

Multiple Challenges Faced By Social Work Students during the Field Practice: Special Reference to the National Institute of Social Development

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka has a limited number of social work educational institutions, with the National Institute being the first to offer social work education since 1962. It serves as the pioneer institute for social work education in the country, currently offering programs in Tamil, Sinhala, and English, both full-time and part-time. All courses include a field practicum component aligned with the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF). The Bachelor of Social Work program spans four years and incorporates observational visits, field studies, and fieldwork practice at various levels. Students encounter different challenges during their fieldwork, particularly in institutions assigned to them. They work under the supervision of Field supervisors (also referred to as agency supervisors) and faculty supervisors. Multiple challenges faced by students during fieldwork include transportation issues, a lack of clarity from agencies regarding fieldwork objectives, insufficient cooperation from supervisors, difficulties in organising reports, challenges in understanding fieldwork guidance manuals, and financial constraints. These challenges can hinder the timely completion of fieldwork, the achievement of objectives, and the quality of reports. To address these issues, the institute has appointed linguistically separate coordinators and supervisors at various levels for oversight. Additionally, orientation workshops, progress panel presentations, and final panel presentations have been instituted for students. Despite these support measures, students continue to experience challenges in completing field practice. To address this research objective, this study examines the multiple challenges and Regulation of supervision faced by social work students during field practice. 150 fourth-year Social Work students studying in the Tamil medium participated in this study. The students were stratified by field practice location, and a purposive sampling method was used to select 20% of the participants based on their willingness and experience in providing data for fieldwork Practice. Primary data were collected through interviews and key informant interviews, while secondary data were obtained from the literature. The collected data were subjected to conceptual analysis, which identified aspects such as experiences and challenges associated with fieldwork. The study's findings indicated that several factors affect the completion of fieldwork, including low support for field supervisors, poor communication between the institutional field experience department and other supervisors, and a lack of student commitment. Further research into supervisor responsibilities may help mitigate the challenges students face in the field.

Keywords: Psychosocial challenges, Social Work Students. Field practicum

INTRODUCTION

Field practice plays a vital role in the education and professional development of social workers in Sri Lanka. The country has institutions that integrate a comprehensive field practicum into their curriculum, aligned with the Sri Lankan Qualification Framework (SLQF). This integration is crucial for maintaining quality, as emphasised by the university's Grant Commission guidelines. At the undergraduate level, these institutions employ a variety of innovative field learning methods, including field studies, exposure visits, concurrent field practice, block placements, and internships. The primary focus of field practice is to enhance knowledge, practical experience, skills, attitudes, and mindsets essential to effective social work practice. Different institutions tailor their field practice evaluation methods to educational levels and student needs. For example,

some institutions employ a dual approach, assessing students through a combination of a written paper and a practical field experience, often evaluated via an oral examination, commonly called a viva. Historically, social work fieldwork has been an integral part of practice even before formal education in the field emerged. The foundation of social work education dates back to the early nineteenth century, marking a shift toward systematic training and professional development. Today, social work is recognised as a profession that intricately links classroom knowledge with practical application through scientific and evidence-based methods. Interventions in social work can be categorised into micro, intermediate, and macro levels, addressing the needs of individuals, families, groups, and larger societal structures. Fieldwork must be conducted in alignment with social work values, ethics, roles, skills, and relevant national laws and cultural contexts. Moreover, strong oversight by experienced professionals during internships enriches the learning experience. In Sri Lanka, although there are currently only three government-accredited institutions offering social work education, students show noticeable enthusiasm for pursuing this field. Although resources may be limited, this eagerness highlights the importance of strengthening social work education to ensure a well-prepared workforce ready to meet the diverse needs of the community (Attanayake, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

India is characterised by their rich multicultural environments, and social work education plays a vital role in fostering peace, addressing socio-economic challenges, and promoting human rights, democracy, and social justice. This education is crucial for cultivating harmony, social cohesion, and equity within communities. Engaging in fieldwork enables social work students not only to manage their emotions but also to apply theoretical concepts effectively during examinations (Kumbhar, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the traditional notion that building human connections must occur in person, leading to innovative approaches for online interactions (Wijabandara & Adhikari, 2025). In Sri Lanka, where the profession of social work has existed since 1952, there remains significant room for growth, as the field has yet to be fully recognised as a profession. This presents an opportunity to increase awareness and familiarity with social work. Despite high smartphone ownership among the Sri Lankan population, limited internet access poses challenges to raising awareness of social work practices. Moreover, the number of individuals trained in specialised fields of social work is relatively low. However, professionals across sectors can leverage the short-term training and experience they have to enhance their practice. Fostering guidance and supervision in the field can lead to more impactful experiences and better outcomes for communities (Attanayake, 2016).

