

CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS IN SOCIAL WELFARE AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the nature of engagement and tasks of social work students placed in social welfare agencies. Specifically, this study aims to measure the level of competencies of social work students in terms of practice of the primary methods of social work, supervisors' feedback mechanisms on students' performance, nature of learning environment provided by the social welfare agencies, and faculty supervisors' learning strategies. Data were gathered by using a descriptive-evaluative study by utilizing mixed approaches like employed data source triangulation of survey questionnaires, focal group discussion, and field observation. All data sets were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis for qualitative data. A total of 285 students of the College of Social Work and Development, Western Mindanao State University, 9 agency supervisors, 11 faculty supervisors and the 7 agency heads as key informants were placed in social welfare agencies for the SY 2017-2018. Findings revealed that the nature of students' engagements in social welfare agencies, are dependent on the scope of the Field Instruction Program with prevailing tasks along data gathering and problem definition. Social Work Practice adheres to the case management model. Predominant and effective feedback mechanism in casework and groupwork is group supervision while monitoring and evaluation for community organization though for agency supervisors, dialogue is effective for casework. The social welfare agencies as a learning environment affords students activities in consonance with the Field Instruction Program Objectives under the supervision of an agency social worker, adheres to agency policies, procedures, and Memorandum of Agreement. Faculty learning strategies and feedback mechanism in teaching is compliant with the Bachelor of Science in Social Work Outcome-based Education Program as stipulated in the CHED, CMO 39 series of 2017.

Keywords: Curricular competencies, Feedback Mechanisms, Agency Supervisors, Social Work Methods, Social Welfare Agencies

INTRODUCTION

Cognizant of Republic Act 4373 (Social Work Law) formally recognized the profession of social work in the Philippines. The Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) is an undergraduate program that prepares students for direct generalist practice of social work with individuals, families, groups, and communities. The profession aims to advance the growth and empowerment of people, development and social progress of communities, and greater justice and equality of societies where there exist oppression, discrimination and inequality among marginalized individuals, families, groups, and communities. The starting point of the BSSW Program was adopted in July 2014. Social Work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are central to social work (CHED Memo Order Series of 2017). The learning outcomes of social

work students at the College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD), Western Mindanao State University (WMSU) is measured in their ability to demonstrate, integrate, and apply knowledge, attitude, and skills in the practice of the helping process using casework, groupwork and community organization methods of social work. These primary methods of social work practice encapsulate the professional courses of the curriculum that includes Human Behaviour and Social environment, Social Welfare Policies, Programs and Services and Social Work Practice. They are placed in social welfare agencies to engage in fieldwork. According to Noble & Henrickson (2011), that fieldwork is an experiential form of learning, where students develop their professional selves and integrate their knowledge and skills under the supervision of expert practitioners. Fieldwork is an essential method for socializing students to the role of practitioner and vital for the consolidation of theory and practice (Wayne et al 2010).

Fieldwork supervision is distinct from staff supervision because it has a particular focus on the educative function of supervision. It can be defined as the oversight of a student on practicum by a more experienced, qualified practitioner who holds the responsibility to guide the student through the placement, providing a measure of support and advocacy, facilitating learning opportunities that address student learning needs, evaluating practice development, and assessing work performance (Maidment 2001). Kumar & Yadav (2015) stated that the social workers who supervise the students while on field work are licensed social workers that are part of the agency staff usually referred to as agency supervisors. They possess competencies in social work helping process using the primary methods in social work practice. The agency supervisors create or provide learning opportunities for students to integrate social work theory to practice. Theories are taught in the classroom and students apply those theories through social work practice. Theories enhance knowledge to a great extent and field work helps to develop skills extensively. Social work is a subject which mainly focuses on theoretical and practical aspects concurrently. It helps to build networking with other professionals and enhance social interaction.

