Value Integration amongst Students of Social Work: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract

Values form an integral component of the social work profession. In fact, values provide the framework within which social work professionals make decisions and create meaningful and inclusive interventions for their client systems. Consequently, facilitating and promoting value integration must comprise the core component of teaching and learning in this profession. In its early stages of progression, a quest for acceptance shifted the primary thrust of professional social work to developing a scientific knowledge base and skills, at the expense of focusing on its values. Over time, factors such as value plurality, limited 'values' focus and pedagogical challenges in values training, and the dominance of generic, universal, and Western value sets emerged as significant roadblocks in values-based practice. The authors contend that this has led to an ongoing diminution of values teaching and integration in schools of social work, made more critical in the contemporary neoliberal context of professional practice. Based on a descriptive exploratory research study, the paper focuses on a school of social work in Delhi, India. It assumes a critical view of the value transactions that take place in the classroom and field settings and explores the manner in which values are imbibed and practised by the students; the challenges and ethical dilemmas experienced by them; and the mechanisms deployed by them to resolve such dilemmas. Centred on the perspectives of students and educators, the paper examines the nature and process of value integration. It proposes ways to consolidate the value base of social work education and practice.

Keywords: Values; Value Integration; Social Work Education; Ethical Dilemmas

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Introduction

With its historical roots firmly grounded in social justice and fairness, Reamer (1995) claimed that social work is perhaps the most normative among helping professions. The profession has sought to be a beacon for ethical practice and has often acted as the social conscience to deprecate unjust and harmful policies and programmes (Shdaimah & Strier, 2020). It aims to promote people's well-being by standing against inequities and discrimination and advocating for social justice and social change (Chatzifotiou & Papouli, 2022). Quite naturally, therefore, social work is "first and foremost an enterprise imbued with moral purpose and values" (Clark, 2006, p. 77). Both in its genesis and professional progression, social work has been tethered to the bedrock of values that have permeated its interventional thrust.

Professional values represent the core beliefs of a profession. They symbolise the foundational ideals and the aspirational goals of practice. They also reflect the standards for guiding the conduct of people within the profession. For the social work profession, six core values—service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence—are delineated in its widely followed Code of Ethics, as prescribed by the National Association of Social Workers in the United States (NASW, 2018). These core values have stood the test of time and remained steadfast ever since the Code was developed in 1960. In its 'Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles', the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2018) affirmed: recognition of the inherent dignity of humanity; promoting human rights; promoting social justice; promoting the right to self-determination; promoting the right to participation; respect for confidentiality and privacy; treating people as whole persons; ethical use of technology and social media; and professional integrity as the overarching principles to be followed by social workers. Instead of following a single universal code/values set, different nations have adopted their own ethical codes, often inspired by or by referencing the NASW Code. In India, schools of social work have derived values from diverse sources. Essentially, the value sets represent the ideals which all social workers should aspire for. The internalisation of these values is an integral part of the socialisation process for entrants to the social work profession (Allen & Friedman, 2010).

Despite the strong emphasis on values as fundamental to social work, an exhaustive review of the literature in a subsequent section of this paper has revealed several historical trends in the profession that have led to challenges in the domain of social work values. In the formative stages of professionalisation, a substantive thrust on the generation of scientific knowledge and skills occurred at the expense of values (Bisman, 2004). Even after the evolution of ethical codes, an ambiguity and unintelligibility of the concept of value and value plurality (Flídrová, 2015); increasing complexity of ethical decision making and potential for ethical conflicts and moral distress (Fenton, 2019; Hafford-Letchfield & Bell, 2015; Shdaimah & Strier, 2020); neglect of the moral content of actions and internalisation of the neoliberal ethos leading to adoption of managerial, bureaucratic and technical practice (Brockman & Garett, 2022; Shdaimah & Strier, 2020); and ethical challenges in "technology-assisted social work services"(NASW, 2018) have posed challenges to values based practice**.** Furthermore, a gap between classroom instruction and practice of values; limited focus on values training in educational programmes (Petrucijová et al., 2021); dominance of generic, universal, and Western value sets and lack of a single, formal, nationwide code of ethics in India (Weiss-Gal & Welbourne, 2008) have also emerged as significant road blocks in values application.

The motivation for this study stemmed from the authors' experiential engagement with their own students in classroom and practice learning settings. The authors noted with concern an apparent disconnect between students' values in the applied domain. Manifested through several instances where quite a few seemed

unconvinced about the imperatives of application of values, to those who demonstrated an incompetence in identifying the moral and ethical content of their work, and to those who felt ill-equipped to apply values in their practice settings. While these provided more than adequate justification for the authors to undertake a study in this regard, an exhaustive review of the literature also revealed a glaring dearth of studies on the multifarious dimensions of social work values in the Indian context. Ethical dilemmas also remain a relatively neglected theme in social work research, despite their notable importance to ethical professional practice. Although there is considerable international literature and scholarly work on ethical dilemmas, empirical research is still limited, both in the global context and specifically in India.

The present paper is divided into six sections. The paper begins with an introduction of the topic, which also provides the rationale for the study. The second and third sections discuss the research methodology and review of studies, respectively. The fourth section presents the research findings. The fifth and sixth sections of the paper provide the conclusion and recommendations stemming from the discussion.

Research Methodology

The paper emanates from a descriptive, exploratory research study on the dimensions of value and ethics integration amongst the students of social work at a school of social work in Delhi, India. The approach is justifiable given the paucity of empirical research in the country. A qualitative approach was used as it was best suited for this small-scale study aimed at exploring students' own understanding of values. The paper highlights students' perspectives on social work values, the challenges they confront, and the ethical dilemmas they experience in integrating and applying these values. It etches out the mechanisms they deploy to resolve such challenges and also provides recommendations for consolidating the value base of social work education and practice. The students' findings have been triangulated with the perspectives of six social work teachers on their experiences of engaging with students in the domain of values, the challenges they face in inculcating these values amongst students, and their assessment of how to strengthen the process of value inculcation amongst students.

The fourth-semester postgraduate students of social work, who had completed 1.5 years of professional education, were the participants in the study. The rationale for selecting fourth-semester students as participants in the study was that, during their three semesters in the Department, they would have had sufficient opportunities to experience and critically reflect on their personal and professional values, as well as their professional journey towards value inculcation.

The study specifically incorporated the following objectives:

- to explore the students' understanding of values after one and a half years of social work education
- to identify the influences on the development/ application of students' values during this phase of professional education
- to uncover the nature of value clashes and ethical dilemmas faced by the students, both within classroom engagement and 'experiential' practicum settings; and
- to understand the approaches and strategies used by them to resolve or mitigate value clashes and dilemmas.

The more specific research questions which the paper has attempted to answer pertain to the students' understanding about social work values which they develop within the academic ecosystem of professional social work; the major influences on the development of student's values during their educational phase; the presence of specific challenges which the students face in applying these values; the value clashes and ethical dilemmas faced within classroom and field work settings; and the manner in which they resolve or mitigate the clashes and dilemmas.

Convenience sampling was deployed, and voluntary participation was sought from interested students. Twenty-five students agreed to be part of this research, and a formal consent was acquired for their participation. The sample was found to be representative, as it included participants from a wide spectrum of gender, caste, region, religion and rural-urban background. An analysis of their fieldwork settings revealed that they had been placed in diverse settings, ranging from communities, mental health and counselling settings, schools, hospitals, organisations working with prisoners, children in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection, agencies working with families and children, and those engaged with welfare administration and corporate social responsibility.

