UNIT 2: PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL WORK

UNIT STRUCTURE

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the philosophy and values of social work profession
- Explain the principles of social work
- Analyze the issues of marginalized groups and significance of social work in this regard

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Social work is a novice profession and is guided by principles and values. In the previous unit we have discussed the objectives, functions and the six methods of social work. In the present unit let us discuss the philosophy, values and principles of this profession. Let us also understand the vulnerability of the marginalized groups and why social work is necessary to deal with issues of discrimination. This is aligned with the philosophy and objectives of social work practice.

2.3 PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL WORK

Philosophy is the beliefs and principles underlying any department of knowledge. It is the study of truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct. A belief (or system of beliefs) accepted as authoritative by some group or school .Thus it is clear that the concept of philosophy is grounded in the understanding that there are truths and principles of our existence and that these truths are accepted by us as well as others. We can have a set of truths and principles that guide us in how we conduct ourselves and define what we expect from others.

The philosophy of social work is based on humanitarism, liberalism and democracy. Except from devotion to welfare of human beings, social worker has to find a method of enabling those who are assisted to regain their confidence in themselves for the proper adjustment to normal life. The introduction of the concept and philosophy of democracy further strengthened the need to recognize every human being as an individual, worthy of respect and recognition, the individual being given the rights as well as responsibilities of an equal citizen in a democratic society. The consent of the governed, rule of the majority, respect for the creative minority, freedom of assembly, speech and religion supported the development of the individual in his own right. Underlying these factors lay the philosophy of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. It is in the background of this philosophy of life that the methods of social work have been developed by the practitioners.

2.4 BASIC VALUES OF SOCIAL WORK

Values are beliefs about what is good and desirable. It is defined as a conception of a standard , cultural or merely personal , by which things are compared and approved or disapproved in relation to one another, held to be relatively desirable or undesirable, more meritorious or less, more or less correct. The profession of social work is grounded in a value system that focuses on social justice and fairness. Following are the core values of social work:

1. Respect individuals' worth and dignity, encourage mutual participation, demonstrate acceptance, uphold confidentiality, express honesty and handle conflict responsibly.
2. Encourage individuals' active participation in the helping relationship and uphold their right to make their own decisions.
3. Assist clients in securing resources needed to enhance their social functioning
4. Ensure that social institutions are humane and responsive to human needs.
5. Accept and appreciate diverse populations
6. Hold themselves accountable for ethical conduct, quality of their work and continuous professional development



Humanitarianism, Liberalism and Democracy are the main philosophies of social work profession.

2.5 PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL WORK

Principles are the guiding assertions of statements which are guiding force for social work practice. These basic rules enable a practitioner to be competent in his/her profession. The objectives of social work can be fulfilled only within the framework of principles. Therefore, let us discuss the basic principles which are guiding force for social work practice.

i. **Principle of Individualization:** The principle of individualization is fundamental for effective social work practice since the betterment of the individual is the primary purpose of social work. Individualization is the recognition and understanding of each client's unique qualities and the differential use of principles and methods in assisting each one towards better adjustment and participate in the changing process. A social worker must treat his/her client not merely as a human being but a human being with his/her personal differences. The social worker must individualize the client, because for every client the situation and problem may be unique. What works with one client may not work with another. No two persons are alike in all qualities and traits. Their problems may be the same but the cause of the problem, the perception towards the problem and ego strength differs in

every individual. Therefore, each individual client should be treated as a separate entity and complete information is required to establish close relations in order to solve his/her problem from root.

ii. **Principle of Meaningful Relationship:** Professional relationship is essential for the success of social work practice. The quality of relationship is the corner stone of helping in social work. This relationship is developed in social work by demonstrating the interest in client, who is perceived as a real person with spontaneity and capacity for responsiveness within the democratic frame of reference the professional relationship involves a mutual process of shared responsibilities, recognition of other's rights, acceptance of difference, with the goal of socialized attitudes and behavior stimulating growth through interaction. The essence of relationship is seen as an interplay, a mutual emotional exchange, an attitude, a dynamic interaction, a connection between two persons and a mutual process.

iii. **Principle of Self-determination:** Social responsibility, emotional adjustment and personality development are possible when the person exercises his freedom of choice and decision. An ethical principle that recognizes the rights and needs of clients to be free to make their own choices and decisions. Inherent in this principle is the requirement for the member to help the client know what the resources and choices are and what potential consequences of selecting anyone of them may be.

iv. **Principle of Acceptance:** Social work accepts the individual as he is and with all his limitations. The social worker is expected to respect every client as human being without any judgmental attitude. A social worker must appreciate the variations within any group. He should avoid making assumptions about any person's cultural identity, beliefs or values on the basis of the person's external characteristics or membership in a particular population or demographic group. The principle of acceptance implies that

social workers must perceive, acknowledge, receive and establish a relationship with the individual client as he actually is, not as we wish him to be or think he should be. It means that no matter how much the client may differ from the social worker, client need to be accepted and acknowledged as he is if we are to help him.

v. **Principle of Social Functioning:** Social functioning refers to the functioning of people in their social roles and relationships, with emphasis on their relation to the environment. The common base of social work consists in a central focus on social functioning, an orientation towards people involved in the situation, use of social work values and the combined body of social work knowledge for working with individuals and groups.



