

Social Work & Education

©SW&E. 2023

UDC 37.091.214:17:364-78](669.1)

DOI: 10.25128/2520-6230.23.1.7

Tracy B.E. OMOROGIWA,
PhD, Department of Social Work,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Benin, Benin City,
Nigeria;
tracy.omorogiuwa@uniben.edu

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8675-7180>

Article history:

Received: January 07, 2023

1st Revision: January 17, 2023

Accepted: March 30, 2023

Omorogiuwa, T.B.E. (2023). Issues and challenges in social work field education in Nigeria. *Social Work and Education*, Vol. 10, No. 1. pp. 78-86.
DOI: 10.25128/2520-6230.23.1.7

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL WORK FIELD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Abstract. The place of social work in enhancing societal welfare cannot be separated from the role of field education, which is a vital part of social work training. Field practicum offers students with information and opportunities to tackling and resolving issues in practice. Given that it is an essential element in the social work curriculum, field education is crucial in education outcomes. This paper aimed to explore the structure of the social work field experience via the lens of students and the need to seriously look into the practice methods, in order to promote the worth of field experience. Using a qualitative research design, one focus group interview was conducted and transcribed following the permission of the research participants. With the aid of the thematic analysis, data was analysed, by recognizing, exploring, establishing, reporting themes and capturing imperative ideas in view of the research questions. Findings show that social work field education is fraught with irregularities arising from insufficient field agencies to the engagement of students in activities not related to their field experience. Although involving participants from one major university, this study therefore concludes that core stakeholders/departmental administrators should liaise with other social service organizations to create a platform for training and re-training of key staff to ensure effective practical experiences for students. This study might have crucial implications for departmental administrators to improve the quality of field practice training.

Keywords: field education; field practicum; challenges; issues; social work.

INTRODUCTION

Amadasun (2021) asserts that few professions devote adequate time and vigor to field practice compared to social work. Researches indicate that field education is an essential element of social work education, as the training of social work professional requires combined curriculum of theory and field experience prospects (Bogo, 2005, 2015; Omorogiuwa, 2021, 2022). Field practicum, as Gitterman (1989) explains, is such that “transforms knowledge and understanding into practice, principles, and behaviors” (p. 78). Although some studies on social work field practicum has far-reaching evidence on supervision (Reichelt & Skjerve, 2000; Smith, 2000), assessment of student engagement during placement (Kaye & Fortune, 2001), and practice methods utilized by field instructors, research on social work field practice experience in Nigeria is limited (Omorogiuwa, 2016). This situation requires attention, since field practice is the mark of instruction or the core of the social work training (Homonoff, 2008; Wayne & Raskin, 2010; Larrison & Korr, 2013; Omorogiuwa, 2016). To Bogo (2015), “the ability of social work education to graduate ethical, competent, innovative, effective clinical social workers is highly dependent on the quality of the field experience” (p. 317). Given that institutions of higher education need a way of determining whether field practicum experience is of standard and as well as the issues confronting students’ during placement (Omorogiuwa, 2016; 2021; Amadasun, 2021), assessing the field aspects of social work programme offers a thoughtful lens in which the value of practice could be determined and plans are made for future practice. Thus, this study explores the issues and challenges of field placement in Nigeria through the lens of social work students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Aristotle, “for all things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them” (as quoted in Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2007, p. 1). Research indicates that “field practice, is also conterminously referred to as field practicum, field instruction, field placement, field education, or simply fieldwork in social work literature, forms an important part of social work education and training” (Amadasun, 2021, p. 2). To Bogo (2015) and Omorogiuwa and Eweka (2012), field education is the aspect of social work education, which involves the actual utilization of knowledge and abilities acquired during classroom learning to the practice setting where students are taught to reflect on practical issues by social workers. Whilst, Savaya et al. (2003) point that field practicum, is centered on the value of development. Therefore, students’ are expected to improve and develop both in theory and field experiences.

