

# Rural Education Camp: A Practice Oriented Pedagogic Tool in Social Work Education (A Case Study of Manpura Village, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India)

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## Abstract

Rural Education Camp (REC) is one of the significant components of fieldwork in social work education. The primary objective of rural education camp is to provide learning opportunities for students to gain comprehensive understanding about rural setting and make students more sensitive about rural reality. The Department of Social Work, University of Delhi had organized a rural camp for social work students in collaboration with Department of Social Work, Central University of Rajasthan (CURAJ) in the year-2015. This article highlights the importance of rural education camp and its training in social work education. It also elucidates the learning outcomes resulting from its process. The insights and reflections gained from the process being shared with wider social work community to organize rural education camp with innovative methods. This case study could be used into classroom teaching to orient the students about rural education camp process and its organization with a systematic process to foster enabling learning environment into rural community settings.

**Keywords:** Rural Education Camp, Social Work Education, Transformative Learning and Change.

## Introduction

The social work is practice based profession which always concerned about change and well-being. The profession has various field practice settings. The rural and urban community development is one of the core domain of practice in which social work professionals addresses the issues and concerns and make strategic interventions to cater the needs of rural populace. Since, its inception, social work educators and

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practitioners have demonstrated their strong commitment and dedications for promoting transformation and well-being through various forms of interventions. A rural education camp provides learning opportunities for social work students to apply interdisciplinary theoretical knowledge such as rural sociology to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse aspects of rural community. Additionally, it engages students to practice various methodological skills to develop programmatic competencies and perspectives. The structured and systematic process facilitates learning exposure to cultivating a professional demeanor by fostering self-awareness, reflections, and sensitivity towards diverse issues and challenges encountered by the rural people. The broad aim of this camp was to offer educational opportunities for students, enabling the learn and lead some sort of transformative process in the village. Moreover, it provides an exposure and learning space to apply skills through active engagement into various activities. This reciprocal learning platform creates mutual benefit for the students and the local community to learn from each other. The pedagogy employed in the rural education camp also facilitates trainees' active involvement with the local community people and stakeholders to address their pertinent needs. This particular participatory and reciprocal pedagogical approach offers significant learning space for spearheading the process of social transformation through deliberate and organized acts during the camp. In this article the essence and importance of rural education camp in social work training articulated through experiential learning and reflections gained through the actual process of the camp.

**Aims and objectives of this article:** (i) to highlight the importance of rural education camp in social work as an innovative learning pedagogy. (ii) To share the learning experiences and the process followed during the camp with social work fraternity. (iii) To create a space for dialog and discussion to make the rural education camp as more creative, engaging, and learning space to foster reciprocal wisdom for mutual benefit of the social work students and local community.

## **Methodology**

This article is written based on the lived experiences of trainee social work students, faculty supervisor's and their active engagement with village community during the camp. The process documentation was used a major tool to write the narratives and learning gained by the students through lived experiences. The daily observations written by the trainee social workers in their daily journal were used as reference material to track learning, particularly their perceptual understanding and attitudinal changes occurred during the process. The social work faculty members

who were part of this camp they were active participant observer shared their insights and learning from the process. The critical self-reflexivity was also used as tool to understand the process of change among trainee social workers (TSW), and it was documented on a daily basis. These notes are referred as a secondary source to validate the empirical process of the rural education camp.

### **Field Work in Social Work Profession: An Importance**

The field of social work education and its professional practice are concerned with the study and application of various methods while applying the principle of learning by doing. Therefore, social work profession widely acknowledged for its distinctive approach of field engagement and interventions aimed at addressing the diverse social issues through interventions and actions. The social work profession has also gained international recognition due to its comprehensive approach to education and training which incorporates both theoretical and practical elements. The fieldwork practicum holds a distinct reputation within the profession since it involves community stakeholders to address and resolve the challenges through collaborative endeavors. This action oriented space provides an opportunity for students to gain experiential knowledge, skills and attitude under the structured supervision of trained professionals and educators. The significance of field practicum is also emphasized in globally recognized definition of the social work profession. “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being” ( IFSW and IASSW, 2014).