In Sri Lanka, the opportunities for individuals to study specialised fields of social work remain limited. Although practitioners come from various backgrounds, they often rely on the short-term training and experience they acquire in different areas to navigate their roles effectively (Vasudevan et al., 2020). This reliance can shape their field experience, guidance, and supervision. In Malaysia, while fieldwork offers students invaluable practical experience, they face several challenges, including stress, limited resources, and cultural barriers. Additionally, issues such as inadequate supervision can hinder the establishment of a solid professional identity, the acquisition of practical skills, and the cultivation of trust within the community (Drolet, 2023). In Sri Lanka, societal perceptions of social work often carry a negative connotation, primarily due to concerns about integrating local cultural practices into the profession. Addressing these perceptions is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of social work initiatives (Vijesekera, 2020). In Nepal, aspiring social workers are required to complete an internship of 23 to 30 days to qualify for the social work examination. This fieldwork is comprehensive, encompassing service placements, Concurrent Fieldwork, Block placements, and Exposure visits tailored to the specific field of study. However, social work is still striving for recognition as a formal profession in Nepal, which presents an opportunity for advocacy and development. Through engaging in fieldwork, students can develop essential skills, including gathering factual data, maintaining professional relationships, managing administrative tasks, and planning and executing projects. This experience also fosters an environment where students can openly share their concerns and achievements, with support from the institution, faculty, and field supervisors. Group supervision fosters collaboration, enabling students to share their concerns and celebrate progress together, while learning to document and report on their daily activities (Drolet, 2023). Participation in field experiences enables students to gain a deeper understanding of social structures and apply community mapping techniques effectively. They also encounter ethical values firsthand throughout their training. During challenging times, such as the pandemic, students

have faced significant obstacles, including safety concerns, economic hardships, social isolation, and inadequate guidance. Effective communication between field coordinators and field institutions is crucial for mitigating these challenges. The impact of field exposure can also vary depending on the distance between training institutions and students, highlighting opportunities to improve accessibility and support (Singh & Kushawaha, 2021). Social work is a dynamic field that continually evolves to meet the diverse needs of the communities it serves. The insights gained through fieldwork are invaluable, fostering an intermediate level of practice that benefits both students and the profession as a whole (Kumbhar et al., 2024). At its core, social work promotes human rights while also accounting for the various stages of human development in its methodologies (Litwin, 2020). In Sri Lanka, the establishment of the Ceylon Social Work Association in 1952 marked a significant milestone in the profession's history. Since the introduction of social work in England, fieldwork has been recognised as a crucial component of social work education, with its quality and structure evolving (Shamila & Jeevasuthan, 2022). While challenges encountered during field experiences can sometimes lead to anxiety, they also provide valuable opportunities for reflection and growth. These experiences allow students to identify and learn from their mistakes, enhancing their ability to engage effectively in the field (Islam, 2024). Through structured Fieldwork Practice, students learn to navigate their emotions and understand the alignment—or gaps—between their academic education and the job market. This training equips them to work competently under supervision. Additionally, the support provided by supervisors, including educational and administrative guidance, not only builds students' confidence but also nurtures their professional identity and interests (Litwin, 2020).

Aim of the study

To evaluate the multiple challenges and regulations of Supervision faced by social work students during the field practice.

Objective

1. To explore the key factors that contribute to the multiple challenges experienced by social work students during their field practice.
2. To evaluate the Regulation of supervision that social work students face while engaged in their field practice.

METHODOLOGY

The study involved 150 students from the BSW fourth-year Tamil-medium, stratified by Field Location (urban, rural, and up-country plantation areas). Based on the richness of information, their willingness to respond, and their experience in fieldwork, (20%) per cent of the students were selected using purposive sampling, and their responses were obtained. Data were collected from students using a pre-prepared interview guide, and through key informant interviews with six associated personnel (the field coordinator, field supervisor, faculty supervisor, mentor, organisational supervisor, and director). Additionally, secondary data were obtained through books, journals, literature, records, field notes, and student reflection journals. The data were coded, and recurring patterns were identified. These codes were subsequently organised into categories. Based on these, the main themes and sub-themes were developed. These themes were subsequently developed. They were further analysed and interpreted using a conceptual analysis method, thereby elucidating the experiences, opportunities, and challenges associated with social work fieldwork.

Justification

The National Institute of Social Development, a pioneer institution, is one of the two institutions in Sri Lanka that offer social work degrees. Every year, students are invited to participate in field practice. However, student feedback is collected at the end of the field Practice. Changes are not made during the next field Practice based on the feedback received. As a result, each Batch of student teams continues to face the same challenges, making it impossible to complete the field practice to the required standard. Therefore, the evidence-based

recommendations from this study will facilitate strengthening field experience and the implementation of new practices.

Theoretical Framework

According to David A. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, learning is a continuous process. It comprises four stages: direct experience, reflective observation (reflection on the experience), conceptualisation, and active application. Fieldwork training provides social work students with direct, real-life experiences. Through this training, students encounter a range of challenges, opportunities, and learning experiences. By reflecting on and examining these experiences, they develop professional knowledge and skills. Therefore, this theory appears suitable for understanding the challenges students face during social work fieldwork practice at the National Institute of Social Development.

Based on role theory developed by George H. Mead (1934) and Biddle (1986), this paper explains that an individual plays multiple roles in society, each with distinct expectations. Role conflict and role crisis arise when these expectations cannot be balanced. Students, professionals, and supervisors each play distinct roles during social work fieldwork, encountering various challenges along the way. Consequently, the fieldwork-related challenges students face in social development can be understood through the lens of role theory.

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Physical Challenges

During field Practice, some students faced physical challenges, including malnutrition, poor drinking water quality, high temperatures, and long walks. Some female students experienced difficulties carrying out fieldwork while menstruating. Furthermore, a lack of sanitation facilities and irregular eating habits were reported to affect students' health.

