

# An Exploratory Path Model of Social Work Students' Satisfaction with Field Education Experience in China

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The present study explores a path model of the associations between social work students' field education experience and their satisfaction. Based on Herzberg's two-factor theory, the postulated model investigates the relationship between students' achievement motivation, preparedness, relationships with others, and satisfaction. The model also explores the mediation effect of students' evaluation of supervision quality and school supervisors' supportive behaviors, and the moderation effect of social work programs and university location. The results of an online survey administered to 291 social work students and assessing their field experience are presented and discussed. The results indicate that the model has a good fit with the data (comparative fit index = .989, root mean square error of approximation = .057,  $p = .101$ ). Limitations related to satisfaction, such as intermediate learning outcomes, memory bias, and cross-sectional design, are considered, and recommendations are made for increasing students' preparedness and for training school supervisors and field supervisors in China.

KEY WORDS: *China; field education; path model; student satisfaction*

Social work education has flourished in China in the past two decades. It is anticipated that the expansion of undergraduate and postgraduate social work programs will provide voluminous growth in the number of social work graduates. Nonetheless, given the uneven nature of such expansion and development, it is questionable whether the quality of social work education will be maintained. One of the key elements in social work education is field education, the success of which is of paramount importance to the success of social work education. Students' satisfaction with the learning process is of cardinal significance to the success of field education, which leads ultimately to the training of competent social work practitioners.

## BACKGROUND

### Social Work Field Education in China

The Chinese government's National Development Mid- and Long-Term Framework on Human Capital 2011–2020, launched in 2010, provided the impetus for spectacular development of social work education. The number of social workers in China was projected to grow to 1.5 million by 2020 in the *Report on the Mid- and Long-Term Development of the Social Work Workforce* (Leung, 2013). Due to a huge demand for

social workers, the state's intention to expand university education, and its relaxation of central control over the establishment of new programs at local universities (Xiong & Wang, 2007), social work education expanded from just 20 programs in 1994 to 298 in 2014 for undergraduate studies, and from zero to 61 for graduate studies (Wang, Ruan, & Shi, 2014). However, amid the rapid development of social work education in China, the most important problems lie in the implementation of systematic field education because of the lack of policy governing it, of qualified field supervisors, of professional service organizations to serve as placement agencies, and of research and publication in field education (Li, Han, & Huang, 2012). Few studies on field education are published in China. Most have examined the difficulty of arranging proper field education for thousands of social work students, the model of supervision, the role of supervisors, the process of supervision and supervision arrangement, and the development of practicum sites. Almost all of these are descriptive works involving little theoretical and empirical work (Ting & Zhang, 2012). This shows the need to embark on serious academic research in the limited connection between field education and future careers, poor undergraduate training, and the lack of social work faculties (Liu, Sun, & Anderson, 2013).

Due to the lack of policy governing field education, there has been uneven development and enforcement of the complex rules and regulations that govern time and resource allocation; objectives, content, and format of supervision; evaluation systems; and so on in the field education in MSW and BSW programs (Liu et al., 2013; Xu, 2008). The current arrangements in field education for BSW programs are irregular and random, lacking a unified set of standards or core curricula: The number of practicums ranges from one to four, the hours spent in field placements range from 50 to 200, and there are not enough field supervisors (Ting & Zhang, 2012). However, the current field arrangements for MSW programs are comparatively systematized: 78.6% of MSW programs have adopted both concurrent field placement for juniors and block field placement for seniors; 52.7% of programs require 800-plus hours of field placement experience (mean = 715 hours, ranging from 100 to 2,000 hours), and 85.7% of programs have adopted a two-supervisor model—school supervisors and field supervisors—to facilitate students' field learning (Wang et al., 2014).

The disparity in economic and social development across the various provinces and regions in China has caused uneven regional development in social work education (Leung, 2013). A national survey revealed that 52.9% of social work programs are located in coastal regions in the east, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong Province, whereas 30.3% are inland, such as Hubei and Henan Provinces (Wang et al., 2014). The number of social work education programs in both of these regions corresponds generally to the differences of regional economic development levels (Wang et al., 2014). Economic and social development do not necessarily influence the development of social work field education but may influence the financial and social support for the professionalization of social work. This may eventually influence the quality of field education due to the differing capacities to address lack of qualified field supervisors and professional service organizations serving as placement agencies.