However, in the process of theory application, the students encounter opportunities as well as challenges in the practice setting though it provide opportunity for the students to apply their knowledge, skills and develop the professional attitude towards working with individuals, group, and community. Under the supervision of an agency supervisor, the students are expected to be administratively guided, be taught, supported, perform well and productive to deliver the social agency's programs and services efficiently and effectively. At times, as experienced by students, they have difficulties in relating competency to actual practice for what is taught in the classroom theoretically differs in the actual practice. The social work students' studies the subjects, passed the examinations given by respective professors handling the professional courses of the BSSW program and when they apply those theories, they face the challenges in implementing it. No study has been done to find the gaps in what was taught in the classroom to actual social work practice. This study aim study to assess the level of competencies of students in the application of the social work primary methods in social welfare agencies while under the supervision of agency supervisors. Assessment information derived from this research will be used to guide student's learning, assess students' outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of the Social Work Field Instruction program of the College of Social Work and Community Development, Western Mindanao State University, Philippines and enhance assessment methods used.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study used mixed methodology design using quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 285 students were interviewed using survey questionnaire following a universal sampling technique in determining nature of students' tasks, determine supervisor's feedback when assigned in the various social welfare agencies. Another survey tool was designed to agency supervisors. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and field observation were also used. A Key Informant Interview (KII) was used to agency heads to understand the nature of learning environment provided to social work students adapted from Creswell (2008). Class observation was also conducted to assess curricular competencies taught in the classroom as applied to actual field practice and later triangulated using field observation. A researcher-made evaluation tool duly validated, and item analyzed using Cronbach Alpha was used to assess the level of curricular competencies taught in the classroom and in the actual field practice. Ranking for multiple Responses and weighed average mean were used to analyze level of competencies of social work students and agency supervisors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed the responses of social work students on the nature of their engagements in the various social welfare agencies in terms of the application of competencies in casework process. As they engaged in these tasks, the students performed the roles as interviewer for assessment of clients' cases and assist social worker in facilitating intake as prerequisite to provision of service. The tasks and the roles they performed developed student's skill in the helping process and used of social work tools for data gathering with a frequency of 188 and rank 1.5. On case documentation, students' tasks are along journal writing, process recordings, prepare case study reports and progress notes. The students performed roles as social worker, case manager and applied/developed skills in writing, keeping important records, documentation and writing case study report with a frequency of 188 and rank 1.5. On Case Management, tasks are along case planning, identify client's problems and implement interventions, referral and tapping resources with frequency a frequency of 143 out of 285 and rank 3.5. Roles performed are direct service providers, enabler to include assisting clients with medical needs, facilitate program of activities and assist social workers in the provision of services. The engagement developed students' skills in providing interventions with application of social work principles and techniques.

Mendoza (2008) stated that social work agencies keep some form of records which identify the clients they serve, and the kind of service rendered to them. Records, particularly those that dwell on actual activities undertaken to solve the client's problem serve as tools that guide the worker as he and the client proceed with task of problem-solving, thus, students' tasks and skill competency developed and applied along this aspect corresponds to this theory. The social worker's problem-solving efforts will require a variety of interventive roles which refer to the composite of activities or tasks that she is expected to undertake in order to accomplish the goals agreed upon with the client and these includes roles as resource provider, social broker, mediator, advocate, enabler, counsellor/therapist, and many others. Skidmore 1995 in Cordero 2013 defined case management as a method of providing services whereby a professional social worker assesses the needs of the client and the family and when appropriate, arranges, coordinates, monitors, evaluates, and advocates a package of multiple services to meet the specific clients' complex needs. She further stressed that the case manager has a dual role of providing some casework services if needed as

well as coordinating the network services that are appropriate, thus the students' engagement in terms of tasks are consistently, along this stage of the helping process. Along the area of evaluation and monitoring, 143 out of 285 and rank 3.5, the social work students have experienced tasks related to this process to include monitoring the progress of the clients' cases, attend to case conference, exit conference, and prepare accomplishment report. In the process, the students performed the role of a social worker involved in the assessment and evaluation of service/program provided to clients, learn the skills in the assessment process and application of theories related to identification and defining client's needs (Mendoza 2008).

These findings imply that the nature of students' engagement in the social welfare agencies are dependent on the scope of the Field Instruction Program. Since casework is a social work method to help individuals cope with problems of social functioning, the kind of tasks, roles performed, and skills learned by the students while place in a social welfare agency is anchored on casework. The prevailing nature of engagement is along the tasks of data gathering through interview, observation of clients' behaviors, home visit, case finding and collateral information. As they engaged in these tasks, students performed the roles as interviewer and assistant to the social workers in doing intake as prerequisite to provision of services. In the process, the students apply skill competencies in the engagement process of social work and use of social work tools in data gathering. This skill competency is evidenced by Article IV of the CMO 11 series of 2010 of the Competency Standards of the BSSW Curriculum on knowledge of and skills in the generalist helping process and planned change within the micro practice of social work. Likewise, the social work helping process specifically, on the assessment, Mendoza 2018 avers that this step involves the collection of necessary information and its analysis and interpretation in order to reach an understanding of the client, the problem, and the social context in which it exists, thus the major social work tasks on this stage are information or data gathering and problem definition. In addition, Kadushin and Harkness (2000) notes that the students' engagement reflects a traditional casework orientation to direct social work practice in agency settings rather than any models. From the students' responses, the nature of engagement is the first step in the assessment process of helping individuals. From the social workers perspectives, the activities must focus on gathering information for assessment of the clients' cases.

