

SOCIAL WORK

Social work refers to the systematic forms of support and counselling that are offered to families experiencing severe financial and/or relational difficulties. In the nineteenth century such support was offered by charitable bodies whose work gradually became subsumed by that of the state as social work became a professional public service in the twentieth century.

Overview

Organizing and bureaucratizing efforts to alleviate human suffering are relatively new, but the call to help others is as old as humanity itself. In fact, many religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism) mandate helping others as one avenue by which religious duties can be fulfilled. Regardless of its origins – religious teachings, a call to serve humanity, governmental or non-governmental directive – perhaps the broadest and most fitting definition of social work is the activity of helping people to deal with problems. Such efforts to help others, once formally organized and grounded in scientific inquiry, constitute the beginning of social work as a profession. The origins of social work in countries across the world have depended greatly on social, economic and political conditions. Generally, when socio-political and economic conditions are unstable, the attention of members of society must necessarily focus on survival. Likewise, when conditions stabilize and sufficient resources follow, there is greater opportunity for people to pay attention to the needs of others in society. Ironically, when aid is most needed, it is probably least likely to be delivered.

In spite of historical claims that social work should not be considered a profession because it lacked scientific inquiry; the field has gained a specialized knowledge base and currently boasts a membership of

thousands of practitioners and more than 2,000 educational programmes worldwide. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), an organization that seeks to promote international social work linkage, has 485,000 members in seventy-seven member countries. Although cultural relativism can become a significant factor in assessing problems and providing interventions, the IFSW has forged twelve principles that provide direction to social workers everywhere. In turn, many of the national social work associations incorporate these principles into their national codes of ethics. The twelve principles are:

- 1 Every human being has a unique value.
- 2 Each individual has the right to self-fulfilment.
- 3 Each society, regardless of its form, should function to provide the maximum benefits for all of its members.
- 4 Social workers have a commitment to principles of social justice.
- 5 Social workers have the responsibility to devote objective and disciplined knowledge and skill to aid individuals, groups, communities and societies in their development and resolution of personal-societal conflicts and their consequences.
- 6 Social workers are expected to provide the best possible assistance to anybody seeking their help and advice, without discrimination on the basis of gender, age, disability, colour, social class, race, religion, language, political beliefs or sexual orientation.
- 7 Social workers should respect the basic human rights of individuals and groups as expressed in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international conventions derived from that declaration.

- 8 Social workers pay regard to the principles of privacy, confidentiality, and responsible use of information in their professional work. Social workers respect justified confidentiality even when their country's legislation is in conflict with this demand.
- 9 Social workers are expected to work in full collaboration with their clients, working for the best interests of the clients but paying due regard to the interests of others involved. Clients are encouraged to participate as much as possible, and should be informed of risks and likely benefits of proposed courses of action.
- 10 Social workers generally expect clients to take responsibility and collaborate with them to determine courses of action affecting their lives. Compulsion, which might be necessary to solve one party's problems at the expense of the interests of others involved, should only take place after careful and explicit evaluation of the claims of the conflicting parties. Social workers should minimize the use of legal compulsion.
- 11 Social work is inconsistent with direct or indirect support for individuals, groups, political forces or power structures that oppress their fellow human beings by employing terrorism, torture or similar brutal means.
- 12 Social workers make ethically justified decisions and stand by them, paying due regard to the IFSW International Declaration of Ethical Principles, and to the International Ethical Standards for Social Workers adopted by their national professional association.

In addition to the IFSW, other international social work organizations include the International Association of Schools of Social Work, which promotes quality edu-

cation and training of social workers; the International Council on Social Welfare, which promotes social development and social welfare and works in conjunction with the United Nations (UN) on social development; and the Inter-University Consortium for International Social Development, an interdisciplinary organization that promotes social development through teaching, practising, researching and networking.

Today, in addition to creating its own theoretical base of more than twenty systems, social work draws from the social and behavioural sciences, thus resting heavily on a generalist foundation for helping others. Generalist practice emphasizes considering the significance of environmental influences on the person (i.e. the person-in-environment perspective) and being able to intervene on many levels – both seeking social reform and tending to the needs of individuals – while also assuming a variety of roles. No matter where in the world they practise, all social workers fundamentally share a belief in the interactive nature of people and their environments.

Currently, the profession's members practise in a variety of specialized areas, including mental health, child and family, medical, psychiatric, and school social work, where they encounter a host of social problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, neglect, malnutrition, poverty and mental illness. Social workers also serve as policy analysts, legislative advocates, therapists, counsellors, case managers, supervisors, directors and managers of social service programmes (including large-scale agencies), emergency aid workers, specialists, educators, researchers and community organizers.