### **Importance of Student Satisfaction with Field Education**

It is widely accepted that social work field education is very important in integrating students' knowledge and the skills learned in school with the real world (Bogo, Regehr, Hughes, Power, & Globerman, 2002). Field education plays a key role in making

students competent social workers (Bogo, 2010). However, besides social work students' competency developed in field education, their satisfaction with field education contributes partially to their work motivation and the efforts they make in the field, as well as their retention in training (Elliott, 2002). On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that there is a strong association between differences in learning engagement and the level of satisfaction with fieldwork (Lee & Fortune, 2013). To engage social work students to become more actively involved in field education, it is imperative to ensure their satisfaction with field education, a necessary condition for appropriate learning (Fortune & Kaye, 2002; Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001; Parker, 2006). Students' satisfaction with field education is very important because it not only is interrelated with students' success, retention, and persistence (Elliott & Healy, 2001), but also provides an indication of good practice learning experiences, which may assist social work educators in developing appreciated experiences (Parker, 2006).

### **Factors in Field Education Affecting Students' Satisfaction**

There is much literature investigating the prediction of varied factors' impact on social work students' satisfaction with field education, including their achievement motivation, preparedness when entering a field placement, relationships with others, supervision quality, and school supervisors' performance. First, students' achievement motivation in field practicums has been emphasized as a critical factor because it can be assessed and changed during field education (Fortune, Cavazos, & Lee, 2005). In a study of four social work programs involving 190 students, it was found that value of task, intrinsic motivation, and difficulty of task are statistically significantly related to students' satisfaction (Fortune et al., 2005). Second, another important factor that may influence satisfaction is preparedness, including the students' level of overall preparation and anxiety. Many studies have suggested that social work students often enter their placements with apprehension, stress, anxiety, unclear expectations, and negative emotions (Maidment, 2003). The more adequate students' preparation when they enter a field placement, the less anxiety they feel and the greater their engagement (Gelman, 2004), which may ultimately affect their satisfaction with field learning. In addition, many studies on student engagement in higher education have shown that

students' relationships with other people in the learning environment influence their perceptions of learning experience and satisfaction (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006). Applying this factor in the context of social work field education, we can postulate that students' relationships with other students, agency staff, and school supervisors may contribute to variance in satisfaction.

Researchers have found that students' perception of supervision quality received during field placements is highly related to their satisfaction (Bogo & Vayda, 2000). Fortune and colleagues (2005), using 11 statements related to supervisors' behaviors—such as availability, trustworthiness, giving independence, providing support and clear feedback, encouraging participation in the learning experience, and so on—found that students' evaluation of supervision quality contributed the most to MSW students' satisfaction with their placement (Fortune & Abramson, 1993; Kanno & Koeske, 2010). In addition, in field education, field supervisors and school supervisors play complementary roles in supporting students' learning. While field supervisors attend to students' day-to-day work, school supervisors provide academic and other support. A supportive environment is conducive to effective learning, and teachers' support is obviously an indispensable aspect of providing such an environment. School supervisors' supportive behaviors have been emphasized by Cooper, Orrell, and Bowden (2010), who proposed that supporting students is a function of teachers and is necessary before, during, and after students' learning experiences. They further claimed that a supportive environment nourishes students' learning engagement and satisfaction (Cooper et al., 2010).

### **Theory Underpinning Satisfaction— Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory**

Herzberg's two-factor theory has become one of the "most used, known, and widely respected theories" (Oscar, Ali, & Erdener, 2005, p. 131) for understanding predictors of employees' satisfaction in Western countries. The theory emphasizes two sets of factors for satisfaction: (1) motivators, which lead to satisfaction when adequately fulfilled; and (2) hygiene factors, which lead to dissatisfaction when not provided (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1967). In addition, motivation factors, such as achievement, recognition, and the work itself, will lead to positive job attitudes because they satisfy the need for self-actualization, whereas the hygiene factors,

such as supervision, physical working conditions, and company policy and administration, prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1967; Tietjen & Myers, 1998). Both sets of factors, motivation (intrinsic factors) and hygiene (extrinsic factors), are important to maintain a certain level of satisfaction (Naylor, 1999).