Twenty-five students agreed to be part of this research, and formal consent was acquired for their participation. In-depth interviews were conducted with these students using a semi-structured interview schedule. In addition, three FGDs were also conducted, each covering 8-10 students. The research also involved a calibrated response from six social work faculty members regarding the inculcation of values in the teaching-learning process, the challenges they face in imparting values to students, and how this process can be strengthened. The data was analysed thematically to identify and delineate the patterns in the responses. The prominent themes included: values in the social work curriculum and pedagogy; value conflicts and challenges in integration; ethical dilemmas in fieldwork practice; and spaces for resolving ethical challenges.

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the University's Institutional Ethics Committee.

Review of Studies

Values and Ethics: Definitions and Perspectives

Values have been defined through different lenses. Rokeach (1979) quotes Kiuckhohn (1951) in stating that value is a conception, explicit or implicit... of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action" (p. 48). It can be seen as a sustained belief that a particular mode of conduct or end-state of existence is individually or socially preferable as compared to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. (Rokeach, 1979). Reamer (1995) conceptualised values as "generalized, emotionally charged conceptions of what is desirable; historically created and derived from experience; shared by a population or group within it; and they provide the means for organizing and structuring patterns of behavior" (p.11). The literature on professional social work values has also portrayed values in diverse formats. From being treated as "ethical principles relating to how people should be treated, what ideas or actions are worthy or unworthy, good or bad, right or wrong" to "intangible virtues or character traits of workers"; to a representation of "the broad beliefs about the nature of the good society and the role of social work within this" (Banks, 2008, p.8), values have subsumed diverse interpretations. Vigilante (1974) referred to values as the "fulcrum of practice" (p.114) and Congress (1999) defined them as the "relatively enduring beliefs of the profession" (p. 3) about what is right and correct. She further defines *ethics* as values put into practice, that is, the behaviours that follow from our beliefs about what is right.

The word ethic, etymologically, derives its meaning from a Greek word that is synonymous with the English word 'habit' in English. Ethics have been characterised both as moral philosophy and moral standards. The former representation has a singular connotation and incorporates meta-ethics, normative ethics and descriptive ethics. The latter representation, on the other hand, has a plural thrust and refers to the norms and standards of behaviour that people follow concerning what is good or bad, or right or wrong as qualities of character or conduct (Banks, 2021). Ethics has spawned several ethical theories; the most established of which are deontology, utilitarianism, consequentialism and virtue ethics (Gray & Webb, 2010).

The domain of social work ethics is diversifying and embracing specialised realms of virtue ethics, ethics of care, communitarian ethics and other pluralist approaches, beyond the traditional professional ethics (Banks, 2008). Developments in philosophical and professional ethics within other human service professions, such as medicine and nursing, have influenced the theoretical approaches to social work ethics. According to Banks (2008), most often, the term 'social work ethics' is used as singular term to refer to a "specialist area of professional ethics comprising the study of the norms of right action, good qualities of character and values relating to the nature of the good life that are aspired to, espoused and enacted by social workers in the context of their work" (p. 1238).

Professional social work is grounded in sets of established ethical principles of what is right and wrong, in deontological or principles-based systems of ethics, which are often expressed in ethical codes (Banks, 2021; Reamer, 2018). It was felt that the relationship between social workers and their clients is 'fiduciary' that is, based on trust (Kutchins, 1991, as quoted by Banks, 2021) and unequal. Therefore, social work requires a code of ethics that is designed, among other things, to protect clients from exploitation or misconduct (Banks, 2021) and guide social workers for ethical practice. Social workers are expected to use their authority, knowledge and expertise to serve their clients' best interests, and, insofar as they can, they must be trusted by their client groups. Professional associations in different countries have developed such codes of ethics for social work.

Unfortunately, in the Indian context, the absence of a national-level, universally accepted professional body has delayed the development in a context-specific code of ethics for Indian practice. In 2015, the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) gave a list of ethical principles for practice, subsuming: human rights and human dignity, social justice, integrity and belongingness, sustainability, services, and human relations (NAPSWI, 2015). However, limited membership in this body has not created conducive conditions for a universal acceptance and application of this code.

The Primacy/ Decline of Values

The formative years of social work showed a distinct thrust on moral concerns, but a shift of focus on knowledge and skills transpired quite early in its professional development. Critiques regarding professionalisation of social work centred on a lack of systematic scientific knowledge base informing social work practice (Cnaan & Dichter, 2007). A call for a "highly organised body of knowledge" (Richmond, 1930 as quoted in Bisman, 2004, p. 113), alongside the affiliation of social work education with university systems fuelled the desire for social work to be accepted as a science. An emergent focus on building the 'helping relationship' in case work and on practical work in agencies initiated a stress on skills, at the expense of focus on values and mission. In the US, Flexner's mandate for a profession to be "academic and theoretic" (Flexner, 1915, p.579) further generated a full-fledged discourse on scientific respectability, empiricism and a paradigm shift towards scientifically based practice (Fisher, 1981). It was generally felt that since "social work practice occurs in the real world with real life problems, empirical support and demonstrability is essential" (Bisman, 2004, p. 116). Focus on evidence-based practice emerged as a manifestation of this long-standing desire of social work to be counted as a scientific profession engaged in the progressive and rational project of modernity (Gray & McDonald, 2006).

Over time, many authors questioned the trend of attributing merit to knowledge and skills, without these being rooted in values and morality. They strongly argued that professional engagements must be firmly grounded in values and guided by ethical codes (Brint, 1994; Gordon, 1965; Gustafson, 1982; Siporin, 1975). Many among them contended that values have not been treated with the seriousness befitting their role as the fulcrum of practice. For instance, Vigilante (1974) highlighted the deterministic stand of social workers when it

came to dealing with professional values when he lamented that social workers religiously clung to values, intuitively, out of faith, and as a symbol of their humanitarianism. Highlighting the likely dissonance between knowledge and values, Gordan (1965) stipulated that "knowledge refers to what seems to be established by the highest standards of objectivity and rationality of which man is capable, while value refers to what man prefers or would want to be with a degree of attachment that may involve all the loyalty or devotion or sacrifice of which he is capable" (p. 34). The challenge arises when confirmation (knowledge) and preference (value) do not concur. In our strife to become 'scientific', the preference for "confirmed" or "confirmable" propositions (knowledge) grows to supersede those propositions that are held largely by preference (values). Gordan (1965) recommended that for social work, instead of visualising a knowledge-values clash (or a science-change dichotomy), it was desirable to opt for a values-knowledge alignment. Viewing a profession as a "calling", Gustafson (1982) contended that the moral motives that brought people to specific professions defined their sense of worth and professional dignity and kept them energized in conditions of adversity. He asserted that "calling without professionalization is inept, and a profession without a calling lacks moral and humane roots, loses human sensitivity, and restricts the vision of the purposes of human good that are served"(p. 505). Banks (2021) reiterated that it was "the values reflected in the moral conundrums of practice, not knowledge base used (that) distinguishes and guides the profession" (p. 12). Practice wisdom is developed through human sensibilities and sensitivities, and not merely through theoretical and technical problem-solving models.