Table 1. Responses of social work students on the nature of engagements and tasks using casework method in terms of task, roles, and competency application in social welfare agencies

CASEWORK (N-285)				
Nature of engagement				
Tasks	Roles performed on tasks	Applied skills	f	Rank
1. Data gathering through interview, observation, home visit, case finding and collateral information.	a) Interviewer b) Assistant to the social worker in facilitating conduct of intake as prerequisite to provision of service.	a) Skill in social work helping process, specifically on the engagement process. b) Skill in the use of social work tool for data gathering	188	1.5

2. Case documentation to include journal writing, process recordings, prepare case study reports and writes progress notes.	a) Performing the role of a social worker and as Case manager	a) Skill in writing, keeping important records, documentation and writing case study report	188	1.5
3. Case management to include case planning, identify clients' problems and implement interventions, referral and tapping resources.	a) Interventive role as direct service provider and enabler.	a) Skill in case management to include assessment of client's needs with application of social work principles and techniques. b) Skill in the implementation of work plan	143	3.5
4. Evaluate intervention provided and monitor clients' case, attend to case and exit conference and prepare accomplishment report	a) Perform role of a social worker doing evaluation of services and assessment of Intervention provided.	a) Skill in the assessment process and application of theories related to assessment of client's needs.	143	3.5
*Multiple Responses				

Table 2 present the nature of engagement of social work students in the application of the group work method in social work practice. On the task of data gathering, preliminary activities in the assessment stage of the helping process with groups, 160 out of 285 and rank 1 of the social work students were engaged in integration which means, they immersed themselves to the group to achieve the purpose of gathering information. Individual or group interview, profiling, observation, survey, home visit, and community assembly were strategies that are very important in the engagement process in a helping relationship with groups. The process is undertaken to identify and define the problem area to focus on. As they engage themselves in these tasks, they perform the roles as interviewer, enabler to include facilitating, and organizing groups, mediator, and assistant to the staff/social worker in the provision of services and in the process, learn the skills in assessment that is understanding analyzing information about clients' cases and building rapport to engage group in a meaningful helping relationship with the workers. Siporin in Mendoza (2008) noted that the assessment as a process involves the collection of necessary information and its analysis and interpretation in order to reach an understanding of the group to be helped. The students' engagement in the various social welfare agencies follows the sequential step in the helping process generic to all primary methods but focusing on working with groups.

On tasks pertaining to group formation, findings revealed that 156 students and rank 2 were engaged in sectoral organizing. They performed the role of an enabler in activities such as facilitating, organizing, and mediating to make change possible by supplying the group with means, the knowledge, or the opportunity to be or to do something and acquired in the process (De

Guzman 1998). The group formation is the process of getting a group organized so that it can start to function and move toward the attainment of its planned goals. Thus, the tasks given to students, role performed on the tasks and skills applied correspond to these activities (Mendoza 2013). On tasks pertaining records and documentation, students' engagements are along case documentation such as journal writing, group case study report, sessions with the group and process recordings of engagement. The various tasks exposed the students to different activities where they performed a variety of roles as documenter, group worker and assistant to the social worker in the delivery of services. The process made them learned the skills and abilities to communicate, interpret actions and documentation skill with 130 students and ranked three (3) have engaged in these activities. Mendoza 2008 indicates that knowledge about communication can be extremely helpful to social worker who will undoubtedly have many occasions to use such knowledge to effectively influence people and help bring about change. Further, it is very important for the worker to recognize the role played by the client's attitudes and feelings (as well as the worker's) and how these affect communications, and for the worker to seek feedback in order to know whether the message communicated was properly understood.

Formulate plan of action and implementation of the plans with the used of different models of social work practice as strategies in case management, are tasks of students under the social work process of planning. Findings revealed that a frequency of 120 students and rank 4, have been doing these tasks in the social welfare agencies, perform the role of a social worker, developed/applied skills in plan implementation and used of different models of intervention. Depending on the nature of the client's problem situation, the worker can choose one or more of the models as helping strategies (Mendoza 2008). On implementation of the various programs of the social welfare agency, a frequency of 105 students and rank 5.5 assist in the implementation of the different programs such as capacity building (seminars, trainings, and livelihood), psycho-social programs like Therapeutic Community Modality Session for prisoners released on probation, street education for street children and others depending on the nature of the agency, students are placed. These tasks provide avenues for students to perform role of an enabler which include facilitating clients' needs and applied/developed skill in the provision/implementation of services such as social work counselling and referral.

