

Mapping of Research Settings and Topics on Social Work Students in Indonesia and Malaysia

Oman Sukmana¹

Social Welfare Study Program, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

Khadijah Alavi²

Social Work Study Program, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

Zaenal Abidin³

Social Welfare Study Program, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

Hutri Agustino⁴

Social Welfare Study Program, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

¹Corresponding author: Email: oman@umm.ac.id

Abstract

This paper aims to describe student setting maps and research topics in the final semester of the Indonesian and Malaysian social work study programs. The data was collected using documentation, specifically student research reports, and analyzed through percentages. The population included 2018, 2019, and 2020 social work graduates from the University of Muhammadiyah Malang Indonesia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The total sample size was 381, consisting of 199 and 184 Indonesian and Malaysian students, respectively. The results showed that the setting map of Social Work Indonesian students included Micro 50%, Mezzo 22%, and Macro 28%. In comparison, the map setting for Malaysian students included Micro 52%, Mezzo 32%, and Macro 16%. The results showed that social work students are more interested in micro settings compared to mezzo and macro.

Keywords

Mapping, Research Topics, Student, Social Work, Practice Setting

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Introduction

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredits social work programs in all 50 states. According to Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), social work programs must incorporate specific ideals throughout their curricula. The core values include "service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, competence, human rights, and scientific inquiry, among others." According to EPAS, graduates must demonstrate competency in ten areas, including being identified professionally and conducting themselves appropriately, applying social work ethical principles to guide professional practice, using critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments, engaging diversity and difference in practice, advancing human rights and social and economic justice, and engendering trust (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010). Conducting Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice Informed Practice is a skill that a worker must possess (Rowan, Richardson, & Long, 2018). Workers, on the whole, are aware of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and their respective responsibilities in developing social work science and evaluating their practice. Apart from cultural awareness, they understand the concepts of logic, scientific inquiry, and ethical approaches to knowledge construction. Additionally, they recognize that data that informs practice should come from a variety of disciplines and sources of knowledge. The employees are familiar with the processes involved in converting research findings into effective practice. They incorporate practice experience and theory into scientific inquiry and study, use critical thinking to the analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and findings, and translate evidence to inform and enhance practice, policy, and service delivery (Zastrow, 2016). Practicing social workers needs to promote, formulate, conduct, interpret, and utilize research (Rowan et al., 2018). According to Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010), understanding social work research is critical for two primary reasons. To begin, it assists workers in become more effective in their direct practice by recommending actions that have been shown to be beneficial and provide more precise results. Framing interventions can be examined using research that identifies the precise strategies that are most effective for particular difficulties. Throughout the intervention process, evaluating practice can assist in determining whether a worker is assisting a client. Second, cumulative research contributes to the establishment of a foundation for designing effective solutions. Knowledge of what has worked in the past provides suggestions for current and future methods and techniques. Research lays the groundwork for the establishment of programs and policies that touch a large number of people. Additionally, such knowledge can result in the development of new theories and concepts that further enhance the effectiveness of social work practice. According to Gambrill (2006) and Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010), evidence-based practice is frequently used interchangeably with research-informed practice in social work. This is defined as "the conscientious, explicit, and prudent application of current best evidence in making client care decisions." The phrase empirical practice is chosen over evidence-based practice. This is a new paradigm that encourages the deliberate, prudent, and explicit use of the best available scientific data in professional decision-making (Howard, McMillen, & Pollio, 2003). Evidence-based social care is the thoughtful, explicit, and prudent application of the best available evidence when making decisions about the welfare of individuals, groups, and communities (Sheldon & Macdonald, 2010). EBP is a word that is frequently used in social work and other psychosocial sciences (Adams, Matto, & LeCroy, 2009). It consists of four steps: (1) formulating specific answerable questions about practice situations and identifying the necessary practice information; (2) locating and critically appraising the best scientific evidence; (3) applying the best scientific evidence to practice-relevant situations during the treatment process; and (4) evaluating the utility of information in specific answerable questions obtained through evaluation (Edmond et al., 2006). Diverse stakeholders are involved in social work research, including practitioners, service users, teachers, students, politicians, and administrators (Engen, Nissen, & Uggerhøj, 2019). It frequently falls into four broad types, as follows: 1) Much research examines the behavior of individual clients and their interactions with those in their immediate environment, such as families and small groups; 2) much research examines how and what services are provided to clients, as well as their success in achieving their goals; 3) some research examines social workers' attitudes and educational backgrounds, in addition to major trends in the profession; and (Kirst-Ashman, 2010). Social work research is practice-oriented and tries to accomplish one or more of the following: (a) assessing the requirements of individuals in

