

The effectiveness of a training program in developing professional performance of social workers with elderly groups

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Abstract:

This research is aimed at verifying the effectiveness of a training program in developing the professional performance of social workers working with elderly groups. The researcher adopted a quasi-experimental approach. The sample includes (18) social workers working with elderly groups in Assiut Governorate (experimental group). The training program was implemented for three months through weekly sessions with the experimental group. The researcher used a professional performance scale that has four dimensions as shown: scientific knowledge and professional information, professional skills and abilities, the professional directions. and, professional experiences. The results of the research training program succeeded to develop this professional performance.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Training Program, Professional performance, Social Workers, Group Work, Elders Groups.

Introduction:

Egypt is hopefully aspiring to progress and prosperity through a comprehensive development in all its social and economic aspects. Thus, labor plans for implementing this target have been made. Applying these plans efficiently requires large numbers of trained and high-quality scientific competencies.

Given this, it has been a must for Egypt to count on its human resources to chase social and economic development. This is for the human element, as well as other material ones, which is such a vital resource for the development process. Thereby, building and promoting these human resources would be prioritized so that they can undertake the task of developing their societies. (Hedden, 2018, P.34)

Indeed, the underlying principles of human development, our society seeks, require providing freedom, dignity, and well-being for citizens everywhere. Accordingly, this would demand preparing human key-staff who are aware of the world changes and able to make changes in proportion to circumstances of societies they live in. (UNDP, 2019, P.8).

The elderly, in any society, are seen as national wealth due to the experience, reason, value, and wisdom they possess; they are more mature, far-sighted, balanced, and fairer when judging things (Deneulin, &Shahni. 2019, P.59).

Hence, the issues and needs of the elderly have received the attention of different countries of the world. Worth mentioning, research addressing the setting of fostering the elderly has confirmed that aging is a natural developmental stage of growth, which is

characterized, more importantly, by biological, mental, emotional, and social changes. (Hall & Scragg, 2019, P.78)

The United Nations named the year 1982 as an international year for the elderly, as a reminder to provide them with care and decent lives and tackle their problems in terms of being, as declared, an increasingly large proportion of the total adult population. Additionally, these problems are wholly linked to issues of economic and social development (Blazer, 2012, P.89). This was once emphasized in a study proposing the significance of adopting systematic policies and programs that contribute to boosting the elderly and developing their physical, psychological, and social lives (Worth, 1998).

Therefore, humanities and social sciences were profoundly interested in studying the elderly group in terms of their needs, problems, and various issues they go through and trying to benefit from their experiences, ideas, and knowledge in serving the society in which they spent their lives through all professions in community, including social work (Crawford, & Walker, 2009, P.44).

Elderly welfare is a social work setting that comprises social workers' intervention with old-age individuals in their welfare institutions according to bases of knowledge, skills, and values to help them satisfy their needs, solve their problems, and fulfill the most appropriate adjustment to their social surroundings (Greene, 2011, P.109). A relevant study confirmed this assuming a positive correlation between the professional practice of social work and the empowerment of older women to address their social problems, e.g., fragile social relationships, free time, and social isolation. (Mohamed, 2002). Another study emphasized the efficacy of providing psychological and social support to the elderly through the professional intervention of social work performed by social workers who proficiently master dealing with this group (Semple, 2009).

Group work is a method of social work that looks upon a group as a means of developing a personality and achieving an individual's social adjustment through the process of interaction. Also, this method invests the mutual relations that a group provides to accomplish individual and social goals as the individual acquires his/her personality as a result of his/her participation in the group life (Bradley, 2018, P.19). The study Louis (2008) indicated to applying the developmental approach in professional practice with the elderly results in boosting their attitudes towards participation in the development of the local community. Top of Form

The study Varsha, (2010) argued for the same assuming that group work programs positively and effectively help in deciphering the changes, which the elderly go through, which is useful to design and implement programs helping increase their social performance.

The study of Duyan (2008) refers to the recreational programs of group work that have led to an effective fulfillment of social adjustment for the elderly through modifying socially unaccepted behavior and accomplishing a satisfactory level of successful social relations.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has stressed the workers' constant need for training programs that provide plenty of novel knowledge and skills intending to activate the practice process. This can be done by providing workers with myriad advanced and updated knowledge, techniques, and methods. (NASW). Noticeably, some of this knowledge is related to professional sources and systems associated with practice (on the individual, group, and society levels). The professional performance of social workers functioning with elderly groups can be linked to many constituents that help them fulfill their roles proficiently so that the various goals of these groups can be met.

