

Lifelong Training of Certified Social Workers: Current Status and Issues

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Key words : Certified Social Worker, Lifelong Training System, Continuing Education

Abstract

Since the establishment of the qualification system for Certified Social Workers (CSWs) in Japan over 20 years ago, the number of CSWs has increased rapidly to over 100,000. However, to meet the diversifying welfare needs of the Japanese people, the quality of CSWs must be raised. The Law for the License of Social Workers and Care Workers underwent its first revision in December 2007, and the newly stipulated “obligation to improve quality” in this law is another indication of rising social demands for better CSWs.

In addition, the national association of CSWs has increasing expectations for efforts to raise the quality of its members; thus, I conducted the present investigation based on materials related to the current state of the association's lifelong training system. This investigation revealed that the number of people who have completed the courses making up the core of this lifelong training system account for less than 3% of the association membership; a glaringly poor state of affairs. In addition, the number of presentations given at the academic conference held together with the annual meeting of this association was 28, which is very low compared to that of the academic conferences other associations of the helping professions. The number of journal articles describing the results of practical research is also very low compared with other associations. The lifelong training system started by this

association 10 years ago needs to be fundamentally reviewed and modified to develop it into a system in which large numbers of association members can participate.

CSWs in every part of Japan study in university master's programs while working, and actively pursue self-study. In the future, I would like to conduct a detailed study of this process as a real-life example of advanced lifelong training, and obtain hints for building a model for self-cultivation through this investigation.

Introduction

The Law for the License of Social Workers and Care Workers in Japan was established in 1987. More than 20 years later, in 2008, the number of certified individuals exceeds 100,000.

During this time, programs to train Certified Social Workers (CSWs) have been established at universities and trade schools across Japan, and the number of CSWs is increasing rapidly. However, to meet Japan's diversifying welfare needs, society has come to demand high quality in the social welfare professions.

In December 2007, the Law underwent its first revision, and the provision “Certified social workers and care workers must make efforts to improve their knowledge and skills related to advice, support and care, in order to adapt to the changing substance of their work, which was brought about by changes in the social welfare and care environment” was added to Article 47.

For CSWs, therefore, improvement of quality has become an obligation that is also required by law.

To respond to these social demands, CSWs need to raise their professional quality through lifelong training after obtaining their initial qualifications; however, it cannot be said that an environment for lifelong training has been adequately developed for CSWs in Japan.

This article reviews the current state of the lifelong training system of the Japanese Association of Certified Social Workers (JACSW), the national organization of CSWs, and clarifies the issues confronting this system.

Methods

Information and reports published by JACSW related to lifelong training, and information from related organizations such as the Japanese Association of Schools of Social Workers (JASSW), were collected and analyzed. A comparison was also made based on related data from the other associations of the helping professions.

Lifelong Training System of the JACSW

Outline of the JACSW

The Association was established in 1993 and incorporated in 1996.

The Association had 28,001 members as of July 31, 2008, which was about 26% of the 108,375 registered CSWs in Japan as of the same date (JACSW, 2008).

The Association's membership rate was considerably lower than that of other associations such as the Japanese Physical Therapy Association (JPTA), which is estimated to be more than 80%, the Japanese Association of Speech-Language-Hearing Therapists (JAS), estimated at 60%, and the Japanese Nursing Association (JNA), estimated at 40%. We need to consider why many Japanese CSWs do not join JACSW.

For reference, although there is no national

qualification system for social workers in the USA, the total number of social workers was listed as 468,000 in 2000 in the "directory of occupations" put out by the US Department of Labor. The membership of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) at that time was about 155,000, or 33.1% of all social workers in the country (Miyamoto, 2004).

JACSW's Lifelong Training System

The "Special Committee on Lifelong Training" was established by JACSW in 1994, and began investigating a lifelong training system for CSWs. Later, while conducting systematic investigations, the committee was reorganized into two sections, the "Special Committee on Lifelong Training Program Development" and the "Exploratory Committee for Creation of a Lifelong Training System", and a lifelong training system was started in April 1999 (Harada et al, 2000).

