



Addis Ababa University

College of Social Sciences

School of Social Work

**Exploring the Opportunities and Challenges of Social Work Students during
the Field Practicum: The case of School of Social Work, Addis Ababa
University**

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by **Alemu Muneye**, entitled: “ *Exploring the Opportunities and Challenges of Social Work Students during the Field Practicum: In the case of School of Social Work, Addis Ababa University*” in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Social Work (Family, Children and Youth Concentration) Complies with the Regulations of the University and Meets the Accepted Standards with Respect to its Originality and Quality.

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Acronyms/Abbreviations

AAU	Addis Ababa University
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CSWE	Council of Social Work Education
MSW	Master of Social Work
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SSWAAU	School of Social Work at Addis Ababa University

Abstract

The field practicum is the most essential but marginalized part of social work education. This study aimed to explore the existing opportunities and the challenges experienced by social work students during their field practicum in the case of School of Social Work at Addis Ababa University. Qualitative case study method used to carry out the study. Semi structured interview method was used to collect the data. The participants of the study were selected purposively from both the Bachelor of Social Work and the Master of Social Work programs and academic staffs. The finding of the study brought key opportunities such as availability of field agencies, availability of resources, supports of field agencies, social work curriculum and prior knowledge and skills that help social work students to have better field practicum experiences. The findings also indicated that social work students face different challenges that mostly arise from the institutional, personal and client related limitations. Those challenges include poor supports and guidance, lack of resources, lack of awareness, weak collaborations, poor evaluations, lack of commitments, communication barriers and poor application of theories and reports. These challenges come up with some negative outcomes such as developing negative attitudes towards the field practicum, feelings of incompetent, and fragmentation of school- agency relationships, receiving low grades and underdevelopments of the social work profession. The study concluded that social work students experienced with a list of existing opportunities and challenges that might facilitate or hide their practical leanings at school of social work, Addis Ababa University. The findings have implications for social work students, School of Social Work, curriculum developers, field agencies and future researchers.

Key words: Experiences, field practicum, opportunities, challenges

Chapter One

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

As of most African countries, social work education was emerged in Ethiopia at the beginning of 1960s. The first school of social work in Ethiopia was opened at the Haile Selassie University (the current Addis Ababa University) with the two-year diploma and later upgraded to four years BSW program (Wassie, 2019). However, some years later, the school was closed because of a change in a political system in the country during 1974 (Addis Ababa University, school of social work, 2012). 30 years after its closure, the school also was reopened in 2004 in the same university in collaboration with university of Illinois at Chicago that voluntaries came to assist the Ethiopian professors at Addis Ababa University in the reestablishment of the school. This time, the social work education is rapidly expanding in Ethiopian universities. There are about 13 universities (eleven public and two private) that offer social work education in BSW and MSW programs and within few numbers of PhD levels (Wassie, 2019).

The profession of social work has two integral components of its educational curricula systems. These are the theoretical components, which students learn in classrooms and the field practices, which is a form of learning outside classroom in the agency settings (Romman, 2018). Both methods of teaching are equally important to produce well-equipped and competent social work professionals in social work institutions around the world (CSWE, 2008). However, in the reality, the field practicum is more downgraded than its counterpart (Dhemba, 2012).

In fieldwork practicum, students apply their theoretical knowledge, skill and values of the social work profession into practical experiences through providing different services in the organizational settings (Dhemba, 2012). It is a process where students gain hands on experience of knowledge and skills while they are exposed to deal with the problems of different clients under supervised activities in practical settings (Romman, 2018). The process of placement could have international contexts in both developing and developed countries for the bachelor's and Master's social work students to enhance their personal and professional development (Sossou & Dubus, 2013).

Fieldwork practice as a teaching method requires the minimum standards of the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) to complete 400 hours for the Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) and 900 hours for Masters of Social Work (MSW) programs in a supervised organizational setting so as to earn accredited Bachelor's and Master's degree in social work (CSWE, 2008).

Social work students have the positive and negative experiences in their field practicum activities. According to Baikady et al (2017), the positive experiences among others include, getting an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge into practices, developing new personal and professional skills and sharing of experiences with diversified clients and workers. On the other hand, Dehemba(2012) mentioned the negative experiences such as difficulties to apply theories into practices, unable to get appropriate supports and guidance, limited resources and difficulties to adjust into new cultures. However, in most social work schools especially in developing countries like Ethiopia such experiences are not well recognized by all actors of the field practicum due to the less attention, which is given to the field practicum. In general, the limited understandings of the field practicum process by stakeholders exposed social work students to pass through in complex practical training experiences.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the existing opportunities and challenges that the Bachelors and Masters of Social Work students faced in their field practicum at Addis Ababa University (AAU) School of Social Work. This paper will bring some contributions to fill the knowledge gaps among the stakeholders about the opportunities and challenges existed in the field practicum. Hence, the researcher reviewed relevant literatures on the field practicum to be aware of the basic concepts. The qualitative research approach with case study was employed to conduct the paper. The data gathered from purposively selected participants by using semi-structured interviews were qualitatively analyzed and interpreted. Finally, the study come up with a list of existing opportunities and challenges that social work students experienced while they conduct their field practicum trainings. Those opportunities and challenges carefully described.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

While there is no doubt about the equal importance of the practical and theoretical teaching methods in social work education, the field practicum has given less emphasis (Dheba, 2012). Furthermore, the subject of field practicum is not much documented in literatures especially in developing countries. However, in social work education, the relevance of field practicum in helping students to gain knowledge and skills is well acknowledged by researchers such as Jeyarani & Jebaseelan(2017) , Dimo(2013), Baikady et al (2017) and Williamson et al (2010). Yet, some studies showed that during the field practicum social work students face many challenges that have both structural and personal origins. The structural problems related to the way the social work school settings operate and the institutional arrangements of practicum sites. Dhembba (2012), for instance, revealed that most of the social work schools in sub-Saharan African countries lack proper social work field practicum curriculums and/or guidelines to facilitate the fieldwork practices. Moreover, Dimo (2013) stated that there is an absence of continued guidance and visitation from the school instructors to students and their supervisors at the agency settings. According to Schmidt & Rautenbach (2016), this is mainly due to the mismatching of students and staffs at social work schools.

Jeyarani & Jebaseelan (2017) in their qualitative study revealed that social work students perceived the application of theories into practices is very challenging. Gentle-Genitty et al (2014) stated that those problems were mostly caused by the personal limitations of social work students to choose relevant and applicable theories. Those authors also reported that the inflexibility of students to adjust themselves with the current theoretical application process is the other concern to link theories into practices.

On the other hand, Dhemba (2012) reported that in most cases, the challenge of social work students to apply theories into practices is highly related to non-suitability of the field agencies.

(Shokale et al, 2016) confirmed that in most of the field agencies, social work students do not access adequate resources (such as offices, stationaries and cars) for their practicum.

Furthermore, Carelse & Poggenpoel (2016) revealed that social work students do not receive the proper supervisions at the field agencies. This is because in most cases, nonsocial work professionals with their limited knowledge and skills are assigned to assist students in the field agencies.

In addition, a qualitative case study reported by Charelse and Poggenpoel (2016) in south Africa showed that social work students challenged by the stressful clients cases and time constraints to prepare their field reports. Moreover, Pawar (2016) reported that social work students on overseas field placement experienced with the language barriers to communicate effectively with clients and communities they reside in.

In Ethiopia, a recent study by Wassie (2019) confirmed that lack of independent units to facilitate the practical learning process, inconsistent follow-ups, absence of ongoing seminars, and absence of trained social workers in the field institutions are among the problems observed in field practicum. That study highlighted the history and status of social work education from the views of administrators and professionals from selected social work schools in the broader sense. Particularly, there are issues that affect the successes of social work students' in their field practicum experiences and the quality of their fieldwork trainings along with unrecognized existing opportunities. Therefore, the current study addressed the existing gaps related to opportunities and challenges experienced by social work students during their field practicum. This study uniquely emphasizes the existing opportunities that help to facilitate the practical

learning process alongside the challenges experienced by social work students. The study also focused on students as units of analysis than institutions based on the data obtained from firsthand sources.

1.3. Research Objectives

1.3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to explore opportunities and challenges that are being experienced by social work students during their fieldwork practicum in the case of school of social work at Addis Ababa University.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

- To explore the opportunities that exist during the field practicum.
- To identify the challenges that social work students experience during the field practicum.
- To explore the consequences of challenges that students face during the field practicum.

1.4. Research Questions

- What are the existing opportunities during the field practicum?
- What are the challenges that social work students experience during their field practicum?
- What are the consequences resulted from the challenging experiences during the field practicum?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The result from this study will come up with encouraging contributions for major stakeholders who get involved in the social work field education practicum at higher educational institutions. It will benefit such stakeholders including fieldwork supervisors, coordinators, students themselves and their advisors in identifying the challenges and opportunities that BSW and MSW students experience during their fieldwork both at school and in organizations they work with. This will help them to leverage the existing opportunities and to identify the drawbacks observed so far. The study will come up with practicable suggestions that will be taken by such major actors to improve the quality field practicum learning. Furthermore, this study will bring some inputs that will serve policy makers at higher educational institutions specifically for fieldwork curriculum developers in Ethiopia. Finally, the finding of the study will serve as a reference for researchers, practitioners and students who are keen for further investigation on the area.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The researcher believes that social work students in Ethiopian higher educational institutions have diversified experiences in their field education practicum. However, due to the expected financial, time and geographical barriers, the scope of this study is bounded to address only the opportunities and challenging experiences of BSW and MSW students in the case of school of social work at Addis Ababa University.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

In doing this study, one of the major challenges was shortage of time to finish the research paper due to other commitments such as attending classes and doing other projects to fulfill the course requirements. The second limitation of the study was found to be financial constraint due to delayed release of the budget allocated for this study to come up with quality work. Moreover, conducting the data collection process with the research participants appropriately was challenging due to the unprecedented spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this pandemic, the researcher could not approach all the respondents physically and neither conduct group discussions during the data collection as planned initially. The last but not the least limitation of the study is its scope in terms of area coverage, which focused only in Addis Ababa University School of Social Work students. Further studies might be conducted in other school of social works in Ethiopia.

1.8. Operational Definitions

Students: Social work students in Addis Ababa University

Field advisor: The academic staff that is responsible to advise social work students during their field practicum.

Field supervisor: An expert assigned to assist social work students at the agency setting during their field practicum.

Field agency: An organization that host social work students for practical training.

Opportunities: Human, financial and materials resources to facilitate the field practicum experiences for better quality.

Challenge: Something that is an obstacle and students faced to have better experiences of field practicum.

Chapter Two

2. Literature Review

This chapter aims to review the related relevant literatures from different sources to situate the current study into context. The initial chapter elaborates the concept of the field practicum and its importance in social work education. Additionally, the actors of the field practicum and their roles will also be described. Finally, there will be a brief discussion of the theoretical framework that guides the researcher to see the existing opportunities and challenges of social work students experience during their practicum.

2.1. Concepts of Field Practicum

Field practicum always described as the hallmark of social work education. This process of educational training in social work curriculum has named as field instruction, field placement, field education, practicum or internship (Jeyarani & Jebaseelan, 2017).

“The field work education is also considered as the signature of pedagogy where the social work students play the role of practitioners through the socialization process of integration of the theories with the real-life settings” (CSWE,2008, p.8). In this sense, the social work students will be exposed to professional practices and can learn and practice the norms and values of the social work profession through providing different services to the beneficiaries.