Psychological Challenges

During the field Practice, students showed enthusiasm for applying the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to practical situations. However, some had difficulty securing the cooperation and support of the field organisations. They also expressed concerns about meeting the expectations of the field supervisors. The students' field Practice experiences were influenced by their personal feelings and life experiences.

Table 1: Psychological Challenges

SI No	Types of Psychological Challenges	Number of students
01	Feelings of loneliness	03
02	Psychological challenges (Feel Stress)	04
03	Anxiety about completing the fieldwork	03
04	Fear of going to the field alone	01

(Field Data,2026)

During the field trip, 11 students faced psychological challenges such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, and stress. They faced psychological challenges due to isolation, going to the field alone, and fear of not being able to complete the fieldwork. As the interviewee stated:

"It has been noted that brides who are engaged often face challenges in continuing their studies due to their husbands' hesitations about their fieldwork participation," as indicated in the KII.

Married female students face pressure from their husbands to pursue independent fieldwork. This has created limitations for them in visiting field sites with fellow male students and in seeking support from fellow students to conduct fieldwork.

Financial Challenges

Students faced financial challenges during their field practice. It was found that, although there was a provision for stipends for students undergoing field Practice in government institutions, it was not fully implemented due to administrative procedures and staff shortages. Students undergoing Practice at orphanages, cancer treatment centres, homes for the elderly, homes for the differently-abled, and drug rehabilitation centres had to bear their own food and accommodation expenses. Students' field Practice at government and non-government organisations incurred additional costs for transportation, accommodation, and food. Some students worked part-time to cover their educational expenses. Others met their financial needs by borrowing from friends and family.

Forever mentioned the faculty supervisor.

“While some field institutions provide minimal allowances to support students during their field practice, these financial resources are not consistently available, leading to difficulties for the students”, as mentioned in the KII04.

Some institutes expect students to demonstrate their hard work and commitment, but do not provide financial support. In contrast, a few institutes offer an allowance for food and transportation. On a positive note, those who have recently gained field experience have developed effective strategies to address economic challenges.

Table 2: Financial challenges (Multiple choice)

SI No	Students’ opinion	Number of students
01	Transportation costs	13
02	Costs of preparing reports	10
03	Communication charges	26
04	Difficulty in meeting daily expenses	07

(Field Data,2026)

A majority of students identified communication costs as a challenge, whereas only a few cited report preparation costs. Those who mentioned communication expenses stated that the field Practice organisations did not provide any specific allowance for using telephones during fieldwork. Students undergoing field Practice at government institutions struggled to cover the cost of commuting to their workplaces. Because public transport was unavailable in rural areas, they had to hire three-wheelers, which further increased their transportation costs. Some male students stated that, at times, they obtained bicycles from villagers for free to conduct field Practice.

Forever mentioned the field supervisor.

“Many individuals find ways to balance their finances during their field practice period, with some opting for part-time work”, as noted by KII.

Many students hold part-time jobs in various industries, shops, and on farms because their siblings are also attending school. So as not to interfere with the family income. Additionally, some students collaborate in

groups to engage in rituals while also managing their financial responsibilities. Others choose to support orphanages and nursing homes to contribute to their communities and effectively manage their finances.

Challenges of Family

It was reported that family members are working in Middle Eastern countries. As the eldest child, the student is required to manage household responsibilities. Students undertaking fieldwork in their local areas receive family support; however, they are also expected to fulfil their domestic duties after completing their fieldwork sessions. Some other students reported difficulties in meeting family expectations and achieving academic success simultaneously.

Table 3: challenges of family support

SI No	Types of Challenges of Family Support	Number of students
01	Lack of support from family members.	04
02	Inability to communicate appropriately with family members due to a lack of telephone and internet access	04
03	Unwillingness of family members to go to field visits	05
04	Insufficient family income	07

(Field Data,2026)

Many students face family challenges during the Field practicum. They expressed reasons such as unwillingness to go out for fieldwork, lack of internet access for communication, and a lack of family support. Whomever the agency supervisor mentioned:

“Some parents involve their children in household tasks, fostering a sense of responsibility and teamwork within the family”, as noted in the KII.

Sometimes parents pressure their children to take care of family chores during their school holidays. This results in less attention being paid to field-related matters.

Social Challenges

It was reported that students faced various challenges when dealing with social conflicts. They noted that when selecting beneficiaries for fieldwork, they chose individuals willing to cooperate and with prior experience. They also recognised the need to develop multicultural competence when working with diverse social groups.

Table 4: Social Challenges

SI No	Types of Social Challenges	Number of students
01	Social misogyny.	03
02	Social prejudice towards the service user.	03
03	Lack of awareness regarding social work	05
04	Social discrimination.	03
05	Inadequate social support	02

(Field Data,2026)

Many students face social challenges during their field trips. People's lack of trust in social work and their preconceived notions of what it means to be a social worker were seen as challenges. Furthermore, discrimination among communities with low levels of social support was seen as a social challenge. Whomever Menter mentioned

Some students express a preference for undertaking field practice in different districts rather than their local areas. This choice can stem from a desire for a diverse experience and a reduced impact from societal perceptions. It has been noted that some students encounter challenges related to societal views, particularly when they perceive criticism aimed at social work students based on their family backgrounds, as highlighted in the KII02.

