

Social work education for a culturally competente practice

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This research arises from the assumption that cultural competence is integral to best practice and the results achieved in a PhD research, which uncovered a lack of cultural sensitivity by the Portuguese social workers, which challenged us to reflect on the causes and it took us questioning their own initial education.

Study objective:

Identify the existence or absence of curricular units on the theme of «culturally sensitive social work».

Research question: How the curriculum of social work education affects cultural competence and a culturally sensitive social work?

Research method: documentary research

Step 1: Identification of all courses / schools of social work

Step 2: Consulting the webpage of schools/courses

Collecting the syllabus and download the dispatch law (from the national press of legislation)

Step 3: Document analysis (content analysis)

Summary:

The results obtained allow us to verify the lack of curricular units, in social work education, that address the sensitivity and cultural competence of social workers. This gap in formal education helps to explain and understand the discourses of the social workers interviewed for the research in the framework of PhD study that revealed unawareness and ill at ease in these issues.

This research is based on the premise that to successfully face the challenges of a multicultural society and diverse service users, schools of social work in Portugal need to put the goal of cultural competence at the top of their agenda for curriculum reform priorities.

The main outcome consists in finding a gap in social work education regarding cultural competence and culturally sensitive social work. The implication for practice to draw from this study is the need to review the policies and curriculum guidelines for social work in Portugal, as well the accreditation standards for social work education.

Keywords: culturally sensitive social work; cultural competence