

Competencies of Social Workers at the Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi Following the Multi-Service System Transformation

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Abstract

The transformation of social service centers into integrated service centers within the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has brought significant changes to the management and practice of social services. This transformation demands that social workers adapt from providing specific services to multi-service approaches for various beneficiary groups. The policy aims to optimize the function of Technical Implementation Units (UPT) as extensions of the Ministry of Social Affairs in regional areas. This study focuses on the Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur in Bekasi, one of the largest centers in Indonesia, to explore the competencies of social workers in addressing these challenges. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews and observations involving social workers and the center's management. The results indicate that several dimensions of social worker competencies at the Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi do not fully meet the standards set out in Ministerial Regulation No. 12 of 2017 on Social Worker Competency Standards. These underdeveloped competency dimensions include Knowledge, General Skills, Specialized Skills, and Attitude. Social workers without an educational background in social welfare/social work tend to rely on practical experience, while those with such an educational background are more capable of integrating theory into practice. The study identifies competency gaps affecting service quality, with social workers from non-social work backgrounds often making intuitive decisions. Furthermore, challenges in the "inpassing" process highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of beneficiaries. These findings highlight the importance of continuous competency development and adaptive education for social workers to meet the increasingly complex demands of services and to respond effectively to the needs of society.

Keywords: Social Worker, Social Work, Worker Competency, Social Worker Competency.

Introduction/Background

Human service is a field focused on assisting individuals in addressing social, psychological, behavioral, or legal issues they face, with the aim of improving well-being and quality of life (Zins, 2001). Human services encompass various aspects of life, including health, education, criminal justice, and social rehabilitation (Eriksen, 1977; Schmolling et al., 1997). In this context, social service organizations play a vital role in ensuring access to and the effectiveness of services for communities (Hasenfeld, 1983; O'Looney, 1996).

In Indonesia, the primary focus of social services is addressing social welfare issues through strategies such as social protection, social security, rehabilitation, and empowerment, as outlined in Law No. 11 of 2009 on Social Welfare (Anggrain & Mashur, 2022). Social workers bear primary responsibility for implementing rehabilitation services, particularly in institutions like the Pangudi Luhur Integrated Center (STPL) Bekasi, which provides ATENSI program which is a social rehabilitation services based on family, community, and residential settings.

The transformation from single-service systems to multi-service systems by the Ministry of Social Affairs, as stipulated in Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2022, reflects the need to enhance service accessibility and effectiveness (Nurhaliza, 2023; Pradwika & Sokhivah, 2024). Social workers in these service centers play a role in various stages of intervention, including assessment, planning, advocacy, and monitoring, as well as providing guidance and counseling to beneficiaries (Ruswanto et al., 2015).

However, implementing social services faces several challenges. Limited human resources, excessive workloads, and a lack of continuous competency training hinder service optimization (Pradwika Sokhivah, 2024). Social worker competencies include the ability to conduct curative, rehabilitative, and promotive interventions, which aim not only to restore individual conditions but also to strengthen social structures and enhance community resilience (Adityo & Arditya, 2022).

Various studies have explored social work practices in different contexts. Ramdyanti et al. (2022) found that social workers need to enhance their "interpersonal communication skills" when conducting crisis interventions for child victims of sexual violence. Moreover, Napsiyah and Zaky (2021) emphasized the importance of considering "group dynamics and ethical issues" in Group Work methods. Research by Friero Padín et al. (2021) revealed that burnout is a common issue among health social workers, triggered by workplace environmental factors. On the other hand, Abubakar (2018) demonstrated that "employee competency" positively influences work productivity, underscoring the importance of competency development in the health sector.

However, no studies have specifically addressed the competencies of social workers in the one-stop social service centers of the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, creating a gap that requires further research.

Research Problem

The transformation of social service centers into integrated service centers within the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has introduced significant changes in the management and practice of social services. This policy aims to optimize the function of Technical Implementation Units (UPT) as extensions of the Ministry of Social Affairs in regional areas. However, these changes have also presented new challenges for social workers, who must adapt from focusing on a specific type of beneficiary to providing multi-service support for diverse beneficiary groups (PM).

In this context, social workers not only face an increased volume and variety of beneficiary issues but also changes in organizational structure and service delivery technology, as highlighted by Hasenfeld (1983) and Brodtkin (2008). Established practices and routines in traditional service centers must be revised to align with the dynamics and operational needs of the integrated centers. This adaptation requires additional competencies and new strategies, including cross-disciplinary knowledge, interdisciplinary skills, and more complex managerial capabilities.

