

The impact of low levels of income on the life and study success of social work students in Australia

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Who we studied and how

- Students from all 29 AASW-accredited social work courses in Australia 2015
- About 10,000 students
- Online survey
- 2,320 respondents

Why the study?

- Originally grew from a concern about the low payment rates for student and unemployment benefits
- Pilot study of student members of AASW in 2014 showed much higher rates of financial disadvantage than was expected
- National study sought to understand financial disadvantage better to lobby for higher payments but also to support students better

Some demographics

- Female 87%; male 13%
- Aged under 25 = 31%;
- 25 to 34 = 33%;
- Aged less than 34 = 36%
- Metro 64%; regional 27%; rural 9%
- Indigenous 4%
- International students 9%

How social work students are faring compared to other university students

2012 study of all university students (Full time domestic students)

Q: As a student have you regularly gone without food or other necessities because you could not afford them?

- Undergrads 18%
- Post grads 18%

2015 study of social work students (full time domestic students)

Q: As a student have you regularly gone without food or other necessities because you could not afford them?

- Undergrads 32%
- Post grads 29%

Effect on the life of all social work students

Q: Have you had at any time insufficient money for any of the following?

- Food 33% (760)
- Clothing 39% (902)
- Accommodation 27% (625)
- Transport 36% (825)
- Medication 29% (675)

Effect on lack of finances on a student's study experience

- 52% (1200) - Not enough money for all texts or educational resources
- 47% (1083)- Overtired from long working hours in paid employment
- 34% (785) - Need to skip classes in order to attend a paid job
- 29% (666) - Need to defer a course or reduce study load in order to work
- 27% (628) - Increases the likelihood of dropping out of the course.

Hours of paid work for employed full-time students

- 70% full-time social work students are in paid employment
- 44% full time social work students worked more than 16 hours per week, and 20% more than 24 hours.

Financial impact of field placements

- 49% students reduced hours of paid work to allow for placement
- 33% quit paid work
- 72% had additional financial burden
- 15% postponed placement due to necessity of continuing paid employment
- Over 600 students added qualitative comments on their concerns about placement

Take home message

- The study experience of significant numbers of social work students is adversely affected by low levels of financial support.
- The answer is not to lower academic standards.
- The answer is for universities, the professional associations and students to work together to increase Government financial support for student social workers

Collaboration, replication and funding

- We are keen to collaborate with other researchers either within Australia or internationally
- A copy of the survey instrument will be placed on the AASW website shortly
- <http://www.aasw.asn.au/>
- Funding. We are looking for further sources to speed the analysis of the data.

