



Social Work Practice: Conundrums And Mitigations Among Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

**OBUZOR, MEZEWO
EMERINWEN (Ph.D)**

Lecturer Department of Sociology,
(Social Work Option)
Rivers State University
mezewo.obuzor@rsu.edu.ng

**EMEODU, ELIJAH
NWABUEZE (Ph.D)**

(Development Sociology & Social Work Options)
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State
emeodu65@gmail.com

**DICKSON, JOHNWILL
KALIO**

(Criminology and Security Studies Options)
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

ODILI, CELESTINE ENI

(Social Work Option)
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State
celestineodili77@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1907-6342>

ABSTRACT

The paper investigates social work practice, its conundrums, and mitigations among tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Given this, the Structural functionalism theory of Talcott Parson (1961) was adopted to address these problems and develop interventions that aim to strengthen social structures and institutions to improve social work practice in Rivers State. Methodologically, the paper is a position paper therefore secondary sources/data were used for data collection. The thematic content analysis was adopted for the analysis of the secondary data collated. The study found conundrums affecting social work practices in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, including non-professional teaching of core social work courses in the tertiary institutions, lack of adequate resources/funding, poor working conditions, inadequate training and supervision, corruption, and political interference. We also found possible mitigations to address the above challenges. They include the need for increased funding and investment in social work practice in Rivers State and discouraging non-professional participation in the teaching of Social Work in the various tertiary institutions in Rivers State. In all, it was recommended among others that the executive and legislatures at the national levels, as well as the state levels, ensure the implementation of the 2017 social work bills, that was accented into law in 2022, to streamline the profession and avoid non-professionals in social work practices. This is achievable if some penalties are meted out to defaulters of the Social Work Act, or if the Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators (NASWE) and Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOW) are empowered to ensure that only professional social workers are practically involved in social work practices

Keywords:

Work, Social Work, Practises, Conundrums, Mitigation, Tertiary Institutions,

Introduction

The field of social work is a nascent discipline within the realm of social sciences. Despite its relatively recent emergence, social work is experiencing significant growth on a global scale. The significant expansion and advancement of the profession on a global scale serve as a compelling testament to its valuable role in addressing and mitigating social issues. The discipline of social work practise is dedicated to enhancing the overall welfare and standard of living for people, families, and communities. The practise entails collaborating with individuals to address issues and improve their quality of life through a range of interventions, such as therapy, advocacy, education, and community development. Social work is a critical discipline that seeks to enhance the overall welfare and standard of living for people, families, and communities. Similarly, the discipline encompasses a diverse array of interventions and methodologies, necessitating social workers to possess a comprehensive set of competencies and principles in order to proficiently assist their clientele and advance the cause of social equity (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). Social workers frequently engage in professional practise within many settings, including both public and commercial organisations, healthcare establishments, educational institutions, and governmental bodies. Their primary objective is to tackle a diverse array of social concerns, including but not limited to poverty, mental health disorders, substance abuse, child welfare, and instances of social inequity. The fundamental principles that underpin social work practise encompass the recognition and regard for the inherent worth and value of every individual, the pursuit of fairness and equity in society, and the active advancement of the welfare of people, families, and communities. Social work professionals undergo training to effectively interact with persons from various cultural backgrounds and engage in culturally sensitive practises. They acknowledge and value the distinct experiences and viewpoints of individuals and

groups (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Social work practise encompasses a diverse array of interventions, such as individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, case administration, community organising, advocacy, and policy formulation. Consequently, social workers employ a diverse range of evidence-based treatments and treatment modalities to assist clients in attaining their objectives and enhancing their overall functioning (Barker, 2003).

In Nigeria, various initiatives have been undertaken to promote the advancement of social work. These include the establishment of welfare centres in Lagos, which subsequently expanded to other cities such as Calabar, Enugu, Port Harcourt, and Warri. Additionally, the National Council of Social Work was established in 1969 under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth, and Sports was established in 1975 to further support social work efforts. Moreover, professional bodies for social work have been established, and social work has been incorporated as an academic discipline in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The aforementioned initiatives and programmes possess the capacity to enhance social work education and practise within the context of Nigeria. In Nigeria, there exists a professional organisation for social workers that plays a crucial role in safeguarding the interests of the profession. The Institute of Social Work of Nigeria (ISOWN) is a recognised professional organisation that was created with the purpose of certifying and providing training for social workers in Nigeria. The organisation is obligated to uphold five core principles: the recognition and respect for human dignity and value; the provision of service to the betterment of humanity; the demonstration of competence; the pursuit of social justice; and the adherence to principles of honesty.