History

In surveying social work, it quickly becomes clear that the antecedents of the profession across the world have their roots

in a series of English laws, especially the Elizabethan Poor Laws codified in 1601, which provide guidance on how to deal with the poor. The USA, the Netherlands and Germany followed suit by borrowing heavily from the English laws, which ultimately gave rise to the social work profession. Much of the social work in other parts of the world (Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Canada, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries) developed because of international influences as people travelled or read about how to cope with the conditions of the late nineteenth century in their own nations. Given this history, much of the discussion that follows must present the European description of social work as a profession.

Until the enactment of the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601, local parishes had full responsibility to care for the poor. In fact, the law was instituted not to alleviate poverty, but rather because the English ruling class was annoyed with vagrants. By most accounts, population growth and urbanization were the reasons for the increased number of poor needing assistance during this time. In addition to the transfer of responsibility to care for the poor from the church to the state, the law has had a far-reaching impact, which persists even today. Among other beliefs, Elizabethan Poor Laws espoused that relatives were responsible for the well-being of those who were unable to care for themselves, and that relief should be administered locally. The Poor Laws also established three categories of relief recipients: the able-bodied poor, who could be given low-grade employment; the impotent poor, who were disabled and unable to work due to 'legitimate' reasons; and dependent children, who were generally apprenticed out to work for citizens until age 24 for boys and 21 for girls. The Elizabethan Poor Laws successfully laid the foundation for a bifurcated system of poverty relief into the 'worthy' (or deserving) and the 'unworthy'

(undeserving) that underlies relief policies today across Europe and North America.

Two movements in the late nineteenth century, the Charity Organization Society (COS), which began in 1869, and the Settlement House movement, which began in 1884, had in common the goal of helping the poor, but differed significantly by approach. The COS emphasized individual failure as the cause of poverty while the Settlement House movement focused on external causes, such as the environment. These two movements are largely credited with initiating the development of contemporary social work and defining its overarching and conflicting theories: poverty is the cause and consequence of individual failure; or poverty is an inevitable outcome of industrialization, urbanization and population growth. Both movements originated in England and their ideology, in some measure, later influenced other nations.

Charity Organization Society

The COS model of assisting the poor established, as its primary goal, the provision of relief to the needy through organized and coordinated relief entities, including maintaining a registry of the poor and utilizing 'friendly visitors', generally middle- and upper-class white women who volunteered their time, to visit the poor. The role of these friendly visitors was generally to serve as mentors and moral guides to the poor by providing them advice on budgeting and rearing children. Friendly visitors were the forerunners of present day social workers.

The emphasis of the COS movement was on teaching the indigent 'proper' moral conduct, because this movement considered the cause of poverty to be attributable to social and behavioural characteristics of individuals. The eventual reorganization of the COS and its emphasis on 'scientific charity', the systematic delivery of services to attain efficiency and

effectiveness, along with the need to train its workers through formal methods, would quicken the professionalization of social work. The most notable COS leaders in England were Samuel and Henrietta Barnett and Octavia Hill, while in the United States the prominent COS leaders were Mary Richmond and Josephine Shaw Lowell.

Settlement House movement

The cornerstone of the Settlement House movement rested in the belief that poverty and its associated problems could be resolved. Unlike the friendly visitors of COS who called upon individuals in their homes, provided advice, and returned to their own environments, the Settlement House workers were expected to live in the poor communities to get to know the poor intimately. Beyond residence, though, there was another profound difference between the friendly visitors and COS workers. The friendly visitors considered themselves superior to those whom they were assisting, while the Settlement House workers became a natural and cohesive element of the community and, therefore, were less threatening in their approach to helping the poor. Although the Settlement House method was considered less professional in nature, it appealed to some of the COS volunteers who later became Settlement House workers. Settlement Houses were supported by private donations, which in some instances provided workers with housing and small stipends, but many workers remained volunteers. Because the movement's workers saw the environment as a causative factor in social problems, they sought social reforms, including better working conditions, cleaner neighbourhoods, and the democratization of institutions. The efforts of Settlement House workers were directed at both the local and national level. The most notable Settlement House leaders in the United States were Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, foun-

ders of Hull House, which was modelled after Toynbee Hall, a London Settlement House.

Residual and institutional ideologies

Perceptions of how poverty and other disabling conditions are prompted have direct implications for the type and scale of aid provided. Generally, solutions constructed have been either residual or institutional in approach. The residual approach embraces providing support only when the family and the economy prove unable to meet an individual's needs. Thus, support is not an entitlement, but a gift provided by the state or others. This ideology views poverty as being an individual's fault (for lack of industriousness, generally) and therefore the assistance provided is commonly 'means-tested', requiring that individuals prove that they have no other means of survival. Residual-based programmes have a punitive and stigmatized approach to providing aid. The institutional approach purports that poverty results from shifts in the market economy (for example, farming to manufacturing to technological) and increased urbanization and, therefore, assistance ought to be provided to individuals as a legitimate function that enables those individuals to realize their full potential. Institutional-based programmes carry less of a stigma and are more generous in the aid they provide.

