



RESEARCH PAPER

A Preliminary Insight into Social Work Field Training at University of Peshawar

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: May 11, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: August 30, 2021</p> <p>Online: September 05, 2021</p> <p>Keywords: Field Placement, Field Supervisor, Fieldwork, Social Work, University of Peshawar</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: beenish.ijaz@uos.edu.pk</p>	<p>Social Work is an academic program and professional way of helping and enabling people who encounter psycho-social challenges in their life. It needs practical training in the form of fieldwork which is an indispensable activity of Social Work academic program across the globe. It is through fieldwork that the students internalize the practical concepts, values, skills and ethics of the professional social work practice for performing their role in social development of society after completing their social work education. For this purpose, a study was carried out to describe and explore the problems and issues encounter by the students in field placement during academic training of Social Work at University of Peshawar. A qualitative research designed was adopted in which Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the students of BS and MA program. It was found that there is a weak coordination between the Social Work Department and Social Welfare Agencies due to which students are incapable to broaden their abilities for coping future challenges of society after receiving degree.</p>

Introduction

Social Work has been declared as a practice-based profession in 21st century by the international federations; hence its education is a combination of theoretical knowledge and fieldwork learning around the globe. Fieldwork is one of the essential components of Social Work academic program. In Social Work program, fieldwork is not only observational but also participatory which is compulsory for learning Social Work skills, values, ethics and professionalism (Papouli, 2014). Fieldwork training helps the students to internalize the values and ethics of Social Work profession. These values involve social justice, empowerment, and humanitarianism (Kirstman-Ashman, 2017). Through the integration of class learning and fieldwork training, students are trained to become Social Caseworkers, Case Managers, Group Workers, Group Counselors, Family Counselors, Community Organizers, Planners, Administrations, Policy Practitioners, and Social Researchers (Zastrow, 2016).

The fieldwork training of the students of Social Work at graduate level is carried out under supervision within an organizational structure (fieldwork agency) under

supervision. As Kirstman-Ashman (2017) describes an organizational structure and supervision as,

“This organizational structure is the formal and informal manner in which tasks and responsibilities, lines of authority, channels of communication, and dimensions of power are established and coordinated within an organization. Understanding the organizational structure involves knowing how decisions are made, what chain of command is followed, what procedures regulate service provision to clients, and how the social work job expectations fit into the larger scheme of things. Supervision is the process by which a designated supervisor watches over a worker’s performance, directs activities, and provides feedback. A good supervisor can be valuable in helping social workers perform effectively within an agency setting”.

Although, Social Work as discipline and profession in Pakistan was introduced in early 1950s, still it has to gain recognition as a profession so far in the country. The University of Punjab started Master in Social Work in 1956, followed by the Karachi University in 1962, University of Quetta 1974, and the University of Peshawar in 1976 (Graham, Al-Krenawi and Zaidi, 2007); and University of Sargodha and Islamia University of Bahawalpur started graduate program in Social Work in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Under the administrative structure of all the said Social Work departments, fieldwork training is a compulsory component at graduate degree level programs approved by the statutory bodies of the concerned university. All the above said universities offer field training as a credited course at Social Case Work, Social Groupwork and Community Development settings. The structure of this field work training is composed of a small group of female and male students (approximately 5-7 members), supervised by an internal or academic supervisor (from teaching faculty of the department) and an external or field supervisor. There is an annual or semester evaluation of the fieldwork practiced by the students at a designated agency. The model describing the fieldwork training of the students of Social Work at graduate level is presented below.

