Article

Key Competencies in Social Work through Field Placement: Teaching and Learning in Ukraine in the Time of COVID-19

by

Nataliia Gusak
Associate Professor, PhD
School of Social Work Department
National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy
Ukraine
E-mail: gusakny@ukma.edu.ua

Oksana Volhyna
Senior Lecturer, MSW
School of Social Work Department
National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy
Ukraine
E-mail: volhyna@ukma.edu.ua
_____

Abstract

Field placement is considered a core component of social work education. However, it requires regular personal contacts with individuals, groups and communities. These contacts have been limited in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. A central question is how to organize field placement during the lockdown to develop key competencies in social work. To answer this question, we employ the students' reports, competency-based self-evaluation tools, students' assessment of the field placement (led by the University's education quality assurance centre) and assessment of students' performance by the field placement supervisors and university instructors. This paper presents the achievements and challenges of teaching and mastering key competencies in social work at the School of Social Work of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy from different perspectives: students, placement agencies and the University itself. While almost all competencies have been taught and learned, those related to individual casework were the most difficult to achieve. The flexibility of the social work profession is also discussed in this paper. Future social workers should be flexible and meet the people's needs in different contexts, including lockdown. The findings have implications for students, schools of social work and field placement agencies.

Keywords: social work education, field placement, COVID-19, Ukraine

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). The rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 has required an immediate response from universities to adapt curricula to remote learning. The online format is not new in higher education, and most universities around the world now provide courses online. However, field placement in social work requires personal contacts with clients in order for social workers to develop core competencies. Most certainly, schools of social work faced a lot of challenges with organizing field placements and training.

Due to strict lockdown measures, face-to-face and practice education were suspended (Jonge et al., 2020), and lecturers were required to redesign their courses to fit an online format (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). All courses were provided online by schools of social work in the US, Netherlands, Hungary, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Greece and Australia. Research data about social work education during the pandemic in other countries remains limited.

Some social work programmes and field settings have employed virtual platforms in order to develop core competencies (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). However, using online platforms and other digital tools has been stressful for lecturers who are used to teaching social work face-to-face. Csoba and Diebel (2020) stress that the majority of field instructors were not ready to apply remote learning instruments to their courses. Additionally, not all universities made digital tools available to lecturers or trained them on how to use these applications. Some instructors were learning by doing without any previous experience. The study by Csoba and Diebel (2020) highlights that the lack of established methodology and protocols to provide online teaching increased uncertainty, and negatively impacted instructors' motivation.

Meanwhile, Mclaughlin et al. (2020) emphasize that the creativity and imagination of field instructors increased from using new tools and approaches to teach future social workers. The field instructors have disrupted traditional classroom pedagogy, and shifted to technologically supported e-learning to minimize interference with the students' education (Azman et al., 2020). These instructors utilized creative solutions, including implementing simulation learning plays (Tortorelli et al., 2021), a volunteer

call-based companion coordination project that connects social work students with those people in need of social interaction (Morris et al., 2020), a virtual practice Friday, adapted to build social work practice competencies online and a redesigned course on cross-cultural social work practice using simulation-based learning (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020).

Several studies also describe students' perceptions of the pandemic. According to the Council of Social Work Education, 81% of social work students in the US indicate that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health, whereas 65% reported an impact on their financial security (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). Additionally, some students stated that the altered circumstances triggered their insecurity concerning their studies. It was harder to meet deadlines, and increased uncertainty regarding assessments and fear about the possible delay of classes. Furthermore, Jonge et al. (2020) underscore that students appear to lack sufficient self-reliance, discipline and time management skills to face new circumstances. Additional challenges arose with regard to practice settings that have not been able to involve and supervise students as before, while some were able to offer remote learning plans (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). For example, most social service agencies in Malaysia temporarily ceased operations, with students needing to postpone their field practice until the following academic session. Uncertainty remains as to when agencies might resume normal operations. This has undoubtedly delayed students' progress, as they were unable to finish the required field placement hours for graduating (Azman et al., 2020).

For instance, in order to make obtaining a social work degree feasible during the pandemic, the Australian Association of Social Workers has modified some standards related to field education, and the Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work proposed to review criteria for the programme variation across accredited social work programmes during the pandemic. Proposed variations included: reducing total placement hours by up to 20%, being allowed to complete two indirect practice placements, enabling students to complete placements in their workplace, recognizing the 'non-traditional placements', reducing requirements for individual supervision and students completing work remotely (Clarke & Morley, 2020). Meanwhile, the Council of Social Work Education in the US provided guidance

on maintaining student safety, reduced the field hour requirements and changed the in-person requirement to include 'remote-based field activity' (Morris et al., 2020, p. 1127).