The study of Ahmed (1992) was concerned with gauging the social performance of social workers in all practice areas to tackle professional performance deficiencies, which can be done by activating and maximizing the utilization of training programs to improve workers' professional performance efficiency.

In addition, the study of Andrew (2014) stressed the ways to develop the professional performance of social workers. Also, it concluded the need to define professional performance dimensions for workers involved and recommended the establishment of multiple workshops through which they can be acquainted with all the skills, values, and experiences concerning their professional performance.

Given the above theoretical presentation and the situation estimate study, comprising a sample of (9) social workers, conducted by the researcher to determine the degree of professional performance of social workers, a deficiency of professional performance was found. This finding was derived upon applying the professional performance scale which covered four major dimensions: professional knowledge, professional capabilities and skills, professional attitudes, and professional experiences of social workers engaging in elder groups. The deficit for each dimension was shown individually, and the total scale, calculated by applying the T-test, was (1.11). Based on

this, the study problem can be phrased as "The effectiveness of a training program in developing the professional performance of social workers working with elderly groups."

Study Objectives:

The study in hand targets at meeting the following objectives:
The main objective: verifying the effectiveness of a training program in developing the professional performance of social workers working with elderly groups. This main objective can then be divided into the following sub-objectives:

- 1- Developing professional knowledge of social workers working with elder groups.
- 2- Developing professional capabilities and skills of social workers working with elder groups.
- 3- Developing professional attitudes of social workers working with elder groups.
- 4- Developing professional experiences of social workers working with elder groups.

Study Hypotheses:

This study seeks to verify the validity of the following main hypothesis:

There are statistically significant differences between the pre-and post-tests of the experimental group in favor of the post-tests on the professional performance scale. This is achieved through the following hypotheses:

- 1- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of scientific knowledge and professional information.
- 2- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional skills and abilities.
- 3- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional directions.
- 4- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional experiences.

Concepts:

1- Effectiveness:

Effectiveness refers to the degree to which the organization achieves its goals. (Carter, 2011, P.139) And, Effectiveness in this sense refers to analyzing the correlation between the findings and goals possibly met and the efforts exerted to accomplish them. Bryman, 2017, P.115)

Effectiveness in this study is the ability of the training program to the development of the professional performance of social workers working with elderly groups.

2- Training Program:

It is a purposeful and planned activity to achieve the goals of the training process during a specific period; it is the result of identifying the training needs of the trainees. Also, it is a process through which a mutual interaction among all elements of the training process is carried out. (Kadushin, A., - Harkness, D., (2014, P.59)

In the context of this study, a training program refers to the planned procedures designed in line with the needs of social workers working with elder groups, and aim to develop their professional performance through a set of selected theoretical knowledge and applied methods related to professional performance according to a specific time plan.

3- Professional Performance:

A process that involves a range of educational activities and experiences aiming at increasing professionals' knowledge, professional attitudes, skills, and abilities to work and help people. (Bruce, 2018, P. 106)

In the study in hand, professional performance is a process that shows the capability of social workers working with elder groups to perceive professional knowledge, potentials, skills, attitudes, and experiences that have the characteristic of persistence. Hence, the ultimate goal is to improve their ability to deal with elder groups.

Methodology:

The current study is a quasi-experimental study aiming to determine the impact of an independent experimental variable (effectiveness of a Training program) on a dependent variable (professional performance of social workers working with elderly groups). The study followed an experimental approach based on one group experimental group. Data were analyzed by using SPSS 21 version. The current research used both qualitative and quantitative techniques of data analysis.

The study used a comprehensive survey of a population of (18) social workers working with elderly groups accommodated at elderly welfare institutions in Assiut Governorate.

The study was implemented from 15/9/2019 to 15/12/2019. The training program was implemented over three months through weekly sessions, and the study tools were represented in the professional performance scale.

Tools: The professional performance scale has four dimensions as shown: the dimension of Scientific knowledge and professional information for social workers which contains (11) items, the dimension of Professional skills and abilities of social workers which contain (11) items, the dimension of Professional directions for social workers which contain (11) items. The dimension of Professional experiences of social workers contains (11) items. In total the professional performance scale contains (44) items. The scale used the triple Likert method and included the following options: agree=3; neutral=2; and disagree=1.

Validity and Reliability of the Scale:

1- Content Validity: the preliminary version of the scale was presented to (8) reviewers, who are specialists in social work and group work. They examined the professional performance scale and expressed their opinions on the stability of the scale items that contribute to the aims of the study To verify the content validity of the scale. In light of the arbitrators' review, the number of the scale statements reached 44.