This study focuses on the Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi, one of the largest centers under the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. Its service coverage extends to West Java Province, West Sumatra, and the Riau Islands. With a residential service capacity of up to 370 individuals and services spanning 16 districts/cities, this center provides an ideal setting to understand how social workers address the challenges of multi-service provision. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the competencies of social workers in navigating these multi-service challenges.

Literature Review

Organizational Change

Organizational change is a process designed to transition an organization from its current state toward a desired future state, aiming to enhance its effectiveness (Jones, 2013). This process involves strategic and planned efforts to discover new and improved ways of utilizing organizational resources and capabilities to create value and deliver better returns to stakeholders (Porras & Silvers, 1991). Thus, organizational change plays a crucial role in improving overall performance and achieving long-term goals.

Jones (2013) identifies that planned organizational change typically focuses on four main levels: human resources, functional resources, technological capabilities, and organizational capabilities. At the human resources level, change involves empowering employees through new skill training and fostering a more inclusive cultural integration. This is intended to enable employees to adapt to new roles within a dynamic organizational context. Organizations also frequently adjust norms and values to create an inclusive work environment that supports motivation among employees from diverse backgrounds. Restructuring top management teams is another approach to enhance diversity in decision-making, which, in turn, strengthens the organization's ability to adapt to change (Jones, 2013).

At the functional resources level, organizational change can involve transforming structures, cultures, and technologies to optimize value creation across various organizational functions. For instance, transitioning from a traditional functional structure to a product-based team structure can accelerate innovation and product development processes. At the technological level, innovation is keys for organizations to maintain competitiveness. Developing or modifying products to meet the evolving needs of clients is essential for remaining relevant in the market (Jones, 2013).

Organizational capabilities changes involve adjustments to the structure and culture to enable human and functional resources to work more effectively. This often includes fostering greater collaboration across organizational units and creating an environment conducive to innovation. Restructuring relationships between individuals and functions within the organization contributes to enhancing the collective capacity to deliver added value and innovate more effectively (Jones, 2013).

External factors also play a significant role in driving organizational change. According to Hill and Jones (2007), competitive forces compel organizations to continuously innovate and improve efficiency, quality, and their ability to compete with rivals. Additionally, economic, political, and global forces push organizations to alter how and where they produce goods and services (Hill, 2009).

Demographic and social changes, such as increasing workforce diversity, demand that managers adapt their leadership styles to motivate and lead an increasingly diverse workforce (Jamieson et al., 1991; Jones, 2013). Finally, ethical forces are becoming increasingly relevant as governments and societies demand more socially and ethically responsible corporate behavior (Jackson, 1992).

Social Worker Competencies

Work competency is a complex concept with various definitions that underscore its importance in the professional world. Clark (2007) defines work competency as "the mastery of knowledge or skills required to perform tasks effectively." This definition highlights the importance of possessing the necessary knowledge and skills to execute tasks proficiently in the workplace. Meanwhile, Newstrom & Davis (1986) emphasize that competency involves an individual's ability to meet diverse business needs efficiently by minimizing costs and optimizing customer service. This definition underscores the multifaceted nature of competency, encompassing not only knowledge and skills but also the ability to manage resources effectively.

Competency in social work is defined as the ongoing ability to integrate knowledge, skills, judgment, and professional attributes to practice safely and ethically (McKnight, 2013). It reflects an individual's capability to complete tasks relevant to real-world situations in their profession (Blomeke, Gustafsson, & Shavelson, 2015). According to Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2018), competency in social work involves a combination of knowledge, skills, and values demonstrated through behavioral components. These behaviors are measurable actions that reflect the effective application of knowledge and skills, serving as a critical foundation for assessing professionalism and the quality of social work practice.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015) identifies nine core competencies essential for social work practice, including ethical behavior, engagement with diversity, human rights advocacy, evidence-based practice, policy engagement, and practice evaluation. These competencies encompass six critical dimensions: performance, knowledge, values, affective reactions, critical thinking, and professional judgment (Poulin & Matis, 2015). Together, these dimensions complement one another, enabling social workers to handle complex situations effectively.

