

Implications of Technological Innovations for Social Work Education: A Paradigm Shift During COVID-19

Sachin B.S.^{1,*}, Ramesh B.², Saravana K.³

Abstract

In unprecedented and challenging conditions, social work education, and practice have been crossing the roads without any expected outcomes. Social work educators with substantial practical experience and pedagogical knowledge must possess skills and competencies to adapt various creative approaches to teaching social work education during an unprecedented situation like COVID-19 lockdowns. The authors attempted to develop coping mechanisms with the usage of electronic gadgets in addressing issues and challenges like COVID-19 situations and to carry out classroom teaching and practical aspects effectively through Infrastructure on Classroom Teaching with the usage of technological innovations. The article also throws light upon the disruption prompted discoveries on teaching social work through a digital approach by adopting various models with proper technology usage in the present realistic milieu.

Keywords: Social work education and practice, skills and competencies, infrastructure on classroom teaching, ICT, technological innovations

INTRODUCTION

The transition from an industrial society to an information society has significantly affected social work education and practice. However, technology advancements can be socially isolating and have resulted in new social challenges, such as generating a false sense of safety, especially among children and teenagers. However, technology was viewed as having the ability to assist social work students in providing high-quality education and training in critical practical skills. While the advancement of technology is unavoidable, social work teachers, and students must retain a healthy skepticism while avoiding unhealthy enthusiasm and excessive resistance, as technology will continue to present

difficulties and opportunities for the profession. All social work educators should gain competency in technology's professional and ethical use and the best practices for utilizing technology in social work education and practice. They should also be prepared to teach students basic digital literacy skills that are required for ethical practice and meeting the competencies. Social work educators should understand how to utilize technology ethically and model such behavior for their pupils.

*Author for Correspondence

Sachin B.S.
E-mail: sachingowda85@gmail

¹Faculty, Department of Studies in Social Work, Bengaluru City University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

²Professor, Department of Studies and Research in Social Work, Tumkur University, Tumakuru, Karnataka, India

³Faculty, Department of Studies in Social Work, Kuvempu University, Shimoga, Karnataka, India

Received Date: December 11, 2022

Accepted Date: February 08, 2023

Published Date: March 01, 2023

Citation: Sachin B.S., Ramesh B., Saravana K. Implications of Technological Innovations for Social Work Education: A Paradigm Shift During COVID-19. NOLEGEIN Journal of Operations Research & Management. 2022; 5(2): 25–30p.

Social work educators should know the learning management system and stay updated on effective pedagogical practices for using technology in education and training.

We are developing a professional learning network in the area of technology in practice and attending institutional training about technological tools and techniques.

Developing social work practice competencies is a complex process that requires a combination of procedural competencies like knowledge and skills and meta-competencies like self-awareness and self-reflection [1]. Students must also learn cross-cultural competencies, connect theory and practice, and implement social justice principles when working with clients [2]. The American Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) define a “holistic view of competence,” highlighting the importance of a competency-based approach in which students “show the integration and application of the competencies in practice” [3].

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies concerning the circumstances like COVID-19 have been started recently as the present situation is new at the global level and has affected all fields of life in general and education in particular.

Field education is a particular pedagogy in social work, aiming to “integrate the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the actual world of the practice environment.” Even before the pandemic, field education was in a state of emergency due to budget cuts, restricted resources in practice settings, rising enrollments, and fewer practicum opportunities. Social Work schools have been attempting to alleviate the pressure on the field by giving practice chances in the classroom. Physical distance measures were adopted in many nations to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, disrupting social work placements as well as in-person classroom instruction. Some practice settings were unable to continue overseeing students, while others provided plans for remote learning [4].

Like those at other social work schools, our faculty was expected to complete their courses online and redesign subsequent courses for a free platform. Other realities for students, faculty, and community members have been related to health, mental health, economic and employment security, care giving, grief, death, discrimination, oppression, and prejudice in the face of these disruptions to student learning about social work practice around the world.

Most of these realities existed before the pandemic. Still many have been accentuated, and this moment has once again highlighted institutional prejudices [5] and inequities in the social determinants of health [6, 7]. In a survey performed by the American CSWE (2020) on student opinions of the impact of COVID-19 on their educational experience (N = 3,564), 81% said the pandemic had a bad influence on their mental health, and 65% said it had a bad effect on their financial security.

