ADAPTABILITY AND INNOVATIONS IN SOCIAL WORK FIELD EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC OF COVID-19: A STUDY OF STUDENT'S EXPERIENCES ACROSS CAMPUSES IN INDIA AND CANADA

Authors

Smitha Sasidharan Nair[1], Rajesh Kalarivayil[2], Elaine Spencer[3], Baiju PV [4], Ashabanu Soletti[1], Jolene Wright [3] , Mohd. Anjum Afroz[2]

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[1] Tata Institute Of Social Sciences,India [2] Tezpur (Central) University,India, [3] Red Deer Poly Technique, Canada, [4] MacEwan University,Canada

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About the authors:

Dr. Smitha Sasidharan Nair is an assistant professor with Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. She has a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University,New Delhi and areas of interest are reproductive justice, gender and health.

Dr. Rajesh Kalarivayil is an assistant professor with department of social work in Tezpur university for the last 8 years. He has a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University,New Delhi. His areas of interest include science and technology studies, migration , health technology and innovation.

Ms.Elaine Spencer is teaching social work at Red Deer Polytechnic since 2005, after nearly 20 years of Clinical and Administrative Social Work practice. Elaine has served as the Chairperson of the Social Work Department, and as the Faculty Field Instruction, Education, and Liaison Director (FIELD). Elaine is the lead author and co-editor of "Social Work Ethics: Progressive, Practical and Relational Approaches," along with numerous publications on social work ethics, technology and leadership.

Dr.Baiju PV is an Assistant Professor in the School of social work at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He received his doctorate in social work for his research on community engagement practices of NGOs. Baiju has been a social work educator in India and Canada for the last twenty years. His research interests are postcolonial studies, Immigration, community engagement, and critical social work.

Dr. Asha Banu Soletti is currently Professor at the Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work (SSW), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. She is also the Dean, Student's Affairs, TISS. Her field engagement includes co-constructing community-led interventions for emerging public health concerns in both urban and rural contexts. She leads Pragati: Integrated Rural Health and Development Project, a Field Action Project, which is located in a tribal belt and caters to the health needs of the Warli and Katkari tribes. She has been supervising students for fieldwork for both generic and thematic placements. She has published on specific issues concerning older adults that explores inequities in later life, elder abuse and ageism.

Ms. Jolene Wright is a Social Work Instructor Red Deer Polytechnic College, Canada, Jolene is a fulltime faculty with Red Deer Polytechnic for the past five years and holds the role of field coordinator. Prior to teaching, Jolene's social work practice focused on mental health and health care administration working with gerontology, acute psychiatry and the LGBTQ2+ populations. In her PhD studies, her primary focus will be looking at creating supportive environments for LGBTQ2+ people and their families both individually and from a holistic lens.

Mr. Anjum Afroz is a doctoral candidate at the Tezpur (Central) University

Glossary Of Terms

CSWE	Council of Social Work Education
FNMI	First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Canadian Community)
GC	Group Conference
IBM	International Business Machine
IC	Individual Conference
ID	Identification
IEC	Information Education Communication
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MA	Master of Arts
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
NPTEL	National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning
PPT	PowerPoint Presentation
REB	Research Ethics Board
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health organization

Executive Summary

Introduction:

Field Education is at the core of Social Work pedagogy. Fieldwork training in social work education is considered essential, and the social work curriculum should reflect this with field education and classroom education getting equal importance. This pedagogy is deemed essential for the students to adapt to changes in the field, get hands-on practice, develop skills, and imbibe social work values. Students are oriented to the socio-cultural and economic realities of society. They get introduced to the different kinds of organizations and structures of the government and non-governmental sector. The COVID-19 pandemic brought in dramatic changes in the idea of the classroom itself and the way courses were undertaken. The lockdown and physical distancing protocols resulted in the classroom shifting from physical space to a virtual space. Field education also underwent dramatic changes from contact fieldwork to online or blended mode fieldwork. The current study wanted to understand the adaptations and innovations in field education in social work during the pandemic. The study focussed on the experiences of the students who underwent fieldwork during the pandemic to understand how the idea of the field of practice changed field education.

Research Methodology:

The study used a mixed methodology design to understand the experiences of students across four campuses. The study was conducted among students of social work in India and Canada who have undergone online and (or) blended mode of field work for at least one semester between March 2020 to July 2022. Both India and Canada have a rich resource of social work colleges/ institutes/ departments. The study was conducted with students of two institutes of India namely Tata Institute of Social Sciences, location and Tezpur (Central) University, location and two institutes in Canada namely Red Deer Polytechnic, Red, Deer, Alberta and

MacEwan University, Edmonton, Alberta. The study received ethical clearance from IRB boards of TISS, MacEwan University and Red Dear Polytechnic.

An online questionnaire was sent out to students who have had an experience of online or blended mode of field work. A total of 150 respondents participated in the online survey. In-depth interviews were conducted among participants who had self-selected to be part of the interviews during the online survey. A total of twenty-two in-depth interviews were conducted, of which twenty participants were from India and two participants were from Canada.

The quantitative data was cleaned, organised and analysed using MS Excel, tabulation was done on Pivot Chart analysis and the data was analysed using SPSS. The qualitative data was data was analysed thematically.

Ethical Considerations:

Online Survey:

- Informed consent of the participants was taken in the beginning of the survey.

- "No reason asked" option was provided for withdrawal from survey at any given time.

- Confidentiality of the participants were ensured. The respondents were not asked to reveal their identity during the survey. At the end of the survey, the respondents were provided an option to express their willingness to participate in the in-depth interviews as respondents.

- Contact details were obtained (and separated from survey responses), only from those respondents who had given consent for participation in in-depth interview.

In-depth Interviews:

- Respondents willing to be part of a follow up, in-depth interview self-identified through the online survey. Only those participants who have expressed their willingness to

participate in the in-depth interviews and have so notified on the survey sheet were approached for in depth surveys, and they were given full right to withdraw at any time during the interview.

- Identity of the respondents were kept confidential. Participation in the study was voluntary, non-discriminatory, and confidential.

- All the named investigators and the research staff employed under this study were designated to take informed consent.

Protection against risks:

- All data were analysed collectively so that information from any individual will remain anonymous.

- Study participants were protected by having all information obtained by the research staff designated by a code number only.

- Participation in this research study was strictly voluntary, confidential, and non-discriminatory. Research team was available to respond to any questions or concerns that may arise. Subjects will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Findings and Analysis:

Profile of the participants:

Majority (62%) of the respondents were enrolled in Master of Social work/MA in social work. One third was enrolled in Social Work Diploma. A detailed analysis indicates that majority (98%) of respondents from India were enrolled in Master level of education whereas majority (87%) of respondents from Canada were enrolled in Social Work Diploma. A detailed analysis reflects that majority respondents (78.72%) in India did not receive any financial assistance whereas majority of the respondents (75%) in Canada received financial assistance for completion of the social work studies.

Work Schedule:

Fairly 61% of the respondents were able to follow the working hours of the agency, 42% respondents decided the time schedule by themselves as per the assigned tasks. Half of the respondents (53%) got opportunity to work with a professional team of the agency, of which 14% were engaged in COVID-19 related works, one – fifth (20%) had worked with group of trainees in executing the works assigned by the agency supervisor whereas similar number of respondents reported that they worked independently. 7% of the respondents executed works recommended by the faculty supervisor as well.

There was flexibility in following work schedule when it had been decided by the respondents and even assigned by the organisation. However, many had reported difficulty in following work schedule because of barriers of network connectivity, many respondents were not bound to follow any work schedule mostly due to nature of work they had been assigned for example creating social media contents, making campaign and awareness strategy.

Flexibility and diversified work schedule are innovations that has emerged during online/blended mode of fieldwork amid pandemic time. A few supervisors had tried out to make task-oriented fieldwork practicum instead of focusing on hours as well. The work schedule was tailor made as per the COVID situation in a particular region.

It is worth to note that activities carried out during online fieldwork by most of the respondents were office-based desk works or works that can be carried out online which contrasts with the objectives of fieldwork practicum which usually aims for field experiences.

Supervision:

Supervisory meeting with faculty supervisors were primarily done over video (71%) or telephonic calls (47%), WhatsApp (36%) was the alternate medium, very few respondents were able to have in-person meeting with faculty supervisors (13%).

In the second phase of the pandemic there were first year students who had only met their faculty members virtually. These students faced difficulty in connecting with faculty members because of the 'lack of familiarity'.

Majority had individual conference (IC) meeting with faculty supervisor once or twice a week and group conference (GC) whenever required. Video calls and telephonic calls emerged as a main medium of interaction with faculty supervisor for supervision followed by WhatsApp, both in qualitative and quantitative findings

Incidences of connectivity issues, miscommunication, lack of clarity regarding instructions can be underlined which often remained unaddressed were challenges during the supervision process.

Adaptation to the Field- Learning and Challenges

Personal support system helped majority of the respondents (80%) to adjust to the fieldwork while 74% respondents found regular supervision by faculty supervisor quite important to adapt online mode of fieldwork followed by agency supervisor support (69%) in adapting online mode of fieldwork.

More than a half (57%) found difficult to adjust to online/blended mode of fieldwork in contrast to nearly one – third (36%) who considered adapting online/blended mode of fieldwork easy.

Nearly half (49%) considered that online/blended mode of fieldwork led them to understand the alternative methods of fieldwork whereas 54% considered online/blended mode of fieldwork as an innovative method.

Difficulty in adapting online mode of fieldwork was higher than those who found it easy to adapt, a further enquiry highlights the major reason of difficulties such as lack of resources required for online/blended mode of fieldwork in rural areas, familial reasons during pandemic which includes involvement in household chores, COVID – 19 related restrictions and fear of

getting infections, lack of clear instructions regarding online/blended mode of fieldwork along with some other reasons.

More than half (68%) has agreed that the online/ blended mode of field work helped to gain skills that would be useful in future. Nearly half of the responded (49%) consider that they were able to integrate theory to practice in online/blended mode of field work, 28% have disagreement.

Significant indication of not getting opportunity is also reflected in qualitative data analysis highlighting reasons such as limited scope of learning during online mode, online mode was a barrier, unhappy with the outcome of online mode of fieldwork and non-feasibility of online mode of fieldwork.

Challenges due to unavailability of resources required for online mode of fieldwork has also emerged as a major theme with reasons such as electricity, internet connection, electronic devices, availing transport facilities etc.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The study demonstrated that experiences of online/blended field work were diverse and heterogenous based on one's social location, early experiences of skill development, personal support systems and professional help. Nevertheless study holds potential for broadening the paradigms of doing and learning for social work. One of drawbacks of the study is that experiences of faculty supervisors and agency supervisors remain unaccounted. Sector-specific and region-specific experiences are yet to be understood. Studies on experiences of social work students, educators and practitioners from other regions can illuminate our understanding of online/blended mode of field work to recalibrate social work education to contemporary socio-technical changes.

Recommendations:

The study highlights online/blended mode of field work does have pedagogical potential in changing times.

1)   Online/blended fieldwork can be incorporated into fieldwork education because it provides opportunities for innovative work.

2)   There is a need for established institutional protocols that will help navigate online or blended mode of fieldwork.

3)   The role of field supervisor and faculty supervisor must be well defined and their own capabilities to ensure the learning of students will have to be enhanced.

4)   Support systems in the form of technological resources and financial resources must be considered when planning online/ blended mode of field work.

5)   Avenues for peer sharing and peer support have to be consciously established when doing online mode fieldwork.

