

A Study on Rural Camp at Abali Village of Roing, Arunachal Pradesh.

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Abstract:

Rural Camps play a crucial role in the practical education of many Schools of Social Work in India, as stated by Meenu Anand in 2017. The Department of Social Work organizes the rural camp, which is a highly anticipated and intensive fieldwork activity, with the aim of facilitating the holistic professional development of students (Sanjoy R, 2021). The students are responsible for organizing the camp under the guidance and supervision of faculty members. During the camp, the students live in rural areas or villages to study their different structures and elements, which enables them to understand the problems and needs of the rural society, and to prepare plans for social work intervention and community development.

In this particular study, the Co-Escort researcher describes the week-long Rural Camp that took place in Abali village, Roing of Lower Dibang Valley. The selection of the village began a month prior to the departure, and the students were accommodated in RIWATCH. It is located in Khinjili village, 2 km away from Abali as the community hall (termed as Reko in Idu Mishmi) in Abali was an open one without any walls. The students interacted with the villagers and studied their problems using various tools of PRA such as- Transect walk, Seasonal Health Diagram, Venn diagram, Livelihood flowchart, among others. As an interventional method, the students performed a Skit on Health Card by Chief Minister Arogya Arunachal Yojna (CMAAY), which was an outcome of Problem Preference ranking - a PRA tool.

The study employs a Descriptive Research Design to describe the experience and learnings of the camp, which is divided into three phases: Pre-Camp Phase, On-Camp Phase, and Post-Camp Phase. The study provides a detailed account of the varied professional and personal experiences of the trainees, which can be beneficial for future Social Work Trainees.

Keywords: Rural Camp, PRA, Social Work.

Introduction:

Fieldwork as a signature pedagogy constitutes an integral component of the MSW program (RGU, 2020). Rural Camps are an integral part of practice learning for most Schools of Social Work in India (Meenu Anand, 2017). It provides the students exposure and a platform to live the experiences of the community and people dwelling in rural areas. It strives to make the students understand the basic rural issues related to life and also enables them to advise suggestive measures to overcome the said issues. Rural Immersion Camp is an important and mandatory component of the Master's Degree Programme in Social Work (The Model Curriculum Framework,

UGC, 2001). It is organized by the students under the guidance and supervision of faculty members. It gives opportunities for Social Work students/Trainees to get rural exposure, experience rural lifestyle, and also to understand rural realities like the educational, health, occupational, and socio-political-economic status of the village. In this camp, the students reside in rural areas/villages to study different elements/ structures of the village, thereby enabling the trainees to understand rural society, their problems, and needs, and also to prepare plans for social work intervention and community development. Rural camps help in developing practical skills to carry out interventions, evaluate, and finally document their experience. Rural camp is one of the special programmes meant to indigenize social work education with specific focus on training macro practice in India through community-based living-learning (Sanjoy R, 2021).

This article is a narrative of the weeklong Rural Camp at Abali in Roing of Lower Dibang valley as a Social Work Pedagogy in the fieldwork practicum of India. It explains the different phases of the camp: Pre-Camp Phase, On Camp Phase and Post-Camp Phase, this article also narrates the varied professional and personal experiences of the trainees and is a takeaway for future social work trainees.

Research Methodology:

Objectives:

1. To explain Rural Camp experience in Social Work in Arunachal Pradesh
2. To narrate the experiences of the Social Work Trainees
3. To make this article a Guide for the upcoming Social Work Trainees in the state and beyond.

Design of the study

The preliminary work began almost a month before, in the first week of March 2023 where Abali was selected for the camp. Usually, whenever MSW Trainees go to Rural Camps they stay in the Community Hall of the village. However, the community hall (termed “Reko” in Idu Mishmi) of Abali was an open one without any walls. RIWATCH has independent research cottages to accommodate about 20 scholars at a time. Therefore, due to its prime location, compound, and affordable price, it was selected to accommodate the MSW Trainees.

