Social Work with Individuals: Social Diagnosis and Treatment of Psycho-Social Problems

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Abstract:

Today, we live in a globalized world with electrifying-scientific wonders and uncountable achievements that excite the human mind. Yes, we live in an age of information with messages coming from satellites thousands of miles away, and medical schools offer departments of medical informatics that computerize each disease and make the information readily available to practitioners in an easy way. Yet, people suffer with loneliness, dejection, psycho-social problems, insecurity, and other difficulties. Social work, which is a modern profession based on scientific knowledge and skills, is one answer to challenges related to communication, feelings, and humane actions. It seeks to enhance the social functioning of individuals, singly and in groups, by activities focused upon their social relationships which constitute the interaction between client and his/her environment. Social work has two methods to intervene the problems which are

primary method and secondary method. Social casework is the part of primary method of social work profession that works with individuals, and family. In the discourse of social work profession, this paper is an attempt to provide a linear understanding of social casework practice. The paper is divided into eight parts. The first part deals with the introduction of social work profession. The second part presents a view on social casework and its objectives. The third part gives a view of principles of social casework. The fourth part presents the framework of social casework practice. The fifth part presents the components of social casework setting. The sixth part presents the skills required in social casework. The seventh part deals with the process of social casework practice. Finally, the last part presents an example of psycho-social model along with conclusion.

Key Words: Social Casework, Client, Social Diagnosis, Social Treatment, and Process.

Introduction:

Social work emerged as a profession early in the twentieth century. Today, it is the profession charged with accomplishing the social welfare mandate of promoting well-being and quality of life. It encompasses activities directed at improving human and social conditions and alleviating human's stress and psycho-social problems. Social workers, as caring professionals, work with people to enhance their competence and social functioning, to access social supports and resources to create humane and responsive social services, and to expand the structures of society that provide opportunities for all citizens (DuBois & Miley, 1999). The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW, 2001) has formulated a respected and well-used definition of social work, as follows: "*The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work*" (Parris, 2012).

Social work is a modern profession based on scientific knowledge and skills, but its roots stretch back into antiquity. The current professionalized form is one expression of social work that has developed as the result of social reformers, advances in knowledge and the rise of democratic ideas. The knowledge base and the skills have been formalized and continue to be developed and there is a distinctive training, a growing body of research and literature, a protected title and professional associations. Many of the values that underpin social work and the motivation that derives people to become a social worker are timeless and universal: *from individual acts of charity to collective action that challenges injustice and oppression.* In recent times, social work services, in response to governmental policies, have tried to limit this scope through procedures to contain those who are eligible, but this has created its own additional work. Moreover, the joy of social work is its combination of the telescopic and the microscopic, its hard-to-define position and its unclear boundaries. The podiatrist

works with feet, the plumber with pipes, but social workers work with the human and social circumstances and conditions (Deol, 2012).

The future of social work profession in the context of British Society is hard to predict. Social workers will need to accept and adjust with periods of intense change in the organization and management of their work. Practitioners must, therefore, retain clarity about their roles and contribution to welfare services and be prepared to argue for the continuing relevance of their role within environments which they may find harsh and unforgiving. The fundamental changes that have been set in training for social work education confirm the fact that social workers must simultaneously operate in ways that deliver a good quality of service, while also being prepared to amend their practice in accordance with frequent adjustments to their organizational locations (Lymbery & Postle, 2007).

Social Casework:

Social casework or social work with individuals is a primary method of social work which is concerned with the adjustment and development of the individual towards more satisfying human relations. Better family life,

improved schools, better housing, more hospitals and medical care facilities, protected economic conditions and better relations between religious groups help the individual in his/her adjustment and development. But his/her adjustment and development depend on the use of these resources by him/her. Sometimes due to certain factors, internal or external, he/she fails to avail existing facilities. In such situations, social caseworker helps him/her. The credit goes to Mary Richmond for defining the social casework scientifically. In 1915, she said that social casework is an art through which help is provided to people for their betterment as well as for the betterment of society. It means that social casework is essential if any country wants to improve and develop society and community. But this definition was not clear and therefore, she defined again in her book named 'Social Diagnosis', 1917, in which she emphasized the specific purpose i.e. better adjustment in the social relationships. Again in 1922, she told that social casework is for change of the personality of the individual for proper social adjustment. In general, the purpose of social casework is to help an individual client to solve his/her psycho-social problems in such a way so that he/she finds him/her capable of dealing with the problems

at present and also may solve in future if such problems arise. Thus, social casework has the following objectives:

- To understand and solve the internal problems of the individual.

