

Social Work Students' Reflection of their Field Internship: A Study of Dhofar Region in Oman

Reem Abdulmotaleb Abuiyada

Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts and Applied Sciences, Dhofar University,
Salalah, Oman.

Correspondence: Reem Abdulmotaleb Abuiyada, College of Arts and Applied Sciences,
Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman. P.O. Box: 2509 Code: 211 Tel: 968-98551462.

E-mail: reem@du.edu.om

ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to review the pursuance of social-work field practice run by the department of social work, Dhofar University situated in Dhofar region, Sultanate of Oman. It assesses the Students' engagement in social work in local community training that equip them to practice their allocated tasks and management skills that in turn made them more educated in fieldwork concepts, and especially in helping to overcome the challenges experienced by the Omani community to bring them positive changes. Besides, this paper evaluates the efficacy of fieldwork practice from the students' standpoints in higher education. And, it assumes the fact that this practice helped the students in giving equal significance to academic instruction, preparing for them to face the futuristic professions in an effective way.

Key Words: Social Work Field Training, Students, Dhofar University, Oman, Education

Introduction

KINDNESS, as per Plato, is more than deeds. It is boldness, manifestation, appearance. It is whatever thing that boosts another individual.

Well, the social work practice also applies greatly to the above quote in however a shy valiance. Students adopt various paths of career after graduation and it is imperative, maybe, to guide them through their learning process towards professional growth.

Individuals are connected as a community within field work practice, an advantage, and students can explore or discover so as to build their proficiency with similar interests while trying to enhance professional encroachment (Wenger et al., 2002).

An experience of fieldwork practice could be used as one of the learning schemes in fostering students' professional growth. This involves engaging in learning internally and externally. (Wenger, 1998).

Social work is outstandingly an international profession; correspondingly, its education holds both theoretical and practical mechanisms in an international custom. It encompasses classroom-taught theoretical components and academic aspects added to practice-based or field-based education that boosts integration. Fieldwork experience has a vital role in the curricula of social work schools around the world and in building the skills and competencies of social workers in numerous ways (Schmidt & Rautenbach, 2016).

Social work students transfer from class-based learning to experiential learning during fieldwork training, marking their doorway into the world of the profession and the demands of learning through practice. The significance of field experience in shaping social work students is supreme, and cannot be repudiated.

Involving social work students in local community training facilitates their practice of allocated jobs and leadership skills, that acquainted them with knowledge in fieldwork concepts (Lam, 2004). Leadership is defined as great tool that inculcates a binding commitment among community members so that they keenly get involved in advancement of all (Weil, 2008). Jarman-Rohde, McFall, Kolar and Strom (2014) have also reiterated the urge for social work education and practice to nurture leadership skills and sense of engagement to stimulate workable public progress.

This study evaluates the execution of social field-work practice, being used by the social work department in Dhofar University, (DU), in Dhofar Region in the Sultanate of Oman. The study sheds more light on the Bachelor of Social Work students although DU offers under-graduate and post-graduate degree in the subject.

The study also provides prospects for students to reflect their own experience during the placement, based on the grounds that are likely to pave the way for granting more knowledge on the subject. It also aids the students to provide equal importance towards the educational instruction. It's important to note that to bridge the gap in literature, this research assesses the effectiveness of fieldwork practice from the students' perspective in higher education.

Professional development as a social worker

According to Jordan (2000), various notions and ideas about social work in regards to the achievement reasonably explain the gap between the expectation and accomplishment factors of the workers within the restrictions of the institution locale where they work.

Regardless of these different views, there is fairly a comprehensive agreement that social work is committed to rights as well as justice, and that it exists to back and maintain the people suffering from adverse effects of social differences. Furthermore, social work profession fuels problem-solving in human relationships and society. It also stimulates enablement and emancipation of people to improve prosperity. According to Monreiro (2016), social work is utilized in social incorporation: 'the function of social work is to preserve constancy and uphold the rights and prospects for the people in an unplanned, unrestrained community ready to stretch for achievement'.

Social work plays an important role even in dealing with failures in other social policy domains such as crime, health and education, their role had a huge impact through changes on the social context (Jarman-Rohde al.et., 2014). On the basis of a secular.

