UNIT 12: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF SOCIAL WORKERS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to-

- Describe the concept of professional self
- Explain the significance of effective communication
- Understand the ideal traits of professional personality
- Discuss the symptoms of stress at workplace

12.2 INTRODUCTION- SELF DEVELOPMENT

Self development is the process of deciding and taking actions to improve or develop one's self. It includes learning, unlearning and relearning new skills to develop one's personality. Self development is taking responsibility for one's own learning and development through a process of assessment, reflection and action. Understanding of a person's self can be assessed through our understanding of one's relationship with the social environment.

Self awareness or self discovery is an ongoing and everlasting process. People make attempts to discover their potentials as long as they live. Self perceptions form an important component of self awareness. However, perceptions about self may be uncertain for each individual. William James was one of the earliest theorists who described the nature of 'the self'. According to him, **the self has three main aspects**- the material self, the social self and the spiritual self. Material self comprises of a person's possessions, body and family. Social self implies a person's social relationships in the society with his/ her social environment i.e. other people. Spiritual self implies how the person deals with the spiritual and mental aspects of his/her life. It is said that self-discovery is an ongoing process.

12.3 COMMUNICATION FOR EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING

Communication is an essential aspect of human behavior because 'man is a social animal'. Communication implies an action for creating a common understanding. It is natural for people to express feelings, opinions, information and ideas to other people through verbal, written, body language or signs. It is an integral part of life.

Peter Little defines communication as "the process by which information is passed between individuals and/or organizations by means of previously agreed symbols". Here 'previously agreed symbols' denote use of language, signs, expressions, written/ spoken words, that are commonly understood. Similarly, Robert Anderson defines communication as "the interchange of thoughts, opinions or information by speech, writing or signs".

Communication is one of the most essential components of any organization and profession too. Without communication any organization cannot exist. An organization is a group of individuals who aim to achieve specific objectives. Proper coordination of human efforts within an organization is indispensible to achieve its set goals. An effective system of organizational communication ensures coordination and integration of various human activities.

12.3.1 Types of Communication

On the basis of number of members involved in a communication process, following are the classifications-

Intrapersonal Communication: Interacting with oneself about one's feelings, clarifying one's doubts, fears, acknowledging the feelings and rationalizing one's own and others actions, empathizing.

Interpersonal Communication: it refers to the exchange of messages, symbols, ideas and feelings between two persons. Interpersonal communication can be in the form of either verbal, non-verbal or written communication. Examples are of book or letter author/ writer- reader, interviewer-interviewee.



Non-Verbal communication includes signs, facial expressions and gestures.

Group communication: it can be between small or large groups, like in an organization, classroom.

Mass communication: here messages, information is sent to large groups of people, for example, through newspapers, radio or television

On the basis of medium of communication, following is the classification-

Verbal communication: it refers to communicating with written or spoken words. It involves listening, speaking, writing, reading and thinking. It may further be classified as oral or written communication.

Non-verbal communication: it refers to use of signs, pictures, facial expressions, gestures in order to exchange information, feelings and thoughts. Wordless messages are conveyed through all aspects of expressions, signs, movements (action language) and gestures (body language, signs) and object language (pictures, clothes, etc). Further, non-verbal communication can be identified by personal space, sense of smell and time.

Formal communication: it is a means of communication that is formally controlled by management or persons who occupy positions in an organization. The information, from both ways flow through formal lines of communication. It can be related to any information, decision, reminder, leaves, event, rules and regulations, etc. formal communication ensures

orderly passing of these information timely and with accuracy.

Informal communication: Informal communication runs parallel to formal communication in any organization. It mainly refers to informal interaction on a daily basis in any organization. 'grapevine communication' because it runs in all directions - horizontal, vertical, diagonal.

Downward and Upward Communication: In any organizational hierarchical system, when information flows from top to bottom, it is known as downward communication. When information flows from bottom to upper level in the hierarchy, it is known as upward communication.

Lateral and Diagonal Communication: when two or more individuals, who are working in the same hierarchical level, or may be subordinates working under the same person, interact or communicate, it is known as lateral communication. Diagonal or crosswise communication refers to the flow of information between people at different levels, who have no direct reporting relationships in an organizational set-up.