In light of the intricate and diverse nature of social work, additional organisations such as the Nigeria Association of Social Workers/Educators (NASoW/NASWE) have been founded with the aim of enhancing the

field by offering potential resolutions to the various obstacles encountered in social work training and education. However, the study is concerned with the limited outcomes achieved by these associations despite their vigorous endeavours, which can be attributed to the various hurdles they have faced. Notwithstanding these circumstances, it is evident that a significant number of practitioners exhibit a deficiency in adhering to professional ethics and obtaining proper certification, posing a formidable obstacle to the advancement of the profession. Nevertheless, this factor likely contributed to the introduction of measures and proposals aimed at professionalising the course, restricting its practise to individuals who possess the necessary qualifications.

One of the factors contributing to the passage of the Social Work Bill into law by the National Assembly on June 28, 2022, was the signing of the National Council for Social Work (Establishment) Bill 2022 into law by former President Muhammadu Buhari on December 6, 2022. The proposed legislation aims to establish the National Council for Social Work in Nigeria, which would be responsible for regulating the practise of social work. The activities of this council would be overseen by a governing body selected by the Federal Government. The law serves as a comprehensive structure for the purpose of regulating, legitimising, overseeing, and managing the endeavours undertaken by social workers inside the nation (Tosin, 2022). The institute has been granted authority under the Act to establish the criteria for the level of knowledge and skills that individuals must acquire in order to qualify for registration as members of the professional group known as chartered social work practitioners. This legislation imposes limitations on individuals without professional qualifications to engage in the practise of social work. Once more, it is widely acknowledged that the field of social work necessitates a profound degree of empathy, compassion, and a steadfast dedication to the principles of social justice. Additionally, it necessitates the capacity to

partake in critical analysis, resolve complex issues, and engage in proficient communication. To produce favourable results for their clients, social workers are required to possess the ability to engage in collaborative efforts with other professionals and community stakeholders (Gitterman & Knight, 2013; Cournoyer, 2017; Reisch & Lowe, 2000). Presently, there have been numerous instances where obstacles have arisen that impede the achievement of progress in the emerging field. These challenges likely motivated numerous scholars in Nigeria to pursue resolutions to these complex issues. Paradoxically, the field of social work in Nigeria faces numerous challenges in both practise and education. Currently, the profession remains at a peripheral stage, with only seven universities offering social work programmes as of 2014. This number is significantly low considering the presence of over 170 tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This phenomenon is associated with the observation that there exists a limited number of individuals who possess official certification as social workers within the jurisdiction of Rivers State. Consequently, this development has facilitated the participation of individuals without professional expertise in the field of social work, thereby lacking an essential understanding of its foundational principles and practises (Ngwu, 2014). As of the year 2023, it is evident that Nigeria has witnessed the establishment of over seven academic institutions that provide educational programmes in the field of social work. The University of Port Harcourt in Rivers State is currently the only institution offering an undergraduate Social Work curriculum. However, the programme at the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) has recently received clearance. The RSU has not been granted permission to initiate a social work curriculum, nevertheless, it is considered as an alternative within the Department of Psychology. Additionally, the College of Science, Health, and Technology offers a programme in Social Work. Hence, this circumstance additionally impedes the feasibility of social

work implementation at postsecondary institutions within Rivers State.

In relation to the aforementioned topic, a study conducted by Obeten et al. (2020) examined the difficulties encountered in social work practise in Nigeria and their impact on the country's overall development. The findings revealed that despite the primary objectives of the profession in Nigeria, various challenges persistently hinder its practise, educational endeavours, and contributions to national advancement. According to the aforementioned study, one of the recommendations put forth is for NASOW/NASWE to ensure that social work practises are exclusively carried out by professionals. This recommendation is in line with the 2017 social work bill, which was officially passed in 2022 by the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, thereby establishing the professionalisation of the discipline. It is evident that a significant proportion of social work teachers lack certification as professional social workers. The aforementioned issue has a significant impact on the fundamental objectives of social work practise in Nigeria.

In 2014, Ngwu conducted a study on the acquisition of social work skills in Nigeria and expressed concern over the little independence observed in social work training units/departments. The individual expressed disapproval regarding instances in which the social work unit is incorporated into a department unrelated to social work. In such cases, the responsibility for establishing the goals and content of programmes, as well as determining the attributes, calibre, and quantity of trainees, frequently falls upon professionals from fields other than social work. This reality does not contribute to the growth of social work education in Nigeria. In essence, social work education can be characterised as a form of professional training that places a significant emphasis on practical application. Hence, the allocation of individuals into the programme and the determination of their successful completion should be entrusted to professionals in the field of social work.