Social policies, values and social work

All policies, regardless of the issue they address, ultimately impact societal members. Thus, policies are intricately intertwined with social work because they are supposed to be solutions to society's problems although they sometimes become the source of 'ill-fare'. However, economic (fiscal) and social welfare policies (health,

security, child protection, etc.) have a more direct impact on societal members. If these policies are biased to benefit the few, then their repercussions may include negative consequences for the masses, particularly vulnerable groups, such as the aged, children, and poor. Social workers, through their social justice orientation, are expected to advocate equitable policies so that some members of society are not systematically hindered in their attempts to lead productive, dignified and fulfilling lives. In this regard, social work, social policy and values are interconnected. In fact, the principles of the IFSW support one universal hallmark of the profession of social work internationally: it is a very strong value-based profession. Values, however, differ in every society because they are inherently culturally driven. Currently, social work's value base, according to its critics, has a significant 'Western' bias. The issue of values and social policies produces complex and often controversial philosophical arguments within the field of social work, which, in turn, shape relief programmes and services provided.

Social work education

In order to move social work into the professional realm, the charity movements had to establish training schools where knowledge could be formally transferred from experienced to inexperienced workers. Currently, BA, MA, Ph.D. and DSW degrees are offered within the social work discipline. Many developed countries have licensing requirements. However, in many developing nations, there are simply not enough workers to meet the demand for human needs; thus regulation has not taken priority.

While there are no consistent standards for education training internationally, in the United States the Council on Social Work Education requires that five areas, micro and macro in focus, be covered in

training newcomers. The five areas are: human behaviour and the social environment, social work practice skills, research, social policy, and a supervised field practicum. Social work training in the United States is provided through university settings. In Europe, three conditions must be met for social work recognition: there must be an official regulating body, education must surpass high school, and the training duration must be at least three years. As van Wormer explains, in some parts of Europe (Spain and Italy), social workers are trained in the university while in other parts (Denmark, France, Germany and England) there is a mixed set of post-secondary programmes. Technical and specialized schools provide social work education in Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal. Universities perform this role in Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary. Russia and Kyrgyzstan are in the initial stages of formulating education entities. Most of Latin America, many African countries, and Australia and New Zealand train through university programmes. In India, there are over thirty professional schools of social work and education is provided at a higher level than in many European countries. Finally, although social workers were being trained during the 1930s, it was during the 1960s that Egypt, South Africa and Uganda established their schools of social work.

Contemporary issues

A fundamental irony of social work is that without social problems, which have ebbed and flowed in both magnitude and intensity throughout history, social work could not exist as a profession. And yet, perhaps because of human nature and some of what it embodies – inequities, greed, selfishness, violence, the potential for neglect and abuse, and its corrupt political and economic systems which, in part, result in family breakdown – social work is well secured. If social work has its roots in

population growth, rapid urbanization, and at the same time limited and diminishing resources, then social work has much work ahead, because the world's population is projected to be a little over 9 billion by 2050. In addition, many contemporary international issues face the social work community and require intervention and social action, including: gross human rights violations internationally (China, Palestine); ethnic cleansing (Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Croatia); massive immigration and refugee movements (Sudan, Ethiopia); repercussions of colonialism in the developing nations, especially in Africa; lack of health care for millions of people globally; terrorism; starvation (Malawi, India); a disproportionate amount of violence against girls and women in most countries; lack of fresh water supplies; and the spread of AIDS worldwide. Social workers internationally share not only their low professional status, but they also share in their common struggle to promote social justice and well-being for the masses in an increasingly interdependent world.

The profession faces formidable challenges not just in meeting its mission of aiding others, but also from within. Will social workers, who have generally provided services in non-profit and governmental settings abandon their professions' altruistic history and be lured instead to fee-for-service and private offices? Will social workers in developed nations push for further democratization of their nations where race relations remain fragile and wide economic gaps persist between the haves and have-nots? Will social workers in developing nations feel empowered to stand against injustices supported or perpetrated by their government leaders despite the fact that their own lives are placed at risk? Given the increased complexity of power relations among nations and how this comes to bear on the citizenry, one issue remains certain for the profession – the need to help fellow human beings will always exist.

See also: Addams, Jane; charity; class; disability; discrimination; domestic violence; gender; means-testing; mental health; Poor Law; poverty; religion; social control; social justice; social problems; social welfare; substance abuse

Further reading

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SOCIALISM

The broad aim of socialism is to create a humane, just, cooperative and egalitarian society. Over time, however, there have been differences of opinion regarding both the theory and practice of socialism. Should socialism be equated with an unchanging set of beliefs or a particular form of economic organization? Is it a transitional stage on the road to communism? Can socialism be achieved through democratic means or is revolutionary change required? Can socialism co-exist with capitalism?

As with other political doctrines, it is more appropriate to think in terms of *socialisms* rather than one all-encompassing vision of socialism. This is particularly demonstrated in the period following the