Located in Khinjili village, just 2 km from Abali, RIWATCH is an ideal place for students to stay. It serves as a high-quality facilitation center for various universities to conduct field studies in different disciplines related to the ethnic life of local communities, leading to M.A., M. Phil, and Ph.D. degrees (RIWATCH, n.d.) The Department of Social Work at Rajiv Gandhi University recognized the value of RIWATCH and seized the opportunity to collaborate with them. The Camp's learnings and experiences are described using a Descriptive Research Design.

Objectives of Rural Immersion Camp, Abali:

1. To conduct a rapid survey of the village with a view to identify the problems, the felt needs of the villagers through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques and
2. To plan social work intervention strategies in the area.

The Rural Immersion Camp for MSW 2nd Semester students was held at Abali, Roing, Arunachal Pradesh in the month of March 2023. The Rural Camp was divided into three phases:

- Pre-camp Phase: Planning and Committee Formation.
- On Camp Phase: Orientation, PRA, Skit Play, Presentation.
- Post-camp Phase: Sharing and Presentation.

Pre-camp Phase: Planning and Committee Formation.

The 24 students were divided into 5 groups on the basis of the 5 Rivers of NEFA (North east Frontier Agency: Erstwhile Arunachal Pradesh) acronymed as KaSuSiLoTi viz Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap.

The various faculties of the Department of Social Work contributed towards the camp by conducting Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) sessions for the students over a span of two weeks in March 2023. The students were taught about different tools of PRA and a special session was taken on the Lists of Do's and Don'ts during the Rural Immersion Camp in the village.

Further, two Coordinators for the RIC were appointed who took over responsibilities for the camp, they liaised with the Public Relation Officer (PRO) to the Director of Research Institute of World's Ancient Traditions Cultures and Heritage (RIWATCH), Miss Bamili Lingi, and informed them of the menu for each day and the total rooms required and the number of days that they would need the room for. Various Committees were formed for easy task completion like: Food committee, transportation Committee, Finance Committee etc.

Picture 1. MSW Trainees and Escorts before leaving for Roing by bus in RGU Campus.



On Camp Phase

The students interacted with the villagers and studied their problems over the course of days of staying in the village using various tools of PRA. In the end as an interventional method, the students performed a Skit (The skit was an outcome of problem ranking- a PRA tool) on Health Card by Chief Minister Arogya Arunachal Yojna (CMAAY). Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) and Chief Minister Arogya Arunachal Yojna (CMAAY) are the initiatives of Central & State Govt. respectively, which is being implemented by the Chief Minister Arogya Arunachal Society with a vision to accord quality and cashless health care services to the people of the State envisaging Universal Health care to all by 2030 (CMAAY). The respective groups presented the findings of the PRA in a beautiful chart paper presentation in front of RIWATCH staff on the final evening.

Post-Camp Phase

A week after returning from the camp, each group took turns explaining about the data and information they had collected through PRA at Roing. The presentation was attended and applauded by the Head, Escort, Assistant Professors, and the IV Semester MASW students.

Programmes Undertaken During the Camp:

1. Orientation by team RIWATCH:

Faculty members, Sir Vijay Swami (Executive Director of RIWATCH), Sir Somnath Sharma (Former Director of Geological Survey), Miss Bamili Lingi (PRO of RIWATCH) and other staffs of RIWATCH were present during the interaction session. Sir Somnath Sharma introduced the students about the organization. Sir Vijay Swami explained the meaning and importance of preservation of cultures and tradition. The rules to follow while staying in RIWATCH was explained by Miss Bamili Lingi.

Picture 2: Orientation by Sir Vijay Swami (Executive Director of RIWATCH)



2. Rapport Building:

Building rapport with the people of Abali was essential as the village was the prime area for applying tools of Participatory Rural Appraisal. It helps the trainees build trust, which is essential for the villagers to feel comfortable sharing personal information and experiences in order to conduct a successful survey. To interact with the villagers, the students gathered at the residence of Miss Bamili Lingi, PRO

of RIWATCH. The house represented the traditional household of Mishmi tribe with modern architecture. The host, Mr. Bhishmak Linggi explained about the area, the community and the people residing in the village. The students were also enlightened about the community by Sir Vijay Swamy, Gaonburah, Anchal Member, SHG groups, Mrs. Muri Linggi, the 3rd North Eastern Women to climb Mount Everest, and other villagers etc.

