



## ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES REQUIRED IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION: A STUDY OF GUJARAT STATE

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Competence in social work is based on the knowledge, skills, and values of social work, which can only be brought through practice in the profession. This can only happen when students undergo proper practice in the fieldwork with theory. So it is important to have social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and apply them in practice.

**Methods & Approach:** In the present exploratory study an effort has been made to prepare the list of essential competencies required along with the most essential skills required in the social work profession. The students & teachers of the School of Social Work of Gujarat & Social Work professionals were considered & covers as the main unit of the study. Keeping in view the objectives of the present pilot study a total sample size of 50 was covered under the study. Both types of sources of data were used for the study along with the questionnaire as a tool for data collection.

**Major Findings:** The result of the study shows that the majority of the respondents stated that the skill of effective Communication, leadership, educator, learning, active listening, skill in setting boundaries: advisor, self-care & self-awareness, decision making, critical & creative thinking, problem-solving, ability to develop & maintain an interpersonal relationship, ability to cope with stress & report writing are the essential and required skills in social work profession.

**Suggestions & Recommendations:** On the basis of the findings it can be recommended that in order to acquire all the essential skills active participation in group projects must be encouraged. Students need to develop the knowledge & understanding of human behavior, students need to learn various roles of professional social workers in the practice setting, and need focus on record keeping and documentation, and students also need to learn how to control emotions. Social Work professionals also need to learn about project management along with other competency development.

**Conclusions:** On the basis of the findings of the study it can be concluded that in the changing era, social work professionals need to acquire/learn an end number of professional and general skills. The skilfulness of the practitioners will help in effective intervention at

various practice settings and it will lead towards better results and image building of the profession.

**Key Words: Social Work, Profession, Skills, Essentials, Performance, and Competency.**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

Social workers should accept responsibility or employment only on the basis of existing competence or the intention to acquire the necessary competence. Social workers should strive to become and remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions. Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work. Social workers should routinely review the professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics.

Social workers shall function in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards of the profession, recognizing how personal and professional values may conflict with or accommodate the needs of clients. Social workers shall seek to develop an understanding of their own personal values and beliefs as one way of appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people. Social workers shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding of the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions of the major client groups that they serve. Social workers shall use appropriate methodological approaches, skills, and techniques that reflect the workers' understanding of the role of culture in the helping process. Social workers shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of services available in the community and broader society and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse clients (NASW, 2001).

“Education is not for knowing more but for behaving differently” – Jhon Ruskin said this in the general context of education. But this applied more to helping professions, particularly the social work profession. The social work profession evolve from the tradition of charity and concern for others long ago and still continues to struggle for acceptance of its professional status social work profession is perhaps one of the most confused professions with a variety of issues and levels of interventions, different clients and administrative settings for practice which has further compounded the dilemma (Siddiqui, 1999). England (1986) captures the situation aptly.

To understand professionalism and to have professional competence, there are various skills for different verticals like Rural NGO Industry and Medical. Different settings are required to uphold different types of skills. These skills can be acquired through knowledge and practical exposure to the social work profession and objectives to perform job responsibilities.

Skill means the capacity to perform. Webster's dictionary defines it as “Knowledge of and expertness in execution and performance”. As a profession, social work elaborates the development of the professional qualities of social workers in addition to requiring them to possess the necessary professional qualities of mastery over content, values, knowledge, and practice skills.

Skills are organized and coordinated activities about an object or situation in ways that underlie performance (Welford, 1958). Skills are also defined as interventions through which

learning is put into practice (Trevithick et al., 2004) or as specific practitioner behaviors in the helping process (Shulman, 2008).

The social work literature identifies communication skills as a central element of practice (Fortune et al., 2007; Gockel and Burton, 2014; Trevithick, 2008), while the proposed generic interviewing skills principally rely on Egan's (2013) counseling model that prioritizes the skills attentive listening, empathy, clarification, challenging and goal setting (Diggins, 2004; Forrester et al., 2008; Koprowska, 2014). These skills are contemplated to rely on communication, humanistic and behavioral theories (Trevithick et al., 2004) but, mostly, on behavioral instruction, modeling, and feedback techniques.

