

Improvement of The Process of Training Social Workers In Uzbekistan

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Abstract

In the post-independence period, Uzbekistan prioritized the creation of a new social protection system to support vulnerable populations, necessitating the training of professional social workers. Legislative reforms, including the 2023 presidential decree on improving social services, catalyzed institutional developments and expanded educational offerings in social work across major Uzbek universities. Despite progress, gaps remain in aligning social work education with international standards and ensuring practical competency among graduates. This study aims to analyze the evolution, structure, and practical application of social work education in Uzbekistan, emphasizing its challenges and future prospects. The findings highlight significant advancements in curricula development, the introduction of bachelor's and master's programs, and the institutionalization of field practice and supervision. The educational system has integrated theoretical knowledge, ethical principles, and applied skills tailored to local societal needs. The study uniquely synthesizes Uzbekistan's national efforts in social work professionalization with global definitions and methodologies, offering a detailed overview of both academic and field training mechanisms. The results underscore the need for further development in case management, interdisciplinary collaboration, and supervision systems to elevate the profession. Recommendations include enhancing international cooperation, expanding practical internships, and strengthening public-private partnerships. Ultimately, the paper positions social work as a strategic field crucial to human capital development and social justice in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Social work, higher education institutions, staff training, Uzbekistan, improving the quality of education, international experience, practice and innovation, personnel capacity, public-private partnership, social protection, social worker.

1. Introduction

Following Uzbekistan's independence, the development of a new, human-centered system of social protection became a national priority, underscoring the urgent need for a professionally trained workforce capable of addressing the needs of socially vulnerable populations[1]. This led to the formal establishment of the social work profession, grounded in both global principles of human rights and local societal challenges. The institutionalization of

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social work in Uzbekistan has gained momentum, particularly after the inclusion of the profession in national classifiers and the introduction of dedicated bachelor's and master's degree programs across leading universities such as the Tashkent State Institute of Culture, Samarkand State University, and others. The profession is deeply intertwined with the goals of the "New Uzbekistan Development Strategy for 2022–2026," emphasizing social justice, human capital development, and improved access to essential services[2]. As social work in Uzbekistan evolves, it incorporates international standards, theories of human behavior, and intervention practices to empower individuals and communities. Educational institutions now emphasize not only theoretical knowledge but also extensive practical training, including internships and fieldwork. A modern social worker in Uzbekistan must possess diverse competencies—ranging from ethical awareness to policy analysis and organizational management—while also adapting to emerging practices like case management and supervision. Despite considerable progress, challenges remain in aligning educational standards with professional demands and in ensuring consistent quality across institutions. Thus, the need for ongoing innovation, international cooperation, and methodological refinement in training social workers is vital to building a socially inclusive and resilient Uzbekistan[3].

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology grounded in the review of legal documents, government decrees, educational policy frameworks, and academic literature to explore the development and improvement of social worker training in Uzbekistan. The research draws upon official sources such as the 2022–2026 Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan and the 2023 Presidential Decree on the provision of quality social services, which serve as the foundational documents defining state priorities in social policy and education[4]. By systematically analyzing the evolution of higher education programs in social work since their institutional inception in the late 1990s, the study evaluates the trajectory of curriculum development, practical training structures, and international cooperation in social work education. Data were collected from state educational standards, university training modules, and implementation reports of social work courses at institutions such as Tashkent State Institute of Culture, Samarkand State University, and Fergana State University[5]. Furthermore, the research synthesizes best practices from international models and assesses their contextual applicability to Uzbekistan's socio-cultural and economic environment. Particular emphasis was placed on the identification of key competencies required for modern social work professionals, including conceptual, instrumental, integrative, and communicative skills. The role of supervision, case management, and interdisciplinary collaboration was examined through the lens of social intervention theory and field-based practices. The method also included content analysis of supervisory frameworks, intervention protocols, and internship systems to assess their effectiveness in professionalizing social workers. This comprehensive approach allowed the study to draw informed conclusions about the strengths, gaps, and future directions in Uzbekistan's social work education system[6].

3. Result and Discussion

After the Republic of Uzbekistan gained independence, one of its main priorities became the development of a fundamentally new system of social protection and public services that focuses on providing targeted assistance to those in need of special care and attention. Under

these conditions, there arose a need for highly qualified personnel with knowledge and skills in working with socially vulnerable segments of the population. This, in turn, created the demand for a new professional activity – that of a “social worker”[7].