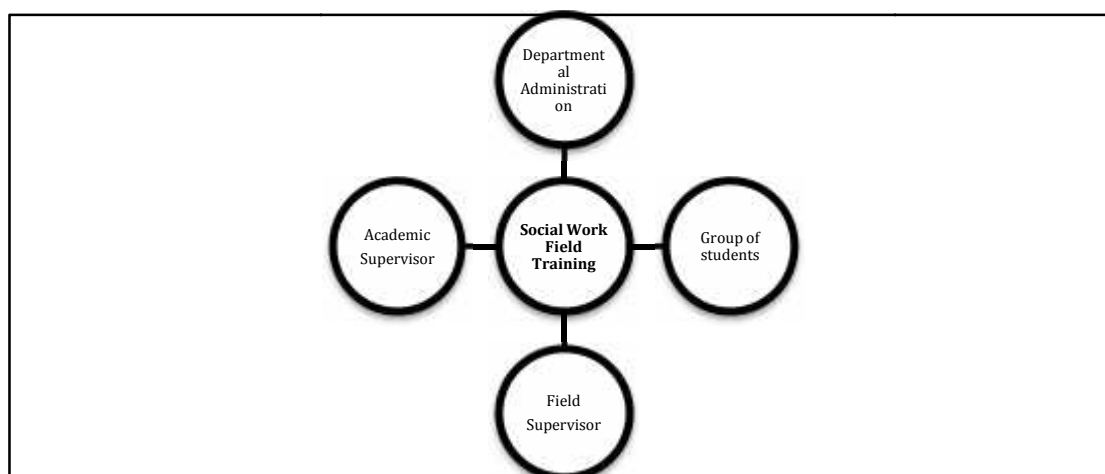


Figure 01: Components of Field Work Training Program of Social Work Graduates

Every department of Social Work has its unique history of Fieldwork training and placement i.e. how and when it was started under which circumstances. A glimpse of Fieldwork Placement Program at University of Peshawar is described below.

Fieldwork Placement Program at University of Peshawar: a glimpse of history

University of Peshawar is located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (former NWFP) of Pakistan. At the University of Peshawar, the Master's Degree program of Social Work was started in December 1976. The first batch of students graduated in 1979. It was Prof. H.M. Close, a retired Major from the British Military in India, and a professor of English at the Islamia College, Peshawar, who was appointed the first Chairman of the department being a practicing social worker. He would take the handicapped children for orthopedic care and reconstructive surgeries. He donated blood and persuaded his students to help stock the blood bank at Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar. There are many former criminals, now law-abiding and productive citizens, who were touched by his visits to the jail to look after their welfare.

There are blind persons who are a bit more independent today because Mr. Close helped procure books and other material for them. In the mountains of Hazara, there are tens of thousands of people who were spared the ravages of Small Pox or Malaria because every summer Mr. Close led his students to those inaccessible areas to inoculate children and conduct anti-malaria spray. There are many natives who became educated because Mr. Close, in a most discrete way, paid for their education (Hussain, 1999).

Mr. Close's spirit lived in the department of Social Work till the arrival of 21st century. However, there is a strong need to reincarnate the spirit of Social Work that Mr. Close and his followers (including Prof. Karamllahi) initially instilled. Since then, no significant changes were introduced in the social work curriculum and fieldwork.

Fieldwork Program at University of Peshawar: a description of present

After admission into the course of Social Work at graduate level, students are required to choose one of agencies for fieldwork from the given list of agencies. Initially, students are placed in the agency in accordance with their interest and ease of accessibility. The reason behind this is, to familiarize the students with process of traveling and mobility, as some of the students and their parents (usually female students) are reluctant to allow their children in faraway. As trainee students of social work, they visit those agencies once a week from October to May for period of eight months and spend five hours per day. After completion of six months phase, students are positioned in new institution/ agency of their choice for one month block placement, also termed as Internship. The reason for such placement is to fulfill the credit hours required for the award of degree by University of Peshawar as well as to assimilate the students with the values and skills of social work practice.

A general orientation regarding fieldwork is given to the students by the incharge Fieldwork at the University. Furthermore, students are given orientation regarding the agency by an instructor of the agency or field supervisor. Field work instructor plays an important role in the education of students, serving as teachers, supervisors, mentors

and gatekeepers for the profession. During fieldwork the instructor guide the students with the necessary theory and practical skills to achieve the required objectives.

In majority of the cases, lecturing is the dominant character of fieldwork in Peshawar. In the agencies, the students are given lectures regarding the agency, its sphere of operations, its clients, its services delivery mechanism etc. However, students are also given chance or task of interviewing the clients, which is one the tool of Social Case Work (SCW). SCW is the primary method of social work that focuses on a single client as case study. Furthermore, students also attend family meetings or community meetings (in some organizations) as which fulfill their practical orientation of Social Group Work and Community Organization. Both concepts are the primary methods of Social Work.

