Field Work Practicum In Social Work Education: Prospects Of Realization

Abstract

Social Work practicum has its structured professional framework which provides opportunities to the trainees to apply their classroom learning into practice through social agencies. Expectations of social work institutions can be realized if their working is according to field work objectives on the line of the vision and mission of the Field Work Practicum. Teaching departments need to be equipped with adequate infrastructural support including general and technical manpower and adequacy of field agencies. Field work agencies are to provide proper opportunities to expose students to realize understanding and confidence about use of methods, principles, techniques in the context of social situations including specializations in the master's course. Due to scarcity of desired field work agencies, students’ practice is overcrowded; consequently students and field work agencies suffer. The theoretical basis of the students should be of such nature in which they can enhance their learning through practice of knowledge in more visible manner. For strong theoretical background the classroom learning requires certain conditions as congenial environment and cordial relationship between faculty and trainees. Faculty should be equipped with ground realities of social situations and linking focused intervention. Theoretical understanding without its contextual practice has no meaning and agencies with different and difficult situations are helpless in the absence of technical and theoretical knowledge. There should be mentoring through teamwork. Effective teaching should be rewarded, and poor teaching needs to be corrected, remediated and improved through training and development programs. In order to bridge the gap between theory and practice of social work, classroom
must involve interactive sessions and field demonstrations. Social work educators will have to give demonstration regarding various field work activities which will increase students’ capacity to incorporate social work knowledge. The departmental supervisor will have to play multidimensional roles during supervision which would enhance students’ capacity for effective integration of theory and practice. Emerging issues and opportunities need to be incorporated in the practice which will enhance effectiveness and will be relevant efforts on the part of students, supervisors and social work institutions.

1. Introduction

Every profession requires the training programme which may be in the form of internship and practicum because practice based learning is an important component of the professional education. It helps learners to apply theoretical knowledge in real life situations. Social Work profession has also its structured professional framework. Field Work Practicum provides opportunities to the trainees to apply classroom learning in real life situation which is carried out through social welfare agency. The entire Field Work Practicum is carried out under the guidance of a trained and experienced social work educator. Field Work Practicum may be defined as an educationally planned and professionally guided programme of interaction of students with real life situations experienced through welfare, institutional, multi-organisational and people based systems in order to help them to perceive, understand and appreciate human conditions and work to bring about desired improvement and changes in them. It serves as social laboratory wherein a student tests his theoretical knowledge in practical situations. Significance of Field Work Practicum in social work is consequential input as mere classroom learning is not enough to comprehend and respond to practical problems in the professional education. The trainee is helped through supervisors both at the departmental and agency levels to work in difficult, intricate and composite social environment to become competent professional social worker. It aims at equipping the students/trainees to deal with complex problems through direct interaction with people which helps them to add to their knowledge. The UGC Review Committee (1978) on Social Work Education in India has evolved specific objectives of the Field Work Practicum training in social work education which has emphasized development of professional skills through practical learning, development of problem solving skills both at micro and macro level, development of impartiality and non-judgmental attitudes and development of professional values and commitments. Fulfilment of Field Work Practicum objectives requires dedication from trainees, social work institutions and Field Work Practicum agencies. Field Work Practicum in social work is still suffering and being criticized as less importance is being given to it as core-component of its professional education. Prospects can be better realized if social work institutions follow field work practicum objectives and their working on the line of the vision and mission of the field work
practicum. Better realization of Field Work Practicum will be only possible if teaching departments are equipped with required infrastructural support. Shortage of faculty in an institution also hinders required support and supervision to trainees which social work education requires. Institutions should have linkages with suitable field work practicum agencies to provide needed opportunities to students to realize understanding and confidence about use of methods, principles, techniques in the context of social situations including specializations at post graduate level.