In Indonesia, Regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs No. 12 of 2017 outlines that social worker competencies consist of knowledge, skills, and values. Knowledge comprises information understood and developed from behavioral and social science concepts, enhanced through research and practice. Skills are the abilities required for social work practice, grounded in knowledge, foundational values, general principles, and the profession's code of ethics. Values are integral to social work practice, encompassing respect for ethical responsibilities and actions aligned with professional codes when addressing issues, concerns, and ethical dilemmas.

According to the regulation, social worker competencies are categorized into three main dimensions, which are knowledge, skills, and attitudes, each with sub-competencies or aspects to be

mastered. In the knowledge dimension, the focus is on social workers' understanding of theoretical concepts, including multidimensional human theories, social environments, practice methods, client characteristics, as well as social policies and organizational governance. This aspect also encompasses the ability of social workers to use research methods and documentation as a foundation for accountability. The skills dimension assesses both general and specific abilities in practice, such as logical and critical thinking, the application of principles for independent performance, case-based evaluations, and decision-making in accordance with standards. Here, specific skills such as client assessment, the selection of theoretical concepts, and the design and evaluation of interventions are highly prioritized. The attitude dimension, as the concluding aspect, includes humanistic values, adherence to Pancasila, pride in the homeland, respect for diversity, and sensitivity toward society and the environment. Additionally, social workers are expected to internalize the professional code of ethics and foster a spirit of independence and innovation in their work.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, allowing the researcher to build theory based on empirical data collected during the research process (Neuman, 2014). This method is non-linear and cyclical, with data gathered through interviews and observations to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study (Bryman, 2012). The research is descriptive in nature, aiming to present an accurate depiction of the phenomenon, uncover new data that might contradict previous findings, and classify and document the stages or causal processes (Neuman, 2014).

The primary informants for this study are social workers and the Head of Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi. Social workers were chosen due to their role as the frontline providers of direct services to the community, while the Head of the Center ensures smooth operations and strategic decision-making. The selection of informants was based on relevant criteria, such as their understanding of the transition to the multi-service system, employment status (civil servant, ASN, or contract worker), and work experience before and after the system change, and at least three months of experience with the new system to ensure the information provided is accurate and insightful.

The study involves five informants who are social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi, with diverse educational backgrounds, job positions, and ranks. The first informant is a Senior Expert Social Worker with a IVa rank and a master's degree in Community Development. The second informant is an Associate Expert Social Worker with a Penata Tk I/IIId rank and a bachelor's degree (DIV) in Social Work. The third informant is a First-Level Social Worker with a Penata Muda/IIIa rank and a bachelor's degree in Social Welfare. The fourth informant, another Senior Expert Social Worker, has a IVa rank and a bachelor's degree (DIV) in Social Work. Lastly, the fifth informant is a Supervisory Social Worker with a Penata Tk I/IIId rank and a high school diploma (SLTA).

Data collection techniques include interviews and observations. Qualitative interviews utilize open-ended questions to generate unstructured textual data from the transcriptions of participants' responses (Creswell, 2014). Observations were conducted directly at the research site to collect textual and visual data documenting the situations observed (Creswell, 2014). By combining interviews and observations, this study aims to provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of the system changes and their impact on operations at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi.

Result

The results of the research show that out of the four dimensions that social workers must possess as competency standards, some aspects have been mastered while others remain suboptimal. These dimensions include knowledge, general skills, specific skills, and attitude.

Knowledge Dimension

The analysis of social workers' knowledge competencies highlights several key elements, such as understanding foundational theories, ethical principles, and social work practice methods. Social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi have met competency standards outlined by Ministerial Regulation in areas such as ethical values, social work practice methods, client characteristics, and knowledge of social welfare policies. However, gaps remain in areas like theoretical concepts, shelter management, and research methods.

Social workers at the center recognize the significance of principles, values, and ethics in guiding their services. For instance, Informant AM stated, "I do not discuss personal information about the beneficiaries with other social workers" (AM, 2024), demonstrating commitment to confidentiality. Similarly, Informant HL emphasized professionalism, focusing on the client's best interests: "I always strive to prioritize the client's best interests" (HL, 2024). Without adherence to service principles, professionalism in social work would not be achieved.

Various practice methods are applied based on client needs. For example, Informant SH explained frequently using casework, group work, and community organization, stating, "I apply the method that best suits the client's situation" (SH, 2024). Government policies, such as ATENSI, influence intervention procedures, which include initial approaches, intake, intervention planning, and monitoring and evaluation. Informant SH added, "The choice of intervention method is very dependent on the client's characteristics" (SH, 2024), showing that approaches are dynamic and context-sensitive.

