

Social Work Field Education in Canada: Learnings from Three National Studies

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Field education is an essential component of social work education in which students extend their professional knowledge by applying theoretical learnings to real-life practice situations under the supervision of experienced social worker practitioners. However, despite its importance, social work programs in Canada are experiencing significant multi-layered challenges in delivering field education to students. Researchers have been calling for an urgent need to better understand the current landscape of social work field education. To answer this call, the Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL) partnership project was launched in 2015. This Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded partnership project brings together a diverse team of more than 100 social work field educators, researchers, students, and partners, identifying the significant gaps, concerns, and challenges to address in field education and supporting development of new innovative and sustainable field education models constitute the major objectives of the TFEL project. To this end, TFEL conducted several nation-wide research studies, including a national survey on the state of social work field education, a national survey on the most significant challenges in social work field education, and virtual dialogue circles to capture student perspectives on socialwork field education.

The state of Social Work Field Education Survey was designed to provide an assessment of the current state of social work field education in Canada by examining the structure and delivery of field education programs, field educators, and staffing at the Canadian Association for Social Work Education – Association Canadienne Pour La Formation En Travail Social (CASWE-ACFTS) accredited institutions. Thirty-nine out of a total 43 accredited institutions participated in the survey conducted between June and July 2020. Here are some of the highlights from the survey:

- In general, field education programs struggle with heavy workloads and a lack of resources. On average, instructors employed only two personnel in their field education programs. One-fifth of all institutions did

not have any administrative office support for field education.

- More institutions had full-time faculty members as field liaisons than part-time seasonal faculty members. Interestingly, institutions with higher student enrollments had more part-time seasonal faculty members in the role of field liaisons. MSW programs had more full-time staff for fewer students.



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- Most institutions (57%) offered urban placements while only 11% of institutions offered placements on reserve. One-fifth of all institutions reported that more than 10% of their students need unique placements adding to the workload and complexities for the field programs.
- Most community organizations and social services agencies are committed to providing quality field instruction; however, they struggle to do so on an ongoing basis due to budget reductions in the past few years.
- Out of necessity and due to higher student enrollments, the majority of institutions (75%) sometimes place