“Fieldwork in social work education means any kind of practical experience in a social organization or agency, if this experience has been deliberately arranged, for the education of the students who are undertaking the courses partly or wholly designed for those who intend to become social workers”(Tippa & Mane, 2018, p. 2).

According to Romman (2018) “*field work practicum is a process of learning in which social work students exercised the knowledge, skills, values, principles or any other social work related disciplines in the arena of service provisions specifically in organizational settings.*”(p.8) such learning exercises of students guided by the senior social work professions both in the schools and in agency settings.

Fieldwork depends on the philosophical concept of “learning by doing” and has always been integral components of social work education (Sunirose, n.d). This assumption highly depends on as students engaged in different activities; they can get an opportunity to generate new knowledge and skills from that activity.

Historically, field practicum existed even before the emergence of social work education in the health science schools. It had been given to students in the form of apprenticeship for some months following the establishments of the Charity Organization Society (COS) in America during 1898 (Tippa & Mane, 2018). Then, in 1904 the first philanthropy school was opened in New York to teach students in an eight months’ durations of field practicum which become supplemented with the social work theory as it has advocated by the early social work practitioner and theoretician, Mary Richmond (Romman, 2018).

2.2. Field Practicum vs. Internship

As I explain below, the term field practicum fits very well to conduct this research. Thus, in my research, I used this term instead of other interrelated concepts (for e.g., internship). The terms field practicum and internship might sound similar. Yet, there are distinctions between them. Of course, both are supervised and experiential leanings approaches to give opportunities for students to gain professional knowledge and skills through integrating theories with practices

(Grace College & Seminary, 2019). Moreover, both require an agreement among the concerned parties that could evolve in the learning process. Both the assigned professionals at workplace and professors from the universities could supervise students in field practicum and internship on the regular visits (Calvo,2011).

To show the difference between the two learning approaches, internship, stimulates a real job by requiring the learners to apply the knowledge and skills independently in the real situations.

Trainers expected to perform heavier activities for long hours. Most of the time internship lasts for a year that is longer than for field practicum. In Internship, trainers may be paid or unpaid for their contributions (Calvo, 2011).

Field practicum on the other hand is a form of hands on experience that allow students to observe, participate and document on tasks that must be done. Unlike interneees, students in field practicum have small responsibilities in performing tasks. They are expected to work in the regular school weeks for short hours that last for a month or a semester. Since the aim of field practicum is to help students to provide firsthand knowledge and skills, it is unpaid onsite experience (Roman,2018). As the practical training of social work students has showed all the above characteristics of field practicum, the researcher has decided to work on it.

2.3. The Importance of the Field Practicum

“The intent of field education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the Classroom with the practical world of the practice setting” (CSWE, 2008, P. 8.). Dimo(2013) and Jeyarani & Jebaseelan (2017) stated that field practicum is a process of learning in which the theoretical parts of the social work education are tested, applied and integrated through observing and experiencing at the well-directed and organized sets of the service provider

agencies. It helps social work students to have comprehensive knowledge and skills all about the profession and the social environments that they will join the world of work following their graduation. The field practicum in Social work education benefit students to understand how they can apply and practice the knowledge, skills, values and principles of the profession at the micro, mezzo and macro levels of the service recipients. According to Romman (2018), the fieldwork practicum helps students to draw learning a social work practice:

- *At the micro-level, the students develop an understanding of the client system.*
- *At the mezzo-level, they learn to assess the needs of a community and, accordingly, learn to develop intervention strategies to fulfill them.*
- *At the macro-level, they understand the various tactics of dealing with the establishment, and to advocate the rights of people. (p.14.).*

Field practicum opens an opportunity to social work students to apply the knowledge they get from classroom lectures to the various clients. It allows social work students to learn how the theories, ethical values, principles and other concepts practiced, and how to deal with the conflicting situations and dilemmas within the real experiences (Jeyarani & Jebaseelan, 2017).

Furthermore, the field practicum helps to develop different personal skills that are very relevant to their future professional endeavors. Additionally, students will get an opportunity to develop their oral and writing communication skills through interacting with their supervisors, clients and other coworkers. They also learn how they can conduct interviews and assessments and apply the appropriate interventions tools with their clients (Roman, 2018).

Through field practicum, social work students would evaluate themselves about their overall proficiency in their performances through practicing the professional activities outside the classroom. They would understand about the knowledge and skills they have developed in their educational enrolments (Williamson,et al, 2010).

2.4. Opportunities in the Field Practicum

There are lists of opportunities that reside in each actors of the field practicum to facilitate the practical training of social work students. The field practicum becomes more effective if the field agencies are more suitable for practical trainings. Jeyarani & Jebaseelan (2017) confirmed that social work students received real practical learning in field agencies where professional social workers are available. Those writers further reveal that social work students perceived that field agencies with professional social workers are helpful to learn more practically and understand the social work profession.

The early placement of students in the field agencies also provides an opportunity to have a positive learning. According to Schmidt & Rautenbach (2016) social work students who started their practicum in the earlier years of their academic received opportunities of growing their knowledge, values and skills over the course of the program. Those authors also revealed that the supportive relationships of social work students with their supervisors provides supports, instructions, feed backs and discussions to have positive learning experiences. Social work students at undergraduate (BSW) and masters level (MSW) have been provided practical trainings throughout their stay at school of social work in Addis Ababa University (SSAAU, 2012). This opportunity enables students to socialize themselves with the social work professional knowledge, skills and values throughout their educational progress.

To have an effective learning, field practicum need to be facilitated with well-organized guidelines. Dhemba (2012) found out that the availability of manuals in some of the Eastern and Southern Africa countries provides valuable reference material for students, agency supervisors and social work educators. The existence of explicit written curriculum helps to empower students in the process of applying theories into practices. School of social work at Addis Ababa

University has prepared well organized field manual to help students during their field practicum.

2.5. Challenges in the Field Practicum

There are many challenges that hinder the success of field practicum experiences. These challenges are mostly caused by the personal and institutional limitations throughout the practical process.

Often times, social work students are challenged to apply the theoretical knowledge they learned in the classrooms into practices (Shokale et al, 2016). Gentle-Genitty et al (2014) stated that those problems were mostly caused by the personal limitations of social work students to choose relevant and applicable theories. Those authors also reported that the inflexibility of students to adjust themselves with the current theoretical application process is the other concern to link theories into practices.

Communication gap is the other concern of social work students in their practicum training.

According to Pawar (2016), language barrier is one of the challenges that students face in establishing smooth relationships with their field supervisors, their clients and the community members. This fact is mostly encountered to students who conduct their practicum far from the community of their origin. Moreover, social work students have also limitations to adapt the stressful working environments such as listening painful experiences from the clients (Charelse & Poggenpoel, 2016).

The limited access of both human and material resources for field practicum is another concern of social work students and the field supervisors. Dhemba (2012) reported that in most sub-Saharan countries majority of social work schools have no field practicum guidelines. The researcher also confirmed that the poor collaborative relationships between the academicians and

the agency personnels affect the field experiences of social work students. Lack of suitable field agency is also another concern in the field practicum experiences. Most of the field agencies are not in a good position to practice the social work theories, values and ethics. Since the field supervisors are not real social workers, they do not give appropriate guidance and supports to students (Dimo, 2013).

2.6. Supervision during the Field Practicum

Social work supervision is generally a practice based process and mutual relationship between knowledgeable social work professionals and social work students to facilitate the practical learning at agency settings (Charelse & Poggenpoel, 2016). In this context of mutual relationship, supervisors expected to enable, guide and facilitate the practical learning process of social work students (Moorhouse, 2013). According to Dimo (2013), *Field supervisors are essential both in gate-keeping for the profession, and in assisting the student's development of professional skills, values, and knowledge* (P. 45).

The field practicum supervision might be takes place on both the school of social work and field agencies. When we see the context of AAU, for instance, social work instructors assigned to assist students from the beginning to the end of the field practicum. The field education manual of school of social work at AAU stated that the field advisors at the school of social work are expected to consult agency administrators, field supervisors and provide guidance, and supports to students through regular visitations (SSW, AAU, 2012). This manual further explained that field instructors assigned by the field agencies are expected to provide onsite supervisions, advisement and instructions to students during the field practicum.

However, social work students experienced with a number of challenges related with the supervisor process during the field practice. They gained poor guidance and supports due to the inconsistency follow-ups and visitations by field advisors at school of social work (Wassie, 2019). The problem of limited supervision is also influencing the practical learning process at the field sites. Moorhouse (2013) reported that field supervisors do not provide professional assistance to student due to the lack of preparation for practicum supervision. The other problem in the supervision process is that the knowledge gap of supervisors with the new social work theories (Charelse & Poggenpoel, 2016). This is because field supervisors sometime are not familiar with the new theories that student learned in the classrooms. In addition, social work students have concerns in relation with the assignments given by their supervisors. For instance, field supervisors give unrelated jobs of social work education (Shokale et al, 2016).

2.7. The Actors of Field practicum

The process of providing trainings for students in the field practicum of social work education requires the participation of different stakeholders. In general, there are four major parties involved in the process of field practicum learning. Those are social work students, school of social work, field agency and field coordinator. Social work students are expected to be guided by the social work professional code of ethics while involving in the practical trainings. They are also obligated to obey and respect the policies and working culture of the host agency and be responsible to prepare and submit assignments, discuss any concerns with field advisors, devoted to working hours to the field practicum (Schmit & Rautenbach, 2016) as cited in Garthwait (2008: P. 6).

School of social work is at the top, which is responsible for facilitating, managing, directing the overall teaching, and learning process of the field practicum. It is responsible to select and send

students to the field agencies, allocate resources, assign field instructors, organize seminars and evaluate students after the completion of the practicum seasons (SSWAAU, 2012).

The field agency is another key actor of the field practicum, which is a formally structured, functioned and well-organized set of institutions where social work students placed for practical instructions (Moorhouse, 2013). The role of the field agency is to facilitate the learning opportunities for social work students. It shall be responsible to give orientations, supervisions, advises and evaluate students, as well as it is expected to fulfill facilities such as offices, manuals to help the practicum more successful (SSWAAU, 2012).

The field education coordinator is an academic staff member of the school of social work, and has a mandate to coordinate, administer, and direct the field instruction programs. He/she is responsible to give orientations to students and supervisors, organize meetings, solve problems arise throughout the practical exercises (Moorhouse, 2013).

2.8. Theoretical Framework

This research looks at the field practicum of the school of social at AAU as a systemic process. By this, I mean that different parties (including school of social work, students, field agencies, and clients) get involved and shape the challenges and opportunities experienced by social work students (see fig 01 below). This are expressed through informal learning. The informal learning used as a means of knowledge transferring in the profession of social work education for long times in the real situations. This learning process enables social work students to absorb new knowledge, skills, concepts and values in the organizational settings (Papouli, 2014).

