

CHAPTER TEN

FIELDWORK PRACTICE AND REPORTING IN SOCIAL WORK

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INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork is also known as field instruction, field placement, field education, practicum or internship in social work education. It is a veritable tool for enhancing Student Social Workers (SSW) towards achievement of expected generic and professional application of skills, knowledge and theories of social work, acquired in the classroom. The essence is to assist individuals, families, organisations and communities to attain their life aspirations, while taking cognisance of social work values and ethics. Also, one of the things that differentiate social work with other social science disciplines is that social workers need to acquire special skills for practice (Yusuf, 2019) and that special skills can only be garnered by SSW during fieldwork practice. Hence, this chapter seeks to look at the concept of fieldwork practice, objectives of fieldwork practice, tasks of SSW on fieldwork practice, templates for fieldwork reporting, and termination of fieldwork practice.

Concept of fieldwork practice

Fieldwork practice, according to Larger and Robbin (2004) offers student social workers the opportunity to test what they have learnt in the classroom, while integrating theory with practice, evaluating the effectiveness of interventions, contending with the realities of social-political and economic injustices, striving for cultural sensitivity and competence, deliberating on the choices posed by ethical dilemmas, developing a sense of self, and in the process identifying with the requisites of the profession. For Jeyarani and Jebaseelan (2017) fieldwork is an opportunity for aligning theoretical knowledge and learning, with the needs of the society.

Thus, social work fieldwork practice could be seen as a consciously planned set of experiences occurring in a practice setting designed to move students from their initial level of understanding, skills and attitudes to levels associated with autonomous social work practice (Hamilton & Else, 1983). The acquisition of knowledge through hands-on experience is central to social work education. It is commonly understood that practice learning is necessary to enable students to integrate theory and practice and to contextualise learning. It is the forum in which the beginning professional develops core skills and competence and a critical and reflective approach (Parker, 2007).

Shardlow and Doel (1996) observe that classroom and fieldwork learning are of two contexts that are mutually consistent, and should be integrated for effective social work practice. Social Work being a practice-based profession, student social workers and agencies supervisors are expected to make this pragmatic during the specified periods of the fieldwork practice. There are various methods of fieldwork placement in agencies. These are block placement, concurrent placement, rotational placement, and community centre placement. According to Liu, Sun and Anderson (2013) in block placement, the student social workers have to complete all coursework and then spend four or five days in a week working at a particular agency for a given period of time, in a concurrent placement, the student social worker divides his/her time between attending lectures and working at a particular agency. In

the rotational method, the student social workers rotate their placements externally (at different agencies) or internally (within an agency) (Birkenmaier, Curley, & Rowan, 2012). In the community centre placement, student social workers are expected to identify community felt, and also develop macro, meso and micro interventions. These centres are developed in partnership with communities and social work agencies and should have strong focus on developmental principles, serving the community while at the same time serving as a base for students' experiential learning (Du Plessis, 2011; Rogers, 1995).

Objectives of fieldwork practice

Murray and Channer, (2019) stated that the core objectives of fieldwork practice are to educate student's social workers to:

1. Apply intervention skills of a generalist problem-solving approach to work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities in a variety of settings.
2. Develop communication skills including accepting feedback, asking for direction, and clarifying misunderstandings so that you can best learn from your supervisor.
3. Learn how to use theory to improve your interactions with clients and client systems.
4. Use collaborative and advocacy skills to address client and community needs, and to demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which social policies, institutions, and forces (such as discrimination and oppression) contribute to presenting problems of diverse clients and communities.
5. Develop skills to assess and communicate client and service needs.
6. Demonstrate an understanding of, and commitment to, the values and ethics of the social work profession to provide culturally appropriate services that demonstrate competence, professional self-awareness, integrity, and respect.
7. Develop practice skills through the application of research knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving.
8. Develop professional interpersonal skills that reflect a conscious use of self, including openness to constructive criticism and a capacity for self-critique.
9. Develop an appreciation for the ongoing nature of social work education and instruction that can be realised through post-graduation professional development

Also, fieldwork experience, enables student social workers to demonstrate the ten core competencies that the Council of Social Work Education (2018) recommended for professional social work practice with individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities. Thus, the student social workers are expected to:

1. **Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly. Social Workers:**
 - (a) Advocate for client access to the services of social work;
 - (b) Practice personal reflection and self-correction to assure continual professional development;
 - (c) Attend to professional roles and boundaries;
 - (d) Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication;
 - (e) Engage in career-long learning; and
 - (f) Use supervision and consultation.

2. **Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice. Social Workers:**
 - (a) Recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice;
 - (b) Make ethical decisions by applying standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, and, as applicable, of the International Federation of Social Workers/International Association of Schools of Social Work Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles;
 - (c) Tolerate ambiguity in resolving ethical conflicts; and
 - (d) Apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions.