The lifelong training system consists of three courses: the "Basic Training Course," "Common Training Course," and "Training Course for Specific Areas." According to the administrative bylaws of the lifelong training system, the Basic Training Course should be offered at branches in each prefecture, and "all new members of the association are required to take the Basic Training Course."

The basic training course consists of three essential programs

- ① Organization and Activities of ACSW (headquarters and branch)
- ② Lifelong Training System of JACSW
- ③ Code of Ethics of Social Work

The requirements of the Common Training Course are 60 units of course work over 3 years and an application for renewal every 3 years. This continues for the duration of professional life (1 hour of training = 1 unit). Completion of the Basic Training Course is required when applying for the first certification from the Common Training Course.

The system of renewal every 3 years is the same as in NASW's Standards for Continuing Professional Education in the US; however the NASW criterion is "90 hours of training every 3 years." Thus, JACSW's requirement for course work units is two-thirds that of NASW (Yamate & Yokoyama, 2004).

A feature of the Common Training Course is that training programs held by organizations other than the JACSW and its branches count toward fulfilling the renewal requirement. The sponsor of the program is not restricted as long as the content matches the lifelong training plan devised by JACSW member him/herself. This is because diverse programs that include training in related fields are thought to be beneficial in improving the quality of social workers, since social workers are required to have a broad range of knowledge and abilities.

When JACSW started this lifelong training system, the six areas below were indicated as training areas for the Common Training Course.

- ① Welfare Rights
- ② Life Structure
- ③ Personal Social Work
- ④ Planning/Participation
- ⑤ Welfare Management
- ⑥ Practical Study for Welfare

Since 2000, JACSW has developed and offered a "National Uniform Training" program at eight sites every year, based on the framework of these six areas. However, JACSW plans to discontinue this program in 2008, and is considering new types of training to offer in its place.

Several standards are set for the training methods in this course. In the case of the most general classroom-type training, a maximum of five units may be certified for one day of training.

Other recognized training methods include practical training, group training and self training, but each of these three types of training can only be awarded a maximum of 15 units in three years. For lifelong training, it is thought that interaction with other participants and extending one's social network by participating in classroom-type training programs where a large number of participants gather is beneficial to raise participants' quality as social workers. For this reason, the system is set up so that the completion requirements of 60 units in three years cannot be satisfied with the above three training methods, which are conducted in limited areas.

The Training Course for Specific Areas is conducted with the aim of having participants acquire specific professional knowledge and skills. This training can only be provided by

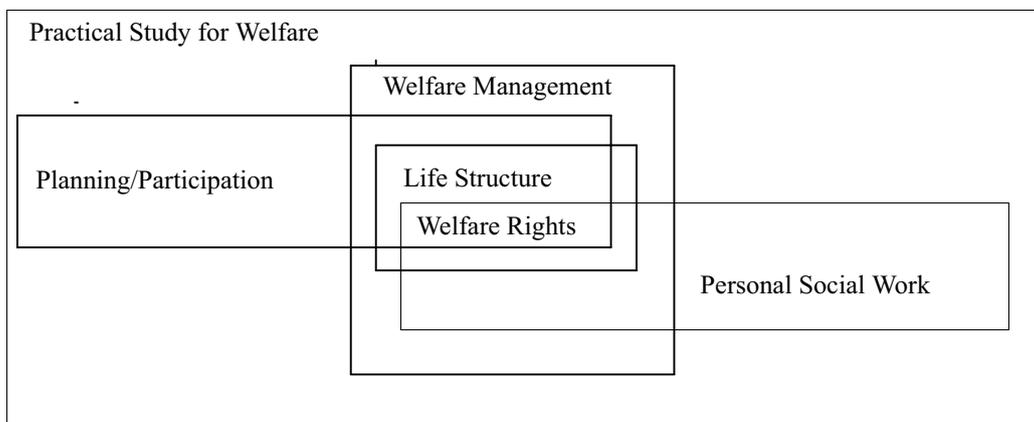


Figure1. The Six Areas of the JACSW Common Training Course (1999)

JACSW or an organization commissioned by JACSW. As of 2008, the following five types of training were being offered.

