattern of field work training and they are not trained in specialized and structured manner. The block field work placement of four to six weeks is generally arranged

after the completion of all other formal requirements of training; in two institutions however this is done as a part of the field work during the second year of training. This placement exposes the student to the actual functioning of social welfare agencies and it often leads to his or her employment as well. Also as guided by UGC curriculum 2000 some of the institutions place social work students for Summer Placement Training after the completion of first two semesters. In terms of both emphasis and credit given in the total curricula of different institutions, the field work practices do vary considerably.

Concept of Field Work in Social Work

The dictionary of sociology and related sciences defines field work as a social survey or process of collecting primary data from a population distributed geographically. In sociological context it is quite true but field work in social work education is quite different.

Field work is any kind of practical experience in a social organization or agency and community if this experience has been deliberately arranged for the education of students who are undertaking courses partly or wholly designed for those who intend to become social workers Shrinivas (1979).

Field work in social work education is a guided interaction process between a students and the actual and practical life situation in which social work as a profession has an abiding and deep concern and which needed to be remedied improved for changed for a fuller and complete development of human environmental potential.

Field work in social work is carried in and through social welfare agencies and communities where the students learn skills and tests out knowledge according to and an educational plan. The whole programme is students and field specifics field work training is supervised practice of social work under the guidance of trained social work educator or field personal. It has been defined as an educational sponsored attachment of social work students to an institution agency or a section of community in which they are helped to extend their knowledge and understanding and experience the

impact of human needs. Such and experience is deliberately arranged on a whole or part time basis.

Field work implies both training and education it is functional in nature and technical in process it involves and educational process that fosters learning in students it is an integrated approach that goes concurrently with class room instructions Lorenz, (2001).

Functions of Field Work Training

Field work is the core and back bone of social work education and it is responsibility of fieldwork to help the social work student to understand the different between the field work area (as a client, group, agency, or community) and the self the social work student. As social problems are multifaceted and complex many contemporary challenges are arising now days in a society. As the social problem is multifaceted and contemporary in nature social work training has to be molded and should satisfy the need of the society. According to Subhedar (2001), Fieldwork in social work education refers to training and education. It consists of accumulating knowledge in different situations. It is a dynamic process of observing, amassing and implementing creative and innovative ideas. Moreover, it fosters the development of intellectual and emotional processes and attitudes. Fieldwork programme provides an opportunity to the students to apply their theoretical knowledge taught in the classroom appropriately in different practical situations.

Structural Components of Fieldwork and its Functions

As described earlier the components of field work in social work education are 1) Orientation visits. 2) Fieldwork (block or concurrent) 3) Study tours 4) Summer Placement and Block Placement training.

Orientation visits: orientation visits are the exposure visits organized by the social work educational institution. Orientation visits provides an opportunity to social work students to understand the working of social work institutions like NGOs, Government departments and also to understand the community setting at first hand learning. A throw

understand and clarity should be made to students about the visit and students should be prepared for the orientation visits. As this may be the first visit and exposure of students to ground realities thus their sensitivity must be channelized to accept the ground realities and think critically with social work perspective. Thus a session should be conducted before the visits about how to have an outlook in orientation, what things should be observed and how it should be observed and relating activity of orientation visits to social work intervention and role of social worker in the particular setting. A proper presentation about what the changes in perspectives the students develop after the visits should be discussed and presented.

Fieldwork: Fieldwork is a component which makes social work education stand out of the box as compared ant other educational knowledge stream. The pedagogy of fieldwork in social work education makes social work education as unique. Field work provides hands on experience to the learners. Field work in social work is an opportunity to learner where the learner can test the theories learned in the class in the field of social work practice. Fieldwork operates at the levels of the specific instance, where social work educational philosophy, values, ethics, practice and research are expected converge social work students. The real integration can only happen only if there is good social work teaching and effective fieldwork training. Generally fieldwork placements are made after the orientation visits in first semester. There are mainly two types of field work placement one is concurrent fieldwork and another is block placement training. Depending upon the nature the curriculum of the social work institution fieldwork planning is done. Field work enhances the capacity of the social work students to sustain into the challenging and competitive field of social work profession. Fieldwork provides the opportunity to the learner by providing a platform to learn new skills and to test these new skills into the society. Thus fieldwork is continues process where theories are learnt in the classroom and these theories are tested using various skills in the social

