

Impacts of COVID-19 on Social Work Field Education: Perspectives of Field Instructors in Canada



Context

- Field work is the **signature pedagogy** of social work
- How has the **COVID-19 pandemic** impacted social work field instructors?



Method

- Field instructors from urban, rural, and Indigenous agencies across Canada were invited to participate in an **online survey**
- 73** field instructors across **6** provinces responded to the survey



Key Findings

Benefits

- Forced greater adaptability, resiliency, and creativity
- Technology enhanced ability to provide support in some situations
- Greater awareness of the need for social justice



Transition to Remote Learning

- Prior to 2020, **89.5%** of client interactions were face-to-face
- Reduced practicum hours
 - BSW: 700 to 323 hrs
 - MSW: 450 to 337.5 hrs
- 88.4%** reported changes to field placements
- 70.8%** felt negative impacts to mental health/wellness
- 26.2%** did not have alternate supervision in place



Challenges

- Fewer training and mentorship opportunities
- Concern over students' stress levels
- Negative impact on student learning



"Students that have worked with me since the pandemic began have been able to get an intimate look into how systems operate and be involved in significant changes that they can be proud of."

-Survey Respondent

"As a hiring manager, I want MSWs with direct experience in the field. Online exceptions to accommodate COVID won't adequately prepare students to do the real work. COVID shouldn't be treated as a 'perk' for the learning reward."

-Survey Respondent

Summary

- Field instructors adapted well to pandemic changes
- Disruptions to field placements revealed a need to support instructors as they continue adapting to change

What's Next?

- Consider alternate forms of supervision (co-supervision, group supervision)
- Develop web-based models of learning
- Create circulation-based education tools