

Online Conferences: Opportunities, Challenges, and Ways Forward

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We have been using video calling or group calling facilities and even small professional meetings virtually through various digital platforms for the last couple of years in India. Many of us may remember our craze to conduct an online or virtual conference or any academics. Some of the institutions have lots of prestige due to having a digital academy. Some of the medical institutions in India had tele or virtual health or mental health services. COVID-19 pandemic affected our life miserably; it imposed on us a virtual existence, and in many aspects of our personal and professional life we started using it and found it quite useful. Similarly, conference organizers have done lots of experiments that attendees felt beneficial and a good alternative to a conventional way of conducting conferences and that might change the way academicians or scientists gather in the future.

“Scientific conferences are essential components of researchers’ lives, allowing them to stay up to date with the latest research trends while disseminating their work to the scientific community. These events are essential for networking and developing collaborations, especially for early-career researchers who use meetings as an opportunity to plan their next career step” (Oester et al., 2017). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting travel bans and restrictions, many in-person meetings since March 2020 were cancelled, rescheduled, or changed to an online format, allowing scientists to present their research and interact with members of their respective communities virtually (Stefanoudis et al., 2021). This was a new opportunity and an alternative way but at the same time, it brings lots of challenges as well.

ISPSW Experience

The Indian Society of Professional Social Work (ISPSW) primarily focuses on uniting the professional social workers to discuss, deliberate, and develop conceptual frameworks and feasible indigenous interventions in social work practice. In order to facilitate this cause, the Society has so far conducted XXXIX (39) Annual National Conferences along with workshops, seminars, and symposia on various issues all over India. The XXXIX Annual National Conference of the Indian Society of Professional Social Work (ISPSW) was held at the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, Maharashtra Institute of Mental Health, Pune from 18th to 20th March 2021 in online or virtual mode. The conference theme was 'Fields of Social Work: Challenges, Practice, and Wellbeing'. There was a lot of uncertainty regarding holding the conference offline due to the COVID-19 situation and keeping in view of guidelines to adhere to, finally happened online.

The inauguration program was on Thursday, 18th March 2021. The chief guest of the program was Dr. Nitin Karmalkar, the Vice-chancellor of Pune University and Maharashtra University of Health Sciences, Dr B. T. Lawani, retired Director- Prof. Bharti Vidyapeeth, Pune, Prof. Dr. Ajay Chandanwale director MIMH, Pune, Dr. A. N. Verma, president of ISPSW, Dr. Kamlesh Kumar Sahu, general secretary of ISPSW, were present in the program. Mr. Shrikant Pawar Assistant Professor and Head Department of Psychiatric Social Work, Maharashtra Institute of Mental Health (MIMH), Pune who was the organizing secretary welcomed all guests and gave highlights of the conference. The program started with Lamp lighting by all guests after that Dr. Kamlesh Kumar Sahu gave an opening remark about ISPSW. Mr. Narendra Sale PSW, MIMH, gave a presentation on the history of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, Maharashtra Institute of Mental Health Pune. After this session, the release of souvenir was done by Dr Nitin Karmalkar, and the release of the abstract book by Dr. B. T. Lawani and Dr. Ajay Chandanwale. Dr. B. T. Lawani, Dr. Ajay Chandanwale and Mr. M. B. Shelke were felicitated for their contributions to the field of professional social work. The president of ISPSW Dr. A. N. Verma addressed. On the first day of the conference, Dr. Kalandi Ranbhare has given a plenary session on ‘Mental health crises during COVID-19’. Total 9

