

# Social Work as a Profession

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## Abstract

Social work is a discipline within human services. Its main goal is to assist individuals and families with their needs and solve their problems using a multidiscipline approach. In order to be effective, social workers work closely with many agencies and professionals. Social work is usually a part of the Human Services Department of a government. It serves as a link between the government's clients and other government resources, such as: manpower training leading to employment, welfare payments towards financial assistance, legal consultation in dealing with legal problems, food and water relief at times of drought, famine and war, etc. As a social worker, you will also work closely with medical professionals in order to provide medical care for clients; with school personnel to identify children who are in need of help and with counselors and psychologists in order to provide psychological counseling. Today the problems faced by individuals and families are often complicated, and assistance from many agencies is needed. Professional social workers assist individuals, groups, or communities to restore or enhance their capacity for social functioning, while creating societal conditions favorable to their goals. The practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior, of social, economic and cultural institutions, and of the interaction of all these factors.

**Keywords:** Social Work, Human Service Department, Human Development, Profession

## 1. Introduction:

Social Work is both an academic discipline and profession that concerns itself with helping individuals, families, groups and communities enhance their social functioning and overall well-being. Social functioning refers to the way in which people perform their social roles, and the structural institutions that are provided to sustain them. Social work is underpinned by theories of social science and humanities and guided by principles of social justice, rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges, socioeconomic development, social cohesion and enhance well-being. Their engagement with client systems creates changes and with communities they may bring about social change. Social work practice is often divided into micro-work, which involves working directly with individuals or small groups; and macro-work, which involves working communities, and within social policy, to create change on a larger scale.

### *1.2 History of Social Work:*

The practice and profession of social work has a relatively modern and scientific origin, and is generally considered to have developed out of three strands. The first was individual casework, a strategy pioneered by the Charity Organization Society in the mid-19th century, which was founded by Helen Bosanquet and Octavia Hill in London, England. Most historians identify COS as the pioneering organization of the social theory that led to the emergence of social work as a professional occupation. COS had its main focus on individual casework. The second was social administration, which included various forms of poverty relief – 'relief of paupers'. Statewide poverty relief could be said to have its roots in the English Poor Laws of the 17th century, but was first systematized through the efforts of the Charity Organization Society. The third consisted of social action – rather than engaging in the resolution of immediate individual requirements, the emphasis was placed on political action working through the community and the group to improve their social conditions and thereby alleviate poverty. This approach was developed originally by the Settlement House Movement.

Professional social work originated in 19th century England, and had its roots in the social and economic upheaval wrought by the Industrial Revolution, in particular the societal struggle to deal with the resultant mass urban-based poverty and its related problems. Because poverty was the main focus of early social work, it was intricately linked with the idea of charity work.

Other important historical figures that shaped the growth of the social work profession are Jane Addams, who founded the Hull House in Chicago and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931; Mary Ellen Richmond, who wrote *Social Diagnosis*, one of the first social work books to incorporate law, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, and history; and William Beveridge, who created the social welfare state, framing the debate on social work within the context of social welfare provision.

### *1.3 Social Work Profession:*

Social work is an interdisciplinary profession, meaning it draws from a number of areas, such as psychology, sociology, politics, criminology, economics, ecology, education, health, law, philosophy, anthropology and counseling, including psychotherapy. It is not a 'single model', such as that of health, followed by medical

professional such as nurses and doctors, but like nurses and doctors, social work requires study and continued professional development to retain knowledge and skills in practice. Field work is a distinctive attribution to social work pedagogy. This equips the trainee in understanding the theories and models within the field of work. Professional practitioners from multicultural aspects have their roots in this social work immersion engagements from the early 19th century in the western countries.

