

The Social Worker-Client Relationship

Setsuko Uchida

Introduction

The human relationship is indispensable in our life. It could be said that it is almost impossible for human beings to escape from any kind of human relationships. Therefore, people often feel grave distress when relationships are disturbed.

There are several methods of dealing with human beings' grief and anxiety such as in giving advice, counseling, casework and so forth.

Swithun Bowers has defined casework as "an art in which knowledge of the science of human relations and skill in relationship are used to mobilize capacities in the individual and resources in the community appropriate for better adjustment between the client and all or any part of his total environment,"¹⁾ and Perlman has defined it as "a process used by certain human welfare agencies to help individuals to cope more effectively with their problems in social functioning."²⁾ They have placed emphasis on the casework relationship as one of the most important elements in establishing casework.

"The relationship is the soul of social casework,"³⁾ Biestek has said, "the processes of study, diagnosis and treatment are the body of casework."⁴⁾

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Various types of relationship exist around us such as husband-wife, parent-child, employer-employee and so on, and each relationship has characteristic traits. The casework relationship is different from other ones. The casework relationship between the caseworker and his client, for instance, is temporary, and the participants in the relationship do not have the areas of mutual interest that are common in a friend-friend relationship, such as similar interests, hobbies and etc. The casework relationship is a medium which is used by the caseworker for solving the client's problem. The reason why the casework relationship is professional can be seen in finding and understanding real needs of the client as an individual with uniqueness, and then offering the client appropriate help. It could be said that some of the important elements, in the caseworker-client relationship, are to recognize the uniqueness and to accept the difference of each client.

Essentially, of course, the caseworker is equal to the client as a human being. The case-

worker, however, is a person who offers various means of help to the client, and the client is a person who receives help to help himself from the caseworker.

Therefore, it could be said that to be successful in casework, it is indispensable to establish a desirable casework relationship. Nichols has very effectively said, "as with any client, the essence of treatment lies in understanding the underlying dynamics and providing the kind of relationship....."⁵⁾ For the development and maintaining of dynamic relationship, the caseworker must have extensive knowledge of human behavior and technical skills.

In the first encounter of two people, they tend to bring to their setting their own ways of thinking, attitudes and criteria of values, which they experienced in the past. At the casework setting, the caseworker can see clients who show various responses, that is, each client's response is different from others. Some clients respond offensively to the caseworker. On the other hand, some clients respond defensively. Sometimes even the same client, as the caseworker knows, shows a different response from one time to another depending upon the circumstances. The behavior of human beings is sometimes incomprehensible or irrational. That is why social workers need to have knowledge of human behavior to understand the client fully, thus fulfilling the casework processes more effectively. Through the understanding of the client's feelings and behaviors, especially based on the concept of ego psychology, the caseworker can recognize the worth of the client, and can accept the client who seems to act in an unacceptable way. It could be said that the casework relationship can be established on the understanding of human beings in relation to their attempt to cope with a problem they are experiencing.

The base of the casework relationship is the interaction between the attitudes and feelings of the caseworker and the client. One person's attitudes and feelings are different from another's in both their quality and quantity. However, clients who need help usually have similar attitudes and feelings, and have some expectation to the caseworker. Biestek has pointed out these common attitudes which are founded "psychosocially" upon the basic needs of human beings.

Biestek's seven principles of the relationship have been accepted by most of social workers. They are:

- (1) Individualization; the client needs to be recognized and treated as an individual, as a human being, not as a case.
- (2) Purposeful expression of feelings; the client needs to express freely his feeling.
- (3) Controlled emotional involvement; the client needs to be understood and to receive an appropriate response from the caseworker.
- (4) Acceptance; the client needs to be respected as a human being and accepted as a person who has worth regardless of his failures and weakness.
- (5) Nonjudgemental attitude; the client needs to be helped and not evaluated.
- (6) Client-Self-Determination; the client needs to make a decision by himself, as he wants

to receive help but does not want to be ordered.

- (7) Confidentiality; the client needs to be assured that the caseworker will keep his confidences to himself.

All clients are not always conscious of these needs, or do not verbalize them. However, it could be said that these seven principles are the basic attitude that the caseworkers should really hold as professional helping persons. Biestek's principles are not independent but related to and are supplementary to each other. If the caseworker cannot individualize the client, he cannot accept the client as he really is. If the caseworker cannot control his own emotion, he cannot hold nonjudgemental attitude toward the client. If the caseworker cannot accept the client, he cannot respect client-self-determination.

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It seems to me that "Acceptance," and "Client-Self-Determination" are the most important principles here. Many casework writers emphasize these principles. I think that even young and new social workers recognize these concepts as they work in the field of social work.

By "Acceptance," I can take both meanings of the humanitarianism and professional skills of the caseworker. Through this concept, the caseworker can perceive the client as he really is, his strengths and even his weaknesses. I can also see the caseworker's empathy with the client in this concept. When the client has a feeling of empathy with the caseworker, he can diminish his distress and develop a good relationship with the caseworker, and therefore the caseworker can establish trust and confidence in him which are the most important elements and are primary dynamics in the caseworker-client relationship.

