

**SOCIAL WORKERS KNOWLEDGE IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE
IN GOVERNMENT SOCIAL WELFARE INSTITUTIONS IN NORTH
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Mansur No.9, Padang Bulan, Medan*Email: pungkut@usu.ac.id**ABSTRACT**

Social problems are conditions that are born in a society that are not ideal, which means there is an unmet need. Social problems arise because there is a striking difference between the values and norms in society and the reality or reality that exists. In an effort to solve existing social problems, social workers are present as a humanitarian aid profession whose main goal is to help the social functioning of individuals, groups and communities to increase or improve their ability to function socially. In carrying out the profession as a social worker, knowledge is needed as a basis for practising social work. This study aims to determine how social workers' knowledge of social work practice at the Government Social Welfare Institution in North Sumatra Province. The results of this study are known. The knowledge possessed by social workers is different than expected; the busy factor of being a complex social worker is also an obstacle for social workers to review and update their knowledge. The social worker profession that emerged not from graduates from universities who have Social Welfare study programmes or the like also creates obstacles to social workers' knowledge.

Keyword: Knowledge, Government, Social, Welfare, Workers.**INTRODUCTION**

The Preamble of the 1945 Constitution establishes that the Indonesian government aims to "protect the entire Indonesian nation and all of Indonesia's spilt blood, promote public welfare, educate the nation's life, and participate in implementing a world order based on independence, lasting peace and social justice." The fifth principle of Pancasila also underscores "social justice for all Indonesian people." These foundational texts highlight that creating a just and prosperous society is a national goal for Indonesia, which necessitates achieving social welfare (Santoso et al., 2023). In pursuit of social welfare, the Indonesian government enacted Law Number 11 of 2009 concerning Social Welfare, replacing Law Number 6 of 1974. Article 1, Paragraph 2 of the 2009 law defines social welfare implementation as a direct, integrated, and sustainable effort by the central government, local governments, and the community through social services aimed at meeting citizens' basic needs, including social rehabilitation, social security, social empowerment, and social protection (Annava et al., 2023). Despite these efforts, implementing social welfare faces numerous complex challenges, both internal and external. These challenges encompass issues such as poverty, child welfare, family support, disabilities, and the impacts of natural and non-natural disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Prompt and effective

responses are necessary to ensure these issues do not hinder social welfare efforts. Law No. 11 of 2009 mandates that the government have human resources dedicated to social welfare implementation. Article 33 specifies that these human resources include social welfare workers, professional social workers, social volunteers, and social instructors. Further, Law No. 14 of 2019 concerning Social Workers emphasizes that addressing social welfare issues requires professional, planned, integrated, quality, and sustainable social work practices to enhance social functioning (Mezzina et al., 2022).

Social workers play a crucial role in addressing social problems individuals, groups, and communities face. Social workers serve both individuals and groups, including those dealing with poverty, minority communities, people with disabilities, abandoned children, and other social issues (Sunija et al., 2020). Social work is a professional activity aimed at helping individuals, groups, and communities improve their capacity for social functioning and create conducive environments for achieving their goals (Hamdy et al., 2023). This professional activity requires a blend of theoretical knowledge, the ability to apply theory and specific skills gained from experience (Napsiyah & Zaky, 2021). Social workers differ from other professions in that they view clients as targets of change within their social environments, including significant others who influence the clients. The primary focus of social work is to enhance social functioning through purposeful interventions. This focus on social functioning sets social work apart from other professions. Effective social work practice necessitates validated scientific knowledge. This interdisciplinary knowledge forms the foundation of social work science and is crucial because a lack of knowledge can hinder the detection and resolution of social problems. Social workers require a precise knowledge base for micro, mezzo, and macro practices. This knowledge base integrates and guides insights from practitioner experience, behavioural theories, and previous research, providing a comprehensive understanding of past, present, and future practice (Hamdy et al., 2023). In Indonesia, social workers typically operate within social welfare institutions (LKS), including social service institutions and rehabilitation centres (Ariefuzzaman, 2015). In North Sumatra Province, the government needs professional social workers (Peksos) to address social welfare problems (PMKS). However, social workers often need help in fulfilling this role effectively due to insufficient mastery of social work competencies (Grant & Kinman, 2018). This competency gap is partly due to the limited number of social workers with a robust scientific foundation in social work, leading to lenient recruitment practices and neglect of education and practical experience in social welfare. Given this context, it is essential to examine the knowledge of social workers practising at Government Social Welfare Institutions in North Sumatra Province. This study explores how well social workers are equipped with the necessary knowledge for effective practice in this region.

