



SOCIAL WORK WITH FAMILIES:AN UNDISPUTED NEED OF THE HOUR

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INTRODUCTION

Any profession in any society has to be socially relevant and must provide its services with all professional competence to the satisfaction of its clients. Kulkarni (1994) has rightly observed that “no education, particularly no professional education, is autonomous. It follows, therefore, that the sub-system cannot and should not decide upon its objectives, contents and methods without reference to the milieu-the system as a whole, within which it is expected to function and deliver. It has to be responsive and responsible to the broader perspectives.” Whitemain(1972) has also pointed out that social work must reflect a “sharpening recognition of these societal needs, dimensions and complexities which demand from social work profession - in concert with other service professions and occupations - new perspectives, new knowledge and understanding of these societal forces.” Despite the completion of more than eight decades of social work education in India since its inception, social work is still branded as ‘new and emerging profession’ and even as ‘incomplete profession’.

In India, since the establishment of Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work way back in 1936, the progress in terms of number of schools and number of trained social workers looks impressive, the quality and competence of the professional social workers to deal with the problems of different clientele groups is far from desirable. 21st century is an era of information, rapid globalization, technological innovation and social transformation. Everybody is looking forward to further advancement in all areas as we have tremendous talent and brainpower. It is



also an era of numerous problems carried forward from the past. Despite the age of space and technology and personal computers, we are witnessing continuing quagmire of property, illiteracy, individual disorganization and social disorganization. We cannot afford to depend upon mysterious dates and times to solve our problems, but have to solve them ourselves. This paper intends to explore and reflect on social workers' unique qualities and to understand the ability of this profession to address a wide range of psycho-social issues. It is also felt, the need for shifting the focus of social work practice to the basic units of the society. Working at the basic level would help to reduce the problems at higher levels. The social work profession emerged as a result of the desire and need to improve the lot of the poor, the sick and the disadvantaged. But, it has expanded to include work with other sections also – even those who are privileged. In its efforts to redefine its role and importance to meet the needs of the changing present day society, social work is being educationally and professionally challenged.

Social work is a response to need and it is a problem solving process. The problem in social work refers to psycho-social dysfunction in which need fulfilment of any of the person or system involved is blocked and the person involved cannot himself or herself remove the block to need fulfilment. Social work uses the knowledge of human development as human needs vary as he / she develops physically, socially, cognitively, economically and spiritually over the life cycle. Human diversity and social system perspectives are also given due consideration in social work. The ability to appropriately and creatively combine the elements of knowledge, values and skills in the helping situation is indeed an important unique characteristic of social work profession. The problem solving is finding way through feeling, thinking and acting. In short, social work helps the individual or system to function in a better way. The three primary methods i.e. casework, group work and community organization of social work with its various interventions have got variety of applications in different settings. Social work intervention is a specific, purposeful and goal oriented action by social worker in relation to human system and processes to induce change or need fulfilment. Social work has got the attributes of the profession and it is not being much recognized in India due to various reasons. The following brief discussion on



the application of social work practice may reveal the fact that social work can be of great help to create happier, self-assured individuals, family and in turn better society and a better nation.

FAMILY SOCIAL WORK

Family is the basic institution in a community. It is the primary group in which members are born, brought up, formed, trained and socialized to play various roles and functions in society. Hence, it is important that the family maintains its well-being. There are many problems and issues that affect a family. These problems are multifaceted in nature. The problem or progress of one person affects others in the family. It is also presupposing that the causes of these problems could be located within the family and handling of such problems also will involve other members of the family. That is why family is treated as a system and any intervention in the family must have this perspective.

Family social work is a specialized area within the broader field of social work that focuses on supporting and assisting families to enhance their well-being and cope with various challenges and issues they may face. The primary goal of family social work is to strengthen family functioning, promote positive relationship and ensure the overall welfare of the family members.

The involvement of social workers with families is almost as old as the profession itself. In the early stages of social work, importance of working with family, the basic unit of society, was emphasised (Richmond, 1917, Reynolds, 1938). Among the distinguishing features of social work is its commitment to enhance the functioning of individuals and society. Family social work will be of great use in achieving the above mentioned commitment in the long term.

The family is one of the major institutions of the society, which is most likely to influence the functions of the individual as it plays a vital role in shaping their personality in all dimensions. For any society to be functional, family must carry out its functions effectively. Today this sacred institution is in deep crisis. The issues and problems facing the modern family are overwhelming and challenging. Family social work is concerned with aiding families to secure



and maintain normal and healthy existence. Even though the problems in the family are numerous. The role of social work practice in major and pertinent family issues is being discussed here.