Social work trainees, during orientation programme, develop their first adherence to meaning, objectives, methods, knowledge, skills and techniques of social work. Afterwards they are placed into various social welfare agencies which are accessibly available and convenient to them. Here various roles of trainees start in terms of selection of social agency for their Field Work Practicum practice. During Field Work Practicum practice, trainees are supposed to be oriented about skills in the following areas:-

- Establishment of purposeful relationship with agency staff/community people.
- Knowledge regarding basics of social sciences which helps them in the understanding of various social institutions and social problems for appropriate intervention.
- Knowledge of social welfare institutions and services available with them.
- Dealing with various issues emerging from various social interactions.
- Knowledge and understanding of human personality and various stages of human life span with special reference to the needs, developmental tasks, problems and solutions.
- Adherence to code of ethics of social work. (Inculcation of social work values)

2. ROLE OF DEPARTMENT / INSTITUTION IN PROSPECTIVE REALIZATION

We know about the mushrooming of institutions of social work education in our country which has put the question mark on the credibility of these institutions with regard to lacking infrastructural support and less emphasis on Field Work Practicum. This is the need of the day that must feel concerned about further deterioration of Field Work Practicum in social work. It is due to ignorance of Field Work Practicum which has led to lack of professional knowledge among social workers. The following professional attributes of social work demand high reliance on Field Work Practicum from social work institutions:-

- Suitable infrastructural support facilitating education and Field Work Practicum practice.
- Recognition and acceptance of institute as centre of excellence in learning and development.
- Educators must play their role as mentors for students.
- Due care must be taken for generic and specific education/training of the students.
- Modern/ current tools and techniques should be available and provided to impart learning/development.
- Ensure the possibility of suitable job placements during/after the course.
- Field Work Practicum supervisor to work as friend, philosopher and guide.
Due to scarcity of desired Field Work Practicum agencies, students’ practice is compelled to be in overcrowded environment consequently students and Field Work Practicum agency suffer. Social work trainees integrate classroom learning and Field Work Practicum practice. Theoretical basis of the students should be of such nature in which they can enhance their learning through practice of knowledge in more visible manner. For strong theoretical background the classroom learning requires certain conditions as congenial environment and cordial relationship between faculty and trainees. Faculty should be equipped with ground realities of social situations and linking focused intervention. Theoretical understanding without its contextual practice has no meaning versa agencies with different and difficult situations are helpless in the absence of technical and theoretical knowledge. Therefore, there must be combination between theoretical understanding and Field Work Practicum practice. Congenial environment of classroom learning involves techniques of listening, questioning, being responsive, and remembering that each student and class is different. It’s about eliciting responses and developing oral communication skills of closed students to become open and responsive. There should be mentoring between senior and junior faculty through teamwork. Effective teaching should be rewarded, and poor teaching needs to be corrected and remediated for improvement through training and development programs. In order to bridge the gap between theory and practice of social work, classroom must involve interactive sessions and field demonstrations. Social work educators will have to give demonstration regarding various Field Work Practicum activities which will increase students’ capacity to incorporate social work knowledge.

3.1 Prospects of Realization through Effective Classroom Learning

Field Work Practicum is based on integration of classroom learning into effective practice. Classroom learning serves as baseline for students to implement their knowledge during Field Work Practicum practice. Thus, role of the teacher during classroom interaction inspires students as role model for their self guidance at the time of practice in specific area of specialization. Social work profession requires the following expertise which will enable students to integrate learning into practice

- There must be demonstration in classroom teaching. (e.g., teachers can demonstrate through practical examples particularly live examples)
- Capacity building of the students should be ensured so that they are able to convert theoretical contents into practice with easily applied manner. (e.g. which will indicate through their self confidence in the class and foresight in the field)
- Successful empirical references in regard to understanding of various concepts relevant to field practice will be appealing evidences to provoke thought process of the students in their Field Work Practicum)
It should encompass recent developments in the field of social work intervention. (e.g., observational visits and feature presentation will solicit response)