According to the research conducted by Alamu (2016), Rwomire and Raditlhokwa (1996), Ucha (2010), and Idyorough (2013), it is widely acknowledged that corruption and insufficient funding have had a significant impact on various facets of social work practise in Nigeria. Indeed, it is often considered that all aspects of the Nigerian economy are characterized by corruption. For example, during the initial five-year tenure of President Buhari's administration, a substantial amount of five hundred million naira was allocated towards social work initiatives. However, the impact of this expenditure on the overall welfare of the country, as per the principles and standards of social work practise, has been little or negligible. The persistent problem of budget diversion has significantly impacted the allocation of government resources in Nigeria, particularly in the realm of educational spending. The field of social work is currently confronted with inadequate financial support from governmental entities, a discouraging circumstance. This phenomenon could also be attributed to the inadequate government responsiveness towards welfare service initiatives. The social workers possess a comprehensive understanding of strategies to enhance the well-being of the population; yet, they are unable to implement these strategies due to limited access to necessary resources. Insufficient financial resources contribute to a lack of proper facilities and office supplies, resulting in suboptimal functionality and organisation. Furthermore, a lack of financial resources results in insufficient transportation and communication infrastructure, hindering the ease and efficiency of home visits, particularly for clients dwelling in rural regions, where the majority of the population is concentrated.

The aforementioned issues faced by social work education and practise in Nigeria and Rivers State have raised concerns among practitioners and scholars. The lack of comprehension regarding this phenomenon posed a significant limitation to the present study. The aforementioned circumstances, which impede the practise of social work, have

stimulated the researcher's intellectual inquiry and piqued their interest in investigating the practise of social work in Rivers State. Specifically, the researcher aims to examine the challenges faced in social work practise within tertiary institutions in Rivers State and explore potential strategies for mitigation. Methodologically, the study adopted a position approach and secondary sources/data for data collection. The thematic content analysis was adopted for the analysis of the secondary data.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on structural functionalism which was made prominent by Talcott Parson (1961). Parsons was a prominent American sociologist whose contributions to the field of sociology were impressive. He developed the structural functionalist theory, also known as functionalism, which sought to explain the structure and function of society. Structural functionalism is a theoretical framework that analyses how the different parts of society work together to maintain social order and stability. The concept of structural functionalism has a significant historical presence within the fields of social sciences, as evidenced by the work of Merton (1968), and biological sciences, as demonstrated by Woodger (1948).

This approach has been applied to social work practice in various ways, including (i) Understanding social problems: it explains that structural functionalism can be used to understand the root causes of social problems such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Social workers can use this approach to analyse the different parts of society that contribute to these problems, including social structures, institutions, and cultural norms. (ii) Identifying resources: Structural functionalism can also be used to identify resources that individuals and communities can use to address social problems. By understanding how different parts of society work together, social workers can help clients identify resources that are available to them, such as government programs, community organizations, and

support networks. (iii) Developing interventions: Structural functionalism can inform the development of interventions that aim to address social problems by strengthening the social structures and institutions that support individuals and communities. Social workers can use this approach to develop interventions that promote social cohesion, improve access to resources, and address systemic barriers to social justice.

In conclusion, structural functionalism provides a useful framework for social workers to understand the root causes of some problems, identify resources that can be used to address these problems and develop interventions that aim to strengthen social structures and institutions to improve social work practice in Rivers State. Parsons believed that social order is maintained through a shared value consensus, which refers to a general agreement among members of society about what is considered right and wrong, moral, and immoral. Value consensus provides a basis for social integration and cooperation. Thus, social work practitioners/professionals need to be unified and agree on the activities that can improve performance. In all, it would be a concern for the government to ensure the maintenance of the system for effective functioning and provide funds, and facilities, excusing non-professionals from practising and among all strengthen the field by implementing the new law that has given more professionalism to the profession.

Understanding Social Work Practice

In order to get a full comprehension of social work practises, it is beneficial to conceptualise the domain of social work. Social work is a career that encompasses multiple disciplines and seeks to enhance the overall well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities. The main goal of this effort is to improve social conditions and promote principles of equity by efficiently addressing issues related to poverty, discrimination, oppression, and inequality. Social workers utilise a wide range of skills and approaches to engage in effective interactions with individuals, families, and communities,

with the aim of understanding their needs, available resources, and possible solutions. The concept of social work has been the topic of analysis and interpretation by various authorities and researchers. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) offers a comprehensive definition of social work as a profession that is firmly rooted in practical application and scholarly inquiry. Its primary objective is to facilitate transformative social change and personal development, promote social harmony, and empower individuals by fostering their liberation. The fundamental principles of social work contain essential beliefs such as social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and the understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives. The subject of social work draws upon a range of theoretical frameworks, encompassing perspectives from social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge. The main aim of this approach is to actively engage individuals and societal systems in addressing the challenges encountered in life and enhancing overall well-being (IFSW, 2020).