Despite the multiple definitions of skilled communication in social work practice (Lefevre et al., 2008), the little theoretical or empirical foundation supports the communication skills accordingly proposed (Forrester et al., 2008). The knowledge gap in the professional judgment of social workers (Laming and Commons, 2009) appears to be the outcome of the minimal consensus on the definition or content of the inter-personal, listening, interviewing, helping, counseling, and micro-skills (Brandon et al., 2014; Corcoran, 2011; Gockel and Burton, 2014; Koprowska, 2014; Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011), arguably because the theoretical underpinnings of these skills are either underdeveloped or missing (Trevithick et al., 2004). The theoretical uncertainty surrounding the training of social work students on practice skills seems the outcome of the overall rejection of positivism and the adoption of the minimally researched reflexive practice that frequently operates as a conceptual and methodological portmanteau (Gursansky et al., 2010). Due to such knowledge and practice uncertainties, it may not be accidental that insufficient attention has been paid to the theoretical basis of the skills required for social work practice with children, young people, and families (Munro, 2011).

One of the most difficult things about the Social Work Professional is knowing how to connect with different people. Leading someone who is like you or thinks the way you think is much easier than leading someone who has radically different views from you.

Leaders must be able to connect with everyone on their team, especially those who disagree with them. As the saying goes, a team is only as strong as its weakest link, and it is a leader's responsibility to make sure there is no weak link. It is a leader's responsibility to make sure there is no weak link

In order to connect and lead diverse groups of people, a leader must have a wide array of social skills. A variety of social skills allows a manager to determine what will be the most productive way to try to connect with someone. Because there are so many different people and situations a leader will have to navigate, it can be overwhelming to try to figure out all the answers on your own.

Social organizations and charities are often dealing with a wide range of challenges and individuals at once. Professionals of social work organizations are focused on a diverse set of challenges and often have limited time to address them. Therefore, they need to be highly skilled in organizational strategies and time management.

Social Work Professionals must define the organizational structure to allow high motivation levels without undermining efficiency. There is a wide range of mundane tasks as well, such as lengthy paperwork, legal processes, and more.

### **Core Competencies of Social Work Practice:**

According to the Council of Social Work Education the following are the five core competencies of social work that it previously required as learning outcomes.

#### **1. Use research in practice and practice in research:**

Social workers use practice experience to inform research, employ evidence-based interventions, evaluate their own practice, and use research findings to improve practice, policy, and social service delivery. Social workers comprehend quantitative and qualitative research and understand scientific and ethical approaches to building knowledge.

Social workers: Use practice experience to inform scientific inquiry, and Use research evidence to inform practice.”

#### **1. Apply knowledge of human behavior and social context:**

Social workers are knowledgeable about human behavior across the life course; the range of social systems in which people live; and the ways social systems promote or deter people from maintaining or achieving health and well-being. Social workers apply theories and knowledge from the liberal arts to understand biological, social, cultural, psychological, and spiritual development.

Social workers: Utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention, and evaluation; and Critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment.”

#### **2. Engage in policy Practice:**

Social work practitioners understand that policy affects service delivery, and they actively engage in policy practice. Social workers know the history and current structures of social policies and services; the role of policy in service delivery; and the role of practice in policy development.

Social workers: Analyse, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance social well-being; and Collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action.”

#### **3. Respond to influential contexts:**

Social workers are informed, resourceful, and proactive in responding to evolving organizational, community, and societal contexts at all levels of practice. Social workers recognize that the context of practice is dynamic, and use knowledge and skill to respond proactively.

Social workers: Continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends

to provide relevant services; and provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery and practice to improve the quality of social services.”

#### **4. Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate:**

Professional practice involves the dynamic and interactive processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation at multiple levels. Social workers have the knowledge and skills to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Practice knowledge includes identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-based interventions designed to achieve client goals; using research and technological advances; evaluating program outcomes and practice effectiveness; developing, analysing, advocating, and providing leadership for policies and services; and promoting social and economic justice.

By practicing the core competencies, social workers can make a tremendous difference for the clients they serve and the greater society as a whole.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Some of the important research reviewed under the study are as follows.

**The Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work, (2015)**, the fundamental purpose of educational assessment is to provide information that will guide program renewal and improvements so that more competent social work graduates will be prepared. Assessment plans that just meet minimal accreditation standards will, most likely, yield data that provides little to no useful information. The NASW Code of Ethics (2005) requires us to provide the best possible level of service to our clients. This requires social work programs to prepare competent social workers who have the knowledge, skills, and professional judgment to provide clients with competent social work services.

**Mahesh Palloor (2017)** To protect the dignity of the social work profession, this is the right time to look inside and make social work students more productive members of society as well as in industry by professionally qualified, experienced, and emotionally matured professors. Every institution has to awaken and provide training-centered education to develop the skills in decision-making, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress and emotion, report writing, documentation, and basic computer and internet searching, rules of group behavior, adjustment, acceptance, initiative, leadership quality, agree the one's leadership, opinion expressed, aesthetic, arts and cultural talents, writing a project proposal, program description, present a case to the multi-disciplinary team and even manage the business executives by providing Life Skills Education and Training during the PG studies.

