

1

Social Work Practicum: Concept, Meaning, Nature, Importance and Scope

**Patricia Lager, B. Hamann*

Introduction

It is important for social workers to have a strong theoretical base. There is a necessity to provide opportunities for students to apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom. It is only by doing that the student can comprehend the nuances of working with clients. It may have seemed abstract while learning about skills and values in the classroom and this can be clarified when put into practice. In the beginning there may be anxiety and inhibition to work with people, but there is a positive learning process as the student gets more comfortable applying the values, skills and knowledge of social work. The skills will get honed only with practice, regardless of the amount of knowledge acquired. Some things learned in the classroom may seem very different in the real world. Studying about the developmental stages may seem simple in class but dealing with issues associated with

** Prof. Patricia Lager, FSU, USA & Dr. B. Hamann, USA*

adolescence may be quite different. Social work practicum helps students deal with administrative, legal and communication issues. Practicum gives an opportunity to work with supervision, intake, and case recording and reporting. It is an integral part of the social work curriculum at the undergraduate and post-graduate level.

Definition of Social Work Practice

Various professions use different words to describe the practical use of classroom learning. Different terms used are practicum, internships, field work, or field experience. Some professions have a year long internship for the doctoral degree. Some placements in the field of shorter duration or which are less intense may be called field work or practicum. This is not true in all cases. In graduate or undergraduate social work, the terms used for practical training is field work, field placement or practicum.

Social work practicum programs vary in different schools. Some may be structured and placements may be made by fitting the students' interests and aptitude to the agency. Still other schools may allow the students to freely choose the setting or supervisor and coordinate with the agency. Some schools may define what the student is expected to learn in a particular setting while other schools may leave the decision to the agency supervisor. A student is usually made aware of what is expected in practicum. Arrangements are usually made with the agency regarding what practical experience the student is required to achieve. There are some agencies which have a specific practicum program and if the school finds that is acceptable then the agency

determines the practicum program. In India, agencies would sometimes get the students placed to complete jobs that are pending in the agency (updating files, home visits). School field work liaisons usually work with the field agency supervisor to plan the students' placement program.

In a complex network of social, economic, political, cultural, and geographical factors, social workers perform various roles to promote social development. Social work practicum uses theoretical knowledge of human behaviour, social development, environmental effects (on individuals) and impact of individual behaviour on society. Social workers professionally apply skills, values, techniques, and principles, to help individuals, groups and communities overcome personal and social problems. In social work practicum, this, however, is secondary to the central objective of student, learning.

Models of Social Work Practicum

According to Zastrow (1995), the diagnosis of clients' problems, the causes of which were believed to be in the client, was the model adopted by U.S. social workers in the 1920's to the 1960's. This medical model was used to assess and treat problems. Emotional and behavioural problems were supposed to be affected by genetics, diseases, early trauma, metabolic disorders, and conflicts within the individual or the defenses used to combat them. These problems were regarded as mental illnesses and given medical labels. The medical model was humane and treated those (with such problems) as persons in need of help and amenable to treatment.

In the 1960's U.S. social workers reemphasized the view that the environment affected the individual and was likely to contribute to causes of clients' problems. A reform approach that attempted to change the clients' system brought needed services to clients. In India, Balwadis were established in areas that did not have it, to ensure that children were educated. A snack or a mid-day meal was provided to enhance their nutrition. Health care centers were set up to motivate clients to take care of themselves. Family planning centers tried to motivate families to limit the number of children so that the quality of life would improve and reduce stress. These are examples of efforts to change the systems to improve clients' well-being. The ecological model focused on the interaction between the individual and the environment that may not be conducive to a healthy balance. The people are not considered to be separate entities but rather as systems that actively reciprocate energy through their boundary with other existing systems, like the family and community. The person is helped to adjust better to the environment. The social worker sees to it that the persons' needs are met by the environment.

The ecological model seeks to work with individuals, families and small groups to help them cope better with regular changes in life like growing up, birth, death, sickness, marriage, divorce, empty nest, and other life cycle transitions. The interaction between people, families, and groups with their environment is also an area where social workers deal with. The maladaptive patterns are identified and dealt with using appropriate approaches. In this model, another area of social work is to see that the environment reciprocates with the

individual to meet the needs, through services and accessibility to the resources. When a young girl from the lower caste is raped in the rice fields by the landlord's son, the family blames her. They try to keep the matter concealed. The families in the lower caste gradually stop sending their girls to school or to even work on the field to keep them safe. The social worker would work with the individual girl's self esteem and emotional problem. The social worker helps the family deal with their helplessness to fight against the higher class victimization. If possible the social worker may educate families in the lower caste about their constitutional, social, and legal rights and help them communicate with the landlord or the media if that does not work. On the other hand the social worker would work with the local government (Panchayat Raj) and see that laws against rape are upheld and the perpetrators are punished. This shows the social worker using the ecological model to work at three levels – individual and group, the environment and the interaction or relationship between the two.

The student may find it easier to work at the individual and family level. Working with the community (government, local leaders or upper class members) would be more difficult even for the social worker. The student can either accompany or observe the supervisor in action or can approach (escorted) with caution. Often, it would be more difficult for a female student to confront dominant male members in the community. It might be a good learning experience for the student to approach activist groups working for particular causes or media group with suggestions.

The Central Themes in Social Work Practicum

The process starts from the initial arrangements made for practicum through the final understanding of integrating theory into field work. It is divided under the following paragraphs (Birkenmaier and Berg-Weger, 2007):

Preparing for a Social Work Practicum

A student considering field work placement should accept personal strengths, weaknesses and emotions that could help or impede field work. It is important to acknowledge what one expects of the field placement, supervisor and what one expects to learn. Even though there may be areas that cannot be foreseen, there are others that can be anticipated and the student can prepare for the upcoming events. Some of them are as follows:

- Building relationships with field instructor, staff and the clients
- Finding and accepting ones role and position in the agency
- Identifying and getting to know the agency and social work programs staff that will help answer questions, deal with problems and crisis situation.
- Chalking out a plan of action and managing time to avoid stress and overload.
 - Identifying personal learning styles and roles to take on.

- Deciding how much personal information should be shared with field staff.

In preparing to be a professional social worker, the decision to become a social worker is the first step. To establish a professional identity and get affiliated to the professional group is a long process. Practicum is an important phase in this process. It is not an end as social workers keep growing and changing as skills are honed and knowledge gets wider. Social work practicum helps the student identify with the profession and establish personal and professional boundaries. Field work is an opportunity to adjust to transitions (of course work, supervision, practicum, graduation, professional social worker), variety of roles (case worker, group worker, community organizer, student, supervisee), and stresses.

Safety issues in the field: In United States of America, social workers are second only to police officers in that they are at risk of having work related violence directed towards them (Landers, 1993). The level of danger has increased over the years along with the new child safety laws that need to be enforced, involvement of families in court cases, and expectations that social workers will solve violent cases (Berkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2007). Students may be threatened by clients, staff and other professionals. Identifying threats to physical, emotional and mental safety and taking reasonable precautions (client restraints, locks, working in teams, standard precautions against medical risks, attending workshops to train for defense against violence) are necessary for effective functioning.

Student may confront sexual harassment which may be verbal or nonverbal, ranging from sexual jokes to sexual intercourse. It can include asking for unwanted dates, unwanted touching, pressure for sexual activity, comments about body, sexual boasting, sexist and homophobic comments. Students need to document details of the harassment, work accomplishments, seek out other victims and directly approach the harasser to put an end to the harassment. If this fails, the agency or field work instructor should be able to address this issue. Other resources should be contacted if these steps fail.

In India, prevention works better than taking steps after the fact. This is because even though laws exist against sexual harassment it would be near impossible to prove or get the laws to be enforced. Supervisors usually see to it that the student does not work late into the night or work alone with a client or professional. Students may not know where exactly their home visits would take them. Here too it is wise to go in pairs or decide to speak to the client outside the house. If sexual harassment does take place, it is best to speak to the agency supervisor and also to the school field work liaison.

Supervision: is a form of teaching by a seasoned social work practitioner who imparts training and education with some level of authority. The mentoring relationship would include advising, consulting, understanding and helping. It is different from the job supervision because practicum supervision involves a teacher-learner relationship and not to oversee if the job is performed well. A student is not expected to know everything

during practicum. A student also learns from mistakes made. However, the student should understand that a mistake could be costly and may really hurt a client. It is important that the student maintains open communication with the supervisor and is truthful about his/her actions, feelings and inhibitions to minimize the mistakes or its impact on the client. A supervisor may provide consultation or feedback.

Organization of the agency: Expectations differ from one organization to another. A student also comes in with expectation of the organization. The student works within the organizations' values, objectives, philosophies and resources. Knowledge of the organization is important to offer the best possible service to clients and for work with staff and other agencies.

Governmental agencies are complex, with loads of paper work, rigid structure, conservative philosophy and larger salary. In for-profit organizations, the salary is higher and so are the expectations. There may be more resources, more flexibility to change in body and use of cutting edge technology. Non-profit organizations rely on government for partial funding and use a lot of volunteers. It could be based on a religion which could decide some policy. The size of the agency also determines what or how much and quality of treatment.

Practicum with individuals and families (micro social work): This requires systems theory knowledge and development of skills and techniques. Skills required in this are to explore the problem, feelings, goal setting, termination and application of appropriate treatment. Critical thinking or conceptual understanding required

to integrate theories and treatment strategies is sharpened during field work. Self directed learning of professional competency requiring flexibility, self initiative and risk taking may be learnt over practicum and all through the work experience period. Interpersonal, administrative and professional skills can be learnt during practicum.

Practicum with groups (mezzo social work): Intervention using groups can be cost effective and an efficient use of time, energy and skills. Skills of communication, education, mediation and negotiation are useful in group work. Even though many social workers may not primarily be group workers, generalist social workers may very well use group work for education or therapy at some time or the other. Social work administrators use skills in conducting groups when they facilitate committees, work groups and supervise groups of staff. Leading groups through discussions, conflict or education enables the student to gain valuable skills that come in useful in intervention and at the work place with colleagues or supervisees. The following are models of group work and the role of the social group worker (Berkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2007).

- Social goals model is based on problem-focused interests and goals. They could include safety groups, parent-teacher associations, community development groups working on specific tasks, and coalitions advocating for improved welfare laws. The social worker would play roles of an initiator, convener, organizer, facilitator, and advocate or be a resource person.

- Reciprocal goals model is based on self-help, mutual aid in which members share experiences, support, ideas, solutions or their time. Anonymous groups on 12-step programs, support groups for grief, caregiver and patient are examples of these groups. The social workers' role would be that of a facilitator, mediator, educator and a support.
- Remedial goals model is based on the principle that group interaction brings about change. Psychotherapy, marital therapy, trauma survivors and child abuse perpetrators group are some examples of this group. The role played by the social worker would be that of a therapist, clinician, educator or mediator.

During practicum the student may not have a chance to work with all models of groups. Any practice with groups would erase some of the inhibitions and anxiety the student may have before group work practicum.

Practicum in the community (macro social work): Some problems cannot be solved with micro and mezzo social work. They need a broader approach that tackles social policy, organizational change or community organization. Skills are listed for the different levels of macro social workers (Berkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2007).

Skills required for administrative social workers could include budgeting, financial management, working with boards, organizational design, development, and diagnosis, computer information systems, human

resource management, networking, marketing, and media relations.

Community organizers, social activists or social researchers may need skills of program development, implementation and evaluation, fundraising, coalition, planned change techniques, macro-level advocacy, community analysis, inter-organizational planning, leadership development, citizen participation, small-group decision making techniques, task force membership development and retention, economic development techniques and computer information systems.

Social policy analysts or lobbyists or elected officials need skills in advocacy, lobbying, policy analysis, management, issue analysis techniques, social policy research and use of legal system.

Legal issues in social work practicum: In the United States of America, social workers come in contact with the legal system on behalf of their clients, organization or themselves. Even though students undergoing practicum may not encounter such situations, they need to be aware of the legal implications of situations and activities related to courts and the law. It could include testifying in court, providing mediation, petitioning the court, help in class action lawsuits, advocating or helping draft legislation.