Euro-centric worldview, social work knowledge as well as skills are socially constructed, in the early twentieth century, Professional social work was initiated in the Western world (Graham, 2005). Thus, social work is a European and North American game, with their socio cultural context.

Moreover, as this work professionalism got internationalized, its localization has gained more ground worldwide (Barise, 2003). Plus, as more and more models of social work emphasizes the importance of understanding clients' view for effective social work, integration and spirituality in social work is progressively being indispensable. As Barise (2003) puts it, 'as holistic, empowerment-focused, and culturally appropriate approaches to social work practice becomes more a critical profession skill'. However, since Islam is a complete way of life, spirituality is viewed in Islam as uniquely comprehensive (Barise, 2004). Similarity, there are arguments for localizing social work within domestic cultural context as well as link certain aspects of Muslim basis to social work (Barise, 2003). The religious preaching poise the individuals to helping others in term of responsibility, accountability and meeting of necessities.

Agreeing to precepts, the sustainability of a Muslim community depends on the reciprocated interdependence between the different adherents. Thus, the role of Muslim family goes as far as to the provision of a healthy environment based on accord, positive emotions and equality in all the more deific values (Al-Krenawi, 2003).

The Islamic values of household bonds, community sustenance, and spiritually-based methods of resolving social problems are all lessening with today's life style (Barise, 2003). The extended family is getting attenuated and the number of small nuclear families is snowballing (Barise, 2004). This explains the diminishing support from some Omani family members that they used to receive before, is missing. Social problems and isolation would rise as outcomes

because of the decline in the number of brothers and sisters, unavailability of grandparents and the degree of kinship. Compared to the mainstream social work methods, it stands to reason that Muslims could be more positive to a Muslim-based social work approach. Cooperation between the client and the social worker is significant for any kind of social work approach to be successful.

Development of Social Work in Oman

Social Work profession is at its initial stages of development in Oman. There are only two universities in Oman which train social workers; that is, The sultan Qaboos University and Dhofar University. The few social workers in the profession have trained either in Europe, USA or other parts of the Middle East like Egypt or Jordan (Al-Krenawi, 2003; Wafa, 2005). It is in this light, that the study explores the experiences of some of the Dhofar University students training to be social workers. To improve the responses to the rapid challenges faced by the community and to promote positive social changes in Oman, there has been an increasing concentration on professional social work.

Field Training for Undergraduate Social Work Students at Dhofar University

Dhofar University offers two levels of field training for social work students. Level one is offered for the students in second year of study, focusing on working with individual cases and some social activities. Level two also functions in a similar way to the level one but with added tasks on working with groups and communities. It is important that the activities done by the social workers during their practical placement remain aligned with the local needs. Accordingly, students are required to present a case- study findings during their training (Parker, 2007).

There are four forms of practical placements: concurrent, block, a blend of concurrent and block, and in-service placements (Hepworth and Larsen, 2002). Block fieldwork placement is a non-stop whole time engagement of a social work student, whose placement duration ranges between one month to one year depending on the institution. The concurrent placement occurs simultaneously with other courses. On the contrary, when the practice is considered as a part of in-service training, they are called as inservice placements.

However, DU uses the method of concurrent placement, which usually occurs at the second year and the fourth year levels. The students are occupied in both the classroom learning and fieldwork placement. The students who got registered for this practical placement are required to complete 127 field training hours over a period of one academic semester (Four months) with two days per week in the field placement and the remaining three days of the week in classes. The instant application of theory learnt in the practical classes becomes the big advantage of fieldwork placement.

The department assigns academic supervisor to be responsible for teaching, providing field training and follow the student in the field (Holtz-Deal, 2006). At the beginning of the semester, the academic supervisor conducts a meeting with the whole students to identify the agencies where they will have the field training. In this meeting, each student received a copy of the

fieldwork manual, which provides valuable reference material for students. The fieldwork manuals are also provided to the agency supervisors to enable them to appreciate expectations of their roles (Horrock and Smaby, 2010). Training plan is also discussed with time-period and probable goals to be achieved in each phase. The academic supervisor needs to contact the agencies to assign supervisor to teach and train the students (Garthwait, 2008).