- ① Training in the adult guardian system
- ② Training for the community-based support of people with disabilities
- ③ Training for social work in the health services
- ④ Training as an independent social workers
- ⑤ Support for returning to work with the aim of financial independence

The requirements for taking this course are, as a rule, completion of the Common Training Course within the past three years (the period of validity of the completion certificate). The course may also be taken, however, if the applicant has fulfilled original requirements set in other training programs.

The number of members who completed the Training Course for Specific Areas and received a certificate for this course in 2007 was around 460.

The above briefly summarizes the JACSW lifelong training system.

Issues in the JACSW Lifelong Training System

I consider that the following issues exist in the current system.

The number of individuals who have completed the common training course is low

According to data from back issues and volume 38 of the JACSW Lifelong Training Center News, the number of members who completed the common training course in the last three years (2005-2007) were as follows (JACSW, 2008).

Table 1 No. of Common Training Course graduates

Year of completion	No. of graduates
2005	590
2006	552
2007	606

JACSW members can only apply for the Common Training Course starting three years

after joining the association. Considering that the number of members who could have applied for the course in 2007 was at least 22,000, the number of members who completed the course in that year was very low, less than 3% of those who were eligible.

Although it could be assumed that a fair number of members were simply negligent in applying for this renewal as they were enthusiastically taking various training courses, the actual situation cannot be accurately determined.

Fundamentally, the aim of having an original lifelong training system in a national organization of one of the helping professions should be, at least partially, to lend credibility to the association in society. However, disclosing such a small number of people completing the training course could have the opposite effect of damaging the association's credibility.

It has been 10 years since the establishment of the lifelong training system, and I consider that the fact that a fundamental portion of this system has lost its substance should lead to a greater sense of crisis in JACSW and in efforts for improvement.

Evaluation and development of training program

I consider that JACSW should create a general overview of the lifelong training system that has been in place for the past 10 years, and conduct a multifaceted evaluation of the training programs. In evaluating such organizational programs, I would like to propose the investigation and evaluation of the evaluation methods themselves with reference, for example, to *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach (7th ed.)*(Rossi et al, 2004).

Surveys should also be conducted to identify the training needs of members, and quality training programs matching the results should be developed. Training in which participants can acquire knowledge and skills that can be put to

practical use and are beneficial in their daily work should be attractive to members, and should lead to an increase in the level of participation.

Increasing the number of quality training programs may also increase the number of social workers joining JACSW and raise the membership rate.

Promotion of practical study

To raise the quality of professional services by social workers, the effects of their daily practices need to be scientifically verified, attempts to develop theories for these practices made, and effective practical methods communicated. To stimulate active research based on real-life practices, I believe that social workers should be active in giving presentations at conferences and publishing their research in journals.

However, an academic environment for these types of activities is lacking. About it, I can clarify it by comparison with the other associations of the helping professions.

For example, in 2007, the number of general presentations given at conferences sponsored by Japanese Physical Therapy Association (JPTA) was 1,371. In comparison, the number of general

presentations given at conferences sponsored by JACSW was a mere 28, nearly 10 times lower than the 225 general presentations at the conference held by the Association for Speech-Language-Hearing Therapists (JAS), even though national certification for speech, language, and hearing therapists (STs) in Japan was established 10 years later than that for social workers.

The number of presentations at the annual JACSW conference is limited to about 28, starting at the stage of calling for papers. Such a number is unthinkable for other national professional associations.

In addition, the number of times these associations publish their association journals each year is 12 for JPTA, 3 for JAS, and 1 for JACSW. With a publication pace of once a year, there are not enough opportunities to submit articles or practical reports, and timely exchange of research information is not possible.