In India, the legal system works very slowly and works more for those who have money. Many crimes are not reported because of the belief that the higher class can buy their innocence. Many times the police would falsify investigative reports. They have even reported

dowry deaths as accidents and the victims and their families have been made to suffer even more. Law enforcers are afraid to do their duty because of repercussions on their job (transfer, demotion or loss of jobs) when the perpetrator is a rich, upper class person.

Even though marital discord and conflict may break a family, there are not many divorces. When there is separation because of abuse, neglect or disease, then the father usually gets custody because of affluence or dominance in society. The wife may be sent home because she did not bring enough dowry (bride price), but her children would not be allowed to go with her (unless the husband or his family doesn't want the children).

To prepare for termination, at the end of the practicum period, the student gets ready to close cases and projects. This closure is important for the student to come to terms with the end of practicum and focus on knowledge, skills and values gained during practicum, and note areas of learning for the future. An evaluation of what the student has learned is useful to reinforce the gains. It may be a good time to note what the student has contributed to the agency. It is important to end relationships with staff, co-workers and field instructor. This closure is important to realize that the supervision is ended and if the student graduates, it will be going on to an independent job. The client needs to feel respected and the relationship should be ended to reinforce the professional role and boundaries.

In India the student is more direct, gives advice or may even take the role of a parent or older sibling. It is

important (even if the student feels that the sessions should not end) to terminate and say specific goodbyes to all the staff. Clients need to be made aware of their growth and encourage students to instill the confidence in the clients to carry on independently, while reassuring that the family will always be there for them.

Social Work Practicum Approaches

Social case work is used by practicum students to help individuals on a one-to-one basis. All social agencies that provide direct services have social case workers. The case workers' job ranges from counseling individuals to adjust their environments to suit their needs or to adapt to changing environments. Caseworkers may help adolescents deal with emotional turmoil, women deal with joint family disputes, men deal with problems with landlords on the agricultural field, clients with an addiction to focus on their asking for help, or enable members to work with stigma of the lower caste, among many other issues.

Group work consists of the group worker facilitating different group activities to meet various objectives. Individuals are helped to develop in different ways (socially, emotionally, and intellectually) through group processes. The groups are different in rural and urban areas. In urban areas, the group may provide information like marriage, religion, career, sex, legal rights, and art. In rural areas the groups are oriented to provide basic necessities and education of bank loans, private enterprise, child health and government programs. The Mahila Mandals or women's groups offer important information to women for social and economic improvement.

Group therapy is used for individuals with emotional, behavioural, or social problems. Individuals are helped to overcome their problems through group processes. Many individuals can be helped at the same time in the group. The group worker is able to comprehend the needs and feelings of the group as he/she is a facilitator of the group unlike that of a case worker. This is used in hospitals, schools, agencies, or self-help groups.

Family therapy is a type of group therapy that helps families deal with problems in communication, behaviour, emotion and relationship. The joint family system that includes the grandparents and siblings of the father, his wife and children may have complex problems that need help. Problems arising between parents-in-law and daughters in law, breadwinner's loyalty to mother and wife, marital conflict, child rearing, keeping tradition and modernism are some issues that can be dealt with in family therapy.

In organizing the community, the student in practicum encourages and stimulates the local residents to plan, develop, coordinate and implement programs. The community organizer is a catalyst of change. In the rural areas, the community organizer may enlist the help of the local Panchayat or village elders to settle disputes over building a school in the temple grounds. A social work administrator may lay down objectives, analyze conditions to provide services, recruit and supervise staff to form the organizational structure, and see to the budget and funding of the agency. Most administrators work in the urban areas. It would be

very difficult for a social worker to be an administrator in a very rigid, rural, hierarchical structure.

Competencies Required for Social Work Practicum

Social workers undergoing practicum may primarily be direct practitioners to clients or indirect service providers. However, the direct practitioners have to do some administrative work, supervise at times, have a good knowledge of the resources and be a team player. The administrators, supervisors and other indirect service providers, on the other hand may take up some case loads working as true generalists. According to Morales and Sheaffor (1995), the direct social workers need some basic competencies.

Use of self that is sensitive of one's limitations and capabilities: The social worker needs to be aware of personal strengths and weaknesses and be able to use all the skills, values, knowledge in helping the client.

Giving and receiving help: While helping clients, the social worker needs to be aware that the primary reason for this act is to benefit the client and not for self satisfaction. While receiving help the client may be embarrassed, feel inadequate or find it demeaning. An understanding of the intricacies of the helping process is necessary.

Professional helping relationship: A positive relationship between the social worker and client, based on mutual respect and trust is important for an effective helping process. A genuine, warm, empathetic social worker, who has positive regard, can engage the client in a successful helping relationship.

Sensitive approach: Social workers need to be aware of differences in culture, gender, age, religion, and disability. An understanding of variations in clients would enable the social worker to see the impact of such factors on the clients' social, emotional and behavioural functioning.

Code of Ethics: The social worker needs to be aware of the requirements for ethical practice. It is the public trust that grants professional sanction. To earn this trust the social worker must adhere to ethical practice of social work. The social worker provides the best possible service and tries not to control damage.

Understand the behaviours of individuals and families: The professional social worker needs to have a repertoire of individual and family behaviour, family and social structure, family and individual life cycles, human physiology, anatomy, growth, development and anticipated times of concern. The impact of any event or situation on individuals and families is another area important knowledge required of the social worker. Knowledge is garnered from biology, psychology, sociology and anthropology.

Gathering information on clients: Conducting an interview helps focus on information about the client and the environment while identifying resources that could be used in the treatment phase. This would help to easily determine the methods to be used in helping. Some of the skills that are useful in conducting an interview are listening, questioning, and reflecting help in establishing an empathetic relationship with open communication.

Analysis of clients' information: After the information

is gathered, the data is analyzed and the problem is identified. A proper determination of the problem situation would lead to selecting appropriate treatment methods. Once the strengths and limitations are assessed, resources that need to be garnered are sought. Information is gathered using a variety of tools and forms.

Empowering the client: An important part of helping is to assist the clients understand and accept the problem and situation. It is a big step towards finding a solution. Assisting a client in clarifying a problem or resolving a conflict should not include deciding and functioning for the client. The client should be empowered to make decisions and actively solve the problem. This would give the client confidence to handle future problems that may occur.

Helping the client throughout: Various skills are required when the social worker builds a professional relationship from intake through termination. After allowing the client to reveal his or her situation, the social worker collects data to describe the problem and identify resources and strengths that can be utilized in the helping process. Once the problem is analyzed and a plan of action or a contract is drawn up, then the client is helped to resolve his problem. At the end when the helping relationship is terminated, the process is evaluated to learn from the positive outcomes.

Ethical and Legal Issues in Social Work Practicum

Standards for treatment or codes of ethical practice by which professionals function have existed to ensure

that the client does not come to any harm or mishap because of the professional's course of action. These standards are set up by professional organizations to restrict their members from committing malpractice. Such guidelines evolve from debates and discussions of practitioners and experts in the field, as represented, for instance, by the ethical standards adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers. Code of ethics is formulated according to conditions prevailing at some particular point. As a result they are bound to change as existing situation may require new standards.

Such guidelines or standards are not law by themselves. However they are accepted by state licensing boards and practice laws. When a professional, acts in a manner that is not in line with the guidelines set by the professional organization, then sanctions may be imposed or worse still professional license may be revoked or the person may be removed from the profession. Civil action for monetary damages or criminal prosecution may be the outcome of certain violations.

Some authorities that provide such guidelines or standards in the United States of America are the American Counseling Association (1995), American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (1990), American Psychological Association (1992), American School Counselor Association (1984), Association for Specialists in Group Work (1990), and National Association of Social Workers (1993).

Conclusion

Any practicum experience should provide an opportunity to integrate theory into practice. A variety of settings provide the field work experience for the students to see how the knowledge they have gleaned in the classroom actually works. Students usually get to practice many approaches in social work. They get a chance to work with individuals, groups, community and get some awareness of social administration, social policy and social action. Along with the knowledge, students need to be aware of the skills, values and ethical guidelines that are required for practice of social work.

It is very important to learn about the social practices and values of the community within which field practica take place. Supervisors can be important guides to understanding the network of social services available in a particular region, and can help orient the student to the agency context in which they will work. Clearly defining student learner roles is an important step, so the student can benefit fully from the educational opportunity, while still providing appropriate service to both clients and agencies. Faculty liaisons can help ensure that everyone's needs are addressed and that opportunities to integrate classroom training with "real world" experiences are maximized. A fruitful social work practicum would be the final shaping of the student in becoming a professional social worker.

References

- American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (1990). Code of ethical principles for marriage and family therapists. Washington, DC.
- American Counseling Association (1995). American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Alexandria, VA
- Association for Specialists in Group Work (1990). Ethical guidelines for group counselors: ASGW 1989 Revision. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 15, 119-126.
- American Psychological Association (1992). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. *American Psychologist*, 46, 1597-1611.
- American School Counselor Association (1984). Ethical standards for school counselors. Alexandria, VA.
- Berkenmaier, J. & Berg-Weger, M. (2007). *The practicum companion for social work: Integrating class and field work*. 2nd Ed. Allyn & Bacon: MA.
- Engelbrecht, L. (2006). Cultural friendliness as a foundation for the support functions in the supervision of social work students in South Africa. *International Social Work*, 49(2), p. 256-266.
- Landers, S. (1993). Social workers combat on-the-job attacks. *NASW News*. February,3.
- Leslie, D. R. & Cassano, R. (2003). The working definition of social work practice: How does it work? *Research on Social Work Practice*, vol. 13, pp, 366-375.

National Association of Social Workers (1993). NASW code of ethics. Silver Spring, MD.

Pawar, M. Hanna, G. & Sheridan, R. (2004). International Social Work Practicum in India. *Australian Social Work*, 57(3).

Rai, G. S. (2004). International field work experience: A survey of US schools. *International Social Work*, 47(2), 213-226.

Zastrow, C. (1995). *The Practice of Social Work*. 5th Ed. Wadsworth Inc. Ca.

2

History of Social Work Practicum: Development of Field Education

**Patricia Lager, B. Hamann*

Introduction

Social work profession was not planned and thought out at the beginning. It emerged in response to human needs and suffering. In different parts of the world, lending a helping hand was instinctive. The development of social work was influenced by social, political and professional pressures. The economic changes, the wars and the rise of other helping professions have played a large part in the emergence of social work as a profession. It is essential for social work to be a profession so that clients can feel secure in the knowledge that they are given services by practitioners who abide by an ethical code of conduct. It would make the general public and other professions respect the profession of social work. This would ensure the recruitment of qualified social work personnel. A social worker finds the work personally satisfying, financially motivating and ensures a higher status along with other professions. When people could not cope up with their problems, when the suffering could not be

** Prof. Patricia Lager, FSU, USA & Dr. B. Hamann, USA*

alleviated by the social network or when there was no help forthcoming, there arose the response of various helping professions. They responded to physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and social needs. It was soon noticed that the intervention was more effective and efficient when the professionals had advanced knowledge and skills. As the knowledge base increased for the profession with increased theory, concept, and practice, the membership became more restrictive and exclusive. The professional boundary became more defined. Social work is devoted to the individual and the environment and therefore has both public and private models of professions. Social workers can work both in the public and private sectors. The history of social work led to changes in education of social workers and the practical training they underwent.

History of Social Work Practice in the US

Social work developed due to various events like wars, economic depression, political stand taken, and international conditions. The history of US is presented as a model to show the development of social work and practical training in the field in particular. Some of the earlier history is comparable to that of India. Indian social work has its beginnings in voluntary helping of the underprivileged. Whether it was the Hindus, Muslims or Christians, each religion held helping the poor and needy in high esteem. To be a good person it was necessary to help the needy. Many organizations have existed over years that helped the underprivileged. Establishing social work as a profession has not been easy. People in India generally believe that social work

is from the heart and should not be a paid work. It has not been easy for the profession to show the people the impact of change which is not dramatic as in the medical field.

Some of the important events that influenced the changes and development of social work into a profession are displayed below in Table (Morales and Sheaffor, 1995).