Classroom teaching to be student centered and Field Work Practicum oriented. (e.g., Students are to be involved in the learning process with focus on learning by doing)

Learning through interactional sessions will ensure initiatives on the part of students. (e.g., Focus to be given in two way communication)

### 3.2 Role of Field Work Practicum Agencies to Realize Prospects

Departments/Institutions place the trainees in various Field Work Practicum agencies in order to implement classroom learning into practice. These Field Work Practicum agencies should have adherence to social work profession. It is usually seen that majority of these Field Work Practicum agencies aren’t aware regarding social work profession which leads to ineffective Field Work Practicum practice because it lacks their co-operation for understanding and effective practice. Institutions have expectations and seek their co-operation in the following areas:-

- Acceptance of trainee in the agency
- Participation and involvement of trainee to organize various activities
- Provision of an professionally trained/oriented agency supervisor to guide trainees
- To provide administrative knowledge and support to trainee ( in terms of physical amenities, financial support preferably when students undertake agency sponsored projects, psychological support, warmth and understanding, involving students in administrative procedures like official correspondence, filing and agency meetings etc. )
- To provide positive exposure to inculcate professional outlook and values in students. (e.g., opportunities to interact with agency professionals in the specialized area as per needs of the students).
- Ensure timely feedback of learning to enhance and develop self-confidence. ( e.g., with compliance to accomplished tasks as per learning objectives in continuous manner to departmental supervisor )
- Possibilities of suitable job placement during/after the training. (e.g., positive reinforcement in the form of preference to trainees during recruitment process).
- Comprehensive planning incorporated with learning objectives.

Apart from above, Field Work Practicum Agencies can contribute in following ways:-

- Field Work Practicum agencies should be integral part of comprehensive activities planning to elicit their active participation and continuous support in regard to students’ as well as department/ social work institutions. Subsequently they will be real agent of an agency for social work practice.
- Orientation of Field Work Practicum agencies by social work institutions will ensure effective Field Work Practicum practice and mutual co-operation.
Departmental and agency supervisors must have effective lines of communication for timely feedback regarding work and progress of the students and programs.

Common minimum activities of all concerned (Department, Field Work Practicum agency, trainees etc.) will meet present needs and cover future perspectives and continuity.

This is observed that some of the agencies don’t specify/ allot agency supervisor. Collaborative networking relations will elicit nominations allocation of a person to serve as agency supervisor.

Proper use of six hours allocated in Field Work Practicum should be fully utilized which is overlooked by trainee and Field Work Practicum agency. Therefore, adequacy of six hours linked with comprehensive planning and programme scheduling should be ensured.

Progress of a trainee must be identified as progress of the agency to spread message to society for positive image building.

Ideal and model work of a Field Work Practicum agency will replicate and inspire for other Field Work Practicum agencies and students will be instrumental to changed path to plan, organize and develop programmes.

Outstanding Field Work Practicum agencies should be recognized, facilitated and awarded for the novel work and meeting the societal needs which will certainly give positive image to department/ institutions and as well as to social work profession.

Above mentioned realization will assert a paradigm shift and Field Work Practicum agencies may approach the department for field/job placement.

4. ROLE OF DEPARTMENTAL SUPERVISOR IN PROSPECTIVE OUTCOME

Supervision, as an integral and essential part of social work education, is an educational process which requires and involves dynamic, intense and individualized educator-learners interaction and educators assume teaching, helping and administrative roles to guide and direct to promote professional growth of learners. Thus, departmental supervisor serves as valuable resource person to the trainee in routine and playing his/her role as friend, philosopher and guide whenever the student is in need and support. The faculty supervisor helps the students to have accurate acquisition of social work knowledge, principles, techniques and skills. It is like an emergency door to students which is always open to the students when they face Field Work Practicum complexities. The supervisor and supervisee relationship has been always remarkable impression on the professional development of the supervisee. Supervisee expectations from the supervisor are

• Helpful to solve the problems of trainees with regard to Field Work Practicum practice.
• Must be skilful in imparting monitoring and evaluation of trainees during Field Work Practicum practice
• On the spot guidance to the students under conditions and limitations of the agency.
• Cordial relationship and congenial environment to students to approach whenever he/she is in need of help.
• Timely feedback.
• Effective contribution during Individual and Group Conferences.