There exist various types of field experience, the traditional method, which is still employed, involves students’ placement in organizations/agencies in communities (Savaya et al., 2003; Amadasun, 2021). However, to Liu et al. (2013), the most regular categories of field education involve block placement, where it is mandatory for students to complete entire coursework, before proceeding with field placement of four to five days weekly in agencies. Birkenmaier et al. (2012) contend that the rotational type of field practicum, which is a substitute to the traditional type, has often been adopted in the past years. Further, they establish that the rotational method helps to

expand the variety of trainings students obtain, given the rotation of placement in different units of agency or at various agencies.

Moreover, the community-center type of practicum has been embraced by a number of social work institutions, as it requires students' engagement within the communities to recognize issues, as well as the need to advance micro, mezzo and macro intervention strategies (Omorogiuwa, 2016). Research asserts that the community-center model has developed in collaboration with communities and organizations/agencies, which centers on developmental values, supporting the community, while simultaneously aiding as a base for students' practice oriented training (Du Plessis, 2011). Amadasun (2021) indicates that there are four groups engaged in the social work field education, which are the students, agency based supervisor, the university liaison/supervisor and the field education coordinator. Garthwait (2008) affirms the need for these parties, recapping that the acknowledgment and devotion to their tasks are basic to the achievement of the aim of field education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on epistemological theory. Epistemology is "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). Epistemology is also "concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). Utilizing an epistemological theory in this current study, enables the understanding of social work students as knowers of the actualities linked to the challenges faced during their field placements. Through their field experience and participation in learning, students determine their encounters and the restrictions in social work education in Nigeria. Understanding of students' actualities through focus group enabled the recognition of the difficulties students encountered during social work field education in Nigeria, and not determining the issues from mere imagination. The purpose of this study is to explore the structure of and the challenges of social work field education from the lens of students and to earnestly look into the practice methods, in view of enhancing the value of field practicum. Hence, the theoretical approach utilized, enables the researcher to produce concepts to assist in comprehending the opinions of students, given the issues and difficulties experienced in social work field education.

METHODOLOGY

Given the scarcity of knowledge in this exploratory nature, a qualitative approach was adopted, as it permits having an in depth understanding of the voice of students in view of challenges encountered in field education (Clarke, 2005). The qualitative research approach facilitated the researcher's effort in recognizing the issues and challenges of social work field education in Nigeria. The participants in this study comprise 300 and 400 level undergraduate social work students in the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. Students in this category were purposively selected because they had experienced field practice training and therefore were in a better position to share their actualities. Before the beginning of this study, leaflets were dispatched to students in classrooms and posted on notice boards in the social work department, and

the aims of the study were emphasized and students were thus informed that participation was voluntary. However, eight (8) students, (comprising of 5 females and 3 males) shown interest to be part of the research, their consents were thereafter sought. Thus, the ethical concerns attended to in this research comprise of informed consent, voluntary participation, no harm and confidentiality.

Data collection and analysis

A focus group discussion (FGD) was utilised for data collection. A pilot study was conducted with five (5) 300 level students to determine ambiguity about the questions. The pilot study interview lasted 30 minutes, with each of the participants. The students recounted no vagueness, hence no modification was made. Consequently, Hofstee (2009) affirms that interviews carried out in a comfortable setting helps to ensure rapport and genuineness. Hence, the focus group with eight participants was carried out in the departmental library, which lasted 60 minutes.

Given the conclusion reached from the interviews, data were analyzed using the steps inherent to “Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)”. Moreover, Data were transcribed and coded using the Atlas ti., which is software for analyzing qualitative data with the help of an experienced independent coder, thus themes were recognized and linked with the data

RESULTS

The result is offered based on the themes that developed from the qualitative data: inadequate human service agencies and engaging students in non-academic activities; and they are shown with precise responses from the students for their voices to be heard.