Table : Events in Social Welfare and Social Work History in the US

Aprox Date	Dev. of S. W. Practicum	U.S. History Event	Social Welfare Event	Social Work Event
Founding of US	Volunteer workers helped	Agricultural society	Orphan homes and first charitable societies, Poorhouses	
1800	Volunteer learned from predecessors	Child labour laws	Ma. General hospital. House of refuge for juveniles, NY	Dorothea Dix's crusade for mentally ill
1863	Paid workers trained with organizers	Civil war	MA. Board of Charities	Natnl. Conf. of Char. & Correction First paid s. wrkrs.
1877 1899	Students were trained in agency		Buffalo Charity Aid Society	Friendly visitors NY School of Philanthropy
1898	Students train in hospitals	Spanish-Amer. War	First juvenile court	Introduction of medical SW
1910	Social work students placed in psych. Hosp.	World War I	White House conference on children US Childrens' Bureau	Introduction of Psychiatric and School SW, Flexner Is SW a profession
1915	Practicum focus on the medical model of S.W.	Progressive era	NAACP National Urban League	Richmond – Social Diagnosis, Assn. of Trng. Schools for Profnl. SW

1920	Development of professional case work	Women's suffrage, Stock mkt. crash	County and state relief agencies Freudian influence Am. Pub. Welf. Assn.	Am. Assn. of SW Milford conf. Am. Assn. of Schools of SW
1930		The Great Depression F.D. R. Admin.	New Deal programs Federal Emergency Relief Act Civilian cons. corp.	
1935	Practicum in group work	Social Security Act		Am. Assn. of Group Workers
1941	Students get oriented to s.w. admn. and research	World War II	Natl. S. Welf. Assembly	Natl. Assn. of Sch. of S. Admn. Assn. for study of comm. Orgn. S. W. research grp.
1952	2-yr. grad. Prog for students	Korean war Brown vs. Bd. Of ed.	US Dept. of Health, Ed. And Welfare estbd.	Council of S. W. education (merger of AASW & NASSA)
1955	Emphasis on knowledge & case work	Kennedy admn.	US Civil Rights Act Juv. Delinquency Act	NASW (merger of Defn. of SW prac. Code of ethics)
1963	2-yr supervised experience & NASW membership for jobs	Kennedy assassin-ation Vietnam war	MR and Comm. Mental Hth. Facilities Act, Food Stamp Act, Civil Rights Act-1964	
1965	Increase in no. of BSW's in practicum	M. L. King assassin-ation	Equal opportunity Act, Medicare Act, Medicaid, Narcotic Addict Rehab. Act	Academy of Cert. SW, NASW recog. of BSWorker as professional
1970	BSW pract. is generalist focus			CSWE begins BSW Accred. process (generalist focus)
1972	Students get oriented to standards of S.W. practice	Watergate, Nixon resignation	Child Abuse, Prevention & Treatment Act	CSWE approves "adv. standing" for BSW graduates
1977		Carter admn.	Ed. of all handicap. Child. Act, Indian Child Welf. Act, Pvt.iz.tion of human services	NASW Conceptual Framework series
1980	Practicum Includes skills in pvt. practice	Reagan admn.	Social Security Block Act, AIDS epidemic, Tax Equity & Fiscal Resp. Act of 1982	Expansion of pvt. Pract., Expansion of doctoral SW (GADE)
1989		G.H.W. Bush admn.		Academy of Certified Baccalaureate SW
1993	Students learn to be accountable	Clinton admn.	Health care reform Welfare reform	SW licensure in all states

Volunteering and Social Work as an Occupation

It can be seen from the table above that social work practice began in a voluntary capacity, as a response

to human need. When family and mutual aid became inadequate, volunteers helped the poor and the infirm. At this time practicum for social workers was learning at the agency. There was no organized learning in schools. All the training was on the job and volunteers learned purely from practice and from the experience of their supervisors and predecessors. Social agencies sprang up in response to the need to relate warmly to people who asked for help.

It was soon realized that social workers needed to be paid and this made social work into an occupation. Wars, passing of laws, specific administrations that supported particular programs, welfare programs and events and movements have all contributed to the development of social work as a profession. The wars gave rise to many women leaders who took it upon themselves to procure federal aid for the cause they were working for. In the late nineteenth century, social research was conducted to find out causes of poverty and suggestions for alleviating it were given. The first theory of practice was introduced by Mary Richmond with her "Friendly visiting among the poor" (1899) and "Social Diagnosis" (1917).

The setting up of settlement houses also brought about a change of attitude in workers who respected the clients who came to learn skills for urban living. The early twentieth century brought about social workers who contributed to the development of children and other welfare programs. Case work in child welfare agencies and charity organizations was limited to a narrow base and economic focus. Medical social work in hospitals changed the sphere of casework and basis

of patients' problems. The social and psychological aspect of patients' illness was given importance by the medical social worker.

Social workers were working in other areas like mental health, correctional institutions, schools and labor industry. This paved the way for social work practicum in specialized areas. The National Conference on Charities brought together volunteer and professional staff of social agencies to exchange ideas about the social services, problems faced, and to study the practical work done. This shows that there was concern about the development of practical work and how it should be done. By 1914, social work was established as a distinct occupation, quite different from volunteers and other professions helping the most under-privileged in the society.

It was noticed that if, the theoretical knowledge, values and skills were channeled properly to the appropriate target group or individual, then, the outcome was more successful. As concepts and theories were developed and social work programs became more intense, the membership rules became more stringent and education more specific. This led to the profession becoming more exclusive.

Emergence of Social Work as a Profession in the US

These ideas of channeling social work into a profession reinforced the need for formal field training. To create professional field training the skills need to be better grounded in principles like a critically defensible knowledge base. Focused goals, techniques and field

training would help achieve such goals. Abraham Flexner (1915) laid out the following criteria based on which he absolutely stated that social work was not a profession:

- 1) Professions have a large individual responsibility.
- 2) Professions are mainly intellectual operations.
- 3) Professions draw their base from science and learning.
- 4) Professions work the base up to a practical and clear-cut end.
- 5) Professions possess an educationally communicable technique.
- 6) Professions generally organize themselves.
- 7) Professions become increasingly altruistic in motivation.

In 1921, Mary Richmond pointed out that social work needed a code of ethics to have a high social standing among professions. The National Conference on Social Welfare initiated the proposal to draft such a code, but it did not materialize at that time. In 1917, the National Social Workers' Exchange provided vocational counseling and placement and also worked towards defining and identifying professional standards.

The American Association of Social Workers tried to develop a unified professional association but at that time there were specialized groups trying to establish their own identity (1918, American Association of Hospital Social Workers, 1919, National Association

Visiting Teachers, 1926, American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers, 1936, American Association for the Study of Group Work, 1946, Association for the Study of Community Organization, 1949, Social Work Research Group). The struggle of these groups to thrust forward and maintain their identity shows the division of the wider profession of social work. There was an even greater need for a single unifying professional association.

Students were trained in hospitals, psychiatric settings and communities. Students were trained to work with individuals and groups. At the same time there was a struggle at the administrative level to instill a set of standards by which social worker would abide to protect the clients. The students were educated in specialized fields based on problem faced and the setting of the clients. This further moved the profession towards other disciplines instead of furthering the professional skill, values and knowledge base.

Up until 1919, social work training was based on agency training. Then the Association of Training Schools for Professional social Workers was set up (to establish standards in professional social work education) of members from agency and university affiliated schools. This was later converted to the American Association of Schools of Social Work which stipulated that only two year graduate programs would be recognized as professional social work education. At this time social work education programs were offered at agencies and at universities. These centers did not agree to the two-year stipulation and this brought about the creation of National Association of Schools of Social Administration

consisting of public universities that offered baccalaureate and one-year masters program. They did not feel the need for a two year program and emphasis on professional case work.

These two organizations merged into the Council of Social Work Education in 1952. This came in response to the Hollis-Taylor study of social work education that suggested a two-year graduate program as minimum requirement for a professional social worker. The knowledge and skills in social work practice was also given due attention at that time. Richmond compiled a variety of techniques for use by caseworkers in different settings in her book "Social Diagnosis". This developmental surge was stumped a bit, by the professions fascination with psychoanalytical approach and techniques. For a while there were no developments in the professional field of social work that developed methods other than casework.

The need to form a unified association was seen in the formation of the Temporary Inter-Association Council of Social Work Membership Organizations. This came into being in 1952 with the merger of the American Association of Social Workers and other specialized associations. The National Association of Social Workers was formed with the merger of specialist associations that strove hard to maintain their identities. The purposes of the NASW are:

- 1) To streamline the administration of social work services
- 2) To develop research in social work

- 3) To make positive changes in social work practice
- 4) To advance social work education
- 5) To improve social conditions
- 6) To orient the public to social work profession
- 7) To enhance the salaries and working conditions
- 8) To develop, promulgate and enforce the Code of Ethics
- 9) To certify the competence to social workers
- 10) To aid in the development of social work in other countries
- 11) To recruit to the profession

The Academy of Certified Social Workers required NASW membership and a two-year supervised experience. Many jobs required the membership in the Academy. The 1950's was a time of debating about the nature of social work and its future. Greenwood (1957) identified the attributes of a profession based on a relative approach. They included a systematic body of knowledge, professional authority, code of ethics and a professional culture. Based on these criteria he said that social work was indeed a profession.

A year later the NASW came up with the working definition of social work practice that clarified the professional boundaries. Gordon critiqued the definition which helped clarify the knowledge, values and practice methodology in the definition. The Code of Ethics was the standard set up to guide the practice of ethical professional social work in 1960. Social work

had become recognized as a profession and had a repertoire of its own jargon that made it exclusive. Graduate schools were university based or affiliated to the university and they could be accredited based on specific standards. All the changes in the profession and its growth do not really make the social worker deviate from keeping the client's needs first in the field. Providing service to the needy was still its main mission. Some states even started licensing social workers. However, a professional social worker needs to do more than follow the heart and "help". It is important for supervisors to keep up with the changes in the profession and orient students to tie history with current events in social work and notice how the events have shaped field work over time. Organizations that once worked for the profession are later found to be less useful and therefore can be consolidated into one unifying unit. The unification of all the associations to form one single body strengthened the resolve to create one unique profession. Professionals know that even though "helping" is the main focus of social work, the political aspects of social work profession influence the nature of practice itself.

In India, the specialist associations strive to maintain their identity (which weakens the professional identity). Psychiatric social workers for example tend to identify more with their inter disciplinary team members. The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences offers a two year post masters degree to psychiatric social workers (Master of Philosophy in PSW). This prestigious course was offered to only 12 students in the whole country after passing an entrance exam and interview. The curriculum aims at providing a pre-

doctoral training to the social worker. The training is intense and is geared more towards the field of Psychiatry (Neurology and Neurosurgery). Students spend most of their days in practicum doing intake interviews, making provisional diagnosis, prognosis and treatment regimen of patients. This may be due to administrative policy arising from need for more professionals for the large number of patients who come from all parts of India. Training does cover some social work intervention for individuals, families and groups. At the end of the two year program the student is proficient in Psychiatric disorders and even some neurological and neurosurgical terms. The social work research and core professional development is somewhat diluted. The weekly social work conferences and supervisory meetings offer potential for the future.

Elitist Model to the Present

At the end of the 1960's with the movements from the women's rights, civil rights, and welfare rights, there was a moving away from clinical social work and into social action and social welfare. Controversy was created by those upholding the clinical social work view to strengthen the profession and those who believed in social change. This was fueled by the Lyndon Johnson administration and the increased federal support. However, under the Reagan and Bush administration federal funding for welfare was cut short and social workers again turned towards the clinical aspect. Social work practice adopted a generalist approach.

NASW relaxed its membership rules, inviting more members to join. A baccalaureate graduate from a CSWE

accredited undergraduate program could become a member. The Academy of Certified Baccalaureate Social Workers in 1990 was set up focusing NASW on a multi-level social work. CSWE recognized many baccalaureate programs based on specific requirements. Many of these programs were situated in urban and rural areas. This enabled many aspiring social workers who could not have attended urban schools to take advantage of the schools in their area. Many students from disadvantaged and lower income areas were given an opportunity to complete the educational requirements without needing both levels of social work degrees. The graduates could also find jobs in smaller communities where urban graduates may have hesitated to take up jobs.