During the field Practice, students are observed choosing new areas, rather than their home areas. This can be attributed to societal inequalities and social criticism. Female students in fieldwork may face pressure from traditional expectations, with some advocating a more open-minded approach that embraces their contributions. On the other hand, many community members are supportive and provide various resources to students, recognising their commitment to community service. However, a few individuals may harbour scepticism due to past experiences with certain officials, leading them to question the students' intentions. Overall, fostering an encouraging environment that values all students' contributions while addressing these challenges could enhance the learning experience for everyone involved.

Number of field supervision

The primary expectation of fieldwork is not whether students complete it as anticipated, but whether they approach the assigned tasks and group work professionally. Therefore, during field Practice, having the field supervisor's guidance at each stage of the social work process enhances the field experience's outcomes. However, students do not need to seek approval from the field supervisor for the effort they put into completing the field experience.

Table 5: Frequency of faculty supervision

SI No	In-person Faculty supervision frequency of Students	Number of students
01	Twice	03
02	Three times	06
03	Four times	15
04	Five times	06
05	Seven times	04
06	Eight times	04

(Field Data, 2026)

Most students received faculty supervision four times, while the fewest received it twice. The benefits that students gain through internships. Four students were supervised eight times, the most. Those who received more supervision received it via Zoom in addition to the direct method, while those who received less maintained continuous contact with the faculty supervisor via WhatsApp. Students who received less direct supervision had a greater distance between the Field work Practice centre and the National Institute of Social Development. They also stated that they did not receive supervision because it was challenging to schedule time with their faculty supervisor. As the field coordinator mentioned:

“The current number of lecturers is limited, which presents an opportunity for improvement in student supervision and support. Given that they are tasked with teaching over 12 hours and supervising students, there may be challenges in dedicating sufficient time to oversight, as highlighted in the KII05.

The lecturer is required to provide supervision for students, in addition to their workload. To enhance the quality of field monitoring, especially as student numbers grow, it would be beneficial to explore alternative supervision strategies, such as utilising platforms like Zoom more effectively. This could help ensure that all students receive the necessary guidance during their field surveys in a timely manner. Additionally, establishing a more streamlined feedback process for supervisors could greatly enhance students' ability to conduct fieldwork successfully. Timely feedback and adjustments will enable students to implement necessary corrections promptly, thereby minimising the challenges they face later on. By focusing on these areas for improvement, we can create a more supportive learning environment that fosters student success.

Table 6: Challenges of Different Levels of Supervision

Challenges faced by the Field Agency	Challenges faced by the mentor	Challenges faced by the Field Supervisor	Challenges faced by the Faculty Supervisor	Challenges faced by the Field Coordinator
<i>“Insufficient space in the field agency....”</i> <i>“The need for institutional officials to help us amidst the workload...”</i> <i>“The limitations of social work knowledge...”</i> <i>“Political interference....”</i> <i>“Delays in providing data...”</i> <i>“Difficulty in receiving guidance due to a lack of teamwork among officials...”</i> <i>“Lack of technical facilities....”</i> <i>“Difficulty in communicating due to a lack of trilingual skills among employees....”</i>	<i>“Feeling disturbed by unnecessary conversations when members of the opposite sex are appointed...”</i> <i>“We feel that our self-esteem is affected by feeling unworthy...”</i> <i>“Those who lack sufficient intellectual memory are unable to receive adequate guidance when appointed...”</i> <i>“Complaining to the field coordinator for even small matters can lead to administrative crises...”</i> <i>“Some people, thinking they have gained power, inflict unnecessary psychological distress...”</i>	<i>“There is not enough supervision...”</i> <i>“Reports are not checked promptly...”</i> <i>“They act in a biased manner without giving points according to their commitment...”</i> <i>“They only carry out document supervision without communicating with field organisations, facilitating the field, or conducting field supervision...”</i> <i>“Even in non-specialised fields, supervision does not provide adequate supervision...”</i>	<i>“Faculty supervisors do not give enough time...”</i> <i>“Sometimes they express personal likes and dislikes in supervision...”</i> <i>“Faculty supervision is provided more in a group setting, so there is no opportunity to ask individual questions...”</i> <i>“Faculty supervisors do not thoroughly review reports during supervision and often point out multiple corrections at the same time....”</i>	<i>“There is no flexibility in the panel and submission of documents...”</i> <i>“We have to exchange instructions ourselves due to insufficient communication with the company and field supervisors.”</i> <i>“Strict procedures should be followed to change the situation where there is an undesirable situation in the field organisation...”</i> <i>“The board is not organised with a sufficient number of people....”</i> <i>“Because the field supervisor is not invited to the progress discussions, the panel faces conflicting instructions...”</i>
23	19	15	21	13

It was noted that students faced challenges due to inadequate supervision, communication gaps, disrespect, and poor planning; these issues led to fears about completing their fieldwork and feelings of inferiority. It was reported that difficulties arose in communicating with students at field Practice institutions in non-Tamil-speaking areas due to staff's limited language proficiency. Furthermore, the lack of adequate facilities at these institutions negatively affected the environment for student service delivery.

Challenges of preparing Documentation

It was reported that social work students were required to prepare various documents. These included an organisational observation report, a self-assessment report, a self-reflection journal, an attendance confirmation certificate, a logbook and a final report. While preparing these documents, they faced challenges including obtaining supervision, gathering evidence, and sourcing information from subject-matter experts. Some students mentioned that they revised and submitted their work after receiving feedback from their supervisors. They also noted that the report preparation process was, at times, difficult and exhausting.