"The casework relationship is the dynamic interaction of attitudes and emotions between the caseworker and the client..... better adjustment between himself and his environment."⁶ Thus, to develop and to maintain this dynamic interaction between the caseworker and the client, first of all it is important to accept the client. To accept the client means "warmth" "courtesy," "listening," "respect," "a certain outgoingness," "concern," "interest," "consistent maturity and firmness" and "willingness consciously to enter and share in the life experience of another"⁷ shown by the caseworker toward the client. In other words, the caseworker is to recognize the dignity and worth of the client as a human being.

However, to accept the client does not mean to give approval of deviant attitudes or behaviors of the client, but to understand the causations which have led the client to his problem. Through this understanding, the caseworker can accept the client's feeling and behavior. This caseworker's acceptable attitude without judgement toward the client contributes to the client's free expression of his feelings, and then to the establishment of the desirable relationship. This desirable relationship between the caseworker and the client consequently makes the casework process more dynamic and progressive, and finally leads the client to

his own solving of his problem.

First of all the caseworker has to be free from bias and prejudice in order to maintain his own accepting attitude. This should be a basic attitude of all social workers. Everyone has his own standard which he has accumulated through his past experiences and contacts with other people. Therefore, a professional social worker, especially the caseworker, is required to be free from his personal standards, his attitudes and his philosophical and ethical views, value and belief.

It could be said that "Client-Self-Determination" characterizes casework itself. This principle has been also considered to be of the highest value in casework. It seems to me that the use of the principle of "Client-Self-Determination" is a distinguishing difference between the casework method and other professional methods such as counseling and psychotherapy. "Client-Self-Determination," as Biestek and Perlman have mentioned, is to recognize and respect the right and need of the client. It also means the belief in the client's potential ability to change himself, ".....demands a high degree of sensitiveness to the unique quality in each human being. An instinctive reverence for personality, more especially for the personality least like his own, must be part of a caseworker's native excellence and require conformity to it is not his aim. It is his privilege, rather, to discover and release the unduplicated excellence in each individual—to care profoundly for the infinitely varied pattern of humanity and to strive, with an artist's striving, to develop the depth and richness of its color tones,"⁸⁾ Richmond has effectively said. I would like to emphasize again that the fundamental attitude for the caseworker, in the casework relationship, is to have respect for the client's worth and dignity.

"Client-Self-Determination" also suggests to us that it is important for the client to participate positively in the process of the casework session, and thus have him make decisions by himself through the help of the caseworker. Since the time when Richmond pointed out, this "participation" of the client in treatment plan has been emphasized. By the client's purposeful directed participation in the casework process the casework relationship is more dynamic, and the client can achieve more effective solution of his problem.

The caseworker, in carrying out his role, would be helping the client to perceive what the client's problem is, to get information about the resources in the community, and to strengthen the client's ego for making decisions and therefore being able to solve his problem.

However, not all clients have the ability to participate in the casework process and to make decisions by themselves. So to speak, "the client's right to self-determination is limited by the client's capacities for positive and constructive decision making, by the framework of civil and moral law, and by the function of the agency."⁹⁾

The casework relationship has often been colored by "Transference." "Transference" means that a person displaces into a present relationship his feeling such as love, hatred or hostility which are carried over from other people (during his childhood in many cases). Human relationship in early childhood is one of the important factors which condition the way one relates to people in later years. Therefore, it is most useful and meaningful that the caseworker perceives and understands his client's attitude or response as an attitude or response which is transferred from his past. It is said that "transference" is an unrealistic attitude and response. "All of these unrealistic reactions can be positive or negative (in the sense of warm or hostile), and they may represent id, ego or superego aspects of the personality."¹⁰⁾

Clients, especially adults with emotional problems and children, tend to give rise to "transference" in the casework relationship, for they tend to place the caseworker in the role of their parents or substitute parents because they perceive the caseworker as a helper. Therefore, it is important how the caseworker diminishes or deals with this "transference." "For effective control of transference, a worker must be aware also of his own countertransference and in reasonable control of it....."¹¹⁾

"Countertransference" is a counter phenomenon of "transference," that is, the caseworker displaces onto his client his own unrealistic attitude and feeling. The caseworker, sometimes, reacts to his client with his feeling such as likes and dislikes. "The caseworker too is only a human being, subject, like his client, to feelings of anxiety, dislike, lovingness, and vulnerability,"¹²⁾ as Perlman has said so effectively.

During the casework treatment, if the caseworker does not notice this "transference," the objectivity of the treatment may be lost, and the caseworker becomes involved in the vortex of his feelings. To prevent this situation precipitating, the caseworker is required to have the ability to control consciously his own feelings (to promote consciously self-control). To do so, first of all, all caseworker must be fully aware of themselves, for instance, "What type of a particular feeling do I have toward a client? (positive or negative). So to speak, it is most important for them to have "self-awareness" and "self-understanding."

It could be said that "self-awareness" is an indispensable element for development of the professional skills of the caseworker.

Thus, the concept of the "supervision" has taken place. Generally speaking, it is difficult for the caseworker to train by himself, although it is not completely impossible, and then he needs the supervisor's assistance for developing his "self-awareness."