In the field practicum, all the role players are directly or indirectly influenced by one another while they work together. Systems theory focuses on the relationships and interactions among

the elements within the system (Gupta, 2013). This theory helps to understand how these elements functionally work together to achieve specific goals (Germain, 2015). Additionally, Gupta explained that the system is generally made from interrelated parts and each element has their own contributions to the sustain abilities of the larger system. However, if one part failed to function, the others will be affected. In the context of education, the process of learning and teaching procedures are highly influenced by the parties involved in its system (Frick, 2004). This is truly exercising in the field of practicum experiences. This is because; the success of social work students in their practical trainings depends on the active involvement of those actors. If each actor contributes for all the expected roles and responsibilities with its resources, field practicum goes to successful. On the other hand, the constraints in each role players led field practicum experience ineffective. Generally, without the existences and contributions of those parties, field practicum is unthinkable because they are interdependent. Hence, systems cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts (Gupta, 2013).

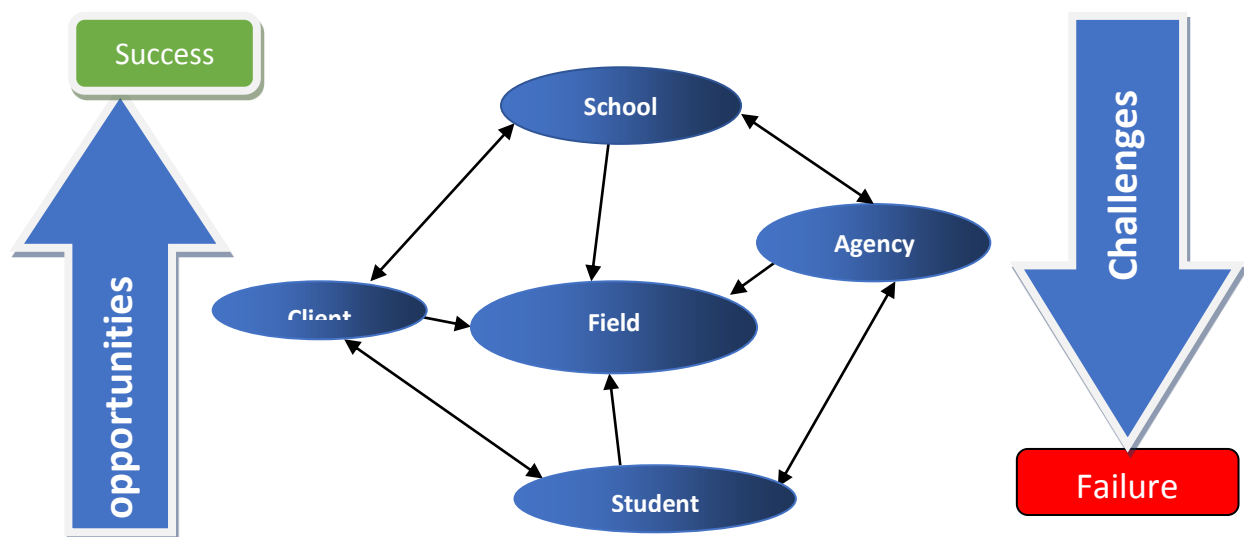


Figure 1.0. Systemic representations of actors of field practicum

Chapter Three

3. Research Methods

The aim of this chapter is to outline the methods used to conduct this study. It starts by presenting the research design. It also describes area of the study, participants of the study, inclusion and exclusion criteria and sampling techniques respectively. Furthermore, it elaborated data collection processes, which include the semi-structured interview and key informant interview. The next part of it is a discussion about the data analysis and interpretations and the way the researcher assures the trustworthiness of the collected data. Finally, the chapter concludes by describing the ethical considerations that the researcher has considered so far during the data collection processes.

3.1. Research Design

The study primarily employed a qualitative research approach with a single case study design. The major rationales of employing qualitative approaches were; firstly, the study was intended to make sense of the real life experiences of social work students in their field practicum. Secondly, such life experiences could understand by using qualitative approach but not measured quantitatively. Qualitative research approach helps to understand and describe the views and experiences of specific target groups towards a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, several MSW and BSW students of both genders shared their feelings about the challenges and opportunities they experienced during their field practicum exercises.

A case study is described as “*an empirical enquiry applied to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in it’s really life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). In this study, the focus of the researcher

was to understand how the contextual challenges and opportunities directly determine the experience of social work students in their field practicum. Since the study was only focused on student's experiences in their practical training programs in a single educational institution(AAU), the single case study inquiry was preferred to be employed. Single case study design is useful to analysis phenomenon in a single context (Yin, 2003).

In terms of its purpose, this research is exploratory study. This is because little has been studied on the area of field practicum so far. Exploratory approach is preferred to study activities or situations that have received little or no empirical investigations (Stebbins, 2001). Therefore, the researcher described all the new issues learned about the opportunities and challenges experienced by social work students during their field practicum.

3.2. The Study Area

This research was conducted at the main campus of Addis Ababa University (AAU), School of social work in Addis Ababa. The main campus of the university exists in Gulelle Sub-city, Addis Ababa. The university is the largest and the oldest higher educational institution in Ethiopia and has thirteen campuses where twelve of them are in the city government of Addis Ababa and the remaining one is located in Bishoftu, Oromia Regional State.

3.3. Population of the Study

The population of this study was from the BSW and MSW social work students who actively enrolled their education during the academic year of 2019/2020. The total population of this is about 216 social work students 45 from BSW and 37 MSW programs. The population of the study summarized in the following table from the data obtained from the registrar office of the college of social sciences.

Table 0.1 population of the study

Program		Year I			Year II			Year III			Remark
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
BSW					42	30	72	33	12	45	
MSW	Regular	13	8	21							
	Extension				26	15	41	23	14	37	
Total		216									

3.4. Participants of the Study

The researcher interviewed nineteen participants for this study. Out of all, three of them were key informants from the academic staffs. All of the students participated in this study were actively attending their education at AAU school of social work in spite of the current pandemic of COVID-19/corona virus. All of the respondents were purposively selected for semi structure interviews. The researcher accessed potential participants from the BSW and MSW programs through the field coordinator at the school. The researcher contacted each participant both physically and through phone calls. In this process, the role of the gatekeeper (the field coordinator) was very high particularly in providing access to the research participants from both Bachelors and Masters Programs.

From the total participants, thirteen were males and the remaining three were females. During the data collection process, students were run to their home following the shutdown of the school due to the spread of corona virus/COVID-19 throughout the world. Due to this, the researcher could not access female students neither in face-to- face nor phone calling for interview as males.

The age of students participated in the study ranges from 20 to 34 years. There is a wide age gaps between participants. This was because the study addressed the experiences of the young BSW students and the adult MSW students. The educational level of participants was bachelors and master's degree levels. Among the participants, nine of them were from BSW program (5 from 2nd year and 4 from 3rd year). The rest seven were from the MSW program both regular and extension programs. Two of them were the MSW 1st year regular students and the other five were from MSW (3 from 2nd and 2 from 3rd) years of extension program. Conducting an interview with such diversified participants increases the richness and comprehensive sensing of the collected data. The more heterogeneous of the participants, the greater values of the data obtained (Botella & Ponte, 2011). The names of all the respondents have changed for seeking of confidentiality.

3.5. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Since the focus of this study was to explore and describe opportunities and challenges of social work students at field practicum, academic enrollment as a social work student both at the BSW and at MSW level was considered as a criterion for participation in the study. Apart from this, the study took into account the seniority (year of study) of active students as a criterion. In this regard, the researcher selected 2nd and 3rd year BSW and 1st and 2nd year MSW students to be part of the study. Moreover, previous field practicum experience was taken as a criterion to select key informant interview in the data collection process. Based on the above criteria, participants in the study included nine students from the baccalaureate program, seven students from the master's program and three field advisors from academic.

First year of MSW extension and second year of MSW regular social work students were excluded in this study. That was because first year MSW extension students were not involved in

the field practicum during the data collection process whereas, the second year MSW students were excluded to avoid potential biases of the researcher.

3.6. Sampling Techniques

As a sampling technique, non-probability sampling was employed. The researcher used a purposive sampling in order to select the sample study participants from the entire population based on personal judgments keeping in mind the purpose of the study to access the respondents for this study (Showkat, 2017). Hence, the purposive sampling helped the researcher to select participants purposively from the potential respondents. The sampling size was determined based on the saturation of the information collected from participants.

3.7. Methods of Data Collection

To access the sufficient qualitative data, the researcher used the primary data sources. The primary types of data sources were accessed through semi-structured interview with social work students and key informant interviews with the field advisors.

3.7.1. Semi Structured Interview

Part of the data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with nineteen participants from both the BSW and MSW social work students and field advisors in one to one and half hours duration. Based on guiding questions designed by the researcher, study participants shared their experiences, opinions and feelings on the challenges and opportunities they experienced during fieldwork practices. As a Master of Social Work Student, the researcher knew some aspects of the field practicum. Accordingly, the interviews took place in a flexible manner. In this regard, semi structured interview was used to collect qualitative data when researchers already have some knowledge about some key issues and expectations of what might

be emerge (Cropley, 2019). The broad, open ended and non-directive questions were asked in order to get the students' in-depth experiences specifically the challenges and opportunities in the field practicum. Small numbers of general questions were asked first and some other probing questions followed based on the responses for the main questions in a coherent manner. The guiding interview questions got approvals from the thesis advisor before presented to participants. The response of the interview was recorded both in written form and in audiotaping.

3.7.2. Key Informant Interview

As I explained in the above section, I have interviewed three key informants from the academic staffs of school of social work who experienced in advising of students. This helped the researcher to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected from the targeted groups (social work students).

3.8. Data Analysis and Interpretations

The data obtained from interviews were analyzed by using thematic analysis method through identifying and categorizing ideas. Thematic analysis method helps to identify the common issues and main themes by summarizing all the views that the researcher has collected from the respondents (Patton & Cohran, 2002). The sub themes were also developed and identified from the main themes. In order to ensure the reliabilities and rigour in the analysis of independently transcribed data, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. Step one, becoming familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the initial transcripts and listen the audio records of the interview to get more details and rewrite the missed transcripts. This step was followed by generating initial coding. In this step, initial codes were established to have understandings about the data set. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this step as "*coding of interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set*"

(p.18). Step three; searching for the themes was done by looking for themes from the transcribed data. The researcher searched the themes using the interview questions and initially coded data to make emerged themes refine. In the fourth step of reviewing themes was done by grouping the identified themes based on their commonalities according to context and numeration. Step five, defining and naming was done by generating proper names to each emerged themes to make them further refine. In step six, the researcher conducted the final analysis based on the research objectives after identifying and reviewed all the themes.

The researcher interpreted carefully through reading, writing and narrating collected data word by word. Finally, summarized and organized data collected from participants was also sent back to the participants to increase its trustworthiness.

3.9. Quality Assurance

To assure the quality of the collected data, the researcher used external auditing and member checking methods. External auditing was done by giving the draft of the thesis to a person who had not any connections with the research in order to get constructive comments. External auditing is beneficial to researchers as it provides support and validation, another perspectives about the subjective process and generally to have conformation that the study was trustworthy (Miller, 1997).

Another technique of assuring the quality of the collected data was member checking. Member checking is a method, which describes as a process of returning the collected data or results to the participants to check its accuracy (Birt et al. 2016). Therefore, the researcher presented back and summarized the information to the participants to crosscheck the accuracy of the obtained data during the data collection process.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

In the process of conducting this study, the researcher followed and applied certain ethical issues with regard to participants' safety and concern. In any research study, participants need to be properly informed and protected from any violations of rights throughout the research process (Arifin, 2018). Accordingly, the researcher approached participants to get their full consents. Having the full consents from participants, the researcher informed them as all the information provided will be kept confidential and nobody will use it except the researcher. Additionally, they were kindly informed that the data collected would be for academic purpose only. Respectful and friendly approach of the researcher to them was also highly considered. Thus, participants were told to terminate their participation anytime if she/he feels discomfort throughout the process of data collection.

