PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK FIELD PLACEMENT ON OPPORTUNITY TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES AMONG RURAL DWELLERS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Inequality concerns variations in living standards across a whole population. It is when a category of people is attributed an unequal status when compared to another. The study examined the influence of community social work field placement on opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. The study used the survey research design and the purposive sampling technique. Three (3) research hypotheses were raised to guide the study. Chi-square statistics was used to analyze the data collected for the study. The finding revealed that there was significant influence of involving community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle social inequalities among rural dwellers. ($X^2 = 1154.538$, $DF = 80$, $P<0.05$). The study also established there was significant influence of involving community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle social inequalities among rural dwellers. ($X^2 = 1154.538$, $DF = 80$, $P<0.05$). The result indicated that there was significant influence of practicing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle social inequalities among rural dwellers. ($X^2 = 374.884$, $DF = 88$, $P<0.05$). The study therefore recommended that community social workers on field placement should be engaged in mobilizing and sensitizing members of the community in participating in community work.

Keywords: Perceived influence, community social work, field placement, opportunity, tackle inequalities

Introduction

Inequality is the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions or statuses within a group or society. It portends unequal opportunity or dealing showing disparity in social, racial, ethnic, political or economic circumstances or situations. Inequality distinguishes the rich from the poor and determines the type of services that each category of people is able to acquire or access. Owing to the all-encompassing effect of inequality on the society, it becomes not just necessary but important to sensitize members of the public on the ills of social inequality with special focus on the responsibilities of the three tiers of government to ameliorate it. Karabanow (2003) argues that inequality exists across the entire social gradient of many societies. Inequalities are differences in income, resources, power and status by those in powerful positions via institutions and social processes (Burke & Ngonyani, 2003). Social inequality ballooned after the labor market went through profound transformation due to globalization, technological change, and policy reforms (Walker, 2009). People with skills in high demand in the IT or financial sectors, for instance, have seen their earnings rise significantly while low-skilled workers have been left behind.

In Nigeria, as is the case in most developing economies, inequality is a thoroughly contentious and recurring issue. The difference between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ can be seen all too clearly, with the lavish lifestyles of a few existing side-by-side with the squalor of the many. Inequality is however, by no means restricted or limited to poor economies. Therefore, while inequality is closely related to poverty, the two issues should be looked at separately because inequality is not ultimately defined by poverty as it still exists in countries with low poverty levels. In fact, the world economy as a whole shows a high level of inequality even though low income countries account for 62% of the world’s income (Walker, 2009). Inequality in Nigeria has three inter-related but distinct aspects, inequality of wealth, inequality of income and inequality of opportunity. It also takes at least three distinct dimensions: inequalities between urban and rural populations, between rich and poor, and between the genders. The gender issue is a serious and complex problem in itself and is part of the social phenomenon.

In order to reduce the rate of inequality, Nigeria needs to build smart institutional frameworks and design effective whole-of-government strategies, targeted and well-coordinated policies encompassing quality education and skills development to promote employment and employability. Education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability
of an individual (Cox & Pawar, 2006). It is the process by which the society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. It is an essential tool for achieving sustainability and moving a society forward. Education, according to Congress, (2006) should make the individual an instrument of happiness for himself and for his fellows, foregoing a common identity, promoting citizenship and providing the individual with job skills.

Community social work field placement is a requirement that advances the classroom teaching skills of students in social work thereby providing an enabling situation for the student to merge theory with practice. The student, through this process, thus becomes exposed to several cases during his/her field placement and is able to gather ideas, learn lots of skills and experiences that would be required for future community social work practices. The student is able to learn to listen and get feedback not only from colleagues or professionals but also from the client themselves in order to further improve future services. The student social worker is also able to learn about the self and how the discoveries on the field are able to make him/her a better social worker who is able to find answers with clients (DASW, 2004).