- To strengthen his/her ego power.

- Remediation of problems in social functioning.

- Prevention of problems in social functioning.

- Development of resources to enhance social problems (Misra, 1994).

Social casework, as taught and practiced in India today, is understood as an approach to help individuals but not at random. As a method of social work profession, it seeks to help individuals in a systematic way based on knowledge of human behavior and various tested approaches. Every individuals, child or adult, in order to grow and develop, has various needs (psychological, physical and social) to fulfill. The concept of 'social functioning' has gained quite an important place in social casework. This concept fully explains the meaning of the adjective, 'social', used with the word 'casework' and helps in differentiating it from psycho-work, i.e. psychotherapy. Social casework enables an individual to obtain a higher level of social functioning through an interpersonal transaction or face-to-face or person-to-person encounter. The caseworker helps the client to act in order to achieve some personal/social goals by utilizing the available resources in terms of strength of personality of the client, his/her social system or material provisions available in the community and/or agency (Upadhyay, 2012).

Principles of Social Casework:

Biestek has described seven principles of casework relationship which are:

1. **Individualization:** Individualization is the recognition and understanding of each client's unique qualities and the differential use of principles and methods in assisting each client toward a better adjustment. Individualization is based upon the right of human beings to be individuals and to be treated not only as a human being but also as a human being with his/her personal differences.

2. **Purposeful Expression of Feelings:** Purposeful expression of feelings is the recognition of the client's need to express his/her feelings freely, especially negative feelings. The caseworker listens purposefully, neither discouraging nor condemning the expression of feelings, sometimes even actively stimulating and encouraging them

when they are therapeutically useful as a part of the casework practice.

3. **Controlled Emotional Involvement:** The controlled emotional involvement is the caseworker's sensitivity to the client's feelings, an understanding of meaning, and purposeful and appropriate response to the client's feelings.

4. **Acceptance:** Acceptance is a principle of action wherein the caseworker perceives and deals with the client as he/she really is, including his/her strength and weakness, congenial and uncongenial qualities, positive and negative feelings, constructive and destructive attitudes and behavior, maintaining all the while a sense of the client's innate dignity and personal worth.

5. **The Non-judgmental Attitude:** The non-judgmental attitude is a quality of the casework relationship. It is based on a conviction that the casework function excludes assigning guilt or innocence, or degree of client responsibility for causation of the problems or needs, but does include making evaluative judgments about the attitudes, standards, or action of the client.

6. **Self-determination:** The principle of client's self-determination is the practical recognition of the right and need of clients to freedom in making their own choice and decisions in the casework process. Caseworker has a corresponding duty to respect that right, recognize that need, stimulate and help to activate that potential for self direction by helping the client to see and use the available and appropriate resources of the community and of his own personality.

7. **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is the preservation of secret information concerning the client which is disclosed in the professional relationship. Confidentiality is based upon a basic right of the client; it is an ethical obligation of the caseworker and is necessary for effective casework service (Misra, 1994).

The Practice Framework:

Purpose, values, sanctions, knowledge, and methods are at the heart of social work practice with individuals and families:

- **Purpose:** The purpose of social work practice is to prevent or cure the breakdown of a healthy relationship between an individual and his or her family or other associates. It helps people to identify and resolve problems in their relationships or, at least, to minimize their effects. Social work seeks to strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups, and communities.

- **Social Work Values:** Social work assumes the inherent worth and importance of the individual and the interdependence between an individual and his or her family or other associates. Emphasis is placed on the importance of respect for the dignity of the individual, and on his or her ability to make important decisions.

- **Sanctions:** Work with individuals and families, except for private practice, is under the auspices of various governmental and private agencies that receive their sanction from the people. Government agencies are intended to express the will of the people. Private voluntary associations are also mandated by the people to serve human needs. The authorization for services is provided by law, or by policy-making bodies in by-laws and constitutions of agencies reflecting the wishes of the people who support the services of the agencies.