To close the gap between real-life practices and research, a more rigorous academic environment needs to be developed. At the same time, I consider that there is a need to provide workshops on the various survey and presentation methods and raise the research skills of members.

Table 2 Comparison of three helping professions

Occupations	PT	CSW	ST
Legal establishment	1965	1987	1997
No. of certified persons (2007)	58,647	95,460	12,543
No. of association members (2007)	48,590	26,385	7,421
Association membership rate (2007)	82.9%	27.6%	59.2%
No. of presentations at association conferences (2007)	1,371	28	225
Publication of association journal (2007)	12 times/year	1 time/year	3 times/year

Conferences are those sponsored by the association. Journals are those published by the association. PT is Physical Therapist. ST is Speech, language, and hearing therapist.

Focus on Active CSWs in Lifelong Training

To raise the quality of the helping professions, it is important that professional organizations support their members through lifelong training systems. However, independent efforts on behalf of the individual practitioners are also required.

For example, the lifelong training system of the JACSW has the training method category of “self-study,” which lists the item “research activities at graduate schools (master’s, doctoral courses)” alongside specific examples such as “research presentations at various types of conference” and “writing a research paper” in the lifelong training notebook provided to all members.

In recent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of CSWs who enter graduate schools after gaining practical experience in social work. Some continue working as they renew their social welfare studies, while others return to social work after completing their course. Although such individuals still make up a minority of CSWs, I wish to call attention to this trend.

Among the various types of “self-study,” the “research activities at graduate schools (master’s, doctoral courses)” training method requires especially large amounts of energy and expenses, and is difficult to carry out unless certain conditions are met in both work and daily life. Despite this, the number of CSWs from rural areas such as Niigata Prefecture who are entering graduate schools outside the prefecture is gradually increasing.

With this background, graduate schools with master’s courses in the study of social welfare are increasing. Among them are an increasing number of schools that give entrance examinations for people who are already working professionally, as well as graduate schools that offer programs in which students can study while working, such as night classes or distance learning courses.

There are 126 universities that are full

members of the Japanese Association of Schools of Social Work (JASSW), of which 83 have graduate courses. Of these 83 schools, 55 have admissions systems for working students or distance learning courses in their graduate programs (JASSW, 2008).

In the coming years, the issue of how well graduate schools can meet the needs of CSWs who want to return to academic study to conduct research suited to their own practical experience may become important.

The national organizations for social welfare education such as JACSW and JASSW will, in the future, be expected to not only provide education at the undergraduate level to train CSWs, but also make efforts to enhance further education for working CSWs.

I would like to conduct research to clarify the benefits to the helping professions from the training and experience of CSWs who obtain further education in graduate school. A future research topic is to clarify aspects that will help to activate lifelong training for all CSWs by analyzing cases of CSWs who engage in active professional improvement.

Conclusion

This investigation revealed that the number of people who have completed the courses making up the core of this lifelong training system account for less than 3% of the association membership; a glaringly poor state of affairs.

In the present study, it was verified that since its establishment 10 years ago, few CSWs in Japan have taken full advantage of the JACSW lifelong training system. Thus, this system should be reviewed and improved to increase member participation.

In addition, the number of presentations given at the academic conference held together with the annual meeting of this association was 28, which is very low compared to that of the academic conferences other associations of the helping

professions. The number of journal articles describing the results of practical research is also very low compared with other associations.

With reference to the lifelong training systems of other helping professions, JACSW should investigate means for developing into an organization that can provide members a wealth of opportunities for improvement.

Moreover, it is hoped that not only JACSW but also national organizations for social welfare education will contribute socially as a sector that supports the lifelong training of graduates. Although the number of progressive CSWs who assiduously and actively pursue self improvement still comprise a minority of CSWs, detailed surveys to create a lifelong training model could serve as a useful reference for others.

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