METHOD

The research design used in this study is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive method focuses attention on actual phenomena at the time the research is being conducted, showing the facts about the problem under study accompanied by an accurate and rational interpretation of data or information (Hermawan, 2019). This research design is considered appropriate to describe social

Proceeding 2nd Medan International Economics and Business

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2024

“Human Resource Transformation and Collaborative Innovation to Build Independent and Competitive Business in the Digital Era”

workers' knowledge in social work practice. This research was conducted at the Government Social Welfare Institution in North Sumatra Province.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social work is a profession responsible for improving and developing interactions between people so that these people can carry out life tasks to overcome the difficulties experienced and realize aspirations and values. In carrying out these responsibilities, knowledge is needed to facilitate carrying out various activities according to the duties of the social work profession. Knowledge is a set of known and understood information formed from behavioural and social science concepts and developed through research and practice. In social work practice, a social worker must have scientific knowledge that has been tested for truth and accuracy (Socialwork.buffalo.edu, 2022). Social workers must have knowledge according to existing standards or regulations. Suppose the knowledge of social workers is below standard. In that case, it will undoubtedly impact the application of skills to handle various kinds of cases, both individuals, families and groups. Social workers' knowledge has been included in the Regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2020 concerning Social Work Practice Standards Article 3 letter b which states that the competence of Social Workers consists of knowledge, skills and values. Knowledge in Article 13 is defined as a set of known and understood information built from behavioural science and social science concepts and developed through research and practice. Furthermore, Article 13, paragraph 2 states that the knowledge that social workers must have must be about:

1. Cultural diversity in Indonesia
2. The influence of ideological, political, economic, social, and cultural systems, as well as national defence and security, on individuals, groups, communities, and countries
3. Fundamental theories and levels of social work interventions, both micro, mezzo, and macro and other relevant theories
4. Social research methods to develop new Social Work Practice knowledge
5. Application of fundamental theories and other sources of knowledge to enrich Social Work Practice

Social workers at the Government Social Welfare Institution in North Sumatra Province still do not provide many services to PPKS (Social Welfare Service Providers) per the theoretical standards, soft skills and heart skills by Law NO. 14 of 2019 and Permensos No. 14 of 2020. The lack of optimal service is due to social workers' need for optimal knowledge. In Permensos No. 14 of 2020, social worker knowledge consists of various very complex aspects, such as knowledge of Indonesian cultural diversity. Knowledge about cultural diversity in Indonesia, owned by social workers, consists of four points, one of which is understanding the complexity of cultural identity and its influence on practice, both on oneself and others. Social workers are also required to know the influence of ideological, political, economic, social, and cultural systems, as well as national defence and security on individuals, groups, communities, and countries, consisting of eight points that must be fulfilled, including knowledge of social structures and power in society that affect both positively and negatively on gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and economically vulnerable groups and various other knowledge by existing regulations. The

Proceeding 2nd Medan International Economics and Business

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2024

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existing services still need to be more optimal due to internal factors, namely that social workers need to have better knowledge about social workers according to existing laws and Permensos.