- **Knowledge:** The theory underpinning for casework is derived basically from the profession of social work and from casework practice. Research contributes to the knowledge base and appears to be growing in sophistication and importance. The profession continues to recognize the contributions from the behavioral and natural sciences. Among the more important contributing disciplines are: *dynamic psychology, ego psychology, and the various theoretical developments in sociology, social psychology, psychiatry, and cultural anthropology.*

- **Methods of Social Casework:** Methods of working with individuals and families have remained open. In the 1950s there was much discussion of the diagnostic and functional methods of casework. Many models of casework have been identified: *psychosocial, functional, problem-solving, behavior modification, family group treatment, crisis oriented brief treatment, and adult socialization. One of the newer models is task-oriented casework. The trend in the 1990s appeared to be what has been appropriately labeled selective eclecticism* (Skidmore & et. al., 1991).

The Components of Social Casework Setting:

The nucleus of the casework event is: A *person* with a *problem* comes to a *place* where a professional representative helps him or her by a given *process*:

- **Person:** The person is a man, woman, or a child, anyone who finds himself/herself, or is found to be, in need of help in some aspect of his/her social-emotional living, whether the

need be for tangible provisions or counsel. As he/she begins to receive such help is called a *client.*

- **Problem:** The problem arises from some need or obstacle or accumulation of frustrations or maladjustments, and sometimes all of these together, which threatens or has already attacked the adequacy of the clients' living situation or the effectiveness of efforts to deal with.

- **Place:** The place is a social service agency or a social service department of another kind of human welfare agency. It is a particular kind of social agency and department in that it is set up to deal not with social problems at large but with human beings who are experiencing such problems in the management of their own personal lives.

- **Process:** The process, named 'social casework' to denote its centre of attention and its individualized aspect, is a progressive transaction between the professional social caseworker and the client. It consists of a series of problem-solving operations carried on within a meaningful relationship. The end of this process is contained in its means to influence the client-person that he/she develops effectiveness in coping with his/her problem and/or to so influence the problem as

to resolve it or vitiate its effects (Perlman, 2011).

Skills in Social Casework:

Skill is the capacity to perform a task or an act in such a way that the objectives are realized effectively and within the shortest possible time. Skill development depends upon training, practice, experience and knowledge of human behavior. Basically, there are four skills required for effective casework practice:

I. **Skill In Relationship:** The casework treatment (intervention) that is carried through relationship between the client and caseworker needs creating an atmosphere of trust, confidence and mutual respect wherein the client feels comfortable to express himself/herself and asks for help. Skill lies in showing respect, and genuine interest in the client and his/her problems, respecting his/her opinions and values, and involving him/her in every stage of finding solution of his/her problems.

II. **Skill in Exploring Problems in Depth:** The caseworker ought to possess skills in probing the details and developmental sequence of the problem. Caseworker's ability to help the client to tell his/her story and to indentify his/her real problem requires capacity to listen to, express interest and show respect to the

client's versions along with understanding of human behavior in different conditions, and of social conditions and human problems. Obviously, this requires capacity to empathies with client.

III. **Skill in the Use of Resources:** Very often, services and material resources are used as tools to help the client to solve his/her problems. Therefore, caseworker needs capacity to tap all such resources either available in the friends circle or with the relatives or in the community of the client in general to help him. Caseworker's skill lies in locating and using the resources for helping the client in such a way that it does not damage his/her self-image.

IV. **Skill in Finding out Alternative Solutions:** After having established a congenial relationship, explored his/her problems and tapped the needed resources, it is extremely important to discuss the possible approaches to solve the problems in greater detail with full clarity. Alternative courses of action need to be thrashed out vividly and concretely in terms of its advantages, disadvantages, implications for everyone likely to be affected by this decision. Skill lies in helping the client to understand each alternative with its all implications and to decide for the best possible course of action in the situation. The

suggested actions have to be according to his/her capacity, status, resources and community norms (Upadhyay, 2003).

The Casework Process:

Study, diagnosis, treatment, and termination are the main divisions of the casework process:

- **Study:** In the study phase, the client is engaged in presenting the problem. It is one of the threads of the process that will continue to be interwoven throughout. Interaction and client's participation are emphasized, not because of their special relationship to the beginning phase, but for their importance throughout the process as a setting for the process. In the study phase, the client makes the important decision of whether to enter treatment. The emphasis on the interaction is on the here-and-how and on the problem not as might be perceived by the worker, but as experienced at the moment by the client. Data-gathering and history-taking concentrate on relevance. A sufficiency of facts may be required to satisfy the demands of the agency.