This shift also makes an impact on the type of field work offered to students. Students can be placed in small agencies in the rural areas. They did not have to do their practicum in urban settings. According to Gore (1988), problems faced by the social work profession arise from a discontinuity between rural and urban life. In India this is especially important because most of the population live in rural areas. The main lifestyle is agricultural. Students who want to become social workers cannot only train in urban settings and hope to work in rural areas. To bring about social change it is important to focus on the rural areas and train students in those settings. Most schools of social work are in urban centers. It may be difficult to set up universities in rural areas, but distance learning can open doors to many more students from rural areas. Satellite centers that help students with distance learning and offer a library would be useful. Gore (1988),

also suggests that social work education must find a viable link between professional function of social work and the development process.

Schools of social work in India have part of the practicum focusing on community organizing. Students do get to attend a few mahila mandal (womens' group) meetings, see the balwadi (pre-school for children – usually free and offered by the government in rural areas but can be private too in urban areas) functioning and may meet the head person or persons in the community. It is difficult for the student to see how social work intervention in the community actually works. Some schools sponsor free meal programs or skill based programs in the community. Students then see how this helps the community members. Some urban schools offer social research opportunities for students in the rural areas. Still other urban area schools work with the medical and psychiatric out patient clinics that offer free check up. Many times the students get to see how these programs work and may be help in setting up the clinic and hand out free material. The students do not really get to see any social work intervention at these clinics.

Inter-Disciplinary Practice and Education

Many service agencies that helped clients employed workers from different helping professions. Often the boundaries of the different helping professions were not distinct. There were areas where professionals overlapped their function. To avoid turf disputes and trouble and for the smooth rendering of service to clients, it was necessary for team work and inter-disciplinary cooperation. Students learn about

collaboration in theory and many times they do have an opportunity to put it into practice during practicum. Students learn that it is important to work within the protocol and limits set. At the same time it is beneficial to work with other professionals to ensure that the client gets the best service. Case managers are also in charge of individual cases and they see that the services are not duplicated and that the client gets all the required help. This collaboration of various related professions is also important so that each professional does not falsely believe that the other is taking care of the client and then let the client fall through the cracks. Good administration of the team approach sees that the interdisciplinary work is carried on smoothly. The field work supervisor (may be the case manager of the cases assigned to the student) helps the student with the cases and is responsible for the client getting the best help. The student in turn needs to make sure that the work done is reported in the case file and discussions are not missed with the field work supervisor. This would ensure that work is not duplicated or simply not done. When it is not possible to carry out a particular request or job, it is important for the student to discuss this with the supervisor who could delegate this to another social worker.

In India, the interdisciplinary approach is seen working best at a medical or psychiatric facility. A hospital has a team of professionals who go on rounds discussing the problems, treatment and prognosis of patients. The social worker's role is well defined, whether it is working with the patient's family, community resources, or patients' attitudes and feelings. The student at the practicum setting works with the team, under the

supervision of a field social worker. The social work student gets the feel of working with the team and collaborating in harmony for the welfare of the patient. This sort of team work can be experienced in different settings where social work is part of a team. In the industrial setting it may be working with the union or management for the workers' benefit. In the correctional setting it could mean working with the administration, legal system, and/or psychologist in helping the client. The school system has the school authorities, school psychologist, health professionals, special education experts with whom the social worker works to aid the students. In any case the student doing a practicum can get the benefit of learning how to work in a team. Skills of adjustment, contact, listening, and team work help in this process.

Practicum in India has many challenges. Working with diversity of language, religion, caste, culture and different socio-economic status is not easy. The student comes in with pre-existing beliefs and values. They may be in conflict with values of social work and the values prevalent in the society. A social worker from a middle class family (who gave hard work and education high priority) may find it hard to work with an upper class or upper caste youth who has paid an enormous amount of money in donation to get into a medical college. Showing respect for the client at the outset may not come easily for the student who feels anger with people who use money to get what they want regardless of merit.

A student from a high caste on the other hand may have similar feelings towards a client from the lowest

caste (harijan or sudra) because the client got into engineering because of government policy of reservation for the backward community. It is important that those feelings don't transfer to the practicum setting where the clients' current problem is the issue and not societal values or prejudices.

Low status of women, problems of girl children and attitudes of men towards women play a vital role in field work. It is difficult for a student who is aware that equal status should be given to both genders and see the submissiveness of girls and women when the male dominance is prevalent in the community. Students may feel angry at such injustice and may be provoked to a confrontation where the clients are unaware of the situation to be unjust or unacceptable. Even the women are ingrained in a society where such injustices are considered as part of religion (Muslim and Hindu) and a way of life. A female student may be prejudiced and take the side of the wife while doing marital therapy. A male student could be directive and not allow the right to individual self-determination to play a role because of the bias that the female client is not capable of making decisions. This right is not really seen at work for another reason. In India, the professional is given a higher status in the helping relationship and the client is submissive and expects to be directed towards the right path.

Working with poverty at close quarters and at a regular basis has been difficult for students even though they encounter it daily (Pawar, et. al., 2004). An urban student placed in a slum to conduct an educative group session would need to walk through narrow squalid

streets into small huts and shacks. The student could be overwhelmed with the dirt and squalor and fail to see anything positive. The student could very well transfer such feeling of disgust and make the client feel inadequate and inferior. Pawar, et al. (2004) talk about begging that irritates the students who are not used to it.

It is difficult for urban students to get used to public transport, infrastructure and different concept of time in rural areas (Pawar, et al., 2004). The public transport could be infrequent and very slow. Finding a particular address in an urban slum or a village is not easy. It could be frustrating at first but students should take the help of local people to direct them to the right place. The farmers go to work in the fields early in the morning and usually take some rest after lunch. Due to the seasonal nature of agriculture there may be times when they appear to be lazy and demanding of their wives. Students may not see them at all during peak planting and harvest time. It is important for students to attempt to meet clients when they can spare time and not intrude when they are very busy. Most people in the villages are very hospitable and welcoming. The social work student needs to be careful not to take advantage of their warmth.

There is a need for longer supervisory sessions and different set of communication skills (Pawar, et al., 2004) when problems arise. The supervisor needs to be sensitive to the students' capacities and weaknesses. Normally the supervisor may have a brief daily talk with the student about new and old cases. At the end of the week a time may be set to discuss progress or lack of it.

At the end of the whole placement there would be a long feedback session. However this may not be enough for all students. A student may require discussing the case in detail everyday. A written set of directions may be needed by the student to carry out the responsibilities.

Students placed in medical settings in India, tend to feel inferior to the other interdisciplinary professions. It is not uncommon for students to allow clients to call them doctors and even refer to themselves as doctors. Sometimes supervisors introduce the students to the clients as doctors. Supervisors are under the misconception that clients may not want their services if they are not doctors. This is not an ethical practice and should be avoided at all costs. Even if a few clients refuse to accept social work intervention there will be many more who will realize its benefits. This lowers the status of social work even more. Clients may falsely believe that doctors are helping in areas which is actually the boundary of social work.

Students placed in research practicum (in medical set ups) should maintain similar ethical standards. Clients should be made aware of the true nature of the research and allowed to leave anytime without negative impact on medical treatment which was their primary reason for being there. It is not unheard of for students to imply that the research is part of the medical treatment and that they would be directly benefiting from it. It is the supervisor's role to set this straight and direct the student towards maintaining proper standards of social work practice. If the supervisor does not do so, it is then the students' duty to uphold high ethical standards when working with clients.

Conclusion

Over the years social work has grown from voluntary helping to an occupation and a recognized profession. It is a multilevel profession with baccalaureate and masters level of education offered in colleges and universities. Social workers in agencies and private practice have the autonomy to help clients in need. In the U.S., NASW is the national organization for social workers which clarify the knowledge, skills and values, and sees that social workers function ethically and do not violate the standards set down to protect the clients. Its equivalent in India is the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI). The CSWE in the U.S. is the authority that is responsible for setting educational standards and assuring that colleges and universities adhere to common guidelines in developing and managing professional training. Some of the history of social work is comparable to that of the beginnings of social work in India. Social work in India had its beginnings in voluntary helping to the underprivileged. Even though most of the knowledge of social work in India is borrowed from the West, it is difficult to transplant the theory that is based on a different culture to India. India is now on the brink of major economic developments. The open market is doing well and the large middle class is thriving. The majority of the poor though, are facing deprivation and inequality. The government's priority is in industrialization, defense and growth of the market economy. "Will the cast offs be apportioned to the care of social worker whose intentions notwithstanding, can play only a limited role in alleviating human misery arising out of structural force?" (Kumar, 2002:80-90).

This may shape the history of social work profession in India and in turn make an impact on the education and practical training of students to help the underprivileged. On the other hand would it be easier for social workers to ignore the poor and turn to other problems, which the rich middle class would face with the rise in new income and change in lifestyle and value system. Would social work education turn towards training the rural students and train them to empower the poor or would the focus be on training urban students to deal with new problems of multinational companies dramatically increasing the middle class income and change in life style? Social work practicum would shift accordingly.

References

- Bruce, E. J. & Austin, M. J. (2000). Social work supervision: Assessing the past and mapping the future. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 19(2).
- Flexner, A. (1915). "Is Social Work a Profession?" National Conference on Charities and Correction.
- Gordon, W. E. (1962). Critique of the Working Definition. *Social Work*, 7, p. 3-13.
- Gordon, W. E. (1965). Knowledge and Values: Their Distinction and Relationship in Clarifying Social Work Practice. *Social Work*, 10. p. 32-39.
- Gore, M. S. (1988). Levels of Social Work Provisions in Relation to Needs in a Developing Society. *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, vol. 49 (1), p. 1-9.

Greenwood, E. (1957). Attributes of a Profession. *Social Work*, 2, p. 45-55.

Hollis, E. V. & Taylor, A. L. (1951). *Social Work Education in the United States*. New York: Comumbia University Press.

Ivry, J. & Lawrence, F. P. (2005). Fieldwork rotation: A model for educating social work students for geriatric social work practice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 41(3).

Kumar, 2002. Social Work in India: A "Bright" Future? *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, 63(1), p. 80-90.

Morales, A. T. & Sheaffor, B. W. (1995). *Social Work: A Profession of Many Faces*. 7th ed. MA: Allyn & Bacon.

(Pawar, M., Hanna, G. & Sheridan, R. (2004). International Social Work Practicum in India. *Australian Social Work*, 57 (3), p. 223-236.

Richmond, E. M. (1917). *Social Diagnosis*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

3

Social Work Practicum: Global and National Scenario

**Neil Abell, B. Bamann*

Introduction

Field education is widely considered to be among the most important components of training for professional social work. Its diverse functions include grounding the theories and methods established in the core, "classroom" curriculum in the "real world" experiences of persons providing and receiving social services. As such, careful construction of field learning opportunities for students is among the most challenging tasks faced by social work educators. Like their students, teachers are required to test what they have carefully constructed in the protected atmosphere of the university against the realities of practice environments and the providers and clients who work and seek services in them.

As we will see, careful attention has been paid to the foundations for field education. A major example of this is the extensive process undertaken by the IFSW and the IASSW to develop the field components of their

** Prof. Neil Abell, FSU, USA and Dr. B. Hamann, USA*

Global Standards document. To achieve these recommendations, the authors found it necessary to address standards first generated in the West (chiefly Europe and North America), and to critically assess their relevance across the diverse social and cultural settings encompassed by their organizations. The result was a set of guidelines covering curriculum, settings, supervision, and the responsibilities of all parties to the exchange. These guidelines were not viewed as rigid mandates, but as carefully considered recommendations to be adopted only after careful consideration of their usefulness in specific local contexts.

Ultimately, translating students' learning goals into concrete, specific learning objectives required a deepened understanding not only of the nature of social problems, but of the balance social workers collectively seek between providing remedies for people suffering from existing conditions and confronting the social circumstances, political, economic, and otherwise, that make such problems possible. The result has not always been comfortable, as field education pressed concerns with taking on the causes, and not just the symptoms, of social distress. Consequently, implications for social development are introduced below, with special consideration for the potential that field education can provide. We consider not only students' formal learning opportunities but also the meaningful dialogue and community development that can occur where field education takes place. Along the way, we address the selection of field settings and supervisors, relationships between academic institutions and local communities, and issues that help

or hinder development of successful social work field experiences.