Social work, as defined by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), is a professional endeavour that seeks to support individuals, groups, or communities in enhancing or restoring their capacity for social functioning. Additionally, social work endeavours to create societal conditions that are favourable to the attainment of their goals. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2017) asserts that the discipline of social work requires a thorough comprehension of human growth and conduct, along with the intricate interplay among social, economic, and cultural institutions. In order to properly fulfil their professional obligations, social workers must possess a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics at play within these diverse dimensions. As per the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), social work is a profession that endeavours to enhance the general well-being of individuals and attend to the fundamental needs of all individuals, with a particular emphasis on the needs and empowerment of individuals who

are vulnerable, marginalised, and facing poverty. The field of social work is grounded in a fundamental framework consisting of core values. These values comprise the ideals of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, relevance of human connections, integrity, and competence. As per the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015), the field of social work involves a wide range of activities, which include but are not limited to assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation, advocacy, and education. As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), social work is defined as a vocation that is firmly rooted in pragmatic implementation, with the objective of promoting societal change, progress, cohesion, and the betterment of both individuals and communities. The main aim is to address the needs of individuals, families, groups, and communities facing social, economic, and health-related difficulties, with the ultimate objective of enhancing their overall well-being by offering a wide range of services and interventions. The World Health Organisation (2018) posits that social work is underpinned by the principles of social justice, human rights, and the promotion of equitable and inclusive access to resources and opportunities.

As to the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), social work is defined as a professional pursuit that involves the application of knowledge and skills from the field of social science to assist individuals in improving their social functioning and overall well-being. The discipline of social work covers the examination and intervention of social concerns, the promotion of societal change, and the promotion of fair allocation of resources and opportunities. The primary aim of this project is to augment the capacities of individuals, families, and communities by harnessing their inherent strengths and accessible resources, while concurrently providing support and championing for their requirements (ICSW, 2014). As to the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), social work is defined as an academic and professional discipline that

endeavours to improve the entire quality of life and well-being for individuals, groups, and communities. This is achieved through several methods, including direct intervention, policy development, research efforts, and instructional programmes. The discipline of social work is based on theoretical frameworks that aim to comprehend human behaviour and societal systems. The field of study encompasses other disciplines, such as the social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge, which inform its application. The field of social work is characterised by a commitment to ethical practises and decision-making, which is underpinned by a comprehensive framework of values and principles. These include, but are not limited to, the recognition and reverence for human dignity, the pursuit of social justice, and the advancement of human rights and social welfare (IASSW, 2014). The previously listed scientific definitions provide a comprehensive understanding of the nature, purpose, and scope of social work as both a professional practise and an academic discipline. The preceding assertion underscores the core principles, values, and skills that underpin the field of social work, while also highlighting the importance of promoting social justice, upholding human rights, and fostering the empowerment of individuals, families, and communities.

Based on the aforementioned knowledge, how may social work practises be defined? Social work practise involves the application of social work knowledge, skills, and values to offer support to individuals, groups, and communities in effectively addressing their diverse needs, challenges, and concerns. Social work involves a diverse range of activities, such as assessment, intervention, advocacy, education, research, and evaluation. These activities are undertaken with the overriding objectives of promoting social justice, enhancing general well-being, and facilitating transformative changes in society. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2015), the field of social work encompasses a range of activities including

counselling and psychotherapy, case management and care coordination, community organising and development, advocacy and social action, policy analysis and development, research, and evaluation. Moreover, the field of social work is guided by ethical principles and norms, alongside evidence-based knowledge and theories. In order to effectively address the issue at hand, it is imperative to adopt a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach that involves the participation of various specialists, organisations, and communities (CSWE, 2015; Kirst & Hull, 2018; Payne, 2014). The discipline of social work practise is characterised by its diversity and complexity since it encompasses a broad spectrum of topics and persons. Several prevalent domains of social work practise encompass:

Child welfare: In the local region, social workers are engaged in providing assistance to children and families who have encountered instances of abuse, neglect, or various manifestations of maltreatment. In order to facilitate family reunification, prevent future instances of abuse, or identify alternate homes for children, these professionals may offer counselling, case management, and support services.

Mental health: In this locality, social workers engage in the provision of services to individuals experiencing mental health conditions, including but not limited to depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia. Counselling, case management, and advocacy services may be offered by professionals to assist clients in managing their diseases, obtaining necessary resources, and enhancing their overall well-being.

Ageing and gerontology: In this locality, social workers engage in the provision of services to older persons and their families, with a focus on addressing various concerns associated with the process of ageing. These concerns encompass domains such as healthcare, housing, financial stability, and social disconnection. The organisation has the capacity to offer case management, counselling, and advocacy services with the aim of assisting

individuals in preserving their autonomy, self-respect, and overall well-being.

Health care: Social workers in the local region are employed in various healthcare settings, including hospitals, clinics, and other medical facilities, with the primary objective of providing assistance to patients and their families in managing the challenges associated with disease, disability, and medical interventions. Counselling, education, and advocacy services may be offered by professionals in order to assist clients in navigating the healthcare system, accessing resources, and enhancing their health outcomes.