The fourth direction of the “Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026,” developed at the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, prioritizes the implementation of a just social policy and the development of human capital. This direction includes a number of tasks, such as ensuring employment of the population, providing social protection, improving health care, facilitating access to education, and increasing the social activity of women[8].

In order to effectively implement these tasks, the National Agency for Social Protection was established by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated June 1, 2023, “On Comprehensive Measures to Ensure the Provision of Quality Social Services and Assistance to the Population and to Establish an Effective Control System”.

International Definition of Social Work: The profession of social work promotes social change, helps resolve problems in human relationships, and enhances the distribution of opportunities and the improvement of people's well-being. By applying theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work[9].

One of the most common definitions of social work is that it is a professionally competent activity aimed at achieving positive changes in the lives of individuals, groups, or communities. The concept of “professionalism” implies that a specialist has both theoretical and practical training, confirmed by a diploma or certificate, is engaged in activities for the benefit of the public, is a member of a professional association, adheres to the code of ethics established by that association, and possesses the capacity for professional self-awareness[10].

The knowledge and skills of a modern social work professional include familiarity with the characteristics of socialization, the experience of overcoming life's difficulties, and theoretical and practical knowledge of providing specialized assistance to individual clients.

Social work can be understood as a professionally competent activity aimed at improving the quality of life of individuals.

One of the key concepts found in the social work literature is empowerment, which refers to the primary goal of a social worker – to enhance a client's own personal resources and abilities, expand their understanding, and develop their capacity to independently solve their problems by fostering control and management skills without relying on the social worker's direct assistance.

Another definition states that social work is related to the mutual interaction between the individual and social reality. This, in turn, influences a person's ability to solve life's tasks, overcome stressful situations, and realize their aspirations and values[11].

Whenever professional assistance is provided, social reality intervenes in the personal lives of each individual, family, or group. This process is called intervention. Intervention can occur at the level of the individual, family, community, and sometimes large groups, or even the entire nation. It refers to the large-scale involvement of social actors in the social process with the aim of changing its character in accordance with socially acceptable objectives.

In modern methods of social intervention in social policy and social work, special attention is given to the factor of the client's conscious participation in social change.

The content and forms of services provided by social workers are extremely diverse and complex, stemming from the needs of society. Their activities include the following main areas: providing financial assistance, supporting employment for the population, developing work and life skills, promoting the work of community centers aimed at strengthening mental health, supplying food products and daily necessities, referring clients to medical services, offering social support, protecting the legal interests of citizens, planning communal services, and representing the interests of individuals who are unable to protect themselves independently[12].

This list, of course, is not exhaustive, but it gives an idea of the broad and complex nature of the opportunities within the field of social work.

Social work also has a complex system of professional forms, in which specialists operate in various directions. Among them, the following can be distinguished:

- social workers involved in managing the social services system;
- specialists working with families;
- specialists in child development;
- social workers with a psychological and psychotherapeutic focus who work with individuals or groups;
- social workers in social service agencies and shelter (or refuge) institutions;
- social workers operating within the medical system;
- specialists working with persons with disabilities;
- social workers engaged in employment and migration services;
- officer-social workers operating within military structures;
- social pedagogues working in schools and the education system.

Modern social work is viewed not only as a service system that responds to social needs, but also as a strategic field that helps realize human potential and actively integrates individuals into social life[13].

The social work institution in Uzbekistan began to take shape by the late 1990s. A significant milestone was reached in 1998, when the new—at that time—higher education specialties and areas of “social work” were included in the State Classifier of Educational Specialties.

The profession of “social work” and the specialty “social work” were added to the National Classifier of Professions and Positions of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Training in the field of “social work” began at the Tashkent State Institute of Culture as well as at Samarkand and Fergana State Universities. The Tashkent State Institute of Culture became the leading higher education institution in training specialists in social work, being the first to offer bachelor’s and master’s degrees in this area.

In Uzbekistan, higher education consists of two stages: bachelor’s degree (4 years) and master’s degree (2 years). The institutionalization of social work in Uzbekistan has shown expansion trends within the higher education system at universities responsible for training personnel for the social sector, as well as through special retraining courses[14].