Social worker knowledge

Social workers' current knowledge has begun to increase compared to five or ten years ago. Social workers are known to have understood the theories in social work practice. They also have technical skills, both soft skills and hard skills, as required by this profession. This increase in knowledge is inseparable from the development of the social work profession and the needs of society and government for the existence of this profession (Trevithick, 2008). Social workers are currently required to have complex knowledge that aligns with the development and progress of the times. The progress of the times as it is today is far different from the birth counter of social workers, so increasing knowledge is necessary. Social work has strong epistemological roots in social welfare science, where social work practice is an axiological form of social welfare science epistemology as a scientific building. Thus, the epistemological basis of social work is Social Welfare Science, both of which are an existential unity where social work practice and social welfare science are inseparable and are one body that explains each other (Puansah, 2020).

Currently, with the development of technology-driven times and the emergence of disruption in all aspects of life, problems are increasingly complex. However, currently, the knowledge and skills social workers possess are not as expected in handling social welfare problems or providing services. This is inseparable from the fact that many social worker professions still emerge not from graduates from universities that have Social Welfare study programs or the like. However, from other study programs, enter work in social service institutions. They can indeed assist without the theory and knowledge that they should have. The skills obtained are not from research development or practicum but from the experience gained when entering the service institution. Another aspect that causes the knowledge possessed is still not optimal because they are busy with the routine of social workers practising both in government and non-government environments, with limitations in reviewing and updating social work theories simultaneously. To obtain complex knowledge through existing regulations, extensive time and opportunities are needed, but with the many activities of social workers, they are hampered in increasing knowledge capacity.

The Role of Higher Education in Increasing Social Workers' Knowledge

Higher education plays an important role in the pace of development, especially in community development, by strengthening and producing human resources (HR) for social development. Higher education is also one of the pillars of the nation's progress, a place to prepare human resources for implementing development, especially development in the field of social welfare (Almendarez, 2011). In this case, universities with social welfare study programs can provide more specific knowledge about the profession of social work. In the social welfare study program, several courses are specifically related to aspects of social workers, such as Introduction to Social Welfare Science, Theory of Social Work Practice, Fundamentals of Social Work, Sociological Theory for Social Work, English for Social Work, and Psychology. In addition, core courses are part of the main methods of social work,

Proceeding 2nd Medan International Economics and Business

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2024

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namely Social Case Work courses and Social Group Work courses. There are also auxiliary methods of social work that are also courses, namely Social Research, Social Work Administration and Organization, and Social Action. Universities also have a curriculum that can be used as a basis for learning. In this case, the curriculum prepared has met the needs of social work institutions (Wang, 2023). The existing curriculum has also been adapted to the times and the courses in it have also responded to the core curriculum according to what has been recommended by the study program association (ASPEKSI). The curriculum contained in the world of education has also been compiled and involves stakeholders, alumni users, experts, and managers of social work institutions. Universities can also play a role in the tri-dharma activities of higher education, namely education, research, and community service. This is important because community service and empowerment are two pillars of the Tridharma of Higher Education, a series of activities in the context of higher education's contribution to society that are concrete and directly beneficial.

CONCLUSION

Social workers are the primary profession that plays the most role in social welfare development. The presence of social workers is an effort to overcome problems in social welfare and provide solutions to social services, which are a form of social worker activity in their professional practice. So that social workers have their role in society. Social workers must have competence in the form of knowledge based on existing regulations, namely Regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2020 concerning Social Work Practice Standards. Social workers at the Government Social Welfare Institution in North Sumatra Province have not been able to provide optimal services because their knowledge and skills have not met expectations; this is inseparable from the complex knowledge that social workers must have by existing regulations coupled with busyness as complex social work is an obstacle to reviewing and updating their theories. The number of social worker professions that emerge not from undergraduate Social Welfare study programs or the like also raises issues about social workers' knowledge. Social workers who emerge not from undergraduate Social Welfare programs in practice can provide assistance, but without the theory and knowledge that is in accordance with the learning context, social workers' knowledge becomes less mature.

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Volume 2, Issue 1, 2024

“Human Resource Transformation and Collaborative Innovation to Build Independent and Competitive Business in the Digital Era”

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