This definition gives immense importance to theories and its practice component to promote the well-being of the local community through concerted efforts. It also emphasizes the need for change and people’s liberation. The social justice and human rights are the core pillars and motivation of the profession to cater the needs of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Hence, community practice is one of the core methods in social work in which social work educators and practitioners work at micro and macro level to bring the desired changes in the society. As time changing rapidly, technology bringing massive changes into social-cultural aspects, artificial intelligence is gaining huge importance into every field. In this fast changing socio-economic and cultural context, social work

education and practice space need to be more creative, innovative, and compassionate in order to address the complex issues.

### **Rural Education Camp: An Importance in Social Work Education**

A rural education camp is one of the essential fieldwork learning components that strongly believes in the philosophy of “learning by doing”. The philosophy of direct engagement aimed to engage the social work trainee to develop understanding about rural reality. It also give a space to apply critical lens to understand socio-political, economic, religious, cultural, educational dimension and its consequences on the marginalized social groups. It also provides an exposure and opportunities for the students to enhance their experiential knowledge through active engagement. It also provides an opportunity to apply various sets of skills to gain competency. The “learning by doing” is the core philosophy behind field practicums, and it equally applies during rural education camp. Rural camp also considered as one of the tool of social learning process. It serves to empower individual students as well as teams and social groups by involving them as citizens in collective activities aimed at socio-economic regeneration, development, and change through community participation. It provides ample of opportunities for students to fine-tune their interpersonal relationship skills through the processes of group dynamics and teamwork (Anand, 2017). It is a process to engage the students in real-life learning experiences and involve them in leading change, through planned and reciprocal interventions, so social work trainees and local community members should get equal benefits from each other. For this, the first requirement is to have a proper plan for the rural education camp. In which, many aspects are involved such as site selection, pre-visit of the site, identification of learning components, networking and identification of local resources, creating an understanding between the students and the community stakeholders. The logistics and other arrangements for stay, and so on.

### **Importance of Experiential Learning in Social Work Education:**

In social work education, learning is not only focused on cognitive aspects it also gives immense importance to experiential learning too. The Aristotle, proponent of experiential learning once said, “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them. Similarly, Kolb (1984), the modern father of experiential learning theory, said learning is more meaningful if it has been done through actual experience because experience is the key to success in any endeavor. Kolb has also considered experiential learning is a process that links to education, work,

and personal development which further leads professional development as well.

In rural education camp students explore the possibility to practice skills and models of group work and community organization. They also practiced the principles, values, skills, and techniques of various social work methods. Moreover, this had provided them immense learning opportunities and to adapt new culture and adjust with the new environment, and work as a united group to meet a few needs of the community. The students also develop some intervention plans for awareness generation on different social issues, they share necessary information about government schemes and programmes, and they also make community people more conscious about their exploitation. The student also applies various skills and competencies through active role performance in organizing, mobilizing, problem-solving, leadership, decision-making actions. Thus, rural education camp creates excellent platform to work collectively in a team to foster reciprocal values. The philosophy and outcome of the rural camp shares affinity with Lao Tzu poem. Which all the students practice during the camp to make it more enriching for students' learning and stewardship of community well-being.

***“Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But with the best leaders, when the work is done and the task accomplished, the people will say, “We have done this ourselves.” Lao Tzu (700 B.C.)***

### **Expected Learning Outcome**

This camp had also created a space for students to understand the rural community setting and its dynamic structural reality. Particularly, the socio-political, economic, religious, cultural, educational, and governance related aspects. It was also expected that students should get on opportunity to initiate the transformative process in the skilled through active participation. The students were expected to practice social work ethos, theories, models, and principles in a rural setting. It was also anticipated that they should learn the enumeration process. They were expected to prepare a detailed village community profile. To assess the needs and problems of the community and priorities it and to develop the intervention plans. It was also anticipated that they should learn to design intervention strategies based on the felt needs of the community and implement them during the rural camp. At the end they were also expected to prepare detailed report and present their insights, learning, and reflections with community stakeholders.

### **Brief Profile of Manpura Village:**

The Manpura village comes under Kishangad Block of Ajmer District. It comprises 65 households, only one family belongs to schedule caste family and 64 belongs to Jat community. Most of the people are dependent on agriculture and allied occupations, such as animal husbandry and other allied activities. The people also work in marble industries or other informal employment activities, to sustain their livelihood. The village has primary school up to the 5th grade, and for further study students go nearby villages. The village has the basic minimum of infrastructure, such as a community hall, Panchyat Bhavan, etc. It was observed that patriarchy dominance is very high in the village. The men are more dominant as compare to the women. Most of the decisions were taken by male members in their family and at community too.