There are different ways of dealing with "transference" in the professions of psychoanalytic therapy and casework. A psychoanalyst positively promotes a client's transference and analyzes the feelings of the client which have been transferred to himself, that is, the an-

alyst makes use of transference. However, the caseworker should not promote transference and analyze the transferred feelings of the client. The caseworker should accept and deal with transference in relating to reality. He can explain the agency's function and limitation, and bring the client back into the realistic situation. As Perlman has stated, "In casework practice our effort is to maintain the relationship on the basis of reality."¹³⁾ "Primarily, the caseworker avoids the rousing of transference."¹⁴⁾

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I would like to discuss the casework relationship by presenting the following case material. In particular, I would like to discuss "Acceptance" and "Transference."

This case was initiated by the parents's visit to the child guidance clinic center. The client was a fourteen-year-old boy, in the second grade of Junior High School. His major problems were aggressive behavior, rowdiness toward his friends without any reasons, and spending his money foolishly. He has gotten the money by force from his mother. His father was a teacher of a Junior High School, and had opposed the mother in disciplining the child (the client). His mother was a teacher of an Elementary School, and she was easily stirred emotionally, and has overprotected the client and as a result spoiled him.

At the first interview, the client was very meek at the beginning of the interview, but he gradually became excited as he began to speak ill of his friends and teachers.[Ⓐ] The caseworker just listened quietly to him,[Ⓑ] and made an appointment for the next interview.

At the second interview, as soon as the client entered the room, he handled things one after another which were placed on the table. As in the first interview, he complained against his teachers with strong tone,[Ⓒ] and he said to the caseworker "I wish my teacher were a person like you."[Ⓓ] He had hostility toward the people who had given attention to him. Again, the caseworker just listened to him.[Ⓔ]

At the interviews after that, the client often complained of the teachers, and after that "I wish you were my teacher."[Ⓕ] Some day later, looking at the caseworker, the client said to the caseworker "Today I was very gentle in the class and I did not quarrel with friends,"[Ⓖ] and the caseworker responded with the expression of "That was so good of you indeed. I am sure you have spent time pleasantly with your friends in the classroom."[Ⓖ]

Five months later from the first interview, the client came to the clinic without an appointment while the caseworker was interviewing another client. Since the caseworker told him to come to the clinic an hour later again, he went back rudely and he did not come back to the clinic.[Ⓙ]

In this case, I see a typical overprotected child who has had overprotectively characteristic traits such as magnification of need, adhesiveness, aggressiveness, self-centered attitude and impulsiveness. Besides the client has had a negative relationship with his father, the teachers and the friends. Ⓐ (see underlined sentences in preceding paragraphs) and Ⓒ show the negative relationship between the client and the teachers, and the client and the friends. At the same time, Ⓐ may be the client's defense mechanism (rationalization).

As the caseworker understood the client's characteristic traits of his personality and his growth history including the human relationship in the family and society, and schooling, she did not give any admonishment to the client but accept his feelings by listening to him at the beginning interviews (⑥, ⑦). This attitude of the caseworker resulted in releasing the client's anxiety. What the caseworker should do at the beginning of the casework process is to establish good relationship between the caseworker and the client. At this stage, it is especially important for the caseworker to use the concepts of purposeful expression of feelings, acceptance and nonjudgemental attitude. Of course, I do not mean not to use other concepts.

The caseworker's responses have been on "empathy." These empathized response or understanding is important for the professional attitude of the caseworker in casework and counseling.

④, ⑤ and ⑧ are positive transferences to the caseworker, and the client's great dependency is indicated, also. The relationship between the client and his mother was poor, and he has experienced undesirable relationships in the family. Therefore, the client's attitude or response toward women has been conditioned greatly by distorted relationship between the client and his mother. The caseworker has had to understand fully the client's family dynamics. At ⑧, the client has meant that he has been a good boy in the class for getting the caseworker's favor. However, she did not say she was very glad, but she has given the client a general expression of thanks (⑤), that is, she has managed not to promote transference. The caseworker must control not promoting transference, and he must consider timing for controlling transference.

At ④, the client has been able to have an extremely therapeutic experience, that is, the caseworker has brought him back to reality (his self-centered attitude was not enforced). The caseworker, of course, has understood the situation of the relationship between the caseworker and her client in degree of quality and quantity. In other words, she has had conviction that the client would not feel "denied" by her. Thus the caseworker's deep insight toward the client and knowledge of ego functioning has led to reconstruction and integration of the client's ego functioning.

Summary

The casework relationship is the most important medium in the casework process. Therefore, it is the most important to develop and maintain desirable relationship, dynamic interaction, between the caseworker and the client. The caseworker has to continue training himself by repeating casework-experience, and through the supervisor's assistances to him in order to develop self-awareness and professional skills. I would especially like to emphasize that the caseworker should develop such qualities as warmth, compassion, humility, and earnest and scientific attitude toward gaining knowledge. The scientific attitude, extensive

knowledge of human beings and full humanitarianism of the caseworker surely brings success to the casework process (treatment).

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