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Training and Continuing Professional Development Among the Social Work Workforce in Hanoi, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT :

Purpose: Training and continuing professional development play an important role in maintaining and developing the competencies of the social work workforce to meet increasingly diverse needs in the current context. However, research on training and continuing professional development for the social work workforce remains limited in Vietnam. This study aimed to assess the current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 351 social workers in Hanoi using a purposive sampling method. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The training and continuing professional development scale including 37 observed variables corresponding to comprises eight dimensions. In this study, descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were used, along with Cronbach's alpha to assess the reliability of the scale.

Results: Social workers reported varied experiences of training and continuing professional development. Among the eight dimensions assessed, employee satisfaction with training had the highest mean score and fell within the agreement level.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that continuing professional development of the social work workforce should be approached as an integrated process linking training, practice, and the organizational environment, rather than focusing solely on the provision of training programs. These findings provide an empirical basis for improving training and continuing professional development systems to better respond to practice needs and strengthen organizational support in Hanoi, Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: continuing education, continuing professional development, training, social work workforce

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, training and continuing professional development for the social work workforce have received increasing attention. Social work is a highly dynamic practice profession (Mueller & King, 2018). Social workers practice in complex and rapidly changing environments and therefore face various challenges, including increasing demands for evidence-based practice, changing information contexts, and declining workplace resources (Nissen et al., 2014). Therefore, participation in training and continuing professional development is important (Brintzenhofeszoc et al., 2019) and constitutes one of the mandatory requirements for social workers.

Training and continuing professional development involve more than regular participation in courses, professional development programs, or training sessions. They also concern the capacity of training systems and agencies/organizations to support social workers in updating knowledge and translating it into practice competencies. Training and continuing professional development take place in various settings and involve diverse "trainers" or educators, with different durations and levels of intensity (Filges et al., 2019). They include various forms of supported learning throughout professional practice (Jordaan & Geyer, 2025). Some forms of training and continuing professional development are short-term and informal, closely linked to work practice, and do not lead to academic credits, diplomas, or certificates. Others may last longer and include formal courses at universities that lead to diplomas or certificates (Filges et al., 2019).

In Vietnam, Nguyen Thi Thai Lan (2019) reported that people requiring social work services account for approximately 28% of the population. Meeting this demand for social work services requires a workforce development strategy, particularly as needs continue to increase due to the impacts of natural and social environments. However, implementation in practice shows that the social work workforce remains insufficient in number and uneven in quality, and many social work service providers do not have professionally trained social workers or employ staff trained in different professions (Nguyen Trung Hai, 2022). Tran Thi Thanh Huong et al. (2024), in an assessment of the professional competencies of 116 social workers at three hospitals in Hanoi, found that 59.5% had moderate competency, 22.4% had good competency, and 18.1% had fairly good competency. The authors emphasized the importance of specialized training and skill development for the social work

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workforce to improve the quality of healthcare services and proposed appropriate training programs and competency assessment standards for hospitals in Vietnam.

Existing studies have mainly focused on pre-service training, whereas evidence on training and continuing professional development among practicing social workers, particularly in Hanoi, remains limited. This study aimed to assess the current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in Hanoi, Vietnam, based on a lifelong learning approach.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bubb and Earley (2007: 4) describe continuing professional development as "a continuous process involving all formal and informal learning experiences" that enables staff to "reflect on what they are doing, enhance their knowledge and skills, and improve the way they work." Overall, researchers view continuing professional development as a lifelong learning process throughout the professional career, involving various forms of learning to maintain, develop, and enhance professional competencies while improving the quality of professional practice.

Training and continuing professional development in social work constitute an intentional and goal-oriented process that benefits both professional practice and individuals (Mueller & King, 2018). They enable social workers to continuously update and enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide effective and targeted social work services (Spirina & Liakh, 2020). Accordingly, various forms of support, both formal and informal, have been implemented to meet the support, training, and continuing professional development needs of newly graduated social workers. These include specialized training programs, induction processes, workload-limitation mechanisms, and effective supervision activities (Jordaan & Geyer, 2025).