6)   Communication skills, Documentation skills, Time management skills, Resource mobilization skills, Technical skills can be areas of focus when doing online or blended mode of field work

Introduction

Field Education is at the core of Social Work pedagogy. The definition of Social Work by the International Federation of Social Workers (2013) highlights that social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline.

> *A practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by social work theories, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.*

The definition highlights that social work is an interdisciplinary evolved/evolving from theory and practice. Theory and field base practice are considered integral to the student's development as a social work professional. Field-based practice is known by multiple terms- field education, fieldwork, field training, and field instruction. The Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) guidelines state, "The intent of field education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting. It is a basic precept of social work education that the two interrelated components of curriculum - classroom and field - are of equal importance within the curriculum, and each contributes to the requisite competencies of professional practice." (CSWE, 2015, a, b, p.12). Field Education is what Shulman (2005) referred to as the "signature pedagogy" of social work education. The global Covid-19 pandemic which began to impact our nations in the early part of 2020 resulted in dramatic changes in the idea of the classroom itself and the way courses were undertaken. The lockdown and physical distancing protocols resulted in the classroom shifting from physical space to a virtual space. Field education also underwent dramatic changes from contact fieldwork to online or blended mode fieldwork. This study examines the experiences of students of doing online/blended mode of field work

Review of Literature

Field education in Social Work:

Fieldwork training in social work education is considered essential, and the social work curriculum should reflect this with field education and classroom education getting equal importance. This pedagogy is deemed essential for the students to adapt to changes in the field, get hands-on practice, develop skills, and imbibe social work values. Students are oriented to the socio-cultural and economic realities of society. They get introduced to the different kinds of organizations and structures of the government and non-governmental sector. The importance of field education in building the competencies of students is well documented. Field placements help students understand the field's spectrum, gain in-depth knowledge of the approach and perspectives, and develop skills required to be part of the social work profession. The 'field of practice' in field education is varied and depends on the student's specialization, availability of organizations, and acceptance of the student by the agency/group/community. Field education encourages the student to be self-reflective, skilled, and motivated towards their professional development. The structure of the placement and processes involved may be different across schools. The field education is structured to provide incremental learning. This process starts with the beginning of the first semester and carries forward to the fourth semester.

Many schools/centres of social work have concurrent fieldwork in the first year, enabling the students to get acclimatized with the field. This concurrent fieldwork also ensures a hand holding by the supervisor as the students meet the supervisor weekly for the individual and group conferences. Incremental learning helps the students to integrate theory and practice. In the second year, students may have concurrent or block placement for fieldwork. Block placement is when the students are placed with an organization for a specified period. The structure helps the student to work independently with support from the agency supervisor and

a faculty supervisor. The second-year fieldwork aims to integrate previously learned knowledge, enhance students' cognitive and analytical abilities, get in-depth knowledge of the student's area of specialization and develop specific skills required to work in the specialized area. Experiential learning also helps the students interact with members directly work in the field and learn through interaction and demonstration. Self-reflection, self-learning, and self-assessment are also essential learnings from the block placement.

Field Education and supervision

Supervision is an essential component of the fieldwork process. It is a process in which students learn to work in the field under the guidance of an experienced social worker. The main stakeholders in the supervisory process are the students, supervisor, agency supervisor, department, and the client system. Supervision in social work has evolved over the years (Morrison 2003 and Hughes 2010). Helen Joseph (2020) has argued that the change in nomenclature form supervisor to facilitator will help make the process facilitative as the supervision connotes a superior role of the supervisor. They have also highlighted the importance of being an adaptive facilitator who understands the student's potential and facilitates the fieldwork to enhance their potential. Here the potential is given importance rather than an evaluation of the student.

Supervision can be understood as an event as well as a process. The supervisory event is the scheduled formal meeting between the supervisor and the student. The event includes individual and group conferences where the students meet their supervisor individually or with other students supervised by the same supervisor. The individual conference allows the student to discuss learnings, difficulties, and challenges in the field. The individual conferences provide a space for the student to interact openly and engage in self-reflection with support from the

supervisor. Group conferences encourage group learning and provide an area where the students can learn about and from each other's experiences. Group conferences may be of different types- students under the same supervisor placed in various organizations, students in the same organization, and students placed in the same area of practice but not necessarily the same supervisor. This space allows the supervisor-student to understand each other well and create a vital learning space for the supervisory process. The process occurs in three phases: consolidation (beginning), middle (construction), and termination (closure). The role expectations from the supervisor and the student are different in each phase. The supervisory process involves creating learning opportunities for the students, encouraging the student to understand the rights-based and people-centred practice, fostering the student's growth as a professional social worker, and engaging in problem-solving. The agency supervisor (if present) also plays an essential role in the supervisory process. They orient the students into the field, support learning, and provide on-field guidance, and they are also helping in charting out the students' work and are part of the assessment process. The different models (Lowy,1983) for supervision that play an essential role in how the student approaches field learning and the supervisor-student interaction. The supervisory process should be an empowering and non-discriminatory supervisory process. The supervisory structure is designed to encourage the student in the field, monitor the student's development and work and engage with the student and help them evolve in the area.

Student as a learner in fieldwork:

It is important to treat the students in higher education as mature learners who are self-directed and learn by recognising self-directed problems and by doing. Learning by doing is an important method to encourage curiosity, empower the student to take initiative and let them explore formal and informal forms of learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Eleni Papouli

(2014) has explored the student as a learner in fieldwork education in two different ways: adult learning theory and socio-cultural learning approaches. The adult learning theory focuses on individual approaches to learning while the social- cultural learning approaches on social, relational, and situational aspects of learning. There are number of factors that influence the learning path of the demographic factors, degrees of anxiety, understanding of the curriculum and expectations from students, learning experiences in the field. Learning can be limited by the process of educational programmes, perceptions of students as adult learners or not and past experiences or processes which have not prepared the students well. The learning process will be aided if the students is aware of and identifies their learning styles. Learning styles are the ways in which students prefer to process the information, absorb and observe and do self-directed learning. Many authors have highlighted the importance of understanding learning styles of the students (Kolb,1984; Provident I, Leibold, Dolhi & Jeffcoat ,2009). This will also help the supervisory-supervisee process (Titiloye and Scott,2001). A self-awareness of their learning styles helps the student to be efficient, effective and engaged in their work (Brown, Cosgriff, and French, 2008)

Fieldwork and Evaluation:

A substantial part of the grades in the social work curriculum is dedicated to fieldwork. Evaluation of the student is an ongoing process throughout the fieldwork, not just the outcome. Evaluation is based on several criteria, including professional development, understanding of the field work setting, self-development, supervision, and skill development. The evaluation pattern may be different across campuses- it may include an internal assessment with the supervisor, agency supervisors' assessment, viva by an external. The tools for assessment include recordings, daily logs, individual and group conferences, self-assessment report, attendance sheets, supervisor assessment report. The tools of evaluation are to ensure that the

process of fieldwork is given importance. A structured fieldwork curriculum with objectives and learning outcomes eases the process of evaluation.

Rationale:

The unprecedented global pandemic of COVID 19 had impact on the everyday functioning of the society. The pandemic began in early part of January 2020 and the World Health organisation declared it as a pandemic in March (WHO, 2020). Lockdown and quarantine were imposed in several countries as a measure to control the spread of the disease. This lockdown was for different time periods depending on the intensity of the disease in the country. While protective of public health, this had an adverse impact on the everyday life of people world over. In person education in the institutions were shut down to restrict the spread of the disease. The in-person classes were shifted to the virtual mode. This was a major shift that the students, faculty, and institutions had to initiate and adapt. There was also a change in the way the classes were taken and innovative ways for the same were explored. The impact of the changes varied across populations. Studies have shown that the digital divide has had an impact on the education of the children across religion, class, caste and gender (Broadbent & Papadopolous, 2013, Shaw-Verhoek, Shephard, Spencer & Khan, 2014, Gough, MacDonald & Spencer, 2017).

Field education is an essential component of social work. The importance of it in the curriculum has been highlighted and emphasized several times. Field education is structured in a specific manner with objectives and learning outcomes across the institutions/centres/universities. It is structured in a manner where the students have an experience of working directly with people and in organisations facilitated by a faculty supervisor and in many cases an agency supervisor. There is immense focus on skill development, self-development, understanding the approaches

and history of different organisations. The process of field work is important for a hands-on experience or 'dirtying one's hand in the field'. There were changes in the understanding of the idea of 'field' in social work education. The field of practice in many places shifted to the virtual mode or blended mode (virtual + in person).

The current study wanted to understand the adaptations and innovations in field education in social work during the pandemic. The study focussed on the experiences of the students who underwent fieldwork during the pandemic to understand how the idea of the field of practice changed field education. How did social work field education adapt to the pandemic situations? What were innovations in the process of field practice? How has the social work training adapted itself to the constraints of the pandemic? What has been the experience of students in the online/blended fieldwork during the pandemic? What lessons can we draw for field education in social work training with the opportunities and barriers presented by the pandemic?

Methodology

Research Objectives:

- To study the experiences of students in online or blended mode of field work.

- To identify opportunities and barriers to adaptations in social work field education during the pandemic.

- To document the innovations in field work education during pandemic times.

Study settings and design:

The study was conducted among students of social work in India and Canada who have undergone online and (or) blended mode of field work for at least one semester between March 2020 to July 2022. Both India and Canada have a rich resource of social work colleges/ institutes/ departments. The study was conducted with students of two institutes of India namely Tata Institute of Social Sciences, location and Tezpur (Central) University, location and two institutes in Canada namely Red Deer Polytechnic, Red, Deer, Alberta and MacEwan University, Edmonton, Alberta.

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India: The School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai has a post-graduation programme for social work with eight centres and nine specialisation- Public Health, Mental Health, Women Centred Practice, Child and Family, Disability Studies, Dalit and Tribal Studies, Criminal Justice, Livelihoods, Community Organisation and Development Practice. The first-year students across all programmes of social work have generic concurrent field work for two days a week. The second-year students have thematic placements. Field work is an important part of the pedagogy and has 24 credits over two years and students are expected to complete over 900 hours of field work. There is a structured supervisory process followed in fieldwork education field contact, faculty supervisor. The process is considered when evaluating the students weekly Individual

conference, group conference aid the process of evaluation. The documents for evaluation include- individual recording, summary report and a detailed evaluation form.

MacEwan University, Canada: The School of Social Work at MacEwan University, Canada offers a two-year social work diploma and a bachelor's degree in social work, with the mission of Launching competent ethical social workers committed to diversity, inclusion, and just society. Social work diploma students do field practicum on two days every semester. BSW students do their field practicum in winter semesters.

Red Deer Polytechnic, Canada: Red Deer Polytechnic has a Social Work Diploma 2-year Program. The goal is to graduate ethical and compassionate social workers committed to anti-oppressive practice and social justice. Students are required to complete 720 hours, in 2 distinct field placements in field, under supervision of a registered social worker. Additionally, students attend 15 hours of seminar with a social work faculty member. Evaluation is completed in part with the field supervisor and faculty member.

Tezpur University

The study adopted a mixed methodology approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. The mixed methodology ensures a synergetic utilisation of data. The study received multi-site IRB clearance from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, MacEwan University, Edmonton and Red Deer Polytechnic, Alberta before the study was conducted.

Tools for Data Collection:

Online survey - An online survey was conducted with students of social work from selected campuses in India and Canada to understand their experience of online and blended mode of field work.

In-depth interviews- In-depth interviews through telephonic call/ Google Meet were carried out among self-selected participants from the online survey. This has been done to understand the experiences, challenges and opportunities presented by online or blended mode field work.

