

Policy Education in U.S. Social Work Programs: Results of a National Study

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WHY IS THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

- The National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics and the Council of Social Work Education call on social workers to engage in policy practice that promotes social justice and equity for all people. Strong and effective policy education is therefore critical within social curricula.

KEY POINTS

- Very little comprehensive academic research has been conducted focusing on how policy is integrated into social work curricula and what policy course education looks like in the United States.
- This is the first U.S.-wide study of policy practice education in BSW and MSW programs and focuses on examining policy-related coursework, instruction, practicum-based learning, and hands-on educational experience.

WHAT WERE THE KEY FINDINGS?

- There is significant variation across the U.S. in both Bachelor and Master level programs in terms of policy education, suggesting that the nature of students' preparedness to implement policy change depends on which program they attended.
- Policy instructors are often not required to obtain post-MSW experience prior to teaching policy classes, with over half of BSW programs and over one-third of MSW programs not requiring the two years of experience required to teach other social work content areas.
- BSW and MSW programs vary widely in providing practicum-based opportunities for policy practice, with just 30-40% of programs seeing more than 3/4th of students implementing policy projects in their practica. In contrast, 30-40% of programs saw fewer than 1/4th of students working on policy projects in practicum education.
- Exposure to hands-on opportunities to develop policy skills also varies widely across programs.

Policy education varied widely across Bachelor (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) programs in the U.S.

CRITICAL TAKE-AWAYS

Some students in BSW and MSW programs are substantially exposed to policy education, while other students have limited opportunities.

Limited exposure to policy-based educational experiences may help explain why other studies find that a minority of professional social workers feel adequately prepared to engage in policy practice.

Moving forward, findings provide insight for programs to strengthen their education methods to enable students to fulfill their professional policy practice obligations.



CONTINUE READING

Full Article

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