3. **Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments. Social Workers:**
 - (a) Distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge, and practice wisdom;
 - (b) Analyze models of assessment, prevention, intervention, and evaluation;
 - (c) Demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and colleagues.

4. **Engage diversity and difference in practice. Social workers:**
 - (a) Recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power;
 - (b) Gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups;
 - (c) Recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences; and
 - (d) View themselves as learners and engage those with whom they work as informants.

5. **Advance human rights and social and economic justice. Social workers:**
 - (a) Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination;
 - (b) Advocate for human rights and social and economic justice; and
 - (c) Engage in practices that advance social and economic justice.

6. **Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research. Social workers:**
 - (a) Use practice experience to inform scientific inquiry; and
 - (b) Use research evidence to inform practice.

7. **Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment. Social workers:**
 - (a) Utilise conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention, and evaluation; and
 - (b) Critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment.

8. **Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services. Social workers:**

- (a) Analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance social well-being; and
 - (b) Collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action.
9. **Respond to contexts that shape practice. Social workers:**
- (a) Continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends to provide relevant services; and
 - (b) Provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery and practice to improve the quality of social services.
10. **Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities.**
- Engagement: Social workers:**
- (a) Substantively and effectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities;
 - (b) Use empathy and other interpersonal skills; and
 - (c) Develop a mutually agreed-on focus of work and desired outcomes
- Assessment: Social workers:**
- (a) Collect, s, and interpret client data;
 - (b) Assess client strengths and limitations;
 - (c) Develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives; and
 - (d) Select appropriate intervention strategies.
- Intervention: Social workers:**
- (a) Initiate actions to achieve organisational goals;
 - (b) Implement prevention interventions that enhance client capacities;
 - (c) Help clients resolve problems; d) Negotiate, mediate, and advocate for clients; and
 - (e) Facilitate transitions and endings.
- Evaluation: Social workers:**
- (a) Critically analyse, monitor, and evaluate interventions.

Tasks of student social workers on fieldwork practice

Student social workers should be placed rotationally in different agencies for them to have professional experience in working with individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities. In these agencies, they are to carry out different tasks as follows:

Social work with individuals: Intake and assessment of client, creating service plans, case management, advocacy; supportive counseling and psychotherapy, research and evaluation of services provided, receiving feedback from client, goal attainment, measurement of task completion, and termination of intervention process i.e. reviewing progress, making referrals, planning for future, transferring cases, and a possible follow-up.

Social work with families: Intake and assessments, assessment of impact of family dynamics on individuals, helping families to identify and change dysfunctional dynamics, if any, creating service plans, case management, advocacy, giving supportive counseling, research and evaluation of services, receiving feedback from clients, goal attainment, measurement of task completion, and termination (i.e. reviewing progress, making referrals,

planning for future, transferring cases), and a possible follow-up.

Social work with groups: Review of membership criteria, interviews with potential group members, review of prior minutes and group reports, contracting with a group, co-facilitation or facilitation of a group, committee participation, staff group participation, research and evaluation of services, client feedback, goal attainment, measurement of task completion, and termination I.e. reviewing progress, making referrals, planning for future, transferring cases, and a possible follow-up.

Social Work with Organisations: Awareness of the organisation's policies and procedures, mission, goals, and role, identification of management theories/structure, organisational assessment, programme assessment, programme implementation and coordination, grant-writing, in-service training, supervisory activities, program monitoring, program evaluation design, organisational analysis, a possible follow-up.

Social work with the community: Research on community demographics and characteristics, speaking with community members, identification of the community resources, programme planning, implementation, outreach services, community education, resource coordination, research and evaluation via community organisation scale, monitoring attendance and participation, community feedback, monitoring rates of community incidences, and follow-up (Murray & Channer, 2019).

According to Maxwell (1999) student social workers' fieldwork experience could be improved by:

1. More and better training for supervisors in all aspects of the supervisory role;
2. Supervisors to have an adequate social work background;
3. More resources to assist students in their placement (from university and/or agency);
4. More agency visits to be made by the university coordinator/school supervisor; Additional proposals made by Caribbean students were for:
5. Better preparation of students for entering the practicum;
6. Better communication and interaction between the universities and the field agency (i.e. Coordinator function); And the Harare students also proposed:
7. More supervision time to assist students; and
8. Increased placement time. The success of the student practicum, while for the most part dependent on the effectiveness of the supervision and instruction offered by the agency supervisor, is also influenced by the role played by the university practicum coordinator and/or school supervisor who has overall responsibility for the practicum as a part of the educational institution's social work education programme.

However, the success of the fieldwork practice depends on the effectiveness of the supervision and instruction offered by the agency supervisor, and mainly on the role played by the fieldwork coordinator or supervisor who has overall responsibility for the fieldwork practice as required by the institution's social work education programme.