Theme 1: Insufficient Human Service Agencies

In view of the invitation of students to discuss their opinions regarding field practice, a number of the participants recounted mixed feelings in that on being assigned social service agencies, they felt a profound sense of responsibility as they looked forward to drawing experiences from the field but that such cheerful outlook became a sordid tale as some of the agencies declined to accept them as interns. Questioning why agency staffers would agree to receive students for training and then decline to fulfil their obligations, the participants stressed the need for more cooperation based on mutually beneficial understanding. As one of the students purports, *‘while we looked forward to a promising field work training, we had our hopes dashed as we were rejected by the agency we were assigned to do our internships’* Going further, another student adds: *‘I still feel a strong sense of dissatisfaction and pain because most of our colleagues who went to field training at about the same time had already completed their training while we were still waiting to be assigned other agencies’*. Exonerating the field practicum unit of the department, all the participants felt a sense of distrust with human service agencies highlighting that agencies’ administrators need to show a sense of accountability towards students: *‘in all fairness, we cannot blame the department for shortage of human service agencies or, to put it strictly, for the refusal of agencies’ officials to receive us for training because they had earlier indicated interest to train us only for them to suddenly change their mind and refuse us entry’*. Another suggests *‘there should be a very cordial relationship between our*

departmental placement units and of agencies so that when issues like this arise in the future, they will be able to arrange for alternative means thereby relieving students of unnecessary distress and humiliation'

Theme 2: Engaging Students in Non-Academic Activities

The participants specifically spoke of how agencies' supervisors often send them to do non-professional activities. These activities as they remarked border on issues that are not within the confines of field practice training such as case handling, report writing and journaling, and clients' observation. Instead, they pointed out that too often, they are send on errand which impinges their capacity to learn and assimilate the ethos and values of professionalism in social work education. As one of the students puts it, *'the agency supervisor is fond of religiously sending some of us on errand to the point that we spend valuable time meeting his needs instead of working on the purpose of why we were sent to the agency'*. Another student concurs, asserting that, *'how can we have a memorable fieldwork experience when every now and then, the man [agency supervisor] keeps sending us to buy him things from the market and asking some of our colleagues to do school run for him. Sometimes, I wonder if we were there to do serve one supervisor or our clients and community. Left to me, I think we served our supervisor more because I cannot recall having a one-on-one interaction with clients at the agency. In conclusion, all the participants pointed out that, 'our department needs to seriously consider re-strategizing so that the issues we saw and the challenges we experienced will not repeat itself again especially for those coming after we might have graduated'.*

Limitations of the study

The main constraint of this study is relative to the small sample size. Even though unswerving with the guidelines in qualitative research, the sample size restricts the predictions of the overview of the research outcomes. This nevertheless, this study has made an ineradicable impact to the narrow and scarce literature on social work field education in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper is to explore the structure of social work field education through the experience of social work students and the need to earnestly look into the practice methods, in order to improve the quality of field experience. Findings show that social work field education is fraught with irregularities arising from insufficient field agencies to engagement of students in activities not related to their field experience. The findings from the interview concerning inadequate human service agencies are disturbing. This is so not because of the shortage of social service organizations per se but due to the artificial blockade of such agencies that require advance payments as a precondition to offer training to students. Such exploitative behavior is capable of rendering the field practicum training component of social work disempowering and disillusioning to many students who are desirous of learning. Although social work students' actualities of anxiety of disheartening responsibilities, necessitating the use of critical thoughtful skills have been acknowledged in the prevailing literature (Omorogiuwa & Eweka, 2012; Chui, 2010; Nisivoccia, 1990; Romph et al., 1993; Sun, 1999), this finding of inadequate human service agencies and

their exploitative behavior is novel but hardly surprising. This position is highlighted in light of widespread poverty and poor remuneration which, taken together, culminates in official corruption (UNDP, as cited in Amadasun, 2021). This tendency to shift the burden on other groups (in this case, social work students) is a pervasive phenomenon in Nigerian society. The finding highlighting the involvement of social work students in irrelevant assignments reflects a cause for serious concern. This is so in that if, students must live up to their counterparts in other parts of the world, they should be fully grounded on pertinent job specifications in terms of responding to the needs of our clients system. Clients' system as used here includes individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

In the milieu of the broader Nigerian context, this study has made an ineffaceable impact to the field social work as professionals would now play better role to re-appraise their training methods. This will help to ensure that gaps recognized are adjusted to improve the field experience for students' while simultaneously ensuring that social work education in Nigeria live up to its dual standards of quality-driven classroom instruction and field practicum training.