Group meetings with clients etc. are also part of the fieldwork practicum. In substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation agencies, group meetings are carried out on regular basis. In group meetings, all the relevant stakeholders sit together along with a supervisor from the agency (and the intern social workers). It is a formal meeting that follows a fixed pattern. Attendance in seminars of the respective organizations is also part of the fieldwork practicum. As a qualified and a professional social worker will work with a wide range of people, each with their own unique strength, needs and hopes for the future. He will fulfill many roles, including counselor, advocator, protector, sounding-board, problem-solver, manager, change agent, mediator and decision-maker respectively etc.

There is a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring students' fieldwork activities. Students submit their reports on regular basis to the Fieldwork Supervisor. The Fieldwork Supervisor also conducts occasional visits to the agencies at random. The students are required to submit a monthly report of all the fieldwork activities to the Director Field Work. Further, after completing the required period of training at the fieldwork agency, the students are required to submit an Annual Report of all the Fieldwork activities with compulsory case-histories etc. The student's level of competence and skill enhancement is evaluated through a final viva and presentation at the Department of Social Work, in which one representative from the respective Fieldwork agency is invited as an examiner. After successful completion of their fieldwork training period, the students are given certificates by the respective agencies. This certificate also works as an experience certificate.

Literature Review

Many social workers recognize field work as an important step towards professional career development (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). According to classic collection of field literature by Alfred E. Kadushin (1991) "Only in the transition of knowledge into practice, acquired in the field, does social work education achieve professional justification". Field placement in Social Work can be traced back to the apprenticeship model of teaching where a student learns by observing and modeling the teacher (Clean, Hawkins, & Hess, 2000).

Cleakand Smith (2012) studied social work field placement program in Australia. The dominant mode of field supervision in Australia is traditional one student to one

social worker. There were also emerging models where more than one social worker supervised one student. Students on the other hand showed a high level of dissatisfaction with external supervisors. Students were more satisfied when the placement involved a strong on-site social work presence.

Lam, Wong and Leung (2007) conducted a study on students of Social Work in Chinese University of Hong Kong. The study revealed that students show an undue concern with the application of knowledge and skills within a specified framework. Initially students' minds are highly influenced by scientism and competence-based practice. In this model learning out comes and instrumental and technical reasoning are highly emphasized. Their study also suggests that students are highly concerned with discovery of 'self'. They show a concern for being constantly verified in interaction with others in the field placement.

Doel and Sharlow (1996) asserts that student-supervisor relationship is highly important in field education. They further assert that this practice is universally valued in social work. Cooper (2007) on the other hand challenged this old paradigm. He claims that students can learn more while acting in a similar way to an employee.

Singh (2010) found that most of the social work field placement programs involve a responsibility of the university in selection, placement and monitoring of students as well as maintaining contact with the agencies. According to Rich (1993) field supervisors, no matter what their theoretical background might be, use similar techniques in supervision.

Maidment (2003) conducted a survey of students to find out their problems in the field. Students faced a number of problems and suggested the need for additional opportunities both before and during the placements to engage with material on safety in the field, and ways to deal with workplace stress and conflict.

There is no significant literature found published on fieldwork training and its related issues in Pakistan, only its historical account is found in a few books and articles (Rehmatullah, 2002, Graham, Al-Krenawi and Zaidi, 2007). To fulfill the existing literature gap, this article will describe and explain the strengths and weakness of on-going fieldwork training program at graduate level at Department of Social Work, University of Peshawar.

Material and Methods

The purpose of this article is to present an insight into Social Work field placement in University of Peshawar. It also describes and explains the problems and issues encountered by the students in field placement during academic training of Social Work at University of Peshawar and the strengths and weakness of on-going fieldwork training program at graduate level under the said university. To fulfill the said purpose, Focused Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted with the help of a loosely structured interview protocol for assessing the strengths and weakness of on-going fieldwork program under Department of Social Work, University of Peshawar. A total number of five FGDs were conducted with the students involved in fieldwork training in order to

reach code saturation. Furthermore, one In-depth Interview was conducted with the In-charge fieldwork at the department.

By following the purposive sampling technique, the criterion for selection of respondents was taken as the students of BS and MA program who have completed their fieldwork training and are willing to involve in this research activity. The selection of the students was made with proper consultation and consent by the In-charge fieldwork and two senior teachers. Furthermore, gender ratio was also observed in the selection.

A total number of twenty (20) students participated for discussion, 10 male and 10 female students, placed indifferent agencies for field work. The subjects' selection was done by the in-charge field works at the University of Peshawar. A verbal informed consent was taken from the participants.