Marriage

Marriage is a stepping stone for the establishment of a family. Many a times the couple enter into married life without much preparation as we don't have the systems and services to provide it. Even the parents are also not able to give adequate information to the couples. Each person approaches the marital relationship with a set of assumptions and expectations. Many adults have romantic concept of marriage that have been developed in adolescence. Overly optimistic expectations increases difficulties in adjusting to the duties and responsibilities of marriage. Unrealistic approach to marriage inevitably leads to conflicts between role expectation and role behaviour. Marriage is supposed to protect the physical and mental health of partners through mutual support. In order to achieve this the couple should have basic knowledge of physical and psychological makeup and the needs of partners. Most couples have little preparation in the area of domestic skills, child rearing, getting along with in-laws, time management and money management. The inter-personal incompatibility may exist on demographic aspect, psychological aspect, socio-economic aspect and cultural aspect. Mixed marriages also make the adjustment more complex. Intelligence and extroversion (Kumar and Rohatigi, 1987) are also associated with adjustment. Sexual adjustment is the most difficult adjustment in marriage and researches say that this is one of the main causes of marital discord and unhappiness. Attitude towards sex, past sexual experiences, degree of sexual desire and misconceptions about sex causes sexual adjustment problem. Psychological traits of dominance and submissiveness also have a role to play in marital adjustment. Manifestations of marital adjustment problems may be in the form of psychiatric illness, marital violence, extramarital relationship, temporary or permanent breakdown of marriage in terms of separation, discarding and violence.



Pre-marital counselling will be helpful in preventing the marital problem up to a certain extent. In pre-marital counselling the social worker makes the couple aware of psychological, sexual and demographic factors that may help or hamper their marital adjustment. Defective personality factors can be treated before marriage. The importance of pre-marital counselling lies in the fact that it is helpful to prepare the couples in various dimensions. Social worker can do a systematic assessment of the person concerned and give necessary counselling as per the need of the person. Adequate sex education (Family Life Education) will be of great help to the couples to face problems related to sexual matters. Family life education which involves general information about family planning, conception, pre-natal and post-natal care, upbringing of children and allied aspects of family management in general. Primary methods of social work (Casework and Group work) can be effectively used in pre-marital counselling centres. As social work practice advocates and maintains confidentiality, people will feel more free. Pre-marital counselling enables couples to face their problems in a better way.

Family counselling centres that deal with marital relationship is of great significance with regard to family problems. The problems between husband and wife cannot be always solved or communicated because of emotional nature of their relationship, whereas the social worker can view the problem in a professional way without any emotional involvement. Social worker may diagnose the cause of the maladjustment and treatment can be provided through casework and group work method. Inadequate communication, excess need for affection, anxiety and fear with reference to sex are specific areas in marital problems that a social worker can deal. The causes of any family problems are not related to one factor, one person or one situation but to a variety of reasons. The non-judgemental attitude and the rapport the social worker develops with the client will help the client to identify the exact cause of the problem. Social worker takes into consideration the totality of the situation and then gives treatment. When people try to solve serious problem on their own they are often unsuccessful and problems aggravate. As it becomes more complex and disabling, the individuals' problem solving capabilities get impaired. Group situation provides opportunity for self-evaluation, self-perception, recognition,



ventilation of feelings and to accept a new idea in new atmosphere as the group members share a common interest and have a feeling of oneness. Groups of children, youth, couples, the aged and women can constitute the group for group work. If the group members are from different families, the group has got the advantage to understand the problem from a different perspective and support each other in the problem solving process.

Divyangjan and the Aged

The presence of differently abled (*Divyangjan*) family member disrupts family equilibrium. These families need guidance, training and comprehensive counselling in order to adjust with the *Divyangjan* and to function effectively in rehabilitation. Professional social work intervention is needed in the familial context. Community education should be strengthened to advocate on behalf of the rights of the *Divyangjan*. A social worker will be able to bring various welfare schemes to the *Divyangjan*. Similarly, due to the changes in values and social transformation, families are having problems with the aged people. Old age is characterised by certain physical and psychological changes that are more likely to lead to poor adjustment and unhappiness in family. Here both the family and the old person need professional help to overcome the difficulties.

Addicted / Divorced / Separated Parents

Addicted parents affect the family environment adversely. Addiction leads to poverty, cruelty, quarrelling and in turn the family environment will be disorganised, no clarity in roles, unpredictable arguments and illogical thinking. The social workers with the help of group therapy and social work methods will be able to intervene and help the addicted person and family members.