Because field placements are simulated to resemble actual social work settings and students' experiences are very similar to those in entry-level positions in social services agencies, the job-related satisfaction theory may be appropriate to analyzing students' satisfaction with fieldwork. Motivation factors are typically intrinsic factors determined by the actors themselves, for instance, employees in the work setting and social work students in the present case. In applying Herzberg's theory to this study, students' preparedness in terms of their perceived level of preparation and anxiety; their relationships with school supervisors, peers, and agency staff (because students can more or less control their approach to the various parties); and achievement motivation are directly conducted by students, vary in student-individual level, and may be considered intrinsic factors. High levels of perceived preparation and lack of anxiety when entering a field placement facilitate students' integration into the environment, which may in turn lead to a more positive field experience (Gelman, 2004). In addition, students' positive learning relationships may nourish their perception of positive field experience and satisfaction (Alperin, 1998). Furthermore, students will be more satisfied with field education if they value what they learn and find the experience important, useful, pleasurable, enjoyable, and interesting, a perception defined as being central to achievement motivation (Fortune et al., 2005).

Hygiene factors, on the other hand, are normally extrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors are conducted by other people rather than the actor himself or herself, for instance, employers in the work setting or field supervisors and school supervisors in the present study. Supervision quality and school supervisor's supportive behaviors during field placements are determined by the field supervisor and school supervisor rather than by students and may be considered extrinsic factors (that is, environmental factors) affecting dissatisfaction. The absence of high-quality supervision and adequate school supervisor support may lead to dissatisfaction because such support is expected (Kanno & Koeske, 2010).

## Research Objectives and Hypothesized Framework

The research framework of the study was proposed on the basis of the research objectives and derived from the review of the relevant literature and research, guided by Herzberg's two-factor theory, as shown in Figure 1, to understand social work students' satisfaction with field education. This study is an attempt to explore the processes and interrelationships among the various factors pertinent to students' satisfaction with their field practicums, taking into consideration program and regional differences in field education in China.

This exploratory study has three objectives: The first is to examine the associations of the key predictive variables with Chinese social work students' satisfaction during their field placements. The second is to test whether students' evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors and their evaluation of supervision quality act as mediators. It should be emphasized that these two mediators are not totally objective assessments by a third party but students' evaluation of their own supervisors' performance. We expect supervision to mediate the effect of inadequate preparation on low satisfaction because low preparedness is expected to result in dissatisfaction, but only when supervision quality is low (Kanno & Koeske, 2010). We also expect high-quality supervision to mediate the effect of low achievement motivation on satisfaction because learning is a transactional process. Finally, we expect school supervisors' supportive behaviors to buffer the effect of students' relationships with school supervisors, peers, and agency staff on

satisfaction because poor relationships with others are expected to result in dissatisfaction, but only when school supervisors do not relieve the negative impact. The third objective of this study is to show when (under what kinds of program and in which regions) the determinant variables predict social work students' satisfaction by the moderation effects of social work programs and university location.

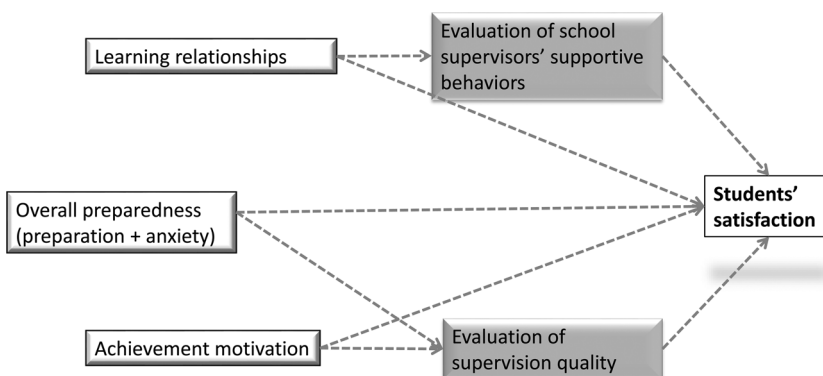
## METHOD

This cross-sectional study was undertaken in May 2014. Data were collected online via SurveyMonkey from social work students who provided retrospective ratings of their most recent field placement experience, which must have ended no more than three months previously. This restriction was intended to reduce the negative impact of memory effect.