Fieldwork report in social work

A fieldwork report is a written record of an interaction with a client and client system. It is a necessary tool used by the student, the agencies supervisors, and the fieldwork coordinator or

supervisor to examine the dynamics of particular interaction and intervention process. In other words, the fieldwork report could be seen as an indispensable teaching device for impartation, and also, for assimilation of social work interview and intervention skills. Therefore, fieldwork report helps the student to conceptualise and organise ongoing activities with clients and client systems, to clarify the purpose of interviews or intervention processes, to improve written expression, to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to improve self-awareness. (Urbanowski & Dwyer, 1988).

Social work, being unique in reliance on fieldwork report to teach assessment and intervention skills, has developed different methods or templates towards attaining its professional objectives. Some of these templates or methods include: Verbatim fieldwork report, in which the student records the dialogue of the session entirely or the excerpts. The second is the narrative fieldwork report in which the student writes the story of the session entirely or the excerpts. The method of fieldwork report to apply mainly depends on the institution's social work programme. However, all methods must maintain confidentiality by identifying all clients only by initials or a pseudonym.

The Department of Field Education (2017) (Report Writing 10) suggests templates for verbatim and narrative fieldwork report along the following lines:

Verbatim fieldwork report

1. Student Name
2. Date of Interview
3. Client Identifying/Background Information
4. Purpose/ goals of session
5. Four Columns
 - a. Verbatim recording of session
 - b. Feelings that emerged
 - c. Analysis- including case to cause issues that emerge.
 - d. Field Instructor's comments
6. Impressions/Assessment of client
7. Assessment of session/work
8. Planning/Next steps
9. My agenda
10. Future considerations/questions

Narrative fieldwork report

1. Student Name
2. Date of Interview
3. Client Identifying/Background Information
4. Purpose/ goals of session
5. Narrative of session (entire or excerpts)
6. Impressions/Assessment of client
7. Assessment of session/work
8. Planning/Next steps-- including case to cause issues that emerge.
9. My agenda
10. Future considerations/questions

Baldock (1980, cited in Okala, Okechukwu & Ebue, 2014) suggested a structure for group process recording along the following lines:

1. Purpose of group event of the worker in attending.
2. Observation about the setting and group members.
3. Content:
 - (a) A description of how the meeting, social session, etc. began.
 - (b) Pertinent factual information about decisions taken and reasons for them or other activity according to the type of group event and the responses of the group members and of the worker to these things.
 - (c) A description of the feeling content of the group event on the part of the members, the worker and any other outsiders.
 - (d) Notes on how the event ended and, in particular, whether it was on an optimistic note or a pessimistic one and arrangements finalised to ensure that they would be put into effect.
4. Impressions on a more general level.
5. A brief summary of the worker's role in the events, outlining how far this was thought out and followed decisions taken by him before the event.
6. Plan of future action.

Fieldwork report in Nigerian Universities

In most Nigerian universities offering social work education, the fieldwork report covers:

Purpose of the visit: The student social or professional social worker needs to explain the reasons for his/her visitation to the assigned agency.

- (a) **Observation:** Here, the student or professional social worker has to give details of his/her personal understanding of the agency, verbal and non-verbal communication with the client and client system, and other issues that are related to and of significant or relevant to the intervention process.
- (b) **Content:** In this aspect, the student or the professional social worker is expected to give details of all that took place between him/her in the process of intervention.
- (c) **Impression:** The student or professional social worker is expected to give detailed assessment and discuss his/her intervention process, express his/her feelings about the client's response to the process and goal(s) achieved.
- (d) **Worker's role:** The student or professional social worker needs to describe in details the social work methods or techniques, skills, competencies, knowledge and theories that were applied in the intervention process.
- (e) **Next plan of action:** The student or professional social worker, in the course of intervention, is expected to plan his/her next line of action before every visit to his agency or client. Here, this has to be clearly stated (Department of Social Work, 2015).

Termination of fieldwork practice

Fieldwork practice could be terminated in two ways. Firstly, if a student social worker exhibits unacceptable behaviour or violates Social Work Code of Ethics and/or the rules and regulations of the social work institution's programme, the department has the right to terminate the student's placement from a given agency and/ or the programme, based on the level of such anti-social behaviour. Secondly, when a student social worker on a fieldwork practice completes his/her duration of placement, as specified, he/she has to give details of

how the case(s) he/she handled ended before the expiration of the fieldwork placement. Thus, the student social worker reviews progress made during the periods of the fieldwork practice, gives details of referrals, if any, plans for the future, nature of transfers case(s), if any, and follow-up plans. This is a very necessary stage for preparation towards case conference presentation, and a great pointer to the fieldwork coordinator and next student social worker(s) coming into such agency.

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