The students are required to prepare their profile folder where they can document their work with presenting evidence (Hay and O'Donoghue, 2009).

Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies got the placement of students who include "flexibility" in the standards to choose field-work agencies. However, the major priority is owed to those with great potential for provision of learning. In the area of study (Oman), all the agencies are keen in taking students on placement which makes the job initiation works easier. According to Royse et al (2007:5), the fieldwork that occurs in locales must fortify students in "identification with the purposes, core values, and ethics of the profession and foster the integration of empirical and practical- based knowledge and promote the growth and wellbeing of professional competency".

Literature Review

In a study of situation education, the concept of Communities of Practice was initially settled by Lave and Wenger (1991). He argued that Communities of Practice that they define as a "system of association among people, activities and the world: emerging over time, and in relation to other peripheral and coinciding communities of practice" is an essential condition of the presence of knowledge. Brown and Duguid (1998), drawing on the work of Orr (1990) among others, have further developed the methodology. The association of Practice approach centers the social interaction scopes of situated learning (Ebue and Agwu, 2017).

Spitzer, Holden, Cuzzi, Rutter and Rosenberg (2001: 79) cites that the training plays a vital role in modeling professional culture of social work as long as preliminary opportunities involve the student working in applied use of newly assimilated expertise, aptitude and capacities.

To enhance the students to have a better agreement with future practice challenges, Eleni (2014) highlights about the confidence that can arise as an outcome of insightful practice.

The creation of the above-mentioned practice can be a powerful tool for educators and administrators in institutions of education as it provides a forum for students to meet their learning needs and professional development (Wenger et al., 2002)

According to Bogo (2015) fieldwork practice eases the socialization of students in to the professional culture.

Recognizing negative emotions such as anxiety by using reflections can stimulate a stronger relationship between the instructors and the students (Mckee, Muskat and Perlman, 2015). Through a thorough focus on Individual beliefs, values, merits and demerits, some disturbing events and the self-discovery reflected in student reflection logs during practical helped the learning process. (Jarman-Rohde al.et., 2014).

Fieldwork practice grants a golden chance for students to connect theory and practice. (Kirke et al., 2007: 15). It is contributory in developing students' professional behavior thereby sculpting them into profession roles. It serves as an essential link from classroom to service delivery locales. (Kirke et al., 2007: 15).

Hicks and Swain (2007: 69) accentuates that the training is a prime component of professional education where the incorporation of theoretical concepts into authentic client situations and profile-raising to the core values of the profession befalls.

This field work training is demarcated here as education that looks forward to teach or train under graduate and post graduate students with reliable policy systems that could be distinct in study as 'efforts to change policies in judicial, agency and community settings, whether by launching new policies or refining the existing ones' (Jansson, 2014, P.14).

Thus, social work field training is marching ahead in progress to a more noticeable role in social work education (Healy,2008). Wrenn and Wrenn (2009) state that one of the important goals of fieldwork training is to apply and use the learned skills and theories to enhance classroom learning.

In a nutshell, upon a clear review and examination, the social work educators are progressively occupied with the query of how to edify students to engage in field work training as part of their professional undertaking every day. (Teater, 2014).

Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of some of the Dhofar University social work undergraduate students training as social workers. The following are the questions that guided this study:

1. How did the social work students' experiences during practical placement impact their learning and professional development?
2. Is there any perceived academic link to professional growth for the social work students through their experiences of practical placement?
3. Are there any challenges that the students have during their practical placement?

This study used a qualitative approach for the reason that the "data needed was descriptive and exploratory. However, information was required from those who thought to have had the required information" (Hofstee, 2009:132). Using a qualitative approach could answer as when, how and why questions rather than an approach which assumes the existence of an objective reality and where a more standardized, quantified approach could be valid (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) further emphasizes the importance of individual interaction and experiences.

The learning made use of resolute sampling to gather data. The fixed sampling can be used in studies interested in procuring opulent features: the researcher hand-pick participants who can decisively share information relating to the research topic (Strydom & Delpert, 2013). To aid discussions, a semi-structured interview schedule was used. Individual interview was

conducted by the students wherein open-ended questions were asked in regards to the core components of practical placement as identified by Bogo (2015) that facilitate participants to share what they revealed in and the challenges they faced during field practice. Hofstede (2009) notes that a few open-ended questions, asked in a comfortable atmosphere, are effective in building rapport. Stenback (2001) also support the use of such questions in order to warrant an authentic thoughtfulness of participants' involvements. They also assure about the precision in qualitative research time and again has more to do with legitimacy than dependability.