Criminal justice: Social workers within this locality engage in providing support and assistance to individuals who have had interactions with the criminal justice system, including ex-offenders, victims of crime, and their respective families. Counselling, case management, and advocacy services may be offered by these professionals in order to facilitate the reintegration of clients into society, enable access to necessary services, and address the underlying factors contributing to criminal activity.

Imperative for Social Work Practice in Nigeria

The significance of social work practice in Nigeria is underscored by the multitude of social, economic, and political difficulties that the nation is confronted with. Social workers in Nigeria fulfil a crucial function in tackling a range of societal challenges, including but not limited to poverty, inequality, unemployment, violence, and prejudice. The following will highlight some of the key reasons why social work practice is important in Nigeria:

Poverty reduction: Poverty constitutes a significant societal issue within the Nigerian context, as a substantial proportion of the populace resides behind the poverty threshold. Social workers possess the potential to make valuable contributions towards the elimination of poverty through the provision of social support services to individuals and families who are vulnerable, advocating for social policies that effectively address poverty, and

promoting economic empowerment by means of skills training and the establishment of job creation programmes. Akintoye and Olusakin (2020) assert that social workers in Nigeria possess the potential to significantly contribute to poverty alleviation by means of enhancing community capacity, fostering a conducive atmosphere for community development, and advocating for sustainable livelihoods.

Child protection: Nigeria exhibits a significantly elevated prevalence of child abuse and neglect, positioning it among the countries with the highest rates globally. This distressing reality exposes millions of children to diverse manifestations of violence and exploitation. Social workers in Nigeria possess the potential to assume a pivotal position in safeguarding children against instances of abuse and neglect, advocating for the rights of children, and extending assistance to families impacted by child abuse. Oladepo and Omotoso (2020) assert that social workers possess the capacity to advance child protection by means of several strategies, including advocacy, awareness generation, sensitization, counselling, and the rehabilitation of both victims and perpetrators.

Mental health: Mental health constitutes a significant public health issue within the Nigerian context, characterised by a notable incidence of mental disorders including but not limited to depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Social workers possess the capacity to make valuable contributions to the promotion and prevention of mental health through the provision of counselling services, the dissemination of knowledge on mental health, and the active advocacy for policies that prioritise the provision of mental health care. Onuoha and Ibe (2021) posit that social workers possess the potential to assume a pivotal position in mitigating mental health issues in Nigeria through the facilitation of mental health awareness, enhancement of mental health professionals' competencies, and advocacy for policies and initiatives that accord priority to mental health care.

Gender equality: Gender inequality is a prevalent issue in Nigeria, wherein women and girls encounter discriminatory practices across

all domains of society. Social workers possess the capacity to advance gender equality through the provision of assistance to women and girls, the active promotion of policies aimed at rectifying gender disparities, and the cultivation of consciousness regarding gender-based violence. Olowo and Ogunsiji (2020) assert that the promotion of gender equality in Nigeria can be facilitated by social workers by several means, including the empowerment of women and girls, active advocacy for women's rights, and the critical examination and contestation of prevailing gender stereotypes and biases.

Health care: Nigeria's healthcare system is characterised by inherent weaknesses, resulting in restricted availability of healthcare services, particularly in rural regions. Social workers possess the capacity to enhance the quality of health care through their involvement in health education, promotion of health-seeking behaviour, and advocacy for policies that prioritise the provision of health care services. Ogunlaja, Oluwagbohunmi, and Adewole (2020) assert that social workers has the capacity to significantly enhance the quality of healthcare in Nigeria through their active involvement in lobbying for equitable access to healthcare services, facilitating health education and promotion, and fostering community participation in healthcare delivery.

Human rights: Nigeria is characterised by a significant prevalence of human rights breaches, wherein both individuals and groups endure various forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and abuse. Social workers have the capacity to advance the cause of human rights through several means, such as offering legal assistance, engaging in advocacy efforts to promote human rights policies and legislation, and fostering public consciousness on human rights issues. Bello and Adediran (2021) assert that social workers possess the capacity to assume a pivotal position in advancing human rights in Nigeria through many means. These include empowering individuals and collectives to assert their rights, engaging in advocacy efforts to promote

human rights policies and legislation, and fostering public consciousness on instances of human rights violations.

Social justice: Social justice is a key value of social work practice, and social workers in Nigeria can promote social justice by advocating for policies that address social inequalities, community development, and empowering marginalized groups. According to Yusuf and Ayodeji (2020), social workers can promote social justice in Nigeria by "advocating for policies that address social inequalities, promoting community participation in decision-making processes, and empowering marginalized groups to demand their rights.

In Nigeria, the significance of social work practise is paramount, as social workers has the capacity to assume a pivotal position in tackling diverse societal issues and advancing the principles of social justice, human rights, and equitable service provision. The practise of social work in Nigeria holds promise for enhancing the well-being of people, families, and communities, while also making a significant contribution to the broader socio-economic progress of the nation.