In their highly provocative work, Specht and Courtney (1994) highlighted the dominant trend towards psychotherapy and clinical social work in the West as both a cause and an effect of a movement away from traditional social work values. It contributed to and became a symptom of the relinquishment of social work's "mission to help the poor and oppressed and to build communality" (p. 4). In another contentious work, Margolin (1997) argued that social work's core mission was neither altruism nor justice but, rather, the exercise of power, and that this was achieved through the investigation and social control of the poor on behalf of other classes. Both works managed to stir the social work fraternity into an effort to examine the conceptual and ethical foundations of social work, leading to a debate to re-examine social work's mission.

In the more contemporary context, neoliberal ideology and practices are significantly divergent from social work and its espoused values (Brockman & Garett, 2022) as neoliberalism thwarts social justice and human rights-oriented practice. Having permeated major ideological shifts towards an outcome and efficiency-based system with a top-down orientation, neoliberalism has focused more on the individual rather than social structures. This has created conditions where the social worker is increasingly "unable to enact his/her 'compassionate self' and, instead, is mired in an outcome-oriented practice" (Butler-Warke et.al., 2020, p.69). In a discourse on dichotomies prevailing within social work, Banks (1995) postulated that "value statements have tended to be somewhat divorced from the reality of social work practice" (p. 41). In similar context, Ornellas et al., (2020) highlighted that the identity, values and practice of the social work profession are facing severe challenges as a result of neoliberal reform. Reisch (2019) has brought forth the "tension prevailing between the profession's social justice mission and status elevation goal, its shifts between social reform and elite support; social change and social control, empowerment and expertise" (p. 581). Evidence of multiple expressions of ethical distress being experienced by social workers is increasingly being documented (Attrash-Najjar & Strier, 2020; Barnes & Hugman, 2002; Dlamini & Sewpaul 2015; Fenton, (2019); Hyslop, 2016; McMilan, 2020). Yuill (2018) highlights the loss of control experienced by British social workers, who felt constrained from expressing their compassionate selves and instead engaged with technocratic, reductive reports rather than

working with people in need of help. Contemporary trends marking depletion in values in social work have been characterised by Shdaimah and Strier (2020) as "insidious forms of erosion" of the social conscience that are harder to identify and challenge. Calling it a moment of moral distress for the profession, they assert that social workers must acknowledge that their concerns have moral meaning and implications. Similarly, Fenton (2019) has also upheld moral distress as an opportunity to learn and to consider the normative implications of social work.

Social Work Values in the Indian Context

Social work in India is rooted in a rich history and tradition of social service. Its indigenous moorings were inspired by religious, humanitarian and rational secular traditions and grounded in philanthropy, social reform and institutionalized social services (Kulkarni, 1993). Values and ethical thinking have been integral to Indian culture (Reamer & Nimmagadda, 2017), and charity, altruism and *dharma* (religious and moral duty) have found extensive discourse in the ancient cultural tradition and literary texts. Social work has also drawn values from diverse religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Indigenous beliefs (Nadkarni & Joseph, 2014). Reform movements also upheld the ideals of equality, the emancipation of marginalised groups, and the creation of a just society. Gandhian values found resonance in social policy and planning in independent India. Most importantly, the adoption of the Indian Constitution guaranteed a diversity of freedoms, while upholding the elimination of all forms of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex for the attainment of social, economic and political justice (Pathak, 2013).

Among the first few Indians who made a significant contribution towards developing an Indian perspective of social work was G.R. Banerjee. Her work appeared in 1972, and therein the concepts of social welfare as *kalyan* or *mangal*; concepts of love, duty or *Dharma* and *Ahimsa*; concept of detachment or *Nishkama Karma*; the welfare of all human beings; or *loka sangraha;* concepts of self, professional self, self-help, and Karma theory; concept of social functioning and social consciousness were elucidated as core to social work (Pathak, 2016). Renowned educators like Gangrade (1964), Gore (1966), Mukundarao (1969) and Nagpaul (1970) also devoted significant thought and writing to Indian cultural dimensions not aligned with American value-based social work education, and ways in which Indian values and heritage could be meaningfully integrated within Indian social work education (Howard, 1971). In 1997, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai) brought out a draft "Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers in India" (TISS Social Work Educator's Forum, 1997), which acknowledged *Sarvodaya* (well-being of all), *Swarajya* (self-governance), *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and solidarity and partnership with the marginalized as important values through which the overall well-being of people; people centered development; and work with communities through non-violent and peaceful ways could be realized (p. 337). Unfortunately, this document could not culminate in the codification of an Indigenous value base and ethical standards.

In the overall context, while the subject of ethics gained notable momentum in social work literature and professional forums of the West, the profession failed to consistently invest in rigorous scholarship on social work ethics and indigenous ethical standards in India (Goswami, 2012; Reamer & Nimmagadda, 2017). Not surprisingly, an adherence to universal social work definitions and standards, and acceptance of the generic Western-centric values continued to prevail. Lack of indigenous knowledge in Indian social work curriculum has also been underscored by many educators like Akhup (2009), Andharia (2007), Banerjee (1972) , Bodhi (2011), Dasgupta (1968), , Desai (1985), Desai (2004), Kuruvilla (2005), Saldanha (2008) and Siddiqui (1987). The imperatives of evolving a curriculum that could cater to the regional and cultural diversities, and challenges of the Indian context, while also enlightening students with "emancipatory ideologies, theories and practice of social

transformation with radical underpinnings" (Nadkarni & Joseph, 2014, p. 78) were upheld. In the more recent post-COVID context, Agnimitra and Sharma (2022) have emphasized a deeper engagement with values within the indigenous context of India, more so when a multiplicity of global challenges confront human service professionals and when social work in India seeks a renewed sense of relevance. The authors have proposed a focal thrust on: Universal Right to Life; Ecologically Wise and Harmonious Living; Unity Consciousness and Interconnectedness; Mutuality and Collectivism; Self-Reliance (*Swadeshi*); Simple Living; Nonviolence and Truth (*Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*); and Welfare of all through Welfare of the Marginalized (*Sarvodaya* through *Antyodaya*) as core Indigenous values, with universal contemporary relevance.

Ethical Dilemmas and Ethical Distress

According to Gómez-Garcia et al. (2021), social workers often confront ethical issues, ethical problems and ethical dilemmas. An "ethical dilemma is when a social worker must decide between two equally inopportune alternatives that may involve a conflict of moral principles and, therefore, the final choice will to some extent violate one of them" (p. 2). In a study of social workers' practice, Fenton (2015, 2016) identified 'ethical stress' wherein practitioners felt unable to practice in ways that they felt were ethical. This was either because "there was a disjuncture between the expectations of their agency and what is formally expressed social work values, or because they were unable to base their practice in what they felt was 'right' because ideas about what is right, such as equality or justice, are hard to put into practice" (Fenton, 2016, p.12). Morales and Sheafor (1980) underscored four core categories of values: the values of society or community in which the social worker operates; the professional values that define the profession and are included in codes; the personal values of the social worker, with its own axiological constellation; and the client`s values, with its own set of attitudes, beliefs and convictions. It is often assumed that social and professional

values are in perfect unison, as professional values reflect society's preferred values. However, dissonance generated by dominant ideologies, traditions, societal inertia, prejudices, stereotypes, and the existence of multiple subcultures often occur. This leads to value collisions and consequential challenges for the social worker to find the right balance and use them correctly in the decision-making process (Giurgiu & Marica, 2013).