Chapter Four

4. Findings of the Study

The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the study. The chapter begins with explanation of the existing opportunities in the field practicum is the next section. This part will be followed by the identification and description of challenges that social work students face during the field practicum. Sub themes that emerged from the first and the second sections will be explained. Finally, the chapter will be concluded by explaining the consequences that have been resulted from the challenging experiences in the field practicum.

4.2. Opportunities in the Field Practicum

4.2.1. Availabilities of Field Agencies

In this finding, the majority of respondents argued that the accessibility of a suitable field agency is most vitally important for practical trainings. In this regard, AAU is advantageous in its geographical location as Addis Ababa is the capital for both Ethiopia and Africa where many governmental, developmental and non-governmental organizations reside in.

“I believe that the availability of such organizations could be taken as an opportunity to collaborate with these organizations to host students for field practicum. Most importantly, AAU has a good recognition to establish effective partnerships and work with such multiple agencies” (Interview with Jemal, 3rd year extension MSW student, April 10/2020).

Field practicum by its nature requires the win - win relationships of the social work schools and the field agencies. Accordingly, participants argued that the geographical location of AAU

allowed establishing such partnerships backgrounds with governmental organizations, private agencies, local and international organizations that work on public issues in Addis Ababa. This is an added advantage of the university as there is no shortage of field agencies to place its students for practical training. However, the placement of students so far is limited into NGOs (mostly local), hospitals, and courts. The school needs further identify other institutions that work on social issues to broaden its partnerships during field placement. In addition, AAU is well known educational institute for its human and material developments. Therefore, different organizations might be interested in working in collaboration with it for mutual developments.

4.2.2. Availability of Human, Financial and Material Resources at the School

Most of participants acknowledged school of social work in AAU for its human, material and financial resources in facilitating practical trainings.

“I could see that the school of social work has very qualified and experienced professionals on the area where they are unreserved to share their knowledge and skills”
(Interview with Getachew, 3rd year extension MSW student, April 12/2020).

“Majority of the professors are very willing to take additional responsibilities such as advising and guiding which is beyond the duties and responsibilities expected from them. In my understanding, this clearly shows how much they are committed for the development of social work profession and learning outcomes. It is a good asset for field practicum experiences for social work students” (Interview with Fikru, field advisor, April 11/2020).

As described in the above quotes, fulfilling qualified and experienced personnel is required to bring positive impacts on the learning and teaching experiences of social work education. There

is the existence of very qualified and experienced social work professionals in the school of social work, which helped students to have a positive practical learning experience for the majority of the participants. Students indicated that most of the professionals were very willing to sacrifice in supporting them by sharing their knowledge and skills even in crowding situations. Giving rewards and recognition should be considered to motivate them for more collaborations and team workings.

Financial resources are the other important inputs to facilitate an effective field practicum. AAU is allocating budgets especially for BSW students to minimize their daily transportation and food (launch) expenses. Such financial support acknowledged by some of the participants though its amount is still a concern. One of the 3rd years, BSW student described it as:

“The grant that I received from the school simplifies my transportation and other financial issues during my field practicum” (Interview with Mekonen, April 7/2020).

In addition to the financial supports, the availability of well-structured documents such as the field manual was mentioned as very important assets to facilitate student’s practical trainings. Such learning tools serve as guiding references for students and the field supervisors to understand how to handle the practical learning and teaching situations in a real life setting. Therefore, it is commented that every role player needs to receive and read that manual for the better preparations during the field practicum.

“I found the field education manual an essential tool that makes easy the practicum if we apply it properly on the ground” (Interview with Mohammed, 1st year regular MSW student, April 15/ 2020).

4.2.3. Support of Field Agencies for Field practicum

The participants of the study explained as the awareness about the profession of social work and its practical trainings in the organizational settings being improving. This helped them to have a good field practicum experiences in the real social environments. Here are the voices of participants.

“There are agencies that work closely with the school during the field practicum. This is because they know how much students we send to them and the collaboration we have with them will contribute to the success of their objectives and the social work educational policies” (Interview with Mahlet, Field advisor, April 21/2020).

“The good welcoming and initiations by the hospital workers when we arrived indicated me how much they are aware about the aim and benefits of field practicum” (Interview with Jemal, 3rd year MSW student, April 10/ 2020).

“The initiatives started recently by Ethiopian government on the voluntarism activities of students before and after graduation shows how much the importance of the internship got an emphasis as national agenda” (Interview with Girma, 2nd year MSW student, April 17/2020).

In the above interview, some of the participants indicated that there were supportive relationships in some of the selected field agencies during the field practicum for mutual developments.

Participants explained that the supportive relationships and initiations by supervisors in the hospital settings helped them to get proper feedback and guidance. Currently, the free services provided by students in different field agencies somehow attract many governmental and non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia. This is because unpaid labor forces they get from the

field practicum minimize the costs and energies they invest. Such understandings are important to create collaborative learning and teaching environment during the practical exercises.

4.2.4. The social work education curriculum

The sampled respondents described the existing social work educational curriculum of AAU as very useful to provide different learning opportunities in field instructions throughout students' academic progress. Students felt that having practical experiences since the first year of joining the school allowed them to learn and develop their professional knowledge and skills, to integrate theories with practices, to develop personal and professional skills, expand their social networks, to understand the social work practice areas, and generate new research ideas for their future specialization. To make the field practicum more effective, it should be organized based on standardized procedures. In particular, the availability of educational materials such as field manual are necessarily required to guide the learning and teaching process of field education.

Here are the views of the participants:

“I appreciate the school for placing us since early our academic year course in both BSW and MSW programs. This helps us to socialize ourselves with the social work practices from the beginning to the end of the program we have been enrolled”

(interview with Mohammed, 1st year regular MSW student, April 15/2020).

“Being placed from the beginning to field practicum helped me to develop my personal and professional skills, to understand how organizations operationalize, to identify potential social work practice areas and to generate research ideas” (Interview with

Mekonen, 3rd year BSW student, April 7/ 2020).

4.2.5. Prior Knowledge and Skills of Social Work Students

BSW students attended in the field practicum have diverse theoretical knowledge gained from classroom lectures and the MSW students further have both theoretical knowledge and skills that they got from the academic teaching process and work experiences. Such prior experiences with social work knowledge and skills served them as a base to implement a good practical training at the field agencies.

“My theoretical knowledge which I learned in the classrooms really helped me how to approach my clients and provide services” (Interview with Biruk, 2nd year BSW student, April 26/2020).

The above interview revealed that social work students learned theoretical concepts in the classrooms before they go to the field sites. Having such knowledge backgrounds simplifies the ways of exercising services provisions to their clients during practical trainings. On the other notion, it is confirmed that the prior work experiences of students helped them to have a fruitful practical trainings.

“Being a case manager officer in my work place made easy to conduct my practicum assignment at agency sites” (Interview with Getahun, 2nd year extension MSW student, April 12/2020)

The above interview with a master’s student revealed that there are students in a master’s program who attended the practicum training along with their regular duties at their work place. Participants confirmed that the experiences they got from their work positions made them to be proactive to handle cases that came from with service seekers. They can perform tasks even better than their supervisors do. Having prior work experience is also helpful to students to have

smooth communications and collaborations with supervisors and other workers in the field agencies.

4.3. The challenges of social work students during their field practicum

There are many challenges that social work students encountered during their field practicum. These challenges are related with the institutions (the school and field agencies) and students themselves or the clients that they approached to serve. Such challenges directly or indirectly have affected the success of the field practicum and experiences of social work students.

4.3.1. Institutional challenges

There are challenges that originated from the failures that the school and field agencies operationalized. Thus, the findings of the study proved that obstacles raised from both institutions causes most of the challenges faced during the field practicum. Such institutional challenges are stated bellow.

Poor guidance and supports

Findings of the study concerning to guidance and supports given by field advisors at both the school and agencies to students were found very poor. As a result, social work students are passing through complex process of practical trainings. Participants mentioned their concerns as follows:

“When we were placed in the 1st field practicum course, our advisor was somewhere outside Ethiopia. We met him only at the end of the field practicum for report presentation” (Interview with Jemal, 3rd year extension MSW student, April 10/2020).

“Of course, my advisor at the school tried to orient for few minutes at the beginning and visited us only once throughout the field practice. I think he crowded with other additional burdens. Therefore, I am afraid to say I got the necessary advice and supports from my advisor” (Interview with Alebel, 2nd year BSW student, April 5/2020).

One of the field advisors expressed her feelings about the reasons that most of the instructors failed to assist students at field sites.

“It is difficult to go to the field sites that are far from the school. That is because the school has no vehicles to facilitate the transportation costs for instructors” (Interview with Birtukan, Field advisor, April 27/2020).

The above interview briefly showed that the poor guidance and supports given by the field advisors at the school is a common challenge of social work students during their field practicum. Most of the participants complained that the orientations, guidance and supports given to students from the school by field advisors were unsatisfactory. To have a positive practical experience, the assigned field advisors from the school are expected to give guidance and feedback to trainers on regular visitations, and follow-up in the field sites. The frequent visitations and follow-ups help to motivate trainers and solve problems in the field immediately. Some participants argued that the main cause for this problem is the workload that the instructors have on their day-to-day activities. They (field advisors) are assigned to advise students over their daily teaching, administering and researching and other personal burdens. Additionally, the distance of the field agencies from the school was the other obstacle to give regular follow-ups by the field advisors. This is because there are some difficulties to access transportation for regular visitation at the agency setting.

Furthermore, similar problems were also observed in the practicum sites. Participants reported that some of the supervisors did not responsibly guide and supervise social work students. Few students indicated that some supervisors pushed them to be absent from the office. That might be due to the limited tasks to be done by students. Moreover, some others give unrelated tasks with social work practices such as typing, documentation and counting stored materials. Such factors highly influence a student's motivation to go to their field sites regularly. In addition, most of the supervisors lack the required social work professional knowledge and skills to guide students. That was due to their professional backgrounds. Most of them are non-social workers. Some BSW students also complained that the time schedule of the practical training of the school sometimes mismatched with the office hours of the field supervisors. All those problems clearly indicated that there is low coordination of the practical learning of social work students on both institutions. Here are the voice of participants:

“Some of the agency workers did not encourage you to go to office. Additionally, they sometimes tried to delegate you to fill positions, which do not have any relationship with social work practices” (Interview with Getahun, 2nd extension MSW student, April 14/2020).

“The agency supervisor asked me back about questions I raised to understand. She had knowledge gaps about the social work practices. She also knows little about the social work theories and the ethical values” (Interview with Selamawit, 3rd year BSW student, April 19/2020).

“Agency supervisors give us either nothing to be done or unrelated tasks with the social work practice such as typing, documenting, and counting stored materials” (Interview with Tizta, 3rd year BSW student, April 24/2020).

“While we were conducting our second-year field practicum, we were frequently unable to find the field supervisor. That was due to the mismatch of the office hours of the agency with our fieldwork programs and some meetings” (Interview with Netsanet, 2nd year BSW student, April 9/2020).