FGDs were conducted in a room that was almost free from echo and distraction. Similarly, discussion for each FGD went for two hours. A note taker recorded the responses of the students, fieldwork instructors and fieldwork supervisors, through digital audio recording device. Recorded data was transcribed by the researchers to extract the codes from the raw data and latterly data was analyzed to present the major themes.

Results and Discussions

Selection and Placement in the Agency

In congruence to the findings of Singh (2010), it is the responsibility of the University Fieldwork supervisor to select and place the students in agencies of practice. Students were of the view that they have no choice in selection of agency where they will carry out their field training. While deciding on students' placement, the fieldwork supervisor's decision is influenced by many factors. Proximity to the student's place of residence is one of the highly influential factors in this regard. Similarly, there is difference in placement of male and female students. Male students may be placed in agencies far distant than their place of residence. However, female students are placed in agencies which are near to their place of residence. Further, female students are placed in urban centers.

Students have a limited choice. Students might request the fieldwork supervisor to place them in a particular agency. The fieldwork supervisor takes into consideration the number of students and space availability in the agency.

Mode of Supervision at the Agency

The traditional one student to one social worker model, as practiced in Australia (Cleak & Smith, 2012) is non-existent in Peshawar. An agency supervisor may supervise 5 to 20 students simultaneously. As suggested by Cooper (2007) students at Peshawar University Social Work program work more as an employee or internee than as a student. In BS program, students arrange different events on their own according to the agency policy. For example, a group of BS students were placed in Paiman Alumna Trust. One of its projects is on peace building. The students conducted peace conferences in

three different communities of Peshawar. Another group of students was placed in Dosti Welfare Organization. Some of the students started their own one room schools.

Interpersonal Communication & Conceptual Issues of the Students

Most of the students do not possess good communication skills required for fieldwork practice and lack some interpersonal skills. They have problems in developing relationship with the clients, compilation of profile for case history, interview skills and recording of other important information. As a consequence, the client does not feel comfortable sharing their personal and psycho-social problem. As one student puts it,

"We have problems and confusions in establishing rapport with the patients. We are unable to conduct interviews of the patients properly. Our interviewing and probing skills are very weak. We are not confident enough to interview or probe the patient if he/she lies to us during the interview."

Communication and probing in interview are difficult task for the students. When they are added with lack of skills for doing so, then the situation is aggravated.

The most severe problem in communication is faced by those students who are working with special children. One student lamented upon not knowing the sign language.

"There are many children in classes with different kinds of diseases. We don't know sign language and due to this weakness, we are unable to communicate with most of the children at our agency."

Besides this, fieldwork once a week also creates problems for students in establishing rapport or to carry-on rehabilitation work. One student puts it

"We are not able to establish rapport with the patients in the fieldwork. Because, at one visit we interview a patient, but when we go the next week, that patient is discharged. Along with this, there is too much distraction."

Such interpersonal problems are mostly faced by fresh students who are either new in Social Work discipline or have no previous background of the subject. The students who secure admission in the discipline of Social Work at the University of Peshawar is mostly from diverse cultural backgrounds including urban-rural divide. The culture of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa promotes obedience and silence in many situations. This pattern of socialization mostly affects the self-esteem confidence level of the students. Proper trainings and self-confidence together result in the consequences mentioned above.

Another associated problem is that most of the students are not properly skilled about conducting interviews or conversations and writing the report. The students are required to develop interview guide or schedule for getting their case history. For this purpose, they are required to complete orientation about such skill before deputing into fieldwork agency. After completion of fieldwork, students write a report that is

mandatory for them. Due to lack of report writing skills, students go for cut and paste. They reproduce the same work that was produced by someone else in previous years.

Management and Training Issues

Besides the above-mentioned issue, students face problems time schedule compatibility in the social welfare agencies. Sometimes, there is a clash between the student's fieldwork day and the agencies activities. In some cases, social agencies cannot entertain the students in fieldwork activities.

"There were only two or three field work activities in the last few months. We just go there for attendance and nothing else is conducted."

As an end result, students become careless regarding their punctuality. One reason is the communication gap between the University and the social agency.

