Scholars' Journal

ISSN: 2645-8381

DOI: https://doi.org/10.3126/scholars.v6i1.69995
Published by Scholars' Association of Nepal
A Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed, Open Access Journal

Ethical Challenges Faced by Social Work Trainee During Fieldwork Practice: Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

Fieldwork practice is included and explained in social work education to develop and expand the social work profession. The most important aspect of the fieldwork practice for producing competent, effective, and ethical social workers is fieldwork discipline. The main objective of this study is to seek the ethical challenges for social work students in fieldwork practice the social work discipline in the context of Nepal. The theoretical portion of social work discipline is instructing in the classroom, and field-based practice combines the academic and practical components. The cornerstone of social work education is the fieldwork practicum; it currently faces various ethical challenges, including relying on different methodologies, methods, and tactics. For the study, descriptive qualitative research design was used, and secondary sources of data like journal articles, books, and reports were used in the research. Content analysis was used to draw the themes and results, primary theme investigated the ethical challenges faced by the fieldwork practice social work education in Nepal. To discuss the findings, content analysis on the themes was employed. By applying a relational ethics framework, the research can comprehensively investigate the moral dilemmas that social work candidates confront, considering the impact of relationships and contextual elements on moral judgment. This perspective offers a solid framework for examining and resolving ethical issues in fieldwork practice, consistent with the social work profession's emphasis on the value of relationships.

Keywords: Fieldwork practice, profession, social worker, trainee

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Introduction

Social workers assist persons who are facing mental, physical, or emotional distress as well as social disruptions in an individual, family, group, or community people. It is a practice-based field of social work that supports community and individual empowerment as well as social development and cohesiveness. Understanding human growth and behavior, as well as the institutions and interactions of the social, economic, and cultural spheres, is essential to social work practice. Social workers must adhere to ethical norms because of the vulnerable nature of their clients and the extremely private nature of the counseling they conduct. They have to provide the necessary care for their clients. Social workers face ethical challenges while working with clients who have varied personal beliefs impacted by beliefs, cultural norms, and morality. Fieldwork is an essential portion of social work discipline. Generally, fieldwork has been regarded by the social work profession as the main way to give students the chance to gain valuable knowledge and skills. Fieldwork is the process by which social work knowledge, values, and other disciplines related to social work are applied to the fields of social service welfare and sustainable development.

Social work discipline in a global context aims at developing a universal perspective in social work education and teamwork in instruction and study (Woli, 2024). It is a practice-based profession that supports community empowerment, social development, and social change, demanding base professional discipline that places the best on interpersonal communication skills, abilities, and the capacity to engage with a diverse population within organizations and in the form of clients (Woli, 2023). It is a relatively new field of study that focuses on scientifically diagnosing and treating psychological concerns. Commonly known as fieldwork, it provides the trainee with the experiential substance for their academic program (Goossen & Austin, 2016). Fieldwork practice is an important part of social work discipline because it allows trainees to gain experience in direct practice(Lam et al., 2007), their professional identities, and understand how social agencies function under the supervision of more experienced social workers (Wong & Pearson, 2010). The fieldwork discipline of social workers faces numerous challenges, which have an effect on fieldwork practice for trainees(Crisp & Hosken, 2016). Fieldwork practice known as a practicum, professional experience, internship, or clinical placement, is any practical work, instruction, study, or research activity required by the curriculum instruction education providers as a requirement for a course(Koh & Divaharan, 2011). Fieldwork enables trainees to learn by directly implementing their upcoming professional roles in actual workplace settings(Fuller et al., 2005). It prepares trainees for active and effective participation in the workforce, the community, and practice settings. Fieldwork practice is one of the key components of social work education and a significant determinant of the standard of social work education(Carpenter, 2011). Fieldwork is overseen by Scholars' Journal, Volume 6, December 2023, 68-83

supervisors who are not academic employees and who are frequently not consulted by the university when developing courses and conducting grant programs (Petrila et al., 2015). The ideal environment for fieldwork trainee to incorporate their academic and classroom learning into the development of their rapidly expanding professional skill set has long been thought to be fieldwork practice. Field placements, also known as internships, are strengthened when what is learned in the classroom can be put into practice right away (Graham, 2006). As a result, when it comes to fostering professional skills, instruction them, and drawing connections between theory and practice, field supervisors are frequently absent on their own. Lack of human and material resources is a problem for fieldwork practice in social work discipline but demands for service delivery rise as a result of major social issues like these: poverty, resources (economic and human), abuse (physical and sexual), violence, torture, and illness, these issues occur in complicated contexts where cultural sensitivity is essential (Osei-Hwedie et al., 2007).

