

Chilean Social Work Students and Their Options to Access to College Financial Aid: Policy Implications on Equity and Professional Training

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Abstract : In Chile, social workers' professional training is developed in the undergraduate level, mainly. Despite the fact that several schools have been launched Master of Social Work programs, the Bachelor in Social Work is the minimum qualification to start a professional career. In the current Chilean higher education system, there exist different financial aid options in order to guarantee equal access to higher education. These policies, which are student loans and scholarships, basically, are applied and distributed by Government agencies. They are linked to academic performance and socio-economic needs, in terms of standardized test scores and social vulnerability criteria. In addition, institutions that enroll students with high scores, also receive direct financial support. In other words, social work students must compete for the resources to pay for college tuitions and fees with other students from different programs and knowledge fields and, as a consequence, they can indirectly enhance schools' money income. This work aims to describe the reality of social work students to access to financial aid in Chile. The analysis presents the results of the University Selection Test of students, who were accepted in social work undergraduate programs during 2014 related to their qualifications to apply to three main financial aid programs, and their contribution to attracting resources to their schools. In general, data show that social work students participate in a low proportion in the distribution of financial aid, both student loans and scholarships. Few of them reach enough scores to guarantee direct financial resources to their institutions. Therefore, this situation has deep implications on equal access to higher education for vulnerable students and affects equal access to training options for young social workers, due to the highly competitive financial aid system.

Keywords : social work, professional training, higher education, financial aid, equity

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