Table 7: Challenges of Preparing Documentation

Sl no	Types of Challenges in Preparing Documentation	Coding	Number of students
01	Psychological problems due to not being able to submit reports on time.	<i>"I am feeling worried because I was unable to submit the reports on time."</i> <i>"At the last minute, my documents got lost on the computer. I hated life. I had to resubmit a sample...."</i>	02
02	Lack of proper technical equipment.	<i>"I do not have a computer; I just type outside..."</i> <i>"I will be typing on the phone, it will not be as neat..."</i> <i>"I do not have a recorder to record the sessions. I record them on my phone..."</i>	08
03	Field Manual	<i>"The guidance manual did not clearly mention writing a report, so the help of senior students was required every time...."</i> <i>"Inadequate training to write case studies according to organisational guidelines..."</i>	03
04	Preparing a supporting Document	<i>"Difficulties in writing an verbatim Report..."</i> <i>"Difficulty in logically organising data in a report..."</i> <i>"Lack of typing skills, forced to rely on commercial offices..."</i>	11
05	Supervision	<i>"Difficulty in obtaining signatures from appropriate supervisors...."</i> <i>"Economic difficulties in preparing reports..."</i> <i>"Difficulties in linking evidence..."</i> <i>"Delays in checking reports by faculty and field"</i>	06

		<i>supervisors promptly... ”</i>	
		<i>“Difficulty in obtaining documents from coworkers.”</i>	

(Field Data,2026)

While most people have difficulty preparing the supporting documents, a few face feelings of anxiety while completing the documentation. The reasons for this include a lack of preparation and proper supervision in documenting the process, as well as inadequate instructions in the guidance manual. Whomever. The Director of the School Division also stated:

“Students across various disciplines in higher education demonstrate different levels of writing and reporting skills in their Social Work courses. For instance, those with strong writing abilities may struggle with proper referencing, while students proficient in gathering references might not excel in writing quality.” KII06 pointed

Students' writing ability and the extent of supervision they receive determine the quality of their reporting. Sometimes, students who lack reporting skills, despite dedicating themselves to field practice, score low marks. Similarly, there is a situation in which more points are obtained through reports rather than through properly conducted field practice. A field supervisor supervises four or more students. The fact that students submit reports for review at the end of the term also affects their quality.

Positive influence of a mentor on field practice

It is free mentoring for mentors to expand their knowledge base and gain experience in supervision. It enables students to successfully complete field practice by allowing them to approach mentors whenever needed without fear.

Table 8: Influence of a mentor on field practice

SI No	Support of Menter	Number of students
01	Being approachable at all times.	18
02	Being able to avoid mistakes through excellent experience sharing.	13
03	Receiving and guiding field feedback every day	14
04	Taking the time to explain unknown things	15

(Field Data,2026)

Since most mentors are senior or former students, they are seen to carry out the work with care and enthusiasm. Students can access it whenever they need it. By having mentors share their experiences, students can easily plan their own. Mentoring students not only empowers their learning journey but also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on and enhance the curriculum. We greatly appreciate the trust the institution places in us. Their willingness to assist without expecting any reward exemplifies a strong commitment to community service. This approach creates a welcoming environment that allows students to seek guidance with confidence.

Challenges of Panel Presentations

Engaging in self-reflection and self-analysis of field experiences is vital for personal and professional growth. This practice encourages students to identify areas for improvement, build on their strengths, and cultivate a more positive outlook on society. By actively engaging in this process, social workers can enhance their professional competence and effectiveness in their roles.

Table 9: Challenges of panel presentation

SI No	Students' opinion	Number of students
01	I felt satisfied with the final panel discussion.	14
02	The field progress discussion made the panel discussion easier	06
03	I was worried that the final panel discussion was not conducted properly	02
04	I felt humiliated by the panel members.	04
05	I felt confused by the supervisor's approach and the panel members' guidance.	02

(Field Data,2026).

Most students face challenges of some kind during panel presentations. They face challenges due to factors such as panel members' attitudes and feedback, the panelis organisation, and the notice period before the panel presentation.

Challenges of Case Work Practice

The process of selecting service providers during the subject matter review can be a valuable opportunity for growth, though it does come with its challenges. Building professional relationships and establishing trust with these providers is essential, as it can enhance collaboration over time. It is essential to create an environment where individuals feel confident in their abilities, particularly when they do not regularly participate in Seva Nadi sessions. Encouraging older service members to engage in subject-matter familiarisation can benefit both their development and the team's overall effectiveness. Addressing service delivery issues can improve outcomes, and obtaining support from coworkers is key to creating a more cohesive work environment. While some service providers initially focused on financial benefits, they may have felt uncertain; there is potential for productive discussions that highlight the broader advantages of engaging with students. This can lead to stronger partnerships and greater mutual understanding.

Table 10: Challenges of Case Work Practice & Group Work Practice

SI No	Challenges of Casework Practice	Number of Students	Challenges of Group Practice	Number of Students
01	Refusing to provide evidence related to the client's problem	02	Getting cooperation from group members.	12
02	Difficulty in building rapport with the client.	04	Difficulty in resolving conflicts that arise within the group.	08
03	Service users are not consistently cooperating.	05	Difficulty in selecting appropriate evaluation tools for group members based on their issues	05
04	Service users not wanting professional referrals	03	Inability to effectively conduct group sessions at a specified time	08
05	Lack of support from officials in visiting the home of the client, and professional support	11		

(Field Data, 2026).