Usage of Technological Innovations for Social Work Education and Practice: An Insight

As we battle with these problems and disruptions to teaching and learning, social work programs and field settings have used virtual platforms to assist students in developing social work practice competencies. While remote learning has been around for a long time in various forms, there have been concerns about how we can effectively teach social work practice online [8]. Social Work practice learning necessitates practice opportunities for students in order for instructors to assess demonstrated competencies in addition to their knowledge acquisition of theoretical frameworks and concepts linked to social work practice. Instructors can provide feedback, show and teach practical skills, and direct students' views on practice through observation of practice (e.g., role-playing and simulation). In a study with social work faculty (N = 376) and according to Levin et al., despite significant developments in technology, faculty worries about the effectiveness of online versus traditional education have not improved over the years, particularly in terms of practice [9].

Online learning, according to faculty, is less effective than in-person learning in preparing students for practice. They identified issues in digitally teaching the use of self and therapeutic partnership. In e-learning research with Canadian Social Work instructors and administrators, Knowles [7] identified several challenges and grouped them into four categories to serve as a pedagogical framework for policy and implementation for online teaching in Social Work: (1) pedagogical challenges (e.g., online relationship building, redesigning curricula and teaching methods); (2) professional challenges (e.g., alignment of e-learning with Social Work education, ethics, professionalism, and e-equity); (3) faculty challenges (e.g., time, workload, compensation, professional development, and technical support); and (4) administrative challenges (e.g., program structure and academic policies). Building on Knowles' framework, East et al. propose the development of communities of practice for online learning, emphasizing the requirement for "institutional support and resources, leadership, faculty engagement, and a pedagogical alignment that is specific to a practice profession" [10].

THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Where does the fieldwork practicum stand in such a vital moment of a global pandemic, and how should it be approached? What is the best strategy to ensure that students get hands-on experience? We did not have any space in the present model for fieldwork training for social work students, notably at the BSW and MSW levels, for a fieldwork training module to teach students how to practice fieldwork during a worldwide pandemic. So far, no attempts have been made to reform and restructure the fieldwork practicum for BSW and MSW social work students. Of course, disaster management is taught as a theory paper in many colleges. Still fieldwork practicum and fieldwork modules have never been intended to provide an alternate model of practicum during such a worldwide pandemic. In this purview, the present article put light on remote learning in social work education and field practice during the unprecedented COVID-19 situation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article is prepared based on an explorative design to understand the new normal adjustment to the changing social work education and practice scenario. Higher education has faced many problems in imparting the requisite quality education; the same applies to social work education and training. The study analyzed researcher experience and exploration during the COVID-19 lockdown and conceptualizing technological innovation for social work education and field practicum. Collecting data from various online platforms to accelerate the field practicum of social work trainees is also analyzed in this article; in addition to that, new avenues through the online platforms to learn and transform the personal self into the professional self of social work trainees is explained.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To get acquainted with the new technologies which help in imparting quality social work education and practice.
- To analyze the various problems faced by social work teachers and students during the COVID-19 situation times.
- To find suitable solutions by exploring the vistas of virtual platforms to maintain the quality of social work education and practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Strategies Adopted Through the Usage of Technology

In response to the pandemic and the accompanying shelter-in-place protocols, the social work was redesigned and weekly social work staff presentations were delivered by phone and/or videoconference. To provide interns with virtual clinical experiences, patient scenarios were carefully selected to illustrate CSWE's core competences, specifically engaging, assessing, and intervening with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities [3]. These were provided to replicate clinical encounters with the supervisors through role-playing. The supervisors explained and modeled multifaceted professional abilities, which the interns were able to witness and practice through role-playing [11]. Interns were

encouraged to compose process recordings and reflection papers based on their thoughts and emotions responses to the role-playing exchanges in order to improve their critical thinking skills. Supervisors examined the reflections and process recordings and continued to provide comments and individual and group supervision via phone or videoconference. Interns were nevertheless given the chance to practice the documentation style and word choice most appropriate for a legal patient record, despite the fact that they no longer had access to medical information or chart review. Intern discussions aided in gaining an understanding of how social workers, other disciplines, and various welfare groups were responding to the pandemic. A few of the modules and models are listed below:

- (a) *Virtual field work placements*: Many college students have been disheartened by the loss of in-person opportunities to get real-world work experience in the wake of the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual field placement is the only option left, which can be a fantastic opportunity for personal and professional growth for Master of Social Work students [12]. Virtual field placements, in fact, may provide you with even more opportunities to learn and explore. The Virtual Field Practicum is a hybrid online paradigm that includes both synchronous and asynchronous components. The amount of the course that students and faculty spend together in live class time, with complete real-time audio and visual connectivity, is classified as synchronous. There are 2-hour synchronous sessions each week. Students work independently during the asynchronous component of the course, where students study individually. They are expected to spend approximately 12 hours per week on a variety of activities, ranging from watching pre-produced video content combined with accompanying interactive exercises to obtaining community resources for their case management clients [13]. During pandemic synchronous sessions with social workers, trainees discuss the field practice of social work and address the challenges confronted during the course of practice to reduce confusion and amplify learning opportunities. As a part of the asynchronous component, trainees are asked to practice social work with neighbors and get hands-on experience.
- (b) *Video-based field experiences*: Field experiences captured on video can be an excellent method for increasing exposure to the field. Field experience based on video with a unique play-by-play instructor comment and analysis component. An authentic higher order thinking exercise that requires application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. A method of fostering and accelerating teacher professional growth along a developmental continuum by immersing students in a risk-free learning environment to encourage active engagement in fieldwork learning [14].
- (c) *Knowledge sharing sessions through webinars*: Webinars can also be used to communicate and exchange knowledge, wisdom, and field experiences with those with extensive fieldwork experiences, such as academics, researchers, academics, and field supervisors. Fieldwork coordinators at colleges and schools of social work can network online and encourage second-year students and graduates to share their work experiences as well as past concurrent and block fieldwork experiences with the new incumbents. Many virtual spaces like zoom, Google meet, teach mint, Google hangouts, and other online platforms can be used to share experiences of how volunteers and civil society organizations have pitched over the past year to reach out to the teachers and students' communities.
- (d) *Case studies*: Case studies are simply unit surveys that can be undertaken with one individual, a group of persons, an institution, a community, and so on. Using the telephone interview method as well as interviewing neighbors by following the COVID-19 protocol, Social work trainees can learn from people's experiences at COVID-19, which is an in-depth field experience in which trainees will develop skills such as communication and rapport building, and listening to others. Social work students might be encouraged to share their own experiences from their villages, towns, neighborhoods, and localities, as well as their own personal experiences, in order to bridge the rural-urban barrier and the class-caste split among peers during these changing times.
- (e) *Virtual community camps*: The highlight will be a field survey on the pandemic's impact, with each student covering 10 houses in their neighborhood. Social work trainees can analyze their needs and bridge the gap between service providers and needs by using interview and observation skills.

While most of the activities will take place online, participants can participate in a variety of initiatives in their community in collaboration with other campers residing in the same region or with their friends. Participants can also engage in activities such as rainwater collecting, organic farming, solid waste management, and so on, while following the COVID protocol.

“Social work community camps are a key group activity to boost the professional skills and learning transformation.” Individual experience sharing and linking with the social work knowledge domain can be done virtually. Some of the problems faced by trainees can be addressed during online discussions with camp officers (social work educators). Also, individual and group evaluations will be held to have a better understanding of learning and personal and professional transformation.

Shift of Education Paradigm After COVID-19

The curriculum represents the overall plan and objective of education. The whole planning and objectives of education are being newly reshuffled and reorganized due to the impacts of COVID-19. Changes in curriculum and syllabus could be noticed. Also seen many of institutions have adopted ICT-based materials; many universities are now teaching skill-based courses as a part of their academic curriculum. The advent of digital education facilitated not only skill development but also improved students to develop critical reasoning abilities. Online-based education has opened up new possibilities in the learning environment [15].