Fieldwork practice is influenced by the various factors mentioned, and trainees are placed in fieldwork settings according to their availability and suitability for trainees' learning needs(Beytell, 2014). Fieldwork trainees have to plan carefully to benefit from fieldwork placements (Ogden et al., 2016), especially with the high demand for fieldwork placements and the challenges in the fieldwork practice in Nepal(Flynn et al., 2014). These demands have an impact on the profession as well as field education (Coulton & Krimmer, 2005), however, it cannot include practice education programs (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002). In addition, social work practice fieldwork trainees are facedwith the challenge of deciding what is relevant and appropriate. The course design addresses complex social issues and problems in the curriculum(Homonoff, 2008). The integration of theory and practice in the workplace depends critically on fieldwork practice. It emphasizes that especially for professional qualification and integrated learning to improve trainee learning(Lucas, 2013). Achieving a balance may be challenging, especially since professionally-oriented learning places a strong emphasis on developing social work trainees' professional concepts and skills. Itutilizes a variety of teaching and assessment techniques that are appropriate for the degree outcomes (Wilson et al., 2010).

In these circumstances, this article presents the review about the ethical challenges faced by social work students during fieldwork practices reforming the field work practices and use to apply the social worker activist. To contextualize the practicing, the social worker's construction with social consciousness about the face the different challenges the field work practices in momentarily explored. This study takes a more comprehensive method and seeks deal with the given question:

(a) What are the ethical challenges faced in social work students in field work practices?

In the social work discipline, fieldwork practice is a continuous process of shifting *Scholars' Journal, Volume 6, December 2023, 68-83*

between field action, research, administration and consultation, evaluative reflection, and back to developing critical perspectives (Coughlan & Coghlan, 2002). Fieldwork practice is a highly valued component of social work education, and its evolution has been operated by faculty members and social work practitioners in social work schools and organizations for decades (Bogo, 2015). Fieldwork education is regarded as the most important component of students' and graduates' preparation for social work practice. Fieldwork education provides many learning opportunities for social work students, who learn to apply theories to real-world situations and examine them (Lane, 2013). Fieldwork discipline is defined as learning by delivering social work services in a practice setting under the supervision of an experienced social worker (Roulston et al., 2018). Student assignments include work with individuals, families, small groups, communities, and organizations (Williams et al., 2008). They learn specific procedural knowledge and skills for working with a population or carrying out the mandate of a specific setting, as well as the practice wisdom and know-how accumulated by experienced workers. Social work students learn to apply social work values in general, as well as when faced with ethical dilemmas, to think like practicing social workers, applying reflection and judgment to assessments, planning, and intervention in the fieldwork practice (Drisko & Grady, 2015). They also learn how to effectively and skillfully engage clients and communities in helping and changing processes. Social work students highly importance the field practicum for the preparation for practice it provides; frequently (Zweben et al., 2022). They find their first visit in settings where they have completed their practicum because agencies value the fact that these new workers are already oriented to agency policy and practices (Zhao & Liden, 2011), are socialized to the organization's culture, and can fairly quickly offer service based on this foundation of knowledge and skill. In this way agencies, value the reciprocal benefits of providing learning opportunities for social work students recognizing the way in which it prepares their future workforce (Eyler, 2002).