The code of ethics was embraced for the purpose of this study. All the partakers were provided with the details with an overview of the study. And, the prospect to ask questions, were also provided. As females are more depending on their families compared to the male siblings, Oman is considered as traditional society. Sometimes, this Gender sensitivity affects their freedom and self-confidence.

Participants

The data were drawn from a sample of twenty undergraduate social worker students who belonged to social training. The students who took part in the study had completed their practical placements spending a full semester (two days weekly) at either a local agency or at school in the Dhofar region of Oman. As more than 98% of social work students are female, there were nineteen female students and one male student including in this study. Their ages ranged from 21 to 24 years. The participants were social work students for academic year 2020-2021.

Data collection and analysis

A combination of interviews and observation constitute the raw data for this study. During observation process, the researcher is on the spot and witness actual behavior rather than relying on peoples' account of experiences (Cohen et al, 2007; Morris, 2005). For the interviews, the researcher organized meeting with students and a meeting time was scheduled for each of the twenty students. Each student was interviewed individually after signing a consent form. Beginning interview, students were informed of the procedures such as; time and purpose. In addition, the researcher observed the twenty students while on practical placement at local agencies and at different schools, using a structured observation protocol.

To build rapport, the researcher began asking questions which further made the participants relaxed and able to speak more freely (Flick, 2019).

A tape recorder was used after gaining consent of the participants, the data was then transcribed by the researcher and analyzed, comparing categories to arrive at common themes. Sorting and more categorization refined the themes which was re-checked and analyses to increase validity of the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). On ethical issues, confidentiality and anonymity was assured to the participants and any questions would not be attributed to individuals. To avoid trickery, the researcher explained to the students the nature and reasons of the study (Cohen et al., 2007).

Findings

The objective of this study was to gauge the effectiveness and challenges in the practical placement from the standpoints of Dhofar University social work students. The basic view of this study portrayed that the theory and fieldwork are equally important for undergraduate social work students. The results will be presented instantaneously in the sub-sections below followed by the discussion.

Participation in Practice

The students have different feeling when they come to practice and joining the placement, when asked about the experience during practical placement,

One female student reported,

“On the first day of joining the work placement, I was so worried about how to work with people directly and by the time, I realize that experience during work placement is great! It is after that practical work of joining communities outside the university such as schools and working with people, that one feels the real sense of being a social worker”.

One male student reported,

“By the time of joining the work placement, I began to think of myself as a social worker towards my people and my community in a sincere and serious way”

Other student shared her change of knowledge and transfer beyond the classroom to professional lives during the attachment at center of physically-impaired,

“For the whole three months I spent at the center, I felt not only as part of that community but also, a family member. I was able to closely relate and identify with people of different impairments and emotionally, I was always with them in supporting. I remember one of the young girls, just called me “aunty”. When I was at home over the weekend, I felt like something in my life was missing, and many times I told my parents and my sisters of my daily experiences in the center. It is after practice that I surely felt I chose the correct career of being a social worker”.

The previous student’s comments illustrated how a sense of belonging and identity further emphasizes a link between publics and professional practice.

The linking of rehearsal and identity is one of the most powerful aspects of association of practice where relationship to learning is emphasized (McDonald and Cater-Steel, 2017).

Use of University academic supervisors during practical placement

The students voiced out an assortment of estimations with regards to the practical placement, and they indicated about vast learning and values of the experience. The immense support from the agencies and the university, abundantly serve as a great métier of the student’s field training.

Below are the quotes that highlight the social work students' insights on the part of the academic supervisor:

“The university supervisor comes during the placement at least once a week to support us, and that these visits helped in every situation that came in and increased our confidence.”

“My Academic supervisor was dedicated and ready to assist. She gave a comprehensive feedback”

Assigning university academic supervisor to all social work students was identified by the students and the agency supervisors as a major strength. They also pointed out about the supervisors' ensuring that the students applied what they learned on ethics as well as values of such practices.