## Measures

The survey instrument was a self-reported questionnaire in Chinese with 38 indicators: 28 measuring six variables, nine social demographic indicators, and one open-ended question about students' suggestions for field education. All six variables were rated on a Likert scale: (1) satisfaction (Fortune et al., 2001)—social work students were asked to rate five aspects from 1 = very dissatisfied with to 6 = very satisfied with agency, experiences, school supervisors, field supervisors, and school arrangement; (2) achievement motivation (Fortune et al., 2005)—students were asked to rate six indicators from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree for items such as "your field assignments were useful" and "you enjoyed the process

**Figure 1: Hypothesized Model of Social Work Students' Satisfaction with Field Education Based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory**



Note: Moderation effects of social work programs and university location.

of field placement”; (3) preparedness (Kanno & Koeske, 2010)—students were asked to rate two indicators from 1 = not at all to 3 = very much, and anxiety was rated from 1 = not at all to 3 = very much; (4) learning relationships with other students was rated from 1 = unfriendly and unsupportive to 7 = friendly and supportive, relationship with school supervisor was rated from 1 = unavailable and unhelpful to 7 = available and helpful, and relationship with agency staff was rated from 1 = inconsiderate and unhelpful to 7 = considerate and helpful (Kuh, 2009); (5) supervision quality (Fortune et al., 2001), including four indicators, was rated from 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal for items including “field supervisors’ availability, trustworthiness, and supportiveness”; and (6) school supervisors’ supportive behaviors (Cooper et al., 2010), including eight indicators, were rated from 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal for sample items including “enabled you to reflect on learning and handled issues between you and field supervisor.”

### Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Faculties, The University of Hong Kong in March 2014. A pilot study was conducted before the online survey on satisfaction. Thirteen social work students were invited to complete a paper-based questionnaire to test its duration, reading difficulties, and comprehension level. Six of the students were from a BSW program in Shenzhen city; the seven others (one male and six female) were from an MSW program in Guangzhou city. After the 13 social work students had completed the questionnaire, the researcher also conducted a focus group for the Shenzhen sample and one for the Guangzhou sample to determine how they felt about their field placement and their level of satisfaction, to test the selected variables’ relevance and appropriateness. The two focus groups were conducted in Mandarin and lasted approximately 1.5 hours each. With participants’ approval, the focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

The main study was carried out with students from BSW and MSW programs drawn from different universities. The purposive sampling cum snowball approach (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2006) was adopted, instead of using referral from the academic department or teachers, which was intended to avoid social desirability bias because students who are referred or “chosen” by teachers may feel pressure due to the perceived and actual disparity of power between teachers and

students, and thus not express their true experiences in fieldwork. The researchers first asked the 13 students in the pilot study to refer classmates or friends who were graduating from BSW and MSW programs in 2014; then the referred students (23 social work students) were asked to e-mail a letter of invitation with a Web link to the online 38-item questionnaire via SurveyMonkey to all their classmates. Students interested in the survey could access it after having signed the consent forms. The survey took respondents 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

### Data Analysis Strategies

Relevant statistical packages were used to conduct the analysis, namely, SPSS 20 (Vocht, 2012) for the descriptive and correlated analyses and Amos 18 (Arbuckle, 2009) for the path analysis. A *path model* is a diagram relating independent, intermediary, and dependent variables, which may show the mechanism of the relationship between variants. Single arrows indicate causation between extrinsic or intermediary variables and the dependent variables, whereas double arrows indicate correlation between pairs of extrinsic variables (Garson, 2008). Path modeling is an extension of regression modeling and is a kind of structural equation modeling. Path modeling is a much more appropriate approach than typical multiple regressions to illustrating the relationships in complex social sciences contexts because it involves explicit regression, which allows for measurement errors, and can estimate the overall goodness of fit of the hypothesized model (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004).