Picture 3: Orientation with the Villagers of Abali at Host Bhishmak Linggi's home in New Abali.



3. Tour to RIWATCH Museum, Library and Herbal Garden:

The students were given a tour of the museum at RIWATCH by Sir Somnath Sharma. Museum is way through which cultures and traditions could be preserved through collecting the old artifacts and ornaments of the indigenous people. The museum had sections for books, traditional ornaments, weapons, and many more. The importance of a museum and documentation was explained and how it could help future generations. From the museum, the students were escorted towards the library. The library contained various books on History, Science, Social Sciences, Research etc. The library was facilitated with a Printing and a Photocopy Machine. Student Trainees also visited the Herbal Garden of RIWATCH. The students walked in the garden and noted down the information about various plants and trees of medicinal value. The information on herbal garden was provided by an escort/gardener called as Gogoi Dada.

Picture 4: Sir Somnath Sharma giving a tour of the Museum in RIWATCH



4. Physical Exercises

Physical Exercises/Meditation is a great way to begin mornings. Physical activities help open our minds and help us in planning our day ahead. There was PTE, meditation and warm-up exercises in the camp every morning at 6 am for half an hour. Every morning two members from each group were assigned to lead the workout.

Picture 5: PTE by a Trainee in the campus of RIWATCH



5. Participatory Rural Appraisal

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is one of the methods to identify the problems or needs, resources available in the community. It is an analysis of the problems of community themselves. Participatory means participation of community people voluntarily, appraisal is finding problems, needs and potentials in a village. Therefore, PRA is intended to enable local people to conduct their own analysis, and often to plan and take action. (M C Sandhyarani, 2018). As part of rural camp, PRA activity was conducted in the village. Trainees had to build rapport then each group worked on their respective PRA tools. Through the drawn maps, our trainees could understand the various institutions in the villages, number of households and resources such as money, man, material that are available in the community. Transect walk as a tool was given to all the groups so that all of them learn about it. Meanwhile, ten (10) other tools were given to the 5 groups.

The 5 groups worked on their respective tools and presented their findings in chart papers.

Table 1. Tools and groups

Group Name	PRA Tools
Kameng	Transect walk, Seasonal Health Diagram and Venn diagram
Lohit	Transect walk, Historical mapping and Social mapping
Siang	Transect walk, Mobility mapping and Livelihood flowchart
Subansiri	Transect walk, Resource mapping and Wealth ranking
Tirap	Transect walk, Seasonal mapping on Agriculture and Problem Preference ranking

6. Skit Performance on Health Card

The students divided themselves into four groups and mobilised the people to gather for the skit. The skit was presented to convey the importance of health card explaining the prevalence of CMAAY and how it could be beneficial to the villagers.

Picture 6: Photo with the Abali people after concluding the SKIT on Health-Card



7. Visit to various agencies in Roing

Since, Roing was only 12 km away, so the students were taken to visit two agencies wherein alumni of the Department were working. Nani Maria Society works towards the upliftment of most vulnerable woman and children in the tribal areas focusing on making them self-reliant though providing them with education. The Students learnt about the various services provided by Nani Maria Society and its stakeholders: Nani Maria Children's Home, Specialized Adoption Agency, One Stop Centre, After Care Home and Nani Maria Kindergarten School.

Picture 7: Visit to Nani Maria Society, Roing



After Nani Maria

Society, the students visited AMYAA where three more alumni of the Department were working. The students learnt that AMYAA was established with the vision to combat poverty, illiteracy, ill health, corruption, injustice and suppression of the poor. The members further enlightened everyone about the various projects initiated by AMYAA which were CHILDLINE, S2S (steps to succeed) which concentrated on training students on different market strategies, WIPRO EARTHAN which concentrates on sustainability, IBM STEM for girls, and MODEL SCHOOL.