Lack of Awareness

The findings of the study revealed that majority of the agency workers poorly understood the field practicum. Participants reported that some agencies know little about the free labor services provided by trainers and the educational benefits that students gain from practical trainings. As a result, they see students as an additional burden of their day today's duties. Additionally, the services given by social workers do not recognized by most of the agency workers from other professions like doctors and nurses and the beneficiaries themselves in the hospital settings. That is mostly caused by the lack of awareness about the social work profession in general and the field practicum in particular. Such problems create an obstacle to have an effective training. Here are the views of the participants:

“Some agencies were unwilling to accept social work students for the field practicum. That was mostly due to lack of awareness about unpaid services that students come up with and being unaware of building good relationship with the school of social work which could be one of their organizational goals” (Interview with Mahlet, Filed advisor, April 21/2020).

“Health professionals especially the doctors and nurses in the hospital saw us (students and the supervisors) as supportive staffs other than professionals” (Interview with Girma, 2nd year extension MSW student, April 17/2020).

“Clients usually do not approach you seeking professional social work supports rather for only financial requests (in kind or in cash)” (Interview with Selamawit, 3rd year BSW student, April 19/2020).

Limited Access of Resources

Another concern that students experienced during their field practicum is related with material and financial resources. Respondents complained that the constraints of such resources created obstacle to practice essential skills in the field sites.

“Both hospitals I made my first and second field practicum lack offices and other necessary materials like case files to successfully accomplish tasks. We (5 students) were placed at a time and the social work unit office was too small to have a sit with other six social workers” (Interview with Getachew, 3rd year MSW student, April 12/2020).

“We conducted an interview and counseling clients in open areas or in front of other workers” (Interview with Zekarias, 1st year regular MSW student, March 2/2020).

“If your placement is in hospital setting, you will be really exposed to different health related risks. We did not have any protective materials like face mask or gloves to prevent ourselves from other communicable diseases” (Interview with Alebel, 2nd year BSW student April 5/2020).

In the above interviews, social work students discussed that lack of resources was the other greater challenge in conducting their practicum. Majority of the field agencies lack offices and other facilities for practical exercises. Students complained that they sat in a crowd with other workers in one office. They also stated that there was no isolated office to conduct interviews and counseling to clients. As a result, the confidentiality of clients might be violated in many ways. To have good work motivation, office arrangement matters. Very conducive and isolated offices require to freely discuss among colleagues over issues and conduct an interview with clients by considering the ethical values of the profession. Furthermore, field practicum in a health care setting is full of stress. Some students complained that they did not access any protective materials while they were trying to serve clients in hospital settings. This might expose them to different health related risks such as communicable disease. Participants also confirmed the constraints related to the financial and material supports as follows:

“The payment that we received from the school was insufficient to cover all the necessary expenses like transportation and food. Moreover, it was not transferred immediately at the beginning. In my second year placement, I started my practicum by borrowing some money from my advisor” (Interview with Biruk, 2nd year BSW student, April 26/2020).

“The only document I received was the field education manual in the school. On the agency side, the local NGO, where I was placed during the first year of field practicum had not even action plan and organized reports” (Interview with Jemal, 3rd extension MSW student, April 10/ 2020)

For some of the participants in the above interviews, the payment given to BWS students by the school is still insufficient. Economic factors strongly influence the active practical learning

experiences of students. This is because no one will work out any task effectively in a way that he/she thinks about his/her day today's expenses. In addition, some students hinted that there is a shortage of materials to support their practicum learning in both institutions. However, the availability of well-organized and updated practicing guidelines and documents are supportive of conducting an effective field practicum.

Evaluation and Grading

Participants of the study mentioned their concerns with regard to evaluations and grading at both the school and agencies after the completion of their field practicum.

“The evaluation and grading of field practicum report was inconsistency. It sometimes depends on the relationships between the student and field advisor/agency supervisor. I don't think that my advisor properly reviewed my field practicum report” (Interview with Netsanet, 2nd year BSW student, April 9/2020).

“Field advisors do not give feedbacks for reports we submitted to them” (Interview with Girma, 2nd year extension MSW student, April 17/2020).

The above two interviews showed that the evaluation and grading of students takes place in both the school of social work and in the field agencies. Most of the students explained their concerns related to the grading and evaluation process at the end of the practical trainings. They confirmed that some of the field advisors in the school give relatively similar grades without reviewing the quality of student's field reports and neither gave them feedbacks. This problem causes students to have negative attitudes towards the field practicum as everybody gets similar grades. However, students must be critically evaluated according to their performance during the

practical training and the quality of their reports. This helps to learn from mistakes and to know the potentials of professional development during the field practicum.

On the agency side, a field advisor at the school stated that some of the agency supervisors poorly evaluated students due to their misunderstandings of evaluating formats sent from the school. Few students also reported they evaluated by experts who did not supervise them throughout the training. The evaluation and grading depend on the performance of the trainers throughout the practical experiences. Therefore, supervisors should carefully evaluate students whom they themselves supervised during the practicum based on a given assessment format. One of the field advisors and a 3rd year BSW student explained their concerns about the evaluation process as follows:

“Sometimes there are misunderstandings about the evaluation formats sent from the school by the agency supervisors. I sometimes received the reversed types of grading given to students by their agency supervisor” (Interview with Birtukan, April 27/2020).

“I poorly evaluated at the agency by the officer who was on annual leave and came at the end of my field practice” (Interview with Tizta, April 15/2020).

School – Agency Collaborations

Participants expressed their feelings on how the collaboration and communication gaps between the academics and the agency supervisors challenged them during their field practicum.

“When we arrived at the agency, the officers asked us who are we and why we were getting up there. All most, they knew and informed nothing about field practicum during the time” (Interview with Biruk, 2nd year BSW student, April 26/2020).

“I think the school has failed to provide the necessary supports to the agencies. I did not observe the school has paid the expected to benefit agencies but only sending its students. I only saw Dr. E & Dr. Z have good relationships with some field agencies” (Interview with Jemal, 3rd extension MSW student, April 10/2020).

Field advisors at school of social work also described the partnership experiences of the school and the field agencies as follow:

“We sent sometimes our students to the agencies without any communication. That was due to being busy with other burdens to contact all the field agencies” (Interview with Mahlet, April 21/2020).

“There are some agencies, which we totally stopped to send our students to them. I remember one field agency (hospital) refused to accept our students after we rejected to give scholarship to one of its employee. That was due to the miss understanding of the rules and procedures of the university to accepting new candidates” (Interview with Fikru, April 11/2020).

“Some field agencies expect payments from the school to their staff who have been supervising students” (Interview with Birtukan, April 27/2020).

In the above interviews, all of the participants agreed that the insufficient collaborations and communications that existed between the school of social work and the field agencies influence the practical learning experiences of social work students. The school – agency partnership is not that much clear. The school has rather informal collaborative relationships with field agencies by some of its academic staff. Some participants indicated that sometimes agency workers lacked information while students arrived at the field sites. Open flow of information to all the actors of

the field practicum is important to avoid bureaucratic barriers in the field agencies at the beginning of placements. This helps to start the training immediately as students arrive at the agency. Some of the field advisors also confirmed that there was a miss understanding about the partnership relationships between the school and some field agencies. Some agencies expect benefits (incentives) from the school. To promote students' academic progress, the two institutions need to work collaboratively based on a formally established partnership. Such collaborative partnerships could be facilitated with a kind of open and informed contracts between them. This helps to have a common understanding about the roles and expectations from the two parties.

4.3.2. Personal Challenges

Other important challenges were personal problems of social work students themselves during their field practicum. Due to their own personal failures, they go through in a complex process of field practicum. Participants described their personal limitations as follows.

Difficulties to Adjust the New Organizational Environment

Adjusting one's self into the new organizational environment is among the most challenging experiences of social work students especially in the first season of the field practicum.

Participants of the study shared their personal limitations to adapt the organizational culture.

"I was confused especially in my first placement in at local NGO. I did not know what to do at the movement" (Interview with Selamawit, 3rd year BSW student, April 19/2020).

"The crowding, suffocations, mass causality, bleeding and grieving made me very stressed when I was placed in the hospital setting in my second year field practicum" (Interview with Alebel, 2nd year BSW student, April 5/2020).

“The strange and very sad stories I heard from my client made me stressed. I made my mind busy by thinking repeatedly about such stories. The bad thing is also when you failed to solve their (the clients) problems after they told you everything seeking of your help. That may be due to limited resources you have or other administrative issues to support them” (Interview with Getachew, 3rd year extension MSW student, April 12/2020).

In the above quotes, participants revealed that social work students experienced with some challenges related with the working situations practicing in the field sites. Some students indicated that the working environments such as crowding, suffocations, traumas, grieving and strange stories they heard from clients in the field sites made them stressful. Therefore, supervisors and other workers have great roles to give directions, motivations and encouragement to students.

Lack of Commitment

Participants of the study described their own limitations related to their personal commitment that affected their practical trainings. Some of them blamed themselves as follows.

“Many of us (students) consider it (the field practicum) as a course that we get relaxed and score good grades without exerting much energy. Even, if you are more committed to work hard, your group members discourage you even give you a nick name “akabide” (in Amharic አካብሮ)” (Interview with Biruk, 2nd year BSW student, April 26/2020).

“I feel like most of us (students) have limitations to manage the time allocated to the field practicum. For instance, we frequently absent or not punctual and/or leave from the

office before the exit time to do our private businesses” (Interview with Getachew, 3rd year extension MSW student, April 12/2020).

In the above interviews, some of the participants argued that the majority of students wrongly perceived field practicum as a requirement to fill the courses of the program they attend. In this context, they do not want to sacrifice their time and energy while they are sent to the field agencies. This causes them to be absent, lately entry or early left from the field sites. In this case, students do not observe nor exercise the practical activities.

Additionally, they have a poor culture of team working with other classmates. Due to this, a few responsible students might do assignments expected from all in a group. However, the field practicum approach of learning requires all the personal commitments of students to work in a team. The personal motivations and commitments of students are important to achieve positive learning outcomes and sharing of experiences during the field practicum.

“I was a group coordinator in my second field placement. The problem I frequently observed was the poor teamwork. Some of my group members were not voluntary to sacrifice their time and efforts for group work. As a result, group reports usually done by few committed members of the group and submit it as if all members of the group did it” (Interview with Yohans, 3rd year BSW student, April 25/2020).

Lack of Communication and Financial Management Skills

Some participants told that some of their challenging experience relies with their own limited personal skills.

“Throughout the field practicum, my greatest challenge was my poor communication skills. I only speak Somaligna and English. The only means of communication in the organizations was Amharic. It was difficult to understand all the points that the supervisor told to us and the issues presented by the clients” (Interview with Qumer, 2nd year BSW student, April 20/2020).

“I improperly used the financial support that the school provided to me. I immediately finished it (the money) by buying clothes. Finally, I become in financial crisis to cover my transportation and food expenses” (Interview with Biruk, 2nd year BSW student, April 26/2020).

In the above quotes, some of the BSW students explained how their poor communication and money management skills affected their practical experiences. Students who were unable to speak the national working language of Ethiopia (Amharic) got some difficulties to communicate with their supervisors and the clients they approached to serve. However, social work practice highly depends on the effective communications and rapport skills of students. Furthermore, students who improperly used the money they received from the school were exposed to some financial crises. This might cause them to be absent from the field sites or uninterested in working hard.