Conversely, some studies emphasize the positive effects of the pandemic on social work education. According to Csoba and Diebel (2020), the lockdown made it possible to carry out field practice in a wider range of settings. The use of digital tools allowed students to become familiar with locations, institutions and target groups that they had had no or limited access to. Students were able to expand their professional networks and gain a broader range of experience during the online field placement, which will be of significant value to them when looking for jobs after graduation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required a crisis response that has altered many aspects of social work education. This paper details the response to social work field education under the COVID-19 pandemic by the School of Social Work at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Ukraine.

Background

Social work is a new profession in Ukraine, and has been practiced for approximately 30 years. The process of its professionalization is still ongoing (Semigina & Boiko, 2014). Nonetheless, there is no national professional association for social workers, nor an official body that regulates social work education and training. In line with educational standards for other professions, national educational standards for social work have been developed and adopted at the national level two years ago (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019).

The site for this study was the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA) in Kyiv, Ukraine, where the first School of Social Work (SSW) in Ukraine was established in 1994 with support from a range of international projects, universities and nongovernmental organizations from the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, the US and Canada (Boiko & Kabachenko, 2016).

Currently, SSW NaUKMA has a bachelor (up to 50 students per year) and master (up to 25 students per year) degree programmes. Also, approximately 100 social work

practitioners from all over Ukraine attend annual training courses, developed by SSW NaUKMA and proposed to practitioners who do not have a basic education in social work.

Field placement education is the core component for both bachelor's and master's social work programmes (NaUKMA, 2011). According to the curriculum, the bachelor programme includes different types of field placement education and training: introductory practice and practice as a volunteer in the 2nd year of study, field placement education in the 3rd year and during the first semester of the 4th year (NaUKMA, 2020). Introductory practice aims to introduce students with the scope of governmental and non-governmental organizations, providing services to vulnerable populations in Kyiv, their structure and tasks, professional roles of social workers at the individual, group and community levels and different groups of clients in social work. As volunteers, students participate in the activities of different organizations, and provide support in holding events for different groups of clients.

The purpose of field placement education is twofold: to acquaint students with their future profession and to develop key competencies for social work practice. Once a week, students visit the field service provider in Kyiv for six hours. Also, once a week, there is a regular class with university instructors called 'doradnyctvo' (i.e. advisory session), in which students discuss their experience and work on competency development.

For the field placement education, students can choose among a variety of organizations providing services to vulnerable populations in Kyiv. The SSW has formal agreements with more than 50 social service providers. University instructors organize annual meetings with field placement supervisors to help develop a common understanding of competencies, and discuss potential challenges for field placement education and training. Besides, university instructors have regular meetings with field placement supervisors. Traditionally, most field supervisors are SSW alumni who help the School of Social Work to transfer knowledge.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the format of field placement education. The University was forced to adapt all courses to online teaching for two

weeks in March 2020, and upload all materials to the newly established DistEdu online platform. Even so, numerous service providers were closed until further notice, and were not able to work with students, even online. Only 13 organizations out of the 50 SSW partners agreed to continue working with students to develop key social work competencies. Those agencies included the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, the Charitable Organization 'Dzherela', the All-Ukrainian Union of Combatants 'Pobratymy', the International Charitable Foundation 'Jewish Hesed "Bnei Azriel"', the All-Ukrainian non-governmental organization 'Convictus', the SOS Children's Villages Ukraine, A21 Ukraine, the All-Ukrainian Public Association 'National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine', Eleos Ukraine, the Charitable Foundation 'Lifelover', Teenergizer, the Charitable Foundation 'ROKADA' and the National Children's Council.

This study aims to explore how the field placement education was organized during the lockdown to develop key competencies in social work. More specifically, 1) What are the institutional challenges and innovations in field placement organizing? 2) How well did social work students master key competencies?

Methods

This case study was employed to present an in-depth understanding of innovation in social work practice education in the context of the pandemic lockdown (Aberdeen, 2009). The study site is the SSW NaUKMA, with the study covering the period from early March 2020 to March 2021, capturing the period of lockdown and online education at the University.

The data set analysed for this study consists of students' reports, competency-based self-assessment, students' assessment of the field placement (led by the University's education quality assurance centre) and the assessment of students' performance by the field placement supervisors and university's instructors. Only social work students (class of 2021 and 2022) were eligible to participate in the study. The University instructor invited students to participate in the study, fill out a self-evaluation questionnaire and participate in an anonymous university survey. Those who agreed to participate in the case study consented to having their reports used in the analysis.