- **Social Diagnosis:** Social diagnosis (assessment) provides a differential approach to treatment based on individual differences and needs. It clearly recognizes the uniqueness of every situation, the importance of treatment

planning related to a particular problematic situation, area of family dysfunction, system breakdown, or trouble within a life situation. Defining the problem is clearly a way of individualizing the person. Assessment begins with a statement of the problem by the client. It is guided by what is indicated by the client to be the major problem and may penetrate a range of somatic, psychosocial, social, cultural, spiritual, and environmental forces. It includes judgment about the strength and limitations of the individual in coping with the situation. The functioning person, the person with mastering ego capacity, can be expected ordinarily to say what brings him/her to the agency. This becomes the point of intersection between the worker and the client. The worker will apply his/her knowledge of forces, knowledge of life situations, problem-producing stresses, and understanding of people to the helping role by questions, comments, and in many non-verbal ways. There is a mutual agreement between the worker and the client in assessment. Goals must be congruent with client's needs and the availability of services. These goals are respected, supported, and reinforced.

- **Social Treatment:** Social treatment (intervention) begins with the first contact. The study process is treatment when it helps

the client to clarify the problem for himself/herself and to make changes in his/her life situation resulting from mutual understanding. Treatment goals are determined by the client and the worker together. Intervention is determined by the client's need, and when the agency does not provide the service indicated the worker has the responsibility to help the client tap other resources. The relationship is the mainspring of social work with individuals and families, with the possible exception of those who follow the behavior-modification model. Warmth, genuineness, and congruence have been identified as essential qualities the worker must bring to the relationship. Combined with interviewing skills, the worker helps the client to tell his/her story and partialize an approach to treatment so as not to be overwhelmed. Treatment skills include interviewing, recording, letter writing, referrals to other agencies and services, and helping the client to use personal and other resources. Intervention efforts support and strengthen the client's ego through emotional catharsis, reassurance, clarification of the problem and sympathetic listening.

- **Termination:** A decision to accept a "case" to intervene professionally, to provide help to an applicant (an individual or to a family)

needing help, carried with it the assumption that at some point in the process the intervention will end. Termination as used in social work means the ending or limiting a process that was commenced when the agency (worker) agreed to enter into the intervention process aimed at delivering a service to a client with a problem (Skidmore & et. al., 1991).

Case Example: Psycho-social Model

- **Study:** Such factors as the following, revealed in the interview, are noted and taken into consideration for assessment and intervention: Soham, the only son in a family of ten children, grew up as a student having parents always protecting him, limiting and controlling his activities, and often thinking for him. Till his schooling, parents were supportive any how to afford his study. But suddenly parents denied him to get higher education believing that there will only be the wastage of money and time for higher study. He tried his best to convince his father and relatives to support and afford his higher education but result was zero. The only way was to drop the ambition of higher study and get involved with father's local business. He was also unable to compromise with the

situation and scattered into rays of hopes deciding to leave home.

- **Assessment:** Soham, excessively dependent upon his parents, resented this dependency, and wanted to break out of the box he felt he was in. He also was resentful of the conviction of his relatives, even though this dependency was age appropriate. His feelings of helplessness in social situations, with his father and relatives, appeared to be referable to the long period of time.

- **Intervention:** The goal was to support Soham in efforts to become more self-reliant and to help him for helping himself. He was encouraged to make decisions affecting his life. He was helped to question him about strength of his earning. He shared his skill that he was efficient to teach English language and its grammar. He was aided to understand why he resented his dependency and how to cope with this by encouraging him to be self-reliant and earning and getting higher education together as well as maintaining good relationship with family also. He was helped to understand his dependency and how to handle his relationships with parents and relatives without feeling helpless and dejected.

- **Termination:** When Soham engaged himself with a coaching centre, started teaching

English language, and he got first salary, he was now just to move on to realize his capacity to carry on his higher education.

Conclusion:

The purpose of social casework is to help an individual client to solve his/her psycho-social problems in such a way that he/she finds himself/herself capable of dealing with such problems at present and also may solve in future as well if arise. Before studying the problem of client by the caseworker, rapport building is an inevitable part of social casework process. While involving in the social case work process, the caseworker is to abide by the professional principles, goals, values, and application of social casework along with its knowledge and skills.

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