Poor Application of Theories into Practices

The findings confirmed that majority of students were challenged to apply the theories they learned in the classrooms into practice.

“I found the theory we learned in the class far different from the realities to practice and apply them in the social environment. For instance, I saw the social work ethical values

are violated due to the personal and organizational limitations” (Interview with Jemal, 3rd year extension MSW student, April 10/2020).

“It was very challenging to apply the social work theories I learned in the classrooms into my client’s context. It is not as simple as we read and answer exams in the classroom” (Interview with Selamawit, 3rd year BSW student, April 19/2020).

“When I practiced in the hospital setting, I tried to apply the biopsychosocial and spiritual model of social work practices. However, I do not believe I properly applied it. Just it is trying with limitations” (Interview with Getachew, 3rd year extension MSW student, April 12/2020).

In the above interviews, all of the social work students who participated in the study reported that linking theories into a practical context was very challenging. The applicability of theoretical concepts in practical situations depends on the ability of students to contextualize and the working environment of the field agencies. Hence, the majority of students were confused how to apply theories into practices. The working cultures of the field agencies also determine the application of theoretical concepts. For instance, some students indicated that the ethical values of the social work profession sometimes violated in most of the practical sites where non-professional workers were providing services to clients. Students need to be assisted by real social work professionals while they try to link the theories they learned in classrooms to practical realities.

Poor Reporting

Writing a well-organized fieldwork report is another source of challenging experience of social work students in their practical training. As one of the field advisor explained, majority of the

students reported poorly organized assignments in language usages. In addition, Students also submitted similar or copied reports from other students.

“Students use a very poor language to write their reports. They also bring me similar/copied reports” (Interview with Mahlet, Field advisor, April 21/2020).

Social work students’ also described their weakness related to preparing their practicum reports which is one part of the practical trainings.

“To prepare good reports and score good grade, sometimes you add unaccomplished tasks or present small tasks exaggeratedly. This is because in some agencies there is no work even for themselves (agency workers)” (Interview with Biruk, 2nd year BSW student, April 26/2020).

“My problem related with the field practicum report was to write all the activities I have undertaken on daily bases. I do have a bad habit to write everything at the end of the practices” (Interview with Girma, 2nd year extension MSW student, April 17/2020).

“I faced challenges to submit reports on time. It was because I sometimes became crowded with other personal issues” (Interview with Getahun, 2nd year extension MSW student, April 12/2020).

As shown in the above interviews, at the end of the field practicum season, students are expected to submit a well-organized report. Participates indicated that a few students sometimes submit falsified, untimely or exaggerated field practicum reports. Participants also hinted that most of the students were not good at writing daily records. If students did not properly document the activities they performed on the daily bases, they faced some difficulties to write a good field

practicum report. This is because some of the accomplished tasks might be forgotten to be included in reports. Poorly submitted reports (in both quality and deadline) affect the evaluation and grading of students.

4.2.3. Challenges Related with Clients

As the participants explained, students challenged with the problems that come from the clients they attempted to serve. In some cases, there are clients who are not willing to be treated by trainers. According to the participants, beneficiaries in field agencies not feel confidence about the skills and knowledge of students. Moreover, some others lack awareness about the professional services of social work education. They assume the social workers only as sponsors who provide material or financial supports to clients.

“Some clients are unhappy to be treated by students. They assumed the only expert to solve their problem is the supervisors or administrators” (Interview with Netsanet, 2nd year BSW student, April 9/2020).

“I came across with clients who do not want professional treatments. I think, that was due to limited awareness they have about the social work services” (Interview with Getahun, 2nd extension MSW student, April 14/2020).

In addition, communication barriers were the other obstacle to have smooth relationships with clients in the practical settings. Some students reported that there were difficulties to communicate with clients who came from different parts of the country in referral hospitals. This is because many of them can speak only the regional languages of their origin. Some of the participants told as they used translators to conduct interviews with such clients. This might have also some impacts as the confidentialities of clients become disclosed.

“When I took my field course in a referral hospital, I met several clients who came from different corners of the country and spoke only the local language of their origin”

(Interview with Girma, 2nd extension MSW student, April 15/2020).

Still social work students reported that some clients showed unnecessary behaviors such as disrespecting, laying, and attempting to have sexual relationships with female students. This mostly happened to students whose placement was in the local NGOs that provide services to children who have street life. To have an effective field practicum, the collaborative relationships with the service users are very important. Clients need to know what trainers do for them in a way professional boundary is under consideration.

“Some clients approach you aggressively and some others laying you to get the free services of the agency. This is especially true in the hospital settings where free medical services are given to economically weak clients” (Interview with Tizta, 3rd year BSW student, April 24/2020).

“One youth from beneficiaries in local NGO, where I conducted my first year field practices frequently cheat me through phone call. His intention seemed to have sexual relationship” (Interview with Selamawit, 3rd year BSW student, April 9/2020).

4.3. Consequences of the Challenging Experiences in the Field Practicum

The challenging experiences of social work students during the field practicum bring some negative impacts on the success of social work students and all role players in general.

Participants listed some of the consequences resulted from such challenges.

4.3.1. Developing Negative Attitudes towards the Field Practicum

The findings revealed that most of social work students developed negative attitudes towards the field practicum course due to the challenges they experienced in it. The little emphasizes given to their practical trainings discourages them to work with commitments. Due to this, students do not want to invest their time and energy in their practicum. As a result, they perceived the field practicum as a course that every students get vacations without real leanings.

“The challenging experience of field practicum lets social work students to be discouraged and hopeless. Most of us become less committed to work onin such complex process of practical learning. I feel like it (the field practicum) only as requirement to fill the course and score grades” (Interview with Biruk, 2nd year BSW student, April 26/2020).

4.3.2. Feeling Incompetent

Participants described their arguments that due to the challenges facing in the practical trainings, social work students returned without gaining the knowledge and skills as expected. Students spend their time by doing nothing or work on unrelated tasks of social work practices. This mostly happened due to the problems reside in all of the actors of the field practicum. As a result, students might graduate with limited practical knowledge and skills. This will have its own impacts on their success in their academic and future professional competitions.

“Unless all actors of the field practicum work responsibly, social work students could not gain the necessary skills and knowledge from the field practice courses” (Interview with Girma, 2nd year extension MSW student, April 17/2020).

4.3.3. The School – Agency Relationships Become Fragmented

All of the participants believe that the field agencies and their respected clients are not much profiting from the field practicum. Following this, field agencies are/ might be unwilling to accept future students. This is because the relationship between the school and the agencies depends on a kind of give and take relationships. Therefore, it is commented that the school should strengthen its supportive relationships with its partners through knowledge and technology transferring.

“I am afraid to say, field agencies and their beneficiaries are benefiting from the unpaid workforces of the social work students. Unless the agencies get something benefit for themselves or their beneficiaries from the school or students, they become unwilling to accept social work students again” (Interview with Mekonen, 3rd year BSW student, April 7/2020).

4.3.4. Scoring Low Grades

Social work students have been evaluated and given grades based on sated evaluation criteria by the two supervisors at the school and field agencies. Participants revealed that it is difficult to fulfill the duties based on such criteria due to the existing challenges they encountered. As a result, students’ scored low grades during the evaluations process after the practical leanings. That is mostly due to the low performances they have showed during the practical trainings and poorly organized reports they present to their advisors.

“I mostly got poor grades in my field courses. That was due to my failures to fulfill the evaluation criteria during and after the field practicum” (Interview with Qumar, 2nd year BSW student, April 20/2020).

4.3.5. The Profession Remains Underdeveloped

Participants agreed that if students graduate with limited practical knowledge and skills, they will contribute little to the professional development of social work. Graduates are expected to work with real professional practices while they serve their communities in the world of work.

However, this would be affected by the poor practical trainings they experienced during their practical courses. On the other hand, participants agreed that field practicum is a means to market the profession of social work through providing services in organizational settings without payments. However, due to the existing challenges, students could not provide social work services effectively which helped to promote the profession.

“I think, our weak field practicum will result the slower development of our social work profession. If unskilled professionals produced due to our weak educational practices, the advocacy and recognition of the profession will also be affected” (Interview with Getahun, 2nd year extension MSW student, April 12/2020).

Chapter Five

5. Discussions of the Study

This chapter discusses the findings with the literatures reviews. The chapter starts by describing the existing opportunities which is followed by the examining the challenges experienced by social work students in the field practicum. Then, it closes with descriptions of the consequences that resulted from the challenging experiences of the field practicum. The finding of the study will discuss based on the categorizations of the main themes with sub themes along with the objectives of the study.

5.1. Opportunities in the Field Practicum

Social work students at AAU school of social work have experienced certain opportunities in their field practicum. First, the geographical location of the university allows the school of social work to create partnership grounds with various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, the existence of such numerous field agencies simplifies the constraints of placing social work students for practical trainings. This find contrasts with a study conducted by Schmidt & Rautenbach (2016) that confirmed rural based universities are commonly constraint to find field agencies during the field placement.

Secondly, the knowledgeable, experienced and very willing social work experts working in school of social work at AAU are added assets to have a good practicum experience. Availability of such personnel helped students to get whatever explanations concerning the field of practicum learning. Additionally, the grant that the university allocated for field practicum minimizes the financial problems of students regardless of its quantity. To have an effective practical

experiences, social work students need to be supported with the stipend allocated by the school of social work (Shokane et al, 2016).

The other promising finding was the support of field agencies for field practicum. An evidence for this argument is that some agencies including the Ethiopian government are promoting different unpaid voluntarism activities to support the needy groups and minimize the cost of energy invested on it. This helps to bring mutual developments through strengthen partnerships among the school and field agencies. Social work students also acknowledged that the welcoming and initiations made by workers at some of the field agencies. The instructions, feedbacks and discussions facilitated by the field supervisors are helpful to have positive learning experiences at the agency level (Schmidt & Rautenbach, 2016).

Fourthly, the field instruction program itself provides progressive learning opportunities to social work students. School of social work at AAU is sending its students since the first year of joining the department. This allows students to link theories into practices and to strength their professional knowledge and skills through progressive learning. Moreover, such instruction allowed students to strengthen their social relationships with their classmates, supervisors and other workers in the field agencies. It also helps them to generate and identify future research ideas and potential job areas while they work with vulnerable groups. The existence of the practice curriculum helps students to be aware of the required practical learning (Dhemba, 2012).

Lastly, the students' prior knowledge, skills and experiences, which they gained from their formal learning at classrooms, work and life experiences, are helpful to make easy the practical trainings. Specially, most of the MSW students have all those assets and see the practicum as their regular activities. This is because they perform tasks better than even their supervisors do.

5.2. Challenging Experiences in the Field Practicum

From the results of the study, it is clear that social work students go through challenging experiences that mainly originated from the limitations of each of the actors of the field practicum. Poor advising and support in both the school and field agencies is the first concern of social work students. The main reasons for this problem at the school of social work include workloads, the distance of field sites and low commitments of some instructors. According to Wassie(2019) there is inconsistency follow up and visitation by the social work educators assigned to coordinate the field practicum in some Ethiopian universities. However, the continuous visiting and guidance by the faculty supervisors is critical to have intensive learning in the field (Jeyarani & Jebaseelan, 2017).