Field placement supervisors verbalized informed consent, and were interviewed by phone.

Data on course organizing were collected from phone interviews with field placement supervisors (n=13), and from an anonymous student survey (n=23). Field placement supervisors had to meet the following requirements: to be field placement supervisors for SSW students and to express consent to participate in the study. They answered questions concerning achievements and challenges they experienced during the field placement. The anonymous student survey was led by the University's education quality assurance centre. Only five questions from this survey were included in the analysis: (1) Was remote learning comfortable? (2) Did the field instructor apply a variety of learning instruments? (3) Did the field instructor employ the available options of the DistEdu platform? (4) What did students like about the course? (5) What changes did students suggest?

Data on mastering key competencies were collected from the student's final reports and self-assessment of their competencies at the beginning and end of field placement education. In their report, students described their field placement and tasks, and provided feedback regarding the mastery of key social work competencies. The self-assessment employed a competency-based self-evaluation questionnaire (Table 1). All 53 students assessed their competencies at the beginning and end of field placement education (class of 2021 - at the end of the course and the class of 2022 - after two semesters). However, only 43 of them expressed their consent to participate in the study. Therefore, the analysis is focused on the 43 students who expressed their consent to participate.

Table 1
Key competencies (KC) for bachelor of social work

KC 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behaviour
KC 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice
KC 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic and Environmental Justice
KC 4: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
KC 5: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
KC 6: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
KC 7: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
KC 8: Knowledge and understanding of the social protection system and social services

Source: NaUKMA. (2020). *Educational programme in social work for bachelor level* (Order No. 2.2).

All data was collected in Ukrainian. After all the interviews were transcribed, reports and answers from the survey and a self-administered questionnaire were uploaded and anonymized. The data was translated verbatim into English, and translated back into Ukrainian to validate the accuracy of translation.

Theoretical foundations in analysing and discussing the student self-evaluations on mastering key competencies employ a competency-based approach (Shepard & Wahle, 1981). On the one hand, students must develop professional competency, and be able to apply multiple competencies in a variety of practice situations (Poulin & Matis, 2019). On the other hand, faculty are increasing their use of various tools to provide opportunities to develop practice skills (Phillips, 2011).

For analysis, the authors used the five steps of the thematic framework approach: familiarization with the data, developing a coding scheme based on the themes in the data indexing, in which the coding framework is systematically applied to the dataset, charting, whereby the data is rearranged according to its thematic content, and mapping and interpretation, a process of exploring the relationships between the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data about key competencies in social work were compared at the base and end lines and complemented with students' and field placement supervisor's feedback.

Result

The study population included 43 bachelor students (18 - class of 2021, 25 - class of 2022 aged 19-20 years, 6 males, 37 female) and 13 field placement supervisors

(eight of them are SSW NaUKMA alumni), who are the key informants for this case study.

During the initial peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all instructors were required to adapt their courses for teaching online. At the beginning of the summer trimester (additional time for the spring semester that lasts seven weeks and starts in May), 18 bachelor social work students (class of 2021) had already finished about 28 weeks of face-to-face field placement education. An additional 21 weeks of practice were required to fulfil the curricula requirements. Therefore, it was necessary to quickly adapt the field placement to the new circumstances. Additionally, 35 bachelor social work students (class of 2022) have delayed their practice education until September 2021, and started it online due to the ongoing pandemic. Bachelor social work students, university instructors and field placement supervisors met challenges regarding field placement organizing in new circumstances in achieving the primary task - to develop social work competencies.

Below, we will analyse the results of teaching/courses delivery as a result of the pandemic in three domains: (1) institutional challenges, (2) core competencies in students, and (3) mastery of competencies.

Field Placement Organization
University policies and transition to online education
At the beginning of the quarantine, there was a period of confusion and uncertainty, as nobody had a clear understanding of the duration of the quarantine restrictions. According to the NaUKMA order (March 12, 2020), face-to-face education was suspended and all courses were to be provided online until further notice. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a possibility to apply for programme changes, and some courses were allowed to be postponed until the following year. However, those courses that had already started, including SSW field placement, had to be finished.

During the first two weeks of the lockdown, classes were held via ZOOM or Ms Teams platforms. There were not enough licensed accounts, and some lecturers had never used these tools before. Instead, the University suggested teaching all courses

via the DistEdu platform, but most teachers and students were also not aware of this platform, nor were they trained to use it. One month later, the University organized training courses for all lecturers on how to use DistEdu platform properly. Thus, the transition from in-person to online learning started.