On account of the above, ethical dilemmas and stress may inevitably arise in almost all aspects of work, be it clinical work, administration and management, advocacy, community organising, policy, practice and research and evaluation (Reamer, 2019). Ethical dilemmas play an important role in the decision-making process, as they affect the social workers' ability to make decisions that are crucial in tackling ethically challenging situations that may arise during the course of their work. Despite their significance for ethical professional practice, the subject of ethical dilemmas has remained a largely understudied area of social work research. While ethical dilemmas in helping professions cannot be wished away, they can be managed by having access to ethics support mechanisms and deploying coping strategies that act as a defence against ethically dilemmatic situations (Banks & Williams, 2005; Papouli, 2019; Reamer, 2021).

Research on values, ethics and ethical dilemmas in the West has been frequent. Studies have shed light on various critical themes like: exploration of roles and values of students and practitioners in order to quantify intimate convictions, beliefs, feelings, values and highlight their importance, along with social work values (Giurgiu & Marica, 2013); barriers to value application, mainly related to the definition of the concept of values and to the plurality of values in social work (Flídrová , 2015); challenges emanating from conflict over perceived differences in professional values, allegiances, or norms faced, and opportunities offered for social workers in inter-professional settings (Sweifach, 2015); assessment of anti-racist and diversity content in the undergraduate social work curriculum indicating lack of clear

and systematic strategy to address the themes of anti-racism, anti-discrimination, and culturally sensitive practice (Scherf, 2024); perceptions of faculty, students, and staff regarding the factors that contribute to the effective delivery of diversity and social justice content (Deepak et al., 2015); social work students' beliefs, emotions, and experiences around race and racism in order to inform the development of anti-racist pedagogies (Abrams, et al., 2021); diversity of ethical dilemmas encountered in professional practice in Greece and the need for ethics support and training programmes as an integral part of social work professional education and development (Chatzifotiou & Papouli, 2022); among others.

In a recent critical article on the NASW Code of Ethics, the cornerstone of social work practice in the United States, Gross (2024) characterises it as both fostering and constraining ethical development and social work practice. Framed largely as a tool for risk management, the author highlights its perceptive tilt towards "ontological positivism", greater applicability to individual therapeutic practice, lack of reflexivity about the complexities of global social work, and support of the status quo, as against a transformative paradigm. It perpetuates the neutrality of social workers, which is incongruent with justice-oriented social work. The "neoliberal social cohesion" view of social work is not focused on changing society but on helping people fit into social structures that often dominate and oppress them.

The review of literature underscores the critical importance of values for the social work profession and also highlights their worrisome erosion, especially in the present neo-liberal times. Significantly, there is a discernible shortage of contemporary studies elucidating the frame of values education in social work in the Indian context, which clearly underscores the relative undermining of the subject of values and ethics in social work education and practice in India. This paucity of literature on the value inculcation process, students' engagement with values, their ethical dilemmas, challenges and the coping strategies used by them during value

conflicts prevails has tended to obfuscate the moral 'distress' confronting the profession. In India, with its immensely diverse population and cultures, it is critical to develop professionals who are grounded in social work values and demonstrate cultural competency.

Findings

This section presents the findings from the research conducted with students and faculty in social work. It first elaborates the formal, structured framework of value integration adopted in the school of social work under study and then explores students' and educators' perspectives on social work values.

The Context: Structured Framework of Value Integration

The two-year Master's programme in social work at the designated school attracts students from a wide array of academic disciplines and diverse backgrounds and ideologies. This collage of cultures provides the context for student-teacher interactions on social work values. At the outset, it is noteworthy that a transition in the selection process towards a centralized nationwide exam for all disciplines across all public universities and a reliance on multiple choice questions as the sole determinant of candidates' eligibility has emerged as a constraining factor for social work education, as the process constricts the educators to comprehensively assess the candidates' motivation, aptitude and proclivity to do social work, which in turn has ramifications not only on the diversity of values that they carry with them but also challenges in training them to assimilate and accommodate social work values.

Post admission, students experience a week-long orientation programme to initiate them into social work and sensitise them for professional commitment to practice constituencies. An introduction to the values and ethics of the profession enables them to acquire the first glimpse of the social work values of service, dignity and worth of the person, social justice, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence (NASW, 2018). The imperatives of non-discrimination, equity,

empathy, and sensitivity to cultural diversity are also introduced. This is achieved through lectures, audio-visuals, and workshops specially designed for this purpose. The students also undertake the Social Work Pledge, which aligns with the international definition of social work (Agnimitra & Sharma, 2023; IFSW, 2014) and embodies the values-based approach of social work.

The theoretical courses provide a platform for teachers to introduce values and highlight their significance and application. Courses focusing on social work methods and working with marginalised and vulnerable groups place special emphasis on values and ethics. Ideally speaking, classroom space allows teachers to engage in discussions on values and value conflicts, but the semester-based format, suffused with an ambitious theoretical curriculum, poses a challenge to a consistent and meaningful values engagement by all course teachers. Field practicum settings and guided supervision also emerge as desirable means for reflecting on experiential engagement with values, along with individualised conferences, affording valuable spaces to foster frank discussions of the predicaments encountered in applying values to practice. Additional inputs from invited resource persons across diverse fields are intended to enhance the skill base and value frames central to practice.

Values Building in Social Work Education: Students' Perspectives

Values in social work curriculum and pedagogy

The student participants showed a range in their original motivation to join the social work programme. While 14 of them acknowledged that social work was their first choice, for the rest of the 11 students, it was not their first choice. The latter joined the social work programme on account of diverse reasons which were largely involuntary and circumstantial, like failure to get admission in other courses, dire need for hostel accommodation, and job orientation of the programme, among others. To begin, this variability in itself, presents inherent challenges to the assumption of a uniform, generic process of value building, given the vast

continuum of initial value sets and the associated motivations to change and modify, as underscored by all faculty participants.

Participants were asked to reminisce about their experience of engaging in values at the school. They were asked to focus on their own thinking and beliefs and to reflect on any effective changes they made in their attitudes and behaviour towards social work practice, client groups, and people in general over the last one and a half years of education. They were also prompted to share their experiences, the outcomes, and the challenges they confronted in such transformation.

Professional values were perceived as important by all participants. When asked to highlight the values that they paid utmost attention to, they elucidated the values of inherent dignity and worth of individuals, individualisation, acceptance, non-judgmental attitude, right to self-determination, empathy and confidentiality. Many of them also included social justice and human rights as core values. The perception of faculty reflected diversity, in that while four of them projected empathy and acceptance of diversity as core attributes, the other two participants drew their discourse from the anti-oppressive paradigm and viewed social justice and human rights as paramount. Student participants were largely unaware of the international codes of ethics that guide the profession. Some were familiar with their names, but not their components. Some were aware of the NASW Code of Ethics, but they did not know the details. Most of them were apprised of the presence of the NAPSWI Code of Ethics, but were not cognizant of its specific sections/ provisions.

As mentioned earlier, although the curriculum envisions teaching of values as an ongoing and diffused process spread over the entire two years of education, most students presented a differential perspective regarding values teaching-learning. Participants unanimously appreciated the initial attempts of the school to instil students with the core values through the pledge. However, many admitted that this was a transient emotion which gradually faded over

time. While some reinforcement of these values did continue through different media, it was not as impactful in rekindling an overwhelming and transformative emotion.