The International Federation of Social Workers emphasizes the important role of continuing professional development for social workers. Members of the organization consider regular training essential to social work practice, drawing on current research, theories, and methods. Continuing professional development has two benefits: first, social workers grow and develop personally and professionally; second, society benefits from higher-quality and more effective social work services. In practice, professional associations in different countries incorporate continuing professional development requirements into professional responsibilities or codes of ethics. The standards for social workers in the United States require social workers to complete 48 hours of continuing professional education during each two-year cycle to maintain and enhance professional competence. Continuing professional development activities fall into three main groups: (1) formal training programs, such as courses, workshops, conferences, and distance education, which integrate theory and practice in areas such as change and social action, management and supervision, and policy planning and development; (2) professional meetings and other organized learning experiences, such as conferences, workshops, and professional forums; and (3) self-directed learning and professional development experiences, such as writing articles, presenting on important professional issues or programs, reading professional journals and books, preparing for initial consulting, teaching, or training assignments, and participating in independent learning, research, or mentoring projects. Learning time counts only for actual educational activities (60 minutes per learning hour) and excludes travel, meetings, and social activities (NASW, 2003). These standards recommend that social workers develop a learning plan that balances all three forms to update their knowledge, develop professional competencies, and meet the requirements of professional practice.

In Vietnam, Article 34 of Decree No. 110/2024/ND-CP stipulates that social work practitioners are responsible for participating in social work knowledge updates to maintain and enhance their professional competence (Government of Vietnam, 2024). This requirement is linked to maintaining practitioners' professional competence and is further guided by the Ministry of Health (2026) of Vietnam through Circular No. 29/2026/TT-BYT. Accordingly, knowledge updates can take various forms, including short-term training and professional development courses; conferences, workshops, and scientific seminars; in-person, online, or blended training; and activities that can be converted into knowledge-update credits in accordance with the Circular. Participants who complete a course receive a certificate of knowledge updating. Circular No. 29/2026/TT-BYT also specifies the conversion of learning hours into knowledge-update credits, as well as requirements for issuing certificates, maintaining records, training programs, and managing evidence of knowledge updating at authorized training institutions. In addition, only social work knowledge-update institutions that meet the requirements under Decree No. 110/2024/ND-CP and Circular No. 29/2026/TT-BYT may organize knowledge-update programs, develop training programs, or use training programs issued by other institutions in accordance with the regulations.

Comparison with international experience shows that although the overall goals of social work professional associations focus on ensuring professional competence and improving the quality of social work services, countries differ in how they organize and manage continuing professional development. Some countries require practitioners to accumulate a specified number of mandatory hours or credits within a given cycle to maintain registration or a professional license, whereas Vietnam regulates knowledge updating within the current legal framework and links it to the management of practitioners. These differences reflect the diversity of approaches to social work governance across countries, with continuing professional development requirements designed according to each country's institutional context, legal framework, education system, professional regulation mechanisms, and specific professional development directions.

The evidence above demonstrates the importance of training and continuing professional development for the social work workforce. However, these studies have mainly examined the role, content, or effectiveness of specific forms of support within particular service settings, rather than providing a comprehensive picture of the current status of training and continuing professional development. In addition, research on training and continuing professional development for the social work workforce remains limited in Vietnam.

The present research

In this context, our research aims to address the following critical question: What is the current state of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in Hanoi, Vietnam?

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3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Study design and population

A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in Hanoi, Vietnam, using an online questionnaire and a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The participants were social workers working at social work service providers in Hanoi.

The inclusion criteria were: (i) managers, social workers, civil servants, public employees, or other employees working at social work service providers operated by the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs/INGOs), shelters or open houses operated by religious organizations or charitable foundations, schools/educational centers, hospitals/health centers, private providers (companies/social service or counseling centers, etc.), or social work collaborators who participated regularly and met the required duration of employment; (ii) at least one year of work experience at the organization to ensure sufficient experience to assess recruitment, training, employment, compensation, and career development policies; (iii) the ability to read, understand, and complete the questionnaire in Vietnamese; and (iv) voluntary agreement to participate after receiving full information about the study objectives, content, and principles of information confidentiality.

The exclusion criteria were: (i) failure to meet one or more of the inclusion criteria; (ii) being on probation or having worked at the organization for less than 12 months; (iii) being on maternity leave, long-term sick leave, unpaid leave, or temporarily absent from work during the survey period; (iv) declining to participate or withdrawing from the study at any time; (v) failing to complete the questionnaire or leaving more than 20% of the questions unanswered; and (vi) being absent from work during the study period.

A total of 375 questionnaires were collected, of which 351 were valid, resulting in an effective response rate of 93.6%.

