

SOCIAL WORK MAPPING IN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

Strengthening Social Solidarity and Connectivity
Annamaria Campanini

The findings of the research on "Mapping of Social Work in Higher Education during COVID-19" have been presented at an event held at UNAM Mexico during the International Seminar of Spain, Mexico and Africa¹.

The following is a brief summary.

In relation to the objective, which was "To investigate the educational and research methodology in the Faculty/School/Diploma of Social Work during COVID-19", it is worth noting that the passion for learning in virtual classrooms was maintained:

"Use words with care".

"We reinvented ourselves and it was very satisfying for all students, I feel that we kept the passion, that grew and was transmitted through the networks, technologies, feelings of the participants to the community which they were working with. This was a difficult challenge as it was not only teaching, but also managing, coordinating, and supporting".

Likewise, classrooms and curriculum were the focus of the intervention for issues related to COVID-19, as well as case studies.

Students were encouraged to share their experiences as testimony so that other students in similar circumstances would have social references to support their academic practice.

Several teaching patterns and models changed substantially, from field research to researching news and community references in digital media (news, statistics, chronicles, research studies, etc.).

The most used pedagogical and technological resources were podcasts, PowerPoint presentations, Prezi, or videos. Furthermore, various tools and communication channels were used to keep in touch with students and to share content: Zoom, Google Meet, Youtube, Collaborate, SMS, WhatsApp, email and other social media platforms.

"We had to design, practically invent new methodologies, both in terms of applying online research techniques and use of secondary data. We also had to use an increased amount of creativity".

It also shows that: "when a subject is alive, students speak about it outside the classroom", which is why it had crossed borders.

The Social Work departments, as well as the faculties, had a service similar to a "Student-Teacher Liaison Committee - Online. Monthly meetings were held to build a report and to understand the students' situation".

Equally important was the proactive attitude of students. "Strong commitments were encouraged, so it contributed to a high level of attendance and participation". Projects with high social commitment were activated, such as the significant experience by Semillas con Esperanzas (Seeds of Hope)².

The universities also provided digital resources for teaching staff and students. In some cases, these resources were accessible, and support was provided for students who had particular difficulty following the online training sessions.

Similarly, it is important to emphasise a gender and age dimension. In all three universities the average participants were female and in an age range from 18 to 30 years old.

¹ 30th November 2021. International Seminar Spain, Mexico and Africa Social Work Mapping
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUMOLKcOvL8&t=5090s>

² Seeds of Hope. An oak tree for Social Work, a symbol of strength and hope.
<https://www.ucm.es/tribunacomplutense/273/art4241.php#.YfqzrOrMJPY>

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Considering the objective of “analyzing the intervention of Social Workers in university context” the internship centres closed in response to the country's COVID-19 regulations. They did not accept students in a traineeship. It was in this context that fieldwork was the central axis of their education. There was a shift from fieldwork to virtual work with the community.

On the other hand, during the pandemic, support programs saw an increase in the number of applications from students with some form of disability, mental health problems or specific educational support needs.

All three universities, at some point, activated modernisation plans. Some significant experiences were the creation of a support guide for online resources and accessible computer and SIM cards lending.

- Conclusions and Recommendations.

In conclusion, we consider that the pandemic has reshaped the education and the vision of intervention in Social Work. Faced with the social circumstances, it reformulated the pedagogical-intervention methodologies used to develop other ways finally. Ultimately, reinventing oneself and maintaining the passion for the discipline in the online context has allowed for greater creativity, the development of new competencies, and new links.

Recommendations for Social Work education in future health pandemics:

- ✓ Examining and transcending the limitations of the online experience allowed faculty and lecturers to overcome fears be creative and resilient academically and personally.
- ✓ Working on new ways of relating to others even more deeply and empathetically.
- ✓ Recognising the potential of self-learning and the richness of one's own metacognition in this specific context.
- ✓ Achieve emotional self-management and respect for others.
- ✓ To understand that everything has a time and a meaning.
- ✓ To have patience because everyone was burdened by the same circumstances, the pandemic and the lockdown.

- Working across borders with colleagues in other countries

The key strengths identified in the teams during the research process have been passion and determination and hard work and planning, all of which have guided us to achieve our objectives and goals.

Interdisciplinarity was the prevailing factor in the composition of the teams, with the richness of disability, cultural, intergenerational and gender diversity being present, and the competences of each researcher being equally important. Likewise, the link between the three teams was provided by information and communication technologies, which facilitated the planning, management and field work, as well as the dissemination of the study in several international events³. We must highlight the institutional support of the Deans or Directors of Social Work of the three universities and the President of the IASSW.

On the other hand, language barriers and time differences have been resolved with patience, a sense of tolerance, respect for diversity and commitment to service.

To our regret, the group itself has experienced personal and familiar situations directly related to COVID-19, which has led us to request a deferral in the delivery of the report.

³ Tuesday, March 17th, 2020. International Day of Social Work https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_cGCCfKmaU&t=2368s
Wednesday, July 14th, 2021. IV International Congress of Social Work y XIII Social Work Faculties and School Congress <https://adeit-estaticos.econgres.es/2020-CIFETS/Experiencias-TS3.pdf>
Wednesday, June 2nd, 2021. XXI International Congress of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations https://cgscholar.com/cg_event/events/Des21/schedule#2021-06-02

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To conclude, as a projection for the future, we plan to present this research to the Madrid Professional Association of Social Work awards⁴, publish a book and establish new lines of research.

Our commitment is to maintain the passion of Social Work in the classroom and in intervention in higher education. Our purpose is to generate alliances and to make this significant experience useful for the profession as well as for other disciplines. Similarly, to continue investigating in the university context, bearing in mind the Global Agenda 2020-2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals at the Faculty of Social Work of the Complutense University of Madrid, the School of Social Work of the National Autonomous University of Mexico and at the Discipline of Social Work of the University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa.

Grupo de investigación Interdisciplinaria Internacional

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⁴ Madrid Social Work Awards 2022

<https://www.comtrabajosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Bases-premios-V.pdf>