However, social workers at the center have yet to fully integrate social work theories into their practice. Despite educational backgrounds in social work, not all are up-to-date with theoretical developments. Informant SH remarked, "I don't keep up with new theories in social work" (SH, 2024), reflecting this limitation. Theoretical application often relies on daily practice rather than formal theoretical frameworks, as stated by Informant ET: "What I understand about humans as social beings comes from my practical experience" (ET, 2024). Thus, mid-level social workers struggle to define social work theories and rely on experience-based practices.

General Skill Dimension

In the dimension of general skills, the skills that have been fulfilled include logical and critical thinking, measurable independent performance, case analysis, interdisciplinary decision-making, maintaining work networks, and evaluation, while the aspect that has not been fully achieved is documentation.

In terms of logical and critical thinking, social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi understand that determining the best intervention for clients requires logical thinking about their actual needs and critical thinking regarding client requests, which are often inconsistent with their needs. This aligns with Informant SH's statement, "We are case managers; ultimately, we make the decisions. But sometimes they play the victim because they know ATENSI assistance exists, even though they don't really need it" (SH, 2024). This statement emphasizes the importance of logical and critical thinking in analyzing information and choosing appropriate interventions based on client needs.

The ability to work independently is also a primary competency in social work. Informant SH emphasized that social workers must be capable of making independent, measurable decisions while continuously updating their knowledge of client needs: "A social worker must be independent. If they make decisions for PM, they need to be updated... they must be independent and measurable" (SH, 2024). This independence implies that social workers are expected to identify client needs autonomously without constantly relying on external directions while remaining within applicable procedures. This was confirmed by Informant HL: "When it comes to measurable decisions, we must adhere to the standards of social welfare services" (HL, 2024). This is crucial because each beneficiary has different needs and conditions, and decisions must be appropriate and accountable.

Meanwhile, regarding decision-making in line with procedures, social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi understand that decisions on client interventions must be made through case conferences (CC). Informant HL stated, "We cannot decide on our own."

Maintaining work networks is also a crucial skill in supporting successful interventions. The relationship between social workers and external parties, such as social services offices, health institutions, community leaders, and neighborhood administrations, must be continuously maintained to ensure smooth assistance and referrals. Informant DN pointed out that social workers must actively explain the services available at the center to related parties to foster synergy. They stated, "To maintain cooperation, we usually tell others that here at the center; we provide services to

beneficiaries like this and that” (DN, 2024). Strong networking enables social workers to offer broader and more responsive service access to beneficiaries’ needs.

Moreover, social workers are also required to evaluate their work outcomes, both individually and in groups. This evaluation aims to monitor changes in clients and identify further needs. Informant ET emphasized that evaluations must be conducted periodically to ensure that interventions have a positive impact on clients and that their changing conditions are well-documented: “Beneficiaries evaluations must be reported. We need to determine what to do with beneficiaries, where to take them, and the nature of their problems” (ET, 2024). Regular evaluations allow social workers to adjust intervention methods or develop new approaches more relevant to the client’s evolving conditions.

Finally, documentation is an essential aspect of social workers’ competencies, encompassing not only daily records but also reports on clients’ development and ongoing needs. However, daily records are perceived as suboptimal, as revealed by Informant SH: “Ideally, we have daily notes, progress notes. But our weakness as social workers is not having those” (SH, 2024). Informant AM also stated, “As social workers, we should have daily notes, but even mid-level social workers might not have them. So, why should I make them either?” (AM, 2024). This emphasizes that documentation is not optimal across various social worker ranks, from mid-level to supervisory roles. Structured documentation is vital for tracking each client’s progress and providing accurate data for discussions or decision-making forums. However, the lack of daily notes points to a weakness in practice that needs improvement.

Specific Skill Dimension

Social workers at the Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi have demonstrated specific skills in building trust, conducting in-depth assessments, selecting appropriate theories for clients, and designing systematic interventions. However, they have yet to fully master collaboration among multidisciplinary experts during the intervention phase. Social workers there take a cautious approach before initiating interventions, particularly with child and adolescent clients. Informant HL emphasized the importance of first establishing a sense of security and trust, noting that without trust, clients are unlikely to accept the interventions provided. HL stated, “We build trust first; once they trust us, intervention becomes much easier” (HL, 2024). This highlights the critical nature of this approach, especially for children, who need to feel that social workers are trustworthy figures, akin to friends or parents. Similarly, Informant AM mentioned the importance of “small talk or light conversation” (AM, 2024) to prevent children from feeling overwhelmed by sudden personal questions.

