

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Social Work & Social Administration

Social Work Fieldwork Placement

**Record Keeping:
Guidelines for Students in Field Practice**

Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance, 1995

1. The first and most important concern is that record-keeping practices must comply with the requirements of the above Ordinance. The objectives of the Ordinance and the principles of data protection are listed in the attached “Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance, A Guide for Data Users” published by the Home Affairs Branch. In brief, the objective is to ensure that personal data are obtained with the consent of the person (the data subject) and for a purpose that he or she understands and agrees to; that they are accurate and kept no longer than necessary; that they are not revealed to anyone without the person's consent; and that the person has the right of access to his or her data.
2. It should be noted that "records" refer to records of any form, including audio-visual recordings, although the written form is the most common.

Preparation

3. Before contacting the service recipients, students should study carefully the agency's policies and procedures in relation to data collection and recording. They have to learn the skills in explaining to service recipients the purpose of data collection, the rights of the data subject, and obtain their consent in providing the data. This is particularly important if the students are responsible for intake and recruitment. If consent forms have to be signed, the students must ensure that this is properly done.
4. The rule is to get familiar with the agency procedures and to follow them strictly in all aspects of handling the personal data of service recipients. When in doubt, always consult the agency supervisor.

Types of records and their purposes

5. According to their purposes, records that students have to handle can be generally divided into two types: those to be put into agency files to meet administration and accountability purposes, those to be handed in to the fieldwork supervisors for teaching, learning and assessment purposes.
6. Records to be kept in agency files are usually in written form. The students must ensure that they follow strictly the requirements of the agency in submitting and safekeeping the records.
7. Records for learning, teaching and assessment purposes may be in various forms including audio and video tapes, but the written form is still the most common, such as logs, case analysis, group session analysis, process recordings. Most agencies do not require the students to hand in these kinds of records, but some agencies regard all records of service recipients as agency property which should be returned to the agency at the end of placement.
8. If such records are not required to be handed in to the agency, they must be handed in to the fieldwork supervisors at the end of the placement. Once the purpose of teaching, learning

and assessment is served, these records will be destroyed or erased. If the students wish to have a copy of a particular piece of their own work for their future reference, they must seek the approval of the agency and complete any procedures as required by the agency.

9. The students will sign a Form at the end of the placement declaring that they have handed in all the records containing personal data of service recipients to the agency and the fieldwork supervisor as required; that they have deleted all such records from their computer disks if applicable; and that they have obtained the approval of the parties concerned for any copies which they wish to retain for their own personal reference. A sample of this Form is attached.

10. Records written for learning and assessment purposes and handed in to the fieldwork supervisors only must not contain any identifying data. Names of persons, places, organisations etc. should be removed or disguised. Fieldwork supervisors are suggested to write their comments on a separate piece of paper, not on the records themselves, so that students can, if they wish to, keep the comments for future reference.

Good report-writing

11. In writing up reports, every effort should be made to ensure the accuracy of the data. It is important to note that an assessment which basically is a summary of the writer's "opinions" on the "facts" is also a form of data. The reports should give an accurate, specific and concrete account of facts, including what the worker has or has not done and what has been achieved. Facts must be clearly differentiated from opinions. Comments should be tentative. The reports must not contain any casual remarks or inferences on the client's behaviours, characteristics etc. that cannot be backed up by concrete evidences. A simple but most useful rule is to ask you: Am I satisfied that this report is ready to be read by the data subject?

12. In submitting records, the legal liabilities of poor report writing have to be borne in mind.

Measures to upkeep confidentiality

13. Every effort must be made to safeguard the confidentiality of the data. As far as possible, students should do their recordings in the placement agencies. Under no circumstances should agency files be taken out of the agency premises. Care must be taken to ensure that the data are not accidentally made accessible to people who have no right to such data. This is particularly crucial if a computer is used to process the records. **The record files should be stored in designated password protected electronic storage devices** and not in hard disks. All records, written, video-taped, or electronically processed, should be locked up in a safe place. Records should not be sent by fax, unless action is taken to ensure that they are picked up by the recipient immediately. **If students send out records by email to fieldwork supervisor, the emails should also be password protected.**

Stringent standards in record-keeping and strict measures to safeguard confidentiality are not just responses to meet legal requirements, they are essential to competent and ethical practice in social work.

I declare that I have read through the document and I understand the importance of data protection in record keeping throughout the placement period.

Name of student: _____ Program of Study: (FT/PT BSW/MSW)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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I declare that:

1. I have handed in all the records containing personal data of service recipients to the agency and the fieldwork supervisor as appropriate.
2. I have deleted all such records from my computer disks, where applicable.
3. I have not kept any copy of such records for my own personal reference without the consent of the agency and other concerned parties.

Remarks:

Name of student:

Name of fieldwork supervisor:

Signature:

Signature:

Program of Study: (FT/PT BSW/MSW)

Date:

Note:

This Form should be completed and signed by the student social worker at the end of each period of field work placement.