One of the important issues that was raised by the students regarding the benefits of the academic supervisor is conducting field instruction seminars by the academic supervisor. One student reported,

“Through field instruction seminars, I got wholesome support from the supervisor and also she assists me in resolving all the problems that I faced during my practical placement. It was also a good opportunity to exchange what I have learned from the field with other students in different field agencies”.

To share any learning, challenges or encountered issues and concerns, field seminars assist in bringing students from different settings. (Bushfield, 2005, Garthwait, 2008:14). seminars are used to help in preparing students for placement, help with theory and integrating it with their placement work, and to promote inter-group support.

Support of agencies and agency field instructors

The Agency supervisor is a very important partner in the social workers training. With continuous support, they help the students to practice what they learn in the classroom into the field, provide them with support, discussion, feedback and a selection of learning experiences. The following are the specification given by some of the social work students on the role of the supervisor:

“At the agency they gave us appropriate orientation and explain everything that helped us a lot”

“At the first few days joining the agency, I felt anxious because I do not know what to do. With a planning ahead for four months by the agency, I became to know what is expected from me and I have learnt that when you plan well, you have a good production...”

The learning experience from practical placement

The study highlighted that the engagement of students of social work in practical placement within their local community fortifies connection between them and their society, and mature

a better sympathy with people's needs. According to the students' experiences, being in field practical placement helped them to build their leadership skills and encourages them to be dynamic member of constructive social adjustment.

Once field work was over, a group of students sustained their involvement in their community. Below are some highlights of students' views of their experience:

“There are poor people need financial help and because we do not have time to do it in training, we will follow this up with our local agencies.

Working directly with local community built my confidence and allow me to improve my communication skills taking into account the practical realities of interaction with individuals, groups and communities is important. I learned a lot about my community and my culture. I also learned about myself which before I do not know.

Discussions with my local people were extremely accommodating in showing sympathy understanding views of our society and determining how to react to everyone's needs”.

Considering the values and ethics of social work, the students were able to use the leadership as well as communication skills even with their limited experience in practice. This practice placement would help them prepare for their future professional careers efficiently (Chowa and Ansong, 2010). Social work student commented:

“When studying social work, we learnt about applying principles, value and ethics of social work when we work with clients. During my practical placement, the principles of how it is important to accept them were recalled, and the day was truly enjoyed and I felt extremely happy”.

The students were able to value teamwork and to cooperate with others. For example, the social work students participated in a local event organized by the agency expertise team who are working with disabled children. Social work student stated:

“Before engaging in the field training, I do not know what team work truly means but realized it today when helping other students to do their tasks and I felt so proud”.

Gender issues

As more than 98% of the students studying social work are females, their gender values were highlighted and that reflected gender issues and generation gap. Fieldwork practice allowed the students to learn about their gender roles, statuses and relationship with their own society's values (Chowa and Ansong, 2010). It is important for the women to be involved in the community development as they can play an effective role. In a country like Oman, the women are weakly participating in the public sphere due to socio-cultural norm. It is vivacious to have norms and traditions as strategic markers that define women's roles in private and public spheres alike within the community. Fieldwork practice was a good and positive experience for female students as first time for them to depend on themselves away from the family. Female social work student shared her experience:

“This is the first time for us to meet people without our family, I felt nervous and I was uncomfortable but we support each as a group. I liked that a female can have an impact on the life of others; they respect my views; Great!”.

“It never occurred to me that I would discuss serious issues with people outside my parlance. I feel much more poised practicing social work which will help me in my future career”.

Challenges

Students take on the practical component of their work, a set of principles, qualms and assertiveness. They report that in order to fulfil field training, requirements seem to have great challenges. The following are some of the social work students’ challenges.

Stress

Stress among students during their fieldwork training is neither surprising nor new. Students feel stressed when role and expectations are not well outlined. It also exists when relationship suffer some difficulties between students and supervisor. Absence of integration between theory and practice is another challenge to add. (Bogo & Raskin, 2006).

