

# Fieldwork in Social Work Education During Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic in India: Disruptions and Discoveries

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Vishal Mishra<sup>1</sup> , Rambabu Botcha<sup>2</sup>  and Sanjoy Roy<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This article explores the discoveries and disruptions of fieldwork in social work during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic by obtaining information from the social work educators in India. By employing an exploratory online survey method, emerging experiences, growing challenges, implemented activities, engagement of learners and solid suggestions are drawn from the study and presented in this article. The findings of this article are useful for the fraternity of social work to adopt and implement online/offline/blended modes of fieldwork for their students in a systematic way and complete the fieldwork requirements during a pandemic situation.

## Keywords

COVID-19, fieldwork, India, pandemic, social work, students

## Introduction

In December 2019, a new pandemic called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) originated in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread across the globe to numerous other nations, posing a global health hazard. Within weeks, the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Social Work, University of Delhi, New Delhi, Delhi, India

<sup>2</sup> Department of Social Work, Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, India

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### Corresponding author:

Rambabu Botcha, Department of Social Work, Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu 602105, India.

E-mail: [rambabu@rgniyd.gov.in](mailto:rambabu@rgniyd.gov.in)

World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus a worldwide pandemic (WHO, 2020). The COVID-19 virus had infected 177 nations as of the end of March 2020 (Sahu, 2020). The first incidence of COVID-19 infection in India was reported in Thrissur, Kerala, on 27 January 2020 (Andrews et al., 2020). This worldwide pandemic affected the field education in social work (SW), including India.

Following the COVID-19 crisis, scientists, social scientists and economists all predict that the world will not be the same as before (Roy & Kaur, 2020). The COVID-19 shutdown, which was imposed to prevent the transmission of the virus, had a significant impact on SW field practice in India. Classroom education was not possible, and educators were compelled to adopt the e-learning pedagogy of teaching as universities got closed (Azman et al., 2020). The majority of the SW organisations were forced to temporarily close their doors, forcing students to postpone their fieldwork until the next academic term. The fieldwork agencies were also unaware of operating normally again. The SW programme is a field-based programme, and if one uses e-learning as a teaching method, then it has drawbacks. In SW, field practice is a compulsory part of the curriculum as it develops skills and practice abilities of the students. The fieldwork offers experiential learning where the student learns through experience from the field. Students' progress has surely been impacted as a result of their inability to complete the required field placement hours to obtain a degree. Only students having these capabilities and competencies are eligible to be called as professional SWs (Azman et al., 2020).

The SW profession has its soul in field education as it not only helps in imparting skills to the social worker but also expresses the role of the SW profession and the responsibilities towards society. The education sector faced numerous obstacles as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown. Due to the lockdown, the social workers, educators and students were experiencing substantial difficulties. In addition, it was a difficult time for students who were working and extending their support to vulnerable individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a lot of new challenges and created unusual and difficult conditions for SW education and practice (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). To limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries implemented physical distance restrictions, which also affected the SW placements and physical classroom learning where students could not attend in person. It was also difficult for fieldwork placement agencies as they were unable to continue supervising social work trainees, whereas others provided the online mode of fieldwork training (Canadian Association for Social Work Education [CASWE], 2020). In a study conducted by Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), it was found that if classes were offered for in-person candidates in the fall of 2020, 91.1% of students who would normally enrol in person would enrol, whereas 5.8% would not, and 3.1% would prefer not to state whether they would like to go in for in-person classes (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2020a, b).