Issues in field education in India illustrate this range of concerns, and set the stage for making the most of your own field experiences.

Global Standards for Field Education and Training

In 2004, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) published their *Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession* (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005). As part of this comprehensive and carefully crafted document, the authors developed a set of specific recommendations for field education. These included the recommendations that programmes should consistently aspire to achieve:

- Field education (that is) sufficient in duration and complexity of tasks and learning opportunities to ensure that students are prepared for professional practice.
- Planned coordination and links between the school and the agency/field placement setting.
- Provision of orientation for fieldwork supervisors or instructors.
- Appointment of field supervisors or instructors who are qualified and experienced, as determined by the development status of the social work profession in any given country, and provision of orientation for fieldwork supervisors or instructors.

- Provision for the inclusion and participation of field instructors in curriculum development
- A partnership between the educational institution and the agency (where applicable) and service users in decision-making regarding field education and the evaluation of student's fieldwork performance.
- Making available, to fieldwork instructors or supervisors, a field instruction manual that details its fieldwork standards, procedures, assessment standards/criteria and expectations.
- Ensuring that adequate and appropriate resources, to meet the needs of the fieldwork component of the programme, are made available (2005: 220).

The authors noted that, in some countries, the recommended links between schools and their agency/field placement settings take the form of independent student units established by schools in communities defined either by their locations, or by their specialized interests. These, too, could be acceptable field training sites. The larger goal with respect to international field education standards remains achieving a balance between universal recommendations to be adopted everywhere, and culturally relevant recommendations tailored to the customs and needs of specific sites.

Field Education in a Developing Country

Rambally (1999), writing on her field education experiences in the Eastern Caribbean, noted the differences between working in some developing

countries where a network of social work agencies and trained supervisors are in place, and in other developing countries where field settings were still being established. These circumstances, she wrote, suggested an intersection between field education and the promotion of organizational change and social development. Such development may occur in the forms of therapy, organizational change, community development, social education, and social action, and represent opportunities for social work field education to contribute to the social development of the settings where it takes place.

Defining Social Development

Social development is a broad concept, which must be approached with the utmost respect for the cultural values and social norms of the settings involved. Rambally noted that it included:

- “the integrated, balanced, and unified development of society and the capacity of the social system to generate broad and favorable changes in levels of living...
- planned social change and economic development to promote the well-being of all....and
- principles shared with social work, such as collaboration, cooperation, and social justice” (1999: 488).

Citing Falk, she observed that most social workers have difficulty making the connections between these broad concepts and their day-to-day work.

Establishing Field Sites and Opportunities

A “hands-on” approach is often required to establish field settings, including such tasks as building supportive relationships with key persons in the community, meeting with agency and community representatives to ensure their concerns and goals are being included, and obtaining approvals from decision makers and authorities to increase the potential for future success (Rambally, 1999). Clearly specifying the qualifications of potential supervisors required an understanding of agency bureaucracies, and skill in avoiding giving offense or settling for less skilled instructors simply because they had worked in their environments for a longer period of time. Respecting the extra effort expected once field supervisors assumed their new responsibilities was also an important way of minimizing future problems as agencies absorbed students into their midst.

In small communities with relatively limited field training opportunities, other concerns arise. Students, for instance, may come from the very same agencies offering field training. Great skill is required when educators negotiate new roles and responsibilities for the student and attempt to ensure that if he or she completes a field practicum in an agency where he or she is also employed, that educational goals are not compromised while juggling the student and employee roles. Further, when almost everyone in a service network knows (or knows of) each other, achieving unbiased, objective supervision may be difficult. Where possible, it seems best to avoid mixing student/employee roles, or establishing supervision with persons

who already have existing relationships. In some settings, the small number of qualified supervisors makes it necessary to establish joint, or group student supervision, with responsibilities shared by the School's Field Placement Coordinator, and the agency's field instructors.

Resolving some of the issues identified above can lead to social development in the host community. Working with agencies to lay the foundation for field supervision can raise awareness of the scope and helping role of social work. Upper level students may learn how to be assertive, to negotiate with authority figures, and to form clear, theoretically sound arguments backing up their needs and requests (Rambally, 1999). In addition, organizational boundaries in service delivery can begin to blur when field instructors meet for training seminars and deepen their collaborations and communication. Finally, supervisors and supervisees, guided by the formal educational objectives of a learning contract, may help to anchor aspects of agency practice in current theory and literature, and provide students with bases for becoming more assertive and assuming greater responsibility for their own learning.

These small changes can combine over time, creating a strategic position for field education, leading to clearer identification of social needs or problems in service delivery, and generating ideas for productive improvement. "Depending on the context, field education can become more than a medium for the integration of knowledge and values....and can act as a force for organizational change and a catalyst for social development" (1999: 494).

Problems in Conceptualizing Field Training

Even in the best of circumstances, achieving field education ideals remains challenging. In a study including respondents from 67 countries and all seven regions of the world as identified by IASSW (Africa, Asia, Australia/Oceania, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and North America) (Skolnik, Wayne, & Raskin, 1999), some common points of concern included:

- a shortage of qualified field instructors
- a shortage of appropriate field settings
- questions regarding the role of the field liason, and
- how to help students integrate field and practice.

In nearly two-thirds of the countries sampled, no outside standard-setting organization mandated guidelines for conducting field education. (Note that the IFSW/IASSW *Global Standards* may serve as guidelines internationally, but are not necessarily formally adopted and/or mandated in specific countries.) In 94% of the programs surveyed, agency employees, most often selected by the schools, serve as field supervisors. Respondents cited the lack of properly trained, highly qualified practicum instructors as the most critical problem in field education.

Worldwide, most field placements take place in medical hospitals, family service agencies, and psychiatric hospitals. To support this work, schools provide social work methods training in specializations including practice with individuals, families, and groups; community development; social planning and change;

administration/management, and research. Fields of practice included child welfare, gerontology, and mental health, with women's issues being least frequently taught. Only one-third of schools required that practicum assignments were linked specifically to methods taught in classrooms, and about half required assignments linked to their fields of practice. Consequently, establishing clear connections between students' classroom learning and field educations remains problematic worldwide.

Consistency of placements also varied widely, with students receiving their training in as few as one and as many as four different settings. Practicum requirements ranged from 200 hours to 1000 hours, with some consisting of rotating through a series of observational opportunities and others involving semester or year-long placements. As Skolnik, et al. (1999) observe, advantages of these options deserve consideration.

"While observational experiences and rapid rotations limit the opportunity to gain practice skills by 'doing', they do offer potential benefits. Rotations through a series of agencies can provide a breadth of experience to support a foundation curriculum which seeks to help students grasp the full range of social work practice and provide a context for understanding the transferability of professional skills" (1999: 479).

Challenges to a Social Development Approach

Finally, Skolnik, et al.'s (1999) survey highlighted the difficulties in addressing social development concerns, and associated these with the observation that less

widespread attention is given to macro-practice addressing the socio-political context of social problems. Many areas, they write, sanction social workers primarily "to help individuals adapt within society, rather than to change that society" (1999: 480). This issue was echoed by observations in South America where some schools attempted to teach an "integrated method", placing greater emphasis on changing social structures than on helping those who suffered in relation to them (Resnick, 1995). Schools teaching such approaches had serious problems finding agencies that could support related field training.

Ultimately, this led social work educators to realize that "no matter how important and interesting it had become, in most cases, it was too idealistic an approach to be applied to the real world and that they had to return to more conservative models"(1995: 78-79).

Illustrations and Applications in India

National Scenario

India is rich in diversity with regard to religion, language, lifestyle, geography, castes, class and culture. India is now on the brink of major economic developments. The open market is doing well and the large middle class is thriving. The majority of the poor though, are facing deprivation and inequality. The governments' priority is in industrialization, defense and growth of the market economy. "Will the cast offs be apportioned to the care of social workers whose intentions notwithstanding, can play only a limited role in alleviating human misery arising out of structural force?" (Kumar, 2002)

This question may well shape the history of social work profession in India and in turn make an impact on the education and practical training of students to help the underprivileged. On the other hand would it be easier for social workers to ignore the poor and turn to other problems, which the rich middle class would face with the rise in new income and change in lifestyle and value system?

Problems Faced by Student Social Workers in India

There is a serious lack of literature that is of Indian or foreign origin available to the students and professionals in India. Even though most of the knowledge of social work in India is borrowed from the West, it is difficult to directly apply the theory that is based on a different culture to India. Some of the history of social work is comparable to that of the beginnings of social work in India. Social work in India had its beginnings in voluntary helping to the underprivileged. There are major differences when one considers the family structure, religious beliefs, legal emphasis, status of women and prevailing value system. There is a dire need to develop indigenous social work literature.

Many social workers who are qualified are attracted to western universities and jobs in the west for many reasons. It is very difficult for social workers to be proud of their profession when it is generally believed that they probably ended up in social work profession because they could not get into engineering, medicine, law or business, (the professions that are held high in peoples' esteem). Social work as an occupation is looked down upon because helping another human being is considered as a voluntary act of human nature since

centuries. There is a constant need to justify social work to be an occupation and to prove that the reason for becoming a social worker was because one wanted to.

The low pay scale of social workers and lack of widespread public support of this occupation has led to 'brain drain' to the U.K., U.S.A. and Australia. Another reason social workers go abroad is for higher studies. Many get frustrated when they see that ethical standards that they read in theory are not really practiced. This is especially seen in social work research. The emphasis (by some professors) of students conducting research interviews, entering data and not actually getting experience in doing analysis and writing articles also frustrates social workers. Harassment of students by professors is another reason that makes students dejected and turns them to other countries or other fields.

In India, the specialist associations strive to maintain their identity (which weakens the professional identity). Psychiatric social workers for example tend to identify more with their team members from other disciplines. The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences offers a two year post masters degree to psychiatric social workers (Master of Philosophy in PSW). The curriculum aims at providing a pre-doctoral training to the social worker. The training is intense and is geared more towards the field of Psychiatry (Neurology and Neurosurgery). Students spend most of their days in practicum doing intake interviews, making provisional diagnosis, prognosis and treatment regimen of patients. Training does cover some social work intervention for individuals, families and groups.

At the end of the two year program the student is proficient in psychiatric disorders and even some neurological and neurosurgical terms. The social work research and core professional development is somewhat diluted. The weekly social work conferences and supervisory meetings offer potential for the future.

According to Gore (1988), problems faced by the social work profession arise from a discontinuity between rural and urban life. Most of the population lives in rural areas. The main lifestyle is agricultural. It may be difficult to set up universities in rural areas, but distance learning can open doors to many more students from rural areas. Satellite centers that help students with distance learning and offer a library would be useful. Gore also suggests that social work education must find a viable link between professional function of social work and the development process.

In India, the students are taught the generic course content in the first year of some of the masters programs on the basic premise that a social worker needs to be able to manage various types of situations, playing different roles and adopting appropriate methods. The second year would allow the students to choose their specialization area. Schools of social work in India partly focus on community organizing. Students attend a few mahila mandal (women's' group) meetings, see the balwadi (pre-school for children) functioning and may meet the head person or persons in the community. It is difficult for the student to see how social work intervention in the community actually works. Some urban schools offer social research opportunities for students in the rural areas.

Problems Faced by Social Workers

In India, the interdisciplinary approach is seen working best at a medical or psychiatric facility. The social worker's role is well defined, whether it is working with the patient's family, community resources, or patients' attitudes and feelings. The social worker gets the feel of working with the team and collaborating in harmony for the welfare of the patient. This sort of team work can be experienced in different settings where social work is part of a team. Skills of adjustment, contact, listening, and team work help in this process.