On the agencies side, most of the supervisors are non-social workers. Thus, social work students could not get the proper professional supports from such personnels as they lack the knowledge and skills of social work profession. In addition, supervisors sometimes not to give tasks as they fear to take risks or if, they let students to work on unrelated tasks with the social work profession. Social work students cannot get professional trainings and achieve less learning from field agencies where professional social workers lack (Jeyarani & Jebaseelan, 2017).

Additionally, there is also mismatch of students' practicum programs with the supervisors working hours. Students sometimes remained unsupervised as most of the government social workers mostly busy with meetings and workshops (Shokane et al, 2016).

Another important finding is that of a shortage of resources in the field agencies. It is reported that most of the social work units in field agencies lack budgets, isolated offices, and other necessary materials such as case files and protective materials (in hospital settings). Shortage of suitability of host agencies limits social work schools to place high numbers of students and

brings some difficulties to manage the field practicum (Dhemba, 2012). Social work students in the context of South Africa universities experienced with limited resources such as stationaries, office space and transportation for home visits (Shokane et al, 2016).

There are also concerns relating to the evaluation and grading after the completions of the field practicum. The supervisors from both institutions failed to give grades based on the performance of students and the qualities of fieldwork reports. Very committed students become discouraged as the supervisors give similar grades to almost all. Students should be evaluated through self and peer assessment mechanisms (Dimo, 2013). The last limitation of the school of social work and the field agencies is that of the weak collaborations between them. There are no formally established ways of partnerships as the school lacks an independent unit responsible for coordinating the field practicum. Rather, the relationships that exist between the school and the field agencies seemed semi-formal that mostly facilitated through the self-motivated professors at the school. A similar finding reported by Carelse and Poggenpoel (2016) showed that the poor collaboration between academics and agency supervisors affects the field practicum experiences of all actors. As a result, students and field supervisors contribute little to the development of fieldwork program.

The other challenges of field practicum come from the personal failures of social work students themselves. Students face some difficulties to adjust to the stressful working environments such as traumatic cases and painful pasts of clients in the field of agencies. Unlikely, Baikady et al (2017) confirmed that students were challenged to adjust to the culture, food, habits and traditions of the communities they conducted their practicum in as they were placed far from their community. Moreover, Carelse and Poggenpoel (2016) noted that students are emotionally immature with the traumatic cases of clients as they lack the experiences of such situations.

Some others lack commitments to meet the practice learning requirements. Social work students are less committed to use their time in performing tasks and working in a team to do assignments with their classmates. Applying the theories taught in the classrooms to practice is the other challenge in the field practicum. This is due to the lack of knowledge and understandings about the social work practices among the students and their supervisors. According to Shokane et al (2016) students were challenged to integrate theories due to the non-suitability of the field agencies such as lack of professional social work supervisors. Moreover, this also happened due to the inability to choose relevant and applicable theories and the inflexibilities of students to adjust themselves with the theory application process (Gentle-Genitty et al, 2014).

Additionally, there are communication barriers to work with clients and supervisors among students. Few students who only speak the language of their origins were challenged to build rapport and conduct interviews with clients and to take orientations and assignments from their supervisors. The inability to speak the working language of any organizations or countries reduce students' confidence and abilities to work actively with clients and community members (Pawar, 2016). Furthermore, some students have limitations to prepare well-organized field practicum reports. They report similar/ copied reports or include unaccomplished tasks. They also missed to report all they have done due to their poor daily recording habits.

Clients are the other sources of challenges faced to students in their field practice experiences. The main challenge that comes from the clients is the lack of confidence about the abilities of social work students and the limited awareness about the general social work services. It is also challenging to communicate with clients who came from different backgrounds. Social work students sometimes also come across with clients who approached them in miss behaving

behaviors like disrespecting, to lie and abusing. This highly related with past-burned life of clients and their intentions to get benefits in improperly ways.

5.3. Consequences of Challenging Experiences in the Field Practicum

The challenging experiences in the field practicum brought some negative outcomes both on the personal and institutional levels. Social work students developed negative attitudes toward the field practicum due to the challenges they experienced in it. It is confirmed that they are the first losers. Most social work students reported that the challenging process of their practical training affected them to score good grades. Furthermore, they expressed their frustrations, as they would graduate with limited practical knowledge and skills from the field practicum courses. Thus, they will be remaining professionally incompetent as they gain only theoretical knowledge.

Secondly, the host agencies and their respected beneficiaries will not much benefit from unpaid labor forces of social work students. Due to this, the supportive relationship between the school and the field agencies became fragmented. In addition, if we go in such a way, gradually the agencies might be unwilling to accept the future students for the fieldwork placements.

Generally, the professional development of social work will remain stagnant unless some measurements could not be taken to improve the quality of the field practicum. This is because field practicum is one of the means to market the profession of social work through providing different unpaid practical services at the agency and community levels. Moreover, less practically skilled graduates who are going to join the community will contribute little for societal changes. This has direct impacts to the development of the profession of social work.

5.4. Field Practicum as a Systemic Process

In the second chapter of this paper, it was stated that system theory would be used as a lens to see the field practicum and the parties involved in it (see figure 0.1). In general, field practicum is made up from the four parties (including the school, students, agency and clients) that get involved and shape the opportunities and challenges experienced by social work students.

Without the existence of all the parties, we cannot think about the field practicum. This is to mean that students could not get real practical training if one of the actors missed. This is because they are interdependent to one another. For instance, school of social work could not send its students to field agencies where direct beneficiary are not available. All those parties are interacting while they perform tasks together to improve students' academic achievement and to have successful practical experiences. System theory focuses on relationships and interactions of elements through their interconnections which help to understand how they work together to achieve a common objective (Gupta, 2013).

According to the findings of this study, there are lists of opportunities such as availabilities of field agencies, availabilities of resources, the supports of field agencies, the educational curriculum and the prior knowledge and skills of students that help to achieve a successful practical learning. Those assets/resources contributed by each of the parties that get involved in the field practicum are important to have positive practical experiences. The complementary function of each of the components would be helpful to bring positive impacts on a given system (Germain, 2015).

On the other hand, there are lists of challenges that have institutional and personal bases.

According to the findings of this study, lack of supports and guidance, shortage of resources, lack of awareness weak school- agency collaborations, lack of commitments, poor applications

of theories into practices, lack of communication skills, poor evaluations and grading are among the challenges experienced during the field practicum. The existence of those challenges negatively affected the practicum experiences of each party and the achievements of the practical learning objectives. The limitations in one party will have negative consequences on the functions of other elements in the learning process during the field practicum. For instance, the lack of field practicum coordinator from the school of social work made students to be poorly guided by instructors who are busy by other duties. Such problems affect not only the experiences of social work students but also the effectiveness of the field practicum in general. This is because all the role players in the field practicum are influencing one another. According to systems theory if one part in a system failed to function, the whole will be disrupted (Gupta, 2013).

Chapter Six

6. Conclusions and Implications of the Study

The focus of this chapter is to conclude the aim of the study, the methodological approaches employed in the study. It also briefly summarizes the key findings of the study. The implications of the study also described in the second sections of the chapter.

6.1. Conclusions

This study has identified the existing opportunities and challenges that might hinder or facilitate the field practicum experiences of social work students in school of social work at AAU. The qualitative single case study method was used to carry out the study. The participants of the study purposively selected from both the BSW and the MSW programs of social work education at AAU. Each participant approached based on their consent of willingness for semi structure interviews.

All the participants expressed their feelings about the existing opportunities and challenges they experienced during the field practicum. There are Points mentioned by participants as opportunities to facilitate the field practicum in the right track. Those opportunities include the availability of field agencies in the nearby locations of AAU, the availability of human, financial and material resources, supports of field agencies, the compatibilities of the social work education curriculums and the prior knowledge, skills and experiences of social work students.

However, all the participants also expressed their concerns they encountered during their field practicum experiences. The challenges that affect the success of social work students mainly originated from the institutional drawbacks of the school of social work and the host agencies,

the personal limitations of the social work students and challenges related with the service recipients. The major challenges commonly observed in both the school and the field agencies are poor guidance and supports, lack of awareness, insufficient access of resources, poor grading and evaluations and weak collaborations. The personal limitations of students also include difficulties to adjust oneself with the organizational environments, lack of personal commitment, lack of personal skills, difficulties to link theories with practices and the poor reporting. The lack of awareness about the social work services, the language barriers and other personal problems observed as challenges from clients' side.

All the participants also expressed their arguments about the consequences of such challenging experiences during the field practicum. Participants listed some negative consequences that resulted from the challenges that students faced in the practical trainings. Those include developing negative attitudes towards the field practicum; become being incompetent and receiving low grades. Furthermore, the profession remains under developed and the school-agency relationships become affected.

The significant aspect of the study is that the findings will assist the curriculum developers, academics, students, field supervisors and other actors of the field practicum to have better understandings about the existing opportunities in the field practicum experiences. Additionally, they will have insights about the challenges and gaps experienced by social work students during their fieldwork experiences and the consequences that resulted from such challenging experiences.

6.2. Implications of the Study

The opportunities and challenges experienced by social work students in the field practicum have implications for stakeholders involved on it. Because field practicum is, a vital experience in social work education that requires the efforts of all actors that could benefit from it in return.

The result of this study has implications for social work students, school of social work, the field agencies, the curriculum developers and the future researchers. These implications presented as follows.

6.2.1. Implications for Social Work Students

The first implication of the study goes to the social work students as they are regarded as the first beneficiaries from the field practicum experiences. Social work students have direct roles to improve the quality of the field practicum and be responsible for its failures as well. As the finding of the study indicated, the personal limitations of the students had negative effects on the success of the field practicum experiences.

Most of the time, social work students were observed as expecting much support from others. However, especially during the field practicum, everybody is running to do his/her own business. Even the person who is assigned to assist students does not give that much emphasis. Therefore, this will affect their field practicum experiences directly. Therefore, social work students should prepare themselves through reading different materials and use their own efforts to use the chance from the field practicum for better practical experiences.

Majority of social work students perceived the field practicum as a course where good grades were scored in a way small efforts made. They sometimes observed as grade-oriented. They do not want to sacrifice their time, energy or resources to improve their practical skills. Therefore,

students should be committed to invest whatever efforts are required to get a good practicum experience. They should always ask themselves why they go to the field agencies.

6.2.2. Implication for School of Social work

The school of social work invests its material, financial and human resources to support its students by providing opportunities for practical trainings and meeting its institutional objectives of producing skilled and well-equipped social work professionals. However, due to the problems raised from it and other actors, the field practicum experiences are unsuccessful. It has been explained that the field practicum has not received the necessary attention by the school of social work as of the theoretical teaching process in the classrooms. As reported in the findings of the study, the field practicum was poorly facilitated by the academic staffs in addition to their regular teaching, researching and administrating responsibilities. This causes people to have weaker communications and coordination systems. Therefore, this implies that the school of social work should establish an independent unit that could be responsible for coordinating and facilitating the field practicum teaching and learning process.

It is evident that the weaker collaborative relationships between the school and the host agencies cause the field practicum experiences to be challenging. In this case, both parties are losing to get the expected benefits from the field practicum. Therefore, the school of social work should strengthen such fragmented relationships to fill the existing gaps. To do so, there should be a memorandum of understanding agreement to have a formal partnership between the two parties. This will help to avoid the confusion about what is expected from each institution. Preparing the tanks and giving the ceremony at every completion of the field practicum is the other recommendation to strengthen the supportive relationships between the staffs of the school of social work and the field agencies. In addition, there should be continued seminars and

discussions among each actor of the field practicum. This will help to share experiences and set solutions for the existed drawbacks together.