Theory and Practice Integration

As to integration between theory and practice, students sounded clueless. The researcher believes that in the heat of practical work, students turn a blind eye to theory. Work place is one more challenge to mention here. One of the female social work students commented:

“I feel that I am acting instinctively rather than from acquired knowledge base”

According to Panos, Cox, Roby & Matheson (2002), field work practice helps the students incorporate classroom theoretical concepts into actual situation within agency setting. In support of that Lewis (2007) confirmed that field practice offers a chance for students to unite theoretical education and field work practice together.

Also, when asked the students about opinions on what might be a hindrance for the application of theory into practice, one of the students said:

“... under the pressure of the work load assigned as a part of the fieldwork training, are we expected to do the right job? Our focus is the university requirements.”

Other factors that were pointed out as interference were the absence of resources, such as office space, no supervision due to meetings and workshops.

There was also a warning that agencies where social work students are placed is also a contributor; one of the students commented as

“The agency supervisor was using only one method of social work, case work, ignoring other methods of social work such as group work and community work”.

Students have different feelings as to sufficient supervision they get within their placement. According to them that was explained to the lack of supervisory skills and high case load of supervision. Demotivation or lack of motives, among social work students to learn was also highlighted as one of the obstacles on the way to the amalgamation of learning into practice.

Assessment process

Some students expressed concern regarding university absence from the score that was given by the agency supervisor. Students also indicated that the assessment by the agency need to be shared by the university and the agency supervisor. Students also said they didn't receive regular or any form of feedback with regards to work being done during their placements and they do not know about the assessment process. One of the students remarked

“We didn't have regular feedback from the agency supervisor; she sent her feedback to the university supervisor instead”

The researcher observed that students have objectionable attitudes towards assessment for non-clarity or account of what is being assessed, methods of assessment and involvement in the process.

Lack of Updating of the Agency Supervisor with the Latest Information

The students felt that the agency-based are not updating their information for not understanding theories and knowledge that the students bring into supervision. Respondents also said agency-based supervisors do not work on their development themselves or further their studies in social work. The researcher believes that, since the respondents feel that agency-based supervisors are not in line with the present progresses, regarding social work curriculum, and lack of aspiration to have a cultivated career in social work might put social work students in a position where they will not get quality supervision and training. A student reported

“... sometimes, the agency supervisor didn't sound familiar with our core theoretical knowledge”.

This is also established by Holtz -Deal and Clements (2006:291), when they highlighted that social work experts, in social work fieldwork practice, keep high mention of fieldwork supervisors, particularly in learning theories, as a major gap. The majority of agency- based supervisors are not on par with the current social work curriculum and knowledge.

According to Holtz Deal and Clements (2006:291), agency-based supervisors provide social work with the most nonstop individualized educational experience of their social work education. Social work experts in field education continue to mention training for field instructors, as a major gap in the learning theory.

Discussion

As you are aware, each institution is unique as regards to prevalent circumstances and conditions. The most effective form of fieldwork that warranties development and uplift for the students must be the benchmark to settle for.

The findings highlighted the importance of field work placement for the social work students to prepare themselves well for their effective professional practice. They felt empowered and enhanced their self-esteem, awareness and feeling of satisfaction (Hay & O'Donoghue, 2009) able to develop methods of interposition that addressed related local community specific related issues.

An important aspect of the data collected in this study demonstrated that the social work students during fieldwork practice shared common goals and purpose of academic success. Few developed emotional attachments with their clients and were in good position to share their feelings. The respondents supported each other emotionally and academically and information and experience was passed from one student to another.

The majority of the students indicated that the academic supervisor played a significant role to make their fieldwork successful through their evaluation appointments. Apparently, it is tough enough to accomplish the objectives and provide qualitative learning, without any guide or program.

The data showed positive interaction between DU and fieldwork agencies. The study found that the agencies provided the agency supervisors with regular training in order to capacitate and empower them to perform their roles effectively. Parker (2007) observes, "Learning, for a student in placement, does not just happen; it takes struggle and preparation by student and practice teacher". For a better performance in quality learning, sufficient provision of training materials, hand books, booklets or manuals would be advisable and guiding.

This study displayed that the students did not sustain the co-existing model where academic requirements were intensive during the time of fieldwork, as this makes a distractor on the work required by the agency. Also, the students preferred the use of the block model of field instruction in order to focus on meeting agencies and field's requirements minus the pressure of academic work.