Limited Training Opportunity

Any course of social work must cover at least the basic or primary methods of Social Work, i.e. Social Case work, Social Group Work and Community Organization. In Social Casework, students are trained in management of individual level problems. Similarly, in Social Group Work, students are trained in management of clients having similar problem in group setting. In the Community Organization, the students of social work are trained in how to address community level problems. After theoretical orientation on campus, the students are placed indifferent organization that are rendering social work services to the clients like drug addicts, people with psychiatric problem, or poverty alleviation, promotion of education and health etc.

Such practical orientations are very important for students for learning about social work professional skills. However, the students revealed that their training at the campus or at the social services agency is not enough. It does not enable them to translate social work concepts into practice.

"We apply Medical Social Work techniques which are mainly Social Casework for us. Our grooming as a social worker is not up to the mark. We are told to take Case-histories but the fact is we don't know how to conduct it."

The social agencies mostly offer either casework or group work or administrative aspect of social work. So far, the community related skills are required, it is not there in any organization. Most of the students spend their time in in-door activities. There is a lack of community opportunities. The reason may be the placement of students in public social welfare agencies. There are a few if any Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in the given list for field placement.

Unclear Syllabus or Course Outline

The students have no course outline and syllabus for fieldwork. They do not know what is to be covered during the field. They are at the discretion of fieldwork instructor who teaches and guides them as he/she may think fit or easy so. Due to this,

the students are unable to acquire most important knowledge and skill required for developing practical skills.

Lack of Planned Activities

Planning in fieldwork on the part of the University and the social agency is very crucial. Planning reduces future anxieties and ensures smooth running of any program. As a matter of fact, there is apparently no planning on the part of the university or the social agencies regarding fieldwork activities. Students have realized it too.

“Within the time period of past two months, only two field work activities were conducted at our agency, mostly lectures were delivered by the field instructor.”

“There is nothing as fieldwork activities I the institutions just taking the case-histories in some field work institutions.”

“Lack of activities leads to students’ lack of interest in the field work placement thereby resulting in lack of attendance or punctuality of the students.”

This lack of planning leads to haphazard activities. It is a hurdle in the professionalization of social work as well. It hampers the students’ capacity to internalize the attitude and skills required to deliver professional social service.

Attitudinal and Space Related Issues

Attitude of the field supervisors from the agency have a significant impact upon the learning of the students. A good supervisor shows a warm and positive regards toward his supervisees. It is the supervisor’s warmth and unconditional positive regards that the students take a greater interest in the field activities and the social services agency. The situation is not so good here. It was revealed by the students that

“The attitude of the instructors at the agency is not very positive. We are told to take the forms and go and interview the patient. While the fact is that we do not have the interviewing skills. When we ask the instructor how to interview, we are told that it is the duty of your university to teach you that.”

The role of Field Supervisor is that of an educator in the field. An educator’s responsibility is to create and maintain a conducive learning environment, by supporting students in applying classroom knowledge to field practice. It is linked with students’ satisfaction from field activities.

There is a confrontational relationship between the field supervisors and the students. There is a stronger need for proper training of the field supervisors. In most of the agencies, students face problems of proper and specific place for discussion during fieldwork. A large number of participants complained for limited space and distractions during sessions with clients as well as during orientation sessions with the fieldwork supervisors at the agency. A hot discussion was generated over this issue. It was revealed that

“There is space problem in our fieldwork agency. In our agency, there is one room for both drugs and psychiatry staff and students, plus the patients also do come in and go out during the lecture sessions. In such an environment we cannot focus or pay attention to the lectures being given to us by the facilitators.”

Likewise, another group of students also agreed to the same point and said,

“There is no lecture room at our agency. We are simply sent to patients for interview and are told take case-histories. There is a very limited space at our agency for field work students.”

The data analysis explicates the major issues faced by the students in their fieldwork placements. Conceptual clarity of the students is at stake. There is a severe lack of planning in the field placement as well as fieldwork activities. The relationship between students and their field work instructors is central to students learning and preparation. In contrast to the cooperation needed between the student and field supervisors, the relationship between the field supervisors and the students are confrontational in nature. The students are not clear about their role in the field agency. There is a stronger need to address all these issues for the improvement of students' skills in Social Work.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Social Work education was started in Pakistan with theory and fieldwork training in the second half of the twentieth century. The vision of this discipline revolves around “the identification of persistent and contemporary social problems of the communities (at micro, macro and mezzo level) and the solution of these problems is intervened by the social worker with the help of theoretical and practice-based models”. It is more important to mention here that in Pakistan, Clinical Social Work has not been accredited by the government and still generalist Social Work and its practice is carried out through field work practice by the students of the Social Work departments. But there are certain gaps which are the major cause to implicate the vision of the discipline. Social Work as profession has certain challenges and issues in Pakistan; one of them is the recognition of Social Work as a profession in the country. There is no functional professional association for recognition and issuing license to social workers in Pakistan. Further at student level, there are certain syllabus and fieldwork training related issues which needs to be explored and addressed by the departments.