their circumstances, (b) establishing the relative costs and benefits of social work services, (c) developing professional education in light of changing practice contexts, and (d) analyzing the influence of legislation and social policy on clients and communities (Teater, 2017). Social research is a method for delving into and mapping out a subject that may merit further investigation. This may entail investigating a new political or religious group and gaining knowledge about a new street drug. The methodologies used vary considerably, and the outcomes are frequently indicative rather than conclusive. Social research can be used to assess the state of social affairs, such as the unemployment rate, the racial makeup of a city, or the percentage of the population having a specific political perspective or intending to vote for a particular candidate. Extensive empirical description replaces conjecture and impressions. By and large, social research seeks to explain something—to provide explanations for phenomena via the lens of causal links (Babbie, 2008). As a relatively young profession, social work often seeks to strengthen its knowledge base and claims legitimacy among competing occupations through research. Furthermore, it has asserted the importance of other sources of legitimacy for its methods and goals, such as the mission of service, sanction from the community, and value base (Anastas, 2000). Professional social workers are devoted to ethical practice at all levels of intervention, including work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and society. Their activity is grounded in empirical research and social work ethics (Frederico, 2020; Garthwait, 2015). Undergraduate social work education standards in Indonesia and Malaysia require students to conduct research. This activity serves as material for compiling final scientific work assignments as a condition for graduating with a social work degree. This article focuses on analyzing the (1) mapping of research settings for students and (2) dominant research topics of social work students.

Social Work Practice Setting

Social work is a profession that assists individuals, groups, and communities in strengthening their capacity to carry out their social functions and in creating favorable conditions for them to accomplish their goals. Social work practice is the professional application of values, principles, and techniques for the purpose of (1) assisting individuals, families, and groups in obtaining essential services such as food, housing, and income, (2) providing counseling and psychotherapy to individuals, families, and groups, (3) assisting communities or groups in providing or improving social and health services, and (4) participating in relevant legislative processes (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010). Social work practice has five objectives: (1) to improve people's problem-solving, coping, and developmental capacities; (2) to connect people to systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities; (3) to promote the effectiveness and humane operation of systems that provide people with resources and services; (4) to develop and improve social policy; and (5) to promote human rights (Zastrow, 2016). Social work includes three facets, objectives, or functions: (1) therapeutic, which may promote transformation and provide support; (2) problem-solving in human interactions, fostering interpersonal and social "harmony," and acting as a social control mechanism; and (3) supporting social development and change (Anastas, 2014). Social work practice settings can be categorized as direct and indirect (Amin, Mohamad, & Ahmad, 2019). In direct practice, one works directly with an individual, family, or group of people. In indirect practice, the social worker is involved in facilitating change through programs and policies, which mainly occur behind the scenes to help prevent problems. A social worker may engage in this form of practice by advocating for change on behalf of agency officials, politicians, or other influential individuals. Social work practices can be categorized into three settings, including (1) Micro level, where workers practice with individuals directly, (2) Mezzo level, where families and other small groups are involved, and (3) Macro level, where workers practice with organizations and communities or make changes to social status and policies (Zastrow, 2016). Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010) further categorized social work practice settings into four levels, including Micro, Micro-Mezzo, Mezzo, and Macro practices. Micropractice is an intervention with a single client (a microsystem). Counseling, education, brokering, and case management are all examples of this. Micro-Mezzo practice is an intervention by a social worker with a family. This environment mixes micro and mezzo practices due to the presence of a small group (the family) bound by an intimate character. Mezzo practice is group social work intervention. In this situation, group work may entail a wide variety of issues, objectives, and personalities. A macro practice is one that involves organizations and communities (macrosystems). Workers conduct a variety of different tasks, including social casework, case management, group work, group therapy, family