Community social work field placement is an integral component of social work education anchored within the mission, goals and educational level of the program. It occurs in settings that reinforce students’ identification with the purpose, values and ethics of the profession. It fosters the integration of empirical and practice-based knowledge and promotes the development of professional competence. Community social work field placement is systematically designed, supervised, coordinated and is evaluated on the basis of how well the students demonstrate the achievement of program objectives. The involvement of community social workers in community-based programs that fosters human capital development is an effective way of engaging the professional in social development (Olaleye, 2013). Community social work field placement is the application of skills to alter the behavioral patterns of community groups, organizations and institutions or people’s relationships and interactions. Netting, Kettner and MacMurtry, (1993) conceive of community practice as part of macro-practice.

According to O’Conner et al, (2006), of all the learning experiences available on social work courses, the one that students cite as being most memorable are their practice placements. This assertion is premised on the fact that community social work field placement involves integrating theory and practice in community social work. They also stress that placement provokes an opportunity to learn from others—service users, community social work colleagues and other stakeholders as well as chance to practice the skills gained from prior learning.

In community social work field placement, new sets of behaviors, methods or skills that can be effective in designed situations are acquired. In addition, community social work field placement affords an opportunity to develop more knowledge about how well systems (be they families, communities, organizations and so on) work or what can go wrong. Such information is used to enhance better relationships among the community social workers and their clients.

Community social work is committed to preparing students competent enough to address the needs of vulnerable populations and persons for whom the quality of life is threatened, prepare students to provide community social work services at the entry level to address the needs of clients and populations in their transactions with the environment, prepare students to practise at the advanced level to integrate their analytic and practical skills with areas of social concern. Achieving these objectives requires that students be placed in agencies and settings where they will have well-structured assignments and consistent field instruction (Askeland & Payne, 2001).

One role that derives increased attention is community development, which requires skills in community analysis, social planning, community organizing and social action. Community development requires the ability to foster economic opportunities for area residents through work on industrial retention, local business development, job training, and placement. Another role is community practice which calls for community social workers to help people to discover their own resources and their own ability to create influence and positive change (Jacquemin, 2006).

Globally, community social workers are trained professionals with unique education and experience providing a wide range of services across the human life span and in a wide variety of
settings. Community social workers may play all these roles in different contexts and at different times in their career and there may well be conflicts between them. Community social work field placement is a new opportunity that adds to the knowledge and skills of students and at the same time, utilizes a variety of skills and techniques and is consistent with its holistic focus on persons and their environments (Neckerman & Torche, 2007).

For many developing countries and emerging economies, reducing inequalities will require tackling informality, expanding the social security system, and reducing unemployment. It is obvious that community social work field placement is an opportunity to tackle the menace of inequality. With community social work field placement, community members are able to participate in community projects with the community social work students themselves as students on field placement in collaboration with the community members are able to identify the problems in the community and attempt to find solutions to them. Taking joint decisions in matters concerning the development of the community reduces inequalities. The psychological implication of such move is that the underprivileged groups such as women, the illiterates, the poor, the children and the aged feel relieved as they are mainstreamed into the development process in the community.

Based on the foregoing, the study intends to examine the influence of community social work field placement as an opportunity to tackle social inequalities among rural dwellers in Nigeria. The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of using community social work field placement as a tool to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. The study also seeks to find out the influence of practising community social work field placement as an opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. This paper intends to look at the functional and conflict theories as the theoretical framework on which to base the study.

The Functional Theory

The functional theory is a sociological theory that originally attempts to explain social institutions as a collective means to meet individual biological needs. This theory draws inspiration from the ideas of Durkheim who was concerned with the question on how to maintain internal stability and to survive over time. It is a mechanical solidarity where everyone performs tasks that hold the society tighter. Functional theory assumes that in the different parts of a society, each one has their own role to play, working together to form a harmonious whole. The metaphor often used to describe functionalism is that it views societies as a body with different parts of society, government, media, religion, family, and so on. Many functionalists argue that social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system and that a change in one institution will precipitate a change in other institutions. Functional theorists believe that inequality is inevitable and desirable and plays an important function in society. Important positions in society require more training and thus should receive more rewards.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory argues that society is not best understood as a complex striving for equilibrium but rather as a competition. Society is made up of individuals competing for limited resources, for example, money, leisure, sexual partners and so on. Some people and organizations have more resources i.e. power and influence and use those resources to maintain their positions of power in the society. The structural functionalist approach argues that the society tends towards equilibrium focusing on stability at the expense of social change. This is in contrast to conflict theory that argues that society is constantly in conflict over resources. The following are the primary assumptions of modern conflict theory:

1. Competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships.
2. Competition, rather than consensus, is characteristic of human relationships.

Inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures (Farley & Smith, 2006). Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained. Change occurs as a result of competing interest rather than through adaption. They also view inequality as resulting from groups with power dominating less powerful groups. They believe that inequality prevents and hinders societal progress as those in power repress the powerless people in order to
maintain the status quo. Positions are important so far as those in power consider them to be significant.

**Research Hypotheses**

- **Ho₁** There is no significant influence of mobilizing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers.

- **Ho₂** There is no significant influence of involving community social work field placement opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers.

- **Ho₃** There is no significant influence of practising community social work field placement opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The study used descriptive survey design. The independent variables are the opportunities to tackle social inequalities while the dependent variable is the community social work field placement. This research design was used to facilitate easy collection of factual information about the research problem.

**Population of the Study**

The target populations for the study are both male and female community social workers, practising social workers on field work, community representatives, and change agents in the rural areas of Ondo State.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

Purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents from the communities. The population for the study comprised 300 respondents from rural communities in Ondo State. Random sampling technique was used to select 6 communities from Ondo State. 50 respondents were randomly selected from each community to give a total of 300 respondents.

**Research Instrument**

The main instrument used for the study is questionnaire tagged: “Perceived Influence of Community Social Work Field Placement in Opportunity to Tackle Inequalities among Rural Dwellers Questionnaire” (PICSWFPOIRDQ). The researcher adapted an instrument called Audience Measurement Scale by Meyer 1988. Responses were recorded on a four-point scale from strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) to Disagree (D).

**Validity and Reliability of the Study**

The questionnaire used for this study was validated to achieve its aims. Validity is the extent to which the instrument designed measures what it is designed to measure. To validate the contents of the instrument, the instrument was presented to researcher colleagues in the Department of Social Work, and other experts in the field of evaluation. Their comments were incorporated into the final drafting of the questionnaire.

Reliability is the degree of consistency between two sets of observations obtained with the same instrument. Pilot study was conducted in another community different from the one sampled, 30 respondents were used and the information collected was used to calculate using Cronbach Alpha.
reliability coefficient that yielded “r” value 0.85.

**Data Analysis**

Chi-Square statistics was used to the data collected.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Table 1: Chi-Square Showing the Influence of Mobilizing Community Social Work Field Placement in Opportunity to Tackle Inequalities among Rural Dwellers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mobilizing opportunities to tackle</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inequalities</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA A SD D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X¹</td>
<td>158 52.7% 127 42.3% 0 0% 10 3.2%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td>365.144</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>185 61.7% 95 31.7% 0 0% 15 5.0%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X³</td>
<td>161 53.7% 124 41.3% 0 0% 10 3.3%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X⁴</td>
<td>99 33.0% 183 61.0% 3 1.0% 10 3.3%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X⁵</td>
<td>129 43.0% 140 46.7% 15 5.0% 11 3.7%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that there was significant influence of mobilizing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers ($X^2 = 365.144$, $DF = 64$, $P<0.05$). From the result obtained from testing hypothesis one, it is revealed that there was significant influence of mobilizing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. Therefore, null hypothesis (HO) state that there is no significant influence of mobilizing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers was rejected.