Conundrums of Social Work Practice among Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

Social work practice faces numerous conundrums globally, and Rivers State in Nigeria is not an exception. In this response, the paper explored some of the hiccups and conundrums facing social work practice among Tertiary institutions in Rivers State

- i. **Non-professional teaching core social work courses in tertiary institutions:** This presents itself as one of the prevailing challenges linked to social work education and practise in Rivers State. It was noticed that the Rivers State College of Health Sciences and Technology, Social Work Department, has a total of 9 lecturers in the department, of which 5 lecturers are social work Professionals and 4 lecturers are non-Social Work Professionals with options in Anthropology and

Sociology respectively (College of Health, Science and Technology, Social Work Department Handbook, 2023).

Secondly, it was found that in the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, only nine lecturers are found in the department, of which three lecturers are core Social Work Professionals and 6 lecturers are non-social work Professionals with options in institutional analysis, Development Sociology and Criminology in the Department of Social Work (UPH, Social Work Department Handbook, 2022). This similar situation is not far from the case of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, where all the lecturers that are supposed to pioneer the newly approved Department of Social Work are all Sociologists with various specialities in Criminology, Development Studies, Industrial Relations, and Human Resource Management. Although on the commencement of the program, they may employ the assistance of a few social work professionals as adjunct/casual lecturers to support the program. Consequently, in a situation where such provisions are not provided, it poses a challenge to social work practice in the institution.

- ii. Hence, based on the aforementioned data, it is plausible that the essential ideals of social work could potentially be undermined in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This statement aligns with the perspective presented by Idyorough (2013), which suggests that there is a scarcity of adequately trained individuals in the domain of social work across various regions. Additionally, there remains a population that has yet to receive formal training in the field of social

work. The individuals possess academic credentials in the fields of arts and social sciences; yet, they lack a formal certification in social work. In numerous instances, individuals depend on the utilisation of academic literature in the form of textbooks pertaining to the field of social work, as well as engaging in practical experiential learning within their professional environment. The lack of professionalism exhibited in this behaviour undermines the credibility and importance of the respective profession.

- iii. **Lack of Adequate Resources/Funding:** Social workers in Rivers State lack adequate resources to perform their duties effectively. The state government allocates insufficient funds to social welfare programs, leading to a lack of resources, including basic supplies such as office equipment, transportation, and funds to facilitate interventions. According to a study by Eseadi et al. (2021), "social workers in Rivers State have to cope with inadequate funding, limited staff, and poor working conditions that undermine their effectiveness." This lack of resources makes it difficult for social workers to provide quality services to vulnerable populations, especially in remote areas. The above assertion was supported by Ajegbo and Ukoha (2020), who claims that it limits the ability of social workers to provide adequate and quality services to the people who need them. Ngwu (2014) asserts that the majority of pertinent literature and scholarly publications pertaining to social work in Nigeria predominantly originate from foreign sources, focusing on issues, policies, and tactics that may not

align with the cultural context and experiences of African students. The challenges inherent in the learning and teaching of social work education are exacerbated within the context of the country. Furthermore, a lack of financial resources results in inadequate transportation and communication infrastructure, so impeding the ability to conduct home visits for clients, particularly those residing in rural regions where the majority of the population is concentrated. Insufficient provision of budgetary funding for the social services department can be identified as the primary cause. In Rivers State, there has been a recurring occurrence of mistaking sociology textbooks for social work textbooks, perhaps due to the misconception that these two disciplines are identical. According to Okoye (2013), social work practitioners in Nigeria encounter challenges in appreciating and understanding textbooks sourced from foreign countries due to cultural differences and distinct social challenges. This phenomenon also impacts students across several academic levels, ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate.

- iv. **Poor Working Conditions:** Social workers in Rivers State face poor working conditions, which impact their motivation, productivity, and ability to provide quality services. This includes inadequate salaries, lack of basic amenities, and unsafe working conditions. According to a study by Omeje et al. (2021), "the poor working conditions in Rivers State discourage social workers from staying in the profession, leading to high turnover rates". Truthfully, the situation can be seen in the Rivers State College of Health, Science and Technology where most of the

buildings have become obsolete and unattractive. There is a need for modern buildings with quality offices for the staff, although, the Uniport and IAUE have more quality buildings than Rivers State College of Health, Science and Technology.