All the course's tasks were reoriented to an online format, and additional online resources were used during lessons. These included Mentimeter, Kahoot, Mirro and the Google interactive whiteboard. Additionally, students created closed groups on Facebook, Viber and Telegram to communicate with the instructors and field placement supervisors. Instructors used these chats to inform students about tasks, and provide quick responses to urgent questions regarding field placement education. All of these changes allowed the course to be more flexible. So far, all the course tasks and activities have been uploaded to DistEdu, and at any time students can review the programme and other course materials at any time of their choosing, such as videos, assignments, information about the organizations, etc.

Hard time for students and lecturers

This transition period was stressful for both students and lecturers. Due to the quarantine limitations, the dormitory was closed, and students were forced to return from Kyiv to other cities in Ukraine. At home, they faced difficulties with access to online education because of a poor or limited Internet connection, limited digital skills or even a lack of computers. For example, in one family there was one computer for five family members, and all of them needed it for work or studying at the same time. Students also experienced stress due to the increased workload, as well as social isolation and the temporary break-up of close relationships with peers:

> ...in time of distance learning, I critically miss the opportunity to spend time with classmates in discussions, just to talk, and see the faces…" (BA student, class of 2021)

It was a hard time for the University instructors as well. In addition to the current training issues, it was necessary to negotiate with the field agencies, look for new placement opportunities online, quickly learn new tools, computer programmes and the platform. The following semester, the field placement education was completely switched to online and uploaded to DistEdu platform.

Service providers suspended their work

When the lockdown was announced, several social service providers – SSW NaUKMA partners – temporarily suspended their work, while others continued to work remotely. A number of organizations that provided individual or group work in person were closed in March 2020 until further notice. On the one hand, the organizations were not ready to provide online services due to a lack of digital skills and resources. On the other hand, according to field placement supervisors' feedback, there was no previous experience in providing services online:

> We were working with vulnerable families, doing home visits and assessments at client's homes. It was not possible due to COVID restrictions. (Charitable organization 'Dzherela')

> We provide hot meals to homeless people in the street. We stopped doing this for a few months. (Charitable foundation 'Lifelover')

Only some of these service providers were reopened in the summer of 2020 after adapting their practice to new circumstances. As a result, 11 out of 18 students (class of 2021) were not able to continue their field placement education. University instructors were looking for new service providers in order to accomplish SSW requirements. However, there were no formal agreements between SSW NaUKMA and the new service providers, and it was not easy to follow all formal procedures, including signing documents and organizing meetings to discuss core competencies for social work students with the new supervisors. The other seven students continued their field placement at the same organizations they started their field placements with.

New needs required new service development

Some service providers changed their practice in a short period of time to respond to the current needs of their clients. For example, since the beginning of the pandemic many people faced loneliness, and lost their jobs and social contacts. The need for psychosocial support and online counselling grew significantly. In order to respond to this need, the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, in partnership with the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, launched a national COVID hotline in April 2020. They invited SSW NaUKMA students as online consultants because there were not enough trained specialists:

> I took part in two trainings, where I learned more about online counselling, studied the necessary scripts and was trained as an online consultant. (BA student, class of 2021)

> I learned how specialists work over the phone, how first aid is provided at the hotline. (BA student, class of 2021)

Hence, it was a great opportunity for those 11 students to continue their field placement education and training. They were directly involved in online counselling as call centre operators responsible for receiving calls, recording requests, providing information about resources available or recording the request and passing information about urgent needs to another department of the organization. Also, they were trained to provide first psychosocial aid for clients with behavioural issues such as verbal aggression and crying. The field placement supervisors stated that students responded very well to this challenge:

> Students quickly learned new information and started actively joining the hotline. The most active students expressed a desire to work in the organization's office, despite quarantine restrictions. The organization provided all needed safety measures and transportation. It was an interesting experience to involve students in this activity. (Field placement supervisor, Ukrainian Red Cross Society)

Developing key social work competencies

There were significant challenges regarding the development of all eight competencies required by the bachelor programme in social work during a time of pandemic restrictions. Social work students who mastered these competencies employed various methods, including reviewing cases, watching videos with follow-up discussions, etc. They considered each competence separately, with relevant theoretical explanation and training for its mastery. Students received various tasks from University instructors and field placement supervisors, and recorded their performance in a diary. They also received feedback from the field supervisor about their progress in each competency. Lastly, students assessed their progress in the mastering of the key competencies by themselves (Table 2). The analysis below will focus on each competency separately, and highlight the challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic, in addition to the related restrictions on its mastery by the students.