## RESULTS

### Participants’ Sociodemographic Characteristics

The participants were recruited in May 2014 from among social work students enrolled in a BSW or MSW program: 363 social work students signed the consent forms to participate in the survey. Among them, 291 (completion rate = 80.2%) completed all the indicators of the online questionnaire (mean age = 24;  $SD = 1.644$ ; ranging from 20 to 31; 78.7% female). In our sample, 47.4% of the students were enrolled in BSW programs and 52.6% in MSW programs. In terms of the respondents’ regional distribution, 72.5% were studying in “BSG” regions: Beijing (28.1%), Shanghai (7%), and Guangdong Province (42.2%); 27.5% came from other regions: Henan Province (7.4%), Shanxi Province (4.4%), Jiangsu Province (5.2%), and Hubei Province (5.6%). Furthermore, 60% of the social work



graduates had experienced a single field placement; the remaining 40% had experienced at least two placements. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the full sample ( $N = 291$ ), the MSW subsample ( $n = 153$ ), and the BSW subsample ( $n = 138$ ).

### Descriptive Results of Independent and Dependent Variables

There were six variables in all (see Table 2). There were no problems of data outliers or normality, because the absolute values of the skewness index of the data were less than three and the absolute values of the kurtosis index were less than 10 (Kline, 2011). In addition, with the exception of learning relationships and preparedness, the scales showed acceptable to excellent internal consistency as indicated by the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of learning relationships (.55; three indicators) was poor but not unacceptable (Kline, 2011) for the first use of the scale in a new culture (Nunnally, 1988). The  $\alpha$  value of the scale cannot be improved by the deletion of any item. Because there were just two indicators of preparedness

(preparation and anxiety), correlation was used to measure the reliability of the two indicators (Pearson  $r = -0.59, p < .000$ ).

### Intercorrelation Analysis

Table 3 shows the bivariate correlations for the six key variables in the hypothesized model. All the intercorrelations were statistically significant at the .01 level under the two-tail test.

### Path Analysis

This study examined how social work students' learning experience differs across field practicum and used path modeling to understand how motivation and hygiene factors influence student satisfaction with field education.

No problems with data outliers and normality were found, so maximum likelihood estimation and the bootstrap procedure in Amos 20 were used to conduct the path model. Preparedness was inputted with the total scores of preparation and anxiety. Satisfaction, achievement motivation, learning relationship,

**Table 1: Sample Characteristics**

	Gender		Age (Years)	Median Field Hours	% Working with/in <sup>a</sup>		
	% Female	% Male			Individual	Group	Community
Full sample	78.7	21.3	24	600+	50.2	48.9	52.2
MSW	73.9	26.1	26	700+	48.4	49.0	47.1
BSW	84.1	15.9	22	400+	52.2	50.7	58.0

<sup>a</sup>This was a multiple choice item (one respondent could choose more than one response).

**Table 2: Descriptive Report of Dependent and Independent Variables**

Key Variables	M/Max	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Pearson $r$
DV Satisfaction	4.31/6	0.99	-0.61	0.03	0.83	
IVs LR	5.17/7	1.12	-0.61	0.95	0.55	
P	3.82/6	1.33	-0.34	0.23		-0.59
AM	3.62/5	0.71	-0.66	0.68	0.72	
ESQ	3.42/5	0.94	-0.7	0.75	0.90	
ESSSB	2.6/5	0.88	0.8	-0.45	0.92	

Notes: DV = dependent variable, LR = learning relationship, P = preparedness, IVs = independent variables, AM = achievement motivation, ESQ = evaluation of supervision quality, ESSSB = evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors.

**Table 3: Pearson' Correlations of Dependent and Independent Variables**

	Satisfaction	LR	P	AM	ESSSB
LR	.391***				
P	.368***	.238***			
AM	.509***	.299***	.271***		
ESSSB	.320***	.407***	.203***	.202**	
ESQ	.540***	.215***	.284***	.443***	.182**

Notes: LR = learning relationship, P = preparedness, AM = achievement motivation, ESSSB = evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors, ESQ = evaluation of supervision quality.