3.2 Instruments

Training and continuing professional development are considered important strategies for enhancing professional competence, service quality, and the sustainable development of the workforce. In the field of human resource development, various instruments have been developed to assess the effectiveness of and employees' perceptions of training and continuing professional development activities. Among these, Schmidt's (2004) Job Training and Job Satisfaction Survey (JTJSS) is one of the widely used instruments. Based on the JTJSS and incorporating training outcome measures developed by Heyes and Stuart (1996) and Santos and Stuart (2003), the present study selected, adapted, and integrated items relevant to the context of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce. Items that did not align with the study objectives were removed, and several items addressing the benefits and outcomes of training were added based on previous studies to provide broader coverage of the content domain.The resulting measure comprised 37 items across eight dimensions:

(i) Specific outcomes (9 items): Adapted from Heyes and Stuart (1996), this dimension assesses perceived changes in achieving organizational goals, improving daily work performance, and promoting personal development.

(ii) Perception about training programs (7 items): Adapted from Santos and Stuart (2003), this dimension assesses learners' perceptions of the objectives, quality, and impact of training programs.

(iii) Perception about planning and evaluation of training programs (4 items): Adapted from Schmidt's (2004) JTJSS, this dimension assesses perceptions of training needs analysis, periodic evaluation, and training development policies.

(iv) Perception about practice opportunity (3 items): Based on Santos and Stuart (2003), this dimension assesses the extent to which learners are provided with opportunities to apply and practice knowledge and skills during training.

(v) General outcomes (2 items): Adapted from Heyes and Stuart (1996), this dimension assesses the overall benefits perceived by learners after training, including increased perceived job security and job satisfaction.

(vi) Organizational support for training (4 items): Adapted from Schmidt's (2004) JTJSS, this dimension assesses the extent to which organizations demonstrate commitment to, facilitate, and encourage employees' participation in training and development through policies, resources, and learning opportunities.

(vii) Employee feelings about training and development (4 items): Adapted from Schmidt's (2004) JTJSS, this dimension assesses employees' attitudes, perceptions, and motivation toward training and development activities, as well as the extent to which they value learning and enhancing professional competence.

(viii) Employee satisfaction with training (4 items): Adapted from Schmidt's (2004) JTJSS, this dimension assesses employees' satisfaction with the quality, content, organization, and ability of training programs to meet job-related needs.

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. Higher scores indicate greater agreement with the statements concerning training and continuing professional development activities.

The integration and adaptation of items from previously developed measures provided a theoretical basis for the measure and allowed the study to cover multiple aspects of training and continuing professional development, including program quality, planning and implementation, organizational support, and perceived training outcomes.

3.3. Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0. After data cleaning, 351 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. The data screening process included identifying and handling missing values, checking for outliers, and assessing the statistical assumptions required for parametric analyses. The study used the following analyses:

+ Reliability analysis: we assessed the reliability of each dimension and the overall scale using Cronbach's alpha. We considered removing items that did not meet the reliability criteria before conducting subsequent analyses. The scale was considered reliable when Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.60. The overall scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.948, which exceeded the threshold of 0.60. The scale therefore demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and was used to assess the current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in this study.

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Table 1. Reliability of the subscales and overall scale of training and continuous professional development of the social work workforce in Hanoi in 2026

TT	Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Specific outcomes	0.698
2	Perception about training programs	0. 869
3	Perception about planning and evaluation of training programs	0.842
4	Perception about practice opportunity	0.883
5	General outcomes	0.832
6	Organizational support for training	0.712
7	Employee feelings about training and development	0.664
8	Employee satisfaction with training	0.788
Cronbach's Alpha for the overall scale		**0.948**

+ Descriptive statistical analysis. We used frequency statistics to describe the general demographic and professional characteristics of the study sample, including sex, age, religion, marital status, educational level, field of training, and years of work experience. We calculated the mean and standard deviation to assess the current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in Hanoi.

Mean scores were interpreted using an equal-interval method across the response categories of the scale. The interval width was calculated using the following formula:

Interval = (Maximum − Minimum)/n = (5 − 1)/5 = 0.80

Therefore, the value ranges were as follows:

- 1.00–1.80: Strongly disagree
- 1.81–2.60: Disagree
- 2.61–3.40: Slightly disagree
- 3.41–4.20: Agree
- 4.21–5.00: Strongly agree

3.4. Ethical considerations

During the pre-survey phase, a pre-survey was carried out in order to ascertain whether the questionnaire was operational based on the survey's real findings, whether any of the entries were unclear or poorly articulated, and to promptly address any concerns. Additionally, received standardized pre-survey training to ensure they fully understood the study's content and objectives, and were proficient with the questionnaire and procedures.