#### *1.4 Social Work Profession in India:*

Social work in today's world has established itself as a significant full-fledged profession at par with any other profession. As the world is fast becoming increasingly materialistic, devoid of human sentiments and emotions, with people growing more and more self-centered, yet another global trend is becoming distinctly evident—the urge of the young lot who want to do something for the welfare of the society. There is a great satisfaction in doing something for others, which cannot be equaled or compensated by any remunerative job. Even those working in full-time jobs want to do some social work in their spare time.

It may be said that it is indeed a noble gesture to indulge in working for others or lend a helping hand to those who may not be as privileged as we are. The scope of social work is very wide. There is a dire need for people who can provide help to the disadvantaged members of the society. There are centers for rehabilitation for drug addicts, orphaned children and people with disabilities. Counseling, both educational and psychological, are required these days by a large section of the population. There are opportunities in health care, community policing, adoption, environmental protection, culture, and soon.

The social sector consists of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and institutions providing services to different sections of society. Many are engaged in research and publishing while others are active in solving problems at the grass root level. An idealistic youngster who wants to do something for the country may, thus, be attracted to the social sector. Fortunately, it is now more than an occupation of the idle and is getting highly professionalized.

Several institutes offer degrees and diplomas in social work, after which permanent positions can be obtained in organizations. Salaries have been soaring, with generous infusion of funds from the government and foreign agencies.

#### *1.5 Public Perception about Social Work*

The social work profession has long been concerned about its mission and perception. The two interests go hand in hand, because to have an effect on how we as social workers are viewed, we must be self-aware about who we are and what we do. This paper will address how social work periodically reflects upon and re-assesses its purpose because of internal considerations, such as the profession's ethics, and external forces, including the job market and public perception. Some of the research conducted over the years into public perception of social work—as well as that of our clients—will be presented and compared. In addition, I review how the media have portrayed the field, and how we as professionals have marketed ourselves. Finally, some suggestions will be offered, which can be applied at various levels, including direct practice, program development and evaluation, administration, and branding of the profession as a whole.

#### *1.6 The Uniqueness of Social Work:*

The following functions and methods are unique to social work. Social work is the only professional group with the mandate to undertake statutory functions including adoption and foster care. It is further uniquely mandated to do the following:

- Undertake econometric testing and assessments Econometric testing involves the use of a range of different structured assessment technologies, such as scales, questionnaires, protocols, classification systems and procedures, that are designed to promote the accuracy, precision and consistency with which client assessments are done. Overall, econometrics promotes accountability specifically during the assessment phase, but also generally regarding the entire helping process in social work (SACSSP, econometrics policy document).
- Case management Case management refers to a method of professional practice conducted by a specific individual or team characterized by an on-going responsibility to help people 1) by helping them to develop goals and to make informed choices about opportunities; 2) by helping access and effectively use services; 3) by developing services needed but not otherwise available; and 4) by advocating for and in other ways acting in a manner that promotes people's own efforts in the pursuit of goals that increases their sense of well-being (Norlin & Chess, 1997) 23
- Casework, group work, community work, social work supervision, social work administration and research are entrenched as domains of social work. Initial and on-going supervision is a prerequisite especially in view of the demands of ethical practice, the ethical dilemmas faced by social workers in day to day practice, the need to act in the best interests of clients and in recognition of the complexities of statutory practice.
- Casework: A method of direct practice in social work typically conducted on a face-to-face basis with

individuals, couples and/or families; it often involves case advocacy in that the social worker seeks to secure resources in the best interests of people that they are engaged with.

- Group work is a method used in social work practice that involves a small group of people with common interests or concerns who meet on a regular basis to work toward their common goals. In contrast to casework and group therapy, group work is not primarily therapeutic. Different types of groups have different objectives e.g. socialization, information exchange and education, minimizing destructive behaviour e.g. delinquency; prevention of social problems, advocacy, lobbying, recreation and facilitating harmonious relationships among people.

- Community work – used sometimes synonymously with community organisation and community development – is a broad concept that embraces a range of approaches, strategies and paradigms that do not fall solely within the domain of a specific discipline. Community work is used by social workers as well as a range of other practitioners including community development workers, adult education teachers, health care workers and development economists (Lombard, 1991).