- v. **Inadequate Training and Supervision:** Another challenge facing social work practice in Rivers State is the lack of adequate training and supervision. Social workers in Rivers State face a wide range of complex and sensitive issues, including poverty, child abuse, and mental health issues. Without adequate training and supervision, social workers may lack the skills and knowledge necessary to provide effective services. Many social workers in Rivers State do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively address the complex social issues that they encounter (Akpan, 2020)
- vi. **Inadequate Collaboration:** Social workers in Rivers State often work in isolation, without adequate collaboration with other professionals and stakeholders. This limits their ability to effectively address social issues and provide comprehensive services (Ozuruiabo, 2020). Secondly, there has existed disagreement among social work educators (lecturers) and social work practitioners such as those in the hospitals, Ministries, and correctional Centres, on whom to oversee Social Work bodies in Rivers State. The educators felt they are the producers of social workers, while the practitioners felt they are the ones in the field and should be given more leadership positions in the State. This condition if not well harnessed could jeopardize the efforts or sustainability of Social Work.

vii. Corruption and Political Interference: Corruption and political interference are also major challenges facing social work practices in Rivers State. These issues can undermine the effectiveness of social work interventions and lead to mismanagement of resources (Awoh, 2019).

Mitigations to the Conundrums of Social Work Practice among Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

The possible mitigations to address the above conundrums are:

- i. Discouraging Non-Professional Participation in the teaching of Social Work:** It is advisable to discourage the incorporation of non-professional participation in fundamental social work practises. Ngwu (2014) argued that the decision to discontinue non-professionals in the field of social work is likely motivated by their lack of foundational knowledge in the profession. Consequently, these individuals may not be able to effectively impart sufficient knowledge to students, ultimately resulting in a lack of competency among those who receive such instruction.
- ii. Increase Funding:** To address this challenge, there is a need for increased funding and investment in social work practice in Rivers State. The government needs to prioritize social welfare programs by allocating adequate funds for the recruitment and training of social workers and providing necessary equipment, including vehicles and other supplies. This would enable social workers to carry out their duties effectively. Additionally, partnerships with local and international organizations can help

to bridge the gap in funding and resources.

- iii. Improve Working Conditions:** There is a need for improved working conditions for social workers in Rivers State. This includes providing adequate salaries and benefits, access to basic amenities such as housing and transportation, and ensuring safe working conditions. Additionally, there is a need for policies and regulations that protect social workers from workplace harassment and discrimination
- iv. Provide Adequate Training:** There is a need for increased investment in training and supervision for social workers in Rivers State. This includes providing ongoing professional development opportunities, access to mentoring and coaching, and ensuring that social workers have access to relevant and up-to-date information and resources. Additionally, there is a need for regular supervision and performance evaluations to ensure that social workers are providing quality services.
- v. Encourage Collaboration:** Efforts should be made to encourage collaboration among social workers, other professionals, and stakeholders in Rivers State. This will enhance the effectiveness of social work interventions and improve service delivery to clients.

Conclusion

In this study, it has been established that social work practice in Rivers State faces several challenges that impact service delivery to vulnerable populations. In conclusion, social work practice is crucial in Nigeria due to the numerous social problems facing the country. Social workers in Nigeria can contribute to poverty reduction, child protection, mental health promotion, and gender equality, among other areas. By providing social support

services, advocating for policies that address social problems, and promoting community development, social workers can make a significant impact on the lives of individuals, families, and communities in Nigeria. In conclusion, social work practice in Rivers State faces a few conundrums that impact service delivery to vulnerable populations. However, with increased funding and investment in social work practice, improved working conditions, and adequate training and supervision, social workers in Rivers State can provide effective and impactful services to those who need them the most.

Recommendations

- i. There should be integrated efforts of the governments, Non-Governmental Organizations with the inclusion of other Philanthropist to equip social work units/departments with current/modern facilities, e-materials, e-journals, e-books, computer laboratories and websites where information about recent literature, can be accessed. This would be achieved if proper funding and ideal supervision are channelled towards those facilities.
- ii. **Public enlightenment and sensitization:** The prevailing observation is that there exists a widespread absence of professional acknowledgment towards social workers in Rivers State and Nigeria as a whole. This is substantiated by the notable lack of understanding regarding the nature of social work, which is evident even within certain government authorities. Hence, it is incumbent upon the Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOW) and the Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators (NASWE) to enhance their commitment to public awareness and education regarding the social work profession.

- iii. It is advisable for both the executive and legislative branches at the national and state levels to adopt the 2017 social work bills, which were enacted into law in 2022, in order to enhance the efficiency of the profession and prevent unqualified individuals from engaging in social work practises. In order to accomplish this objective, it is imperative to impose penalties on individuals who may attempt to evade compliance with the Social Work Bill. Alternatively, empowering the Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators (NASWE) and Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOW) would enable them to enforce the requirement that only qualified social workers actively engage in social work practises.

