
Social Work: A Comprehensive Helping Profession

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community wellbeing. Professional help is a disciplined approach focuses on the needs of the client, and it necessitates specific knowledge, values, and skills to guide the client to change life style which is causing problem for his day-to-day activities. The professional social worker has the task of recognizing or identifying, addressing and treating the social, emotional and environmental problems where the clients live and depend. In the process of social work practice the social work professionals enrich the lives of individuals, families, groups and communities from diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Social work practice is based on a number of theories developed in a variety of fields, they provide a wide range of innovative professional services and they adopt theories like crisis intervention, problem solving theory, role theory to enhance the social functioning and support. In the social work profession the social workers build strengths, support growth, prevent problems, ameliorate long-standing problems, advocate for change, develop innovative interventions for change, in the process of social work practice the social work professionals adopts strategies, methods, skills and professional principles and integrates professional ethics and values.

***Key Words:** Social Work, Profession, Practice, Challenges*

SOCIAL WORK: A COMPREHENSIVE HELPING PROFESSION

Profession of social work came forth through the effort to address the person-environment interaction in the service of improving peoples' lives and facilitating transformation and growth through skillful interventions. Social work is geared toward helping underprivileged members of society, enhancing the well-being of people within their social context, and addressing the welfare of society as a whole (National Association, 1999). The social work profession is committed to the quest of social justice, the enhancement of the quality of life and the development of the full impending of each individual, group and community in society. Professional Social workers work at the limit between people and their environments, applying theories of human behaviour and social systems and structures.

Professional help is a disciplined approach focuses on the needs of the client, and it necessitates specific knowledge, values, and skills to guide the client to change life style which is causing problem for his day-to-day activities. Professional Social work is the most comprehensive of human service occupations and, through time, has become recognized as the profession that centers its attention on helping people improves their social functioning. Professional Social

work is also committed to modifying factors in the society that decrease the quality of life for all people, but especially for those persons who are most vulnerable to psycho-social problems. Social work's mission of serving both people and the social environment is ambitious. The interactions with the client's foster solutions in systematic and scientific way, it represents the whole of professional activity. The social work profession has taken the position that all people should have the opportunity for assistance in meeting their social needs.

The social work profession is action oriented and it finds out the root cause of the psycho-social problems of the individual, group and community. It is concerned with helping people enhance their social functioning, in which they interact with people and social institutions. Profession social workers help people and social institutions change in relation to a rapidly changing world. The community /society is not static, it is dynamic, the regular interventions, interaction will change according to the situation and the time, these conditions may cause the individuals in their transactions, at this course of time the professional social worker's interventions are needed. The profession of social work sprouted from practical experience, rather than theoretical knowledge, of two roots. The professional social workers engaged in interventions oriented toward the person through social relationships, and the environmental interventions as the solution to improving people's lives.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

The *Social Work Dictionary* defines profession as, "A group of people who use in common a system of values, skills, techniques, knowledge, and beliefs to meet a specific social need. The public comes to identify this group as being suited to fulfill the specific need and often gives it formal and legal recognition through licensing or other sanctions as the legitimate source for providing the relevant service" (Barker, 2003).

In addition, The *Social Work Dictionary* defines a professional as "an individual who qualifies for membership in a specific profession and uses its practices, knowledge, and skills to provide services to a client system, and in so doing, always adheres to its values and code of ethics," (Barker, 2003). By the middle of the twentieth century, the social work profession articulated core values and developed formal ethical guidelines to guide the conduct of practitioners. The first Code of Ethics was adopted in 1947 by the Delegate Conference of the American Association of Social Workers. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) adopted its first Code of Ethics in 1960, 5 years after the organization was formed from several professional social work organizations (Barker, 2003). The process of professionalisation can therefore be seen as a process of defining, laying claim to, and controlling a distinct body of knowledge and skills, or expertise.