The assessment stage is a crucial initial step in understanding the background and issues faced by clients before determining the most suitable intervention. Informant HL explained that this stage includes components such as intake, informed consent, and gathering information about clients and their families, all aimed at uncovering the root causes of the clients’ problems. HL remarked, “The purpose of assessment is to uncover their issues. If we don’t delve into their experiences, we won’t be able to proceed” (HL, 2024). This underscores that assessment is conducted not just to identify client details but to deeply understand their challenges.

In selecting theoretical concepts, social workers consider the specific needs and characteristics of each client. For example, Informant AM prefers using tools like genograms for clients who are less expressive in verbal communication. According to AM, the use of genograms helps clients “start asking questions and sharing stories” (AM, 2024), enabling them to gradually open up about their problems. This illustrates that social workers adapt their approaches not only based on theoretical frameworks but also through observing client behavior.

Social workers offer not just one intervention option but provide alternatives that align with the client’s condition. Informant AM explained that they often discuss extended intervention needs with clients by asking, “Would you prefer accompaniment or to manage independently during your time at the hospital?” (AM, 2024). This demonstrates the social workers’ understanding of the importance of flexible approaches that consider client preferences. Informant DN also shared an example of offering solutions for a client with physical limitations who wished to work. An

alternative suggestion was to set up a stationary cart for selling goods, balancing the client's desire to work with their physical constraints.

Intervention stages are systematically and collaboratively designed, beginning with intake, assessment, intervention planning, and proceeding to evaluation and aftercare. Informant AM stated, "Before termination, there's always a case conference" (AM, 2024), illustrating the discussion among experts before making significant decisions. Additionally, social workers ensure that comprehensive documentation and assessment data are critical aspects of the intervention. Informant DN noted, "Intervention can only proceed once the data is complete" (DN, 2024), emphasizing the importance of thorough data preparation as a foundation for intervention.

Attitude Dimension

Field findings on the attitude aspects of social workers' competencies reveal that social workers at the Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi demonstrate a profound understanding of humanitarian values, diversity, entrepreneurship, and responsibility in their practice. These social workers exhibit strong adherence to values such as humanity, respect for diversity, independence, environmental sensitivity, and confidentiality while upholding professional ethics in their practice. Their attitudes not only impact their interactions with beneficiaries but also influence the success of interventions.

Informant HL highlighted the importance of humanitarian values in social work, stating, "Beneficiaries are humans, not objects, so we must treat them as humans" (HL, 2024). Similarly, Informant SH added, "Beneficiaries are humans who, despite their challenges, have their strengths" (SH, 2024). These statements reflect a commitment to respecting the dignity of every individual and recognizing their positive potential, regardless of the difficulties they face. This perspective underscores the dual role of social workers as both supportive companions and objective guides, emphasizing the importance of constructive feedback to encourage positive change in clients.

Informant SH further emphasized the significance of recognizing clients' positive potential, explaining, "Beneficiaries, despite their challenges, have strengths, and it is our job to uncover them" (SH, 2024). This shows a commitment to exploring and developing clients' potential, focusing on their ability to function socially. This attitude not only supports clients' self-development but also transforms their self-perception, enhancing their confidence and motivation for change. However, middle-level social workers who transitioned from structural roles via inpassing processes faced difficulties in practical application, as noted by Informant SH: "I previously held a structural position before transitioning to social work, so I'm still struggling a bit" (SH, 2024).

Cultural and religious diversity is recognized as a crucial aspect of social work practice. Informant DN shared, "Typically, we in West Java are not always soft-spoken; sometimes we can express anger. For instance, people from other regions naturally speak in their own way" (DN, 2024). This statement reflects the openness and flexibility of social workers in understanding clients' differing characteristics. Informant SH also stressed the importance of tolerance, stating, "We must not allow any SARA issues. The key is to always act kindly, wherever and whenever" (SH, 2024). This inclusive attitude fosters an environment where individuals feel valued and accepted, regardless of their cultural or religious backgrounds.

