Research on Social Work Practice for Enhancing Core Competencies of Social Workers

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the key role of enhancing the core competencies of social workers in social work practice. Through literature research, it combs through the constituent elements of social workers' core competencies, analyzes the ability shortfalls in current social work practice combined with practical cases, and deeply discusses the strategies and paths for enhancing core competencies. The study shows that improving the core competencies of social workers is of great significance for optimizing service quality and promoting the professional development of the social work industry, which requires collaborative efforts at the individual, institutional, and social levels to construct a sound capability enhancement system.

Keywords: Social workers; Core competencies; Social work practice; Capability enhancement

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of China's urbanization process and the gradual improvement of the social public service system, the demand for social work services continues to grow, putting forward higher requirements for the quality of social work services, which poses a severe challenge to many social workers. In this context, the government should cultivate more high-quality social workers, continuously improve their professional and core competencies, so as to meet the development needs of social work, enable them to carry out social service work in rural and urban communities, meet the needs of the masses, thereby promoting the construction of a harmonious society and improving the public's satisfaction with social work. The government should focus on cultivating social workers' core competencies, professional knowledge, practical skills, values, and professional ethics, eliminate their job burnout, and enhance their professional identity, so as to cultivate a team of social workers with high professional literacy and a willingness to contribute. This paper analyzes the constituent elements of social workers' core competencies, expounds the problems existing in the current social workers' community practice, and puts forward corresponding solutions, providing a reference for the cultivation of social workers.

2. Constituent elements of social workers' core competencies

2.1. Professional knowledge system

In the new era, social workers should not only have solid professional knowledge, such as sociology, psychology, law, and public management, but also be competent in community public service work. Sociological knowledge can help social workers understand the characteristics of service work in rural and urban communities, discover existing problems, and provide timely help to service recipients [1]. Psychological knowledge can help social workers understand the psychological state and emotional demands of service recipients, such as helping to mediate neighborhood disputes and care for left-behind children, so as to help service recipients solve various problems and win their recognition. Legal knowledge can help social workers carry out community law popularization and legal aid promotion work, and help service recipients safeguard their legitimate rights and interests. For example, community workers can assist the neighborhood committee in mediating family conflicts, analyze the root causes of family conflicts using sociological knowledge, analyze the emotional demands of family members using psychological knowledge, and use legal knowledge to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of women and children, so as to successfully resolve family conflicts [2].

2.2. Practical skills

Practical skills refer to the ability of social workers to use professional knowledge to solve practical problems, including communication skills, case work skills, group work skills, community work skills, etc. Good communication skills can help social workers narrow the distance with service recipients, win their trust, and thus quickly and accurately understand their needs. Case work skills can help social workers formulate personalized service plans according to the needs of service recipients, help them solve problems, and improve work quality. Group work skills can help social workers participate in group activities, participate in community service work as a group, and improve personal and professional capabilities [3]. For example, when carrying out elderly service projects, community workers can mobilize community volunteers to participate, care for the lives of the elderly, establish good communication with them, and understand their living and emotional needs, so as to improve the quality of community group work.

2.3. Professional values and ethics

Social workers should establish professional values of respect, acceptance, empathy, and fairness, enhance personal and professional identity and social responsibility, and actively serve others and society. In their work, social workers should respect the personality and privacy of service recipients, accept their differences, use empathy to understand their difficulties and emotional needs, formulate personalized service plans, and treat each service recipient fairly. For example, when dealing with privacy disputes of service recipients, social workers should use empathy to understand their difficulties, accept their various needs, strictly protect their privacy, and help them seek legal aid to ensure their legitimate rights and interests.

2.4. Self-reflection and learning ability

Due to the economic differences between urban and rural areas and the large mobility of personnel, the current social work environment is relatively complex, and the scope of service recipients is very wide, which puts forward higher requirements for the core competencies of social workers [4]. In order to be better qualified for community work, social workers should improve their self-reflection and learning abilities. On the one hand, they should reflect on past social work, summarize excellent work experience, make up for their own shortcomings, and

modestly accept the suggestions of service recipients to continuously improve their personal capabilities. On the other hand, social workers should continue to learn new concepts and knowledge to improve their comprehensive abilities. For example, social workers should learn new social work concepts and gain excellent work experience through the Internet, participate in online training, and use fragmented time to improve core professional skills, be competent for new work challenges, and thus improve the quality of social work services[5].

3. Problems of core competencies in current social work practice

3.1. Insufficient application of professional knowledge

In actual work, although some social workers have mastered certain professional knowledge, they have difficulties in applying theoretical knowledge to practice[6]. For example, when facing complex social problems, they cannot accurately use the learned theoretical knowledge to analyze and solve them, resulting in service plans lacking pertinence and effectiveness. Some social workers cannot effectively combine the behavior correction theory in psychology and the social support theory in sociology to formulate practical intervention plans when dealing with the problem of adolescent Internet addiction.