While they acknowledged that values were discussed as part of a few courses, they strongly felt that the subject of values was not built as an ongoing and coherent process across the two-year programme. Often, ethics and values were referred to implicitly, rather than with an explicit, direct thrust on them *per se*. It was only in occasional measure that any significant discussion on value engagement actually transpired. The courses which provided them specific focus on building values in social work, included: (a) methods of social work (b) courses dealing with marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as elderly, people with disabilities, children, women, and tribals (c) courses where teachers incorporated reflective and experiential pedagogies of practice (e.g., case studies, group discussions, role plays, simulation, workshops), and (d) field practicum which entailed self-experience.

A common discourse was the confinement of the values curriculum and pedagogy to simply naming the values and explicating their essence. However, since there was limited guidance on actually integrating values in their thinking and action, students felt constrained in their practical application. One student mentioned:

> In many instances, I could deduce the presence of values from the narratives presented by a few teachers, and these were very helpful in making me understand the specific value and how to apply it. However, such inputs were occasional.

A thrust on integrated teaching of values was lacking. Faculty responses reinforced this, as four faculty members expressed concern that the curriculum did not provide the requisite bandwidth to dwell on values and values integration, because of which they addressed it through scattered inputs wherever possible/ required. A dire need for a systematically structured space for this important component, or even a distinct course for values, was recommended by four faculty members. Two faculty members were, however, of the opinion that while the curriculum did provide ample space; the pace at which the curriculum was expected to run did not provide sufficient time for discussions and interactions in the class and outside. Although individualised support to those who shared ethical dilemmas was often provided, the increased number of students and in the course load reduced their ability to connect personally with students.

For many students, theoretical familiarity with values did not lead to their application or even to a conviction to use them. A participant acknowledged confusion about the distinction between 'values', 'principles' and 'codes', and how to identify values as distinct from principles and codes. In the words of another participant:

> I do appreciate the significance of values, and among all the values that I imbibed, I was more conscious in applying 'acceptance' and 'confidentiality' as these were rather easy to apply. But I never applied other values, especially the more abstract ones like social justice consciously, as not much practical orientation was given to us. Most of us memorised the value set for the sake of exams and viva voce.

Yet another participant shared:

> I guess all work that we do is for social justice and human rights, and so I never felt the need to be deeply conscious of how I applied these values during field interventions. I just assumed that all my work was value replete.

From the responses, it was easy to glean the many constraints that participants felt regarding the assimilation and practice of values, especially the foundational value of social justice. While some like the above, were confused about its practical application, as mere conceptual understanding of social justice did not give them the wherewithal to practice; another set of students acknowledged (in good faith) that their personal beliefs were tangential to what was generally upheld as social justice in

the social work parlance and that they did not find the classroom to be a very 'safe' space for honestly expressing their thoughts and views. Faculty conversations attributed the glaring gap between the theory and practice of social justice to pedagogical constraints by way of lack of opportunities available for practicing social justice skills, leading to 'symbolic' practice; lack of faculty competency to engage with the subject; and an overall detachment of most field work settings with social action, activism and advocacy, as spaces fostering application.

Many student participants iterated that most values were too idealistic and did not work in the complex world in which they practiced:

> It is good to know and appreciate these values, but the outside world has its own system and these values do not fit in there or values have remained transfixed in time while time has moved on.

Responses such as these revealed that the rapidly changing context was perceived as a factor leading to a misfit between what they were oriented to eulogise, and what actually prevailed/ worked in the real world. A student very candidly confessed that:

> When the whole world is becoming self-centred and materialistic, it is rather unrealistic for us to stand firm on our core values.

The aforementioned challenges in values application highlight the generality and plurality of values and principles introduced to the class. Even if the enunciated ideals align with students' personal values and commitment, they remain disconnected from the practical realities they face, leading to a disjuncture between what students believe and what they can implement in practice (Payne, 2022). The challenge of enabling students to glean social work values from the generic principles elucidated in diverse ethical codes, and facilitating their application to real-life situations within the limited curriculum, was highlighted by four interviewed faculty members.

The understanding of the role of field work in facilitating value integration also oscillated among participants. A few reported that fieldwork strengthened their adherence to professional values, as they used the opportunity to consciously engage with these values and reflect on the challenges encountered in the field with their supervisors. Others noted that social work values were contextual and specific to field work settings. Therefore, applying professional values universally in the practical context emerged as a challenge. They also shared how they had been able to apply the values of service, empathy, acceptance, and inherent dignity of all persons while engaging with client groups, especially persons with disability, commercial sex workers, juvenile delinquents and people from other vulnerable groups.

As far as effective strategies to inculcate social work values were concerned, participants unanimously expressed support for experiential forums like value integration workshops, case studies, model situations, role plays, supportive instruction and discussions. Various responses which highlighted the effectiveness of 'learning through experience' were gleaned from their conversations, such as:

> I could relate to what is empathy and the experience of empathy with a person with disability, or I could sense how acceptance works, or I understood how we are often judgmental in real life situations, and how difficult it was to remain non- judgmental or what is stigma and labeling or what is the essence of social justice for a privileged person like me.

The preference for practical demonstration, case examples of values application and facilitation through first-hand "guided" experience with anticipated practice situations were shared by all participants. For many, only those teachers who could incorporate specific instances of value integration and demonstrate value clashes and resolution through specific cases and narratives were able to make them more deeply aware of values and how they realistically operated in practice settings.

Value Conflicts and Challenges in Integration

Many participants shared that social work values largely aligned with their personal values and socialisation, making their transition to social work values relatively smooth. One participant noted:

> The values which social work professes are a part of my religion and socialisation. This is what my parents encouraged me to acquire. Thus, my personal values only got reinforced here.

In the words of another participant:

> When the teachers shared and discussed social work values in the class, I never felt that I was learning something new. Acceptance, non-discrimination and respect are the values with which I grew up at home. So, I easily connected with these values. Going out of the way to help others was what I have seen at home.

Thus, the students whose socialisation had sensitised them to the values of equality, justice and acceptance found it easy to transition into the professional frame. For them, classroom discussions and field experience helped reinforce the validity of their personal values. Students who had consciously chosen social work as their preferred choice found a greater alignment with social work values, as they had expected that a human service profession would entail values such as service, altruism, acceptance, empathy and compassion. Four students mentioned that they had considered social work as their 'calling' only because they possessed desirable values needed for human service.

However, many participants acknowledged a divergence between the values imbibed as part of their primary and secondary socialisation, and those which the profession subscribed. They gradually opened up to share their challenges in overcoming their personal biases. One participant shared:

> It has not been easy to offload the values which have been part of my socialisation. I have tried, but often the values with which I grew up affect my behaviour/ conduct.

Giving the example of acceptance of people with alternate sexuality, she articulated her unease in showing an unbiased acceptance of them. Another participant said that she had to consistently push herself to accept the professional values of diversity and social justice but expressed satisfaction with the change that she was able to generate within herself. She learnt to critically reflect on her erstwhile positions and inherent biases and appreciate social work values with a positive orientation.