During the formal survey phase, the research team approached several social work service providers in Hanoi to ensure diversity in the types and areas of services provided. After obtaining approval from the organizational leaders, we sent the Google Forms survey link to several social workers working at these organizations. The initial participants were encouraged to share the survey with their colleagues within the same organization or with staff from other public agencies in their professional networks.

Before completing the survey, participants received information about the study objectives, content, data collection procedures, their rights and responsibilities, and their right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage. We collected data only after participants provided written or verbal informed consent to participate in the study.

This study was approved and assigned by Hanoi Metropolitan University under Decision No. 890/QĐ-ĐHTĐHN dated May 20th, 2025.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Participants

Table 2. Characteristics of the study group (n = 351)

Characteristic	variable	n	%
Gender	Male	134	38.2
	Female	217	61.8
Age group	20-30	145	41.3
	31-40	155	44.2
	41-50	47	13.4
	51-65	4	1.1
Marital status	Single	92	26.2
	Married	249	70.9
	Divorced	9	2.6
	Widowed	1	0.3
Education level	College degree	46	13.1
	Bachelor's degree	245	69.8
	Postgraduate degree	60	17.1
Field of study	Social work	224	63.8

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	Psychology	30	8.5
	Sociology	34	9.7
	Public Health	41	11.7
	Other	22	6.3
Years of work experience	From 1 to under 3 years	46	13.1
	From 3 to under 5 years	74	21.1
	From 5 to under 10 years	161	45.9
	Over 10 years	70	19.9
Characteristics		**M**	**SD**
Age		**33.3**	**6.56**

Table 2 presents the demographic and occupational characteristics of the 351 participants (61.8% were female, and the mean age was 33.3 years). Regarding age, the 31–40 age group accounted for the highest proportion (44.2%), the 20–30 age group (41.3%), the 41–50 age group (13.4%), and the 51–65 age group (only 1.1%). This result shows that the majority of the study participants belonged to the young and middle-aged groups, who constitute the main workforce in the social work field.

Regarding marital status, 70.9% of the participants were married, 26.2% were single, 2.6% were divorced or separated, and 0.3% were widowed. This structure is relatively consistent with the age characteristics of the study sample, as the majority of participants belonged to the 31–40 age group, who are at a stage of stability in family life.

Regarding educational attainment, 69.8% of the participants had a bachelor's degree, 17.1% had a postgraduate degree, and 13.1% had an intermediate or college-level qualification. This indicates that the educational attainment of the majority of the surveyed participants was relatively high, consistent with the human resource requirements of social work service-providing facilities.

Regarding field of study, 63.8% had been trained in social work, 11.7% were from Public Health, 9.7% were from Sociology, 8.5% were from Psychology, and 6.3% were from other fields of study. This indicates that the social work workforce in the study was mainly trained in the relevant field, while there was also participation from personnel from related fields.

Regarding work experience, the group with 5 to less than 10 years of experience accounted for the highest proportion (45.9%), followed by the group with 3 to less than 5 years (21.1%), the group with more than 10 years of experience (19.9%), and the group with 1 to less than 3 years (13.1%). In general, the work experience structure of the study sample created favorable conditions for assessing activities in the process of human resource development, such as training, supervision, and continuous professional development …

Regarding employment status, 40.7% of the participants worked under fixed-term employment contracts, 31.6% were public employees, 27.4% worked under indefinite-term employment contracts, and only 0.3% belonged to other forms of employment. The results show that the study sample worked under various forms of employment, reflecting the diversity of employment relationships among the surveyed participants.

4.2. Current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce

Table 3. Current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce across 8 dimensions in Hanoi, 2026 (n = 351)

No.	Dimensions	M	SD
1.	Specific outcomes	3.46	0.44
2.	Perception about training programs	3.02	0.67
3.	Perception about planning and evaluation of training programs	3.47	0.51
4.	Perception about practice opportunity	2.86	0.83
5.	General outcomes	2.80	0.83
6.	Organizational support for training	3.17	0.64
7.	Employee feelings about training and development	3.03	0.63
8.	Employee satisfaction with training	3.86	0.59

Note: M: Mean; SD: Standard deviation.

The results showed that the mean scores across the eight dimensions of training and continuing professional development ranged from 2.80 to 3.86. Table 3 shows that three dimensions reached the “Agree” level, including specific toutcomes (M = 3.46), Perception about planning and evaluation of training programs (M = 3.47), and employee satisfaction with training (M = 3.86). The remaining five dimensions had mean scores ranging from 2.61 to 3.40, corresponding to the “Slightly disagree” level. These included perception about training programs (M = 3.02), perception about practice opportunity (M = 2.86), general outcomes (M = 2.80), organizational support for training (M = 3.17), and employee feelings about training and development (M = 3.03).