therapy, community organization, and administration. Additionally, social work professionals engage in research, consultation, supervision, planning, program development, policy formation, and teaching, primarily at the college level. The key professional activities that beginning social workers are likely to provide include social casework, case management, group work, family work, and community organization (Zastrow, 2016).

Table 1.

Summary on Macro Practice of Social Work Models Comparison

Characteristic	Locality Development Model	Social Planning Model	Social Action Model
Goals	Self-help; improve community living; emphasis on process goals.	Using a problem-solving approach to resolve community problems; emphasis on task goals.	Shifting of power relationships and resources to an oppressed group; basic institutional change; emphasis on task and process goals.
Assumptions concerning community	Everyone wants community living to improve and is willing to contribute to the improvement.	Social problems in the community can be resolved through the efforts of planning experts.	The community has a power structure and one or more oppressed groups; social injustice is a major problem.
Basic change strategy	Broad cross-section of people involved in identifying and solving their problems.	Experts using fact gathering and the problem-solving approach.	Members of oppressed groups organizing to take action against the power structure, which is the enemy.
Characteristic change tactics and techniques	Consensus: communication among community groups and interests; group discussion.	Consensus or conflict.	Conflict or contest: confrontation, direct action, negotiation.
Practitioner roles	Catalyst; facilitator; coordinator; teacher of problem-solving skills.	Expert planner; fact gatherer; analyst; program developer and implementer.	Activist; advocate; agitator; broker; negotiator; partisan.
Views about the power structure	Members of the power structure as collaborators in a common venture.	Power structure as employers and sponsors.	Power structure as the external target of the action, oppressors to be coerced or overturned.
Views about client population	Citizens	Consumers	Victims
Views about client role	Participants in a problem-solving Process.	Consumers or recipients	Employers, constituents

Source: Zastrow (2016)

Direct engagement with individuals, families, small groups, communities, policies, institutions, and other human care agencies is a component of social work practice (Chukwu, Chukwu, & Nwadike, 2017; Okoye, Chukwu, & Agwu, 2017). "Macro practice as professional guided