However, for a set of participants, this divergence was a source of much conflict and discomfort. As shared by one of them:

> I come from a family where we do not let people from the castes lower than ours utter a word in front of us, leave alone sitting in our presence. For me, this was the normal way of dealing with people from low castes. And so, it has not been easy for me to change my language, vocabulary and attitude. Even now there are occasional slippages on my part, especially when I am contradicted. This continues even though I have now developed a sympathetic attitude towards their condition.

The values of acceptance, equality, empathy and non-discrimination were not easy to practice for students who were socialised into accepting inequality and discrimination as a given. They often struggled to balance the two often contradictory value orientations, and in many instances, tended to pin the blame for their inability to imbibe the new set of values on their prior rigorous socialisation.

Very interestingly, a few participants indicated that they had learnt to compartmentalize their professional and personal values to avoid any conflict that might arise, especially in their interaction with family members. In the words of one participant:

> My family is not very progressive in terms of giving freedom to girls. I do not think I will confront my family elders if the rights

of my women cousins are infringed upon. They would not understand and would be furious with me for crossing my limits.

She indicated that she respected social work values and had imbibed them in her professional capacity, but within her home context, she could not practice these values.

Quite a few participants articulated constraints emanating from the larger neo-liberal context of practice, wherein the cherished values of acceptance, service, solidarity and integrity were dwindling. A participant acknowledged his self-dilemma when he said:

> How can we unequivocally adopt the utopian social work values, when there is so much pressure to internalize neo-liberal values in our personal lives? As individuals draw in and the world becomes privatised, how can we remain grounded in our traditional values?

Responses such as these reflect the challenge that social work education and practice confront in contemporary times. They highlight the real and perceived difficulties that students and practitioners confront in demonstrating loyalty to the professional value base in the larger context that subscribes to values that are often paradoxical to those revered by the profession. Examples include individualism and self-interest, as opposed to social justice and service; economic prudence over social welfare; impersonal interaction with people as case numbers as against individualised and empathetic engagement with clients as individualised persons; emphasis on profit motive/ funding of field placement agencies over and above service as goal, and work with status- quoist orientation, instead of a transformative and anti-oppressive thrust.

Ethical Dilemmas in Field Work Practice

Participants were divided about the presence of any serious value conflict, ethical challenges or dilemmas associated with practical application in field work. While strangely, a few could not identify any ethical confrontation, many of them acknowledged that fieldwork posed multiple ethical dilemmas and value conflicts, especially in the context of acceptance, confidentiality, and demonstration of non-judgmental orientation.

Several students attributed their inability to practice social work values to the changing requirements and demands of different fields of social work practice. The students placed in community clusters for community development work articulated a diversity of ethical dilemmas. They faced maximal challenges in the application of values such as the diversity of the community; scale of rapport building with individuals and groups; and somewhat amorphous engagement with community members left them perturbed and even exhausted. One of them raised the issue of discomfort in "intruding into the private lives of the clients, especially the poor" as a matter of right. She clearly felt that it was unethical to do so, as she did not seek consent from them to engage. She said:

> Just because I belong to an educated class and a dominant group, can I enter into their space, observe them, analyse their lives and advise them? After all, they did not ask me to help them. We seem to be taking them for granted, and so where was the client's right to self-determination, a value deemed to be integral to the profession.

This participant said that she had raised this dilemma with her supervisor but did not get a satisfactory answer.

For a few other participants, relating to clients through small talk and tokenisms was found 'contrived' and they reported feeling uncomfortable, deceptive and manipulative when they "acted" in such a manner. A participant shared her discomfort when she had to demonstrate pretentious behaviour towards clients/ community:

> I had to act overtly nice, even though those emotions were not coming from inside.

Another student also underscored the same sentiment when she mentioned:

> I had to show and act as if I was one of them (community members), and while I clearly knew that I was not.

The students' reliance on such performative acts revealed that while they acknowledged the significance of values in their work, they often did not/ could not imbibe values in the real sense. Margolin (1997) had in fact referred to these as "ritual gestures of forced politeness and graciousness" (p.179).

Three participants also acknowledged that they negotiated with the challenges they encountered by focusing on the *"use value"* of values. For instance, one of them confided:

> I often demonstrate 'acceptance' in the field so that I can make the community members listen to me and give me space to discuss and implement interventions. Acceptance from within does not come naturally. This value, I very consciously demonstrate for the outcomes it yields.

In a similar vein, another student shared that:

> While doing fieldwork in the community, I often felt that we were 'performing' an act of accepting the community members, rather than actually accepting them. However, this did help me to derive credibility and support to implement my fieldwork tasks.

Resolution of the challenge by subscribing to the utilitarian approach towards professional values was reported by other students too. Students working with clients who had a criminal record subscribed to values as a means to an end. On the other hand, the three students who were placed in mental health and disability settings acknowledged a relative ease in the application of social work values on account of the easily perceivable vulnerability and distress among their client groups. A student placed in a disability setting expressed significant displeasure when she pointed out gaps between the professed and practised value of 'dignity and worth of individuals' among social workers and funders who treated clients as 'trophies' for public display in distribution camps for aids/ appliances.

A participant who was working with clients who had a past record of crime shared the challenges in working with this group, as acceptance and non-judgment did not come easily. Overcoming the deeply entrenched biases, prejudices, and stereotypes was by no means an easy task for him and many of his peers. It was iterated that the dilemma in this regard was more generalised and pervasive, two participants shared that even though the value of a non-judgmental attitude was idealised in class, it did not deter them and their classmates from judging and labelling people in real life. This illustrated the gap between 'taught' values and their practice in the real-life context. Interestingly, one participant shared his opinion about the role of social work in actually furthering the notion of labelling and stereotyping when it came to building negative perceptions of clients needing help. According to him:

> When we declare that someone is inadequate, passive, confused, insecure, or dysfunctional, how do we assume we are eliminating judgment ? We do assign labels. It seems so ironic and unethical to project a client's family as dysfunctional when I come from an equally dysfunctional family and cannot seem to do anything about it.

In his analysis of "framing the poor", Margolin (1997) highlighted that social workers demonstrate paternalistic proclivities when they conceptualise the clients as inadequate. And so, degrading the poor vests social work with the authority to help, and even control clients, more so, if they belong to the most marginalised.

Practising integrity as a personal value in the field was a challenge recognised by eight participants. The dilemma of whether to be honest in acknowledging self-limitations in fieldwork to supervisors or to keep projecting that they were progressing satisfactorily was also aired. A participant confided:

> Somehow, there is so much expectation from us to show results that I sometimes exaggerate the results in my field work reports, and show a 'process' where there is none. Although many of us think

that our supervisors are aware of this, we do it, because we are expected to be change agents.

Another shared:

It is not easy to create change in the community within the limited number of fieldwork days, yet there is so much pressure to achieve outcomes that I just cook them up in my reports. I do feel guilty about it, yet I am reassured when I hear that sometimes my friends do it too.

Shortage of time to establish trusting relationships with supervisors, and short supervisory conferences do not enable supervisees to share their failings and challenges. Absence of role models was cited as a reason by participants to rationalise their inadequacy or inability in imbibing and practising values. In the words of one participant:

There are a handful of teachers who practice the values which they preach. We often see favoritism in the classrooms. Their judgmental attitude is visible when they label students in the class. When we witness and experience these instances in the classroom, we get to understand that the social work values professed in the class are merely ritualistic and have little grounding.