- Social work supervisionSupervision within social work organisations forms an essential mechanism of quality assurance for services rendered and it is therefore an imperative that sound, good quality, facilitative and growth promoting supervision is provided.

- Social work administration: A method of indirect practice that is employed to efficiently achieve organizational goals and objectives in a manner that also advances the well-being of members of the organisation (Norlin& Chess, 1997) 24

- Social work research is defined by Grinnell (1993: 4) as a scientific inquiry about a social work problem that provides an answer contributing to an increase in the body of generalizable knowledge about social work concerns.

### *1.7 Importance of Social Work in Society:*

Modern age is the era where everyone encounters some social problems, as people have become so busy in their lives. Moreover, the business minded nature of people has made them competitive in terms of money. With the increase in effort to earn more money there is an increase in social efforts being conducted by different institutes, organizations and individuals. Normally organizations arrange funds that are aimed to help those who deserve monetary help. These organizations have increased their various activities due to the number of people needing help.

The main aim of doing any kind of social activity is actually to create a balance in our societies. This balance helps in maintaining the process of equality in the modern societies. This need of equality has led to the emergence of welfare activities and services that provide services to everyone who is a part of society. By doing so, you can play your role in reducing the social clashes and stress. All kinds of social necessities are provided to the deserving people, to keep a balance in maintaining an environment of peace and security in society. In the last few years social activities have increased in number. In fact, the actual reason behind these activities is to do volunteer work, to eliminate the class difference on a great scale. It is a reality, that people with different societal backgrounds come together and help each other, by sharing their resources. As a result, we can conclude that the importance of social activities cannot be denied. We must promote and encourage the effort of helping one another to create a balanced society. Every individual must play his role in social activities.

### *1.8 Role of Social Worker:*

#### 1.8.1. Broker

The social worker is involved in the process of making referrals to link a family or person to needed resources. Social work professionals do not simply provide information. They also follow up to be sure the needed resources are attained. This requires knowing resources, eligibility requirements, fees and the location of services.

#### 1.8.2. Advocate

In this role, social workers fight for the rights of others and work to obtain needed resources by convincing others of the legitimate needs and rights of members of society. Social workers are particularly concerned for those who are vulnerable or are unable to speak up for themselves. Advocacy can occur on the local, county, state or national level. Some social workers are involved in international human rights and advocacy for those in need.

#### 1.8.3. Case Manager

Case managers are involved in locating services and assisting their clients to access those services. Case management is especially important for complex situations and for those who are homeless or elderly, have chronic physical or mental health issues, are disabled, victims of domestic or other violent crimes, or are vulnerable children.

#### 1.8.4. Educator

Social Workers are often involved in teaching people about resources and how to develop particular skills such

as budgeting, the caring discipline of children, effective communication, the meaning of a medical diagnosis, and the prevention of violence.

#### 1.8.5. Facilitator

In this role, social workers are involved in gathering groups of people together for a variety of purposes including community development, self advocacy, political organization, and policy change. Social workers are involved as group therapists and task group leaders.

#### 1.8.6. Organizer

Social Workers are involved in many levels of community organization and action including economic development, union organization, and research and policy specialists.

#### 1.8.7. Manager

Social Workers, because of their expertise in a wide variety of applications, are well suited to work as managers and supervisors in almost any setting. As managers, they are better able to influence policy change and/or development, and to advocate, on a larger scale, for all underprivileged people.

#### 1.9 Conclusion:

The course has covered a wide range of issues that are designed to make you reflect on your own life experiences and on the experiences and perceptions of service users and practitioners. The title, 'Focusing on individuals', reminds you that social work is about working with people, as service users and as colleagues, and that you are also one of the people in this process. We hope that working through it has prompted you to reflect on your own practices, feelings, thoughts and reactions.

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