2- Internal Consistency: the scale was applied in its final form to a sample of (5) social workers. The correlation coefficients were calculated by the index to which they belong. The correlation coefficients between the scale dimensions and the scale as a whole were calculated, the following table illustrates this.

Table (1): The correlation coefficients between dimensions.

Dimensions	Pearson Correlation
The Scientific knowledge and professional information	.83
The Professional skills and abilities	.81
The Professional directions	.80
The Professional experiences	.83
Total	.83

Table (1) shows that all the professional performance scale dimensions for social workers relate to each other and correlate with the whole degree of the scale, with a statistically significant correlation at a significant level (0.01). They achieve a good level of

confidence in the tool and reliability of the results, so the researcher can rely on it in the current study.

Scale Reliability:

Table (2): Results of the reliability of the professional performance scale for social workers using the Spearman-Brown correction and the Alpha Cronbach Coefficient.

Scale Dimensions	The Spearman-Brown	Alpha Cronbach Coefficient
Professional Performance Scale	.81	.84

The table above shows that most of the coefficients of the variables have a high degree of reliability, thus their results are reliable.

Training program:

The researcher prepared, designed and implemented the training program pursuing the system theory, which comprises inputs, transformative processes and outputs. The inputs included human resources (e.g. social workers, trainers and researchers), logistics (e.g. location, equipment, and technological methods), time, and governing rules. The transformative processes were represented in the training methods used, interaction, discussions, lectures and meetings conducted by the researcher. Eventually, the outputs were represented in providing social workers with knowledge, skills and experience on the dimensions of their professional performance.

The training program involved the following framework:

1- Objectives:

The main objective of the training program is to develop the professional performance of social workers working with youth groups, which is attained through the following sub-objectives:

- a. Developing professional knowledge of social workers.
- b. Developing professional capabilities and skills of social workers.
- c. Developing professional attitudes of social workers.
- d. Developing professional experience of social workers.

2- Foundations and criteria in terms of which the training program is designed:

- a. Main objective and sub-objectives of the study.
- b. Correlation between the training program goals and those of the institution in which it is applied.
- c. Knowledge framework of the group work methodology.
- d. A researcher’s interviews with experts and specialists engaging in old-age setting.

e. A researcher's utilization of his/her knowledge and experience in assisting the experimental group (trainees) during the implementation of the training program.

3- Strategies:

- Persuasion
- Group interaction
- Knowledge presentation
- Cooperation
- Group experience reinforcement
- Social learning
- Encouragement
- Modeling

4- Techniques:

- Group discussion
- Role-play
- Self-learning
- Flyers, hand-outs and illustrations
- Lecturing
- Symposia
- Field visits

5- Content: The training program comprises three phases:

Elementary phase:

Here, the research population is examined, the application of the program in an institution is authorized, and a pre-assessment is applied.

Executive phase:

The training program besides its implications are practiced to develop professional performance of social workers working with elder groups.

The training sessions (3 three-hour meetings a week) were conducted along a duration of three months, which makes the total training hours 108.

The training program addressed a set of constituents and topics that would boost the professional performance of social workers functioning with elder groups. The following is a summary of the activities included in the program in terms of intended timeline: Month 1 (15-9-2019 to 15-10-2019): the following areas were covered:

- Exposure of the experimental group to a pre-assessment.
- Professional knowledge of social workers engaging with elder groups.
- Professional capabilities and skills of social workers engaging with elder groups.
- Professional attitudes of social workers engaging with elder groups.
- Professional experiences of social workers engaging with elder groups.

- Presentation of the International Elderly Rights Document.
Month 2 (16-10-2019 to 16-11-2019): the following areas were covered:

- Discussing the tasks and duties of a social worker addressing elders.
- Holding a discussion on how to build capacities in social workers.
- Presenting a range of professional experience social workers share.
- Presenting various experiences on the effective professional performance of social workers.
- Training in tackling elders issues (start - middle - end).

Monty 3 (17-11-2019 to 17-12-2019): the following areas were covered:

- Presenting various models of institutions working with elders in some countries.
- Explaining the professional skills that social workers are required to possess when addressing elders.
- Training in situations related to intervention with elder groups.
- Presenting the needs and problems of elders.
- Discussing the qualities that should be available in a social worker who works with elders.
- Applying a post-assessment.
- Evaluating the training program.

The training program was designed in terms of many scientific methods that helped the researcher and trainees benefit from the training program contents. These methods include group discussion, lectures, brainstorming, workshops, behavioral modeling, and Power Point presentations.