Students are sure to face challenges as they undertake familiarisation with the subject matter in social work. They face challenges, especially in building relationships with service users, gaining cooperation, and gaining support from professionals. During the group work exam, they faced challenges resolving conflicts within the groups, estimating the time required for each group member, and conducting the session on time. The interviewed mentor further commented:

“The competitive environment among employees can sometimes lead to delays in resource acquisition and misunderstandings about the Institution's culture”, as highlighted in the KII02.

Institutional internal competition and resource scarcity negatively impact students' academic performance. Not only that, but factors such as the shortage of trained social work professionals and officials' attitudes can also affect outcomes. Furthermore, the faculty field supervisor interviewed stated:

“When working with individuals with serious problems in groups and performing medical and group work simultaneously, students become frustrated due to their lack of cooperation”, mentioned KII04.

Students face difficulties in selecting and organising team members. Sometimes, working with elders to explore options for financial support of their medical expenses can lead to more effective partnerships between students and community members.

Influence of the Orientation programme on Field practice.

The orientation event spans two consecutive days, which can be pretty intense for students. Nevertheless, those who aim to excel in the field test actively engage in the activities, thereby fostering a strong mental framework for their upcoming three-month fieldwork. While traditional lectures and group discussions are valuable, relying solely on these methods may lead to diminished attention and engagement among participants. To enhance the effectiveness of the orientation, incorporating hands-on activities and real-world applications can better bridge the knowledge gap and better prepare students for their fieldwork.

Table 11: Influence of the orientation programme

Sl no	Type of influence	Number of respondents
01	Positive influence	21
02	Negative influence	07
03	No influence	02

(Field Data,2026).

Among the field practice students, 21 indicated that the orientation made a significant contribution to their success in the program. In contrast, seven students felt that the orientation hurt their experience, while two reported that it had no effect at all. Notably, the two students who felt the orientation had no influence did not attend the session and instead opted for an alternative route by requesting permission to complete an assignment. Those who reported a negative impact mentioned challenges related to classroom engagement, particularly feelings of reluctance. In response to these insights, the Resource has initiated a constructive review of the study materials on two specific occasions, focusing on overcoming fears and stress associated with field practice, as well as addressing concerns about embarrassment when unable to respond to questions in front of peers. This proactive approach aims to enhance the overall experience for future students.

Table 12: Positive Influence of Orientation Programme

SI No	Subtheme	Coding	Number of students
01	Creating interest in fieldwork	<i>"The experience sharing provided by resource persons in orientation creates interest in the field of knowledge..."</i> <i>"The senior students sharing their experiences during orientation creates a desire for us to complete the course successfully..."</i>	08
02	Clear awareness of Field practice	<i>"The experience sharing made it possible to avoid mistakes in advance..."</i> <i>"It became clear how to obtain supervision during the field practice and how to maintain professional relationships with field agencies."</i>	03
03	Self-Correction	<i>"I received training to conduct a self-assessment..."</i> <i>"I was inspired to write a self-analysis report..."</i> <i>"Self-reflection was a strategy to correct mistakes during the fieldwork..."</i>	06
05	Conceptualised the field practice	<i>"It provides an opportunity to understand the connection between classroom learning and field experience..."</i> <i>"It helps in planning and preparing for fieldwork..."</i> <i>"Provides knowledge to approach field-related topics from a theoretical perspective."</i>	04
	Group Work Practice	<i>Gained knowledge on how to select group members...</i>	05

(Field Data, 2026)

Those who responded that the orientation event had a positive influence commented that it sparked interest, desire, awareness of field practice, motivation, and clarity about undertaking fieldwork. They also responded that they had provided clarity on planning to undertake a professional orientation and establish a professional relationship. The field coordinator who interviewed in this regard commented:

"In a two-day orientation training, it is not possible to impart all the practical aspects needed for field experience to the students. Likewise, financial constraints and academic calendars limit the extension of orientation days, as mentioned by KII05.

Although some students reported feeling tired after the two-day orientation event, the field coordinator suggested increasing its duration. This orientation requires adapting training methods to the learning environment and students' interests during the orientation process. Further, the field supervisor mentioned:

"Some students face difficulties in the final practical panel because they appear inattentive, thinking they know everything about orientation", KII03. Mentioned.

It is mentioned that some students who fully participated in the orientation event are avoiding field supervision, thinking that everything is understood. As a result, they face difficulties with the final panel due to

the manipulation of Case work and group work practices without supervision. From this, it should be clear that student orientation is only one part of the field practice process steps. It also emphasises the need to complete each stage correctly. A digital version of the Field Guidance Manual is accessible to all students. This comprehensive manual provides essential information on admission and leaves procedures, disciplinary matters, assessments, and other important topics. The collaborative nature of the experience increased students' enthusiasm and participation, fostering a positive learning environment through group work.

Satisfaction of the students with the Field practice

Satisfaction following a field experience is primarily an emotional response tied to the alignment of students' initial expectations with the outcomes of their experience. Key figures in this process include the student field supervisor, faculty supervisor, Field work Practice institution supervisor, mentor field coordinator, and Batch coordinator. Furthermore, the Field Examination Improvement Panel, which presents the Panel for the Presentation of the Field Examination, plays a crucial role by guiding field examinations. In this setting, students have the opportunity to share reflections on service providers' attitudes and the feedback they received, fostering a constructive dialogue that can enhance future experiences.