intervention (s) is designed to bring change in organizational, community, and policy arenas" (Netting et al., 2016). The macro practice is an intervention process involving organizations and communities (macrosystems). It is often associated with the term community development (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010). The main focus is on organizations and communities. Furthermore, the roles of social workers in macro practice include being a Mediator, Integrator/Coordinator, General Manager, Educator, Analyst/Evaluator, Broker, Facilitator, Initiator, Negotiator, Mobilizer, and Advocate (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). Macrosocial work is an integral part of generalist social work, focusing on administrative, community, and policy components. Macro practice is defined by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) as engaging in social and political action in order to affect social policy and economic development (Hill & Ferguson, 2014). Macro practice is also known as community intervention, consisting of three forms, specifically (a) Planning and Policy Practice, (b) Community Capacity Development, and (c) Social Advocacy (Rothman, 2007). There are two recurring elements in social work's macro practice. To begin, macro practice entails interaction with organizations, communities, and individuals. Second, social work's macro practice tries to effect intentional change. This is a communal and collaborative approach to social work in which social workers aim to effect change (Reisch, 2016). According to Zastrow (2016), community practice concepts include social planning, community planning, neighborhood development, community action, social action, macro practice, community organization, and community development. It has three models for community development: 1) Model for neighborhood development; 2) Model for social planning; and 3) Model for social action (Zastrow, 2016). Locality Development, also known as the Community Development Model, emphasizes that community change can be realized by increasing the broad participation of people in the local community. Community practitioners play a variety of roles in this Locality Development model approach, including facilitator, catalyst, coordinator, and teacher, all of which contribute to the development of problem-solving skills and ethical principles. The Social Planning Model places a premium on problem-solving. This paradigm presupposes that community transformation in a complex industrial setting requires highly skilled and trained personnel. The crucial role of planners (experts) in this model is to identify and solve social problems. Generally, they work in the power structure segment, such as Area Planning Agency, City Planning Department, Mental Health Center, and Community Welfare Council. According to the Social Action Model, as one of the intervention models in the macro practice of social work, the populations that experience loss or pressure need to unite against power structures to increase resource capacity or improve social justice. The purpose of social action is to make social changes in the redistribution of power and resources. The role of community practitioners in the social action model includes being an advocate, agitator, activist, partisan, broker, and negotiator. The comparison of the three models in the macro practice of social work, including (1) Locality Development Model; (2) Social Planning Model, and (3) Social Action Model, is briefly explained in the following table.

Methods

This was quantitative research (Antonius, 2003; Balnaves & Caputi, 2001; Singh, 2007) that used percentages to analyze data (Neuman, 2007; Sarwono, 2006). The data was collected using documentation, which is in the form of soft file reports of the research from 2018, 2019, and 2020 Social Work graduates of the University of Muhammadiyah Malang Indonesia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The University of Muhammadiyah Malang students who graduated in 2018, 2019, and 2020 were 57, 80, and 62. Similarly, the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia students who graduated in 2018, 2019, and 2020 were 73, 72, and 39, respectively. The total population was 381, 199 Indonesians and 184 Malaysians. The total side technique was used in sampling, where the entire population was used as the sample. This means the total number of samples was 381. The data was displayed using frequency distribution and circle tables containing data and percentages (Antonius, 2003).

Result and Discussion

The results focused on describing the mapping of research settings and the dominant research topics. A description of the research setting mapping of the research conducted by students is described in table 2 table.

Table 2:

Research Setting Mapping of Indonesian Students in 2018, 2019, 2020

No.	Year	Research Setting	Amount	Percentage (%)
1.	2018	Micro Setting	24	42%
		Mezzo Setting	11	19%
		Macro Setting	22	39%
		Total	57	100%
2.	2019	Micro Setting	35	35%
		Mezzo Setting	24	30%
		Macro Setting	21	26%
		Total	80	100%
3.	2020	Micro Setting	40	64%
		Mezzo Setting	9	15%
		Macro Setting	13	21%
		Total	62	100%

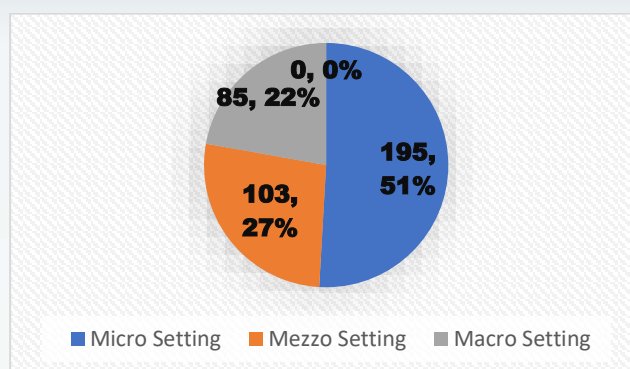
In 2018, Indonesian social work students' topics or research themes in the micro setting category were 42%, the mezzo 19%, and the macro 39%. In 2019, the micro setting category was 35%, the mezzo 30%, and the macro 26%. In 2020, the micro setting was 64%, mezzo 15%, and macro 21%. The research topics of Indonesian social work students can be explained as follows; 50% are in the micro setting category, 22% in mezzo, and 28% in the macro. The students dominantly research topics related to micro settings, such as individual and family problems.