\*\* $p < .01$  (2-tailed). \*\*\* $p < .000$  (2-tailed).

students' evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors, and their evaluation of supervision quality were inputted with the average responses of all their indicators. The thresholds of the goodness-of-fit indices are as follows:  $\chi^2/df < 3$ , goodness-of-fit index (GFI)  $> .95$ , comparative fit index (CFI)  $> .95$ , Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI)  $\rho^2 > .95$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $< .06$ , which is considered an excellent level for the index (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Results of the path analysis indicate excellent fit between the hypothesized model and the sample data ( $p = .101$ , CFI = .989, RMSEA = .057), with statistically significant standardized path coefficients. By this, the first objective of this study was achieved.

Even though the hypothesized model showed excellent model fit, we tested an alternative model as comparison because Herzberg's two-factor theory does not provide direction on how to use the two factors in a path model. Table 4 shows that model 2 (evaluation of supervision quality and school supervisors' supportive behaviors as predictors, and achievement motivation and learning relationships as mediators) is a significantly worse fit than model 1 [ $\Delta\chi^2(df) = 18.512(0)$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. GFI, CFI, TLI  $\rho^2$  indexes also show that model 2 fits worse than model 1 ( $\chi^2/df = 6.567$  and  $1.937$ , respectively), and present much higher values of RMSEA (.139 and .057, respectively). As a result, model 2 is rejected in favor of model 1.

**Mediation.** Bootstrapping in AMOS 20 was used to test the mediation effect in the hypothesized model (Byrne, 2013; Hayes, 2014). We used the recommended bias-corrected confidence intervals and 2,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes & Preacher, 2010). Table 5 indicates partial mediations. One

mediator, students' evaluation of supervision quality, partially buffered the effects of preparedness for field learning and achievement motivation on satisfaction. Another mediator, students' evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors, partially buffered the effect of learning relationship on satisfaction. The indirect effects of achievement motivation and satisfaction, preparedness and satisfaction, and the indirect effects of relationship and students' evaluation of school supervisor supportive behaviors were shown, which serve to achieve the second objective.

**Moderation.** Multiple-group analysis (Arbuckle, 2006) using Amos 20 was conducted to examine the potential moderation effects of two contextual variables—program and university location in the model. The results show that programs and university locations do play moderator roles in the social work student satisfaction model. These results serve to achieve the third objective of this study. The positive effect between preparedness for field learning and students' evaluation of supervision quality was more than twice as strong for students from other regions ( $\beta = .31$ ) than for those from BSG regions ( $\beta = .11$ ). In addition, the positive effect between preparedness and satisfaction was almost five times stronger for BSW students ( $\beta = .23$ ) than for MSW students ( $\beta = .05$ ) (see Figure 2).

## DISCUSSION

This study has uncovered several significant findings that are supported by the comparatively large sample size, the high response rate, and the wide spectrum of respondents from seven regions and 13 social work programs in China. The following findings

**Table 4: Model Fit Indices and Model Comparison**

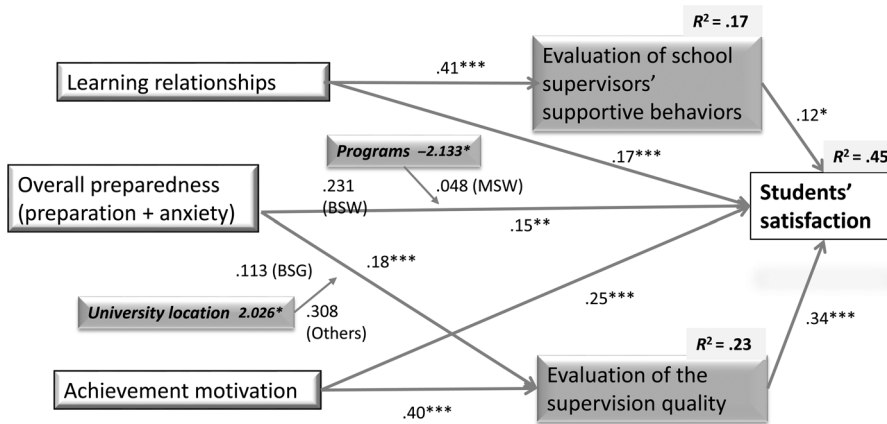
Model	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	CFI	TLI $\rho^2$	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2(df)$
Model 1	7.747	4	.101	1.937	.991	.989	.961	.057	
Model 2	26.268	4	.000	6.567	.972	.938	.766	.139	18.512(0)