Implications for schools of social work administrators

Based on the findings of this study, suggestions are made to schools of social work administrators and field education coordinators in Nigeria to anticipate the occurrence of such encounters among students during their field practicum.

(1) As core stakeholders in the preparation of the next generation of social workers, departmental administrators should create an avenue to liaise with other social service organizations that are desirous of imparting genuine knowledge on students. Fortunately, virtually all states in Nigeria have an avalanche of statutory and voluntary organizations who are more than willing to thoroughly share their experience with students (Amadasun, 2021). These organizations range from being faith-based to social development oriented and are open to partnership with departments of social work in the country.

(2) Social work administrators in conjunction with social service administrators could work together to create a platform for training and re-training of key staff so that the issue of engaging students in frivolous tasks (which are not helpful to their professional development) are drastically reduced. As administrators and educators, we are skillfully answerable for ensuring that student determines proficiency following their graduation. One way in which such synergy may be concretized is through pre- and post-placement integrative seminars (Omorogiuwa, 2011). By facilitating seminars, involving key faculty members and agency staffs, the issue that associates the discontent of social work students to their field practice experience may become a thing of the past

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study has made some significant findings, contributing immensely to the very limited literature on the field training component of social work education in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general; further research is needed to authenticate the findings for urgent educational policy response among schools of social work in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Amadasun, S. (2021). Is the signature pedagogy still worthwhile? An empirical study of field practice experience among social work students in Nigeria, *Social Work Education*, 40(2), 229-243. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1771300>
- Birkenmaier, J., & Berg-Weger, M. (2007). *The practicum companion for social work: Integrating class and field work*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Birkenmaier, J., Curley, J., & Rowan, N. L. (2012). Knowledge outcomes within rotational models of social work field education. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 55(4), 321-336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2011.625596>
- Bogo, M. (2005). Field instruction in social work: A review of the research literature. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 24(1-2), 163-193. https://doi.org/10.1300/j001v24n01_09
- Bogo, M. (2015). Field education for clinical social work practice: Best practices and contemporary challenges. *Clinical Social Work*, 43(1), 317-324. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615015-0526-5>
- Chui, W. H. (2010). First practice placement: Great expectation and anxiety of a cohort of social work students. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 9(2), 10-32. <https://doi.org/10.1921/146066910X518085>
- Clarke, A. (2005). *Evaluation research: An introduction to principles, methods, and practice*. Sage Publications.
- Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspectives in the research process*. London: Sage Publications, 3rd edition, 10.
- Du Plessis, C. (2011). Fourth-year social work students' experiences relating to their social work practical training at a service-learning center of an open and distance learning university [Unpublished Master's thesis]. University of South Africa. <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/4799>
- Garthwait, C. L. (2008). *The social work practicum: A guide and workbook for students*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Gitterman, A. L. (1989). Field instruction in social work education: Issues, tasks and skills. *Clinical Supervisor*, 7(1), 77-91. https://doi.org/10.1300/J001v07n04_07
- Hofstee, E. (2009). *Constructing a good dissertation: a practical guide to finishing a master's MBA or Ph.D. on schedule*. Epee.
- Homonoff, E. (2008). The heart of social work: Best practitioners rise to challenges in field instruction. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 27(2), 135-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07325220802490828>
- Larrison, T., & Korr, W. (2013). Does social work have a signature pedagogy? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49(2), 194-206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2013.768102>
- Liu, M., Sun, F., & Anderson, S. G. (2013). Challenges in social work field education in China: Lessons from the western experience. *Social Work Education*, 32(2), 179-196. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.723682
- Mynard, M. (1994). Methods, practice and epistemology: The debate about feminism and research. In *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective: Feminist perspectives on the past and present*, M. Maynard and J. Pervis. Oxfordshire; Routledge
- Nisovocchia, D. (1990). Teaching and learning tasks in the beginning phase of field instruction. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 8(1), 7-22. https://doi.org/10.1300/J001v08n01_02
- Omorogiuwa, T. (2011). The place of integrative seminar in social work education: The University of Benin experience. *Knowledge Review: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 23(4), 29-34.
- Omorogiuwa, T.B.E. & Eweka, H.E. (2012). Integrating teaching and practice: Effective teaching-learning methods in social work education. *Bangladesh Education Journal*, 11(2), 53-59.
- Omorogiuwa, T.B.E. (2016). Field education an integral component of social work education: Students' perception of the learning process. *Benue State University Journal of Education*, 16(1), 221-228.