The aspects of entrepreneurship and independence are emphasized by the informants. Informant DN explained, "We accompany beneficiaries from their entry until their exit. Even after they leave, we visit to ensure they're still running their businesses" (DN, 2024). This demonstrates a commitment to ensuring clients not only acquire skills but also receive ongoing support. Such assistance is essential in helping clients navigate challenges as they embark on entrepreneurial endeavors.

Informant SH added, "Some people are suited for entrepreneurship, while others are better as employees that's what we need to prepare them for" (SH, 2024). SH continued, "In entrepreneurship, there are ups and downs; profit isn't guaranteed all the time" (SH, 2024). This highlights the role of social workers in helping clients understand the realities of entrepreneurship, preparing them mentally and strategically to handle potential failures.

Sensitivity to environmental situations is also a significant aspect of social work practice. Informant ET stated, "For elderly clients, their understanding and memory may decline, so we need to be sensitive" (ET, 2024). This shows that social workers must adjust their approaches based on clients' physical and mental conditions. When working with clients with special needs, such as the elderly or individuals with disabilities, social workers must adapt their communication and interaction methods to align with clients' capacities. This demonstrates the essential sensitivity required to provide better services.

All informants agreed on the critical importance of maintaining confidentiality and ethics in client interactions. Informant ET emphasized, "Confidentiality cannot be breached, even if it means the client might feel guilty about their actions" (ET, 2024). This indicates that social workers bear the responsibility of safeguarding clients' privacy, creating a safe space for them to share their stories and problems. Upholding professional ethics is key to building trust between social workers and clients, which in turn supports the clients' rehabilitation and social reintegration processes.

Discussion

The research findings reveal how social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi understand theory and competence, particularly based on their educational backgrounds and experiences, reflecting the complexity of competencies in social work as proposed by Clark (2007), Newstrom & Davis (1986), and other theorists. According to Clark, competence involves mastering the knowledge and skills fundamental to work effectiveness. However, at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi, social workers with educational backgrounds outside of social welfare or social work rely more on practical experience rather than theoretical understanding. This indicates an imbalance between theory and practice, where some social workers feel more comfortable relying on practical approaches than applying formal theories learned through education.

In line with Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2018), who emphasize behavior as a reflection of competence in social work, this study found that some social workers, particularly those with minimal educational backgrounds, demonstrate competence through practical approaches. However, a lack of understanding of formal theories such as micro and mezzo social work methods poses challenges in addressing complex situations requiring critical analysis and the application of multidimensional concepts. This aligns with Indonesia's Social Minister Regulation No. 12 of 2017 and McKnight's (2013) emphasis on integrating knowledge, skills, and professional judgment.

Competency dimensions outlined by CSWE (2015), such as performance, knowledge, and critical thinking, are found to be less optimal among social workers without a social welfare education background. Their struggles in recalling specific theories highlight the need for ongoing competency development through training and learning. This is especially important in the skills dimension, which emphasizes standard-based decision-making and case evaluation, as noted by Poulin & Matis (2015). A more flexible approach to education and training for social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi appears necessary to enable them to adapt better to the demands of their roles and the diverse needs of beneficiaries.

The study also identified variations in the understanding of competencies and theories among social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi, consistent with the competency dimensions in Social Minister Regulation No. 12 of 2017. This regulation states that social worker competencies encompass three main dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attitudes, each with specific aspects that must be mastered.

In the knowledge dimension, social workers are expected to understand theoretical concepts such as the multidimensional theory of human and social environments, practice methods, client characteristics, and social policies and organizational governance. The study shows that social workers with non-social welfare educational backgrounds tend to lack in this aspect, relying more on field experience than theoretical understanding. For example, one informant, who completed high school and has been working autodidactically since 2008, struggles with understanding formal theories like micro and mezzo social work methods. This reflects a limitation in theoretical understanding, which is essential according to the knowledge standards expected in the regulation, as social workers need a strong theoretical foundation to support evidence-based practice.

In the skills dimension, the regulation emphasizes the importance of abilities in client assessment, logical and critical principle application, case-based evaluation, and standard-based decision-making. These skills also include the ability to select and apply relevant theories in practical interventions. The study shows that social workers with formal education in social welfare are more proficient in these skills. They exhibit better critical thinking abilities and are more adept at selecting appropriate theoretical concepts when dealing with beneficiaries from diverse backgrounds. Conversely, social workers without social welfare education find it more challenging to integrate theory and practice. In the context of Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi, this creates a competency gap that impacts service quality. Social workers without a social welfare education background often make decisions intuitively, relying on practical approaches, whereas the regulation emphasizes decisions grounded in standards and deep case understanding.