Table 3.

Map of Malaysian Student Research Setting in 2018, 2019, 2020

No.	Year	Research Setting	Amount	Percentage (%)
1.	2018	Micro Setting	35	48%
		Mezzo Setting	22	30%
		Macro Setting	16	22%
		Total	83	100%
2.	2019	Micro Setting	41	57%
		Mezzo Setting	22	31%
		Macro Setting	9	12%
		Total	72	100%
3.	2020	Micro Setting	20	51%
		Mezzo Setting	15	39%
		Macro Setting	4	10%
		Total	39	100%

In 2018, the topics or research themes of social work students in Malaysia in the micro setting category were 48%, mezzo 30%, and macro 22%. In 2019, the micro setting category was 57%, mezzo 31%, and macro 12%. In 2020, the micro setting category was 51%, mezzo 39%, and macro 10%. Based on the data display of Pie Chart 2, the research topics for social work students in Malaysia include 52% micro setting, 32% mezzo, and 16% macro. The Indonesian students dominantly research topics related to micro settings, including individual and family problems. The description of the combined research topics between students in Indonesia and Malaysia is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Mapping of Research Topics for Indonesian and Malaysian Students in 2018, 2019, and 2020

In general, the research topics for social work students in Indonesia and Malaysia include 51% in the micro setting category, 27% in mezzo, and 22% in macro. Therefore, students are more interested in researching micro settings, including individual and family problems.

Table 4 shows the comparison of research topics mapping between Indonesian and Malaysian students.

Table 4:

Comparison of Research Setting Mapping between Indonesian and Malaysian Students

No.	Research Setting	Indonesia		Malaysia	
		Amount	Percentage (%)	Amount	Percentage (%)
1.	Micro Setting	99	50%	96	52%
2.	Mezzo Setting	44	22%	59	32%
3.	Macro Setting	56	28%	29	16%
Total		199	100%	184	100%

Both Indonesian and Malaysian social work students are more dominant and interested in research topics in the micro setting category (individual and family social problems), which is more than 50%. In the mezzo setting (groups and institutions), the interest of Malaysians is higher than of Indonesians. In the macro setting (organizations and communities), the interest of Indonesian students is higher than Malaysians'. Based on the research data, an overview of the research topics of Indonesian and Malaysian social work-study program students in each setting can be obtained. For Indonesian social work students, the dominant research topics in micro settings include Disabilities (18.81%), Family (16.83%), Children and Adolescents (14.85%), Women and Elderly (11.88%), Rehabilitation (10.89%), Health and Reproduction (7.92%), Counseling and Motivation (7.92%), Social functioning (6.93%), and others (3.96%). Dominant research topics in the mezzo setting include Institutional social service models (20.93%), Forms of institutional social support (16.27%), Role of social institutions (13.95%), Institutional social protection programs (11.63%), Corporate Social Responsibility (11.63%), Group Social Interaction (9.30%), Social Group Functions (9.30%), and others (6.98%). The dominant research topics in the macro setting include Community Empowerment (24.24%), Social Change (19.69%), Community Intervention (18.18%), Social Policy (16.67%), Social Advocacy (15.15%), and others (4.55%). In Malaysian social work students, the descriptions of dominant research topics in Micro setting include Self-restraint (9.43%), Behavior/action power (16.98%), Mental health (11.32%), Drug abuse (9.43%), Child and adolescent whipping (5.66%), Recovery/rehabilitation (11.32%), Underprivileged and golden citizen (15.09%), Domestic violence (7.55%), Role of mother and father and family (7.55%), and social function (5.67%). The dominant research topics in the mezzo setting include Institutional support, roles, and functions (27.21%), Institutional Social Workers (35.53%), and School guidance and counseling (29.13%), and others (8.13 %). Lastly, the dominant research topics in the macro setting include Community Development (37.25%), Community Intervention (25.37%), Community Social Support (28.36%), and others (9.02%).