Omorogiuwa, T.B.E. (2021). Overview, principles and objectives of field education, in *social work field education manual: A guide for field experience*. Benin City: Department of Social Work, University of Benin, pp 4-24.

Omorogiuwa, T. (2022). Incorporating spirituality in social work education in Nigeria. *Social work and education*, 9(3), 358-369. <https://doi.org/10.25128/2520-6230.22.3.3>

Reichelt, S., & Skjerve, J. (2000). Supervision of inexperienced therapists: A qualitative analysis. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 19(2), 25–43. https://doi.org/10.1300/J001v19n02_02

Romph, E. L., Royse, D., & Dhooper, S. S. (1993). Anxiety preceding fieldwork: What students worry about. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 7(2), 81–95. https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v07n02_07

Savaya, R., Peleg-Oren, N., Stange, D., & Geron, Y. (2003). Congruence of classroom and field instruction in social work: An empirical study. *Social Work Education*, 22(3), 297–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0261547032000083487>

Shulman, L. S. (2005). Signature pedagogies in the professions. *Dædalus*, 134(3), 52–59. doi:10.1162/0011526054622015

Sun, A. (1999). Issues BSW interns experience in their first semester's practicum. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 18(1), 105–123. https://doi.org/10.1300/J001v18n01_07

Wayne, J., Bogo, M., & Raskin, M. (2010). Field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(3), 327–339. <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2010.200900043>

ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА ВИКЛИКИ У СФЕРІ ПРАКТИЧНОЇ ПІДГОТОВКИ МАЙБУТНІХ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ ПРАЦІВНИКІВ В НІГЕРІЇ

Трейсі ОМОРОГІУВА, доктор наук, старший викладач, завідувач кафедри соціальної роботи, Університет Беніна, Нігерія; trasy.omorogiuwa@uniben.edu

Анотація. Місце соціальної роботи в підвищенні суспільного добробуту не можна відокремити від ролі практичної підготовки майбутніх фахівців із соціальної роботи в системі вищої освіти, яка є важливою частиною навчання за спеціальністю «Соціальна робота». Практична підготовка допомагає студентам отримати інформацію та можливості про те, як вирішувати проблеми на практиці. Враховуючи те, що це важливий елемент навчальної програми з соціальної роботи, практична підготовка має вирішальне значення для результатів здобуття вищої освіти зі спеціальності. Ця стаття має на меті дослідити структуру практичної підготовки студентів зі спеціальності «Соціальна робота» крізь призму необхідності серйозного вивчення практико-зорієнтованих методів з метою формування та підвищення цінності практичного досвіду. Використовуючи дизайн якісного дослідження, було проведено одне фокус-групове інтерв'ю, яке було транскрибовано після отримання дозволу від учасників дослідження. За допомогою тематичного аналізу дані були проаналізовані шляхом розпізнавання, дослідження, встановлення, звітування про теми та фіксування імперативних ідей з огляду на питання дослідження. Отримані результати та сформульовані висновки показують, що практична підготовка майбутніх студентів із спеціальності «Соціальна робота» сповнена порушень, пов'язаних із недостатньою кількістю організацій на місцях для залучення студентів до діяльності, не пов'язаної з їхнім практичним досвідом. Незважаючи на те, що вибірку становили студенти одного великого університету, це дослідження дає підстави для висновку, що основні зацікавлені сторони/адміністрація відділів повинні співпрацювати з соціальними службами задля того, щоб створити платформу для навчання та перепідготовки свого основного персоналу задля забезпечення ефективного практичного досвіду для студентів. Проведене дослідження є цікавим для адміністрації відділів, які прагнуть покращити якість практичної підготовки студентів.

Ключові слова: практична підготовка; практикум; виклики; соціальна робота.

Статус статті:

Отримано: січень 07, 2023

1-шерезування: січень 17, 2023

Прийнято: березень 30, 2023