In terms of tasks, students are involved in case conference, attending to supervision where their concerns in handling group is presented, brainstorming and group sharing, evaluation of performance in the field, monitoring and evaluation of interventions conducted for the group and exit conference. These tasks are within the context of problem-solving where their roles in the process is as social work practitioner and learned skill in the group work helping process focusing on monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the group with a frequency of 105 and rank 5.5.

The data presented imply that the nature of the engagement of social work students in the various social welfare agencies is dependent on the scope of the Field instruction Program they are enrolled just like in casework. The prevailing nature of engagement of the students are performing tasks along the process of data gathering through integration, interviewing, group profiling, observation, survey, home visit and community assembly. The roles the students performed as they engaged in the tasks are as interviewers, enabler to include facilitating, organizer of group activities, mediator, and assistant to the staff/social worker in the provision of services. The tasks and roles performed gave the students the chance to apply and develop skills in assessment, understanding and

analyzing information and building rapport to engage group in a meaningful relationship. Since group work method is a process and a method, through which individuals in groups are helped by a worker to relate themselves to other people and to experience growth opportunities in consonance with their needs and capacities, the nature of tasks, role performed, and the skills applied in the engagement with the group are in the context of social work with groups (De Guzman 1988).

Table 2. Social work students' 'responses on the nature of engagement and tasks in the various social welfare agencies in the application of group work method

GROUPWORK (N-285)				
Nature of engagement				
Tasks	Roles performed on tasks	Applied skills	F	Rank
1. Data gathering through integration, interview, group profiling observation, survey, home visit, and community assembly.	a) Interviewer b) Enabler which include facilitating, organizing groups, mediator, and assistant to the staff/social worker in the provision of service.	a) Skill in assessment that is understanding and analyzing information. b) Engagement skill to include building rapport to engage group into a meaningful relationship.	160	1
2. Group formation through sectoral organizing.	a) Organizer b) Enabler	a) Skill in organizing groups, group intake, profiling of potential clients	156	2
3. Case documentation to include journal writing, group case study report, process recordings, and group session recordings	a) Documenter b) Group worker role c) Assistant to the social worker	a) Ability to communicate, interpret actions that are verbal and non-verbal, documentation skill.	130	3
5. Implement programs of the agency	a) Enabler to include facilitating the needs of the clients	a) Skill in facilitating clients' needs	105	5.5
6. Attend to case conference, evaluation, supervision and exit conference	Social work practitioner role	a) Skill in the group work helping process focusing on monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the group. b) Skill in evaluating performance as student learner	105	5.5
*Multiple responses				

Table 3 present the responses of 142 Students on the nature of their engagements in the communities where they are currently placed for community organization experience. Just like casework and group work methods, the context of the engagement is on the different tasks' students engaged in, roles performed and the skills they applied or have developed following the sequential step in social work helping process. The data were categorized according to the relatedness of the responses and rank based on the highest frequency.

At the onset of the helping process in Community organization, the nature of engagement of students are along the tasks of community entry to include courtesy call with the existing political structure which is the Barangay Council. Paying respect to the existence of the Barangay council is necessary for the community organizer as De Guzman (1992) noted that the target of the community worker is not only social welfare needs and resources; he may be equally concerned with social goals that entails resource mobilization, establishment of community projects and may even be concerned with the organization of Barangay councils. Further, integration through ocular survey, performing the role of a community worker and in the process of engaging into these activities, students learned the skills in understanding the situation of the people, their problems, and issues with a frequency of 123 and rank 1.5.

And as they continue to engage themselves in community work, tasks on social investigation through resource mapping, community assembly and profiling were experienced by students, perform an enabler role to include series of activities such as facilitating and mediating for identified community needs and learned the skill in data gathering using tools of analysis such as SWOT analysis, interview, recording and communication with a frequency of 123 rank 1.5. Organizing communities involved participation of people in the process, thus the process of spotting leaders or selection of potential leaders, core group formation, sectoral organizing were among the tasks experienced by the students as they engaged themselves in community work, perform the role of an enabler and in the process learned the skill in organizing committees with a frequency of 116 and rank 3. In terms of planning as vital step in the Community Organization process, the students have experienced planning with various stakeholders, project proposal preparation, community case study writing and involved in the presentation of their output in the field through case conference, performing the role as facilitator and application of tools of analysis such as resource mapping and SWOT analysis in analyzing community situation with a frequency of 133 and rank 4.