It is apparent that there are both merits and demerits in both the placement methods at the undergraduate levels. Considering the training location and learning needs of the students in to main account is of prime. Students, after qualification will be able to function in any kinds of social work environment because of their fruitful experiences in the placement trainings.

Some of the students were of the view that three months of fieldwork was rather short, preferred longer placements that enabled them to pursue the fieldwork objectives to the end. However, the students needed more time to absorb and to adapt to the new situation.

Study also suggested the need for extensive and lengthy block fieldwork program duration for the students in order to upgrade and consolidate their skills. As per CWSE (The Council on Social Work Education), the undergraduate students must do fieldwork for a minimum of 400 contact hours, which interprets 3 months and that requirement is completely adhered by DU.

It is found that the need for block fieldwork would be sensible for students to fuse their skills. If one is to use The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) standard to measure the adequacy of the duration of fieldwork, then clearly, DU meets this requirement.

It is understandable that some female students experienced anxiety as they came from traditionalist families where females are over-protected by family members and this is the first time for them to have direct contact with people away from their families. However, gender barriers were reduced because students got support from the academic and the agency supervisors in addition to support and empower each other (Lam, 2004). Gender issues as key factors of community development need to be considered in future social work practice in Oman.

Conclusion

This paper, based on the Qualitative results, concludes that there are both advantages and disadvantages in the social work practices held by Dhofar university students during the suggested period in the Field-Center. It is greatly positive to note about the obvious advantages of both concurrent and block placements through which students get diverse experiences to work in any social work setting when they qualify. It is obvious from the students' report that they preferred the use of the block model of field instruction so that the students would be able to focus on meeting agency and field requirements without academic pressure. The need for block fieldwork would be sensible for students to amalgamate their skills. Finally, this paper, in concise, concludes about the challenges and the importance of fieldwork placement for the social work students in preparing them for effective professional practice. The team spirit, empathy, raise in self-esteem level, awareness, feeling of satisfaction, selfconfidence boost, are all the best and positive outcomes of the Social Field work practices that are practiced by the Omani Students of Dhofar University.

Recommendations

Build and maintain good and strong partnership between the university with agency and agency supervisors, a part of university field instruction program. A partnership implies working with others and having systematic communication through orientation meeting, regular visit or telephonic contact. This would greatly improve the quality of work for all. The students should receive ongoing feedback, guidance and suggestions throughout the placement. Assessment of the students should take in all parties to warrant a fair and truthful assessment. Offer formal, structured ongoing training for the agency supervisors, this will help them to develop their profession and being update with the latest information of social work curriculum.

REFERENCES

- Al-Krenawi, A. (2003). Principles of social work practice in the Muslim Arab World. *Arab Studies Quarterly*.
- Barise, A. (2004). Islamic perspective in social work: towards a practice model, paper presented at the 32nd Biennial Conference of the International Association of Schools of Social Work, Adelaide, Australia.
- Barise, A. (2003 b). Towards indigenization of social work in the UAE. Proceeding of the international conference on advancing indigenous social work. Kuching, Malaysia, University Malaysia Sarawak.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research*, (3): 77-101.
- Birkenmaier, J. & Berg-Weger, M. (2007). *The practicum companion for social work: Integrated class and field work*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon
- Bogo, M. (2015). Field education for clinical social work practice: Best practices and contemporary challenges. *Clinical Social Work*, (43):317-324.
- Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P. (1998). Organizing knowledge. *California Management Review*, 40 (3): 9-11.
- Bushfield, S. (2005). Field clusters online. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 23(3-4):215-227.
- Chowa G. and Ansong D. (2010). Student-directed projects: An international case Study for social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(2):285-91.
- Cohen, L. et al (2007). *Research methods in education*. London. New York. Routledge-Falmer.
- Cleak, H. & Smith, D. (2012). Student satisfaction with models of field placement supervision. *Australian Social Work*, 65(2):243-258.
- Ebue, M. & Agwu, P.C. (2017). Synergizing perspectives in social work: Blending critical theory and solution-focused model. *International Journal of Contemporary Research and Review*, 8 (9), 20263 -20270.
- Eleni, P. (2014). Field learning in social work education: Implications for educators and instructors. *Simmons School of Social Work*, 4(2):1-15.
- Flick, U. (2019). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Six edition. SAGE Publication Ltd.
- Garthwait, C.L. (2008). *The social work practicum. A guide and work book for students*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Graham, J. R. (2005). Social welfare (Canada) before the marsh report. In Herrick, J., & Stuart, P. *Encyclopedia of social welfare history in North America*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hay, K., & O'Donoghue, K. (2009). Assessing social work field education: Towards standardizing fieldwork assessment in New Zealand. *Social Work Education*, 28 (1): 42-53.
- Hepworth, D.H, Rooney, R. and Larsen, J.A. (2002). *Direct social work practice: Theory and Skills*. U.S.A., Brooks/Cole.
- Healy, L. (2008). *International social work: Professional action in an independence world*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press.
- Hicks, H., and Swain, P., (2007). Direct, facilities, enable the juxtaposition of the duty of care and the duty of disclosure in social work field education. *Social Work Education*, 26(1): 69-85.
- Hofstee, E. (2009). *Constructing a good dissertation: A practical guide to finishing a master's MBA or PhD on schedule*. South Africa: EPE.