Overall, the differences in mean scores indicate that the levels of assessment were not uniform across the eight dimensions examined. Employee satisfaction with training had the highest mean score (M = 3.86), falling within the “Agree” level, whereas general training outcomes had the lowest mean score (M = 2.80), falling within the “Slightly disagree” level. The results indicate differences in participants’ assessments across the dimensions, but they do not provide sufficient evidence to explain the reasons for these differences or to evaluate the effectiveness of training activities.

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Table 4. Current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in Hanoi, 2026 (n = 351)

No.	Items	M	SD
	Component 1: Specific outcomes	**3.46**	**0.44**
1.	Training and development help employees achieve organizational goals	3,72	0,77
2.	Participating in training programs has a positive impact on my future employment prospects	3,92	0,73
3.	Training and development has improved my daily activities	4,06	0,74
4.	Participating in training programs has increased my ability to do my job	2,88	0,91
5.	Participating in training activities will help my personal development	3,85	0,75
6.	Training programs are given enough importance in my organization	3,04	0,77
7.	Participating in training programs will improve my qualifications	2,95	0,91
8.	Training is part of the organizational strategy in my organization	3,67	0,88
9.	Training helps increase productivity of employees	3,06	0,93
	Component 2: Perception about training programs	**3.02**	**0.67**
10.	Employees receive adequate training and development to their jobs	2,88	0,92
11.	The current training program in my organization should be retained	3,84	0,75
12.	Training is encouraged and rewarded in my organization	3,06	0,93
13.	The objectives are achieved in training and development programs	2,74	0,88
14.	The quality of training and development programs in my organization is excellent	2,86	0,91
15.	Participating in training programs has a positive impact on my promotion chances	2,81	0,96
16.	Participating in training programs has increased my motivation	2,94	0,90
	Component 3: Perception about planning and evaluation of training programs	**3.47**	**0.51**
17.	Training programs in my organization are periodically evaluated and improved	4,06	0,74
18.	Training programs in my organization are well planned	2,84	0,89
19.	Participants in training programs are identified after careful analysis and training needs	3,85	0,75
20.	My organization has a well-designed and widely shared training and development policy	3,11	0,93
	Component 4: Perception about practice opportunity	**2.86**	**0.83**
21.	I had enough opportunities to practice during training programs	2,86	0,92
22.	My organization allowed me to test out training received	2,80	0,95
23.	Training helps employees achieve individual goals	2,94	0,90
	Component 5: General outcomes	**2.80**	**0.83**
24.	Participating in training programs will increase my job security	2,74	0,88
25.	Participating in training programs has increased job satisfaction	2,86	0,91
	Component 6: Organizational Support for training	**3.17**	**0.64**
26.	My organization provides learning/training opportunities to meet the changing needs of the workplace	2,87	0,91
27.	In my organization, learning is planned and purposeful rather than accidental	2,80	0,95
28.	In my organization, people are interested in both personal and professional development	2,93	0,90
29.	Training and development are encouraged and rewarded in my organization	4,09	0,73
	Component 7: Employee feelings about training and development	**3.03**	**0.63**
30.	I view my education on-the-job as a continuous, lifelong endeavor	2,93	0,90
31.	I am proactive in seeking ways to improve what I do	3,88	0,90
32.	I deliberately seek out learning opportunities rather than waiting to be sent to training	2,65	0,91
33.	I have learning goals designed to enhance my current work assignment and prepare me for future positions	2,67	0,89
	Component 8: Employee satisfaction with training	**3.86**	**0.59**
34.	Overall, the on-the-job training I receive is applicable to my job	3,93	0,73
35.	Overall, the training I receive on thejob meets my need	3,87	0,76
36.	Overall, I am satisfied with the amount of training I receive on the job	3,80	0,73
37.	I am generally able to use what I learn in on-the-job training in my job	3,84	0,81

Note: M: Mean; SD: Standard deviation.

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Specific outcomes: The results showed that the mean scores of the observed variables ranged from 2.88 to 4.06, corresponding to the "Slightly disagree" to "Agree" levels on the five-point Likert scale. Among them, 5 of the 9 variables reached the "Agree" level, indicating that participants tended to provide favorable assessments of some direct outcomes of training. The variable with the highest mean score was "training and development has improved my daily activities" (M = 4.06). This result indicates that participants viewed the role of training favorably in relation to their daily work, personal development, career prospects, and the organization's development orientation. The remaining four variables were at the "Slightly disagree" level, with "participating in training programs has increased my ability to do my job" (M = 2.88) having the lowest mean score. This result indicates that, although participants recognized the role of training in supporting their daily work, they were more cautious in assessing the impact of training on professional competency development, work productivity, and the position of training activities within the organization.