Low status of women, problems of girl children and attitudes of men towards women play vital roles. It is difficult for a social worker who is aware that equal status should be given to both genders and see the submissiveness of girls and women when the male dominance is prevalent in the community. When a young girl from the lower caste was raped in the rice fields by the landlord's son, the family blamed her. Families had to yield to the landlords' unjust wishes. The social worker worked with the individual girl's self esteem and emotional problems. The social worker helped the family deal with their helplessness to fight against the higher class victimization. The social worker could have educated families in the lower caste about their constitutional, social, and legal rights but it would be dangerous to work with the landlord or the media. In a just world, the social worker could help the client work with the local government (Panchayat Raj) and see that laws against rape are upheld and the perpetrators are punished.

Social workers feel angry at such injustice and may be provoked to a confrontation where the clients are unaware of the unjust situation. The right to individual self-determination is not really seen at work in India. Professionals are given a higher status in the helping relationship and the client is submissive and expects to be directed towards the right path.

In India, prevention is better than treatments because existing laws are not easy to enforce. The legal system in India works for those who have money. Many crimes are not reported because of the belief that the higher class can buy their innocence. The police have been known to falsify investigative reports. They have reported dowry deaths as accidents. Law enforcers are afraid to do their duty because of repercussions on their job (transfer, demotion or loss of jobs) when the perpetrator is rich and from the upper class.

Marital discords and conflicts cause stress in families. There are not as many divorces as there are separations because of abuse, neglect or disease and the father usually gets custody because of affluence or dominance in society. The wife may be sent home because she did not bring enough dowry (bride price), but her children would not be allowed to go with her (unless the husband or his family do not want the children). Social workers find such injustice difficult to work with. Working with diversity of language, religion, caste, culture and different socio-economic status is not easy. The social worker comes in with pre-existing beliefs and values. They may be in conflict with values of social work and the values prevalent in the society. A social worker from a middle class family (who gave hard work and

education high priority) may find it hard to work with an upper class or upper caste youth who has paid an enormous amount of money in donation to get into a medical college. Showing respect for the client at the outset may not come easily for the student who feels anger with people who use money to get what they want regardless of merit. A social worker from a high caste on the other hand may have similar feelings towards a client from the lowest caste (harijan or sudra) because the client got into engineering because of a government policy of reservation for the backward community. It is important that those feelings do not hinder the helping process.

The social worker would have to acknowledge personal prejudices while working in an urban slum. A hut dweller may have different priorities (from that of the social worker) and not care for his family. The social worker understands the client's right to determine his priorities and does not impose his/her own bias. The social worker may find it easier to work at the individual and family level. Working with the community (government, local leaders or upper class members) would be difficult.

Working with poverty at close quarters and at a regular basis has been difficult for students even though they encounter it daily (Pawar, Hanna, & Sheridan, 2004). An urban social worker placed in a slum to conduct an educative group session would need to walk through narrow squalid streets into small huts and shacks. The social worker could be overwhelmed with deplorable conditions and fail to see the positives. The social worker may show disgust and make the client feel inadequate

and inferior. It is difficult for urban social workers to get used to public transport, infrastructure and different concepts of time in rural areas (Pawar, et al., 2004). The public transport could be infrequent and slow. Finding a particular address in an urban slum or a village is not easy.

Social workers in medical settings in India tend to feel inferior to the other interdisciplinary professions. It is not uncommon for social workers to allow clients to call them doctors and even refer to themselves as doctors. Sometimes other professionals introduce the social workers to the clients as doctors. They are under the misconception that clients may not want their services if they are not doctors. This is not an ethical practice and should be avoided at all costs. Even if a few clients refuse to accept social work intervention there will be many more who will realize its benefits. This lowers the status of social work even more. Clients may falsely believe that doctors are helping in areas which are actually the domain of social work.

Social workers in research practica (in medical set ups) should maintain similar ethical standards. Clients should be made aware of the true nature of the research and allowed to leave anytime without negative impact on medical treatment which was their primary reason for being there. It is not unheard of for social workers to imply that the research is part of the medical treatment and that they would be directly benefiting from it.

It is important to have a basic generalist foundation and use specialized techniques where appropriate. A generalist social worker would be sensitive to different

cultures and be able to approach with varied skills. In families where the young girl child is given up to the temple in prostitution (devadasi system), a social worker would serve as a social activist in promoting the rights of the girl child at the macro level. The social worker would also have to work with the family with sensitivity to the cultural needs. A generalist social worker also works with the girl child at the individual level.

A social worker needs to have different skills to work with clients in urban areas and rural settings. A social worker from an urban setting would have to draw on a different repertoire of skills when working with clients in a village. The social worker may have to work through existing groups in the village (mahila mandal /women's' group and Balawadi/pre-school).

Conclusion

Global standards for social work field education have been developed as recommendations, rather than mandates, for conducting this critical component of professional training. Given its importance, field training requires extensive advance planning, thoughtful and sophisticated engagement with local communities, and careful recruitment of institutions and individuals with the right set of opportunities and skills. Faculty liaisons must have clear understandings of both the learning objectives established in the classroom, and the real world possibilities available in community settings. Respect for existing bureaucratic structures and cultural practices and values are critical to development of realistic field training opportunities.

Social development opportunities naturally arise when

the skills and talents essential for good field training converge. In such instances, opportunities to move beyond providing remedies and on to addressing root social, economic, and environmental causes sometimes emerge. When this is the case, all involved are encouraged to remember the values of social justice and human dignity, and to carefully consider when it is and is not useful to pursue larger rather than immediate goals. Skolnik, et al., citing Slocombe's experience in Australia, conclude that "field work still remains the single most important factor in the preparation of social workers, yet is the most vulnerable to mediocrity, lack of standardization, poor quality control, few resources, and the myriad of other frailties so prevalent in the welfare and educational climate today"(1999: 482).

Students are encouraged to approach these exciting opportunities with respect for the clients they will observe and serve, and for the agency administrators and supervisors who work hard, along with classroom instructors, to provide them with the best opportunities possible. The supervision process, whether in individual or group formats, provides opportunities for applying prior training on social work methods and specializations and for critically assessing one's strengths and weaknesses as a developing professional. When approached with reasonable confidence and a willingness to learn from both successes and mistakes, the outcomes for all concerned can be great.

References

- Gore, M. S. (1988). Levels of social work provisions in relation to needs in a developing society. *The Indian Journal of Social Work, 49*(1).
- Kumar, A. (2002). Social Work in India: A 'bright' future? *The Indian Journal of Social Work, 63*(1), 80-90.
- Pawar, M., Hanna, G., & Sheridan, R. (2004). International social work practicum in India. *Australian Social Work, 57*(3), 223-236.
- Rambally, R. E. T. (1999). Field Education in a Developing Country: Promoting Organizational Change and Social Development. *International Social Work, 42*(4), 485-496.
- Resnick, R. P. (1995). South America. In T. D. E. Watts, Doreen; Mayadas, Nazneen S. (Ed.), *International Handbook on Social Work Education* (pp. 65-86). London: Greenwood Press.
- Sewpaul, V., & Jones, D. (2005). Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 14*, 218-230.
- Skolnik, L., Wayne, J., & Raskin, M. S. (1999). A Worldwide View of Field Education Structures and Curricula. *International Social Work, 42*(4), 471-483.

4

Social Work Practicum in Open and Distance Learning

**Manju Kumar*

Introduction

The main purpose of social work education is to prepare competent and effective professionals who can meet complex client needs within diverse public and private human service settings. Social Work Education combines scientific enquiry with the teaching of professional skills and values. The training in social work enables the practitioners to perform a variety of roles using multiple social work practice methodologies.

It is crucial that the education and preparation of budding professionals is provided at levels that are suited to their heavy responsibilities and demands of the field. The increasing complexities of life require the practitioner to intervene in a number of human systems and at different levels.

You may recall that major changes have been witnessed (relatively) recently in Social Work Education System. Two main reasons have lead to these changes.

**Manju Kumar, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar College, Delhi University, Delhi.*

First, there has been an acknowledgement of the need of larger number of trained professionals to operate social care and social developmental programmes at different levels of intervention. This means that social work educational system has to equip professionals not only for senior and supervisory level jobs, but also to produce professionals who could operate, with sensitivity and empathy, at grass root levels in wider geographical areas.

Second, there has been a growing criticism of the elitist and urban slant in social work education. Practitioners in the field (especially in India) claim that the aspirations of students with master's degree do not match the realities of social work practice at the grass root levels where they are needed the most. Also, postgraduate qualified professionals find it hard to bridge the socio-cultural gap between themselves and the people in rural / tribal / remote areas.

Besides, the existing systems of higher education have not been very accessible to persons in disadvantaged positions whether socially, geographically or economically.

A number of initiatives have been adopted in the last few decades to respond to the above-mentioned developments. Most educational programmes abroad now offer degrees at undergraduate and / or postgraduate levels. Undergraduate degree is generally perceived to equip entry-level professionals for direct generalist practice, leaving those with postgraduate qualifications for supervisory and macro level interventions.

Explosion in information technology has opened diverse

avenues for reaching out to potential students so far excluded from the higher education network. Like many other professional education systems, Social Work educators have experimented with online / web-based learning, multimedia initiatives, interactive TV and so on. Most of these technologies have helped in enriching students' learning of the theory and information contents in Social Work Courses.

In India, The Second Review Committee on Social Work Education (UGC, 1975) emphasized the need to provide a holistic framework for the development of a ladder programme of education where there were several termination points related to job functions in the country.

The UGC Committee recorded in its findings that Social Work Educational Programme in the country tended to be 'elitist'. Two of the conditions, which supported this observation, were that most of the educational institutions were located in cities and the students hailed largely from the urban middle class. The committee felt that there was a need for a systematic geographical distribution of social work education.

The conventional system of social work education has not proved to be responsive to social development concerns of contemporary society and to the need for trained professionals to manage social development programmes. There is also a demonstrable need for social workers in areas, which lack educational opportunities and resources. Inadequate number of formally trained social work professional's forces local organizations to employ paraprofessional and non-social work personnel.

The alternate educational strategy in the form of Distance Learning Mode extended to social work education has been one of the most significant developments in the field of Social Education System. A large number of educational institutions in countries like UK, USA, Canada and Australia offer BSW and /or MSW degrees through distance learning.

After an extensive analysis of the published literature authors of a review concluded that "course and program outcomes achieved in social work distance education courses and programs are comparable to those achieved in traditional face-to-face programs". (Macy, et. al, 2001, p.72)

Provision of Field – based learning has been one of the most important concerns, however, that delayed considerably the acceptance of Distance Learning Mode for social work education, particularly in India.

The School of Social Work (SOSW) at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) recognized the need to initiate an alternate educational programme to address the training needs of large number of untrained staff already employed in the social welfare sector. SOSW believed that Distance Education programme could help a large number of those persons who are unable to avail the benefits of the conventional, expensive and full time education system. Supported by a need assessment survey, the School pioneered the design of a first Three-Year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) course programme grounded in the Distance Learning methodology.

Introduction of BSW course aims to meet the need for

a broader based trained social care / development workforce. The students enrolled from across the country will be equipped to address the social service needs of the underserved indigenous populations. It is also vital that the profession reflects the wider composition of the communities it serves. For those who are already employed in the social care sector, the course offers an opportunity for upward mobility, economically, socially and professionally by pursuing part-time educational programme.

Extensive use of multimedia- teleconferencing, videoconferencing, and video lectures added to study materials and face-to-face interactions with the tutors at the study centres provide effective support to the students' learning of theory component of the BSW Course.

Field Practicum in Conventional and Distance Education Systems

Even at the risk of repetition, I will reiterate that you can 'learn social work only by doing'. It is widely acknowledged among Social Work educators that Field Work is an integral and necessary component of Social Work Education.

This component of "learning by doing" in social work education is variously designated as Field Work, Field-Based Learning, Field Instruction or Field Practicum. The uniform content in all of these is a field – based placement of students, planned assignments to be undertaken by them at these placements, recording of the work done, reflection and evaluation of experiences in the field; and utilizing supervisory guidance to

achieve specified sequential learning. To make it a 'professional learning', this practical work is grounded in classroom course content (theory) and is done within an ambit of overarching ethical code.

Achieving minimum standards of performance in Field Work is essential for successful completion of the course in Social Work. In the available literature on social work education in India and abroad, 'Practicum' have been used to describe the content that educational institutions organize for students' practical experience in the fields of social work practice.