Social work professionals follow democratic values and apply technical skills to address the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society and by active involvement in situations of personal anguish and catastrophe. This is done by working and interacting with individuals towards the realization of their intellectual, physical and emotional potential, and by working with individuals, groups and communities in the quest and achievement of equitable access to social, economic and political resources. The professional social work education emphasizes the

initial preparation of qualified social work personnel as well as the provision of continuing education for social work practice, administration, education, training and research, within the value framework of the profession. The objective of social work education is to impart the integration of social work knowledge, attitudes and skills.

The professional social work promotes respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions amongst different ethnic groups and societies, to that extent as they do not disagree with the fundamental human rights of people. Social workers need to be able to critically examine the structure of society, with particular attention being paid to dimensions of power and disadvantage and the influence of class, creed, gender, age, intellectual and physical ability, sexuality, race and ethnicity. The ability to understand the context of social work practice at local, national and international levels, and the institutional context of social work practice, is required. This understanding requires knowledge of, and the ability to, critically analyze social, political, economic, historical, cultural and ecological systems as well as the important considerations of governance with respect to these.

Social work is practiced within a range of settings and is increasingly undertaken as part of integrated service delivery systems. This diversity occurs partly because utilization of knowledge and skills is a contested activity in social work that enables different interpretations and values stances to be adopted. It is also due to the complex situations faced by those using the service confronting multiple oppressions on a daily basis. Even in the most straightforward of interactions with service users, workers have to be able to understand what the service users' experience means for them and how this perception is influenced and shaped by the nature of the wider community and society. Workers therefore need knowledge of how people function, their support networks and how society can influence and impact on everyday lives. This will be influenced for both worker and service user alike by 'differences of class, race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, culture, health, geography, expectations and outlook on life' (Trevithick 2000, p. 2).

The Social work intervention is now taking place within an organizational culture that does not necessarily lend itself to democratic forms of empowerment and may even at times challenge the core values of social work as a professional discipline. Social work as a professional activity based on working together with service users and modifying them to take more control of their lives. Social work is increasingly taking place in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team settings (General Social Care Council, 2008). The evidence suggests that such arrangements work best when there is clarity about the particular contribution of each agency or service and respect for each other's specific expertise, rather than an attempt to do away with difference and blur professional boundaries (Statham et al., 2006).

The social work role and task is not simply about action and good intentions, laudable and important as these are for many people who need and require support in their lives. It is also about thinking, planning and empowering those using the service and it therefore needs workers to develop a conscious awareness of their own approach to practice. This should enable workers to be aware of how their own knowledge, skills and values impinge and impact on the service user's situation. By maintaining this level of artistry (Ruch 2000), workers are less likely solely

to become caught up in the procedural imperatives of the managerial agenda. It is our view that the development of each worker's approach to practice requires to be undertaken in a reflective and deliberate manner, as this will underpin every other aspect of professional activity and process

A MULTIPURPOSE PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

The Social Work Profession deals with wide range of human conditions with which social workers deal, the variety of settings in which they are employed, and the diverse populations they serve make it unrealistic to expect that a single practice approach could adequately support social work. Rather, the social worker must have an ample range of knowledge and techniques that can be used to meet the unique needs of individual clients, client groups, communities and organizations at large. Professional Social work, at its most comprehensive, has committed itself to addressing the connection between clients or client systems and society, intervening to create change on both personal and environmental levels. Social work is practised within a range of settings and is increasingly undertaken as part of integrated service delivery systems. This diversity occurs partly because utilisation of professional knowledge and skills is a repugned activity in social work that enables different interpretations and values stances to be adopted.

Social work practice is rarely a straightforward activity, but instead is characterised by complexity related to a range of oppressions impacting on both the service user's and the worker's situation. Unthinking, reactive practice is not enough to meet service users' needs or provide a good service. Instead, good practice is a skilled activity where workers constantly reflect on their knowledge, skills and values to make sense of the complex situations that service user's face.

SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IS AN ART

Social workers ideally possess a broad spectrum of skills, often making them priceless contributors in efforts to facilitate transformation throughout society (Haynes, 1998). Yet, the social work profession struggles with its sense of self-identity and continues to search for a clear definition for itself (Albers, 2001). This may be because the profession's strength lies in its ability to cross professional boundaries, attempting to integrate theories and knowledge from various disciplines in order to address both the person *and* the environment most effectively (Glaser, 2001) Because each of these theories has been exclusive and partial, none has been capable of providing a unifying theoretical base for a profession that attends equally to both the environment and the person (Albers, 2001). Albers (2001) suggested that the competing moral ideals of the promotion of selfhood and the promotion of community well-being define the essence of social work and that the profession's purposes flow from these ideals. Some recent efforts at self-definition are presented in a special issue of *Research on Social Work Practice*, "Evaluating the Definition of Social Work Practice." (Bidgood, 2003). These authors carefully considered Bartlett's working definition of social work. It emphasized the uniqueness of the profession by outlining its particular content and organization of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method (Bartlett, 1958).

Social work practice does not take place in a vacuum in which workers are the sole arbiters of what is provided. While the professional integrity of individual workers is important, it is also influenced by both the agency and the society in which it is located. Arguably, modern social work is at a difficult junction between two competing ways of working that are often contradictory and conflicting in relation to each other. These are the growing clarity of 'new' professional practice, with its aim of empowering those using the service to effect change, and the influence of managerialism on organisation and service delivery. Workers do not practise independently but represent and act for the organisations in which they are employed. This has implications for the level of discretion and autonomy available in their daily practice (Hugman 1991; White 1999). Social work organisations are increasingly adopting an organisational ethos that reflects the ideas and values of managerialism with its top-down control of the decision-making and change processes (Clarke and Newman 1997).

STATE OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION INDIA

Professional Social Work Education started in India in 1936 with the establishment of Tata School of Social-Work with the ceaseless efforts of Sir Dorabji TATA in Bombay. The efforts of the institute promoted number of institutions in India at different levels i.e Graduation, Post Graduation and Doctoral Studies. There are great challenges are hindering the profession. The issues in Social Work Education (SWE) are the lack of uniformity in curriculum and standards of practice among the professionals in different settings.

The social work practicum is a fundamental aspect of social work education that provides students with the opportunity to apply the theoretical foundations of the profession to the practice arena, in India most of the institutions are not concentrating and improving the practicum standards thus it's affecting the quality of the education.

CHALLENGES

Social Work Certification and Licensure Board is to protect the public by setting standards for qualification, training, and experience for those who seek to represent themselves to the public as certified social workers or licensed social workers and by promoting high standards of professional performance for those engaged in the practice of social work in accordance with the Social Worker standards. A codified and uniform set of values and ethics must necessarily be in place to protect and enhance the profession. The recognitions for new schools of social work should be given based on the sound knowledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROFESSION ENHANCEMENT

- Uniformity in Social Work Education is needed across the country
- Field Practicum is needs to be strengthened.
- Central Task Force should be constituted to keep-up, enhance and to innovate the professional standards.
- Licensure Process should be evolved to enhance the professional standards.
- National Social Work Council needs to be established.
- Social Work course should be brought under the jurisdiction of AICTE.

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- National Level Entrance should be conducted for admission in to Post Graduation.

CONCLUSION

The process of professionalization can therefore be seen as a process of defining, laying claim to, and controlling a distinct body of knowledge and skills, or expertise. Social work practice does not take place in a vacuum in which workers are the sole arbiters of what is provided. The professional social work is at a difficult junction between two competing ways of working that are often contradictory and conflicting in relation to each other. Social work's various methods facilitate growth through the levels as an all quadrant affair, contributing to the growing global consciousness. The schools of social work should consistently aspire towards, which would actually provide for quite sophisticated levels of social work education and training. The Colleges, Universities and other regulatory boards must keep-up the standards for the quality of profession.

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