Table 5:

Comparison of Research Topics for Indonesian and Malaysian Students

No.	Research Setting	Research Topic Indonesian	Malaysian
1.	Micro Setting	Disability (18.81%), Families (16.83%), Children and Adolescents (14.85%), Women and Elderly (11.88%), Rehabilitation (10.89%), Health and Reproduction (7, 92%), Counseling and Motivation (7.92%), Social functioning (6.93%), and others (3.96%).	Self-restraint (9.43), Behavior/action power (16.98), Mental health (11.32), Drug abuse (9.43), Child and adolescent whipping (5.66), Recovery/rehabilitation (11.32), Underprivileged people and golden citizens (15.09), Domestic violence (7.55), Role of parents and family (7.55), and Social function (5.67).
2.	Mezzo Setting	Institutional social service model (20.93%), Forms of institutional social support (16.27%), Role of social institutions (13.95%), Institutional social protection program (11.63%), Corporate Social Responsibility (11.63 %), Group Social Interaction (9.30%), Social Group Function (9.30%), others (6.98%).	Institutional support, roles, and functions (27.21%), institutional social workers (35.53%), and school guidance and counseling (29.13), and others (8.13%).
3.	Macro Setting	Community Empowerment (24.24%), Social Change (19.69%), Community Intervention (18.18%), Social Policy (16.67%), Social Advocacy (15.15%), others (4.55 %).	Community Development (37.25%), Community Intervention (25.37%), and Community Social Support (28.36%), and others (9.02%).

Discussion

Social work is a career that assists individuals, groups, and communities in affecting positive change in their areas. It establishes social circumstances that benefit both individuals and society (Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 2016). In general, this is a practice-based profession and academic discipline. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), "Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge, it engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being" (Berggren, Anand, & Bjerger, 2020). Social work practice aims to assist clients in solving social problems, whether as individuals, family, group, or community. Workers address issues that obstruct individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities from functioning optimally. Poverty, marital conflict, parent-child interactions, delinquency, abuse and neglect, substance misuse, and mental and emotional stress are just a few of the numerous issues that workers assist individuals with (Ambrosino et al., 2007). Furthermore, social work practice settings are categorized into three settings, including micro, mezzo, and macro. The principle of social work practice is Evidence-Based Practice (EBP), which requires empirical data from research for implementation. Workers need an interest and competence in all social work practice and research settings, including micro, mezzo, and macro. However, these results indicate that students are more interested in micro settings than mezzo and macro settings. Both students are less interested in conducting

research and social work practices in mezzo and macro settings. The conditions in Indonesia and Malaysia are not much different from what is experienced in the United States, where macro practices become a marginal practice field. Research on Master of Social Work (MSW) in the United States showed that only 6% of the 37,699 MSW students focus more on macro social work practices in community development or planning, administration, advocacy, and social policy. The MSW students were more interested in micro settings. However, the complexity of social problems in the United States requires the role of social workers in the macro intervention (Reisch, 2016).

Conclusion

Indonesian and Malaysian social work students are more interested in conducting research and practice in micro settings than in mezzo and macro settings. The results show that Indonesian students are interested in conducting research and social work practices differently. For instance, 50% concentrate on micro settings (individuals and families), 22% on mezzo (groups and institutions), and 28% on macro (institutions and community). Similarly, 52% of Malaysian students focus on the micro setting category, 32% on mezzo, and 16% on macro. As developing countries, Indonesia and Malaysia have macro social problems, including poverty, community powerlessness, social discrimination, and social injustice. This requires a macro intervention from social workers. Therefore, students need to be directed to have an interest in macro settings.

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