12.3.2 Importance of Communication in Social Work Profession:

Social work profession, which is based on use of self by establishing purposeful client- social worker relationship, communication plays a key role here. There is more to good communication than just being able to talk. Good communication comprises of knowledge that comes from education and life experiences, speaking, listening, expressing, analyzing information and presentation. Communication is a two-way process that includes sharing knowledge, information, feeling and experiences. Thus, speaking as well as patience to listen and analyze information and react to it, form an integral part of effective communication.

Let us discuss some of the significant aspects of communication in social work profession:

- Information sharing and sending across correct message
- Problem solving through effective communication between individuals and groups
- Assists in decision-making: communication between social worker and client ascertains better decision making to solve problems

- Communication is the key to efficient group construction/ formation and helps in co-ordination of efforts to deal with difficult situations and issues that the clients face
- Communication ensures motivating people and facilitates the expression of feelings. It helps in dealing with grievances and emotional problems.

12.4 CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL PERSONALITY

Personality can be defined as a set of characteristics of a person's nature that are stable and hardly change either over a period of time or in differing situations. Thus, these characteristics account for a consistent pattern of behavior in a person.

Similarly, professional personality is defined as personality of a person with regard to his/ her profession. Organizations classify personality for the selection of employees as well as their training. The two categories are:

Type A: restless, impatient and desire to achieve goals quickly

Type B: easy going, less competitive and philosophical in nature

There are many factors that contribute to the formation of personality. The first category consists of factors related to hereditary 'ie his/ her genes and the second factor consists of environment factors ie his/ her social environment. The environmental factors include the influences of family environment, social interactions, culture and atmosphere of the organization.

Attributes of professional personality

An ideal professional personality would include the following attributes-

- Understanding the culture of the organization and the profession in general that he or she is part of. Only then it would ensure effective functioning of an individual as a professional.
- Knowledge and skill of a profession should be acquired by a professional and there should be continuous efforts to enhance the skills and thrive for self-improvement.
- Open to criticism and self- acceptance. A professional should be open to feedback on his work from supervisors or clients in case

of social workers

- Team spirit is a key element to successful functioning of any profession. The professional should possess skills to handle conflict situations
- Other important attributes of professional personality includes emotional stability of the person, ability to isolate personal life from the professional, rationality in decision-making, creativity, i.e. ability to imagine, create 'out-of the box', self motivation and possess good inter-personal skills for effective communication. Thus, a social worker needs to have these ideal traits for functioning effectively in this profession which is based on human interactions and building professional relationships with the clients/ beneficiaries.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: According to William James, what are the three aspects of self?

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Q 2: What are the types of personality?

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12.5 PROFESSIONAL STRESS AND BURNOUT

Work related stress is associated with burnout, job satisfaction and physical as well as mental health outcomes. Stressors contributing to the experience of work related stress, including poor supervision, conflict with peers and patients, high job demands, overtime, etc.

Conceptually, personal stress includes stress experienced in the home environment including ongoing health problems of loved ones, relationship

problems as well as financial problems whereas work stress includes stress experienced in the work environment related to patient care, job demands, staff issues, lack of support and overtime. These stressors have been known to affect burnout, job satisfaction and health outcomes through a pattern of physiological, emotional, behavioural and cognitive processes.

It is important to note that burnout and job satisfaction have also been found to be associated with each other as well as poor health outcomes. Although not studied extensively in relation to work related stress, existing research shows a negative relationship between burnout and job satisfaction. According to the conservation of resources theory, burnout directly affects health outcomes through the depletion of resources necessary for coping, thereby leading to negative states of being characterized by exhaustion, fatigue and social withdrawal.



Burn-out is a state of physical and emotional depletion and a result of prolonged stressful work environment

Burn-out is described as a state of physical and emotional depletion, it is a result of prolonged exposure to stressful working environments. Ten signs of burn-out are:

1. Exhaustion

A clear sign of burnout is when one feels tired all the time. Exhaustion can be emotional, mental or physical. It's the sense of not having any energy, of being completely spent.

2. Lack of Motivation

When one doesn't feel enthusiastic about anything anymore or no longer have that internal motivation for work, there's a good chance one is experiencing burnout. It may be harder to get going in the morning and more difficult to drag oneself into work every day.