References

1. Ajegbo, O. N., & Ukoha, I. E. (2020). Social work practice in Nigeria: An overview. *Social Work and Society*, 18(1), 1-11.
2. Akintoye, I. R., & Olusakin, J. (2020). Social work practice and poverty reduction in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*, 8(2), 23-33.
3. Akpan, I. I. (2020). *Challenges of social work practice in Nigeria*. In Handbook of Research on Global Issues in Social Work (pp. 56-69). IGI Global.
4. Alamu, O. I. (2016). Corruption, anti-corruption agencies and the Nigerian government. *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 5(2), 1-5
5. Awoh, O. A. (2019). Political interference and social work practice in Nigeria: A critical review. *Social Work and Society*, 17(1), 1-11.
6. Barker, R. L. (2003). *The social work dictionary (5th ed.)*. NASW Press.

7. Bello, I. O., & Adediran, O. A. (2021). Social work practice and human rights promotion in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*, 9(2), 51-60.
8. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). (2015). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*. <https://www.cswe.org/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2015-EPAS>
9. Cournoyer, B. R. (2017). *The social work skills workbook (8th ed.)*. Cengage Learning.
10. Eseadi, C., Eseadi, E., & Anyanwu, J. (2021). Challenges and prospects of social work practice in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 21(1), 43-59.
11. Gitterman, A., & Knight, C. (2013). *The handbook of social work practice with vulnerable and resilient populations (2nd ed.)*. Columbia University Press.
12. Idyorough, A. E., (2013). *Social work administration in Nigeria, challenges and prospects*. A keynote address delivered during a 2-day stakeholders' meeting on the Professionalization of social work in Nigeria organized by the Nigeria Association of Social Workers (NASW) held at 5GF main conference room, federal secretariat complex, Abuja, from Tuesday 26th to Wednesday 27th March
13. Ihebuzor, N. (2018). The need for a comprehensive legal framework for social work in Nigeria. *Social Work and Society*, 16(1), 1-11.
14. International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). (2014). *Definition of social work*. <https://www.icsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Definition-of-Social-Work-Approved-by-the-ICSW-General-Assembly-in-2014.pdf>
15. International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). (2020). *Global definition of social work*. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>
16. Kirst-Ashman, K. K., & Hull, G. H. (2018). *Understanding generalist practice*. Cengage Learning.
17. National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2017). NASW Code of Ethics. <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>
18. Ngwu, C (2014). *Learning to practice social work*. The University of Nigeria Press Ltd.
19. Nwankwo, N. E., & Nwankwo, C. A. (2017). Social work and the challenges of professional identity in Nigeria. *Social Work and Society*, 15(1), 1-11.
20. Nwosu, I. E., & Ukaegbu, C. C. (2019). The role of information in social work practice in Nigeria. *International Journal of Information Management*, 4(6), 159-166.
21. Obeten, U. B., Onyenemerem, N. P., & Mbah Francis (2020). The challenges of social work practice in Nigeria and its implication on national development. *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, 1(3)82-90
22. Odimegwu, C. O., & Okechukwu, E. O. (2018). Working conditions of social workers in Nigeria: A study of selected states. *International Social Work*, 61(5), 710-724.
23. Oduaran, A. B. (2019). Cultural and linguistic competence in social work practice in Nigeria. *Social Work and Society*, 17(1), 1-11.
24. Ogunlaja, O. A., Oluwagbohunmi, O. A., & Adewole, T. A. (2020). Social work practice and healthcare delivery in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*, 8(3), 34-44.
25. Okoye, U. O. (2013). *Trends and challenges of social work practice in Nigeria*. Social Work Chapter 19, Unpublished
26. Oladepo, O., & Omotoso, O. (2020). Child protection in Nigeria: The role of social workers. *International Journal of Social*

-
- Work and Human Services Practice*, 8(2), 12-22.
27. Omeje, J. C., Nwankwo, C. N., & Ugwu, C. E. (2021). Challenges of social work practice in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Journal of Social Work*, 21(3), 335-347.
28. Onuoha, F. N., & Ibe, C. N. (2021). Mental health challenges in Nigeria: The role of social workers in prevention and care. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*, 9(1), 11-22.
29. Oviasu, O. S., & Igbinomwanhia, E. B. (2018). The impact of supervision on social work practice in Nigeria: A qualitative study. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 32(1), 23-34.
30. Ozuruigbo, C. U. (2020). Collaborative social work practice in Nigeria: A review of its challenges and prospects. *Social Work and Society*, 18(1), 1-13.
31. Payne, M. (2014). *Modern social work theory*. Oxford University Press.
32. Reisch, M., & Lowe, J. I. (2000). *Social work research and evaluation: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Oxford University Press
33. Rwomire, A. & Raditlhokwa, P. A. (1996). Social work in Africa: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 2(2), 5-19
34. Tosin, A. (2022). *Group hails Buhari over assent to social workers' bill*. Peoples Gazette
35. World Health Organization (WHO). (2018). *Social work*. <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/social-inclusion/social-work>
36. Yusuf, R. O., & Ayodeji, A. O. (2020). Social work practice and social justice in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*, 8(1), 1-10.