Finally, the training program was executed as a result of the collaborative efforts of the researcher, experts, and leaders of the Social Solidarity Directorate.

Closure phase:

At this point, a closing ceremony is prepared for the training program, in which the ups of the program and training activities are discussed with the members of the experimental group. Later, the researcher holds another meeting for the experimental group, in which he applies a post-assessment to identify the effect of the experimental variable, which is "the effectiveness of a training program" on the

dependent variable, "the development of the professional performance of social workers working with elder groups."

6- Skills on which the program is built:

- a. Initiating social relationships.
- b. Analyzing and observing actions and reactions of the group.
- c. Managing meetings.
- d. Time management and investment.
- e. Utilizing institutional and societal capabilities.

Results:

The study results are explained in terms of the demographic variables of the experimental group along with validating the study hypotheses, conducted by calculating the values of mean, standard deviation and applying T test to one sample as follows:

1- Demographics Characteristics of the study sample (Experimental Group)

Table (3) Social workers distribution according to Age: N= 18

Variables	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
Age				
25 – 30	3	16.67%	38.17	6.54
31 – 36	5	27.78%		
37 – 42	8	44.44%		
Over43	2	11.11%		
Total	18	100%		

The data in table (3) refers to age of social workers; period (37-42) at 44.44% is the highest, while the (over 43) age period increased by 11.11% is less than the age of the total sample.

Table (4): Social workers distribution according to Gender:

Variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	11	61.11%
Female	7	38.89%
Total	18	%100

The data in table (4) refers to social workers according to gender that 61.11% male ratio is greater than the proportion of females 38.89% of the total sample.

Table (5): Social workers distribution according to Experience age:

Variables	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
Experience Age				
1 – 3 year	5	27.77%	5.91	2.81
4 – 6 year	10	55.56%		
More than 7 years	3	16.67%		
Total	18	100%		

The data in table 5 refers to the experience age, it is clear that 55.56% of the sample proportion experience age of (4-6) years, while 16.67% of the sample more than 7 years.

2- Results related to study hypotheses

Results of the main hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post- tests of the experimental group in favor of the post-tests on the professional performance scale, The following table presents the related results:

Table (6) Differences between the pre- and post- tests of the experimental group in favor of the post-tests on the professional performance scale:

Professional Performance Scale						
Measure	Mean	S.D	T value	T(Table)	Level of Significance	Effect Size Eta Sq
Pre-test	21.31	5.622	17.28	1.740	Significant (0.01)	.761
Post-test	34.56	7.665				

Based on the above table, it is evident that calculated T value (17.28) is larger than that of tabulated T (1.740) at the significance level of 0.01. Yet, the impact factor value (ETA) is 761. This implies that the experimental group witnessed significant differences that led to developing their professional performance after being exposed to the training program. Given this, it is normal to accept the major null hypothesis: there are statistically significant differences between the average scores of the experimental group before and after the application of the training program regarding professional performance development of social workers working with elder groups.

Results of the first sub-hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre- and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of scientific knowledge and professional information, the following table presents the related results:

Table (7) Differences between the mean scores of the pre-and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of scientific knowledge and professional information:

Scientific Knowledge and Professional Information						
Measure	Mean	S.D	T value	T(Table)	Level of Significance	Effect Size Eta Sq
Pre-test	20.81	1.762	15.174	1.740	Significant (0.01)	.570
Post-test	33.13	3.054				

Based on the above table, it is evident that calculated T value (15.174) is larger than that of tabulated T (1.740) at the significance level of 0.01. Yet, the impact factor value (ETA) is 570. This implies

that the experimental group witnessed significant differences that led to developing their academic and professional knowledge after being exposed to the training program. Given this, it is normal to accept the first sub-hypothesis: there are statistically significant differences between the average scores of the experimental group before and after the application of the training program regarding the development of academic and professional knowledge of social workers working with elder groups.

Results of the second sub-hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre- and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional skills and abilities, the following table presents the related results:

Table (8) Differences between the mean scores of the pre-and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional skills and abilities:

Professional Skills and Abilities						
Measure	Mean	S.D	T value	T(Table)	Level of Significance	Effect Size Eta Sq
Pre-test	20.64	2.445	14.563	1.740	Significant (0.01)	.465
Post-test	33.91	3.213				

Based on the above table, it is evident that calculated T value (14.563) is larger than that of tabulated T (1.740) at the significance level of 0.01. Yet, the impact factor value (ETA) is 465. This implies that the experimental group witnessed significant differences that led to developing their professional potentials and skills after being exposed to the training program. Given this, it is normal to accept the second sub-hypothesis: there are statistically significant differences between the average scores of the experimental group before and after the application of the training program regarding fostering professional potentials and skills of social workers working with elder groups.