Fieldwork practice is typically thought of as an experiential learning component in many courses that places social work students in real-world situations away from their respective organizations where they are expected to complete a required of allocated time for social work discipline (Zegarac & Isakov, 2019). BSW students who participate in fieldwork practice acquire the skills necessary to respond effectively to client needs (Lucas, 2013). The student learns about his or her capacity to assist by interacting with people in need, their issues, reactions to those issues, and attitudes toward social workers while out in the field(Hargreaves, 2000) Social work students learn their skills by observing, working, and feeling accountable for the task of assisting people in coping with their problems (Collins, 2008). The general objective of fieldwork is to expose students to and provide them with experience in how social welfare organizations operate and provide services (Mazid, 2018). Therefore, the main goal of fieldwork is to familiarize

students with real-world social work situations in order to prepare them for professional social work practice (Cox, 2013). It is an instrument for introducing students to the field of social work through, among other things, instilling and assimilating social work ethics, principles, and values (Walker & Steaton, 2014). Fieldwork practice is an important component of the social work discipline and a major determinant of the quality of social work education (Woodcock, 2003).

Relational ethics is a particularly suitable theoretical perspective. This perspective focuses on the importance of relationships and the context in which ethical decisions are made, which aligns well with the nature of social work field practice. It emphasizes the centrality of relationships in ethical decision-making processes. It posits that ethical challenges and decisions are not made in isolation but within the context of relationships between individuals and the systems, they are part of. In social work, this means considering the dynamics between social work trainees, clients, supervisors, and other stakeholders.

Research Methodology

In this study, a descriptive qualitative research design was used; the exploration relied on secondary sources of information such as relevant books, journal articles, and research reports. In this study, the related literature was using the term "Ethical Challenges the Social Work Trainee the Fieldwork Practice" used Eric, Google, Google Scholar, Pro-Quest, Web of science platform, Website, and information from various portals were used to find relevant documents by using keywords such as Fieldwork practice, profession, social worker, and trainee, among others. The search was limited 17 articles published from 2010 to 2021. This study examined relevant material related to the research that was published in peer-reviewed journals and included the research methodology, data analysis techniques, and methods.

Results and Discussion

Challenges Faced by Social Work Students at Fieldwork Practice

Fieldwork practice is based on the theory that highly skilled and qualified specialists, such as who workers, should be equipped and supported with the skills and knowledge required to improve living conditions and development. Being a field worker at related field in a practice situation presents many challenges, which should prepare students to respond appropriately to the needs of clients and should be well grounded in field work practice, with knowledge, understanding, and skills in a variety of settings (Gray & Gibbons, 2007). The practice of fieldwork holds promise and offers limited opportunities to address the human developmental needs to restore the ravaged human dignity of millions of people who have been subsumed by the effects of imposing history, such as poverty, disease, and homelessness. Fieldwork education in social work evolved from the

internshipclassic of training, in which the students learning by doing and the practitioner served as a role model. Under supervision, the learner has the opportunity to demonstrate practical methods of dealing with clients. Fieldwork practice is defined in the field of social work as a continuous relationship in which a qualified supervisor monitors social work students' professional development and competency as they gain practical experience. The placement of a student with a professionally qualified practitioner who assumes responsibility for professional practice learning distinguishes this traditional model of field practice education. A social work agency and a student-supervisor relationship help social work students learn during their placement. As a result, the relationship helps to define and structure the range of learning tasks and experiences (Cheung et al., 2010). The apprenticeship perspective provides direction and meaning to educational practices such as student supervision during practical.

The main purpose of fieldwork practice to notify students about actual social work practical situations, the practice of fieldwork in real field derives its mandate from the department of social work policy on fieldwork (Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009), which seeks to provide guidelines to social work students, department supervisors, agency supervisors, and other stakeholders who may be served by the regarding fieldwork practical (Zuchowski, 2016). Fieldwork practice requires that students should be provided with guidance and support for the integration of theory with practical experience under the supervision of a social worker (Budeli et al., 2016); it is a required and integral component of the course for all scholars pursuing recognized social work disciplines at Nepalese universities (Parker et al., 2018). Fieldwork practice is regarded as the autograph pedagogy of social work to represent the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students to perform the role of a practitioner (Anand & Adusumalli, 2019). Students are exposed to real-life situations during practical, where they must integrate theory and practice (Morgan, 2006). The integration of theory and practice is essential in social work practice and education.

