

From Theory to Therapy: Challenges for Mental Health Training in Australian Social Work

Research by Alex Kelemen based at Ramsay Albert Road Clinic (2022)

ABSTRACT

Social workers are often the front-line responders for individuals and groups with mental illness. However, there has been limited research in Australia and worldwide related to how social workers are prepared, what the best practices are, and what suggestions have been made to improve preparation in mental health settings. The proposed research study will include a quantitative study examining the perceptions around preparation of social work professionals as well as recommendations for improving education, professional practice and development. The results will give an indication around competency and lived experience of mental health social workers. The quantitative responses may indicate overarching themes such as: (1) perceived abilities; (2) need for training, support, resources and practice; (3) realities and challenges of mental health social work. The study aims to provide several recommendations for improving education, practice and policy in order to better prepare social workers to work in mental health. The results of this study could be used to enhance future research, practice, education and policy built around mental health social work in Australia in 2022.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed at exploring the social workers' perceptions about their education, competency and potential improvement for mental health social work in Australia. The study attempts to describe the social worker perspective on mental health practice taking into consideration the demands of their work and the preparation of their previous studies. For this research study the following lines of questioning lines have been used:

1. What are social work professionals' perspectives on their training?
2. What are social worker professionals' perspectives on mental health competency?
3. What are social work professionals' suggestions for improvement in regards to mental health education?

RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative descriptive design was chosen to survey the perspectives and viewpoints of social workers regarding their education, mental health training, competence and suggestions from improvements. As a mode, an email request to complete an online questionnaire was chosen, suggested for this type of survey by Lin and Van Ruzin (2012). The quantitative questionnaire designed will be sent to social professionals who have graduated from an Australian social work university after the changes to social work curricula were implemented.



RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to have a better understanding of social workers perception of their readiness for mental health in social work practice. This study will be able to seek and describe social workers' perspectives on their education and preparedness for mental health practice via classroom on campus and off-campus programs as well experiences in mental health practice and recommendations to improve mental health preparedness. Given the broad nature of social work the researcher is hypothesizing that social workers' perspectives on their training will depend on the areas of employment. The researcher also hypothesizes that social work professionals' perspectives on mental health competency were of improvable nature, leaving many feeling underprepared for mental health practice. The researcher also hypothesizes that social work professionals' suggestions will be critical and allow for room for improvement in mental health delivery. The study intends to drive conversations around mental health practices amongst all stakeholders involved, social work governing bodies, curriculum designers and mental health professionals.

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