### **A Rural Education Camp in Manpura Village:**

The rural camp serves as a valuable component of social work education, offering significant potential and avenues for social work students to gain a comprehensive understanding of rural reality through immersive experiences at the village site. The process of rural camp is very important to discuss because this will give us insight into the efforts that are required to create atmosphere and space for students to achieve the set learning objectives. A group of 27 students were placed in Manpura and Marogala village; both these villages are part of the Kishangad tehsil, Ajmer district, Rajasthan. The group was again sub-divided into two groups, comprising 12 students those who were stayed in Marogala village and 15 students in Manpura village. A facilitating team comprising two faculty members, one research scholar, and two project staff from the Department of Social Work, CURAJ also stayed with the students in Manpura village. Another team made up of three professors and one project worker stayed with the students in Marogala Village.

### **Rural Education Camp: A Process**

#### **Pre-visit for selection of village site:**

The Department of Social Work, University of Delhi had planned a pre-camp visit to ensure proper planning for the rural camp. The department formed a joint team comprising two faculty members of the Delhi School of Social Work (DSW) and two project staff members of the Central University of Rajasthan (CURAJ). The team jointly visited both villages and interacted with the stakeholders. The faculty member shared the dates of the camp with community. The duration of the stay, and the size and composition of

the student was finalized. Enquiry also made to ensure minimum logistics requirements for stay, sanitation facilities, and food arrangements. The exploration was also made in keeping learning opportunities for the students and staff. After a very preliminary understanding, we had set the first criteria for selection of villages where students could stay for a week as a part of their rural education camp. Another criterion was used where less intervention done by the NGOs and social work department. The distance was also considered in the selection of a site or village. Finally, the Manpura and Marogala, these village were identified for one week camp in the month of December 2015. There various facilities, such as a training hall, boarding facilities, and short-stay facilities were identified. The team also selected an NGO-SWERA Sansthan which works in the nearby villages for making presentation and sharing the learning and experiences with the students, of CURAJ. Thereafter, the joint team planned and formulated a tentative schedule, specifying the dates and times for possible activities, programmes, and learning exercises. The team also developed a tentative budget for the camp and submitted it to the office of Director Fieldwork for administrative approval from the University.

### Phase- I Study

At the initial phase, different sets of activities were planned, and the prioritization of these activities was done in order to create a systematic learning process. On the very first day, all of these planned activities were discussed among the students. Oriented them about, and principle of “learning by doing. Various activities were planned to keep in mind the context of the local community. **Rapport Building** through meeting with stakeholders to get to know each other, learn about the community, get different points of view, and find out about local resources to make the site safe and keep a direct focus on the goals of the rural camp instead of getting caught up in logistics. **Prabhaat Pheri**: The students of primary schools were involved into creating awareness about REC. The aim of this exercise was to make community people aware about the camp. **Transect Walk** was conducted at the commencement of the camp to become more acquainted with the villagers, learn about the geographical and demographic structure of the village, understand the socio-ecological demography of the village, and identifies key people and resources available in the community to serve the purpose of the camp. Participatory rural appraisal tools, such as social and natural resource mapping to locate available community resources to meet their current needs through short term intervention. A visit to agricultural land was done to identify the main source of livelihood. Through this visit, student also observed irrigation and other facilities and local difficulties

encountered by farmers. Learnt about major crops, crop patterns, and issues linked to them. Visit to MGNREGA work site to learn about issues and challenges faced by the worker and also learned about difficulty and challenges in the implementation of the policy. **A community profiling:** A preliminary study was undertaken to gather demographic information pertaining to the hamlet, with the aim of enhancing comprehension of the prevailing difficulties. Both qualitative and quantitative aspects used to gather empirical data for subsequent intervention purposes. To achieve the intended objectives, a range of methodologies and instruments were employed, including interview protocols, a survey instrument, and focused group discussions (FGDs), among others. In conclusion, the students undertook the task of documenting and compiling data to create a comprehensive hamlet profile. The students have acquired a range of methodologies from documented sources, including data analysis, the presentation of data through tabulation and graphical representation, critical examination of concerns and problems, as well as determining the extent and direction of future social interventions.