**Table 5: Direct Effects and Indirect Effects with Mediators**

Predictive Variable	Effect with Mediator: ESSSB	Effect without Mediator: ESSSB	Standardized Indirect Effect
LR	$\beta = 0.17$ ( $p = .000$ )	$\beta = 0.23$ ( $p = .000$ )	$\beta = 0.05$ ( $p = .015$ )
Predictive Variable	Effect with Mediator: ESQ	Effect without Mediator: ESQ	Standardized Indirect Effect
P	$\beta = 0.15$ ( $p = .002$ )	$\beta = 0.21$ ( $p = .000$ )	$\beta = 0.06$ ( $p = .001$ )
AM	$\beta = 0.25$ ( $p = .000$ )	$\beta = 0.38$ ( $p = .000$ )	$\beta = .13$ ( $p = .001$ )

Notes: ESSB = evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors, LR = learning relationship, ESQ = evaluation of supervision quality, P = preparedness, AM = achievement motivation.

**Figure 2: Chinese Social Work Students' Satisfaction with Field Education**



Note: Italic means z-score of moderation. BSG = Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong Province.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

may help us to understand Chinese social work students' satisfaction with their field education: (a) evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors played a partial mediating role between learning relationships and student satisfaction; (b) evaluation of supervision quality played a partial mediating role between overall preparedness and satisfaction, and between achievement motivation and satisfaction; (c) social work programs (BSW and MSW) moderate the relationship between overall preparedness and satisfaction; (d) university location (BSG and other regions) moderates the relationship between preparedness and evaluation of supervision quality.

The result for students' satisfaction is shown to be reliable by the good model fit and the internal consistency of student satisfaction ( $\alpha = .83$ ), which is almost identical to the result in Fortune et al.'s (2001) study ( $\alpha = .82$ , for the second field placement). However, overall, Chinese social work students rated their satisfaction with field education (4.31 on a six-point scale, equal to 5.14 on a seven-point scale) much lower than American students did (6.03 on a seven-point rating scale) (Fortune et al., 2001). The results show that 30% of Chinese social work students were more dissatisfied with their school arrangements than with the other four indicators—overall field experience (22%), school supervisors (21%), field supervisors (21%), and placement agencies (19%). In China, problems related to field placement, including lack of qualified supervisors, underdeveloped agencies, and inadequate learning experiences, have attracted many scholars' attention and interest. However, the

results of this study indicate that it may be time to give more attention to students' comparatively low satisfaction with the arrangement of their field placements. Analysis of the results derived from open-ended questions on how to improve field education suggests that students are eager to receive well-prepared orientation before practicums, and to see bidirectional choice between students and agencies, more than one field placement, more supportive and educational roles for school supervisors, and more communication between schools and agencies.

### Theoretical Significance

Although this study was exploratory in nature, it breaks new ground in using Herzberg's motivation and hygiene theory to examine social work students' satisfaction in China. The established social work student satisfaction model may be one effective way to explain the mechanisms through which student field education experience affects student satisfaction. However, more studies on the application of Herzberg's two-factor theory are necessary to confirm the use of motivation and hygiene factors in establishing the model.

This study has confirmed that social work students' satisfaction is significantly affected (both directly and indirectly) by their achievement motivation; their relationships with other students, school supervisors, and agency staff; their preparedness before practicums; their evaluation of supervision quality; and their evaluation of school supervisors' supportive behaviors. This confirms the importance of students' evaluation



of supervision quality and school supervisors' supportive behaviors in facilitating social work student satisfaction. Greater achievement motivation corresponds with better perception of supervision quality, and better perception of supervision quality corresponds with increased satisfaction. Based on the findings, enhancement of students' achievement motivation could affect their satisfaction through improving their perception of supervision quality. As one partial mediator, students' evaluation of supervision quality has a greater mediation effect on the relationship between achievement motivation and satisfaction than that between preparedness and satisfaction.