Picture 8: Visit to AMYAA, Roing



8. Exhibition of PRA reports:

With the charts prepared by the students, each group took turns explaining about the data and information they have collected through PRA survey. The presentation was done in the presence of Sir Vijay Swamy and other staffs of RIWATCH.

Picture 9: Group Presentation of PRA findings at Documentation Room, RIWATCH.



Experiences and Learnings from Rural Camp, Abali:

Professional Learnings:

The students were taught how to engage the community effectively by visiting households. They were able to put their theoretical knowledge into practice and perform their duties like seasoned professionals. Additionally, they put on a skit the next day that showcased the benefits of the health card (CMAAY) in front of an audience. By using a loudspeaker system to play songs, the students were able to attract a crowd, and the skit was successfully demonstrated.

Through this experience, the students learned the value of teamwork and cooperation. By dividing into subgroups, they were able to cover more ground and visit different households. The trainees were able to follow the daily timetable prepared by the committees and complete their tasks without any major setbacks.

Throughout this journey, the trainees experienced a range of emotions, from highs to lows. However, they managed to maintain their composure and not let their emotions affect their work. Instead, they displayed professionalism and worked together effectively, putting differences aside for the greater good.

Personal Learnings:

The students found great motivation in interacting with the villagers, who provided them with support and cooperation that boosted their confidence. The kind and humble nature of the villagers made the students feel a sense of belonging. The experience taught them that stepping out of one's comfort zone is essential for success, and the circumstances of the village made them rethink their values.

Despite the poor cellular network, the students formed deep bonds of friendship with each other, as social media was not an option. The gloomy weather taught them the importance of being prepared for anything, and the daily 4km trekking improved their physical prowess and willpower. Overall, the students learned to adapt to their surroundings and appreciate the natural setting.

The students were able to learn about the socio-economic conditions of the village and found the community to be peaceful and cooperative. Despite abundant resources, the village still faces challenges such as access to drinking water, electricity, and healthcare.

Views and Opinions of Trainees:

Trainee 1: Since it was a very new experience for the social work trainee to go on a 7-day camp and to meet the locals of the respective area. The trainee really enjoyed being there, the hospitality that villagers gave was really great and the faculty of RIWATCH were so supportive. The place was really friendly for the students. The student social worker had applied communication skills in terms of communicating with the villagers to collect data, also the trainee had used interview tools to take interviews with the local people in order to collect data and the trainee had also done PRA. Each group had been assigned to make 2 tools of PRA and Transect walk in common, the trainee individually participated in Flowchart and Mobility Mapping where the trainee got to know about the resources available in the village and its access. The trainee also got to know about how important time management and group work is.

Trainee 2: It was a great learning experience, where I learned about time management, group work, effective communication. It helped me understand the importance of completing the tasks assigned by roles for the smooth functioning of the system.

Trainee 3: The rural immersion camp in New Abali village was a great experience for me. While the response from the villager was not so well, the RIC taught the trainee about time management, rapport building, Group work, healthy life living, to know about the problem of the village, and the ability to find out the solution to the problem.

Conclusion

The Rural Immersion Camp is a core component of Fieldwork in Social Work that all trainees must attend. It provides an opportunity for them to immerse themselves in a rural community, gain experience, and align with rural life. Although learning continues in both rural and urban settings, participating in the camp requires dedication, hard work and teamwork to achieve the desired results (Meenu Anand, 2017). While classroom learning is important, the Rural Camp teaches students how to apply their theoretical knowledge in everyday life and prepare for the challenges they will face after graduation. Communities serve as laboratories to test all Social Work theories and help transform trainees from personal to professional selves. The Rural Camp gives students practical exposure to dealing with individual and family problems, group development, community organizing, social action methods, Social Work research, assessment of facts, social welfare administration, and resource allocation to meet community needs. The camp also inspires trainees to think creatively about intervention strategies (Sanjoy R, 2021).

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