Results of the third sub-hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional directions, The following table presents the related results:

Table (9) Differences between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional directions:

Professional Direction						
Measure	Mean	S.D	T value	T(Table)	Level of Significance	Effect Size Eta Sq
Pre-test	19.92	2.771	12.216	1.740	Significant (0.01)	.623
Post-test	36.04	4.735				

Based on the above table, it is evident that calculated T value (12.216) is larger than that of tabulated T (1.740) at the significance level of 0.01. Yet, the impact factor value (ETA) is 623. This implies that the experimental group witnessed significant differences that led to developing their professional attitudes after being exposed to the training program. Given this, it is normal to accept the third sub-hypothesis: there are statistically significant differences between the average scores of the experimental group before and after the application of the training program regarding fostering professional attitudes of social workers working with elder groups.

Results of the fourth sub-hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional experiences; The following table presents the related results:

Table (10) Differences between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in favor of post-tests on the dimension of Professional experiences:

Professional Experiences						
Measure	Mean	S.D	T value	T(Table)	Level of Significance	Effect Size Eta Sq
Pre-test	17.56	2.76	13.462	1.740	Significant (0.01)	.587
Post-test	33.81	4.87				

Based on the above table, it is evident that calculated T value (13.462) is larger than that of tabulated T (1.740) at the significance level of 0.01. Yet, the impact factor value (ETA) is 587. This implies that the experimental group witnessed significant differences that led to developing their professional experience after being exposed to the training program. Given this, it is normal to accept the fourth sub-hypothesis: there are statistically significant differences between the average scores of the experimental group before and after the application of the training program regarding fostering professional experience of social workers working with elder groups.

Accordingly, the results of the pre/post assessments applied to the experimental group indicate the presence of statistically significant differences in favor of the post one after applying the experimental variable to members of the experimental group, which reflects the efficacy of the training program in boosting the professional performance of social workers working with elder groups.

Discussion:

The study findings validated both the main hypothesis and the sub-hypotheses, which implies the effectiveness of the training program in developing the professional performance of social workers addressing elder groups. This is evidently seen in the various outputs that appeared in the performance of social workers during the implementation period.

In addition, the program provided a great deal of professional knowledge related to elders: laws and legislations for the elderly, requirements and needs of this group, which was shown by a study (Robert, K., & Jamie, M., 2010) that argued that training programs and courses can lead to increasing the knowledge of social workers. Further, the training program contributed to providing social workers with many professional capabilities and skills concerning addressing elder groups, including communication, problem-solving and decision-making. These findings were in accordance with those of a research (Roxanne, P., 2012), stressing that social workers, intervening with elder groups, are entitled to acquire specific skills which should match the nature of the group they work with in terms of their professional and scientific capabilities.

Similarly, the findings indicated that social workers acquired a variety of modern trends related to work with elders, whether nationally or internationally. The study, likewise, tackled some negative trends with respect to workers' addressing elders. As evidence, one study (...) highlighted the importance of educating social workers modern trends on dealing with elders.

More, the study findings stressed the importance of professional experience gained by social workers functioning with elder groups.

This is fulfilled through experience integration of social workers as well as years of expertise in institutions accommodating elders. Supporting this, one research (Marthaa, W., 2014) emphasized that a social worker is required to attend several training courses and conferences in order to attain plenty of experiences concerning the intervention with elders.

Based on this, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the study findings resulted in the introduction of a set of outputs: determining the professional performance dimensions of social workers and the effectiveness of the training program in fostering the professional performance of social workers who address elder groups. Asserting this, a study (Muammer, C., & Hisashi, H., 2014) explained

that training programs have an effective role in the development of knowledge and professional experience for social workers.

To conclude, it is obvious that the study findings have greatly enriched the group work method as a discipline as shown in both validating the efficacy of the training program in developing the professional performance of social workers engaging with elder groups and determining four dimensions of professional performance of social workers, in contrary to previous studies that did not tackle such dimensions. This was noticed in the discussions, interactions, lectures and workshops that the training program handled.

According to the researcher, the success of the program besides the fulfillment of the study objectives and outputs can all be attributed to the proper preparation of the program, the availability of different resources, the variety of training methods applied in the training program, and discussing possible hardships and resolving them rapidly.

Study Limitations:

- Difficulty of administrative procedures to accept the application of the study in the institution.
- Social workers are preoccupied with administrative work in the institution.
- Security procedures slowed in the institution.

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