Research Samples:

Online Survey: An online questionnaire was sent out to students who have had an experience of online or blended mode of field work. The survey was circulated among students of the campuses the investigators are part of and have done online field placements. An attempt was made to reach maximum number of participants by putting up the survey on social media platforms. A total of 150 respondents participated in the online survey and contributed for quantitative study, of which ninety-four (63%) respondents were from India and fifty-six (37%) were from Canada.

In-depth Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted among participants who had self-selected to be part of the interviews during the online survey. A total of twenty-two in-depth interviews were conducted, of which twenty participants were from India and two participants were from Canada.

Inclusion criteria for the respondents:

- The respondent is enrolled or was enrolled in a post-graduate programme of Social Work in between March 2020 to July 2022.

- The student had at least one semester of graded field work online or in the blended format between March 2020 to July 2022

- Consented to be a part of the study.

Data collection:

Quantitative data was collected through online survey conducted with students of social work from two campuses each in India and Canada to understand their experience of online / blended mode of field work during pandemic time. A questionnaire was shared with students meeting inclusion criteria.

Qualitative data was collected from the consented respondents through a telephonic in-depth interview using a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire, transcription of obtained information was done in English and has been kept for record in a password protected laptop.

Data Management Strategy:

The information obtained from participants was solely meant for the purposes of research and hence collected information is stored in the form of de-identified data and audio recordings only. Data collected for the study purpose are managed in such a way that data is not personally identifiable (de-identified), and was stored in a pass-word protected computer of the authorized members of the research team. Access to the raw data was secured with the research team members authorized for data collection in a password protected laptop and same has been shared with other research team members by ensuring anonymity. The anonymized data was

shared with other members of the research team through securely encrypted Google drive cloud storage link by assigning access to the data through their verified email IDs.

Later, the contents from Google drive were carefully removed and drive including G-mail ID used for the research purpose have been deleted permanently.

Cleaning and Tabulation:

Quantitative data obtained for the study was cleaned, organized and analyzed using a licensed version of MS Excel (version MS Office Home and student 2019). Tabulation was done using Pivot chart analysis. Later a same set of data has been analyzed on trial license of IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for a deeper insight such as correlations.

Data Analysis:

Data was analyzed in a licensed version of MS Excel (version MS Office Home and student 2019). Simple tables, pivot tables, charts and graphs were obtained using the same MS Excel sheet and later data set was analyzed on 30 days trial license of IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for a deeper insight such as correlations. Qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Ethical Considerations:

The following steps were taken in the data collection and analysis to maintain higher ethical standards of research**.**

Online Survey:

- Informed consent of the participants was taken in the beginning of the survey.
- "No reason asked" option was provided for withdrawal from survey at any given time.

- Confidentiality of the participants were ensured. The respondents were not asked to reveal their identity during the survey. At the end of the survey, the respondents were provided an option to express their willingness to participate in the in-depth interviews as respondents.

- Contact details were obtained (and separated from survey responses), only from those respondents who had given consent for participation in in-depth interview.

In-depth Interviews:

- Respondents willing to be part of a follow up, in-depth interview self-identified through the online survey. Only those participants who have expressed their willingness to participate in the in-depth interviews and have so notified on the survey sheet were approached for in depth surveys, and they were given full right to withdraw at any time during the interview.

- Identity of the respondents were kept confidential. Participation in the study was voluntary, non-discriminatory, and confidential.

- All the named investigators and the research staff employed under this study were designated to take informed consent.

Sources of Materials

The information obtained from participants is solely meant for purposes of research and in the form of de-identified data and audio recordings only. It was ensured that all data collected for the purpose was not personally identifiable (de-identified), and was stored in a pass-word protected computer of authorized member of research team.

Protection against risks:

Several precautions were actively integrated into the research procedures to ensure protection of research participants of confidentiality, anonymity, and to minimize any negative emotional or social consequences of study participation.

1. All data were analysed collectively so that information from any individual will remain anonymous.

2. Study participants were protected by having all information obtained by the research staff designated by a code number only.

3. Participation in this research study was strictly voluntary, confidential, and non-discriminatory. Research team was available to respond to any questions or concerns that may arise. Subjects will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Findings and Analysis

Socio-demographic Profile

Table 1: Socio – demographic description of study sample

	Variables	No. of respondents	Percentage %
Course program	Master of Social Work/MA in social work	93	62.00
	Social Work Diploma	49	32.67
	Bachelor of Social Work	8	5.33
University/College	Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India	65	43.33
	Red Deer Polytechnic. Alberta, Canada	33	22.00
	Tezpur University, Tezpur, India	29	19.33
	MacEwan University, Edmonton	23	15.33
Country of institution	India	94	62.67
	Canada	56	37.33
Kind of fieldwork	Block Placement	89	59.33
	Concurrent Fieldwork Placement	51	34.00
	Block and Concurrent Fieldwork Placement	4	2.67
	Other	6	4.00
Age	18-24 years	88	58.67
	25-29 years	41	27.33
	30-34 years	6	4.00
	35-39 years	10	6.67
	40-44 years	3	2.00
	45-49 years	1	0.67
	50-54 years	1	0.67
Gender	Female	116	77.33
	Male	29	19.33
	Non binary	1	0.67
	Non binary – female	1	0.67
	Prefer not to say	3	2.00
Residence during fieldwork	Urban Area	72	48.00
	Rural Area	49	32.67
	Semi-urban Area	25	16.67
	Other	4	2.67
Religion	Atheist	8	5.33
	Buddhist	1	0.67
	Catholic	1	0.67
	Christian	26	17.33
	Hindu	64	42.67
	Muslim	6	4.00
	None	27	18.00
	Other	5	3.33
	Prefer not to say	12	8.00
Financial assistance for the course	Yes	62	41.33
	No	88	58.67

Table 1 shows the socio – demographic description of the study sample (N=150). Majority (62%) of the respondents were enrolled in Master of Social work/MA in social work. One third was enrolled in Social Work Diploma. A detailed analysis indicates that majority (98%) of respondents from India were enrolled in Master level of education whereas majority (87%) of respondents from Canada were enrolled in Social Work Diploma, which is nearly proportionate to the ratio of country of institution i.e., 2:3. Majority (44%) of respondents are from TISS, India whereas respondents from MacEwan University is the lowest (15%). Majority had concurrent fieldwork (59%) or block field work (34%), only 3% had both concurrent and block fieldwork.

Majority (58.67%) are of age group 18-24 years followed by 25-29 years of age group (27.33%). Majority of the respondents are female (77%) whereas 19% are male, 2% respondents were non-binary. Nearly half of the respondents had residence during online/blended mode of fieldwork in urban area, one third in rural area and 16.67% were from semi urban area. 42.67% respondents are Hindu by religious faith, 17% are Christian, 5% Atheist, 4% Muslim and 8% preferred not to say their religion. 58.67% did not receive any financial assistance to complete studies in social work whereas 41.33% respondents received financial assistance. A detailed analysis reflects that majority respondents (78.72%) in India did not receive any financial assistance whereas majority of the respondents (75%) in Canada received financial assistance for completion of the social work studies.

Settings of field Work - Geography, Organization Type

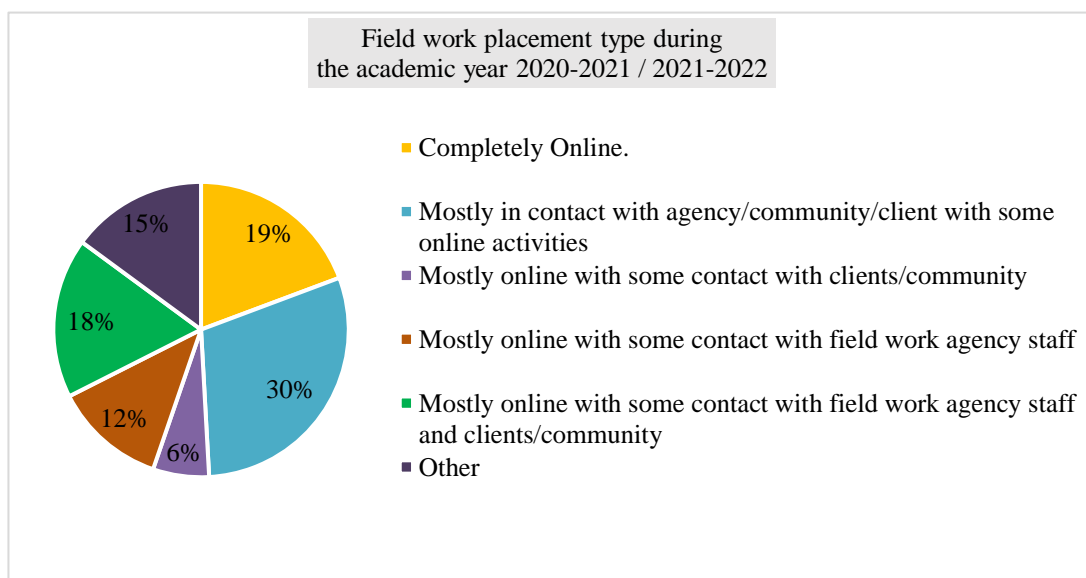Type of Field work placement during the pandemic

Figure 1: Field work placement type during the academic year 2020-2021 / 2021-2022

Nearly One-fifth (19%) of the respondents were placed completely online, 36% were mostly online with some offline contacts and 30% were placed mostly in contact with agency/community/client with some online activities. A country wise comparison reflects that 75% respondents in India were either completely online or mostly online, which is higher in comparison to Canada (62%).

Fieldwork setting
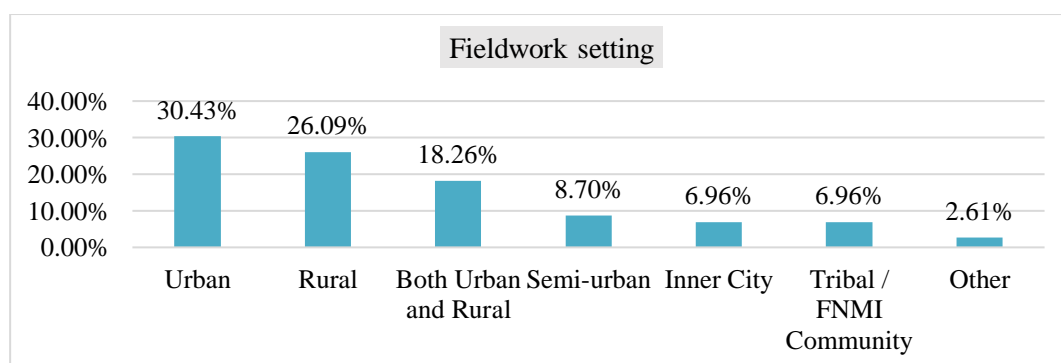
Figure 2: Fieldwork setting

30% of the respondents were placed in urban areas, 26% in rural areas and 18% in blend of rural and urban areas. Only 6.96% respondents were placed in tribal/FNMI community, all from India only.

Type of Organization and Thematic focus area of the organization

Figure 3: Type of organization

Majority (55%) of the respondents were placed in NGO/NPO whereas placement in governmental set up was 10%.