Table 2
Students' self-assessment of key competencies

Key competencies (KC)	Class of 2021 (n=18 responses of 18 enrolled students)			Class of 2022 (n=25 responses of 35 enrolled students)		
	Developed	*In process*	*Need more practice*	*Developed*	*In process*	*Need more practice*
KC 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behaviour	15	3	0	19	6	0
KC 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice	12	6	0	20	3	2
KC 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic and Environmental Justice	9	9	0	13	12	0
KC 4: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities	11	4	3	11	12	2
KC 5: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities	9	4	5	9	15	1
KC 6: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities	16	2	0	2	16	7
KC 7: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities	0	3	15	4	15	6
KC 8: Knowledge and understanding of the social protection system and social services	12	6	0	17	5	3

KC 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behaviour

To obtain more practice regarding this competency, students followed specific rules while working in the field agencies. These rules include: to communicate with staff and clients in a respectful and non-judgmental manner, to become acquainted with the organization's Code of Ethics and to discuss it with the field supervisor, to follow

the agency's policies and procedures on confidentiality, to follow the organization's dress code and to communicate with staff and clients politely and respectfully. Additionally, during class instruction students become acquainted with the National Code of Ethics and its main statements, prepare presentations about professional social work values, ethical decision-making, work out some cases and resolve ethical dilemmas in small groups, as well as watching and discussing a video on this topic:

> This competency is very important to inform people about human trafficking, I tried to demonstrate ethical and professional behaviour. So, the audience trusts the provided information. This competence for me also includes a certain respect for people. (BA student, class of 2021)

KC 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

To develop this competency, students were involved in providing services to different groups of clients in the field agency. For example, they were working with people living with dementia, persons with disabilities, vulnerable families, elderly persons, teens, internally displaced persons, veterans, children, people living with HIV, refugees, etc. Students learned about their cultural diversity, took part in providing online training and webinars for different clients, and helped the field agencies in searching research results related to their group of clients. All these activities helped them to better understand the impact of cultural diversity on the everyday life and well-being of their clients. In class, students presented the needs of clients, watched videos and discussed cultural diversity with their classmates. Only two of 18 students (class of 2021) expressed that they needed more training to master this competence.

> I developed this KC the best, because in my field agency (Centre for Social and Psychological Rehabilitation of Children) there were a lot of children of different ages, nationalities, with different mental health issues and physical development. I consider that I developed this competence well, and I found a common language with every child. (BA student, class 2022)

> I was involved in providing peer-to-peer training for teens. Every kid is unique - I met teens living with HIV, representatives of different nationalities, teens with different gender identities, and it was crucial to accept this. (BA student, class 2022)

KC 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic and Environmental Justice

In the field agency, students were given assignment to analyse how social policy and legislation have addressed the needs of different groups of clients, including people with disabilities, internally displaced persons or victims of human trafficking. Students searched information about their rights reviewed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provided information about Coronavirus and on how to

protect oneself for people with disabilities and informed the local communities about human trafficking through employing Facebook, Instagram and other social media. In class, students presented information about human rights. Both groups of students assessed their progress in developing this competency. Yet, 21 of them are still working on it:

> This competency was developed while conducting a lecture for students at the college, where we talked about the prevention of human trafficking. This competence was also developed while creating materials to A21 organization. (BA student, class 2022)

KC 4: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
During the lockdown, it was difficult to engage individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities because of the strict quarantine protocols that the field agencies followed. But those students who were trained as online consultants in the call centre were more successful. In class, students watched videos about individual and family engagement with follow-up discussion, worked in small groups on active strategies of engagement at the case and agency level and analysed the main barriers on the clients' way to receive social services. Despite all of this, this competency needs more practice (five responses), or is in the process of development (16 answers):

> Practical experience is very valuable. As it turned out, this year, during extra curricula activities, I met some people in difficult life situations who needed my help. (BA student, class of 2021)

KC 5: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
It was difficult to develop this competency in field agencies during the lockdown, as only a few were involved in home visits and family assessment. Some of them were only allowed to review professional documentation, such as a personal profile, assessment or individual plan, discuss the family's case with the case managers, review individual plans, available resources and services. In class, they were working with legal acts which regulate case management; they reviewed and compared professional forms and documents of state organizations and NGOs, worked on cases and worked with individual plans. As a result, only 18 of the students assessed this competency as developed:

> It may seem overconfident, but I think that I have mastered the practical skills to the best of my ability, because I was involved in 'real'" social work with families at risk, and saw a lot with my own eyes. (BA student, class of 2022)