This is a serious observation and merits the need for urgent reflection and action by the educators.

Four participants expressed their discomfort in engaging with issues of social injustice, and so interventions were confined mainly to individualized help. The role of social structures in contributing to social problems was undermined on account of fear and perceived inadequacy in applying an approach for structural change. They justified this by sharing that the course did not prepare/ train them for dealing with larger issues of social injustice and violation of human rights. While theoretically these principles were emphasized in class, their actual application was found challenging. Many authors have reported the relative inability of social work students to consider structural

influences on the lives of clients, thereby attributing simplistic understandings of their problems, or to identify and apply values to help them challenge structural discrimination (Fenton, 2019; Lafrance et al., 2004; Woodward & Mackay, 2011).

Apart from that, the participants acknowledged experiencing a variety of other complex ethical issues in their work. One participant met a woman who was fearful of her husband and refused help for domestic violence, and in another case, an institutionalised woman was hesitant to report a staff member for sexual harassment. The participants were confused about their role in such cases where values required them to intervene, yet clients refused their involvement. The dilemma appeared to be traumatising to one participant who felt that he also became party to the unethical acts by not pursuing the cause of the clients and preventing violence and harassment. The students in such cases gave up on the interventions after a brief discussion with the department supervisor. A few participants acknowledged facing dilemmas when being forced to act against the interests of their clients. A common concern was a divergence between the groups' and the agency's focus, leading to ethical stress.

A mind-boggling piece of information shared by a considerable number of participants was that they did not face any real ethical dilemmas or challenges in applying their values due to the nature of the work they performed in the field. Characterised as 'managerial', their daily remit entailed limited, task-oriented engagement with 'service users'. In such contexts, there was no opportunity for intensive engagement with people or for applying values. Most of these participants were placed in public welfare administration and CSR settings, as well as in some non-governmental organisations. They acknowledged that there was little opportunity for them to test and assimilate professional values in practice. While some among them expressed disappointment that the precedence of managerial and procedural work over social change interventions did not enable them to procure any experiential learning in value

application, one participant was honest in admitting that this also saved her from facing any ethical dilemmas and stress. In an empirical context, Fazzi (2016) found that having internalised managerial responses to issues brought by clients, students offered less imaginative solutions to problems. In such settings, an overload of technical work, inadequate supervision, and bureaucratic requirements severely curtailed reflexive practice and professional dialogue. Most work was deemed to be devoid of moral and ethical content and implied the routinised performance of managerial, bureaucratic and technical tasks. On a more serious note, five respondents highlighted serious conflicts between the organisational work ethics and professional values taught in class. Illustrations of this included violations of clients' rights to self-determination; lengthy, insensitive protocol requirements that were contradictory to clients' rights to speedy service; interventions determined by funders rather than stakeholder choice; and confinement to office work even when clients required direct support.

Another significant and profound observation was a more generalised lack of interest in values among students, as many shared that their classmates were only interested in earning a social work degree because it offered a greater possibility of employment. They did not really identify with the profession or its values. As mentioned earlier, with admission based on multiple-choice scores, students without a proclivity for human services were also finding space in the school. This raises considerable questions and perplexities about training future human service professionals, who may, in the first instance, be disengaged with the essence of human service. How can social work education contend with this serious challenge in some manner?

As is obvious, the responses in this section demonstrate the role that fieldwork placement in professional organisations/settings plays, in either reinforcing professional values that are concurrently being acquired by students in the training period or in creating a conflict between organisational/ field-driven values and professional values. In fact, for some students, the nature of fieldwork was completely impervious to the requirements for values socialisation, as it left them completely untouched. Overexposure and identification with bureaucratic values led to inner conflict and incongruence, which in turn poses a challenge to the "crystallisation of substantiated professional worldview" (Bargal, 1981, p.54).

Spaces for Resolving Ethical Challenges

Very importantly, and contrary to the widespread assumption, participant responses highlighted the limited usage of the many spaces officially provided to resolve ethical dilemmas and value conflicts. In the words of one student:

> We should have discussions in the class which bring the personal value frames of the students in the open. The current focus in the class is primarily on completing the syllabus. There was one discussion on dowry in the class, and it made us realise the distorted value frames which many of our classmates still carried, even as we were almost due to complete our course. It was worrisome, and we wish we had more time for such discussions.

A few women students reported that some men students were averse to discussions about patriarchy and gender equality, and expressed their displeasure and disagreement outside class. Many participants shared that they were not comfortable discussing their ethical dilemmas or conflicts of values in the classroom. In the words of one such participant:

> I do not share these issues in class because I do not feel the classroom is a safe place to discuss my stress points. There is a fear that the students and teachers will label me, one way or another.

These statements indicate a need to make conscious efforts to engage students in discussions and to turn classrooms into safe spaces so that students feel secure in discussing their dilemmas without fear of being targeted or

ridiculed. Most students used individual conferences to clarify their value conflicts and dilemmas. However, not all were satisfied with the responses received from the teachers in these sessions. While a few students did mention engaging with their field/ agency supervisor to clarify ethical dilemmas, none of them mentioned using peer group interactions for the same.

Value Integration in Social Work Education: Discussion and Recommendations

Social workers and other helping and caring professionals need a strong moral philosophy base to guide them in their services to their clients. Clearly, the educational space must form a viable space not just for the transfer of knowledge and values, but for exchange and sharing meanings. It must provide experiential immersion, as the experiential domain is constantly subject to a process of reflection, reconstruction and reorganisation.

Findings indicate that the process of value inculcation amongst the students is neither unilinear nor uniform, and there are multiple challenges to their acceptance and assimilation of professional values. The specific value frames with which they enter the educational precincts influence their experience of engaging with professional values. The relevance of Bargal's (1981) five-stage model of social values development as a part of the socialisation process for social work was reflected in student responses indicating that antecedent factors, such as socioeconomic background, early life experiences, personality factors, and 'anticipatory socialisation', such as mental images of the profession and associated attributes, do influence social work values of students prior to their exposure to social work education. These also determined the 'occupational choice' of some students. For those whose socialised values aligned with social work values, accepting social work values was relatively easy, whereas others who experienced dissonance between their personal and professional values struggled at cognitive and behavioural levels in seamlessly accept, imbibe, and practise social work values. The latter

responded by either focusing on their use value or rejecting them. Students who critically reflected on their personal value frames reached out to the mentors for resolving contradictions. Others tended to externalise the reasons for their inability to practice professional values and thereby shifted the blame onto their socialisation, family context, teachers, field settings, or on the prevailing socio-economic environment.

Generally speaking, the students demonstrated four significant responses towards value inculcation. First, they were cognisant of these values and were comfortably positioned towards them. Second, they were critically conscious of their personal values and positioned them in a state of conflict with professional values. Some among them did focus on resolving value conflicts. Third, they demonstrated a utilitarian approach and used professional values as means to an end, in that they compartmentalised their personal and professional values and used professional values in the field while holding on to their personal values in their private spaces. And lastly, they were cognisant of the values, were not in agreement with them and were apathetic towards the conflict in values that might occur. The findings bespeak the practical significance of Bargal's (1981) third stage of 'professional training period'. It requires social work education to not only work consciously towards accentuating those sets of desirable values that the students may have carried with them, but more importantly, it must actively and systematically enable students to acquire "structures and new combinations of values and world views (p. 48) that are integral to their maturation as social workers.