Figure 4: Thematic focus area of the organization

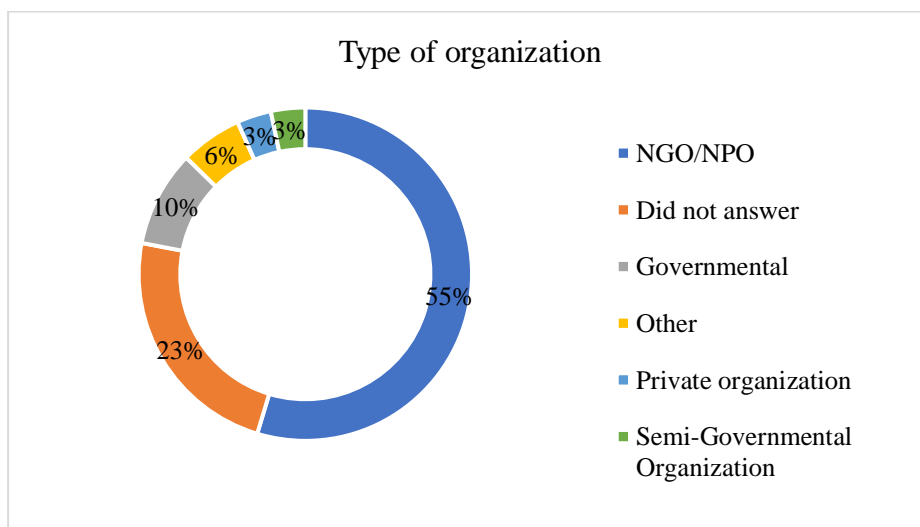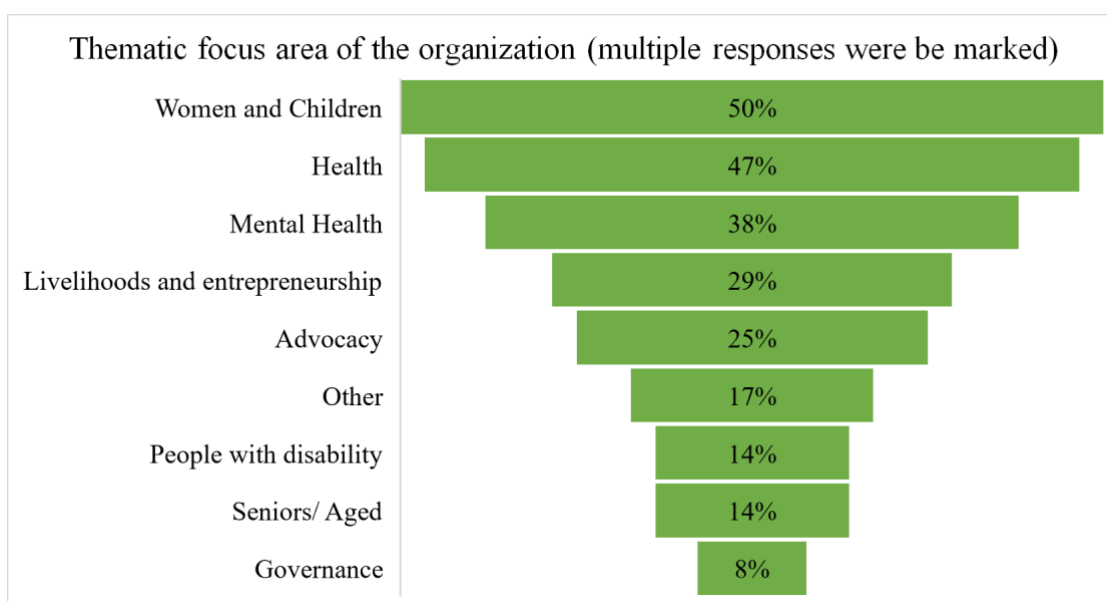Half of the respondents worked in organizations with focus area on women and children, 47% worked in health sector, 38% worked on mental health, 29% on livelihood and entrepreneurship. Thematic focus area such as people with disability, senior/aged and governance were reported least.

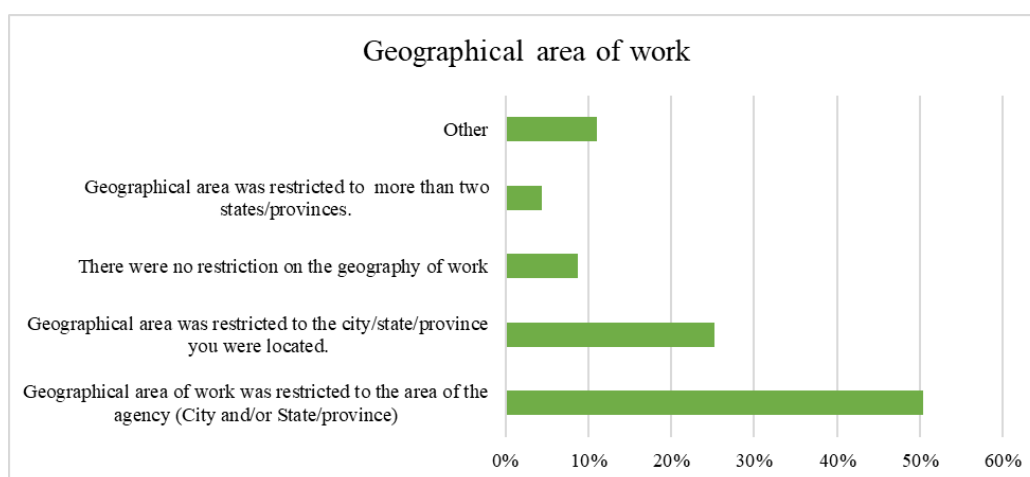**Geographical area of work**

Figure 5: Geographical area of work

Half of the respondents reported that geographical area of work was restricted to the area of the agency whereas one-fourth respondents reported geographical area was restricted to the city/state/province where respondent was located. 9% respondents had no restrictions on the geography of work. 4% respondents reported that geographical area of work was restricted to more than two states/provinces. Remaining 12% respondents reported about miscellaneous other geographical areas of field work, of which fieldwork by 3% respondents covered entire country and 3% respondents were located in a high income country and was associated with agency in high income country and did fieldwork in low/middle income category, 2% respondents were located in low/middle income country and was associated with high income country and did fieldwork in high income country, 2% respondents were located in high income country and was associated with agency in high income country and did fieldwork in high

income country and remaining 2% were located in high income country and was associated with agency in low/middle income country and did fieldwork in low/middle income country.

Work Schedule and Nature of fieldwork- work strategies, innovation, adaptation

Work Schedule
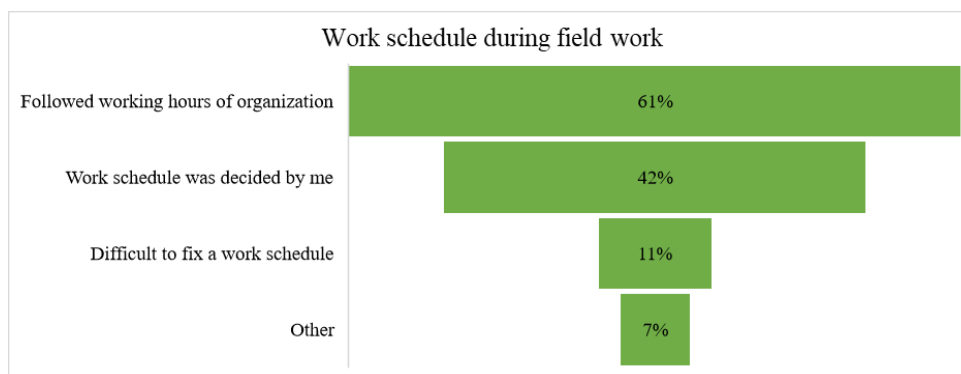
Figure 6: Work schedule during fieldwork

Fairly 61% of the respondents were able to follow the working hours of the agency, 42% respondents decided the time schedule by themselves as per the assigned tasks. There were 11% respondents who faced difficulty in following the work schedule because of the nature of work they have been assigned followed by 7% respondents who had followed work schedule in various ways.

Nature of fieldwork
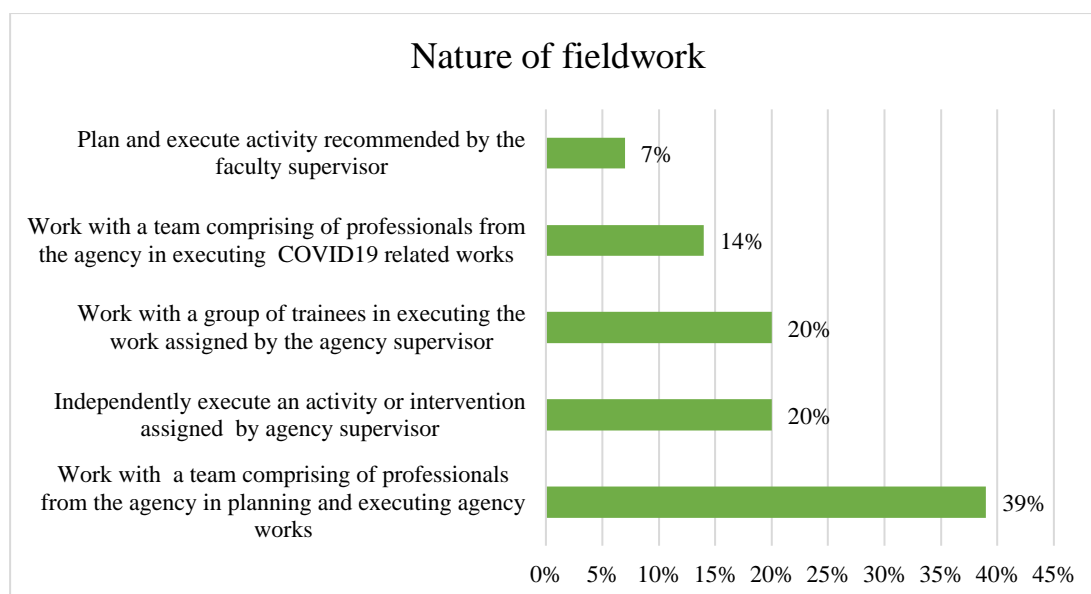
Figure 7: Nature of fieldwork

Half of the respondents (53%) got opportunity to work with a professional team of the agency, of which 14% were engaged in COVID-19 related works, one – fifth (20%) had worked with group of trainees in executing the works assigned by the agency supervisor whereas similar number of respondents reported that they worked independently. 7% of the respondents executed works recommended by the faculty supervisor as well.

Qualitative data highlights that there was flexibility in following work schedule when it had been decided by the respondents and even assigned by the organisation. However, many had reported difficulty in following work schedule because of barriers of network connectivity, many respondents were not bound to follow any work schedule mostly due to nature of work they had been assigned for example creating social media contents, making campaign and awareness strategy. The online field work and flexibility in the schedule meant respondents also undertook other internships (paid and unpaid) along with field work. This technically was against the rules of all the institutes but because of the circumstances it did not become a major issue, or it never came to the forefront.

See, work schedule was not very… it was not a schedule basically, jab jo kaam bola wo karna hai (whenever and whatever work had been asked, that we need to do). Whenever and whatever work is given that time you have to do it. It was not that you have to sit on online. You do not have to sit on a meeting since 9 O'clock till 5 O'clock or anything. It was not like that sometimes. I mean, work schedule was not very tight also, honestly, I can be honest here, right? Yes. So, work schedule was not a lot and in fact, I was able to do two more internships, free internships along with this (online fieldwork) in third semester because it was very less work and sometimes there was no work also. So, there were times we were not given instructions. Say 9 O'clock is when it starts, we were not given an instruction till 12:30pm and we were expected to just make posts and keep making post. Yes, we do not have enough content also now, because we have not worked in the sector a lot, how much content will we make? So, we used to make content together a lot and then after 9 – 12 O'clock there is no work. – R10HS

Qualitative data indicates that in India majority of the of respondents who had worked with a group of trainees on works assigned by the agency supervisor followed by independently working on works assigned by the agency supervisors and respondents who worked with team members that included agency staff or professionals from the agency.