The field practicum and the social work professional practice in general in Ethiopia are poorly understood in the organizational setting and the community. Most of the agency workers, administrators and other stakeholders do not know how the fieldwork educational practice brings positive impacts on a student's professional development and the social services they provide to the beneficiaries. Therefore, the school should advocate and raise awareness about the importance of the field practicum via mass/ social media or facilitating different workshops for such multiple stakeholders. This will help to increase partnerships on one hand and to promote the social work professional development on the other hand. Providing trainings specifically to the social work students and the agency field supervisors about the core points mentioned in the field manual and generally the field practicum is also recommended. The poor reading habits and lower motivations of the majority of social work students and the agency supervisor make them to know little and be confused about what to do during the field practicum. Therefore, if students and their supervisors are aware of the basic concept of the field practicum through planned and organized trainings, seminars, and workshops, it will be a guarantee to improve the effectiveness of the field practicum.

The school of social work is also responsible to manage, coordinate and administer the process of field practicum. However, there are still gaps to understand in what position is the field practicum teaching and learning process. The school should monitor and evaluate the ongoing process of field practicum at last in a fixed time interval. This process will help the school to identify day-to-day challenging experiences by each actor and understand the ground realities about the field practicum. Through using the monitoring and evaluation methods, the school can

impose enforcements on those who cause obstacles on the outcomes and reward the hard workers during the field practicum.

The other implication of the study for the school of social work goes to the evaluation and grading process of social work students after the completion of the field practice experiences. Social work students complained concerning the evaluation and grading process after the completion of the field practicum. This is followed with the poorly evaluation process of the field practicum report resulted from the biased personalities by some advisors. Therefore, the researcher recommended that the recently started group evaluation should be strengthened so that the performance of social work student would fairly evaluate. Alternatively, unless the advisors could use the secret coding to give biased free evaluation and grading.

To facilitate a good practical learning, a well-organized field manual is vitally important. However, the field education manual of Addis Ababa University has prepared before 8 years ago from now. It has not revised since then. Things are changed in every times and contexts. This is true in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the field education manual should revise in a fixed time intervals by considering the social work professional development in the country.

6.2.3. Implications for the Field Agencies

The field practicum experience is the most important teaching and learning process where the host agencies benefited from the free labor forces of the trainers and other technical and material supports from the social work schools. However, due to the personal and institutional drawbacks, the host agencies and its respected beneficiaries have not been much benefited from the field practicum experiences. Therefore, the agencies and its respected staffs should work collaboratively with other actors to be profitable from the unpaid workforces of the social work

trainers and the win- win partnerships with the school of social work. In addition, the agencies should be aware about their institutional duties of the practical teaching and learning roles to produce the future competent professional social workers.

6.2.4. Implications for the Curriculum Developers

The field education has recognitions as equally important as the theoretical part of the social work education by curricula experts (CSWE, 2008). However, in reality, it is the most neglected part of the teaching methods of social work education. This is mostly due to the personal and institutional problems to work on the curriculum applicability. Therefore, the results of the study brought some inputs that need to be considered by the curriculum developers. Whenever a policy is designed, the educational policy developers should address all the issues and challenges that concerns all actors of the field practicum. There should be regulations that would enforce the field agencies to consider the field training of students in their action plans.

6.2.5. Implications for Researchers

The field practicum experience is an important area of research in the teaching and learning approaches of social work education. This is because it is sometimes regarded as the most marginalized parts of the social work education (Dhemba, 2012). There are issues that need to be addressed through scientific investigations. This study has tried to examine the existing opportunities and the challenges experienced by social work students during the field practicum qualitatively. Moreover, there would be further quantitative investigations on how the relationships of different issues could influence the quality of the field practicum experiences. For instance, the impacts of advising and support, the collaborative partnerships of actors, the suitability of the field agencies on the qualities of field practicum requires further investigations.

There is a need to explore the experiences of other actors such as the field coordinators and the field supervisors in the process of the practical trainings.

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Appendices

Appendix I: consent form

My name is Alemu Muneye. I am studying my Master's Degree at Addis Ababa University in school of social work on family, children and youth concentration. Now, I am conducting a study for the partial fulfillment of my Master's Degree and the purpose of the study is solely an academic. The interview will be conducted based on your free will and consent; so that if you feel discomfort you can discontinue whenever you want. All the private issues you disclose and the instruments we use such as records will be kept permanently as a secret for the seek of your safety. Therefore, I kindly ask genuinely respond for the questions that will be presented for you.

Thanks in advance!

Interviewer-----

interviewee-----

Signature-----

signature-----

Date-----

date-----

Appendix II: Interview guide

Date of interview---/-----/-----

Socio demographic information

Sex: Male Female

Age

Educational level: MSW Regular 1st year MSW extension 2nd year MSW
extension 3rd year BSW 2nd year BSW 3rd year

1. Tell me about your field practicum experiences. Where did you place? What preparations were there on both your side and the academics before you go to the host agencies? How was your welcomed at the beginning in the agency?
2. Tell me about the practical learning experience throughout your field practicum at the agency? How do you found the practical training activities at the agencies? Please explain it. How do you describe the advising and guidance from both the agency (field supervisor) and the school (field advisor)? How was the evaluation process at the end of the field practicum?
3. What are the opportunities you get in specific to the field actors and the field practicum itself?
4. How do you explain the challenges you faced specifically in relation to the school, the agency, the clients you serve, and yourself (personal limitations) during your field practicum experiences?
5. Tell me about the consequences that resulted from such challenging experiences during your field practicum. Who affected more?

6. What do you suggest to improve the quality of field practicum in this university?
7. Anything left to be included-----

Appendix III: Interview guide for key informants (only for academic staffs)

1. Tell me the practical experiences of field practicum in this university. What procedures are there in the process of field practicum from the beginning to the end?
2. How do you observe the available opportunities to social work students in their field practicum? Explain it in relation to the field actors and the field practicum itself.
3. Tell me about the challenges that social work students experience during their field practicum.
4. What would be the consequences of the challenges experienced by social work students' during their field practicum?
5. What do you suggest to improve the quality of field practicum in this university?

Appendix IV: Amharic translation of the consent format and the interview guidelines.

ቅጽ I: የቃለ መጠየቅ ስምምነት ቅጽ

አለሙ ሙንዬ እባላለሁ። በአዲስ አበባ ዩኒቨርሲቲ በሶሻል ወርክ ትምህርት ቤት

የማስተርስ ተማሪ ነኝ። በአሁኑ ሰአት የመመረቄያ ጥናቴን እየሰራሁ እገኛለሁ።

የጥናቴ አላማ ሙሉ በሙሉ ትመህርታዊ ብቻ ነው። ቃለ መጠየቁ በአንተ/አንች ሙሉ

ፈቃደኝነት ለይ የተመሰረተ ሲሆን በማንኛውም ሁኔታ ጥሩ ያልሆነ ስሜት ከተሰማህ/ሽ

ቃለመጠየቁን የማወቅራጥ መብትህ/ሽ የተጠበቀ ነው። ማናቸውም የምታነሳቸው/ሻቸው

ነጥቦች እና የምንጠቀምባቸው መሳሪያዎች በሚስጥራዊነት ይቀመጣሉ። ስለሆነም

ለሚቀርብልህ/ሽ ጥያቄዎች ምላሽ እንድትሰጥ/ጭ በአክብሮት ትጠየቃለሁ/ሽ።

ስለ ትብብርህ/ሽ ከልብ አመሰግናለሁ!

የጥናቴ ተሳታፊ ስም-----ፊርማ-----ቀን-----

የአጥኝዉ ስም-----ፊርማ-----ቀን-----

ቅጽ II: ከተማሪዎች ጋር ቃለ መጠየቅ ማድረጊያ ቅጽ

ቃለ መጠየቁ የተደረገበት ቀን----/-----/-----

ጾታ: ወንድ

ሴት

እድሜ:

የትምህርት ደረጃ፡ የመደበኛ ማሰተርስ 1ኛ አመት ተማሪ የማታ ማስተርስ 2ኛ አመት ተማሪ የማታ ማስተርስ 3ኛ አመት ተማሪ ዲግሪ 2ኛ አመት ተማሪ ዲግሪ 3ኛ አመት ተማሪ

1. እስኪ ስለ ተግባራዊ ልምምድ ትምህርት ልምድህ ንግረኝ/ሪኝ፡፡ የት የት ነበር የተመደብከው? ወደ ተግባራዊ ትምህርታዊ ልምምድ ከመሄድህ/ሽ በፊት የነበረው ዝግጅት ምን ይመስል ነበር ? በድርጅቱ በኩልስ የነበረው አቀባበል ምን ይመስል ነበረ?
2. በተመደብክበት/ሽበት ድርጅት የነበረው የተግባር ልምምድ ምን ይመስል ነበር? ምን ምን ተግባራትን ታከናወን/ኝ ነበር ? የማማከር ሂደቱስ ምን ይመስል ነበር? የግምገማ እና ውጤት የመስጠት ሂደቱስ እንዴት ነበር?
3. በአ.አ.ዩ. ሶሻል ወርክ ት/ቤት ለተግባራዊ ልምምድ ት/ት ምን ምን ጥሩ እድሎች አሉ ? እስኪ ከአጋር አካላትም ከተግባራዊ ልምምድም አንጻር ግለጽ ልኝ/ጭልን? እንዴትስ እንጠቀምባቸው?
4. እስኪ በተግባራዊ ት/ት ሂደት ስለሚገጥሙ ተግዳሮቶች ግለጽ ልኝ/ጭልኝ፡፡ መነሻቸውስ ከየት ነው? እስኪ ከተቋማዊም ፣ ከግለሰባዊም እንዲሁም ከተጠቃሚዎቻችንም አንጻር ግለጽ ልኝ/ጭልኝ፡፡ የእነዚህ ተግዳሮቶች መነሻስ ተቋማዊ ወይስ ግለሰባዊ?
5. የተግባራዊ ልምምድ ት/ትን ውጤታማነት ለማሻሻል ማን ምን ያድርግ?
6. በመጨረሻም ቀረ የምትለው ነገር ካለ?

ቅጽ III: ለአካዳሚክ ስታፍ ሰራተኞች የተዘጋጀ ቃለ መጠየቅ

1. እስኪ ስለ ተግባር ት/ት ያለዎትን ልምድ ይግለጹልኝ። ከመጀመሪያው እስከ መጨረሻው የለውን የተግባር ት/ት ሂደትንም ያብራሩልኝ።

2. በአ.አ.ዩ. ሶሻል ወርክ ት/ቤት ለተግባራዊ ልምምድ ት/ት ምን ምን ጥሩ እድሎች አሉ ? እንዴትስ እንጠቀምባቸው?

3. እስኪ በተግባራዊ ት/ት ሂደት ስለሚያግጥሙ ተግዳሮቶች ይግለጹልኝ። የእነዚህ ተግዳሮቶች መነሻስ ተቋማዊ ወይስ ግለሰባዊ?

4. መወሰድ ስላለባቸው የመፍትሄ አቅጣጫዎች ምን ይላሉ? ማን ምን ያድርግ?

5. ቀረ የሚሉት ሃሳብ ካል?