**Business Mental Health (2020)** Leading an organization dedicated to social work can be challenging and unrewarding at times. As a leader, it is important to stay motivated and place greater emphasis on teamwork and strong communication. Leaders must be well-versed in strategies that identify problems and prove efficient in conflict intervention.

**Dr. R. Nalini**, Thus group work skills described above are vital for successfully working with groups. The group worker needs confidence, love for people, and a belief in teamwork

to accomplish his task. For, “great people are those who make others feel that they too, can become great”.

### **METHODS & APPROACH:**

The present exploratory study was conducted to find out the essential competencies of the social work profession. The main objectives of the study were to prepare the list of essential competencies in the social work profession along with knowing the most essential skills required in the social work profession.

The universe of the study was the School of Social Work of Gujarat and teachers, professionals, and students were considered the main unit of the study. Keeping in view the objectives of the study a total sample size of 50 was covered under the study. Both the sources of data were used for the study along with the questionnaire as a tool for data collection.

### **Major Findings:**

Some of the important findings of the study are as follows.

1. **Skill of Effective Communication:** From the study it was found that 78% of respondents strongly agree that effective communication is the most essential skill required by social work professionals where as 22% of respondents agree that effective communication skills the most essential skill is.
2. **Skill of Leadership:** The Study shows that 60 % of respondents strongly agree that leadership is the most essential skill required by the social work professional whereas 38% of respondents agree that leadership is the most essential skill and 2% of respondents found it neutral.
3. **As an Educator:** The study also shows that 36% of respondents strongly agree to be an educator is the most essential skill whereas 56% of respondents agree that educator is a skill to be required by social work professionals and 8 % of respondents found it neutral.
4. **Active Listener:** 82% of respondents strongly agree that active listening is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 16% of respondents agree that active listening as the most essential skill in the social work profession and 2% of respondents were found neutral for active listening as a most essential skill in social work profession.
5. **Ability to set Boundaries:** 28% of respondents strongly agree that boundary setting is the most essential skill in social work profession whereas 52% of respondents agree that boundary setting is the most essential in social work profession and 18% of respondents found neutral for boundary setting as a most essential skill in social work profession, whereas 2% of respondents strongly disagree that boundary setting is the most essential skill in social work profession.
6. **Advisor:** 38% of respondents strongly agree that advisor is the most essential skill in the social work profession whereas 46% of respondents agree that advisor is the most essential skill in the social work profession and 14% of respondents were neutral for cooperation as a most essential skill in social work profession whereas 2% of

respondents disagreed that cooperation is the most essential skill in social work profession.

7. **Cooperation:** 52% of respondents strongly agree that cooperation is the most essential skill in the social work profession, whereas 44% agree that cooperation is a most essential skill in the social work profession, 2% of respondents were neutral about cooperation as a most essential skill in social work profession whereas 2% of respondents disagreed that Cooperation is the most essential skill in social work profession.
8. **Self-care:** 48% of respondents strongly agree that Self-care is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 36% of respondents agree that Self-care as the most essential skill in the social work profession and 16% of respondents were found neutral for Self-care as a most essential skill in social work profession.
9. **Self-Awareness:** The study reveals that 70% of respondents strongly agree that Self-Awareness is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 24% of respondents agree that Self-Awareness is the most essential skill in the social work profession and 6% of respondents were found neutral for Self-Awareness as a most essential skill in social work profession.
10. **Decision Making:** 60% of respondents strongly agree that Decision Making is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 36% of respondents agree that Decision Making as the most essential skill in the social work profession and 4% of respondents were found neutral for Decision Making as a most essential skill in social work profession
11. **Critical Thinking:** 60% of respondents strongly agree that Critical Thinking is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 32% of respondents agree that Critical Thinking as the most essential skill in social work profession and 6% of respondents were found neutral for Critical Thinking as most essential skill in social work profession, whereas 2% of respondents disagreed to critical thinking as an essential skill in social work profession.
12. **Creative Thinking:** 68% of respondents strongly agree that Creative Thinking is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 32% of respondents agree that **Creative Thinking** is the most essential skill in the social work profession.
13. **Problem-Solving:** 76% of respondents strongly agree that Problem Solving is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 24% of respondents agree that Problem-Solving as the most essential skill in the social work profession.
14. **Inter Personal Relationship:** 62% of respondents strongly agree that an Inter Personal Relationship is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 34% of respondents agree that Inter Personal Relationship is the most essential skill in the social work profession and 2% of respondents were found neutral for Inter Personal Relationship as a most essential skill in social work profession, whereas 2% of respondents disagreed to Inter Personal Relationship as an essential skill in social work profession
15. **Coping With Stress And Emotion:** 54% of respondents strongly agree that Coping With Stress And Emotion is the most essential skill social work profession whereas

32% of respondents agree that Coping With Stress And Emotion is the most essential skill in the social work profession and 8% of respondents were found neutral for Coping With Stress And Emotion as a most essential skill in social work profession, whereas 2% of respondents disagreed to Coping With Stress And Emotion as an essential skill in social work profession.