Work strategies: Fieldwork practicum in social work is designed to be carried out in field settings however COVID – 19 pandemic and the lockdown situations demanded a makeshift in the fieldwork strategy. Insights from quantitative and qualitative data reflects that faculty supervisor and social work students had explored various ways to ensure maximum level of possible learning through fieldwork activities amid pandemic times and thus flexibility in terms placement setting, geography of fieldwork, nature of work, work schedule and mode of communication for fieldwork supervision had been given to the social work students while placing for fieldwork during pandemic times. In all the four institutes the field work was online and blended with placement near the students' homes. So even if the classes were online, it still

meant that students had an opportunity to do offline field work. The following response reveals the concerns that played out in placing students close to their homes.

…. faculty concern was like since it was a COVID so we might get affected or people with whom we are working, they might get affected. So it was their perspective. So they decided to place each student in the location where they are currently living. -R18RG

Many respondents considered this important, it also proved beneficial because many of the respondents also felt that they had become conscious of their own locality. For instance, the following response shows how the opportunity helped the student to acquaint with the development indicators of a vulnerable tribe in the Northeast Indian state of Assam.

…. but because of this online mode, that is one advantage I worked in my nearby locality that is tea tribe community where I gained knowledge in different aspect such as health status of women, health status of children, child marriage, different other facts.
Usually, it is supposed to be offline, but it was online during pandemic- R01CB

Innovation: Punctuality and time management are key aspects of training in fieldwork practicum and hence following a work schedule is crucial for fieldwork practicum, yet difficult situations meant that flexibility and diversified work schedule is one such innovation that has emerged during online/blended mode of fieldwork amid pandemic time. A few supervisors had tried out to make task-oriented fieldwork practicum instead of focusing on hours as well. The following response shows how the task-oriented field work was tailored to the demand of the situation by faculty supervisors.

> *"I was placed in community-based field work which I have already shared how we have worked then for second semester condition was very bad. We cannot even go outside, we cannot do anything, so at that time, they have fixed schedule even by our department, because in our department, at the highest points is in field work that is 6 points. So maximum marks obtained in field-based activities only. They gave 5 specific challenges (deliverables) to do during second semester. I cannot recall everything but one was like telephonic communication to the COVID 19 victims and help. I was continuously engaged in oxygen cylinder service, there were a work going on that also. Then another one was… most of the work was related to online work only. We worked up to 4 – 5 hours in a day and two or three days in a week. But that is also need based because I was completely working online." – R01CB*

Adaptation: One of the key contributors to adaptation in online/blended mode of fieldwork was the work schedule which clearly indicates that a diverse range of work schedules followed by students helped in adaptation as well, same goes with nature of fieldwork – many students suggested that group placement in agency for fieldwork in difficult circumstances like COVID – 19 pandemic and lockdown would help them in adaptation and coping with challenges which eventually boost learning.

> *"And wherever we were sent, there are some facilities but I think some difficulties and challenges remains, I think we cannot overcome these in online mode. When we had block placement, we had a peer support system but in case of concurrent, that support system was not there so adaptation becomes more challenging, at times we cannot adapt and even people cannot adapt us, that is a big drawback." – R20AG*

Activities carried out during fieldwork – Challenges, possibilities, innovation.

Activities carried out by respondent during fieldwork

Activity	Percentage
Documentation works	51%
Learnt about the agency's works	50%
Conduct telephonic surveys	37%
Research related activities	36%
Contacting clients through telephone	36%
Direct support for the clients of agency	33%
Online awareness generation activities	31%
Organize online seminar/talk	25%
Direct casework	24%
Offline awareness generation activities	23%
Resource mobilization for agency	23%
IEC materials on COVID19	19%
Coordinating delivery of essential services	12%
Other	8%

Figure 8: Activities carried out by respondents during fieldwork
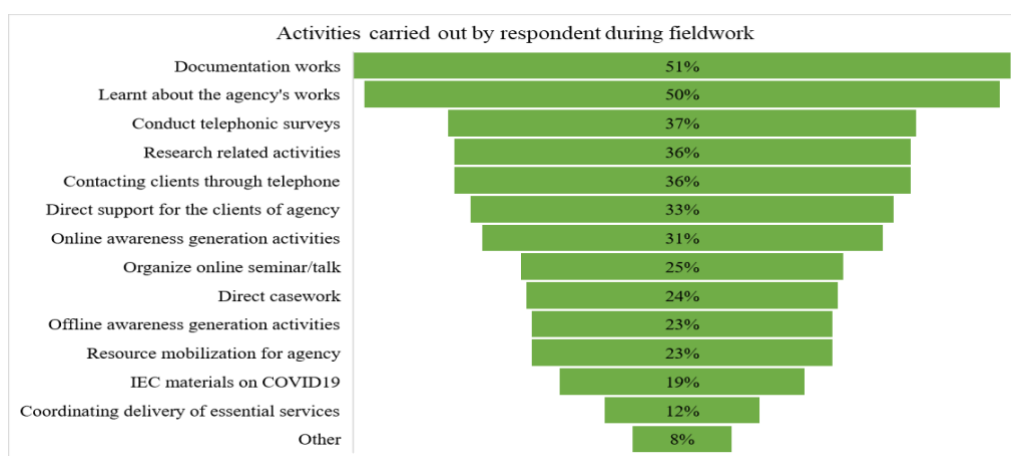
Major works/activities that has been carried out by the respondents during pandemic were documentation works (51%), along with learning activities and programs of the organization (50%), telephonic survey or client follow up works (37%), organizing online seminar/talk for the organization (25%). One – fourth of the responded carried out direct case work, nearly

similar figure (24%) carried out awareness generation activities offline. Less than one – fifth were engaged in development of IEC materials or coordinating delivery of essential services. Qualitative data underlines that activities carried out during online/blended mode of fieldwork were mostly documentation work, awareness generation works, direct support services followed by learning about organization's programs and works. Documentation works includes case story, experience sharing, report writing for organization, newsletter, framework design, standard operating procedure (SOP) preparation, formulation of social media outreach strategy, awareness on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programs, nutrition, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) schemes, reproductive health, child trafficking and sexual abuse, gender sensitization and women friendly work spaces. Other miscellaneous works that had been carried out by the respondents were telephonic surveys, Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material preparation and conducting online events/seminar etc.

> *"Yes, so like I mentioned, in case of District Child Protection Unit, there was not some specific tasks that I was supposed to accomplish. So, it was like learning by doing you know.... I was exploring on my own, like I mentioned and otherwise the briefing part or some briefing or any sessions that were taken regarding the schemes and mechanisms of the organization, I was supposed to attend those, but otherwise there was no such specific activities in case of District Child Protection Unit, and in case of Way Foundation, I had few specific activities that I needed to accomplish by two to three days or within a week. Like I mentioned, creating of IEC materials or writing a report or creating a number of posters, digital posters, I mean coordinating... then coordinating their webinars and then also as far as I could remember, I also have organized online session on how youth can be a part of generating awareness on COVID-19 pandemic during that time. So those were some of the tasks that I was supposed to accomplish." – R14TB*

Challenges: It is worth to note that activities carried out during fieldwork by most of the respondents were office-based desk works or works that can be carried out online which contrasts with the objectives of fieldwork practicum which usually aims for field experiences – mostly due to the limitations brought in by the COVID – 19 pandemic and lockdown rules.

A clear disappoint has been reflected by the respondents over not achieving the objectives but activities carried out by the respondents during COVID – 19 pandemics are indeed useful for instilling required skills for works in the development sector and can be a barrier in obtaining objectives of fieldwork practicum. The following response gives a snapshot of the activities carried out during fieldwork by the respondents.

> *I have told you that we were working on, okay but I could not pinpoint any good outcomes or strong outcomes, I would say, from the entire process, in terms of documentation sure we had a ppt ready and research report ready, but were we actually able to make any impact through the fieldwork - No. – R05TS*

> *I think the courses which can only give your learning experience on offline basis cannot be done online. Like the mental health thing or the other things associated with your practice so that cannot be done on online mode. That organization only gives you a documentation task, and so, their limitations are there. I think online mode of field was not a suitable mode of fieldwork. – R16YP*

Possibilities: Although a shift from fieldwork practicum objectives is observed, findings through quantitative and qualitative data reflected that at some extent there were possibilities of aligning the assigned works with fieldwork practicum objectives, this can be understood in terms of fair possibilities of engaging with clients for direct support and direct casework reflected through quantitative finding falls between mid-range. Thus, considering the limitation and scope of imparting diversified skills to the students, possibilities of reviewing fieldwork objectives can be explored. One such possibilities would be identifying the works that has potentials to impart skills appropriate for social work students which are aligned with fieldwork practicum objectives. Below mentioned quote of the respondent highlights the possibilities of combining the possible works during online fieldwork with fieldwork practicum objectives:

> *I can just summarize in three words like three categories. So first was telephonic conversation with the family or with the clients. Second was the mostly writing case studies and third was the documenting the experiences of legal team and social workers, basically interviewing the social workers and legal team – R18RG.*

Innovations: Office based desk works in organizations involved in the development sector requires a wide range of skill sets ranging from social work skills, 21st century skills such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration etc. and technical skills, there is a fair scope of innovation in social work field education in line with the diverse range of activities in which students can be engaged. Innovation in this aspect has potentials to boost the skills of the social work students as well as to advance their job readiness which may reflect in placement at the end of the course.

> *"That time, as it was a very new work mode for us to do the fieldwork, to complete the fieldwork that time. So basically, it is more about the knowledge of technical skills like the MS Word and Excel and prepare a presentation on those. Then mostly the work was done in the Google sheets, okay. Moreover, if I tell you about the other skills, we basically use the communication skills more or less, because that time the only way is the telephone to get in contact with the field workers and get the work done by them and to monitor that work. So basically, you can say that the communication skills which has been used widely that time and even the thing is the technical skills which were required, actually the MS Word, Excel, most of the working were like this. Preparing report and all is not a new thing for us, okay but that time we have to like do it all digitally. It was very difficult even like to prepare all those things in a very short period of time because it was not the thing like you are going to the field and you are collecting all those things anyway and you were returning from the field. There is a different set of work model, but that time it was like all online. Then you have to sit before your laptop or computer all day and prepare reports only. So, it is like something technically heat up at that moment but yeah, we learnt about something different at that time to work upon, fully online mode is entirely different. A lot of new experience on that for everyone." - R12AM*

Supervision by faculty supervisor, recordings – Challenges, adaptation, innovation
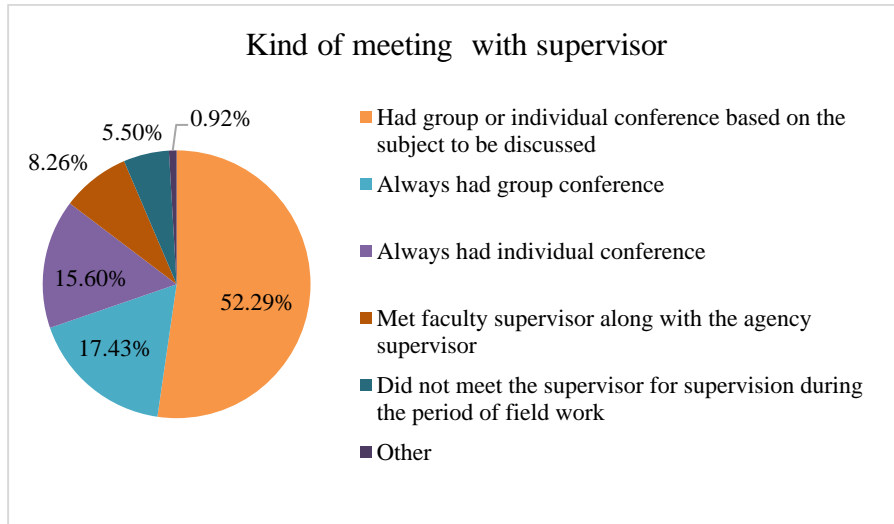
Supervision by faculty supervisor