Table 13: Students' Satisfaction level of the field practice

Sl no	Students' opinion	Sub Thems	coding	Number of students
01	Yes	Sufficient guidance of casework and group work	<i>"Whenever I had doubts, I could ask the mentor for clarification...."</i> <i>"Since practical assignments were given for group work in the classroom, I was able to complete the field practice satisfactorily..."</i> <i>"I felt satisfied in helping the poor..."</i>	17
		Submit field practice documents within the specified time.	<i>"As the reports were made gradually during the Field work Practice period, the supervisors corrected them one by one..."</i> <i>"I was able to do it satisfactorily because I had collected evidence during the Field work Practice..."</i> <i>"With the guidance of senior students, I was able to submit the documents within the specified time..."</i>	07
02	No	Orientation	<i>"Orientation guidance is not sufficient...."</i> <i>"It would be better to hold the orientation event on a single day..."</i> <i>"If the orientation event is conducted through a different teaching method, more explanations can be obtained..."</i> <i>"It would be good if the supervisors were also invited to the orientation event..."</i>	04
		Field manual	<i>"It would be easier if the objectives that students should achieve at each stage were specified with examples...."</i> <i>"The guidance manual should also be provided to the"</i>	02

institutional and field supervisor... ”

(Field Data, 2026).

The majority of students reported a positive experience at the end of their field practice. Notably, those who felt most satisfied tended to receive consistent supervision from their supervisors and guidance from senior students. This support contributed to their punctuality, regular report submissions, prompt corrections, and thorough documentation of their activities. On the other hand, students who expressed dissatisfaction often struggled with paying close attention to key points during orientation events. The field supervisor has also provided valuable insights on this matter, highlighting areas for improvement.

"Providing learners with opportunities to learn outside the classroom after continuous classroom instruction gives them the joy and interest of expressing their social work values", KII03 mentioned.

Students experience a sense of fulfilment when they can apply the social work knowledge they have acquired in the classroom to their fieldwork. This practical application not only reinforces their learning but also allows them to receive valuable feedback through various service channels, fostering both encouragement and enthusiasm. Additionally, one of the interviewees shared insights on this rewarding experience.

"Cultural restrictions or family-imposed limitations and constraints cause frustration for girls regarding their physical experiences, so they are satisfied", KII mentioned.

Female students have noted some challenges in completing their fieldwork due to cultural restrictions. It is essential to acknowledge that individuals who may not feel mentally prepared or who enter specific courses out of obligation often encounter difficulties and express dissatisfaction with their social work field experience. By providing additional support and resources, we can help these students better navigate these challenges and enhance their overall experience in the field.

Skills Development of the Field Practice

Through field experience, social work students not only learn to manage their emotions responsibly but also gain the ability to maintain professional relationships and apply social work ethics in practice. In particular, there is an opportunity to gain proficiency in classroom subjects by applying them in real-world settings. There is also the possibility of understanding the opportunities and gaps in community service experience found in organisations.

Table 14: Skills Empowerment of the Field Practice (Multi-opinion)

Sl no	Name of the Skills	Respondent Number	Number of students
01	Communication skills	<i>"I am confident that I can communicate with officials..."</i> <i>"I can communicate effectively with service personnel using clear and concise communication skills..."</i> <i>"I am used to using calm, non-contradictory language..."</i>	13
02	Interview skills	<i>"My interview skills have improved as I have been practising talking to service users..."</i> <i>"I can use my interview skills during the session..."</i>	05
03	Time Management	<i>"Initially, going to the field was a chore, but now I plan</i>	10

	Skills	<i>and complete my work... ”</i>	
04	Documentation skills improved	<i>“I learned to prepare documents in a supportive manner...”</i> <i>“I learned to organise documents and submit them after getting signatures and approvals from the relevant people...”</i>	05
05	During fieldwork, I gained experience in adhering to ethical principles.	<i>“I have learned to consider moral values in practice.”</i> <i>“I got used to working while respecting company rules.”</i>	06
06	The fieldwork helped me understand the social work perspective and its gaps related to the institution.	<i>“I learned how to use organisational resources to provide services to service users...”</i> <i>“I came to understand how organisational limitations affect social work practice...”</i>	07
07	Friendships with people from different cultures were formed	<i>“I did my fieldwork in a Tamil village. So I accepted their culture and got used to doing fieldwork.... ”</i>	4
08	Group Work Skills	<i>“Team building and mediation skills have improved...”</i> <i>“Ability to implement team development steps practically...”</i> <i>“The ability to facilitate goal setting for the team has improved...”</i> <i>“I had the opportunity to apply group approaches in different situations...”</i>	02

(Field Data,2026)

More students reported that their interview skills improved during the field test, while fewer reported that their multilingual skills improved. Not only that, but they also mentioned interview skills, understanding of corporate service delivery, and documentation skills. It was observed that these differences were influenced by the freedom given to the field organisation for field experience, the target group they worked with, and the nature of the organisation's supervisor. Furthermore, the interviewed mentor stated

“Students gain the confidence that they can work independently in the field”, KII mentioned.

He noted that field experience builds confidence in one's ability to undertake it independently. In contrast to traditional group work, they created customised groups explicitly tailored to service users' needs. This approach allowed them to focus on addressing specific challenges individuals faced. As a result, they developed valuable skills in group relationship-building and learned to set and achieve goals effectively through hands-on experience.