### **Phase-II Need Based Interventions:**

The *Ratri Chaupaal* refers to a regularly scheduled gathering of community stakeholders that were took place in the evening. The primary objective of this initiative was to foster an inclusive and conducive environment to the exchange of ideas and perspectives on a wide range of topics. This platform people raised their voice and uncertainties, establish meaningful connections, deliberate on observations and strategies, and solicit feedback from community members. Additionally, this platform serves the purpose of generating awareness and promoting sensitivity among its members through the utilization of folk media and cultural programs. In the context of social action, local languages were utilized as a means of communication through the mediums of songs, and poems.

The students also used a program media tool “*Nukkad Natak*” to disseminate awareness about domestic violence, child marriage, alcoholism, gender discrimination, girl education, health, and sanitation, etc. Additionally, community involvements were fostered through initiatives such as the construction of soak pits and tree plantations activities. A demonstration was conducted to showcase how to construct “soak pits” using locally available materials, hence minimizing any external expenses. The primary objective of this initiative was to provide instruction on the concept of soak pits and their cost-effective advantages for ensuring water conservation adequate sanitation in the community. “Tree Plantation’ was another important activity performed by the students. Nearby 50 seedlings

plants of diverse species were planted in collaborations with community stakeholders. Through this initiatives the environmental consciousness and advocate for its preservation, with the ultimate goal of securing a more sustainable future. The students actively participated in community engagement activities, as indicated by the context, and sought to disseminate awareness and information to various government schemes. The students also organized educational awareness on hand hygiene, maternal and child health, and engaged in door-to-door visits to distribute informative posters, with the aim of raising awareness among members of the community.

The students were engaged in writing daily journal as a means of reflecting upon their daily experiences, evaluating their abilities and proficiencies, discerning their personal investment in effecting social change, utilizing self-reflection as a tool for self-guidance and mentorship, comprehending the process of cultivating a novel perspective, acquiring knowledge about their own values and attitudes, identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement, and developing the capacity for critical analysis of pertinent issues and challenges. On the final day of the camp, the student groups convened in Kanakhedi (SWERA) to conclude their activities. The camp crew was also joined by students and staff members from CURAJ. A comprehensive day-long session was conducted, in which students from both the institutions engaged in a scholarly discourse with the Head of the Department of Social Work at CURAJ. The session involved presentations, facilitated discussions, and the dissemination of knowledge on diverse topics pertaining to the challenges faced by rural communities. The social development specialist, hailing from a civil society organization, offered invaluable insights and facilitated the students in establishing connections between their learning experience and the realm of social development policies and programmed.

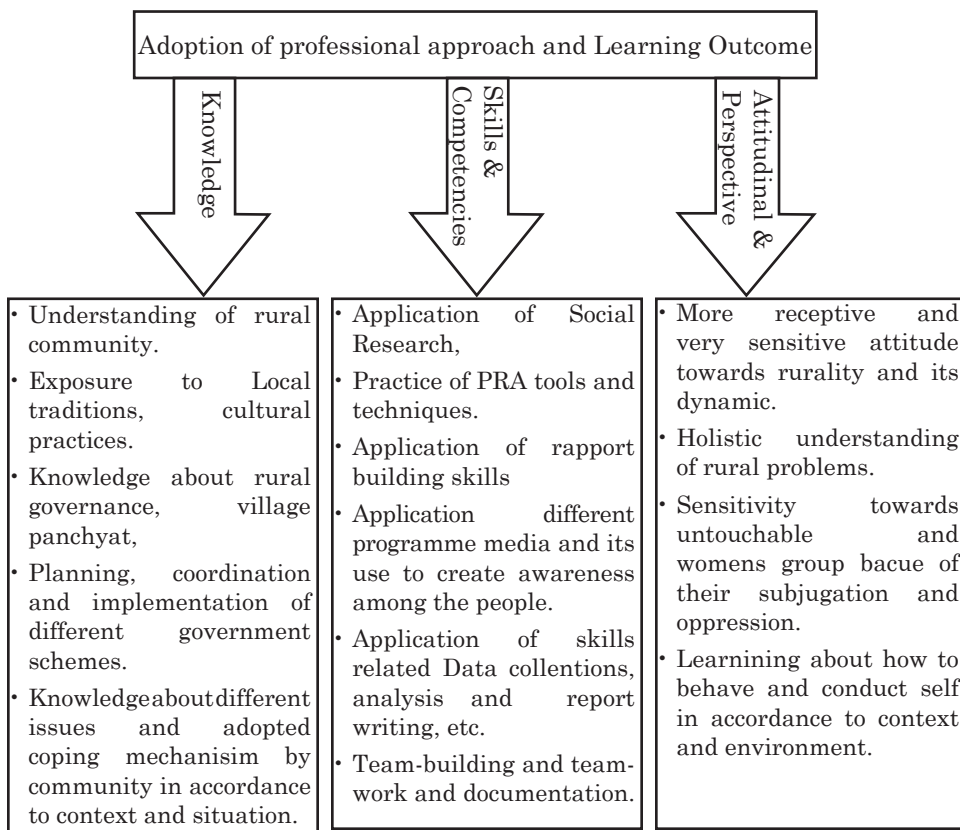
### **Phase-III Sharing of Learning Experiences with CURAJ Students:**