Fieldwork practice should include the following objectives:

- Students must apply theoretical knowledge to real-world problem-solving situations.
- Professional values and ethical standards of practice must be applied by students.
- Students must become familiar with agency policies, procedures, and intervention methods (Williams-gray, 2015).
- The code of ethics defines the following roles and responsibilities for agency supervisors:
- To keep track of supervision sessions,
- To prepare and plan for supervision gatherings,
- To attend student social worker evaluation meetings,

- To ensure that policies and legislation are properly implemented,
- To ensure that the supervisee's intervention techniques and approaches are properly applied,
- To obtain written and informed consent before disclosing confidential information abou beneficiaries or within the context of supervision (Thomas, 2007),
- To conduct a fair and respectful evaluation of the supervisee's performance,
- To solicit feedback and evaluation from their supervisees in order to improve supervision,
- To assist supervisors in conducting difficult assessments aimed at identifying conditions in service delivery that justifies relevant interventions,
- To ensure the production and maintenance of records of social work interventions, processes, and outcomes,
- The relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee interferes with the process of effective supervision, the contract should be reviewed (Hoge et al., 2014).

In fieldwork practice social work trainees faced the different challenges which are the application of different perspectives the relevant working of thefieldwork practices are the mention below:

- Client-Trainee Relationship: Ethical challenges often arise from the complex and sometimes conflicting needs of clients. Trainees must navigate maintaining professional boundaries while providing empathetic and effective support. Relational ethics helps in understanding these dilemmas within the context of the therapeutic relationship (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).
- Supervisor-Trainee Relationship: The guidance and mentorship provided by supervisors are crucial for the ethical development of trainees. Ethical issues can stem from the quality of supervision, differing ethical perspectives, and the power dynamics inherent in the supervisory relationship. Relational ethics examines these interactions to promote better understanding and resolution of ethical conflicts(Austin et al., 2003).
- Cultural Context: In the context of Nepal, cultural norms and values significantly
 influence ethical decision-making. Relational ethics takes into account the cultural
 milieu in which social work practice occurs, highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity and competence in addressing ethical issues (Banks, 2008).
- Systemic Influences: Ethical challenges are often shaped by broader systemic
 factors, including institutional policies, societal norms, and resource constraints.
 Relational ethics provides a framework for understanding how these larger systems
 impact the day-to-day ethical decisions of social work trainees (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005).

The purpose of ethical challenges faced by social work trainee during fieldwork

practice was to look into the various dynamics that occur during field practicum. As a result, the analysis has been guided by the question of what issues and challenges social work students face during their field placements.

Although a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are volunteering their services as "agencies" to universities for student placement (Thara & Patel, 2010). In fact, this practice not only helps the social organizations (SOs) sector build its image, but it also provides human resources at no cost. On the other hand, students can learn about the most recent skills through real-world experience (Houghton et al., 2013). Similarly, one of major issue that arose from the students' perspective was the choice of agency as a choice specialty during field placement. There is no provision for admission to the field placement of their choice, they have been appointed by department heads, faculty, and in consultation with the social agency's chief, and there is no option for social work students to choose their preferred agency or specialty (Kourgiantakis et al., 2018). In many cases, the department head and concerned faculty would assign students to a field placement agency near their home or another convenient location. This is a significant benefit from the departmental side, as it saves social work students from many hassles, particularly long-distance travel at their own expense, but students' learning options or specialty concerns are usually compromised (Hilliard et al., 2007).

Several issues were raised and discussed by faculty members and students, including the purpose of the field training, differences in curriculum content and agency vision, mode of fieldwork, and student performance (Deal et al., 2011). It was discovered that the majority of the agencies' institutions do not have a concurrent fieldwork module for student training. Students were extremely dissatisfied. There should be a proper fieldwork training mechanism with structured activities (Kervinen et al., 2020). It observes that "learning does not happen by osmosis for a student on placement; it requires effort and planning from both student and practice teacher."