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic ended the on-site field placement for social work interns who could not work online. Virtual programming was required to complete the interns' remaining educational obligations in a patient-less learning environment. This adjustment gave a chance for better learning and proper program termination. These aforementioned virtual fieldwork placements, video-based field experiences, conducting webinars, case studies, and virtual community camps can amplify the fieldwork practice of social work trainees. This remote/virtual adaption to fieldwork practice serves as a model for future program, which aim to integrate new techniques to satisfy the different learning needs of individual students while also enriching fieldwork supervision and a larger range of social work practices. Education surely go through many changes which many educators and researchers stressing from past COVID-19 was a situation it made technological driven remote learning passible in education settings and also in industries where services being provided rather manufacturing goods. In light of The Indian National Education Policy 2020, technological innovation has got a pivotal role to play in disseminating education. Social work education is a forerunner in the policy implication because social work education has got field-based learning along with classroom teachings, so COVID-19 has created an inevitable situation to go with the technological driven classroom as well as fieldwork practice. The COVID-19 situation apparently created way to adoption of technology in education and it has shifted paradigm from classroom learning to remote learning. The change is universal and permanent; we must change according to current technological innovations; at the same time, we must be cautious about the adverse effect of the intense use and abuse of technologies.

REFERENCES

1. Kourgiantakis T, Sewell KM, Hu R, Logan J, Bogo M. Simulation in social work education: a scoping review. *Res Soc Work Pract.* 2020; 30 (4): 433–450. doi: 10.1177/1049731519885015.
2. Lee E, Bogo M, Tsang AKT. A socially just and culturally competent clinical SW practice. In: Brandell JR, editor. *Theory and Practice in Clinical Social Work*. San Diego, CA: Cognella; 2020. Pp. 567–588.
3. Council on Social Work Education. (2022). Educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs. [Online] Available at <https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/94471c42-13b8-493b-9041-b30f48533d64/2022-EPAS.pdf> [Accessed on February 2023]

4. Ayala J, Drolet J, Fulton A, Hewson J, Letkemann L, Baynton M et al. "Field education in crisis: experiences of field education coordinators in Canada" social work education. Soc Work Educ. 2018; 37 (3): 281–293. doi: 10.1080/02615479.2017.1397109.
5. Serhan Y, McLaughlin T. (2020). The other problematic outbreak: as the coronavirus spreads across the globe, so too does racism. [Online] The Atlantic. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international> [Accessed on February 2023]
6. Lai J, Ma S, Wang Y, Cai Z, Hu J, Wei N, et al. Factors associated with mental health outcomes among health care workers exposed to coronavirus disease 2019. JAMA Netw Open. 2020; 3(3): e203976. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.3976, PMID 32202646.
7. World Health Organization. Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO; 2020.
8. Knowles AJ. Pedagogical and policy challenges in implementing e-learning in social work education. J Technol Hum Serv. 2007; 25 (1-2): 17–44. doi: 10.1300/J017v25n01_02.
9. Levin S, Fulginiti A, Moore B. The perceived effectiveness of online social work education: insights from a national survey of social work educators. Soc Work Educ. 2018; 37 (6): 775–789. doi: 10.1080/02615479.2018.1482864.
10. East JF, LaMendola W, Alter C. Distance education and organizational environment. J Soc Work Educ. 2014; 50 (1): 19–33. doi: 10.1080/10437797.2014.856226.
11. Molina V, Molina-Moore T, Smith MG, Pratt FE. Bridging education and practice with a competency-based learning contract. J Teach Soc Work. 2018; 38 (1): 18–27. doi: 10.1080/08841233.2017.1407387.
12. Gruber V. (2020). Facilitating Innovation through Virtual Field Placements during COVID-19. [Online] College of Social Work, Florida State University. Available at <https://csw.fsu.edu/article/facilitating-innovation-through-virtual-field-placements-during-covid-19> [Accessed on February 2023]
13. Phillips ES, Wood GJ, Yoo J, Ward KJ, Chen S. A virtual field practicum: building core competencies prior to agency placement. J Soc Work Educ. 2018; 54 (4): 620–640. doi: 10.1080/10437797.2018.1486651.
14. Stapleford, Garlett W. Virtual field experiences. Minneapolis, MN: Walden University; 2007.
15. Alam M, Al-Mamun M, Pramanik MNH, Jahan I, Khan MR, Dishy TT et al. Paradigm shifting of education system during COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study on education components. Heliyon. 2022; 8 (12): e11927. doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e11927, PMID 36466571.