The traumatic effect of divorce, separation and desertion affect the partners and children. Divorced / separated couples will have economic, psychological and social problems. They face loneliness, problem of divided child custody and problem of low self-image and self-esteem.



Here the social worker can use casework and group work to empower the couple and children to face the after effect of divorce.

The family is supposed to provide the children the opportunity for growth, development and to teach them physical, social, intellectual and emotional skills necessary to prepare them for the membership of the larger society. Procreation is one of the important roles of family. There are many factors that can affect the future well-being of children while they are in their mothers' womb. If mothers' diet during pregnancy lacks proper nutritional value and vitamins, the baby may have difficulty in attaining proper IQ level. Mothers who eat contaminated food may give birth to children who are less responsive and more easily upset. Mothers who experience prolonged anxiety or anger during pregnancy may have babies who are of less than of average size, over active and inclined to digestive problems. Addicted mothers cause serious mental and physical handicap to the children. The birth of first child often alters family life more than anticipated. Having a child, create complex and sweeping changes in the roles wife and husband play in the marriage and in their life styles. Parenthood is hard work, it requires responsibility and it is often stressful (Lemasters and Defrain, 1983). Parenting requires skills of various kind like sensitivity to children needs at various stages of development, being able to help them to cope with stress and adversity, knowing how to talk and play with them and to use appropriate disciplinary techniques. Considering the above facts, counselling services should be made available in the maternity hospitals. This would reduce anxiety and fear of pregnant women and prepare the couples for receiving the child and to carry out subsequent roles effectively. Information regarding importance of breast feeding, immunization, health care of child in general and child rearing is to be given. Many parents find problems in the upbringing of their children. The physical abuse of children threatens the well-being of the child. This includes violent methods of disciplining like beating and severe punishment. Parental neglect appears to be on the increase, which involves deprivation of physical necessities of life, emotional security, education and medical care. Ignorance, poor learning about parenting skills, poor socialization, inability to control and resolve frustration and anger, unrealistic expectations of children are the causes of above physical abuse of children. The incidences of sexual abuse are also increasing.



Immediate family members, family friends and strangers force the child into sexual activity. The child victims ranges from infants to adolescents. Dissatisfaction of married life, blind beliefs about sex and low self-control and morality are main causative factors behind this. There is immense scope for social workers to initiate appropriate investigation strategies to work with families of abused children. Social worker can help the abused child and family to deal with the problem. Parental education and public awareness programmes can be organized to sensitize the parents and the public on these issues.

As far as the causes of juvenile delinquency are concerned many of them are related to the family. It is mainly in the family that the child learns about religion, morality, self-help, cooperation, love, sacrifice and sense of service. No child is so constructed at birth that it must certainly become a delinquent and the family is the first agency to affect the direction that particular child will take. Therefore, it is mainly the family that can make the children either the asset or liability to the society. Love and affection is the important psychological needs of a child. If this is disrupted child may develop insecurity, frustration, resentment and hatred. Prevalence of both leniency, severity and inconsistency of discipline within the family are the important causes that result in the delinquent behaviour of children.

At any time, the crises situation like death, severe illness, disablement, communal riots, natural disaster etc. may affect the family in different ways. In such situations, family members may be totally at loss and may not be able to cope up and look for ways and means to reduce the discomfort. Crises intervention is very much required to deal with acute psychological problems resulting from such situations. There may be people who are supporting them but a social worker will be able to give professional help to the clientele system to develop coping skills and ability to face it in future.

CONCLUSION

Appropriate and timely intervention with family can lead to effective functioning of individuals and in turn the society. This would certainly reduce the gravity and number problems at various levels of the society. Even though the social work is practiced in few families related welfare



centres and institutes, the services have not been able to cover a vast majority of the population. In most cases the counsellor is approached as the last remedy after the efforts of non-trained persons like the elders, relatives, friends and respected persons in the community. The practice of social work has already been recognised in family court and in adoption process. Irrespective of the socio-economic background people face various types of problems and they should be helped out in a professional way. It is a challenge to the social worker to prove the effectiveness of social work practice in families. Once this is proved, social work will have better acceptance as a profession in the society. Research in this field has to be strengthened to develop practice knowledge, so that more interventions can be found out in this field. Social work education in new era, should place more emphasis on the practice of social work methods in the families because that is where the future of mankind is.



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