

Commentary on Systematic Review of Service user and Carer Involvement in Qualifying Social Work Education

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Commentary

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DESCRIPTION

The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) advocate SUC (Service User and Carer) involvement in all aspects of the design and delivery of social work programmes the world over. SUC involvement in social work education is well established in the UK and is a mandatory requirement. However there has been little research into the outcomes of SUC involvement for social work practice and its subsequent impact on service users and carers. Our review aimed to synthesise literature from the previous decade (2011–2020) and followed on from an earlier review involving one of the current authors.

original author and source are credited.

PRISMA scoping review guidelines were followed and twenty-eight papers met the inclusion criteria. Papers were included if they described a model, approach, or strategy of SUC involvement in learning and teaching qualifying social work education at either undergraduate or postgraduate level and if they presented some evaluation data of the effectiveness or usefulness of the involvement strategy, approach, or model. We searched six databases: Social Policy and Practice, EMBASE, Medline, PsychInfo, Scopus and Web of Science. A ten-item critical appraisal checklist was used to assess the rigour of all papers which were reviewed independently by two reviewers who applied the inclusion criteria and subsequently met to resolve any disagreements.

Most (n=21) of the papers in our final shortlisted pool were from the UK (England, n=9; Scotland, n=4; Wales, n=1; Northern Ireland, n=7). Three papers were from Ireland, and other countries in the sample were from Norway, Germany, Belgium, and Italy with one paper each. None of the studies from outside of Europe met our criteria for inclusion. A wide range of strategies reporting SUC involvement were seen that included small group discussion one-to-one conversations role plays interviews involvement in learning groups lectures along with regular teaching faculty case studies shared stories workshops and seminars and the use of digital aids such as videos and audio bytes. Involvement in role plays was the most common strategy seen along with classroom engagement alongside lecturers during teaching sessions. Most of the included papers (n=15) used a qualitative design, whilst very few (n=2) exclusively used quantitative methods, and others (n=11) used a combination of both.

About all of the reviews in this analysis gathered information on student opinions. Students claimed that hearing service users' perspectives provided them with advantages and practical ideas. They valued the chances to interact with and gain knowledge from service users and carers and stated that doing so helped they better connect theory to practice. They seemed to be able to transition between actual lived experiences and theories and refute myths and assumptions by listening to "real people" and "genuine stories." Students had the chance to evaluate their knowledge of social justice, identify the effects of injustice on people, groups, and communities, and review their judgmental and discriminatory views through opportunities to listen to and interact with service users.

Our findings indicate that SUC involvement in qualifying social work education is a positive experience for both students and SUCs. For the service user and/or carer the sharing of stigmatized 'lived experiences' on issues such as mental illness and substance misuse seems to provide some form of social support. This review has highlighted shortcomings in terms of the evaluation modalities used to assess SUC involvement in social work education programmes. Future research would benefit from longitudinal methods to follow students into practice to explore the impact of SUC involvement on the quality and outcomes of their practice.