Perception about training programs: The results showed that the mean scores of the observed variables ranged from 2.74 to 3.84, corresponding to the "Slightly disagree" to "Agree" levels. Among the seven observed variables, only one variable reached the "Agree" level, while the remaining six variables were at the "Slightly disagree" level. The variable with the highest mean score was "The current training program in my organization should be retained" (M = 3.84), showing that participants perceived the existing training programs as necessary and wanted them to be maintained. In contrast, for the variables reflecting the quality and effectiveness of training programs, the surveyed participants recognized the necessity of training activities but did not highly evaluate the quality, the extent to which the programs met work-related needs, or the impact of training on motivation and career development opportunities. This reflects that the participants tended to assess the training programs at their organizations rather cautiously.

Perception about planning and evaluation of training programs: The results showed that the mean scores of the four observed variables ranged from 2.84 to 4.06, corresponding to the "Slightly disagree" to "Agree" levels. The variable with the highest rating was "Training programs in my organization are periodically evaluated and improved" (M = 4.06), at the "Agree" level. This result shows that the surveyed participants relatively positively recognized the evaluation and improvement of training programs and the identification of training participants based on needs. In contrast, "Training programs in my organization are well planned" had a mean score of M = 2.84, which was at the "Slightly disagree" level and had the lowest mean score. Thus, the results show a difference between the evaluation/improvement of training programs and the identification of training needs, and the planning and institutionalization of training policies. This is a point worth noting for the development of the social work workforce, because a training system not only needs to organize and evaluate training programs but also needs to be developed on the basis of systematic training plans and clearly communicated policies.

Perception about practice opportunity: The results showed that the mean scores of the three observed variables ranged from 2.80 to 2.94, all falling within the range of 2.61–3.40, corresponding to the "Slightly disagree" level. This shows that the survey participants did not highly evaluate the opportunities to apply and practice the content learned through training in the work context. The most notable point is that the two indicators directly reflecting opportunities for practice and the ability to experiment with knowledge within the organization both had low mean scores (M = 2.86 and M = 2.80). These results show that the gap lies not primarily in whether training is provided, but in the extent to which employees are given opportunities to practice and apply knowledge after training.

General outcomes: The survey results showed that the mean scores of the two variables ranged from 2.74 to 2.86, both falling within the range of 2.61–3.40, corresponding to the "Slightly disagree" level. It is noteworthy that these results do not negate the role of training but show that, in the participants' perceptions, participation in training has not yet translated into a clear outcome in terms of work. These results are also consistent with the findings from the previous components: participants had relatively positive perceptions of the role and necessity of training but gave lower assessments of the ability to apply knowledge, its impact on competency, and career development opportunities. Therefore, at the workforce level, the results show that employees have not yet perceived training as a factor that produces clear changes in final career outcomes.

Organizational support for training: The results showed that the mean scores of the four variables ranged from 2.80 to 4.09, corresponding to the "Slightly disagree" to "Agree" levels. The variable with the highest mean score was "Training and development are encouraged and rewarded in my organization" (M = 4.09), reaching the "Agree" level. This result shows that the participants relatively positively recognized the organization's support for training activities through encouragement and reward mechanisms. Meanwhile, the other three variables were all at the "Slightly disagree" level, with mean scores ranging from 2.80 to 2.93. Thus, employees' level of agreement with the orientation and relevance of training activities was lower than their recognition that training was encouraged and rewarded.

Employee feelings about training and development: The results showed that the mean scores of the four variables ranged from 2.65 to 3.88, corresponding to the "Slightly disagree" to "Agree" levels. The most notable variable was "I am proactive in seeking ways to improve what I do" (M = 3.88), reaching the "Agree" level. However, the results differed in terms of active learning, as the two indicators concerning actively seeking learning opportunities (M = 2.65) and setting learning goals for the present and the future (M = 2.67) were only at the "Slightly disagree" level. This shows that the participants tended to be proactive in improving the way they perform their work, but their level of proactivity in seeking learning opportunities and setting learning goals for the present and the future was not corresponding.