Figure 9: Kind of meeting with supervisor

Half of the respondents (52%) had group or individual conference based on the subject to be discussed, 17% always had group conference, 15% always had individual conference whereas 8% respondents met faculty supervisor along with the agency supervisor and 5.5% did not meet supervisors for supervision during the period of field work.
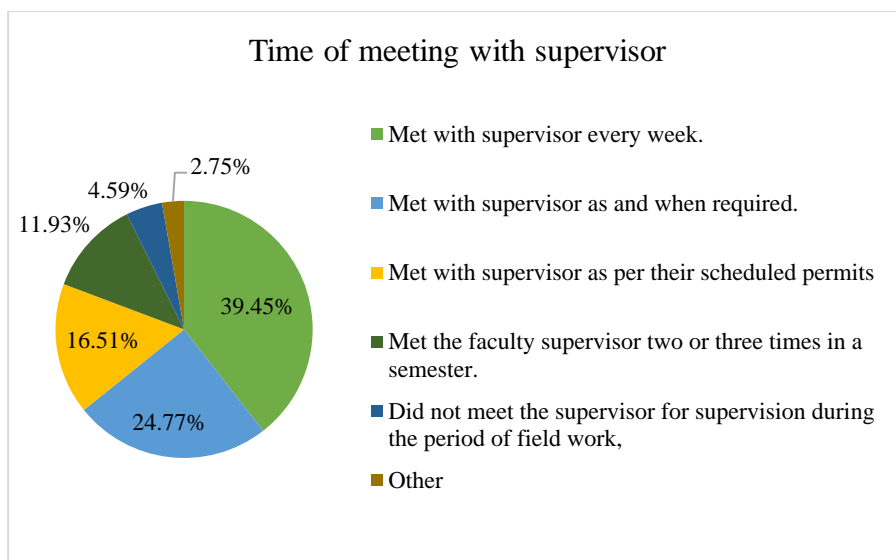
Figure 10: Time of meeting with supervisor

39.45% respondent met with supervisor every week and nearly one fourth met with supervisors as and when required. 12% met faculty supervisors two or three time in a semester whereas 4.59% did not meet their supervisor.
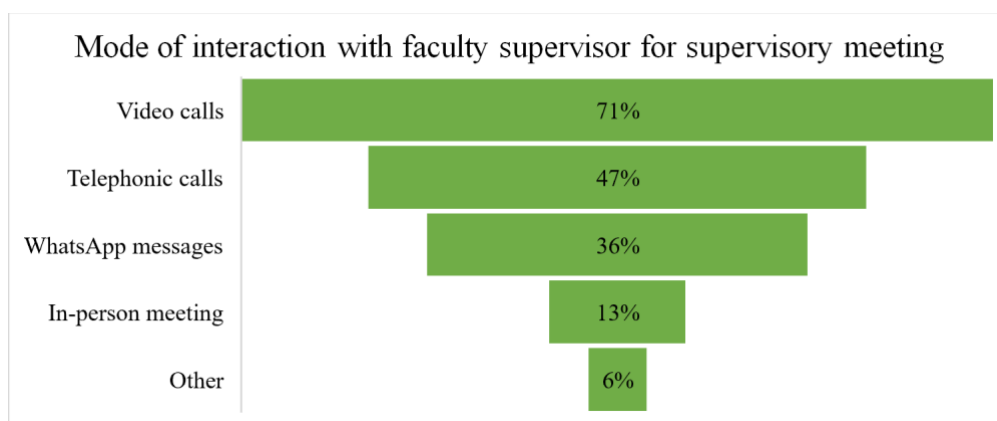
Figure 11: Mode of interaction with faculty supervisor for supervisory meeting

Supervisory meeting with faculty supervisors were primarily done over video (71%) or telephonic calls (47%), WhatsApp (36%) was the alternate medium, very few respondents were able to have in-person meeting with faculty supervisors (13%). It is to be noted that in campuses of India when students went for block placement before the pandemic, they did use different

modes to connect to each other. So, it was not a complete shift in interaction for the supervisory process. But what changed was for concurrent field work the students met with their faculty regularly which was not possible here. In the second phase of the pandemic there were first year students who had only met their faculty members virtually. These students faced difficulty in connecting with faculty members because of the 'lack of familiarity'.

Recordings/ reports submitted during the fieldwork for supervision.
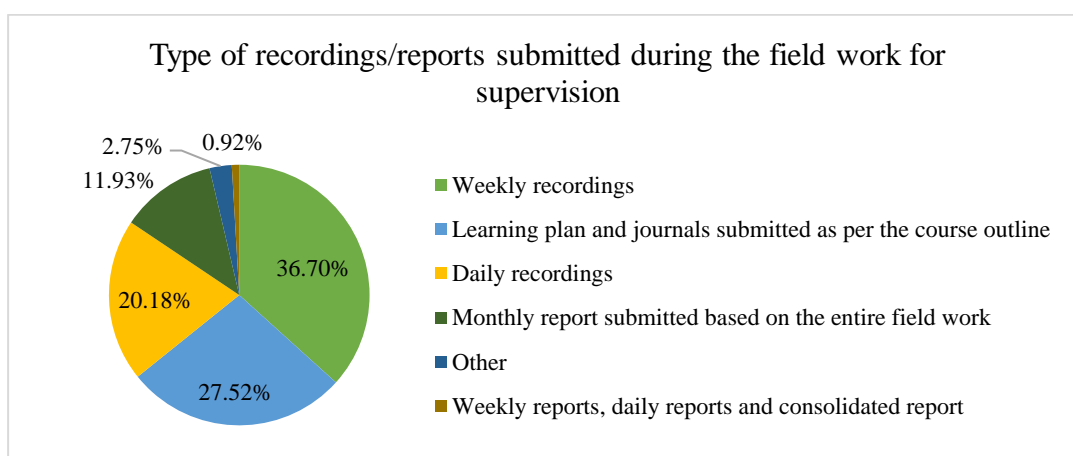

Figure 12: Type of recordings/reports submitted during the field work for supervision

Submission of weekly report was reported by 36.70% respondents followed by learning plan and journals submitted as per the course outline, while one – fifth (20%) reported about daily recordings as well. It is worth to note that learning plan and journals submission as per course outline was done by respondents from Canada. This could also be because every institute has its own evaluation process and requires different documents for evaluation. Nearly 12% had submitted consolidated monthly report. Less than 1% of respondents reported about submitting daily, weekly and consolidated report all together.

Qualitative data also highlights that majority had individual conference (IC) meeting with faculty supervisor once or twice a week and group conference (GC) whenever required. Video

calls and telephonic calls emerged as a main medium of interaction with faculty supervisor for supervision followed by WhatsApp, both in qualitative and quantitative findings. Other mode of interaction with low incidence were in person meeting, Google classroom, text message etc. Daily report/time diary emerged as a major reporting mechanism for recordings and updates to the faculty supervisor followed by consolidated/monthly report, which is in line with the quantitative findings. Others reported about submission of documents prepared for organization to report faculty supervisor as well. Very low incidence of no report submission has been observed.

> *We had ICs (Individual Conferences) and GCs (Group Conferences). For second semester IC and we have these. All these students who were placed under a single professor. So, we had these in a month and ICs every week, every other week. – R03MF*

> *For the third semester, I was not… like none of our batch mates were to meet our supervisors because our university was shut down, hence we were not able to meet supervisor. So, we would call them up and any kind of our notes, our difficulties, or any kind of our queries that we need to update him, those happen over phone, through calls or WhatsApp messages. And our reporting… we used to send all those fieldwork reports through mail or through this Google classroom submissions. Yeah, like I mentioned, I used to interact with him over call or through WhatsApp messages. – R14TB*

> *So basically, report writing was also one thing and daily, daily or after the gap of two days we used to have individual conference and after that once the group conference. It (supervisory meeting) was online, it is Google Meet. Like for (fieldwork discussion) sometimes Zoom, sometimes Google. With faculty supervisor, we used to have a call not on the regular interval, but almost on every single day or day after tomorrow like after interval of two days. So, we used to talk over phone. Like sometimes ma'am used to call us directly. How it is going on or we sometimes used to have a group call. On Weekends, basically. But even if we feel like we should talk to the supervisor. So, we used to talk to our faculty supervisors over WhatsApp or phone, or sometimes we have this like Google Meet also. -R18RG*

Challenges: Though alternate modes of communication were incorporated for supervisory meetings, incidences of connectivity issues, miscommunication, lack of clarity regarding instructions can be underlined which often remained unaddressed. These challenges questions the outcome of supervision process. The following response highlights the barriers to one respondent felt a 'good fieldwork.'

> *First, like I mentioned, the interaction with my department supervisor was one of the challenges and then the lack of clarity of what tasks to do. But yeah, here I would also like to mention that the department has created a format of these are the mandatory tasks that a student has to complete during this semester and these are the extra fieldwork activities among which they can choose and they can conduct this activity with the help of their fieldwork organization. That was one of the things that happened which is why I would say that these two things that I mentioned these two were the challenges and one of the other challenges that I think I feel that I am more of a person who… who can do really do good who can really do good in the field yeah, really do good in the field rather than the online medium – R14TB.*

Adaptation: With all such pros, cons and challenges, a bit flexibility in supervision process in online mode has been significantly observed helpful in adapting online/blended mode of fieldwork for both students as well as faculty supervisors right from being supportive as well as approachable and thus flexible supervision can be considered for incorporation in supervision process**.**

> *No, we did not face anything like that (communication hassle) because our faculty supervisor was quite approachable kind of person. So whenever we had anything to discuss with him, we used to just text him in the WhatsApp and get a time and whenever he was free to see us at that time, we can talk, interact with him. So it was very easy to interact with him. Even online mode, I found online mode more approachable for a faculty supervisor because during the offline mode we had a specific date like every Saturday you have to meet your faculty supervisor, within that time, you have to go and meet your faculty supervisor but at the same time, if your faculty supervisor is busy in something, then he can't give you too much of extra time. But in online mode, what it was, even my faculty supervisor is suppose he's free from 08:00 p.m. after completing his work, then he used to give his time okay, by 8:00pm you can talk to me. So we used to discuss with him (in that way), so it was more productive – R04IM.*

Innovation: It is worth to note that online mode of interaction for supervision and report submission in softcopy (MS Word, Excel, PPTs) have emerged as an alternative means that can be counted as innovation for traditional approach of social work fieldwork practicum.