### **Mediated Satisfaction Model with Moderation Effect**

The present study investigated an omnibus model of the relationship between social work students' field education experience and their satisfaction and then investigated social work programs and university location as two moderators of the postulated model. BSW students have been found to be significantly more sensitive to the effect of increased preparedness on satisfaction than MSW students. In addition, compared with the social work students from BSG regions, students from other regions, like Henan, Shanxi, Jiangsu, and Hubei Provinces, were more sensitive to the effect of increased preparedness on their perception of supervision quality.

The moderation effect of program is basically rooted in different program contexts, which have been discussed before. Compared with BSW programs, MSW programs usually have much better agencies and school resources and are managed more systematically. Therefore, the preparedness of MSW students for their field placement has limited effect on their receipt of a high-quality field experience, which ensures relatively greater consistency of student satisfaction. However, variance in student satisfaction is much greater among BSW students. Due to insufficient agency or school resources and less systematic management, better-prepared BSW students may be able to obtain the best possible resources (for example, agency and supervision), resulting in much higher satisfaction. In addition, two-thirds of MSW students have a BSW degree and have experience of BSW field placements. As a result, they are generally better prepared and have more rational field placement expectations, leading to reduced sensitivity of preparedness to satisfaction. This was partially verified by the comparison of the modera-

tion effect between preparedness and satisfaction among MSW students with BSW degrees ( $\beta = 0.00$ ), MSW students without BSW degrees ( $\beta = 0.21$ ), and BSW students ( $\beta = 0.25$ ).

The moderation effect of university location on the relationship between preparedness and evaluation of supervision quality could be explained from different supervision resources in various programs. Students from BSG regions have more supervisory resources than students from other regions. The supervision structure of BSG regions may also be better planned and institutionalized than those of other regions. Better-prepared students in other regions may obtain more supervision opportunities and resources through their own efforts than those in BSG regions.

### **Implications**

The main findings of this study provide empirical underpinnings and practical recommendations for improving the quality of field education in China. The crux of the matter lies in improving students' satisfaction with field education. Social work programs must recognize this urgent task and be equipped with the expertise to implement effective strategies for change. First, all social work programs in different regions and at different levels must put emphasis on increasing students' preparedness, satisfying students' psychological needs in learning (which may affect their motivation), providing a supportive learning environment, and ensuring the performance of school supervisors and field supervisors. This study verifies that teachers' and supervisors' performance partially mediate the effects of students' achievement motivation, preparedness, and relationships on satisfaction. Social work programs may put greater focus on training school supervisors and field supervisors to facilitate students' field learning. Second, BSW programs in Guangdong Province and MSW programs in other regions should pay more attention to the importance of students' preparedness before field placements. They can better prepare students by increasing their general preparation and relieving their anxiety, by providing formal orientation for field placements or preparing detailed learning contracts and arranging agency visits.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

#### **Directions**

This study has advanced our knowledge of the development of models for social work students' satisfaction based on Chinese students' field experience. It has also

raised four issues for future research to consider. First, the study is based on the perspective of students and their self-reported perception of field education. Though it is widely believed that intrinsic factors are the drivers directly affecting behavior, it is still valuable to include the views of other significant stakeholders in field education, such as field supervisors and school supervisors, and other information about stakeholders that may provide a more comprehensive and less subjective perspective (Vitali, 2011). Second, students' satisfaction may be an intermediate outcome and not necessarily reflect the quality of field placements or the skills students have learned. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to study how students' experience of field education affects their satisfaction because it is a comparatively neglected and underresearched area. Third, this study's findings may be affected by social desirability shift bias and memory bias. To retrospectively measure social work students' learning experiences and learning outcomes (that is, satisfaction), this study relied on students' memories, which could have been inaccurate. Online data collection was used to reduce social desirability bias, whereas the recruitment criterion requiring only participants who had finished their field education in the past three months aimed to reduce memory bias. Fourth, although the study tried to include a broad range of social work programs from different regions, cross-sectional data and purposive sampling limited the representativeness, the generalizability, and the estimation of errors.

Field supervisors' characteristics, such as age, gender, possession of a BSW or an MSW (or not), years of experience in the field, and time spent supervising students each week, may have an impact on students' learning experience in the field and should be included in future studies. In addition, research using both students' satisfaction and competence as learning outcomes, large-scale coverage, randomly collected samples, and longitudinal designs should be considered. **SWR**

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