The challenges faced by social work trainees at fieldwork practice which of their performance classified institutional(universities and colleges), agency (I/NGOs), and trainee specific problems are discussion below:

- To limit the scope and resources of fieldwork training, appropriate agencies should be identified and developed as workshops, seminars and practices for social work trainees,
- The institutions (universities and colleges) are unable to provide professional and practical training in social work education because of a shortage of faculty members who have a practical orientation,
- A fieldwork practice inadequate substance prevents it from consultation professional social work standards, which limits the training's effectiveness,
- A scarcity of fieldwork-related literature, which prevents students from grasping

- the concepts in a clear and practical way,
- The Universities and department are unable to sustain a standard of fieldwork training in social work education because there is a lack of healthy competition in the profession,
- The agencies' absence of a fundamental work culture is the reason fieldwork is not conducted with rigor,
- The majority of the agencies understaffed and lack trained social work personnel, which has an impact on the type of social work education training provided,
- People with semi-training in leadership or supervision roles, depending on the caliber of their fieldwork instruction,
- Poor and weak outcomes emerge from the social work field as a result of the dearth of deserving students choosing to pursue careers in social work,
- Trainee examination orientation prevents the development of a professional approach in the field.

Recommendation

As previously stated, becoming a skilled, ethical social worker is a dynamic and complex process by nature, and as such, it has been described as a multifaceted phenomenon. Furthermore, learning in social work education is a process of development. According to this, trainee -students and senior-experienced students have different learning abilities and needs, and thus require different support during their field of experience. Regardless of these differences, social work students as adult learners generally learn individually, collectively, or through a combination of both approaches. Individual adult learning theories and sociocultural theoretical approaches can help you understand learning and development in the field. As a result, it is critical for schools of social work that offer field instructor training programs to include information on the two dominant learning theories to help instructors better understand how students learn in field agencies (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

However, because learning in field settings has a social-situational orientation and is a strong relational process, special attention should be paid to socio-cultural approaches and their related concepts to learning (Soobard et al., 2020). Socio-cultural approaches emphasize learning through guided participation and support in communities of practice and emphasize the critical role of the social context in which students interact with others and learn to develop their professional skills, values and ethics. In social work discipline, fieldwork practice is an important component of student teaching, learning, and professional development in social work education and should be given adequate attention in the curriculum (Liu et al., 2013). The emphasis should be placed not only on putting theory into practice, but also on practice informing theoretical courses about practice re-

alities. Student experiences can have a big impact on the evolution of practice, theoretical education, and the curriculum (Guile & Griffiths, 2001). The experiences of students can have a significant impact on the development of practice, theoretical education, and the curriculum.

Conclusion

Social work students' field placements, they may face a variety of ethical challenges. If these challenges are poorly handled, they may become ethical dilemmas. My research shows that ethical challenges become ethical dilemmas for students when field instructors fail to provide adequate support and supervision and when students' interpretations of other staff's unethical practices go unacknowledged as an important issue deserving of thorough discussion. As a result of becoming more aware of their values and perspectives and interacting with other staff members, the students who participated in this study encountered ethical quandaries due to a lack of knowledge and experience. The areas in which the students in our study faced ethical dilemmas are well-known and common in social work practice in general, and existing theories about dealing with ethical dilemmas may thus be useful for educating students.

In a field study, researcher believes that the best place to learn about the ethical challenges faced is out in the field with competent field instructors because complex and realistic ethical dilemmas occur there. This implies that the organizational structure of professional training must be altered by allocating teaching about ethical dilemmas to the locations where they occur. This is not to say that this issue should only be taught by professionals in field placements; rather, it can be successfully taught in collaboration with such professionals, with teaching cases that can be real ethical dilemmas. Universities curriculum guide and play an important role in preparing field instructors and students for what to do when they witness cases of unethical behavior and face ethical challenges and dilemmas as a result. Social work students in this study required assistance in defining their boundaries and understanding where to draw the line in professional relationships with service users. The dialogical approach is ideal for organizing teaching and learning practices on the topic of ethical dilemmas because they are always value-laden and their solutions frequently necessitate a choice between values. By adopting a relational ethics perspective, the study can explore the ethical challenges comprehensively faced by social work trainees, considering the influence of relationships and contextual factors on ethical decision-making. This perspective aligns with the social work profession's emphasis on the importance of relationships and provides a robust framework for analyzing and addressing ethical challenges in fieldwork practice.

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