On the nature of students' engagement in terms of program and project implementation, a frequency of 95 and rank 4 have experienced implementation of various programs and projects in the community to include clean- up drive, drug awareness, children summit and conduct of capability building programs, perform the role of direct service provider and advocate. The students gained the ability to apply some of the approaches in helping communities specifically direct provision model of social work and skill in mobilizing resources to sustain projects. On the aspect of monitoring and evaluation process in community organization, a frequency of 89 and rank 6 have taken part in the evaluation and monitoring of the services rendered to the community and in the process, performed the role of a social work practitioner and observer. Exit conference is a process practice in managing cases and in the application of the community organization method of social work that provides avenue for assessment of students' performance. As presented in the table, a frequency of 70 and rank 7 of the student respondents revealed that they were able

to experience exit conference, performed the role of a learner in the process and applies skills in organizing and analyzing experiences relevant to the method of community organization. Based on the above findings, it imply that the nature of students' engagements in the application of the community organization method of social work is anchored in the social work helping process which follows a sequential step of assessment, planning, plan implementation, evaluation, and termination. The prevailing engagements are along data gathering which consists of the tasks of community entry to include courtesy call with the Barangay leaders, ocular survey and social investigation through resource mapping, community assembly and profiling. The students performed the community organizer and enabler roles as they performed the tasks and applies the skills in understanding the situation of the people, their problems and issues, skill in data gathering using tools of analysis, interviewing, recording and communication skill.

Data gathering is common to all methods however as to the uniqueness of the method of community organization from the two other methods, students enjoy the autonomy in the application of their competency for majority of them are community- based and not affiliated with a social welfare agency, however, they are directly under the supervision of the faculty supervisor. As Kadushin and Harkness (2002) highlighted that the nature of the work of the community organizer often tends to diffuse and the goals amorphous. This requires a great measure of on-the-job autonomy in dealing with the demands of the non-standardized situation. Likewise, Holloway and Bragen (1989) reported that the functional requirements of supervision in community organization, assignment of work, review and assessment of work done, maybe performed by the agency administration. These functions have to be performed however infrequently or casually, but often no one is clearly designated as supervisor, and there is no explicit recognition that supervisory tasks are being discharged. Of all the specialized sub-groups in social work, community organizers feel most strongly the need for worker autonomy.

Table 3. Social work students' responses on the nature of engagement and task in social welfare agencies in the practice of community organization method

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION METHOD (N-142)				
Nature of engagement				
Tasks	Roles performed on tasks	Applied skills	f	Rank
1. Community entry to include courtesy call with the political structure, integration through ocular survey.	1. Community worker/ organizer	1. Skill in understanding the situation of the people, their problems, and issues in the community.	123	1.5
2. Social investigation through resource mapping, community assembly and profiling.	Enabler	2. Skill in data gathering using tools of analysis, interview, making records and communication	123	1.5
3. Spotting leaders or selection of potential leaders, core group, social preparation / sectoral organizing	3. Community organizer, mediator	a) Skill in core group formation, spotting potential leaders in the community, facilitating, organizing committees	116	3

4. Planning with various stakeholders, project proposal preparation, community case study writing, case conference,	a) Facilitator	4. Use of tools of analysis such as resource mapping and SWOT Analysis.	113	4
5. Program and project implementation	a). Direct service provider, advocate,	a) Ability to apply some of the approaches in helping communities specifically direct provision model of social work. b) Skill in mobilizing resources	95	5
6. Evaluation and monitoring	a) Social work practitioner and Observer	a) Ability to evaluate social work practice specific to community organization method including evaluation of services rendered to the community.	89	6
7. Exit conference	Perform the role of a social work practitioner in the community	Skill in organizing learning experiences.	70	7
*Multiple Responses				

CONCLUSIONS

In view of the aforementioned findings, the following conclusions were drawn: The nature of students' engagements in the social welfare agencies in terms of tasks undertaken, roles performed, and the skills applied have gained for future practice of the social work profession. The students' exposure on the various activities and their participation in the delivery of the programs and services of the agency are avenues for social work practice experience to prepare them professionally. Group supervision, dialogue, monitoring and evaluation are the prevailing and most effective feedback mechanisms for performance of students in the practice of social work methods. The social welfare agencies as a learning environment exposed student to case management model of practice in all methods. The exposure of students to the different tasks, roles performed, and the skills learned are manifestations of social welfare agencies adherence to the case management model of social work practice.

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