KC 6: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

During the field experience, students were involved in online counselling, provided information to clients about available services in response to their numerous needs, provided information about COVID-19 and the algorithm of action in case of deteriorating health, conducted webinars (provided mini-presentations and interactive activities with clients during the webinar) or online lessons; they developed and provided webinars for persons with dementia, and kept in contact with the organization's clients by phone or via Skype. In class, students discussed these interventions. However, 16 students are still in the process with the competency, and seven need more practice:

> In general, during the course I managed to develop almost all competencies at a sufficient level, because our work was related to direct communication with the organization and a group of clients, I was able to develop most of the competencies and put them into practice. Due to the fact that the practice was in an online format, I could not try to apply various interventions in real life.' (BA student, class of 2021)

> This competency was relatively developed during the lecture in the college when I interacted directly with the target audience. (BA student, class of 2022)

KC 7: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

Only a few students developed this competency in the field, as they were involved in work with families. They reviewed professional documentation, and discussed cases with field staff. For most students, this competence was considered in class, where they learn cases and documentation. Resulting from this, only four students in the class of 2022 think that they have developed this competency:

> Unfortunately, due to lockdown I didn't have access to clients. (BA student, class of 2021)

> Half of these core competencies I was able to practice in my place in practice, as well as speak and put into practice in pairs with my classmates during classes. So, I have a well-formed understanding of these competencies, but some of them have not been worked out yet. But I have a summer semester to do it. (BA student, class of 2022)

KC 8: Knowledge and understanding of the social protection system and social services

To develop this competency in the field agency, students searched for information about available resources in the community for the target group of clients, connected clients to appropriate resources and made referrals to target agencies. In class, students analysed key social services providers, worked with the national register of social services (developed by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine) and mapped social services. Thus, 29 students believe they have progressed in this competency:

> The Ukrainian Red Cross Society referred clients to other social services in the community, so I was able to understand how the social protection system works. Employees of the Red Cross often ask if a person belongs to a certain vulnerable group, check the answer and provide the appropriate information. At hotline counselling, it is important to work hard, which means practicing constantly and regularly. Summing up, it should be said that during the internship I had the opportunity not only to practice all the necessary competencies, but also to enjoy the work that was done. (BA student, class 2022)

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the question on how to organize field placement education and training during the lockdown to help develop key competencies in social work. Research results provide evidence that it is still possible to develop key social work competencies through online teaching. For example, students can learn how to demonstrate ethical and professional behaviour, engage diversity and difference in practice, advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice, and acquire knowledge and an understanding of the social protection system and social services. However, social work is a 'human-human' profession, and it can be challenging to teach online how to engage, assess, intervene and evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. Further research is required to evaluate the impact of the lockdown on social work professional development in different countries, cities and even schools of social work. The research should cover the regulation of social work practice, education and training, programme and field placement designs, key social work competencies and building resilience.

The situation caused by COVID-19 has led to significant restrictions and changes, including the suppression of activity at all levels of education in most countries, and forcing the population to be confined to their homes (Cifuentes-Faura, 2020). In Ukraine, universities were closed and teaching activities had to move onto remote and digital platforms. We identified that online learning for field placement education was unexpected, and required a quick response.

In this article, we decided to share the successful moments and difficulties faced by SSW NaUKMA during the transition from offline to online education. In our case, one of the challenges that students, field supervisors and University instructors faced was lockdown limitations and the suppression of field placement activities. In Ukraine,

social work agencies were closed or suspended activities. A similar situation happened in Australia, Hungary, Canada, the US, Malaysia, the Netherlands and other countries.

In Ukraine, social work is a new profession, and there is no national professional association for social workers or an official body for social work education like in Australia (Clarke & Morley, 2020) and Canada (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). So, universities and schools of social work decided on the changes to the curriculum and field placement education without any regulations and guidance. The School of Social Work NaUKMA did not revise the curriculum and workload hours in field placement education. To compare, the Australian Association of Social Workers introduced modifications to the standards, particularly in social work education in relation to the field education.

The field placement education in our case was not postponed to the next semester, as it was in Malaysia (Azman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, several students had to change their field agency, while others had to coordinate their tasks with the field supervisors at the agency where they were practicing offline, and start performing new tasks remotely. The situation required an immediate response and some changes in the format or model of practice. In response to all of these challenges, NaUKMA required to transfer offline studying into online as happened in many other countries. A similar situation was in Hungary, where the field instructors did not use IT tools, nor did they teach students about forms of work that can be organized on digital platforms (Csoba, 2020).

We can summarize that SSW NaUKMA was not ready for such challenges, since teachers were not trained and did not have experience in providing online courses. There was also a lack of technical support.