The students diligently revised their learning notebooks and meticulously compiled a detailed report detailing the collective knowledge acquired by their team. The student also provided their feedback about the camp to the department. Each of the group and sub-group delivered detailed presentations to the faculty members of the department during a comprehensive full-day event. The individuals in question assimilated a range of concerns through their inter-communication with both their peers and the faculty members. All the students expressed their perspectives on the educational benefits derived from their experience of residing in the village highlighted the value of rural camp in in their professional development.

### **Learning Outcome and Evaluation:**

The rural camp provided extensive opportunities to gain firsthand experience of the rural reality, including its structure and the various difficulties linked with its particular context. The students gained comprehension understanding about the socio-economic and cultural dimensions, how they maintain stability in the Manpurva Village. Moreover, they also acquired knowledge about various social policies, schemes and programmes and its actual state of implementation. The pupils underwent through evaluation based on a range of criteria designed by faculty supervisors. The participants shared responsibilities and subsequently organized themselves into teams and made interventions. The performance of each student was evaluated by two distinct measures: individual performance and task completion, as well as performance within a team and the collective efforts exerted to achieve the task. The evaluation of their performance was conducted in every activity and intervention. The participants' proficiency in integrating and critically comprehending theory, as well as their sensitivity towards the rural issues and concerns. The major component of learning and planning for intervention which reflected through their reports and journal writings were:

<b>Issues and problems identified during the process</b>	<b>Scope for social work Intervention:</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Patriarchy and male dominance in society</li> <li>2. Lack of healthcare facilities</li> <li>3. Lack of awareness about higher education.</li> <li>4. No accessibility to public transportation.</li> <li>5. Lack of awareness about policies and schemes (especially among women)</li> <li>6. self-regulatory module of governance</li> <li>7. Women's subjugation through different cultural practices</li> <li>8. Low political will and interest in village development</li> <li>9. Lack of livelihood opportunities</li> <li>10. The prevalence of early-age child marriage practices</li> <li>11. Unavailability of drinking water (fluorosis) and</li> <li>12. Lack of sanitation facilities and related infrastructure.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilization of community resources</li> <li>• Mobilization and awareness generation on various socio-ecological issues</li> <li>• Extended and alternate education centers (especially for women)</li> <li>• Vocational training for youth and women</li> <li>• Mobile health centers</li> <li>• regular piping of water</li> <li>• Waste management</li> <li>• Gender Sensitization</li> <li>• Youth Participation</li> <li>• Properly planned intervention to deal with water problems and treatment of fluorosis content</li> <li>• The community was a vibrant laboratory for the effective use of studied theories (such as PRA).</li> </ul>



### Limitations and Challenges:

The rural camp serves as a platform for students to engage in meaningful interactions with members of the rural community. Along with learning there were also some challenges faced by the team. The majority of students were coming from the urban. Their upbringing into city life resulting in a limited comprehension of rural communities. During the rural camp, students initially gained insight into the challenges by drawing upon their individual perceptions about the rural hamlet. Despite their commendable attempt to comprehend the intricacies of the town, the duration of 5 days proved to be significantly constrained to accomplish learning objectives in a holistic ways. Although the team of CURAJ assisted in identifying the community's need. The students' assessment of the need was constrained due to the limited duration of five days camp. The rural camp provided a valuable chance for individuals to immerse themselves in village life, and it was also enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by rural communities. Nonetheless, individuals residing in rural areas exhibit linguistic diversity, employing various languages and dialects.

Consequently, all of the pupils encountered a common issue this linguistic variation frequently poses challenges in comprehending and addressing issues effectively.