3. Frustration, Cynicism and Other Negative Emotions

One may feel like what one is doing doesn't matter that much anymore, or may be disillusioned with everything. One feels more generally pessimistic than before. While everybody experiences some negative emotions from time to time, it's important to know when these are becoming unusual.

4. Cognitive Problems

Burnout and chronic stress may interfere with the ability to pay attention or concentrate. When we're stressed, our attention narrows to focus on the negative element that we perceive as a threat.

5. Slipping Job Performance

To identify burn-out , it is important to compare one's job performance of present and past or previous years. Because burnout tends to happen over an extended period of time, taking this long-term view might reveal whether one is in a temporary slump or experiencing more chronic burnout.

6. Interpersonal Problems at Home and at Work

This tends to play out in one of two ways: (a) having more conflicts with other people, such as getting into arguments, or (b) withdraw, talking to your co-workers and family members less. You might find that even when you're physically there, you're tuned out.

7. Not Taking Care of Oneself

When suffering from burnout, some people engage in unhealthy coping strategies like drinking too much, smoking, being too sedentary, eating too much junk food, not eating enough or not getting enough sleep. Self-medication is another issue and could include relying on sleeping pills to sleep, drinking more alcohol at the end of the day to de-stress or even drinking more coffee to summon up the energy to drag yourself into work in the morning.

8. Being Preoccupied With Work even when Not at Work

Even though one might not be working at a given moment, a stressed person feels expending mental energy mulling over job, then work is interfering with one's ability to recover from the stresses of the day. In order to recover, we need time to ourself after the actual task stops and time when you stop thinking about that task altogether.

9. Generally Decreased Satisfaction

This is the tendency to feel less happy and satisfied with your career and with your home life. You might feel dissatisfied or even stuck when it comes to whatever is going on at home, in the community or with your social activities.

10. Health Problems

Over a long period of time, serious chronic stress can create real health problems like digestive issues, heart disease, depression and obesity. It can lead to eating disorders and sleep disorders.

Thus, work- related stress and burnout is there in every profession though it varies from personality to personality and from profession to profession. In cases where such stress develops to a high level, seeking professional help as counsellors is very crucial to prevent further harming of one's physical and mental health.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Define 'burn-out'.

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Q 4: What are the common stressors/ stress factors at workplace?

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12.6 LET US SUM UP

- An ideal professional personality would include the following attributes- Understanding the culture of the organization and the profession in general that he or she is part of. Only then it would ensure effective functioning of an individual as a professional.

- Knowledge and skill of a profession should be acquired by a professional and there should be continuous efforts to enhance the skills and thrive for self-improvement. Open to criticism and self- acceptance is important. A professional should be open to feedback on his work from supervisors or clients in case of social workers.
- Work- related stress and burnout is there in every profession though it varies from personality to personality and from profession to profession. In cases where such stress develops to a high level, seeking professional help as counsellors is very crucial to prevent further harming of one's physical and mental health.
- Good communication comprises of knowledge that comes from education and life experiences, speaking, listening, expressing, analyzing information and presentation. Communication is a two-way process that includes sharing knowledge, information, feeling and experiences. Thus, speaking as well as patience to listen and analyze information and react to it, form an integral part of effective communication.



12.7 FURTHER READING

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12.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

Answer 1. According to William James, the self has three main aspects- the material self, the social self and the spiritual self.

Answer 2. The two categories of personality are:

Type A: restless, impatient and desire to achieve goals quickly

Type B: easy going, less competitive and philosophical in nature

Answer 3. Burnout is described as a state of physical and emotional depletion, it is a result of prolonged exposure to stressful working environments.

Answer 4. Stressors contributing to the experience of work related stress, including poor supervision, conflict with peers and patients, high job demands, overtime, etc.



12.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q.1: How does the concept of 'self' influence one's functioning in a profession?

Q.2: What are the types of communication?

Q.3: Explain the significance of effective communication in social work.

Q.4: How does professional stress and burn out affect job satisfaction?

Q.5: Describe the indicators of burn-out.

Q.6: State the ideal traits of a professional personality.