Principle of Individualization is the recognition of each client's unique qualities and **Acceptance** is accepting the client with all his/ her limitations.

vi. **Principle of Tuning Behavior:** Every individual has body, mind and intellect as three instruments of experiences through life constantly pulsates. These three instruments have their own distinct characteristics in each person. Hence each person has unique personality. There is a need of tuning these instruments regularly so that he may have the proper experience of the world fully. Social work therefore believes that through tuning of behavior of an individual his problems can be minimized if not wholly solved and he feels and realizes a new strength running in his body and mind.

vii. **Principle of Social Learning:** Social learning is a pre-requisite to the changes that are inevitably involved in problem solving. Change in individual, group or community will depend on their capacity to learn new facts, attitudes and ways of behavior. Social learning is an essential part of social work practice whether the change is initiated by social action or individual therapy.

viii. **Principle of Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is essential to professional relationship. It is the foundation for any therapeutic relationship with a client. Therefore worker should keep confidential the information which is being shared by the client. Sharing such information unnecessarily with outsiders can easily

break worker client relationship. Ensuring the client of confidentiality of his/ her sharing personal information and experiences shared, builds up trust in the professional relationship between the client and the social worker.

ix. **Principle of Communication:** Communication is the road through which the social worker identifies with the client. The function of social worker is principally to create an environment in which the client will feel comfortable in giving expression to his feelings. Client should feel that he can tell his story in his own way and he may think that he is given due importance. Two-way effective communication is the key to the success of solving client's issues and empowering him/her. Communication ensures expression and analysis of feelings, experiences and information necessary to deal with for the wellbeing of the client.

Thus the principles of social work are necessary for the profession that act as guidelines for social workers in dealing with client's issues and strive for the betterment of individuals, groups and communities. In this context, let us try to understand the main target groups of social work who are more vulnerable to discrimination and injustice. They are identified as 'vulnerable groups'. However, apart from the vulnerable groups, anyone can seek professional social work help to deal with various issues faced in life- situations.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the philosophy of social work profession?

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Q 2: Explain the principle of social learning.

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2.6 MARGINALIZATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Marginalization is a complex as well as shifting phenomenon linked to social status. It is an experience that affects millions of people throughout the world. People who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives, and the resources available to them. This results in making them handicapped in delving contribution to society. A vicious circle is set up whereby their lack of positive and supportive relationships means that they are prevented from participating in local life, which in turn leads to further isolation. This has a tremendous impact on development of human beings, as well as on society at large. If we analyse the situation of marginality of the vulnerable groups, we would find that it is a complex phenomenon and needs to be examined along several dimensions. The areas of marginality include personal, collective, education, economic, health, cultural and ecological.

Personal dimensions include inadequate food consumption, lack of employment, poor housing and other facilities, oppression etc. The collective dimensions are leadership imposed from outside, conflict among themselves, lack of resistance to discrimination etc. Economic marginalization include lack of equitable access to land and other natural resources, poor wages for labour and not getting access to subsidized public input. Political dimension of marginalization are lack of representation and a political system which does not favour the interests of the marginalized section of society. Educational dimensions include lack of equal opportunity for education, inadequate reservations and lack of financial support for continuing higher education. Health dimensions of marginalization are lack of health facilities and inaccessibility of the people to decision making related to health. Other areas of marginalization are lack of community facilities and ecological imbalances due to deterioration of land, water, air and other natural resources.



Marginalization : implies little control over their lives and resources available to certain sections of the society.