The patriarchal norms, it is customary for male members of the family to assume responsibility for making significant decisions. Consequently, women encounter numerous constraints within both domestic and public spheres. Women residing in rural areas encountered a multitude of constraints, both within the confines of their households and in the public sphere. The students had the same issue during the interactions with women. Consequently, the Ratri Chaupal was orchestrated with the aim of raising awareness among both males and females. However, the level of female engagement shown a notable decline. It is indicated that individuals residing in rural locations, regardless of gender, tend to be occupied with their occupational responsibilities. This cultural context, the male members were ventured outside the confines of the village, while women predominantly engage into agriculture and other activities. Consequently, engaging in conversations with individuals of both genders proved to be challenging during the daytime. Therefore, students were compelled to engage in the discourse with them into the late hours of the evening. While certain requirements were identified, the plan of intervention exhibited deficiencies in its soundness, since it merely presented broad possibilities or difficulties that could be addressed. Due to the limited time frame of only five days, which proved insufficient for the execution of a short-term plan, the focus was primarily directed towards generating awareness and engaging in discussions.

### **Insights, Learning, Reflections and Suggestions:**

The rural education camp provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the rural community and its cultural aspects. It facilitates individuals in arriving at a resolution on the matter, enabling them to proactively strategize an intervention in advance. Furthermore, it is imperative that a substantive dialogue occurs between the student and the villages, wherein the villagers are afforded the opportunity to articulate their concerns and challenges. In addition, it is imperative for instructors to effectively convey their expectations to the pupils. Engaging in dialogue with the villagers will facilitate the students' comprehension of the villagers' expectations and enable them to identify prevalent concerns that can be addressed. By transforming rural camp into a more engaging endeavor, it can facilitate the community's sense of accountability. The proposed initiative aims to establish a reciprocal relationship between the rural camp and the participants, ensuring that both the rural population and students are regarded as equal collaborators.

The active participation of students in the design of the rural camp is encouraged, including the determination of activities, target groups, and other relevant aspects. This approach enables students to use their critical thinking skills and autonomy, rather than relying solely on staff members to devise all aspects of the camp. The field of social work fosters a climate that promotes creative thinking among students, with faculty members playing a pivotal role in guiding and orienting students' thoughts and actions. The limited period of the rural camp poses a constraint on student engagement within the village. Additionally, this temporal restriction impacts the students' ability to effectively carry out their planned interventions and activities. Consequently, it is imperative that the rural camp be arranged for a minimum duration of one month. This prolonged duration will afford students the opportunity to cultivate their individual comprehension of the village and its geographical positioning, establish a positive relationship, and ascertain available resources without being dependent on external aid. There exist numerous rural development plans and programs, but the rural populace remains largely uninformed about their existence. The level of awareness among students who visit the village is limited. Consequently, it is imperative to arrange an orientation session for the students prior to the camp's organization, enabling them to effectively communicate and disseminate information to the villages.

There exist a multitude of village-level bureaucrats who perform an essential part in the advancement of the village. It is vital for students to possess knowledge about the aforementioned entities and comprehend their significance within the local community. This will facilitate the students in implementing a structured intervention, whereby they can solicit assistance from the local administrative officials.

## **Conclusion**

The optimal learning experiences in social work education are twofold: firstly, through the practical application of knowledge during fieldwork in an agency or open community environment; and secondly, through immersive engagement with local community members during a rural camp when students reside in the village. Given that social work is a profession that is primarily focused on practical application. "Learning by doing" holds greater significance. The rural camp offers a valuable opportunity for students to gain exposure that may have been previously inaccessible to them. This program offers social work students a valuable chance to utilize their talents and academic knowledge in innovative ways to tackle grassroots-level issues. This platform serves as a forum for the examination and critique of traditional values, while also providing a platform for advocating for justice. The fundamental nature of the rural camp is in its ability to

enhance the cognitive abilities of individuals who will play a pivotal role in driving future societal transformations. In conclusion, it can be strongly asserted that rural camp, as a pedagogy rooted on wisdom-based learning, constitutes a fundamental element of social work education, as supported by our experiential learning. It possesses the capacity to guide individuals towards achieving collective social transformation and facilitating positive change in rural community. Therefore, rural education camp need to be organized in with systematic planning in every social work institutions because, it play vital role in professional development.

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