Since the 1990s, the course “Social Work” was introduced into the sociologists’ training program at the National University of Uzbekistan. Its objectives include providing information about the content of social work, its main directions, research methods, and related experiences.

In 2004, the “Social Work” program was launched at the Tashkent State Institute of Culture.

In September 2005, similar programs were opened at Samarkand and Fergana State Universities.

In 2006, a master's degree program in "Social Work with Various Population Groups" was established.

In 2010, the National University of Uzbekistan began training bachelor students in the field of "Social Work".

In the educational process, special attention is paid to the practical training of social work. In the first year, students undergo an introductory course, academic processes, and pre-graduation practical training. In other words, after acquiring theoretical knowledge and practical experience, a social work specialist gains organizational-management, scientific-pedagogical, and practical skills necessary for activity in the social field.

During their education, bachelor-level social work practitioners acquire the following knowledge and skills:

- The ability to critically analyze situations arising in professional social work practice;

- The skill to apply the ethics and principles of social work in practice;

- Learning to treat people with respect and on an equal basis regardless of their social background, religion, race, gender, age, or family structure;

- Understanding the forms and mechanisms of social changes and advocacy strategies that comply with social and economic justice criteria;

- Comprehending the history, structure, and issues of the social work profession;

- The ability to apply acquired knowledge and skills in various spheres of social work practice;

- Using empirical research data to understand personal and human factors in the relationships forming among different social layers and groups;

- Analyzing, revising, and influencing social policy;

- Evaluating scientific research conducted in the field of social work and applying research findings in practice;

- Applying stratified skills among members of society, colleagues, and clients;

- Providing appropriate consultations and conducting observations in social work practice;

- Implementing necessary organizational changes in social work institutions and service systems;

- Understanding social groups and layers, and their roles in social life. Learning about pressing issues of different social groups and layers. Methods and directions of social work with specific groups (women, children, elderly, persons with disabilities, unemployed, deviant behavior individuals). Studying the dynamics of social relations in various social groups and layers. Gaining an understanding of the educational influence of social groups on individuals;

- Studying problems of various social groups and layers. The theory of social work and its relation to health. Foundations of social work in connection with health. Medical concepts and basics of medical rights in social work. Child protection and family policy; the role of women in society; norms of family and children's rights; key directions of the state policy on the elderly; specifics of social assistance to persons with disabilities and deviant behavior; knowledge and use of employment policy and social work with unemployed persons in the Republic of Uzbekistan;

- Educational and psychological principles of different social groups and layers; family planning; principles of social protection of the family; the role of social work among children, women, elderly, disabled, unemployed, and persons with deviant behavior; modern

achievements of the field in applying social work to specific social groups and layers. The importance and role of social work among youth. The role of social work in solving youth problems. Knowledge of the legal and normative basis of the social work system among the youth of Uzbekistan. Acquiring skills related to the constitutional rights of Uzbek youth[15].

According to the cycle of specialized subjects, a bachelor's degree holder is required to have foundational knowledge and to master scientific research methods in relatively narrow areas of social work. Specialized subjects include: Introduction to Social Work, History of Social Work and Foreign Experience, Social Work Theory, Social Work with Various Population Groups, Management in Social Work, and Ethical Principles and Values of Social Work.

In the educational process, special attention is given to the practical training of future social work specialists. From the first year, students must complete introductory, academic, industrial, and pre-graduation practical training. Today, a new model for conducting student internships has been developed and implemented in Tashkent, Samarkand, Fergana, and several other educational institutions.

Masters in social work receive education based on more specialized curricula compared to the bachelor's level. Depending on the structure and content of their study programs, masters specialize in providing various social services to different groups and segments of the population (for example, services for people with disabilities, working with families and children, or working with the elderly).

Since 2006, the institutionalization of specialist training in Uzbekistan has progressed with the aim of reducing the number of children placed in orphanages, returning children to their biological families, and developing alternative measures to provide shelter for children without parental care in the country. The successful implementation of these measures is closely linked to ensuring the child social protection system is staffed with qualified social workers.