**Table 2: Chi-Square Showing the Influence of Involving Community Social Work Field Placement in Opportunity to Tackle Inequalities among Rural Dwellers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Involving opportunities to tackle inequalities</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA A SD D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X¹</td>
<td>125 71.7% 75 25.0% 0 0% 5 1.7%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td>1154.538</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>147 49.0% 133 44.4% 0 0% 15 5.0%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X³</td>
<td>144 48.0% 138 42.7% 3 1.0% 20 6.7%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X⁴</td>
<td>127 42.3% 147 49.0% 1 0.3% 20 6.7%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X⁵</td>
<td>119 39.7% 136 45.3% 0 0% 40 13.3%</td>
<td>295 100%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals that there was significant influence of involving community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers ($X^2 = 1154.538$, $DF = 80$, $P<0.05$). From the result obtained from testing hypothesis two, it established that there was significant influence of involving community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. Therefore, null hypothesis (HO) state that there is no significant influence of involving community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers was rejected.
dwellers was rejected.

**Table 3: Chi-Square Showing the Influence of Practicing Community Social Work Field Placement in Practising Opportunity to Tackle Inequalities among Rural Dwellers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Practising opportunities to tackle inequalities</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X₁</td>
<td>SA 12.0% A 37.7% SD 16.7% D 32.0%</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>374.884</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X₂</td>
<td>15.7% 85 28.3% 66 22.0% 97 32.3%</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>374.884</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X₃</td>
<td>17.7% 85 28.3% 82 27.3% 75 25.0%</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>374.884</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X₄</td>
<td>14.3% 104 34.7% 71 23.7% 77 25.7%</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>374.884</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X₅</td>
<td>12.0% 100 33.3% 17 25.7% 82 27.3%</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>374.884</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals that there was significant influence of practising community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. (X² = 374.884, DF = 88, P<0.05). From the result obtained from testing hypothesis two, it established that there was significant influence of practicing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. Therefore, the null hypothesis (HO) states that there is no significant influence of practising community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers was rejected.

**Discussions**

The result in research hypothesis one established that there was significant influence of mobilizing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers (X² = 365.144, DF = 64, P<0.05). Therefore, null hypothesis (HO) state that there was no significant influence of mobilizing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers was rejected. The result obtained tallies with the findings from a study conducted by Neckerman & Torche, (2007) which established that the community social work field placement is a new opportunity that would add to the knowledge and skills which also utilizes a variety of skills, techniques and consistent with its holistic focus on persons and their environments.

It was also discovered in hypothesis two that there was significant influence of involving community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. (X² = 1154.538, DF = 80, P<0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis (HO) that states that there is no significant influence of involving community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers was rejected. This study is in agreement with the findings of Olaleye, (2013) which found that involvement of community social workers in community-based programs that foster human capital development is an effective way of engaging the professional in social development.

Research Hypothesis three indicates that here was significant influence of practicing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers. (X² = 374.884, DF = 88, P<0.05). Therefore, null hypothesis (HO) state that there is no significant influence of practicing community social work field placement in opportunity to tackle inequalities among rural dwellers was rejected. This finding corroborates the study of Jacquemin, (2006) which stated that community practice calls for community social workers to help people to discover their own resources and their own ability to create influence and positive change.
Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has established that the level of inequality that exists in the educational sector can be reduced through adequate funding and providing the necessary equipment so that knowledge impacted on the child of the rich can also be made available to the child of the poor and both categories can have equal access to opportunities in the labour market and can be very productive in the corporate world. Community social work students on field placement have the opportunity to raise the hope of the hopeless. The study recommends that:

i. Skills acquisition programs be made available for individuals who cannot go to school or access formal education and the sustainability of such programs should be ensured.
ii. Participants who are trained should be provided with funds to begin their trade. This ensures that the individual becomes self-employed and is able to create jobs for others.
iii. Tax and benefit policies should be reformed. This can also improve the distribution of income.
iv. Policies are laid down rules that guides the several activities carried out in an area. The government should make policies that should be adhered to, not only by the poor but also by the rich. In Nigeria, people, especially the rich, evade tax in spite of having big and lucrative businesses.
v. Community social workers should be engaged in mobilizing and sensitizing people in participating in community work.

References


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