> *"So, as I mentioned, daily reports, weekly reports, and a consolidated fieldwork report was submitted in form of documents and on calls. And on calls, we used to have weekly calls, review meeting calls, ICs, GCs with our supervisors, which was video call on Zoom or Google Meet. And in Chhattisgarh, there was connectivity issues. So often we used to have, like, voice calls with our professor."- R07MP*

Adaptation to the field : Learning and Challenges:
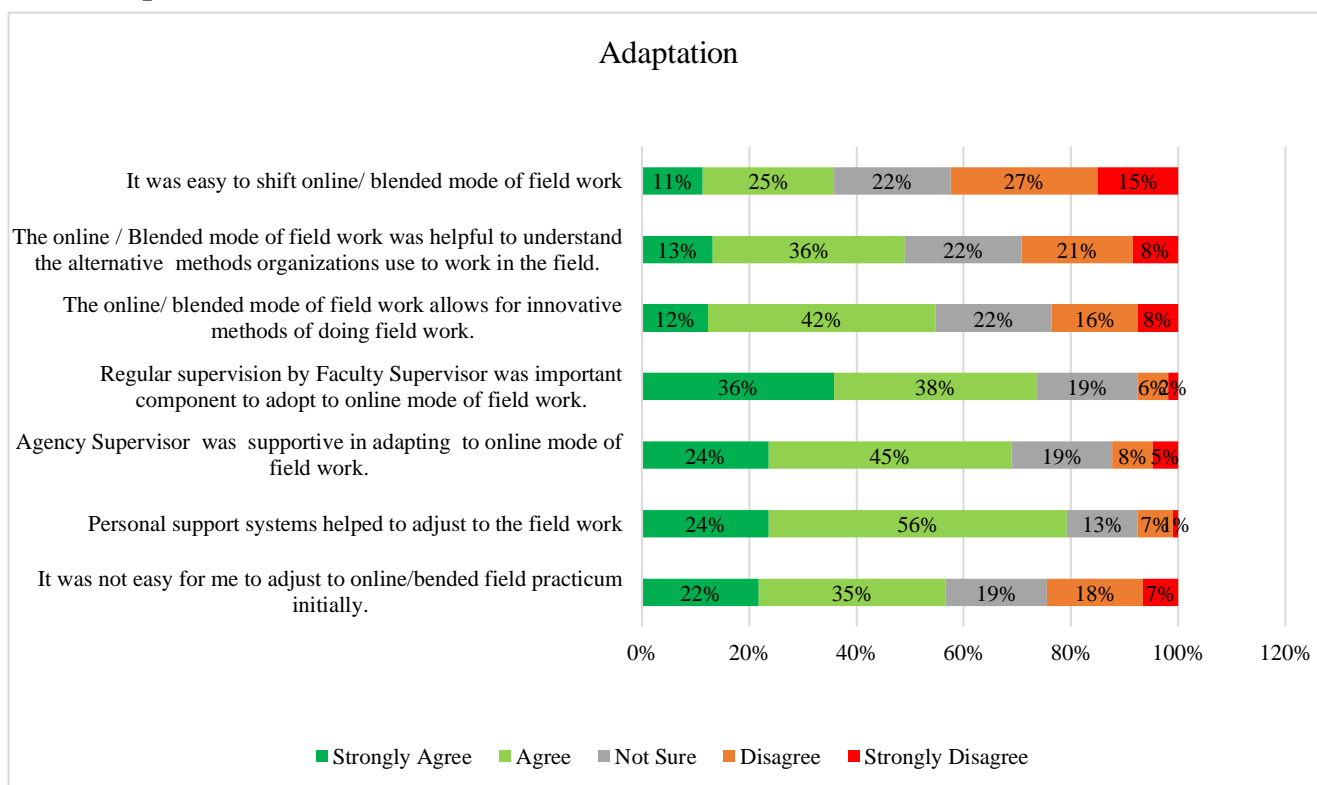
Adaptation –

Figure 13: Adaptation - overall

Personal support system helped majority of the respondents (80%) to adjust to the fieldwork while 74% respondents found regular supervision by faculty supervisor quite important to adapt online mode of fieldwork followed by agency supervisor support (69%) in adapting online mode of fieldwork.

More than a half (57%) found difficult to adjust to online/blended mode of fieldwork in contrast to nearly one – third (36%) who considered adapting online/blended mode of fieldwork easy.

Nearly half (49%) considered that online/blended mode of fieldwork led them to understand the alternative methods of fieldwork whereas 54% considered online/blended mode of fieldwork as an innovative method.

Major theme emerged from qualitative data reflects the proportion of respondents who found difficulty in adapting online mode of fieldwork was higher than those who found it easy to adapt, a further enquiry highlights the major reason of difficulties such as lack of resources required for online/blended mode of fieldwork in rural areas, familial reasons during pandemic which includes involvement in household chores, COVID – 19 related restrictions and fear of getting infections, lack of clear instructions regarding online/blended mode of fieldwork along with some other reasons. Few quotes from the narration of respondents reflects as:

So online mode is… I am basically from village so even I do not have good phone, there were network issue where you cannot access these things and if you have phones, there have no network availability everywhere, you cannot go in COVID also. In my village, mostly electricity is not available in day time, electricity is mostly for evening to morning and that time was summer also, so that time you cannot get easier way access to talk with people even when I am doing working in my phone, it was not charging quickly, so some charging issues. This kind of problem in your home, you have specifically other work also that you have to do. Sometimes our home condition is not well, this kind of problem have to face.
My parents are not much educated so they do not know what I am doing here, they did not question that much. They were asking me questions and sometimes say go to farm do well, why you are always using your mobile, Then I used to tell them that I am working on mobile, explained things and then they understood- R11OS

"So, in the pandemic, everyone was frustrated, everyone was isolated in the home, so most of the time environment of the home was not suitable and background noise were there. Actually, my home is in rural area. It is remote area and most of the time electricity was not there and my laptop does not have battery, that time it cannot run on its own battery, so you have to always plug in, when electricity is there then we can work. So, this thing I faced a lot regarding the electricity issue, regarding the background noise and required comfort so online mode the environment surrounding us was not suitable. So, when we just learning, we are just listening but the things are happening in the background are different things." -R16YP

In contrast respondents found easy to adapt due to familiarity with required skills along with privileged access of resources required for online/blended mode of fieldwork, supportive family environment (personal support system) and support from faculty supervisor were also contributed in ease to adapt online/blended mode of fieldwork.

> *Online mode of fieldwork was not challenging for me to adapt this technical or online thing because I was familiar with that and I attended… I did some courses before in Zoom mode or in this online mode on the Coursera and NPTEL course of IIT Bombay and I did some courses during my graduation also so this platform was not totally unaware. So, I was friendly with that (technical skills). But, one of the very big losses of me due to this pandemic is regarding the opportunity to work in mental health setup. So, as a mental health professional, you have to practice the counselling. According to curriculum, counselling course was taught in fourth semester and then all the activities were on this Zoom based so, when we are practicing that thing, we are practicing on this online mode and also, we don't have any options and we had option to go any counselling centre or reach out to any mental health professionals and understand what are the techniques. So we just finished task and… everyone in the fourth semester were just finishing the things not learning. – R16YP*

Learnings-
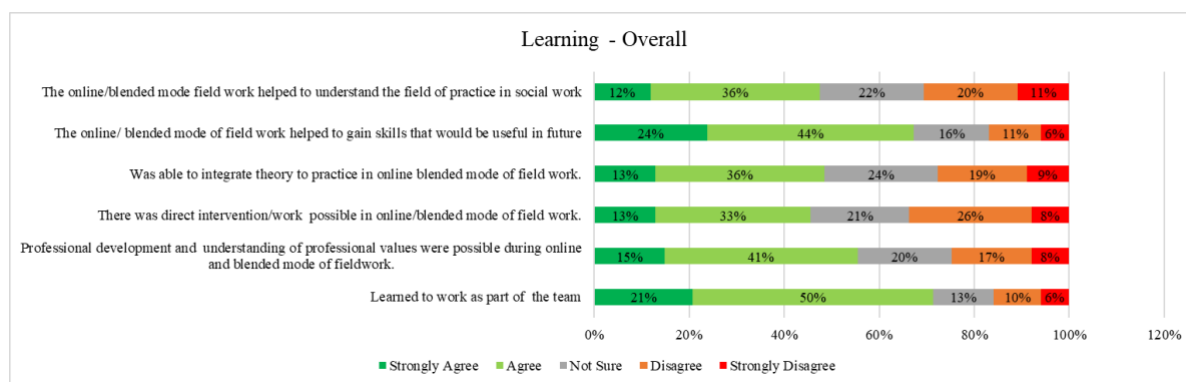
Figure 14: Learning - overall

Though majority (48%) has agreement that the online/blended mode fieldwork helped to understand the field of practice in social work but only 12% has strong agreement, whereas nearly one – third has disagreement for the same i.e. online mode of fieldwork did not help to understand field of practice in social work.

More than half (68%) has agreed that the online/ blended mode of field work helped to gain skills that would be useful in future. Nearly half of the responded (49%) consider that they

were able to integrate theory to practice in online/blended mode of field work, 28% have disagreement.

Less than half (46%) found possibilities for direct intervention/work in online/blended mode of field work, majority has either disagreement (34%) or not sure (22%) on this.

More than half (55%) believed that professional development and understanding of professional values were possible during online and blended mode of fieldwork whereas one – fourth has disagreement. Remarkably, 7 out of 10 had learned to work as part of the team during online/blended fieldwork.

Qualitative data analysis reflects in similar fashion that opportunity to learn and professional development was high and diverse set of learnings ranging from learning scope of doing online/blended mode of fieldwork, resilience, team work, learn to adapt in a difficult situation along with the various other reasons. The following highlights the learning tangent of one of our respondents.

> *During my online field work, what I actually learned is that there is a lot of scope of doing a number of things through the online medium that could really engage a large number of audiences. Online medium could be really impactful, very impactful medium to raise awareness on any topic because majority of the population has a smartphone at hand. So if we are able to circulate some really good contents over the social media platform so that would really create mass awareness generation. But yes, I would like to say one thing that I learned is that working in the community level, like working offline is much better and more productive than online medium. That is what I learned because if I was left to do all those tasks and also some other tasks in the field, I think I would have done more better way than it be in the social media platform. – R14TB*

Significant indication of not getting opportunity is also reflected in qualitative data analysis highlighting reasons such as limited scope of learning during online mode, online mode was a barrier, unhappy with the outcome of online mode of fieldwork and non-feasibility of online mode of fieldwork. For instance the following response shows how a section of our respondents perceive a loss of opportunity to learn during the online mode of fieldwork

See online mode of fieldwork was quite new thing for us, right? Just that we did not even learn that video call with your faces. What we can say, it was a new thing for us very much challenges faced during that time but yes, somehow it had gone…. What I say, somehow it went. Yeah.

The exposure which now… when we discuss about the team, can we see our juniors getting so much of exposure, seeing that I feel that we were left out with a lot of things to do which we could not do, which is like getting exposure to various organizations, communities, different people so we did not know much about it. – R19JS

Inputs through qualitative data also reveals that opportunities for gaining useful skills or professional development were reported by the respondents mentioning documentation skills, communication skills, documentation skills, technical skills such as learning Canva, tableau, MS office, time management etc. A few responses from qualitative data underlines the significance of offline mode of fieldwork over online mode, however the views splits indecisively in terms of comparison between the two modes of fieldwork.

I learned documentation skills while designing standard operating procedure (SOP) and also the technical things that I learned, like working in Tableau, working in Canva and all during this fieldwork. So, all the computer-based things, technical things I learned during this online fieldwork. Yeah, that is what I am thinking, offline… it is very subjective, okay. Because even in offline mode also we have our different learnings and in online we have different learning. What they do is engage students on these, I got opportunity to work on technical thing, so it was good to me.