Students presented ambivalent perspectives in relation to social work values education, where on the one hand, they appreciated the integration of values orientation in subjects and the possibility of reflexively applying values through self-experience or practical training, and on the other hand, they shared that the teaching of values was not built coherently and continuously throughout the educational process. A more explicit/ direct focus on values

should have ideally permeated the entire study programme. Mere theoretical acquaintance with values was not enough; they needed a practical demonstration of the application of these values, especially when dealing with unfavourable situations. In other words, a connection between *"know that"* and *"know how"* was deemed important (Petrucijová, 2021). Many students utilised the formal and informal opportunities within and outside the school to evaluate and recalibrate their value base. However, some students did not find these engagements stimulating enough to challenge their already existing values. Some also found available opportunities for conflict resolution either intimidating or less reassuring for holding free discussions. They preferred personal consultations with teachers within safe supervisory spaces. There seemed to be an urgent need to strengthen effective communication and enhance positive classroom/supervisory interactions, focusing on trust building between teachers and students. While many students reported finding value in a few inspirational teachers, some recommended the use of didactic methods to build values so that learning was not dependent upon the creativity and initiative of a particular teacher.

The interpretation of the value systems of the faculty also contributed to students' ethical dilemmas. They critically interrogate the values subscribed to by the faculty and learn to regulate their behaviour to demonstrate values which they perceived were considered desirable by the faculty. Since this behavioural modification was based on their assumptions and assessment about the faculty's professional and personal value frames, there remained a chasm between the values which students demonstrate and what they actually absorb and imbibe. Undoubtedly, the conduct of educators, their verbal and non-verbal communication, are perpetually under the scrutiny of students who interpret these actions and gestures from their own vantage positions, and accordingly adapt their attitudes and behaviour in the classrooms and in the field. It therefore becomes important for the educators to be cognizant of this interpretive phenomenon and ensure linearity in their behaviour, actions, gestures and words. In the macro context, there is also a need to push for a National Social Work Council to provide stipulated standards and benchmarks for professional values for all schools of social work. The schools must conjoin as viable communities to deliberate and engage with the challenge of value inculcation amongst students and delineate the way forward through collective wisdom.

Internalisation of neoliberal norms was acknowledged as an added challenge to the application of values and ethics. As could be seen, the increasing performance of managerial and technical tasks in the field hindered the ability of students to even locate ethical concerns in the first place. Due to demands for technical rationality, routine practices predominate, and the moral dimension of work often becomes invisible. Inadequate access to appropriate social work supervision, and bureaucratic imperatives also inhibited reflexive practice and dialogue. The importance of dynamic supervision was felt by students who felt concerned about the lack of ethical competency. However, supervisors also require ongoing training that prepares them to help supervisees identify and manage ethical concerns in changing practice contexts.

That the social work curriculum needed a holistic, integrated social justice pedagogy to enhance the integration and practice of this overarching value was evidenced by student and faculty responses alike. The 'circle of insight' proposed by Nicotera (2019) makes for an effective tool for enabling the students to engage with the complexity of the social work notions, such as social justice, through a "dialectical, open, purposeful, and enlightening"(p. 388) 'see-reflect-act"(p. 386) cyclical transformation process. Encouraging students to critically reflect on the structural barriers that create inequality in society by examining what they know and how they know it (Sharma, 2015) is deemed important. The formulation of contextual modules and toolkits and their delivery by trained and experienced

educators must find consistent space within the social work curriculum.

Conclusion

Findings from the study create urgency for constructive interventions to strengthen value inculcation amongst the students of social work. In these difficult times when the world is witnessing rapid changes, professional value conflict and ethical dilemmas are likely to increase. It is therefore essential that the profession prepares social workers who are strongly embedded in social work values. A refurbishment in the content and pedagogy for teaching the values component is imperative. In order to internalise a desirable value, the student must choose it voluntarily from a set of alternatives, prize and uphold the choice, act upon it and thereafter behave consistently with the choice over time.

Value integration, being multidimensional and interconnected, is developed through a process. Guttmann (2013) quoted Heller (1994) to spell out three perspectives in moral philosophy: "the *understanding or explaining,* the *normative,* and the *therapeutic or educating* perspective" (p.2). While the explaining perspective tries to provide an answer to the question of what the content of ethics or moral philosophy is; the normative perspective deals with the norms of behaviour that constitute an ethical human being; and the educational or therapeutic perspective offers ways to shape the natural inclinations of human beings so that they can respond to the moral expectations of societies in which they live and prevent human misery (Guttmann, 2013). All three interrelated perspectives must be reflected in values training efforts.

The goals of learning and consolidation of professional ethics are only achieved through the integration of cognitive, behavioural and emotional/ affective components (Giurgiu & Marica, 2013). Any development in the realm of values, attitudes, ethics, aesthetics, and feelings lies in the affective domain, and this is by far the most complicated component of teaching, as it integrates cognition, behaviour, and feelings. Although social work education acknowledges the core components of affective learning,

teaching mainly focuses on cognitive learning strategies (Bisman, 2004), as was the case here. Even when students derive the knowledge of professional values and their rationale, significant gaps prevail between the knowledge of and application of values. Hence, cognitive affective learning, which involves an alteration in the feelings, attitudes and values, which in turn impact students' thinking and behaviour, is core to social work training. Further, affective learning must entail distinct, planned, systematic and often individual centric process comprising of well-defined levels. This has been highlighted by several taxonomies; a notable one among them being the Neuman's Taxonomy of Affective Learning (Allen & Friedman, 2010). This taxonomy highlights five steps, which provide useful guidelines for courses/ modules on values teaching and integration in social work. Moving through identification, clarification and exploration levels, the learner gradually transits to modification and characterisation. Only after the student has developed an adequate understanding of their attitudes, values, beliefs, and feelings, and has organised them into a coherent structure, that it leads to behavioural consistency or characterisation. Such learning requires well-formulated modules delivered by trained faculty. Clearly, sporadic attempts to "teach" values are not by any means enough for students to derive a critical understanding, behavioural modification and consistency in the application of values in the field. A comprehensive curriculum will promote student engagement in identifying solutions for conflict-ridden situations and for ethical dilemmas for which there is no clear explanation. Even professional codes of ethics merely introduce values and principles as prima facie, and the solutions provided in these codes may not be sufficient to solve the complex problems that arise in contemporary times (Giurgiu & Marica, 2013). It is important that social workers are aware of the wide range of sensitive situations they may encounter over the years of practice and be prepared to meet the real-life challenges by using tools and strategies learned in school to

inform decision-making that critically impacts the lives of their clients.

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Ethical Approval

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest. This is also to confirm that this manuscript was not prepared using AI-generated text.

Author Contribution Statement

Neera Agnimitra: Conceptualisation, collecting resources, and references, methodology, preparing the final draft, final reviewing and editing.

Seema Sharma: Conceptualisation, methodology, and preparing the draft, incorporating suggestions and redrafting.

Tejaswin Sharma: Preparation of tools, collecting resources, data collection and curation

Informed Consent

This is to state that informed consent was obtained from all participants in the research.

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On account of the confidentiality of data shared by the participants, who were enrolled at the Department at the time of data collection, and due to their request for keeping their data completely confidential, data cannot be shared in the public domain.