For a social worker to perform effectively and fulfill their responsibilities, they must primarily possess knowledge and experience, as well as authority among the beneficiaries, administration, and educators. Additionally, they should have a clear position (rights), and personal and professional qualities such as organizational and managerial skills, eloquence, communication ability, willpower, responsibility, initiative, empathy, and personal charisma.

The analysis of specialized literature on the issue shows that professional competence is a combination of six types of competencies (M. Doel, S. Ramon, R. Sarri, S. Shardlow):

Conceptual (scientific): providing an understanding of the theoretical foundations of the profession;

Instrumental: enabling the acquisition of basic professional skills;

Integrative: aimed at developing the ability to harmonize theory and practice;

Contextual: including understanding the economic, social, and cultural environment in which professional activity takes place;

Adaptive: ensuring the development of the ability to anticipate changes and be prepared for them;

Communicative: developing the ability to use written and oral communication tools effectively.

Professional education in the social field also shapes certain social relations, such as:

Professional identity (acceptance of professional norms and responsibilities through the process of professional socialization);

Professional ethics (internalizing the moral standards of the profession);

Career competitiveness;

Scientific improvement (understanding the need to verify existing knowledge and acquire new knowledge through research);

Motivation for continuing education (the desire to maintain knowledge and professional skills at a modern level).

In addition, a social worker deals with life situations and problems for which there are no ready-made solutions. In our view, the uniqueness of this activity lies in the fact that, on one hand, the social worker ensures significant changes in the life of the individual, while on the other hand, they make full use of all existing resources to help the client successfully continue their activities.

One of the developing social practices today is the case management method, aimed at achieving this goal and providing an individual approach, which the social worker organizes. Case management is a strictly regulated procedure for delivering social services and assistance. It involves assessing the needs of the service user, planning and managing a wide range of social services, as well as analyzing the effectiveness of the services provided and the results achieved.

The intake of an application is the initial stage of the case management process. Case management is carried out by a manager and is a process that integrates assessment, planning, and coordination of assistance to receive comprehensive services. During social intervention, the social worker analyzes the key information about the client's problem and determines, based on established criteria, the client's right to receive social services and assistance.

During this activity, the social worker performs several functions:

- a) reviewing the request, creating the case file, assessing the situation, identifying needs, evaluating resources, and completing forms;
- b) maintaining regular communication with the service user, encouraging them to receive services and accept assistance;
- c) helping to strengthen the personal abilities of the service user;
- d) analyzing available local resources (such as neighborhood services, local organizations, volunteers) and continuously improving the support network;
- e) cooperating with other social services (healthcare, employment assistance centers), government agencies, and non-governmental organizations;
- f) collaborating with the family and neighborhood committees;
- g) evaluating the effectiveness of social intervention.

Another developing activity for social workers is supervision.

Supervision refers to activities aimed at improving the professional skills of social workers, addressing professional challenges, analyzing shortcomings, enhancing work organization, supporting motivation at work, ensuring adherence to ethical standards, and preventing professional burnout.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The development of the social work profession in Uzbekistan has undergone significant transformation, aligning with the country's broader social policy reforms and the growing demand for professional support in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. Following independence, the recognition of social work as a distinct academic and professional discipline marked a crucial step toward institutionalizing social protection and human services. The

analysis reveals that social work training in Uzbekistan has evolved through the integration of international best practices, curricular innovations, and a dual emphasis on theoretical knowledge and practical competence. Higher education institutions have progressively introduced bachelor's and master's programs, offering students comprehensive preparation in areas such as ethics, research, advocacy, and case management. These educational programs also cultivate essential soft skills, such as empathy, communication, and problem-solving, necessary for engaging with diverse social groups. The study highlights that social workers in Uzbekistan operate across a wide range of sectors—from healthcare and education to child welfare and employment services—demonstrating the multidisciplinary and dynamic nature of the profession. Emphasis on individualized approaches, especially through case management and supervision, underscores the commitment to client-centered service delivery. Furthermore, public-private partnerships, policy support, and inter-institutional collaboration have become critical to enhancing training quality and expanding professional opportunities. Ultimately, the article affirms that continued investment in social work education, along with systematic efforts to improve practical training and professional development, is key to ensuring that social workers in Uzbekistan are equipped to meet current and future social challenges with competence, integrity, and innovation.

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