Through teamwork, students acquire skills such as team formation and digitisation. Not only that, but I have also gained proficiency in following ethical principles during teamwork. Forever mentioned the agency facilitator,

“By fostering teamwork qualities, individuals cultivate traits such as patience, acceptance of others, and a supportive mindset”, as noted by KII01.

This constructive approach not only enhances collaboration but also strengthens relationships within the group.

Students' strategies for overcoming challenges

During field practice, students have the valuable opportunity to engage with diverse organisations across various specialised sectors. Each student encounters a unique set of challenges that fosters personal and professional growth. By embracing vocational support and effectively utilising available resources, you can navigate these challenges and enhance your skills and understanding.

Table 15: Student Recommendation of Faculty Supervision (Multiple Choice)

Sub them	Field Agency	Field Supervisor	Faculty Supervisor	Field Coordination Unit
Coding	Escalation occurs when students encounter inconveniences in the field... Providing training to students in a manner that is appropriate to achieve the objectives of the Field work Practice... Assisting students during the training period... Providing transportation allowance during training.	“It would be beneficial to set aside a specific day for supervision during the field test...” “It would be better if we could discuss our issues with each other and resolve our mistakes without reporting them to the faculty supervisor....” “If they correct our reports promptly, I can submit them without any hassle....”	“Increase supervision of individual students....” “Supervision times should be announced in advance...” “Report corrected and submit reports within a specified period of time...” “Establish a friendly supervisory environment...”	“Reduce the number of documents to be submitted during the field practice.” “Consider the suggestions given by the students for future Field practice...” “Increase the field practice period to six months...” “Conducting the panel presentation guidelines on time...”
Number of Respondents	12	16	14	27

(Field Data,2026)

Students are expected to plan their supervision activities well in advance. It is also hoped that by correcting the reports within the specified time frame, they will be able to be submitted on time. However, the low supervision allowance provided to faculty and field supervisors is seen as a reason why they are unable to provide it continuously and in full.

The Field work Practice Division has a valuable opportunity to refine its practices to better align with contemporary needs. The Field Education Unit plays a crucial role in ensuring that students have high-quality field experiences, emphasising the importance of integrating classroom instruction with practical work. By updating our approach, we can better support students and enrich their learning journeys.

The Education Unit's efforts to strengthen connections with field supervisors through initial communication, such as letters, can be enhanced by providing regular updates on student progress. Although Zoom meetings are scheduled, finding time to attend can be challenging for many participants. It would be beneficial for the field education division to prioritise field visits, as direct observation of student activities provides valuable encouragement and guidance. While annual training for field supervisors is commendable, increasing the frequency of these training sessions could significantly improve their effectiveness and support for students. With three multilingual field coordinators visiting the field together and students across Sri Lanka eager to participate in field visits, it is essential to secure adequate funding and transportation resources to facilitate these opportunities. Students currently receive fieldwork guidance manuals; however, distributing similar manuals to field supervisors and institutional supervisors would address existing challenges and promote consistency in support. Establishing formal agreements between students and companies is essential to protect students from potential exploitation and to enable them to meet their practical training objectives on time. Lastly, increasing the allowance for field supervisors could significantly enhance their ability to dedicate time and attention to students, fostering a more supportive learning environment.

DISCUSSION

These findings align with the study by Babahonoglu et al. (2023), which identified that social work students experience stress and anxiety during fieldwork. Furthermore, the results support Attanayake's (2026) findings regarding how family and gender roles constrain the participation of married female students in fieldwork. The finding that students face economic pressures during fieldwork aligns with Drolet's (2023) study. Furthermore, as Litwin (2020) notes, the support and guidance provided by field supervisors enhance students' learning experience. The observation that a lack of transportation facilities in rural areas impedes students' fieldwork is consistent with Singh and Kushwaha's (2021) findings. Some students engage in part-time work to cope with financial difficulties. As noted by Kumbar (2024), fieldwork plays a crucial role in enhancing students' practical skills. Therefore, it is essential for educational institutions to provide adequate financial and supervisory support for fieldwork.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE RESEARCH

01. The allowance for supervisors should be increased and should be determined according to the number of supervisions.
02. Before students are attached to field institutions, an awareness workshop regarding fieldwork practice should be conducted for the field institutions.
03. Providing opportunities for students to receive allowances by connecting them with already approved field institutions.
04. Appointing field supervisors in panel presentations.
05. Providing field study guidance manuals to field supervisors.
06. Appointing field supervisors only in the fields of specialisation chosen by the students.
07. To enhance the capacity to expand and generalise the study's findings, it would be appropriate to extend the research to include social work educational institutions in Sri Lanka.
08. In future studies, it is also essential to examine the perspectives of service users and social organisations associated with social work fieldwork. This will help gain a comprehensive understanding of the practical challenges, experiences, and impacts of fieldwork.

CONCLUSION

Social work students are expected to face physical, mental, and social challenges at the individual, family, and community levels during their field experience. However, they have acquired the skills and strategies to manage challenges during Fieldwork Practice. The support mechanism for field and faculty supervisors is viewed as an area that needs strengthening. Similarly, the need to reorganise documents related to fieldwork practice guidance manuals, contracts with institutions, and ethical rules has been realised. The shortage of adequately trained social work personnel in field agencies can also affect students' Field work Practice.

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