Employee satisfaction with training: The results showed that the mean scores of the four variables ranged from 3.80 to 3.93, all corresponding to the "Agree" level on the five-point scale. This group of indicators had relatively consistent and positive assessments. The variable with the highest mean score was "Overall, the on-the-job training I receive is applicable to my job" (M = 3.93), while the lowest was "Overall, I am satisfied with the amount of training I receive on the job" (M = 3.80).

5. DISCUSSION

First, the study shows that the current status of training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in Hanoi varied across the dimensions examined. Employee satisfaction with training was the highest-rated dimension, while general training outcomes and opportunities for practice in training were rated lower. Notably, higher ratings were concentrated on the relevance and responsiveness of on-the-

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job training and some specific training outcomes, whereas aspects related to opportunities to apply knowledge, general training outcomes, and some aspects of training programs received lower ratings.

Second, among the eight dimensions assessed, employee satisfaction with training had the highest mean score and fell within the "Agree" level. The results show that, in the perceptions of social workers, on-the-job training was relatively relevant to their work and could directly support practice, consistent with studies emphasizing the relevance of training and the transfer of knowledge from training to social work practice (Eltaiba et al., 2018; Beltran et al., 2023). However, the scores did not reach the "Strongly agree" level; therefore, there is insufficient basis to conclude that on-the-job training has fully met competency development needs. For social work workforce development, the findings suggest maintaining on-the-job training while more closely linking training content to the competency needs and actual tasks of social workers, and assessing the application of knowledge after training.

Third, perceptions of training program planning and evaluation were also at the "Agree" level, indicating that participants had relatively positive assessments of this aspect. In the field of social work, needs assessment and training planning are particularly important because training needs vary depending on the area of responsibility and geographical region (Phillips et al., 2026). Studies by Hall et al. (2000) and Beltran et al. (2023) show that training needs are diverse, ranging from trauma-informed care, behavioral health, and cultural competence to telehealth and emergency case management. This reinforces the need for training plans based on the actual needs of specific job positions rather than uniform training plans.

Regarding program evaluation and improvement, participants' perceptions indicated that training program planning and evaluation practices at social work agencies were not implemented consistently across all stages. Identifying participants based on their needs and evaluating and improving training programs received more positive assessments, whereas the thoroughness of planning and the clarity and dissemination of training policies received lower assessments. This finding is consistent with studies in the fields of social work and human services that emphasize the role of needs assessment in identifying competencies that need to be developed and the role of program evaluation in the process of improving training. However, the current findings reflect employees' perceptions of training management practices within their organizations and therefore do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude about the actual quality of the programs. From the perspective of social work workforce development, the findings suggest the need for a systematic training process in which needs assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement are linked to one another.

Fourth, specific training outcomes were at the "Agree" level, indicating that participants recognized the specific outcomes achieved through training activities. The findings are also consistent with recent studies. Through a scoping review of continuing professional development for newly qualified social workers, Jordaan and Geyer (2025) showed that training is necessary but not sufficient to enhance practice competence. The effectiveness of training improves considerably when combined with post-training support activities such as professional guidance, professional supervision, mentoring, and appropriate workload allocation. Our current study only reflects employees' perceptions and did not examine the causal relationship between training, satisfaction, and job stability. From the perspective of social work workforce development, if social work agencies and organizations only organize training programs, this alone may not be sufficient to create a clear perception of job satisfaction or job stability among employees. Training needs to be connected with other occupational factors, such as career development opportunities, organizational support, working conditions, recognition of contributions, and career pathways (Wen et al., 2025). However, the current data from this study only reflect employees' perceptions and do not allow conclusions to be drawn about the causal effects of training on job satisfaction or job stability.

Fifth, organizational support, how employees approach learning activities, and how they perceive the value of training programs should be considered as interconnected components in the process of professional development.

Regarding organizational support for training, the results do not mean that organizations do not have training plans, but rather show that employees did not clearly perceive the connection between training activities and their learning needs, professional development, and changes in their work. Encouragement and rewards received more positive assessments than the direction and organization of training activities. Zimmerman (1978) pointed out that regular participation in training is often associated with professional development needs, while the professional value of training programs and the organizational environment play important roles in maintaining training. Therefore, social work workforce development needs to focus on identifying needs, planning, and organizing training that is appropriate to job requirements and professional development needs, in addition to encouraging employees to participate.

