



# PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES OF UNDER GRADUATE SOCIAL WORKS STUDENTS IN CHENNAI

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## ABSTRACT

*Social Work profession deals with the human being and their problems. It is practiced on three levels micro, mezzo and macro level. It is also understood that dealing an individual problem is not an easy task and being a social worker need to be competent. This study made an attempt to assess the under graduate social work students on 8 core professional competencies. Descriptive research design was used to describe the professional competencies. The samples were randomly selected since it is a definite population. 156 under graduate social work students were selected and data was collected using questionnaire after getting their concern. More than half of the respondents chose Social Work because of no other course is been offered for marks they scored. Two third of the respondents are aspired to do Social Work. Two third of the respondents possess high level of professional Competencies. Respondents those aspired for Social Work have high level of professional competencies. Competencies are not stagnant, based on necessity it might change. Hence the Professional Competencies are to be mastered for effective practice. Periodic assessment of once one Professional Competencies, will aid the practice and desired outcome is possible.*

**Key Words:** Social Work, Profession, Professional Competence and Skills.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social Work is the noble profession that helps different folks of life irrespective of their caste, class, creeds, religion, culture, tradition etc.,. Social Work practice involves the understanding of human development, behaviour and the social, economic and cultural institutions and interactions (Workers, July 2014). It is also a challenging profession need to cater the unique need of Individuals. Helping the individual in Social Work lays on the professional competency of the worker. At present the competence of social work students decreasing and the number of professional social workers are increasing. Being a wide field there are many opportunities to work international level also. But the competence of Indian social work students are not as per the expectation of global wants. Even though it noticed by many Indian and international social work experts and social scientists there is no an effective change. (Mahesh Palloor\*, 2017). This study attempts to define the professional competence and understanding the level of the same among under graduate Social Work students of Madras School of Social Work.

## II. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to understand the professional competencies of a social worker in relation to social work knowledge, characteristics, functions, values, principles, methods, Ethics and Skills. Ratings of individual competence will establish a range of competence from beginner to expert. The main focus is to make the student understand about their professional competence level and to enhance the area in which they are lacking. The periodic assessment helps the social worker to enhance their professionalism as result the worker competency will increase.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW:

A study was conducted to measure the reliability and validity of a competency-based evaluation tool to assess M.S.W. Students' Performance in Field Practicum. It was mentioned that measuring competency of a student in field practicum continues to represent a challenge for social work educators. The outcomes of the study are critical because social work schools are responsible for producing competent professional practitioners. The findings from this study indicate that there is some theoretical and practice coherence in the factors and associated skills that comprise the Competency Based Evaluation Tool (CBE). Hence the theoretical input in measuring the competence places a major role. It is recommended that all social work programs test and report the reliability and validity of the tools they use to evaluate students' performance in Field Practicum. (Authors: Bogo, 2018)

Professional Competence Development of the Social Work Specialists in the Period of Study in the System of Additional Education, in this study attempt has been made to define the professional competence of a social work specialist. Professional competence of a social work specialist is a wide concept which includes theoretical knowledge and its practical application, axiological orientations and integral indices of its culture (speech, way of communication etc.). The professional competence includes special, communicative, analytical, reflexive, analytical, motivation-personal, social, and individual. (Denis Kuanyshevich Davletkaliev1Natalia Konstantinovna Zueva1, 2015).

Competence includes skill, knowledge, and a positive attitude that empowers. That which expands personal development inherently affects professional development. *Competence* allows us to absorb knowledge, apply theoretical concepts, assess, and intervene with accuracy. It is measurable and gets the job done. Competence is not stagnant; it is a never-ending push for personal and professional excellence. The challenge is to be better than the day before, while promoting the rights, values, and respect of those we serve. (Britany Swinton, May 2019).

