

The Mediation Effect of Empathy in the Relationship between the Self-Esteem and Practice Performance of Social Work Students

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the personal characteristics of social work students—i.e., self-esteem and empathy—and examined their relationship with practice performance. In particular, as it was assumed based on previous studies that empathy would mediate the influencing relationship between self-esteem and practice performance, this study conducted an analysis using a structural equation model. Therefore, a survey was conducted from Nov. to Dec. 2017 on college students majoring in social welfare, and the data from 146 respondents were used in the analysis. The results showed that, first, the self-esteem of social work students had a positive effect on their practice performance, and empathy also had a positive effect on their practice performance. Second, empathy was discovered to partially mediate the effect of self-esteem on practice performance. Based on these results, this study presented future directions for social work education for enhancing the practice performance of social work students, who are expected to serve as social workers in the future. In detail, although classroom teaching in social work majors and field education are important, it can be pointed out that opportunities to have self-reflection for improving self-esteem and promoting confidence are needed in the course of the curriculum. In particular, as it has been revealed that empathy mediates the relationship between self-esteem and practice performance, it would be great to operate some training programs to cultivate empathic abilities during practice classes, including a nonviolence conversation to improve empathic abilities.

Keywords: competence for social work practice; empathic ability; individual factors; self-esteem; social work education, social work student