Regarding employees' perceptions of training and continuing professional development, the nature of social work, with many direct tasks and needs arising from clients, may lead employees to prioritize immediate work, limiting the time available for intentional learning, seeking training opportunities, and setting long-term development goals. Workplace learning can still take place through daily practice, but it is not always recognized as a component of continuing professional development. This finding is not entirely consistent with the perspective of lifelong learning and proactive career development, according to which learning is maintained through formal training, self-directed learning, and learning from practice. McCulloch et al. (2024) argued that professional learning among social workers occurs continuously during the early years of practice and is not limited to formal training; professional practice and the work environment are important spaces for developing professional competence.

Regarding perceptions of training programs, according to the training evaluation model of Kirkpatrick et al. (2016) and studies on training transfer, perceiving training as necessary does not mean that learners clearly perceive its impact on their ability to perform their work or on career development opportunities. Training effectiveness also depends on the relevance of the content, opportunities to apply learning after training, support from managers and colleagues, and the organizational environment. Therefore, participants' higher assessment of the necessity of training but more cautious assessment of program quality and the impact of training is consistent with findings from research on human resource development (Hughes et al., 2020; Shukla et al., 2024). This shows that training effectiveness depends not only on organizing training courses but is also linked to the quality of program design and post-training support conditions.

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Overall, the results do not negate the existence of learning and continuing professional development at work, but show a difference between learning arising from practice and learning that individuals proactively manage as a goal-oriented process of career development. Therefore, in addition to providing training programs, organizations need to create conditions that enable social workers to identify what they have learned from practice, identify competency gaps, and transform everyday learning experiences into a structured and goal-oriented continuing professional development plan.

Sixth, perceptions of opportunities for practice in training were at the "Slightly disagree" level. This finding suggests that the connection between training and opportunities for practice still needs attention in the organization of training and continuing professional development. For social work workforce development, this is an important aspect because professional competence is developed not only through acquiring knowledge but also through applying knowledge in practical situations, with guidance and feedback. Eltaiba et al. (2018) affirmed that opportunities for practice help learners connect theory with actual professional experiences; at the same time, supervision and assessment are important components that support this process. Our findings suggest that social work training activities need to be designed to be more closely connected with professional practice, for example, through simulated situations, workplace practice, guidance from experienced professionals, post-training supervision, and providing opportunities for employees to try out the methods they have learned.

6. CONCLUSION

The study showed that training and continuing professional development among the social work workforce in Hanoi received different assessments across the eight dimensions. A notable trend was that participants gave relatively positive assessments of aspects related to training experiences and some specific outcomes, whereas aspects such as organizational support, opportunities to link training with practice, and overall training outcomes were not highly rated. This finding shows that the challenge of training and continuing professional development lies not only in providing training programs but also in the ability to connect training with professional practice and build an organizational environment that supports continuing professional development. These findings add practical evidence for the development and improvement of social work workforce development policies in Hanoi, Vietnam. Specifically, social work service providers, training institutions, and management agencies need to review training and continuing professional development systems toward a practice-needs-centered approach, increase opportunities for work-related learning, and strengthen organizational support mechanisms. The evaluation of training and continuing professional development should also be conducted regularly, considering not only satisfaction but also training experiences, outcomes achieved, opportunities to apply learning in practice, and support from the work environment.

Future studies should expand research across different types of organizations and geographical areas, while using longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to track changes in professional competence and practice after training. Further research should also examine more deeply the relationships among program characteristics, organizational support, opportunities for practice, and training and continuing professional development outcomes. Future studies could also compare different types of social work service providers and different groups of social work employees to identify training and continuing professional development models that are more appropriate for specific practice contexts.

Limitations of study:

First, the cross-sectional descriptive design means that the results reflect the current status of training and continuing professional development at a single point in time, based on participants' assessments. Therefore, the findings do not fully capture deeper aspects of training and continuing professional development, such as training content, the extent to which training meets practice needs, and the ability to apply knowledge and skills after training. This limitation restricts the interpretation of why some aspects of training and continuing professional development were assessed more highly than others. Future studies should combine quantitative data with in-depth interviews or focus group discussions to clarify the training and continuing professional development experiences and needs of social workers.

Second, the study was conducted in Hanoi, so the findings reflect the characteristics of the social work workforce within a specific local context. Differences in service delivery models, organizational conditions, and workforce characteristics between Hanoi and other localities may lead to differences in training and continuing professional development activities. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings to the social work workforce nationwide remains limited.

Third, the study used an online survey with snowball sampling. This approach facilitated access to social workers from different organizations and professional networks; however, recruiting participants through initial contacts may have resulted in a concentration of individuals with similar characteristics or professional networks, thereby limiting the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand recruitment networks and combine different sampling methods to increase the diversity and representativeness of participants.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Ethical Committee approval

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Topic: Social work

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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