

Abstract

BACKGROUND: Academic training of social work students is fundamental to the development of quality workforce. Social workers have worked with drug users and their families since the formation of social work field. Due the diversity of target groups and a number of services in which social workers can act, many of them are employed in services for drug users. Education and training of social work students does not focus enough on the field of addictology.

AIMS: To provide a systematic overview of the results of published research studies, dealing with university education of social workers in the field of substance abuse in Europe and the USA. To find out how the training of social workers in the field of substance abuse is organized.

METHODS: The resulting product is a systematic review of scientific articles. Articles have been searched in national databases according to the specific criteria, keywords and their combinations. The target group consists of studies dealing with the university education of social workers in the field of substance abuse. The tool for managing reference (EndNote) was used for data analysis and data processing. To clarify and categorize data, PRISMA flow diagram was used. From a total of 552 studies found, 19 articles were included into the analysis as eligible. Then selected studies were subjected to the information analysis. A clustering method was used to categorize data. All procedures have been drawn up in accordance with ethical standards.

RESULTS: Social workers lack training in empirically grounded methods of working with drug users. More than a half of social work students from the sample of analysed studies never received any specific training in addiction science, with only about a third of them having received at least some form of education in this area. There is lack of content consistency in addiction treatment programs and courses across the social work studies area and there are not many opportunities for specializing in the activities leading to the knowledge of this issue. Less than half of the analysed programs or universities offer elective courses with addictological topics and these programs are provided with very little time allotment. There is inconsistency of addictological issues in the curriculum content of social workers. Studying the links between education, knowledge and attitudes in relation to work with drug users, is extremely important to the process of understanding the capabilities of social workers in addictological practice. A positive attitude in relation to addictive substances users may reflect greater leniency in relation to the problems associated with substance abuse. The studies describing the implementation of teaching methods with addictological content are beneficial for maintaining and improving knowledge and skills of social workers. They are also suitable for its integration as a practical and theoretical educational model.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENTADIONS: Perceived preparedness of many students of social work to work with addictological clients is probably insufficient. There should be a focus on the renovation of the curricula in social work. For the future, there should be an emphasis on interdisciplinary cooperation at all levels. To include dependency issues as part of the curricula of educational programs for social workers and other professions; to promote national platform in accreditation and licensing unification of addiction treatment programs; to place greater emphasis on evidence-based approach and systematic dissemination of research results across the academic institutions is recommended. The student's expertise should be obtained both through knowledge in theoretical and practical courses.

KEY WORDS: social work education - substance abuse/addiction - specialization – training