Some field agencies have also transformed their services remotely in response to the growing demands and needs of vulnerable groups in Ukraine. Clarke and Morley, (2020) underscored that human service organizations that ordinarily host student placements have also needed to rapidly design remote modes of service delivery in the context of current social distancing requirements and unprecedented demands

for assistance. As Morris et al. (2020) pointed out, due to stay-at-home orders, the risk of experiencing social isolation and loneliness, already a major social problem before the crisis, has increased, particularly for older adults. In response to these situations, students in the US found a way to be helpful in the context of a public emergency, and provided a project called GiftsofGab.org, which connects social work students with those in need of social interaction (Morris et al., 2020). In Ukraine, there was a need to involve students of social work in interaction with vulnerable groups. So, our students were involved in the project provided by the Ukrainian Red Cross Society in partnership with the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, which launched a national COVID hotline in April 2021.

In times of social isolation, clients' needs in assistance, communication and interaction have critically grown, as well as increased the demand for social work services and assistance. Consequently, social work must be flexible and respond quickly to changing situations and the needs of the population. Now, social work is moving to various formats, and some services are provided using online applications. Therefore, it is also necessary to take into account different formats of service provision in internship programmes.

For students, the transition to online learning was not an easy task. Most of them noted that a lack of communication with classmates, isolation and an increased workload led to the deterioration of their psychological state and learning difficulties. Jonge et al. (2020) stated that students found it harder to meet deadlines, doubted whether they would still be able to complete assessments properly and feared a delay in their studies. These students appeared to lack sufficient self-reliance, discipline and time management skills to face the new circumstances. School-based field instructors provided support to students during classes, but there were not support programmes or training on how to use the online platform. Csobu (2020) emphasized the importance of developing students' skills in online and digital methods.

We indicated that education in social work should include the development of soft skills, not only for students but also for teachers. At the same time, teachers need training on how to use various digital technologies to provide classes online. Possible

ways to improve the teachers' skills and their qualifications are to provide training and develop a network of field practice teachers in social work.

Since everyone stayed at home, it was important to maintain communication between the students, the teacher and the field agency supervisors. In March 2021, at the beginning of the lockdown, communication primarily took place by telephone or e-mail. At the beginning of April, ZOOM and MsTeams applications were actively used, and group chats for students, the field practice supervisor and the University instructor were later in Telegram and Viber. In these chats, the field supervisor, students and teacher could quickly discuss tasks, and how better to involve students in the organization's activities so that they could work out key competencies. At the same time, chat provides an opportunity to receive rapid responses from everyone. So, we assume that the organization of the field placement requires a good communication between all stakeholders. In the new and changed conditions, it is better to use different channels of communication.

Although the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto reported that online learning is less effective than in-person education in preparing students for practice (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic forced teachers to employ various methods and instruments for mastering key social work competencies online.

This case study has demonstrated the key drivers that enabled SSW NaUKMA to develop core social work competencies for bachelor-level students during the lockdown. Through combining the service providers, university and student's workforce to respond to the vulnerable population's needs in new circumstances, a wide context could be utilized for social work practice, education and training.

As the world continues to live with the pandemic, this study has demonstrated the importance of reacting to the current needs of vulnerable populations, for universities to be flexible and incorporate arising needs into the curricula that might improve the students' ability to be flexible and adaptive during their subsequent careers in social work. This 'soft skill' might be beneficial for the future social work practice, as the challenges to social well-being change rapidly, and the social practice needs to adapt rapidly.

In general, social work field education programmes globally are struggling to meet the demands of providing suitable placements for students. There is a need to consider new and innovative placement models to both meet professional accreditation requirements and deliver high-quality field education opportunities for social work students (Zuchowski et al., 2019). Our case can be a good example of innovation introduction in the field education of social workers, especially in areas without a social work regulatory body and a longer history of the profession. Our experience provides a good background for raising and discussing questions on regulating field education in times of external shocks in the future. Social work education can remain flexible to external shocks that may impact its delivery going forward.

Study Limitations

While the findings do provide insight in how to organize field placement in emergencies to develop key competencies in social work, generalizability for responding to external shocks in other SSW (particularly in areas without a social work regulatory body and a longer history of the profession) is limited by the study design. Additionally, the data were gathered in Ukrainian and translated to English verbatim. For this reason, there might be limitations of accurately capturing what was expressed in English.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all of the SSW NaUKMA students and field placement supervisors. Your commitment and patience make it possible to develop social work competencies in the context of lockdown.