The supervisor will have to play multi-dimensional roles in order to promote learning during the individual conferences which involves:

A. Individual attention to trainees.
B. Cordial relationship between the supervisor and supervisee for conferences and provision of individual conferences beyond the scheduled time must be given.
C. Supervisor can do a lot with adequate preparation, Use of Records and remedial efforts to enhance the level of adaptation among students towards Field Work Practicum.
D. Democratic approach being core component of social work ethics must be visible during such individual conferences.
E. Efforts to encourage students during various phases must be during classroom learning and Field Work Practicum supervision.
F. Recording to be used by students as well as supervisor to strengthen the Field Work Practicum.
G. Evaluation as the major part of entire Field Work Practicum practice to be used in developing mastery in skills and professional growth through Field Work Practicum practice.

4.1 Supervisory Inputs for Prospective Realization

The departmental supervisor will have to play multidimensional roles during supervision which would enhance students’ capacity for effective integration of theory and practice. Supervisor should assume the following qualities to realize effective Field Work Practicum practice:

• Flexibility in establishing and maintaining a supportive teaching environment
• Contributing in development and implementation of the Field Work Practicum objectives and planning
• Emerging Field Work Practicum problems of the trainees may be resolved through success stories in more or less similar situations with suitable modification.
• Individual differences of students pertaining to their capacity, progress should be undertaken during evaluation and false comparison among them should be avoided.
• Should also visit Field Work Practicum agencies to demonstrate on the spot guidance and resolving problems through students.
• Planning, preparing and delivering effective Field Work Practicum instructions keeping in mind the individual differences among the students during group conferences.
• Should have familiarity with information and technology assets and facilities to ensure their optimum use.
• Being firm and fair about observations and evaluation
4.2 Prospective Realization through Field Supervisory Conferences

The supervisor’s inputs during field supervisory conferences are not only remedies during trainee’s inadequate attempt to practice social work knowledge but also enhance their problem solving skills. But today this has limited just to check out whether the student has gone to Field Work Practicum agency or not. There is need to change such approach because these supervisory conferences were meant to provide on spot guidance to trainees. There must be generic and specific inputs among students through expert advice and guidance.

4.3 Realization through Effective Field Work Practicum Evaluation

Field Work Practicum Evaluation is a continuous and realistic assessment of a student in the terms of his efforts, abilities, task accomplishment, learning, use of guidance, personal and professional growth in a particular field situation. Social work educators have always emphasized upon the formative evaluation of trainees which paves ways to take various remedial measures in case of learning difficulties. Departmental supervisor is instrumental in following ways to have objective Field Work Practicum evaluation process

i.) Continuous assessment should be there and

ii.) Comprehensive assessment (in terms of total Field Work Practicum days, report submission, written and verbal expression, participation in Individual and Group conferences, initiatives undertaken, effective use of supervisory inputs, relationship with agency staff and agency supervisor’s evaluation towards trainee

iii.) Continuous involvement of agency supervisor in process of learning and development of trainees.

5. CONCLUSION

In order to have Prospective Realization of Field Work Practicum in social work education, we shall have to relook our current practices of Field Work Practicum either at departmental level or agency level. Mere just 5-7 days induction under the name of orientation programme is not enough new entrants to understand what social work is? They should be oriented through observations visits related to every field of social work practice. Its ample time to take preventive and curative measures, otherwise we shall have nothing to say about Field Work Practicum specialty of this profession which differentiates itself from other social science subjects.

6. REFERENCES