But at the same time, if you had something different which I had to work upon, so it might be that I could have no learning also it could be difficult for me. The online fieldwork offering would be better for me in that way if I would have compared it. – R04IM
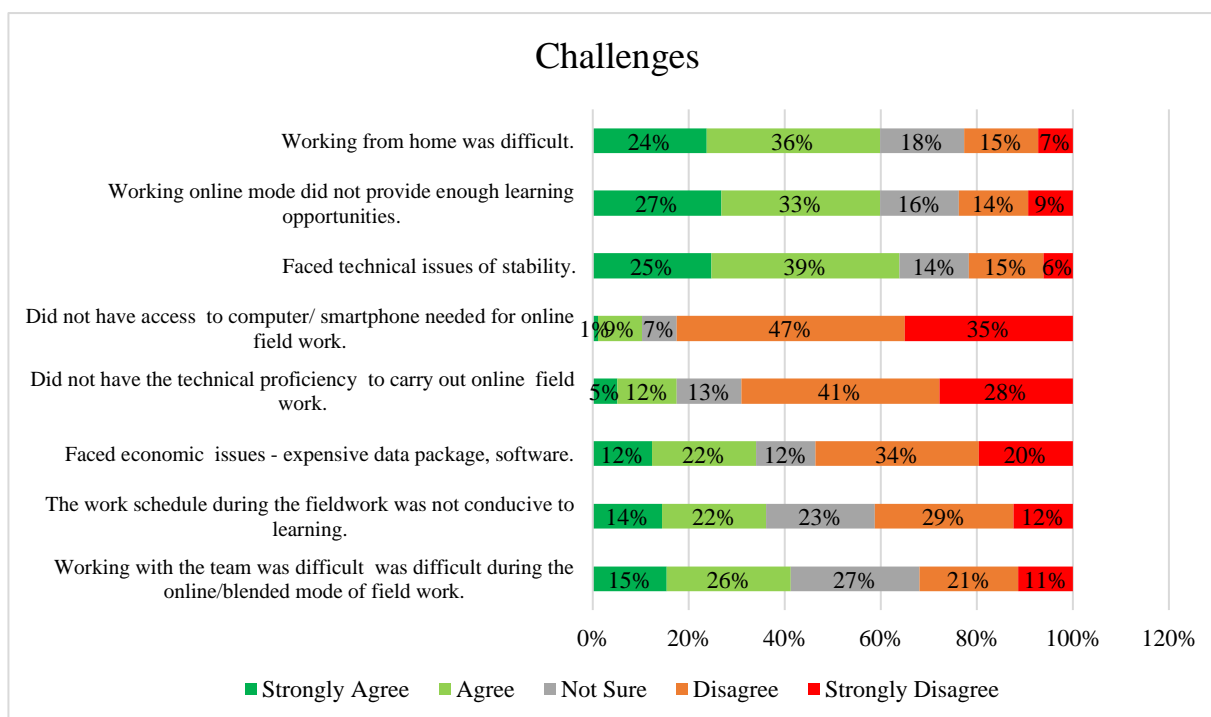
Challenges –

Figure 15: Challenges - overall

Challenges – Overall

60% of the respondents found that work from home was difficult, further same proportion found that working online mode did not provide them enough learning opportunities and 63% faced technical issues of stability.

Only 10% had no access to computer/ smartphone needed for online field work, subsequently, 17% did not have the technical proficiency to carry out online fieldwork. This reflects that accessibility of the devices is largely no longer an issue as majority (82%) respondents had access to computer/smartphone as well as skills needed for fieldwork.

One – third (34%) encountered challenges to face economic issues – such as availing expensive data package, software etc.

36% respondents agreed that the work schedule during the fieldwork was not conducive to learning, whereas slightly more (41%) has disagreement i.e. they found work schedule conducive to learning. However, unlike work schedule, 41% felt that working with the team was difficult during the online/blended mode of field work.

Qualitative data reflects similar results as insights highlight the high incidence of working from home as difficult and adaptation related challenges. Challenges related to adaptation was higher followed by challenges in terms of health and mental health, familial issues and household chores.

> *I was very disturbed at that time. Like mentally disturbed, I can say. I was a bit worried, now what next? Ya, it was like at that time, I had very much anxiety kind of issues. I was very stressed out, like thinking about my career based on my fieldwork activities only I am supposed to pursue my professional... start my professional career but now this is also not going in the right track or as expected. So what next? Like every time, I used to see very blank whenever I think of my future at that time. So it was very disturbing phase for me.*
> *I could not learn much like the way I expected. Maybe I could have learned much, maybe my skills have been improved much in a better way if I would have got chance for this offline field work, I could not connect to my work sometimes, like what I am actually doing, even connecting to supervisors also sometimes even when they used to connect, like, I won't be available, when I used to connect, they won't be available. They may suffer from few things. So, these kinds of issues were also there. Family situation were also like some... people were suffering from COVID right, so in need of that, we were maintaining our professional life also like education. So it was very challenging. – R17SA*

Challenges due to unavailability of resources required for online mode of fieldwork has also emerged as a major theme with reasons such as electricity, internet connection, electronic devices, availing transport facilities etc.

> *Time management was first problem. Then second was if we are (not) in the university, we cannot have one-to-one conversation with our supervisor directly, that was one drawback during online session, we cannot connect them whenever we want. We had to fix a time schedule like we had to share a Google meet link or zoom link so that we can interact with them and another major issue was charging problem, network issues. So these were challenges during online mode during the internship and field visit as well. – R01CB*

Challenges related to facing economic issues, maintaining work schedule, time management and balancing personal and professional life was also reflected through qualitative inputs in line with insights from quantitative data.

> *We do not have that kind of purchasing capability, we cannot buy battery. Though I was able to buy laptop after 3-4 months but some people do not have good financial conditions as well. Some of my friend came to help me. They are very polite. – R11OS*

Whereas few respondents reported that online mode of fieldwork did not provide enough opportunity to learn skills or even use the skills that they had, this can be understood through the narration:

> *It was very difficult for me because I did my Bachelor of Social Work also and even joined TISS for Masters of Social Work, So, that time it was like a totally different environment because I have been in field, in different agencies, working in different communities every time but for me, not going to the community but working from a different location and in a different mode. It was very new to me and very difficult to adapt that time because I was not able to use my skills and all those which I was practicing from so long like past four years. But I was not able to practice those things because that time it is like you have to depend upon your technical skills and communication skills only, okay. So, it was like for some moment it was like it hit me differently because I was not getting interest on that, it was something different. –R12AM*

Conclusion

Field practicum as an essential component of social work education undoubtedly has an established significance in terms of attaining self-development, skill development, understanding approaches and field practices. A systemic process of fieldwork practicum with clear objectives as per curriculum need to be followed while imparting social work education. However, unprecedented situations like pandemic COVID – 19 and lockdown has demanded a new consideration in fulfilling the essentiality of fieldwork curriculum. It is clear from the study that flexibility, innovation, and adaptability have been at the core of ensuring field work education experience. These experiences have been observed in all four institutions from India and Canada where the fieldwork practicum should be carried out by the students in online, blended or offline mode. Findings have evidently reflected the challenges during pandemic and lockdown, majority (85%) of the enrolled students were placed for fieldwork with assigned fieldwork supervisors, however they had to go for online or blended mode of fieldwork, remaining 15% respondents did fieldwork in online mode. This gap highlights the challenges of ensuring field practicum in difficult times.

This mixed method research study broadly reflects the experiences of students in online or blended of fieldwork, opportunities and barriers to the adaptations in social fieldwork education during pandemic times and documents innovations to ensure the essentiality of fieldwork practicum during pandemic time.

Fieldwork settings for online/blended mode of fieldwork was primarily centric to urban and rural geographies and mostly in NGOs (55%), very few (10%) got opportunity to be placed with governmental organization which is mostly due to the closure of government offices due

to lockdown. The distribution of thematic area highlights that respondents were largely placed in organization with central area of interventions in women and children (50%), Health (47%), mental health (38%), livelihood and entrepreneurship (29%), advocacy (25%) and very few in governance (8%) possibly due to the limited opportunity to be placed with governmental organization. Restriction on geographical area for fieldwork practicum was also largely restricted to the area agency (50%) or to the city/state/province respondents were located (25%).

Flexibility in following work schedule has been reported by the respondents however majority had followed the work schedule of the organization an a few were not bound to follow in work schedule on daily basis. Punctuality and time management is one of the key objectives of fieldwork practicum and such flexibility on the call of difficult times led educators to come up with innovative solutions – task centered fieldwork practicum and diversified work schedule were proven innovations. This innovation helped respondents to adapt the online/blended mode of fieldwork.

Unlike the offline mode and physical meeting with faculty supervisor for individual conference (IC) and group conference (GC), respondents had to opt online medium and thus ICs and GCs were conducted online mostly over video call, audio calls and WhatsApp. Very few got opportunity for In-person meeting for fieldwork supervision, however evidence of report submission remained satisfactory. One point to note is that in many cases where the students are placed for block placement, they would not have an opportunity to meet their faculty supervisors and communication has been through video or audio calls. So, an established form of interaction meant that it was easier to adapt during the pandemic. Challenges specially

communication, internet and information dissemination related challenges in facilitation of ICs and GCs has been reported by the respondents.

One of the key curiosities of the researchers was to understand respondent's adaptation, challenges and learning which has been understood through qualitative and quantitative findings. Difficulty in adaptation has been reported by the majority of the respondents however personal support system helped in adaptation to most of respondents (80%), nearly two – third respondents underlined that regular supervision by faculty supervisor was quite essential and helped them in adapting online/blended mode of fieldwork. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) have agreed that online/blended mode of fieldwork helped them to understand field of practice in social work but only 12% had strong agreement, one – third has strong disagreement on that and hence it can be concluded that online/blended mode of fieldwork did not help to majority to understand the field practices. Team work and technological skill required for online mode of fieldwork emerged as key learning for the majority which they consider useful for future work. Work from home mode was a primary adaptation for corporate and development sector works and thus respondents had to opt the same but 60% of the respondents found work from home quite difficult and working online/blend mode did not give enough learning opportunity. Challenges in adaptation for online/blended mode of fieldwork due to unavailability of required resources (internet, electronic devices, electricity etc), economic issues, maintaining work schedule and balancing personal and professional life during online mode remained challenging for many.

The study demonstrated that experiences of online/blended field work were diverse and heterogenous based on one's social location, early experiences of skill development, personal support systems and professional help. Nevertheless study holds potential for broadening the

paradigms of doing and learning for social work. One of drawbacks of the study is that experiences of faculty supervisors and agency supervisors remain unaccounted. Sector-specific and region-specific experiences are yet to be understood. Studies on experiences of social work students, educators and practitioners from other regions can illuminate our understanding of online/blended mode of field work to recalibrate social work education to contemporary socio-technical changes.

Recommendations:

The study highlights online/blended mode of field work does have pedagogical potential in changing times.

1) Online/blended fieldwork can be incorporated into fieldwork education because it provides opportunities for innovative work.

2) There is a need for established institutional protocols that will help navigate online or blended mode of fieldwork.

3) The role of field supervisor and faculty supervisor must be well defined and their own capabilities to ensure the learning of students will have to be enhanced.

4) Support systems in the form of technological resources and financial resources must be considered when planning online/ blended mode of field work.

5) Avenues for peer sharing and peer support have to be consciously established when doing online mode fieldwork.

6) Communication skills, Documentation skills, Time management skills, Resource mobilization skills, Technical skills can be areas of focus when doing online or blended mode of field work.

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