Firstly, at student level, there is a major issue of language barrier. As the existing Social Work literature in Pakistan is in English medium and students in the public sector universities are not able to comprehend it more precisely because of their Urdu medium base at school level. They are unable to fully adapt the values and skills required during fieldwork training which is a main hindrance while assessment and intervention in Social Casework, Social Groupwork or Community Development.

Secondly, Fieldwork, though a credited course at graduate level, is not taught in the university through a manual rather is executed by the students at a social welfare agency (public or non-profit sector) with the help of field supervisors. Fieldwork agency indulges the students in their ongoing programs or projects and students are sometimes

unable to execute an independent project there. Further, field supervisors also belong to different disciplines other than Social Work which also affects the students learning during taking case history or applying Social groupwork techniques as these field supervisors are unable to direct them as per Social Work techniques and methods.

Moreover, with the passage of time, there are changes in literature of every discipline and Social Work is not exempted from it. Field supervisors who do not have contemporary knowledge of Social Work are also unable to train the students as per new methodological techniques. Hence students face issues during academic training of Social Work at University of Peshawar and the weakness of on-going fieldwork training program at graduate level emerges as an issue under the said university.

Keeping in view the above findings and conclusion, the following recommendations have been drawn from the research findings. These finding would not only useful for the academic and social welfare agencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but for department and institutes established in other provinces of the country also.

First, there must be a close and continuous coordination between teaching departments and fieldwork agencies. It would facilitate the students. It would also minimize confusion and misperception emerged due to weak communication between teaching and implementing agencies. This will be useful for developing a common strategy and syllabus or course outline for conceptual and practical topics to covered both by teaching and field work agencies.

The Department of Social Work needs to revise its fieldwork training and supervision policy at three levels i.e. development of Field Work Training Manual, broadening of fieldwork horizons and revision of Social Work curriculum.

There is a dire need to develop a comprehensive and updated Field Work Training Manual for students and instructions. This manual will consist of monthly and annual work plane which shall strictly be followed by the students, field work agencies and the department of social work. Further, this will also contain pre-field orientation strategy of students, necessary theoretical topics like human behavior, psychiatric problems, interviewing; skills and tools developed orientation, report writing, etc. This Manual will help and guide the students to cope more effectively in professional practice. Further there is a need to increase fieldwork credit hours. Students' visits field work institutions once a week for around 4 to 5 hours; however, it does not meet the students' requirement. Each group of students should visit field work twice a week. It would enable the instructors and students to observe and practice different process and skill in a proper way.

Field Work horizon should be broadened beyond the case-histories and indoor activities. Community visits should be made compulsory part of field work. Such visits shall leave at the discretion of the respective field work institutions. Furthermore, such community development organization shall be included in the list of field work where students could observe the community organization skill and principles. Community visits are normally avoided by the department due to cultural constraints for the female students, however; it shall be clearly mentioned in the prospectus that community visits

for students irrespective of gender is mandatory. Hence, those students who are motivated and have no such issue would opt for Social Work as discipline. This would benefit the students as well as enhance the scope the subject in practical field.

The Curriculum of Social Work should be revisited and it shall be made according to the demand of the market. Further, there are some courses which shall be introduced in the curriculum of Social Work like Psychology, management related subjects, social legislation etc. A of Human Behavior and Development shall be re-introduced to meet the needs of the students.

Strictness in Monthly Report should be observed in order to ensure a strong check and balance on students. Monthly Reports should be considered for marking. Field Work Activities should be reported like a diary. Along with Monthly Reports, there should be Monthly Presentations on the report. Such presentations should be done at the respective field work institutions. A strict result-oriented monthly report system should be formulated. Markings should be based on Monthly Report instead of Annual Report. The organization should provide appropriate environment for good learning activities including problems-solving skill exercises, student presentations, and motivation for the student.

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