work fieldwork settings. Throughout the process the learner may face many difficulties and thus may raise many fieldwork related questions. Many a time the learner does not get sufficient time to take the field work at certain higher level of intervention. Thus to reveal new areas, understand dynamics and widen the spectrum of social work profession, the student and fieldwork supervisor should have healthy discussion and interaction on the field work related issues. The student social worker should maintain the communication between the field work setting and the fieldwork supervisor. Fieldwork is itself a process thus students should identify what they are learning and where they can stop. Fieldwork training is a bench mark in the social work student learning life, thus it becomes very important and is a responsibility of the faculty and field work supervisor to build up a social work professional perspectives in the students. This can be done by asking critical question among the students, giving them task of reading new articles and books. The faculty or fieldwork supervisor can also ask the students to write and reflect over their experiences of fieldwork and can arrange exposure visits and meetings with different resource persons. These are also good ideas to build up the professional social worker perspective in students. Reporting and recording are crucial components in field work documentation. Recording is crucial as it can be used later while writing the final reports. Different mediums of recording can be used like audio and video, field notes, photographs etc. recording, reporting and presenting are the basic and core components of field work practicum. Field work process recording helps to understand the context of the social problem and thus the field worker can reflect on it in the form of reporting. Reporting becomes the authentic evidence for the social worker. This reporting can also be used as module for further teaching and learning aid.

Study Tours: Study tours are seen from different dimensions in social work education. In many knowledge streams it's just recreational visits, whereas in social work education study tour has its own importance and objectives. Study tours in social

work education not only provide exposure to the students but also they give an opportunity for job placement. Study tours are organized depending upon the specialization. Specialized NGOs, GOs, are visited and a professional network is established among the social work institution and the NGO or GO. Study tour also provides an opportunity to students to organize the tour and to administrate the same. Many new skills like time management, decision making, planning and execution, professional communication etc are enhanced in the study tours. Study tour reveals the new modules of social work practice that the students can learn to execute in the field work settings. Study tours expose the students to ground realities and contemporary issues of society. This understand of present scenario of practice of different NGOs and GOs helps social work students to evaluate their own capability to work in these settings and the areas where the students should focus for development. Study tours bounds the social work institutions and the social work practitioner professional together for development of social work students and to arrange various skill development trainings and workshops.

Summer Placement training and Block Placement Training

According to the guidelines given by University Grants Commission India (UGC) (2001), it is increasingly recognized and accepted that a part of summer vacation, after completing the first year of the post graduate studies in master of social work programme, could be used fruitfully to integrate practice skills and techniques learnt. Although no all fieldwork programmes have in place Summer Placement training, the time frame recommended for the summer placement is a minimum of three weeks. During the Summer Placement training the trainees (students) should work directly with client system and the management operations of day to day work of the setting. Therefore for a minimum of three weeks students are placed in different social work settings.

Objectives of the summer placement training

The main objectives of summer placement training include providing students with the opportunities to (1) experience direct practice and management operations; (2) improve, enhance and integrate practice of social work method and strategies; and (3) first-hand experience of the role of a professional social worker.

Summer placement training gives students an opportunity to test their skills and understand the ground realities in the social work settings. Block placement training is done after the completion of the second year. Students are placed in the areas where they are expert and have specialised knowledge of working. Usually the students are placed in the same specialization social work area so that after completion of the BPT the students may get job placement. In the BPT the students get adopted and familiar with the job. Many of the students get jobs in the same settings if the students show noticeable skills in the field.

Conclusion

From the above discussion one can identify the functions of field work as follows;

1. Fieldwork gives hands on experience to students.
2. Fieldwork is an opportunity to reveal new grounded theories

3. It enables the students to understand the ground realities
4. It develops the students analytical and critical thinking
5. Fieldwork develops the skills of reporting, recordings and presenting
6. Fieldwork is an opportunity to students to test the knowledge and theory.
7. Fieldwork motivated the students to look social work with new perspectives.
8. Fieldwork provides confidence to students to work with the people in different social work settings.
9. Fieldwork teaches the students the dimension of professionalism in social work.
10. Fieldwork acts as a doctrine for further work and practice of social work for the students.
11. Fieldwork makes students understand self and enable the students not to react but to respond in a right manner.
12. Fieldwork is the only component which can enhance and sustain the social work profession.

Thus, if the fieldwork is practiced with enthusiasm and devotion, the professional development of students is not a tough issue. Fieldwork and theory should be taught clearly and made understandable to the students with developing new modules of social work practice.

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