Vulnerable groups: Certain groups in the society often encounter discriminatory treatment and need special attention to avoid potential exploitation. This population constitutes what is referred to as vulnerable

groups. But the task of identifying the vulnerable groups is not an easy one. There are multiple and complex factors of vulnerability with different layers and more often than once it cannot be analysed in isolation. Most vulnerable marginalized groups in almost every society can be summarized as below:

1. **Women:** Under different economic conditions, and under the influence of specific historical, cultural, legal and religious factors, marginalization is one of the manifestations of gender inequality. Women face double discrimination being members of specific caste, class or ethnic group apart from being experiencing gendered vulnerabilities. They have always been viewed as passive recipients, rather than active participants capable of changing their life situation. In the process, women's participation and important contribution in the productive sphere is at best by-passed and at worst ignored.
2. **Children:** Children form a very vulnerable part of the human society. They need special protection because of their fragile status of development. They face discrimination on the basis of caste, religion and ethnicity. Children's vulnerabilities and exposure to violation of their rights remain spread and multiple in nature. The manifestations of these violations are various ranging from child labour, child trafficking to commercial sexual exploitation and many other forms of violation.
3. **Scheduled caste:** The absence of equal opportunities in any walk of social life is a denial of equal status and equal participation in the affairs of the society. Caste in Indian society is a particular form of social inequality that involves a hierarchy of groups ranked in terms of ritual purity. In earlier period they were deprived of the right to education and thus were left suffering behind, socially and economically. They are a group who are in a state of oppression, social disability and who are helpless and poor. Structural discrimination against these groups takes place in the form of physical, psychological, emotional and cultural abuse which receives legitimacy from the social structure and the social system.

4. **Scheduled tribes:** The scheduled tribes are a product of marginalization based on ethnicity. They are considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. From the historical point of view, they have been subjected to the worst type of societal exploitation. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest and water.
5. **Old aged:** Ageing is a natural process. The vulnerability among the elderly is not only due to an increased incidence of illness and disability, but also due to their economic dependency upon their family members.
6. **Minority:** Minority is most commonly used to refer to communities that are numerically small in relation to the rest of the population. In such cases size can be a disadvantage and lead to the marginalization of the relatively smaller communities. Minorities includes issues of power, access to resource and has cultural and social dimension.
7. **People with disabilities:** People with disabilities have had to battle against centuries of biased assumptions, harmful stereotypes, and irrational fears. The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations with disabilities, and, like many other oppressed minorities, this has left people with disabilities in a severe state of impoverishment for centuries.

To summarize marginalization of vulnerable groups is a complex and serious problem which needs to be addressed at the policy level. A close understanding is required of the problems associated with the groups suffering from marginalization and the ways to reduce them. Social Work profession which is guided by humanitarian philosophy and values, promoting justice for the marginalized groups is one of the core objectives.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write the meaning of 'marginalization'.

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Q 4: Describe the principle of confidentiality in social work profession.

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

- Values are beliefs about what is good and desirable. Social work as a discipline of study and as a profession has certain values.
- The philosophy of social work is based on humanitarism, liberalism and democracy.
- Principles are the guiding assertions of statements which are guiding force for social work practice. These basic rules enable a practitioner to be competent in his/her profession.
- The principle of meaningful relationship between social worker and the client highlights the essence of relationship is seen as an interplay, a mutual emotional exchange , an attitude, a dynamic interaction, a connection between two persons and a mutual process.
- Communication is the road through which the social worker identifies with the client. The function of social worker is principally to create an environment in which the client will feel comfortable in giving expression to his feelings. Thus communication is an inevitable guiding principle of social work profession.

- The principle of individualization is fundamental for effective social work practice since the betterment of the individual is the primary purpose of social work. Individualization is the recognition and understanding of each client's unique qualities and the differential use of principles and methods in assisting each one towards better adjustment and participate in the changing process.
- If we analyse the situation of marginality of the vulnerable groups, we would find that it is a complex phenomenon and needs to be examined along several dimensions. The areas of marginality include personal, collective, education, economic, health, cultural and ecological.



2.8 FURTHER READING

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2.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

Answer 1. The philosophy of social work is based on humanitarism, liberalism and democracy. Except from devotion to welfare of human beings, social worker has to find a method of enabling those who are assisted to regain their confidence in themselves for the proper adjustment to normal life.

Answer 2. Social learning is a pre-requisite to the changes that are inevitably involved in problem solving. Change in individual, group or community will depend on their capacity to learn new facts, attitudes and ways of behavior. Social learning is an essential part of social work practice whether the change is initiated by social action or individual therapy.

Answers 3. Marginalization is a complex as well as shifting phenomenon linked to social status. It is an experience that affects millions of people throughout the world. People who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives, and the resources available to them. This results in making them handicapped in delving contribution to society. A vicious circle is set up whereby their lack of positive and supportive relationships means that they are prevented from participating in local life, which in turn leads to further isolation.

Answer 4. Social worker should keep confidential the information which is being shared by the client. Sharing such information unnecessarily with outsiders is considered unethical in this profession.



2.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q.1: State the basic values of social work profession.

Q.2: Describe the principles of individualization and acceptance.

Q.3: What does 'tuning behaviour' mean in social work?

Q.4: Explain each category identified as vulnerable groups.