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participants presented study papers in the first session; the topic was Social Workers in pandemic and disaster which was chaired by Dr. Praful Kapase and Dr. Pankaj Das. The second session topic was social work with family, which was chaired by Dr. Durgesh Valvi and Dr. Kalindi Ranbhare. In this session, 7 participants presented their study papers. The third session was on social work with women, chaired by Dr. Sandip Jagdale and Dr. Jitendra Gandhi. Total 6 participants presented the study paper. The second plenary session was done by Dr. Sonia Rajput on the topic 'Role of Clinical Social Work'. At the end of the sessions, Ms. Ashwini Dhembare gave a vote of thanks. On the second day of the conference, a plenary session was given by Dr. Shaly Joseph on the topic of 'Intervention of Professional Social Work Perspectives for better outcome in an industrial relationship'. Session four was ISPSW best paper award for social work faculty which was chaired by Dr. Koteshwara Raju and Dr. Sanjai Bhat. 3 participants presented their study papers. In the fifth session, ISPSW best paper award for social work practitioners was chaired by Dr. Sushma Kumari, Dr. Shivani Mishra and Dr. Prashant Shrivastav. Total 3 participants presented their study papers. Session sixth was on ISPSW best paper award for M. Phil/Ph. D scholars of social work was chaired by Dr. Arif Ali, Mr. D. Dhananjay Lokhande and Dr. Nupur Singh, a total of 5 papers were presented under this category. Session seventh was on ISPSW best paper award for MSW/MA Social work student, chaired by Dr. Nandkumar Singh and Dr. Bornalli Das, 4 papers were presented under this category. Session eighth was ISPSW Visva-Bharati best paper award for practitioners in the field of persons with disabilities, chaired by Dr. Ravi Kishan Jha and Dr. Dilip Kumar, 2 papers were presented under this category. Session tenth ISPSW Dr. M. Chandrasekhar Rao memorial best paper award for M.Phil./Ph.D scholars in the field of social work research, chaired by Dr. R Sakshi Prabha and Dr. Apurba Saha, 2 papers were presented under this category. At the end of the award category sessions, Dr. Sanjai Bhat appreciated all participants and the chairpersons. The third plenary session was given by Dr. Devanand Shinde on 'Internationalization of Indian Social Work'. Session eleventh (A) was under the category of 'Social Work in Health and Mental Health', chaired by Dr. Senthil and Mr. Chetan Diwan, 7 participants were presented papers under this category. In Session twelfth (B) Social Work in Health and Mental Health, chaired by Dr. Shakti Prabha and Dr. Devanaand Shinde, 8 papers were presented under this category. In Session thirteenth (C) Social work in Health and Mental Health, chaired by Dr. Prakash Yadav and Mr. Narendra Sale, 4 papers were presented under this category. In Session fourteenth (D) Social work in Health and Mental Health, chaired by Mr. Upendra Singh and Mr. Lokesh Ranjan, 2 papers were presented under this category. The third day of the conference started with the fourth plenary session on the topic of 'Yoga Prana Vidya Distance Healing Intervention for COVID-19 Patients' given by Mr. N. Jayachander Reddy and the fifth plenary session was on 'Patriarchy Women Rights and Mental Health' by Dr. Nisha Waghmare. Session fifteenth was on the topic of 'Social Work in Child and Adolescent', chaired by Dr. Manisha Kiran and Dr. Jahan Ara, 2 papers were presented under this category. Session seventeenth was on social work in old age and aging (other), chaired by Dr. Bhupendra Singh, Dr. Shatabdi Chakravarti and Dr. Swamlata Singh, 7 papers were presented under this category. Session eighteenth, social work in youth, marriage & community (other), 6 papers were presented under this category. At the end of the day, a valedictory session was conducted. Mrs. Minakshi Kumkar was the chief guest for the program. Mr. Narendra Sale gave a welcome address. Dr Praful Kapase gave a conference report of 2 and 1/2 days. After that speech was given by chief guest Mrs. Minakshi Kumkar. Dr Kamlesh Kumar Sahu has given a report and remarks on the conference. Dr Praful Kapase announces the winner of award category papers. Dr. A. N. Verma gave the president's address. Ms. Ashwini Dhembare felicitated to chief guest Mrs. Minakshi Kumakar and gave a memento. At the end of the session, Mr. Srikant Pawar gave a vote of thanks. Around 100 delegates participated in the 39th ANC of ISPSW.

For ISPSW it was the first experience conducting an online conference though we have been conducting webinars during the pandemic period; it will have obvious implications in the future.

The present volume includes award category papers presented at the XXXIX Annual National Conference of the Indian Society of Professional Social Work (ISPSW).

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