An article on ten most demanded professional competencies expected by companies, explained the competencies as optimism, flexibility, loyalty, team work, leadership, leadership, communication skills, creativity, transparency, Energy. It was concluded that all the above competencies are optional whereas the professional competence expected by the companies is subjected to the concern profession. Hence the professional competencies are essential for an effective practice. (people, 2020)

Social Work core Competencies are organized by the Berkeley Social Welfare Institutions for MSW curriculum. It represents the dimensions of social work practice, that students are expected to master those during the professional training. Each core competency is defined by a set of associated practice behaviors expected to result from achieving the competency. The following are the core competencies, 1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behaviour, 2. Engage diversity and difference in practice, 3. Advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice, 4. Engage in practice – informed research and research informed practice, 5. Engage in policy practice, 6. Engage with individuals, groups, families, organizations and communities, 7. Assess Individuals, groups, families, organizations and communities. 8. Intervene with Individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities, 9. Evaluate practice with Individuals, groups, families, organizations and communities. (Curriculum, 2020)

#### IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research study on Professional Competencies of under graduate social works students in Chennai with the objectives to study the demographic profile, understand the aspiration for social work and to assess the professional competencies of the respondents. Descriptive research design is used to study the phenomenon professional competencies among under graduate Social Work Students in Chennai. This study aims to define and describe the professional Competencies of social Work students. The population consists of under graduate students from social work institutions offering the course in Chennai. Using the lottery method, the 3 Social Work institutions were randomly selected. Using the formula, the

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\epsilon^2 N}}$$
 size of the sample was determined 156, with margin error 5percent at 90 percent confidence level. Questionnaire method was used to collect the data from the respondents after getting their willingness. Questionnaire tool was prepared by the researcher based on the review of literature and pre tested.

#### Social Work

“Social Work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to Social Work. Underpinned by theories of Social Work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, Social Work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.” (IFSW, July 2014).

#### Competence:

According to Zeer (2003), a professionally competent worker is a specialist who “has knowledge, skills, qualities, experience and individual style of activity which are necessary for the qualitative and effective work”. IA.Winter [7] and by competence we understand the knowledge-based intellectually and personally determined experience of the social and professional life of a person. The basis of this

integrative quality is the knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, values and inclinations of an individual to social and professional activities. (Bobomurod Khujomov, 2019).

### Professional Competence:

A professional is competent when he/she acts responsibly and effectively according to given standards of performance. Professional Competence requires knowledge (disciplinary knowledge), skills (working with artefacts) and attitudes (accuracy, coping with pressure, integrity). Professional competence is seen as the generic, integrated and internalized capability to deliver sustainable effective (worthy) performance (including problem solving, realizing innovation, and creating transformation) in a certain professional domain, job, role, organisational context, and task situation. (Mulder, 2014).

## V. CONCEPTUALITION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

Assessment of Social Work professional competence is defined as the level of Social Work knowledge, values guiding and the essential skills.



## VI. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The following are the data analysis based on the objectives of the research study

**TABLE NO. 1 Demographic profile of the Respondents**

Demographic details		Frequency	Percent
Age (Years)	18 - 20	131	84.0
	21 - 23	25	16.0
Gender	Female	86	55.1
	Male	70	44.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>156</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table shows the age of the respondents. Majority (84%) of the respondents belong the age between 18 to 20 years. Since are the respondents are from under graduate this is the ideal age. Below one fourth (16%) of the respondents belong the age group 21 to 23 years. This table shows the gender of the respondents. More than half (55%) of the respondents are female and 45 percent of the respondents are male. This is evident that female are more in number than male in pursuing Social Work.

**TABLE NO. 2 Aspirations of the Respondents**

Aspiration	Frequency	Percent
Aspired for Social Work	93	60
Aspired for some other Profession	63	40.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100</b>

This table shows the respondents aspiration for social work while choosing their under graduation. It is clearly evident that two third (60%) of the respondents aspired to study Social Work, whereas more than one third (40%) of the respondents aspired for some other profession. They might join Social Work for various other reasons.

**TABLE NO. 3 Reasons for Choosing Social Work**

Reason For Choosing Social Work	Frequency	Percent
My Interest/Ambition	24	15.4
Parent Compulsion	21	13.5
Peer Influence	27	17.3
No other Choice for the Mark	84	53.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100</b>

This table gives the reason for taking up Social Work as their profession. It is clearly evident that more than half of the respondents (54%) chosen Social Work since they didn't get any other course for the marks, they obtained in 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Only 15 percent of the respondents chose this course out of their own interest. Still parental compulsion in choosing the graduation is still exist with the evident that 13 percent have chosen the Social Work course because of parent compulsion. More than one fourth (17%) of the respondents chose this course out of peer influence.