- Holtz-Deal, K. & Clements, J. A. (2006). Supervising students developmentally: Evaluating a seminar for New Field Instructors. *Social work education*, 42 (2):291 – 306.
- Horrocks, s. and Smaby, M, H. (2010). The supervisory relationship: Its impact on trainee personal and skills development. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 38, 173-176.
- Jansson, B. (2014). *Becoming an effective policy advocate: From policy practice to social justice*. 6th edition, Cengage Learning.
- Jarman-Rohde L., McFall J., Kolar P., Strom G. (2014). The changing context of social work practice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33(1):29–46.
- Jordan, B. (2000.) *Social work and the third way: Through love and social policy*. London: Sage.
- Kirke, P., Layton, N., and Sim, J. (2007). Informing fieldwork design: Key elements to quality in fieldwork education for undergraduate occupational therapy students. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 54(S1): S13-S22.
- Royse, D., Dhooper, S. and Rompf, E. (2007). *Field instruction: A guide for social work students*. Boston, Pearson Educational Inc.
- Lam D. (2004). Problem-based learning: An integration of theory and field. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 40(3):371–89.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- McDonald, J., & Cater-Steel, A. (2017). *Communities of practice: Facilitating social learning in higher education*. Springer, Singapore.
- Mckee, E., Muskat, T. & Perlman, I. (2015). Students today, educators tomorrow: Shaping the social work curriculum to enhance field education. *Field Educator: Practice Digest*, (5.2):1-6.
- Monteiro, M. (2016). The need and importance of field practicum for social work students. *International Journal of Engineering Research and Modern Education (IJERME)*, 1(1) 292-297.
- Morris, T. (2005). *Social work research methods: Four alternatives paradigms*. London: Sage.
- Parker, J. (2007). Developing effective practice learning for tomorrow's social workers. *Social Work Education*, 26 (8)763-779.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Schmidt, K., & Rautenbach, J. V. (2016). Field instruction: Is the heart of social work education still beating in the eastern cape? *Social Work*, 52(4): 589-610.
- Spitzer,W., Holden,G., Cuzzi, L., Rosenbery, G., (2001). Edith Abbott was right: designing fieldwork experiences for contemporary health care practice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 37(1): 79-90.
- Stenbacka, C. (2001). Qualitative research requires quality concepts of its own. *Management Decision*. (39): 551-555.
- Strydom, H. & Delpont, C.S.L. (2013). Sampling and pilot study in qualitative research. In: De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Tanga, P.T. (2012). The challenges of social work field training in Lesotho. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 10(1):1-22.
- Teater, B. (2014). *An introduction to applying social work theories and methods*. Open University Press. Milton Keynes, United Kingdom.

- Wafa, A. (2005). Beacon of light. Oman Tribune. Oman
- Weil M. (2008). Introduction: Models of community practice in action. *Journal of Community Practice*. 4(1):1–9.
- Wenger, E., (1998). *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., and Snyder, W, M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Wrenn, J., and Wrenn, B. (2009). Enhancing learning by integrating theory and practice. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 21(2): 258-265.