In pursuit of Social Work degrees, students are required to undertake varied and challenging practice placements. In these placements, the students are required to draw on theoretical knowledge from their formal courses in order to place their field experiences in a broad context and to develop practical skills.

"Learning by doing" has been the hallmark of social work education and the thrust of a social work practicum is to learn how to apply theoretical social work material to a hands-on situation; how to cope with the practical limitations of a real-life environment and how to be useful to 'real' people with 'real' problems in a real setting that is less than ideal.

Conventionally, bulk of learning through Field Work Placements occurs concurrently with classroom teaching. Students are placed in one / two settings during each year of the total course period. Each student is assigned to a qualified and social work trained Field Work supervisor who guides his / her supervisee throughout a specific placement. Besides, ideally an

experienced social work trained professional employed at the placement agency works out assignments for the student and provides on-the-spot guidance.

Field Work programme requires students to fulfill certain mandatory conditions like, attending specified number of field work days and number of hours at the social agency where the student has been placed for field practicum, and regular submission of records of experiences at the placement to the Field Work supervisor. Successful completion of field instruction is essential for obtaining social work degree. The evaluation process (often in formal or informal consultation with agency supervisor) is based on parameters drawn from objectives and learning outcomes stated in the Field Work Programme.

The potential student entering the 'conventional' system of social work education is one who has been pursuing his/her educational career continuously without major breaks i.e. those joining bachelor's course after senior secondary certificate or its equivalent; and those seeking admission to master's course after graduation. Very few of those who are already working in the social work fields manage to enter the portals of social work education institutions except when a particular institution accepts candidates sponsored by their employers. This trend is gradually disappearing with almost all of the students being inexperienced and raw.

Historically, social work education in India followed the western model and depended almost entirely on western literature. The language, culture and socio-economic status of the students and the people they

were expected to serve became increasingly divergent. Further, as the educational institutions have been located chiefly in urban areas, students in remote areas are not able to access facilities of higher education.

One of the main differences between a distance education student and a campus student is that many distance education students are part-time students, and thus tend to take their courses over a greater number of years than students in full time conventional system. Secondly, the potential students availing of the Distance Learning System present a mixed lot. The students enrolled for Social Work Courses under the Distance Learning (DL) System present, understandably, a wide variety of levels of education and / or work experience. They belong to different regions, speak different languages and come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.

Designing a Field Practicum Programme in Social Work within the *Distance Learning Mode* is indeed a challenging task. Drawing a rough parallel with the conventional system, Social Work Educational Institutions incorporate all significant components of field-based learning in the structure of Field Work Programmes within the distance learning mode as well.

Field Practicum in Social Work Education in the Distance Mode – Overseas

In almost all the countries, the Schools of Social Work offering BSW / MSW courses through Distance Learning have developed Field Work Manuals and guides giving detailed guidelines for students and supervisors respectively. While all the components of field practicum

as extant in the conventional system are there, the actual patterns of field practicum differ chiefly as to (i) the number of placements in each year, (ii) types of social agencies specified for each successive year of the course, (iii) focus of the learning outcomes expected to be successfully achieved, (iv) number of hours / days to be spent by the students at their placements; and (v) supervision to be provided by the faculty of the School or the Trained Agency Staff member or jointly by both.

The students are permitted to carry on their field practicum in their own communities and, in some cases, in the agencies where they are currently employed. Specific guidelines have been provided to work out their assignments in field practicum. Field Work Manuals provide parameters for selection of placements as also the responsibilities of the agencies for sharing in the educational enterprise. Roles of the field work guides and code of conduct for students being placed for field learning are clearly delineated. Some of these Manuals have been listed at the end for your reference.

A serious and concerted effort is made to give due importance to field practicum so as not to dilute this vital component of social work education. A large number of Courses offered through distance education in the USA have been accredited by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE).

Field Practicum in Social Work Education in the Distance Mode – IGNOU Model

As said earlier, designing a Field Practicum Programme in Social Work within the *Distance Learning Mode* was

a challenging task, particularly taking into account the reservations of a number of social work educators about offering social work course through distance learning medium in India.

The School of Social Work (SOSW) at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) initiated BSW Course for a wide variety of student population. As true to distance learning mode, use of self- instructional study materials is supplemented by use of audio-visual media and face-to-face interaction with tutors in the study centres.

Field Work Program is designed to provide students with a wide range of social work learning opportunities. The BSW students enter the course with different levels of experience and learning. The field experience is expected to build on what the individual student already knows. The Field Practicum has to cater to the training needs of a young raw student, coming right after completing senior secondary school as also of a much more mature student who may have been working in an agency similar to the ones selected for Field Placements.

With the offer of MSW, PG Diploma in Social Work, M.Phil courses on the anvil, designing of relevant field based learning has assumed much higher significance.

Keeping in view the significance of field-based learning, satisfactory completion of field work is mandatory to secure the award of social work degree. Achieving minimum standards of performance in Field Work is essential for successful completion of the course in Social Work.

While students are required to put in 25 field work days during BSW course, they will put in 45 to 60 full field work days during MSW. During PGDSW (MSW I Year), students will be expected to complete a small research study beside the field placement work. Evaluation of BSW students, done both by internal and external examiners, has equal weightage. This is expected to maintain objectivity in evaluation of students' work.

Recognizing the importance of personalized supervision and guidance in field practicum, each student is assigned to a Field Work Supervisor (FWS). Supervisors are required to be trained social workers with MSW qualification. Supervisors are given an orientation to their role and function at the beginning of each year through teleconferencing, radio and face-to-face contact.

Profile of Students

The students of BSW course of IGNOU present, understandably, a wide variety of levels of education and / or work experience. They belong to different regions, speak different languages and come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. They belong to different age-groups bringing, therefore, varying levels of maturity. They could be married, with children. They may be returning to academics after an interval of some time; they may have come without any prior exposure to the field situations; or they may belong to the marginalized social groups which are in need of professional interventions. A significant number of students are females, requiring special care in arranging field-based learning in rural / remote areas.

The students in post graduate programmes may be drawn from among BSWs or graduates from allied disciplines. The field experience has, therefore, to fulfill different set of learning objectives. More opportunities for critical thinking, reflection and analyses of micro-macro linkages need to be planned.

Strategies of Field Instruction

The training in social work enables the practitioners to perform a variety of roles using multiple social work practice methodologies. "Within a dynamic interactional process of expectations and outcomes" (Brij Mohan, 2002) students acquire:

- a) A repertoire of knowledge and skills in analysis and assessment;
- b) A confidence to apply knowledge to practice;
- c) The ability to create opportunities for growth of those in need of help and;
- d) Work collaboratively with other professions.

To facilitate this learning for the widely divergent potential student population, a number of strategies have been adopted.

- i) *Specific learning objectives and targets for achievement* have been delineated. B S W perceived both as a terminal point for entry-level professionals as well as a step to post graduate course specifies certain educational objectives which need to be achieved by each student by the end of the Course.

Appropriate learning objectives have been clearly specified for students working towards post graduate degree.

ii) *Field learning is planned sequentially* for each successive year of the Course.

- Completion of First year of MSW leads to the award of Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work. As such field training during the first year equips professionals for generalist practice in a wide variety of fields including social and corporate sectors, civic administrative and financial institutions and the media centres.
- The final year of MSW, leading to degree of MSW focuses on training in primary methods of social work like case work, group work and community organization etc.
- All the three years of BSW cover different dimensions of professional training and socialization. A different set of objectives have been worked out for Field Work for each of the three years. These objectives associated with learning outcomes for each year reflect the sequential nature of field-based training.

During the first year, students develop an awareness of roles and functions of professional workers and acquire basic skills of teamwork, observation and communication skills and learn to deal with simple problems of individuals and families. Also, they are exposed to institutions carrying out development work in the community and learn how to use supervision.

During the second year, they get opportunities for practicing case work and group work methods and get exposed to the agencies carrying out welfare functions.

Third year exposes students to agencies addressing special problems, social or individual. They are expected to perform professional roles, work within social work ethics and begin to think critically on the problems requiring professional interventions.

- iii) *Components of field practicum are clearly specified.*
- iv) Students of each year receive their *Field Work Journal*, which acquaints them with the expectations and gives guidelines for working in the Field. The journal states clearly the do's and don'ts in field work, i.e., a code of conduct; the learning outcomes expected to be achieved; the structure of field work; and the inputs of supervisor they can avail of. The Journal also provides space for recording their field experiences and reflections along with comments of the Supervisor. Field Work supervisors are provided with *Field Work Guides* that include, beside the above information, guidelines for supervising and evaluating students.
- v) *Learning is provided to the students at their 'doorsteps'*. The field practicum – whether placements or supervision – takes place in their own communities. This is in tune with the philosophy underpinning the distance learning mode as an alternate educational system to reach out to the so far inaccessible population.

- vi) *Field Practicum is a mandatory component in M. Phil course as well.* This is an innovation in social work education system, at least in India.

Structure of Field Practicum in BSW Courses

Field Practicum in BSW course consists of Nine Components. Enumeration of Components of Field Work Programme is not intended to indicate that they are independent entities. They are rather parts of a composite whole—the total learning experience in the field.

- 1) Orientation Visits
- 2) Field Placement
- 3) Agency Client Relationship
- 4) Assignment of Tasks
- 5) Nature of Social Work Process
- 6) Teamwork
- 7) Administrative assignments
- 8) Recording
- 9) Field Instruction

- 1) **Orientation Visits:** These observational visits expose the students to a wide range of social work practice and help them find a context for understanding the transferability of professional skills. They are helped to identify different concerns that the organizations are focusing on and their responses to the same. Helped by the Supervisor, the students use the guidelines provided in the Field Work Journal for recording their observations, analyze the same and reflect on their experiences

in respective agencies. These visits, thus, enable them to develop observational skills, a spirit of enquiry, and appreciation of social work interventions. These visits further prepare them for their Placements.

- 2) **Field Placement:** The aim of Field Placement is to enable the students to respond to real life situations, adjust to people from different backgrounds; and to gain experience in reconciling different approaches towards the same problem. Agencies are the settings where students acquire essential skills, tackle ethical dilemmas, test professional values and learn to apply knowledge gathered through academic course work.

Some of the factors influencing the placement decisions include existing experience or orientation of the students; distance to be commuted by the students; interest and preferences of the students; and needs, expectations and limits of the agencies. Groups of three to six students are placed in each agency. The purpose of placing students in groups is to help them learn how to adjust with each other and to acquire teamwork skills.

Another important factor influencing the selection of the placement agency is to ensure a 'fit' in the mission, aims and service delivery system of the agency and the learning objectives of the field practicum. At the beginning of the fieldwork session the supervisor along with the student makes a learning plan based on fieldwork situation and the fieldwork objectives of the particular year.

In case a student is already working in social sector and the work place is selected for field work, the Fieldwork Supervisor will help the student to get maximum exposure in practicing those skills, which cannot be practiced in the employing agency.

- 3) **Agency-Client Relationship:** The client is the center of the whole social work process and therefore the client-social worker-agency system is to be understood properly. The students learn to appreciate the significance of establishing positive relationship with the clients who seek help at the concerned agency. Students try applying the principles of relationship while assisting in the helping process of the agency. It is by establishing a relationship with the client that the social worker achieves the aim of improving the client's social function.

They learn to appreciate the value of sensitive, humane and empowering approaches to interventional strategies – whether in direct interaction with the clients or in referral services.

- 4) **Assignment of Tasks:** Breaking down of the field work objectives into tasks and relating these to the expected learning outcomes is quite a challenging exercise. The aim of doing specific tasks is to expose students to situations where the social work methods are used in rudimentary form. The task may or may not directly be perceived as social work input, but the process of its planning and execution is likely to involve interaction with individuals, groups and other agencies. The tasks can be chosen

depending on the need of the target population and the resources available. Working out of assignments also requires keeping in view the differential in the experience and capabilities of the students.

Planning of tasks is vital to the students' learning as it is through the doing of these tasks that students acquire social work skills, identify their strengths and areas for improvement, gain knowledge of the needs and problems of client groups and critically review the services and service delivery systems meant for the people in need of professional intervention. More than the actual task, it is the total experience that provides necessary learning environment.