3.2. Poor practical skills

Problems such as poor communication, insufficient group activity organization ability, and lack of community resource integration ability are common in social work practice. Some social workers lack listening skills and expressive ability when communicating with service recipients, making it difficult to obtain their true ideas and needs; when carrying out group work, they cannot effectively guide group discussion and interaction, resulting in poor group activity effects; in community work, they cannot fully mobilize community resources, affecting the development of community service projects[7].

3.3. Weak professional values and ethical awareness

Individual social workers have problems with value concept deviation in practice and do not truly respect and accept service recipients. For example, when facing some special groups (such as drug addicts, vagrants, etc.), there is discrimination and prejudice, which affects the establishment of professional relationships and the development of services. In addition, some social workers do not pay enough attention to ethical norms, and may have problems such as violating the principle of confidentiality and conflicts in the service process, which damages the interests of service recipients and the reputation of the social work industry[8].

3.4. Lack of motivation for self-reflection and learning

Due to heavy work tasks and the lack of a learning incentive mechanism, some social workers have low enthusiasm for self-reflection and learning[9]. They are satisfied with the existing work models and methods and are unwilling to invest time and energy in learning new knowledge and skills, resulting in difficult improvement of their professional capabilities and inability to meet the continuous development needs of the social work industry.

4. Strategies for enhancing core competencies of social workers

4.1. Strengthening professional knowledge training and learning

Social work institutions and relevant departments should shoulder the responsibility of cultivating high-quality

social workers, prioritize enhancing the core competencies of social workers, regularly organize professional skills training, and construct an "online + offline" training and learning model to facilitate social workers to timely learn new knowledge and practical skills, and improve their professional knowledge, practical skills, and professional ethics. For example, government departments can invite experts and scholars to give lectures, deeply explain the application of sociology, psychology, and legal knowledge in community work, share community work cases, answer various questions of social workers, and help them solve problems encountered in work; explain the application of interdisciplinary knowledge and new technologies such as artificial intelligence in social work, stimulate the innovative thinking of social workers, and inspire them to actively learn artificial intelligence and interdisciplinary knowledge, so as to improve their professional capabilities [10]. At the same time, social work institutions can regularly organize academic lectures and online lecture activities, provide social workers with free online course learning, organize them to study in excellent communities, and encourage them to learn from the work experience of excellent social workers to promote the professional development of social workers.

4.2. Strengthening practical skills training

Social work institutions should establish a sound practical skills training system for social workers, carry out training through simulation training, case discussions, field internships, and other ways, and stimulate the learning and work enthusiasm of social workers through diversified training methods, so that they can grow in practical skills training and improve their self-reflection and learning abilities [11]. First, institutions can introduce advanced VR technology, build a simulation training system, create a realistic social work scene, and allow social workers to practice in the simulation scene, so as to improve their communication skills, case work, and group work abilities. Social workers can choose training scenarios on the virtual platform according to personal needs, review personal operation videos, and view online comments, so as to improve personal abilities. Second, institutions can organize case seminars to promote exchanges among social workers, guide them to analyze recent typical work cases, let them point out the shortcomings and excellent experience in the cases, and discuss the best work cases, so as to improve the ability of social workers to solve complex problems and enhance the core competencies of social workers [12].

4.3. Deepening professional values and ethical education

Professional values and ethics are an important part of social workers' core competencies and an important guarantee for improving the quality of social work services, and their importance is self-evident [13]. Social work institutions and government departments should attach importance to the values and ethical education of social workers, carry forward the core socialist values, urge social workers to actively engage in public welfare activities and care for vulnerable groups, enhance their professional identity, and guide them to establish correct values of sticking to the front line, being willing to contribute, caring for vulnerable groups, and repaying society, so as to improve the professional ethics of social workers and the quality of social work services. At the same time, government departments should also establish an ethical supervision system, regularly supervise and evaluate the work ability, service attitude, professional ethics, etc., of social workers, timely discover problems existing in their work, and correct unethical behaviors, so as to improve the moral literacy of social workers [14].

4.4. Stimulating motivation for self-reflection and learning

Social work institutions should establish an incentive mechanism to encourage social workers to engage in self-

reflection and continuous learning. For example, set up a learning reward fund to reward social workers who perform outstandingly in professional learning and practical innovation; incorporate self-reflection and learning achievements into the performance appraisal system and link them with salary, promotion opportunities, etc. [15]. In addition, create a good learning atmosphere, organize learning groups, experience sharing meetings, and other activities to promote exchanges and learning among social workers and stimulate their learning motivation.

5. Conclusion

The improvement of social workers' core competencies is a key factor in promoting the development of social work practice. Through the analysis of the constituent elements of social workers' core competencies and the discussion of existing problems in current practice, we have clarified the importance and urgency of enhancing core competencies. The improvement strategies proposed from the aspects of strengthening professional knowledge training, strengthening practical skills training, deepening professional values and ethical education, and stimulating motivation for self-reflection and learning need the joint efforts of individuals, institutions, and society. Only by continuously improving the core competencies of social workers can we improve the quality of social work services, better meet the needs of society and service recipients, and promote the professional development of the social work industry.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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