The attitude dimension in the regulation underscores the importance of humanitarian values, respect for diversity, and sensitivity to society. This includes appreciation for Pancasila values, national pride, and the ability to interact ethically when addressing complex social challenges. Such attitudes are expected to foster pride and a sense of belonging in the social work profession, as well as a spirit of innovation. The findings reveal that while social workers without social welfare education show sensitivity to clients' conditions and strive to understand their backgrounds; their limited understanding of social work theories reduces their ability to fully implement humanitarian values in a structured and evidence-based manner. Social workers with social welfare education backgrounds tend to be better at adapting their professional attitudes based on the theoretical principles they have learned. This highlights that without a strong theoretical foundation, professional attitudes may be less optimal in implementing ethical social practices.

Additionally, the inpassing process or the appointment of civil servants to functional positions through adjustment/equivalence at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi presents challenges in adapting to different beneficiary clusters. In the context of social work or government institutions like Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi, inpassing involves assigning employees who previously held structural positions equivalent to echelon III to functional positions as mid-level social workers. This process is conducted to meet organizational needs. This adaptation requires a deep understanding of the diverse needs of beneficiaries, as mandated in the regulation through knowledge and skills standards for assessment and intervention. For social workers with non-social welfare education backgrounds, this adaptation is more challenging due to their lack of theoretical foundations and limited abilities in deep assessments. Conversely, social workers with social welfare education are better equipped to handle diverse beneficiary clusters due to their more comprehensive theoretical training.

Conclusion

Social worker competencies at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi are not yet fully adequate to meet the multi-service needs, primarily due to several gaps in each competency dimension. In the knowledge dimension, social workers have met the standards for ethical values, practice methods, client understanding, and social policies, but they have not mastered social work theory, shelter management, and research methods that are critical for multi-service delivery. In the general skills dimension, they are capable of critical thinking, working independently, analyzing cases, and maintaining networks, but they lack the documentation skills essential for cross-sector coordination. In the specialized skills dimension, social workers excel in building trust, deep assessment, theory selection, and designing interventions, though collaboration among experts still needs improvement. Meanwhile, in the attitude dimension, they have demonstrated a good understanding of humanitarian values, diversity, and professional ethics.

The most mastered competency by social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi is the attitude dimension. They demonstrate a deep understanding of humanitarian values, respect for diversity, entrepreneurship, environmental sensitivity, and professional ethics, all of which align with the standards for social work practice. In contrast, the knowledge dimension is the least mastered, especially regarding concepts of social work theory, shelter management, and research methods.

These gaps hinder their ability to apply more theoretical and evidence-based approaches, which are essential for handling complex services in multi-service settings.

The findings of this study emphasize that the understanding of theory and competencies among social workers at Sentra Terpadu Pangudi Luhur Bekasi is largely influenced by their educational backgrounds and work experience. Social workers without formal social welfare or social work education tend to rely on practical experience rather than theoretical understanding in performing their tasks. This indicates that while practical competencies may meet basic service needs, limitations in theoretical understanding affect their ability to tackle complex situations that require a multidimensional approach and critical thinking.

Social workers with formal education in social welfare show a more comprehensive understanding and skillset, particularly in case evaluation and standard-based decision-making, in accordance with the provisions of Social Minister Regulation No. 12 of 2017. The competency dimensions encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as outlined in the regulation, appear less optimal among social workers without a social welfare/social work education background, particularly in the areas of human multidimensional theory and social work methods.

Additionally, this study underscores the challenges in the inpassing process or the appointment of mid-level social workers when dealing with beneficiaries from diverse needs clusters, which requires rapid and deep adaptation. Ongoing competency development through training and enhancing theoretical capacity is necessary to achieve a balance between theory and practice, enabling social workers to effectively and ethically perform their roles in varied and complex situations. Competency enhancement, especially in social work theory, research methods, shelter management, and documentation, should be provided across all levels of social workers, from supervisory to mid-level. However, for mid-level social workers, there is a need for enhanced specialized skills in conducting empirical studies on social welfare policies in accordance with the expertise categories that mid-level social workers must possess.

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