- 5) **Nature of Social Work Process:** Field Practicum enables the students to analyze processes involved in the application of different social work methods in the field. Working on field-based assignments, students get familiarized with different tools for assessing needs and problems of the client groups, planning and implementing interventions, for example interviewing; home visits; recording; positive worker- client relationship and networking; and evaluating the results of the interventions. They learn to recognize different steps involved in systematically planning and organizing various activities. Identifying social work processes was all the more important for those already working in social work agencies so that they and their employers could appreciate the value of professional training.

While in the first year, students identify processes of need assessment, planning, execution and evaluation of different tasks, during 2nd and 3rd years, students learn the processes involved in application of case work and group work; problem-solving at different levels of intervention; processes in performing different social work roles; and micro-macro linkages.

- 6) **Teamwork:** Social workers have to work in teams and the team members may be other professionals like lawyers, doctors, nurses or volunteers. The approach of other professionals will be very different from social workers. The social work in such cases has to not only take care of the psychological and social needs of the individual/s, but also has to humanize and integrate the various approaches.

Students learn to work as members of the team of their co-workers. They also observe about staff of the agency working as team members.

- 7) **Administrative Assignments:** To be able to work as efficient professionals in the social agencies students are expected to take up administrative tasks like maintaining simple service statistics of the agency; participating in the planning of basic programmes; assisting in tasks like maintaining correspondence, documentation and report writing, project proposal formulation, conducting need assessment surveys; learning to keep simple accounts and budgeting; attending decision-making meetings etc.
- 8) **Recording:** Recording is one of the important tools

of social work practice. Social work records serve to review, check and monitor the progress of the case; to facilitate consultation; and to form the basis of referral. The records provide significant data for administrative decisions regarding clients and services; and for purposes of research, education and advocacy.

Students learn to differentiate between professional records and literary or creative writing. Starting to write verbatim descriptive records with some analytical inputs in first year, they learn to write increasingly more professional records of their field experiences. They learn to write case studies of individual clients, reports of home visits, group process records and to develop community profiles. They learn the application of processes of selection, analysis and reflection in recording. They learn to write process records of case work interviews and group sessions, analyze and evaluate the sessions and prepare future plans based on the same.

The students are encouraged to write in vernacular so that they have comfort level in communicating their field experiences and learning from the same.

- 9) **Field Instruction:** This is a very crucial component of the Practicum. The Field Practicum design provides for at least five individual and five group conferences to be conducted at the Study Centre.

Individual Conferences enable students to process their experiences in the agency placements – linking knowledge, skills and values acquired in academic course work to experiences and activities

in the field. They are encouraged to discuss workplace issues such as self-care, stress in the helping process and concerns about service delivery system at the agency. Sometimes, students may share their personal problems which are impinging on their performance in the placement.

Group Conferences: Group sessions have proved to be very important medium for students getting peer support. It has been found that common areas of teaching like induction, skills of recording, presentation skills, and discussion of common problems in working with clients could be dealt more effectively and economically in the group conferences. Students learn to present their view points logically and convincingly, field questions and receive feedback. In these group sessions an increased variety of learning experiences become available. Group conferences help students to appreciate effectiveness of alternative solutions to similar situations as they are exposed to a range of opinions and viewpoints.

However, the Supervisors have to be cautious about potential rivalry, which may inhibit learning. Negative feedback from peers could expose individuals to ridicule. The Supervisors help students to be supportive rather than overly critical of each other.

Guided Field Learning a Component of Field Practicum

Field Work Supervisor is the hub of all field work learning and professional socialization of social work

students. His role has been envisaged as a crucial link between the students and the field-based learning. It is the Field Work Supervisor who is responsible to achieve a degree of 'fit' between the field work programme's objectives and expectations and the bureaucratic arrangements of the agencies. Supervisor's liaison with the Agencies is an important form of educational support for the Practicum. Administrative, teaching and helping – the three basic inputs by the supervisor – are put to a tougher test here than in the conventional system. The students' profile, the self-study mode of the course and the goal of developing competent, sensitive and committed professionals require the Supervisor to be creative, innovative, dynamic and perceptive.

Field Practicum for BSW I Year: An Illustration

To illustrate some of the components of the Field Practicum design here is a brief description of Field Practicum as organized for students of BSW I year (IGNOU) at a Study Center in Delhi (Kumar & Thakur, 2005)

Students' Profile: of 17 students enrolled in the BSW Course, more than half were females. Barring two, all the students (15) were working. Most of those employed were engaged in social care and community work. This conforms to the students' profile anticipated in the designing of the course. The students demonstrated high degree of motivation and commitment to their own learning. Those employed perceived the course as an opportunity for enhancing their professional skills and for improving their job profiles. The students employed

in non-social work jobs had wished to join this field because it offered them both a career and a sense of worth. Their career plans were well crystallized and this resulted in their positive response to all supervisory inputs.

Orientation Visits: Students visited five social service agencies such as AVARD, Project Concern International, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Promotion of Employment for Disabled People and Prayas Observation Home for Boys. These observational visits provided the students a wide range of social work practice and helped them find a context for understanding the transferability of professional skills. They identified different concerns that the organizations were focusing on. The students were helped by the Supervisor to use the guidelines provided in the Field Work Journal for recording their observations, analysis of the same and reflection on their experiences in respective agencies.

Placements: Students put in at least 25 full working days at the agency selected for placement. Some of the factors influencing the placement decisions included existing experience or orientation of the students; distance to be commuted by the students; interest and preferences of the students; and needs, expectations and limits of the agencies. The Supervisor arranged field placements, as far as possible, close to where students lived or worked. Groups of three to six students were placed in each agency. The purpose of placing students in groups was to help them learn how to adjust with each other and to acquire teamwork skills.

The aim of Field Placement was to enable the students to respond to real life situations, adjust to people from different backgrounds; and to gain experience in reconciling different approaches towards the same problem.

Agency-Client Relationship: The students learnt to appreciate the significance of establishing a positive relationship with the clients who sought help at the concerned agency. Students tried applying the principles of relationship while assisting in the helping process of the agency. They realized the value of sensitive, humane and empowering approaches to interventional strategies – whether in direct interaction with the clients or in referral services.

Assignment of Tasks: As it was the first year of the Course and the students' group was a mixed one the supervisor actively engaged the Agency Supervisor (a trained social worker responsible for guiding students in the agency) in interpreting the goals and identifying relative complexity of tasks. This helped in matching capabilities of students, particularly those fresh from school or working in non social work jobs, with competence required in different activities. Students engaged in individualized problem-solving process, and assisted the agency staff in planning and organizing of sports events, cultural programmes, health and awareness camps. They conducted educational and recreational activities in groups to learn to observe processes of interaction and programme planning.

It became necessary to plan assignments for those already working in social sector in such a way that they

learnt to appreciate the difference in the approach of a trained social worker. An effort was made to diversify their assignments so that they did not repeat the kind of tasks their existing jobs entailed.

Nature of Social Work Process: Working on field-based assignments, students got familiarized with different tools for assessing needs and problems of the client groups, planning and implementing interventions, and evaluating the results of the interventions, for example interviewing; home visits; recording; positive worker-client relationship and networking. They recognized different steps involved in systematically planning and organizing various activities. Identifying social work processes was all the more important for those already working in social work agencies so that they and their employers could appreciate the value of professional training.

Teamwork: Students learnt to work as members of the team of their co-workers. They also recorded their observations about staff of the agency working as team members.

Administrative Assignments: The students being in first year received limited exposure to administrative tasks. One of the students was able to analyse data gathered in a research enquiry and prepare a report for the same. Some others were engaged in documentation, and correspondence.

Recording: Students were helped to comprehend the difference in literary or creative writing and professional records. They were encouraged to write accurately in simple but clear language. They wrote in Hindi or

English, depending on their comfort level. They learnt to write case study of individual clients, reports of home visits, group process records and to develop community profiles.

Field Instruction: As per the programme design, five to six individual were conducted at the Study Centre. Besides, the students frequently contacted the Supervisor through telephone and e-mails.

Group conferences were not conducted due to constraints of resources but out of a conscious choice. The knowledge that students' problems in the field were common to their co-workers kept their morale and motivation high and helped develop professional identity.

Overview: The students demonstrated a very high degree of commitment to field learning. They completed the stipulated field work days within the year. The feedback from the agency supervisors was very encouraging. This was particularly gratifying as most of the field placements selected also received student - trainees from social work institutions following the conventional system.

Field Practicum in Distance Learning Mode – Evaluatory Comments

There is much controversy over the delivery of social work education via distance education. People will question, how can you learn to relate to people and help them if you are not interacting with them face-to-face? "This question fails to understand that while some content is delivered in a DE format, the application of

the acquired knowledge is usually practiced face-to-face, and always under the supervision of an approved social worker who serves as your supervisor and mentor. Sometimes, this mentoring/supervision may take place over teleconferencing or interactive TV, but it usually involves being assigned to a social service agency where you will perform your work face-to-face and receive supervision in the same manner". (Marshall L. Smith, 2007)

Brief description of the Field Work Programme under the BSW and MSW Courses of IGNOU brings out the fact that it is the design of Social Work Field Practicum that brings the Courses very close to the conventional system of social work education. Distance Education technologies have come to stay. There are those groups of potential students for who distance education is the only viable alternative. In these cases, "distance education technologies become a mechanism for delivering resources – courses and programs – into remote service delivery areas.....There are fewer alternative routes to raising the level of professional social work practice" (Mcfall & Freddolino, 2000). Successful implementation of an elaborately designed Field Work Programme as part of BSW Course launched by IGNOU has demonstrated that Social Work Education through the distance mode is here to stay.

Conclusion

Field Education is a central component of social work education. It is the **only course which is completed** primarily within a workplace setting, whether in direct practice, policy analysis, research and/or community

development, and as such it offers key opportunities for the synthesis of theory and practice. Field Practicum in DL mode as in the conventional system ensures that students are placed in a range of social work settings according to their learning needs and goals.

You have acquired knowledge about the strategies adopted by Social Work Educators following the DL Mode in India and abroad. Outlining the Design of Field Practicum within the IGNOU Model, the only initiative in India, we have covered the different components of this design in detail. The case study of Field Learning of one of the groups of students enrolled in BSW Course I Year illustrates these components in actual practice. Although no scientifically designed comparative study of field – based learning through conventional and DL Mode has so far been undertaken, it is widely acknowledged among social work educators the world over that social work education through the DL mode has come to stay. It is largely on account of elaborate design of field practicum that social work courses in the distance learning mode have received due recognition in the Field.

References

- Brij Mohan :The Future of Social Work Education: Curricular Conundrums in An Age of Uncertainty, *Electronic Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 1 No. 1, February 15, 2002
- Macy, J.A., Hollister, C.D., & Freddolino, P.P.: Evaluation of Distance Education Programs in Social

Work, *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 18 (3/4), 63B84, 2001

Smith Marshall L.: Distance Learning: The Future Has Arrived!, *The New Social Worker*, Vol.13 No.1 , Winter 2006

Smith Marshall L.: Toward a Guide to Distance Education in Social Work, http://www.socialworker.com/home/Feature_Articles/Technology, December 2007

University Grants Commission: Report of Second Review Committee for Social Work Education, University Grants Commission, Govt. of India, 1975

School of Continuing Education: Field Work Guide for Social Work Educators and Supervisors, IGNOU, 2004

Kumar Manju L. & Thakur Manish K.: Social Work Practicum in Distance Learning: Indian Context, paper presented at 2nd National Seminar on Social Work and HIV / AIDS, New Delhi, Sept. 16-18, 2005

<http://socialwork.dal.ca/distance/>

<http://www.nmhu.edu/pdfs/socialwork/socwk-selfstudy.pdf>

Student Field Manual: A Guide for Distance Education Students, Faculty of Social Work University of Manitoba, 2005

Field Education Manual: School of Social Work, Michigan University, 2004

Field Education Manual: Masters of Social Work Program, University of Victoria, 2002

MSW Field Practicum Manual: <http://www.wlu.ca>