16. **Report Writing:** 60% of respondents strongly agree that Report Writing is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 28% of respondents agree that Report Writing as the most essential skill in the social work profession and 12% of respondents were found neutral for Report Writing as a most essential skill in social work profession.
17. **Documentation:** 58% of respondents strongly agree that Documentation is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 36% of respondents agree that Documentation as the most essential skill in the social work profession and 6% of respondents were found neutral for Documentation as the most essential skill in social work profession.
18. **Research In The Relevant Field:** 62% of respondents strongly agree that a Research In The Relevant Field is the most essential skill social work profession whereas 36% of respondents agree that Research In The Relevant Field as the most essential skill in social work profession and 2% of respondents were found neutral for Research In The Relevant Field as a most essential skill in social work profession.

### SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Competencies can be thought of as the state or quality of being well-qualified to perform a task. A professional gains competency through education, training, experience, or natural abilities. On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations can be made.

1. There is a need to develop the skill in dealing with clients and practice setting with Non-judgmental, non-dominating approach.
2. All the schools of Social work need to ensure active participation in all field-based activities so that essential competency can be built.
3. Efforts also should be made to develop IT proficiency among the students and professionals so that techno-based intervention can be ensured.
4. The course curriculum and practice approach should be designed in such a way that social workers can acquire advanced knowledge of human Behaviour, self-care, and professional use of self.
5. There is also a need to understand the critical evaluation of verticals of HR roles is well-versed in student trainees.
6. Social work professionals must have to develop a quality of quick adaptability to any situation and condition.
7. The principle of acceptance is very simple to hear but difficult to actually follow and ask other people to do so, social work professionals need to acquire acceptance from anyone around when working with people.
8. Social Work Professionals must have the skill of Prompt Action for the traumatic situation



9. Documenting is a skill, and if social work professionals are well versed in Report writing skills, it can become authentic data for future courses of action.
10. There are situations where the social work professional may become angry in the situation the skill to manage anger may be very useful.
11. Self-control is the other competency in social work professionals that all professionals need to learn.
12. Social work professionals can only an intervention for any problem when they have accurate data and that is only possible through research skills, so it is required to develop research abilities among professionals.
13. When social work professionals are working on any new problem it is required to have done the homework for a particular problem and be very much informative.
14. More than half of the problem is solved when the social work profession has the skill of very good observation, it is more of analyzing the situation in a different way.
15. Social work Professionals can be a leader if they acquire a team-building skill or has the competency of making a team with the same spirit as the social work professional himself.
16. Social Work Professionals need to learn project management skills, as projects are many but completing them on time is a skill, as during the project work, challenging situations occur which do not allow the professional to complete the project on time.
17. Punctuality is a key to success and that is a skill that social work professionals must need to have.
18. Social work Professionals must be Professional with their clients and colleagues.
19. Social work Professionals must have the ability for Resource utilization which is only possible when the professional social worker is having good networking skill through excellent rapport.

## CONCLUSION:

Competence is a skill that has ethical value in social work practice means the integration of knowledge and values in the practice of the profession. The value of competence demonstrates the integration and proper execution of the competencies in the practice of social work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Competence cannot be achieved in a day it is an ongoing process that the social work professional acquires over a period of time. All active social worker professionals may continue to gain competence, learning how to carry out certain situations effectively, being open to the knowledge from new research findings having skills with a different population group. Thus a commitment to competence is an ongoing endeavor. Competence is not something that one can achieve through the completion of a single course. Gaining competence is an ongoing process. All social work professionals may continue to gain competence, by learning how to carry out certain cases effectively, and by being open to the knowledge from new research findings with different population groups. A holistic approach to the assessment of skills is equally necessary, and practice teachers must seek evidence of the integration of knowledge and values in students' practice. It is essential, for example, that students are required to demonstrate that they not only know about a range of social work methods and theoretical

approaches but that they can select and make skilled use of them in their practice. Evidence of conceptualization, critical analysis, reflection, and transfer of knowledge, skills, and values is essential for the award of the MSW, and students must be required to provide this evidence in written work and in practice throughout the program.

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