References

Aberdeen, T. (2013). Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [Review of *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th Ed..), by R. K. Yin]. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research*, *14*(1), 69–71. https://doi.org/10.33524/cjar.v14i1.73

Azman, A., Singh, P. S. J., Parker, J. & Ashencaen Crabtree, S. (2020). Addressing competency requirements of social work students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. *Social Work Education, 39*(8), 1058–1065. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1815692

Boiko, O. & Kabachenko, N. (2016). Social Work Formation in Ukraine. *International Journal for Transformative Social Policy and Practice*, *1,* 35-40 http://ekmair.ukma.edu.ua/bitstream/handle/123456789/11682/Boiko_Social_Work_Formation_in_Ukraine.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Cifuentes-Faura, J. (2020). The role of social work in the field of education during COVID-19. *International Social Work, 63*(6). https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820944994

Clarke, J. & Morley, C. (2020). From crisis to opportunity?: Innovations in Australian social work field education during the COVID-19 global pandemic. *Social Work Education*, *39*(8), 1048–1057.https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1836145

Csoba, J. & Diebel, A. (2020). Worldwide closed!: Social worker field practice during the 'lockdown' period. *Social Work Education, 39*(8), 1094–1106. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1829580

Dempsey, A., Lanzieri, N., Luce, V., de Leon, C., Malhotra, J. & Heckman, A. (2021). Faculty Respond to COVID-19: Reflections-on-Action in Field Education. *Clinical Social Work Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-021-00787-y

Ewijk, H. (2009). *European social policy and social work: Citizenship-based social work. European Social Policy and Social Work: Citizenship-Based Social Work* (pp. 1–192). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869925

Jonge, E., Kloppenburg, R. & Hendriks, P. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work education and practice in the Netherlands. *Social*

Work Education, 39(8), 1027–1036.
https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1823363

Kourgiantakis, T. & Lee, E. (2020). Social work practice education and training during the pandemic: Disruptions and discoveries. *International Social Work, 63*(6), 761–765. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820959706

Mclaughlin, H., Scholar, H. & Teater, B. (2020, November 16). Social work education in a global pandemic: Strategies, reflections, and challenges. *Social Work Education, 39*(8), 975–982. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1834545

Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2019). *Higher education in social work for bachelor level* (Standard No. 557).
https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/vishcha-osvita/zatverdzeni%20standarty/2019/04/25/231-sotsialna-robota-bakalavr.pdf [in Ukrainian]

Morris, Z. A., Dragone, E., Peabody, C. & Carr, K. (2020). Isolation in the midst of a pandemic: Social work students rapidly respond to community and field work needs. *Social Work Education, 39*(8), 1127–1136.
https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1809649

NaUKMA (2011). *About students' field placement* (Order No. 669).
https://www.ukma.edu.ua/ects/images/ects/praktika.pdf [in Ukrainian]

NaUKMA (2020). *Educational program in social work for bachelor level* (Order No. 2.2).
https://www.ukma.edu.ua/ects/images/ects/docs/op/OP_231_social_work_2020_updated.pdf [in Ukrainian]

Onalu, C. E., Chukwu, N. E., & Okoye, U. O. (2020). COVID-19 response and social work education in Nigeria: Matters arising. *Social Work Education, 39*(8), 1037–1047. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1825663

Phillips, A. (2011). Service-Learning and Social Work Competency-Based Education: A "Goodness of Fit"? *Advances in Social Work, 12*(1), 1–20.
https://doi.org/10.18060/1318

Poulin, J. & Matis, S. (2019). *Social work practice: A competency-based approach.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1891/9780826178534

Semigina, T. & Boiko, O. (2014). Social work education in post-socialist and post-modern era: Case of Ukraine. In C. Noble, H. Strauss & B. Littlechild (Ed.),

Global social work education - crossing borders blurring boundaries (p. 257–269). Sydney University Press. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25366.55365

Shepard, G. & Wahle, L. P. (1981). A competency-based approach to social work education: Does it work? *Journal of Education for Social Work*, *17*(3), 75–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220612.1981.10672055

Tortorelli C., Choate P., Clayton M., El Jamal N., Kaur S. & Schantz K. (2021). Simulation in social work: Creativity of students and faculty during COVID-19. *Social Sciences, 10*(1), Article 7. https://doi:10.3390/socsci10010007

World Health Organization (2020). *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19-11 March 2020*. https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who- director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid -19—11-march-2020

Zuchowski, I., Cleak, H., Nickson, A. & Spencer, A. (2019). A National Survey of Australian Social Work Field Education Programs: Innovation with Limited Capacity. *Australian Social Work*, *72*(1), 75–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2018.1511740