

Understanding Social Workers' Motivation to be Field Instructors*

Authors: Bogo, M, Globerman, J.

Editor of Fact Sheet: Lambert, L.

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Research Grant

Brief Summary of the Research Study

Renewing the profession of social work is historically dependent on social work practitioners volunteering to be field educators for students placed in their agencies.

This qualitative study explored social workers' motivations to offer field instruction. Twenty social workers were randomly selected from a range of field sites for the University of Toronto, Faculty of Social Work. These social workers identified that current organizational culture has a powerful influence on their motivations to volunteer to become field instructors and remain in this role.

Specifically, the organization's commitment and support for education was crucial to their willingness to take on an educational role with students. Other motivating factors were professional growth and commitment to personal values.

The Importance of Social Work Field Instructors

Social workers are essential to successful field education in their roles as field instructors. They link the student, the agency, and the school; teach practice knowledge and skills; and serve as mentors and role models (1). Many social workers voluntarily provide field instruction while maintaining their regular workload. Two recent studies reported that in one-third of the field agencies surveyed, social workers received no workload credit for student education.

The Changing Context of Social Work Practice

During the past decade, massive changes have occurred in the funding and organization of social and health services, such as decreased funding for welfare and human services, downsizing and restructuring in health services, increased privatization, and the proliferation of managed care. Social workers are expected to increase productivity and accountability while handling their own anxieties about their professional careers (2; 3).

These changes have limited agencies' ability to provide practicum learning and had an impact on the availability of field instructors. The commitment of agencies and the motivation of individual social workers to continue to collaborate with schools of social work in field education occur in this complex and unsettled environment.

Factors Influencing Social Workers' Motivations to be Field Instructors

1. Organizational Commitment and Support

The most interesting finding in our analysis was the prominence and depth with which the social workers spoke about their organizations' support and commitment to professional education in general and to them as field educators.

Three themes emerged related to the organizations' commitment and support:

- The organization's investment in a learning culture and encouragement of ongoing professional development
- A sense that social workers and their organizations believed that they had something special to offer to students and the university. Workers talked about how the organization supported and encouraged the promotion of social work knowledge, skills and a professional identity. Social workers believed that they achieved or acquired a special status because the university valued them and they took pride in the unique knowledge their agency offered.
- Field education benefits the organization in the following ways:
 - Field education can connect people internally in a way that breaks down departmental barriers
 - Students share contemporary professional literature and perspectives which positively challenges staff to be more current and look at issues differently
 - Students rejuvenated and refreshed the organization with their vitality and enthusiasm

* This fact sheet is a summary of the following article: Globerman, J. & Bogo, M. (2003). Changing times: Understanding social workers' motivation to be field instructors, *Social Work*, 48(1), 65-73.

- Students also provided “work” that helped the organization
- Having learned organizations’ practices, practicum students were seen as prospective employees who would need little orientation.

2. Professional Growth

Individual growth formed the second major pattern in the findings. Social workers talked about how students challenged them to think critically about their practice and identify what they did and why. Few social workers saw providing practicum opportunities as their professional responsibility, a somewhat surprising response. Some social workers spoke about how they enjoyed the relationship they developed with their student.

3. Personal Motivation

Personal motivation was a less vivid pattern in these interviews than organizational commitment and support and professional growth. However, several social workers elaborated on how the process of teaching was important to them personally either as a way of giving back to the profession or as a way for them to make a unique contribution and have the opportunity to mentor.

Discussion

In comparison with the studies conducted a decade earlier, in which interest in taking students was linked to intrinsic and personal values, these data suggest that social workers’ motivations have shifted. With greater stress on their positions in publicly funded organizations and a greater need to be responsive to their organizations’ mandates and circumstances, the social workers related their motivations to their organizational context.

Implications

- How social workers experience the organizational climate, values, and attitudes about service and education affects their interest in participating in field education.
- Schools of social work must find ways to collaborate better with and support organizations interested in providing practicum education for students. Meaningful reciprocity between organizations and schools that goes beyond practicum will also support education and organizational commitment.
- Leadership and collaboration between national associations of professional social workers, social work educators, and human services organizations is crucial to identify how to prepare the required workforce.

-
- 1 Bogo, M., & Vayda, E. (1998). *The practice of field instruction in social work: Theory and process* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
 - 2 Globerman, J. (1999). Hospital restructuring: Positioning social work to manage change. *Social Work in Health Care*, 28, 13-30.
 - 3 Jarman-Rohde, L., McFall, J., Kolar, P., & Strom, G. (1997). The changing context of social work practice: Implications and recommendations for social work educators. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33, 29-46.

RIEBSW information sheets are produced and distributed by the Research Institute for Evidence Based Social Work in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto to provide timely access to evidence based research.

This information sheet can be downloaded from:
www.socialwork.utoronto.ca/institute