

# Toward a Definition of Professional Identity for Social Work in India: Findings from a Scoping Review

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**Abstract:** *Professional identity is a critical but under-theorized construct in social work globally, and especially within the Indian context. This paper reports finding from a scoping review aimed at clarifying how professional identity is conceptualized, defined, and operationalized in the international literature, and then discusses the implications for social work in India. Using a structured scoping review methodology, 91 peer-reviewed studies were identified that addressed professional identity in social work; 66 of these provided explicit definitions, theoretical frameworks, or measurement indicators. Four major themes emerged across the literature: professional socialization, shared professional characteristics, professional structures, and belonging/commitment. Drawing on these themes, we propose a multidimensional, contextually grounded definition of professional identity for social work and discuss its relevance for building a cohesive professional identity in India. Major gaps identified include the scarcity of India-centric empirical research, limited attention to indigenous cultural contexts, and the absence of harmonized educational and professional standards in Indian social work. We conclude with research and policy recommendations to strengthen professional identity formation in Indian social work education and practice.*

**Keywords:** Professional identity, social work, India, scoping review, social work education, professionalization