**TABLE NO. 5 AVERAGE MARKS OF THE RESPONDENTS**

Average Marks Obtained	Frequency	Percent
Below 40	19	12.2
41 - 61	22	14.1
62 - 82	30	19.2
Above 82	85	54.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100</b>

The table shows the average marks scored by the respondents till the previous semester. More than half (54%) of the respondents score above 82 marks. Nearly one fourth of the respondents (19%) average score

is between 62 and 82 marks. Less than one fourth of the respondents scores between 41 marks and 61 marks. There are below average students of 12 percent who scores below 40.

**TABLE NO. 6 Level of Social Work Students Professional Competencies**

<b>Level of Social Work Students Professional Competencies</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Low	2	1.3
Moderate	51	32.7
High	103	66.0
Total	156	100

The table explains the professional competencies acquired by the respondents comprising of eight core competencies such as the Social work knowledge competence, social work characteristics competency, Value, Principles, Methods, Functions, Ethics and Skills. Two third (66%) of the respondents are having high professional competencies, more than one third of the respondents possess moderate level of professional competencies and only 1 percent of the respondent possess low professional competencies.

**TABLE NO. 07 Aspirations Wise Professional Competencies of Respondents**

<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Professional Competencies</b>			
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Aspired for Social Work</b>	0	32	61	<b>93</b>
<b>Aspired for some other Profession</b>	2	19	42	<b>63</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>156</b>

The cross table shows the comparison of aspiration of the respondents with their professional competencies. It is clearly evident that two third (61) of the respondents those aspired for the Social Work are having high level of professional competencies. Also, more than one third (42) of the respondents, those not aspired for Social Work possess high level of Professional Competencies. One third of the respondents (32) those aspired for Social Work are having moderate level of Professional Competence.

**TABLE NO. 08 Reason for Choosing Social Work and Professional Competencies Of Respondents**

Reason For Choosing Social Work	Professional Competencies			
	Low	Moderate	High	Total
My Interest/Ambition	0	8	16	24
Parent Compulsion	0	7	14	21
Peer Influence	1	7	19	27
No other Choice for the Marks obtained	1	29	54	84
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>156</b>

The above table shows the reason for choosing Social Work and Professional Competencies of the respondents. More than half (54) of the respondents those, who chose Social Work because they didn't get any other course are possessing highly level of Professional Competencies. Among the respondents having Social Work as their ambition only below one fourth of the respondents (16) are having high level of professional competencies.

**TABLE NO. 09 Average Marks and Professional Competencies**

Average Marks	Professional Competencies of Social Work			Total
	Low	Moderate	High	
Below 40	0	9	10	19
41 - 61	0	5	17	22
62 - 82	0	13	17	30
Above 82	2	24	59	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>156</b>

The table shows the comparison between the average marks scored by respondents and the level of Professional Competencies. More than half of the respondents (59) those, score above 82 marks possess high level of Professional Competencies, where as one fourth of the respondents (24) those score above 82 are having moderate level of Professional Competencies. Hence it is clear that the marks scored are not relevant to the level of their Professional Competencies.

## VII. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Majority (84%) of the respondents belong the age between 18 to 20 years.
- More than half (55%) of the respondents are female and 45 percent of the respondents are male.
- Two third (60%) of the respondents aspired to study Social Work, whereas more than one third (40%) of the respondents aspired for some other profession.
- More than half of the respondents (54%) chosen Social Work since they didn't get any other course for the marks, they obtained in 12<sup>th</sup> standard.
- More than half (54%) of the respondents score above 82 marks.
- Two third (66%) of the respondents are having high professional competencies, more than one third of the respondents possess moderate level of professional competencies and only 1 percent of the respondent possess low professional competencies.
- Two third (61) of the respondents those aspired for the Social Work are having high level of professional competencies. Also, more than one third (42) of the respondents, those not aspired for Social Work possess high level of Professional Competencies.
- More than half (54) of the respondents those, who chose Social Work because they didn't get any other course are possessing highly level of Professional Competencies.
- More than half of the respondents (59) those, score above 82 marks possess high level of Professional Competencies.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Social Work is a noble profession, aims to help the people, families, groups and communities at a large scale. It is not very easy to handle an individual problem, since Social Work believes all individuals are unique. To deal effectively with an individuals, groups, families or community problems, it is essential to be competent in Professional traits. The Social Worker must be competent in all the eight domains that constitutes once Professional Competencies. This study reveals that the majority of the respondents in spite of compulsion and many other reasons, the students are able to perform well and possessing high level of Professional Competencies. One way this study aids the students to assess their professional competence and the area in which they are lack behind.



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