UNIT 14 : ROLE OF CASE WORKER

UNIT STRUCTURE

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the qualities essential for being a successful case worker
- Explain the various role played by a case worker
- Understand the case worker's role in the therapeutic processes involved in case work.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the skills required in case work. In the present unit, let us discuss the various roles that the case worker needs to play at different situations and phases in the therapeutic process. Client-focussed, compassionate case workers are driven by deep values and beliefs, who advocate for clients and work to obtain needed resources to support client's capacity to learn and develop their own systems. They play the role of leaders to inspire the client and ensure development of the client. They should build, sustain and work collaboratively

with network of social service partners to deliver the outcomes that are aligned to the overall objectives of case work. The case worker should advocate for the rights of client by addressing needs faced by clients who are vulnerable or marginalised. The therapists should also actively engage in research, investigation and evaluation to gather information to make accurate balanced assessments, employ interventions and identify opportunities in practice, service or social policy.

14.3 ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF A CASE WORKER

An ideal case worker should be able to manage emotions and stay composed and positive under difficult circumstances and responding to conflict. The therapist should have the ability to think clearly and stay focused under pressure, adapt to harsh environment and thrive on continuous personal learning for the betterment of the clients and oneself. Following are the qualities that are essential to be a good case worker:

1. Training and knowledge : Professional competency and admirable skills are necessary in applying the knowledge. It is important that the case worker does not have a history of physical or mental issues that could interfere with the social work profession in the course of helping others.

2. A case worker needs to be able to put aside their personal prejudices to deal with others in a logical, clinical and helpful manner. The case worker should be honest with oneself, realize one's faults, see one's potentials and are aware or one's own personal beliefs, then he/she will be capable of putting them aside to deal with others fairly and without prejudices. The case worker's first responsibility is to attempt to fix a problem and empower the client in decision making and solving one's problem. A case worker must remain neutral and collect facts before coming into any conclusion about a person, problem or a situation.

3. Education is not just in books or internally. A case worker needs to learn how to listen not to formulate a response, but hear what is being stated. From this information, the worker needs to make quick decisions in situations that are not only difficult but also sometimes hazardous.

4. The case worker needs to have courage, and tenacity. It is hard for a case worker/ social worker to witness the result of a family breakdown, an abandoned child, a molested child, a physically assaulted child or injured baby. The case worker should learn how to diffuse the stress because ealing with other people's problems is tough.

5. Commitment to the person(s) under one's care is an essential quality of a case worker without which there cannot be any outcome of the therapeutic process. Professional excellence and personal impeccability is indispensible to a case worker.

6. Ability to assess the situation objectively and the ability to develop a "therapeutic plan" that is beneficial to the client the case worker trying to serve is very important.

7. Authority and assertiveness: Case worker must have a capacity to handle any situation, being resourceful and helpful. Having knowledge, attitude, experience and a position to identify and solve internal problem of client is of utmost necessity. Assertiveness is important to handle certain situations where the case worker feels that the client is not taking a correct decision and might land up in a bigger problem.

14.4 GENERIC ROLE OF THE CASE WORKER

a. Enabler

In this role, the case worker is present with the client as a helper or enabler. His power is indirect rather than direct. He helps individuals to articulate their needs, to clarify and identify their troubles, to explore resolution strategies, to select and apply a strategy, and to develop their capacities to deal with their own troubles more effectively. As an enabler, the worker helps individuals revitalize and rally their own strengths and possessions to cope with hard troubles.

Apart from the above, encouraging verbalisation, providing for ventilation of feelings, examining the pattern of relationships, offering encouragement and reassurance, and engaging in logical discussion and rational decision-making are also avenues by which the enabler role might be enacted. The

case worker takes a series of actions and strategies to enable clients to achieve solutions, e.g. actively fights for the rights of the vulnerable even when it is hard to do so.

b. Advocate

It is an active, directive role in which the worker advocates for the individual. When the individuals are being deprived of their rights or their rights are been taken away, the social case worker role is thus to advocate for the individual. The ***case worker*** role as an advocate is of two types, the first, is that of the case worker's commitment to the individual client or family as regards locating resources and services for meeting urgent material need. The second aspect of this role is with reference to groups of clients who have the same kind of problem or issues. For instance case worker may have many of his clients who are living with HIV/AIDS in his case who are being stigmatised and discriminated. He may organized the individuals and help them to advocate for their rights.



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c. Resource Mobilizer

The case worker must be aware of the resources available that can assist the clients in solving his problems. Case worker 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. Case worker needs to identify and use these resources for helping the client in such way that it does not harm the individual or his relationship.

d. Rehabilitator

Rehabilitation is the process of restoring the individual to the fullest physical, mental, social, vocational and economic capacity of which he or she is capable. It is the process of relearning of former skills and learning of new skills necessary to adapt and live in fully in an altered life style. Case worker should assist the client to develop the necessary skills so that he can become self reliant and adjust in the society. Rehabilitation is important while working individuals in different cases. For instance, the case worker while working with psychiatric has to rehabilitate the patient to relearn the

social and vocational skills which is loss due to the illness. So also while working with orphans the case worker has to rehabilitate in orphanages.

e. Empowering Client

A key goal of social case work is empowerment. In the role of empowering client, the case worker helps the individuals to augment his personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and power through improving his circumstances. It also implies that the case worker has to instill in the client with the skills and techniques that he can become independent and self reliant so that the client can solve his own problems. The case worker should be able to foster self-sufficiency and long term growth of clients with a strong belief that they can be developed. Empower them to gain control of their own lives and overcome barriers to solve problems independently. The therapist should understand strategic and power relationships in the organisation or system to identify, persuade and/or influence a target individual, group or network with maximum impact to ensure social justice.

f. Supervisor

A case worker performs the role of a supervisor in the therapeutic process with the client. The case worker, on whom authority is delegated to direct, assist, coordinate, enhance and evaluate the betterment of client's wellbeing he/she is held accountable. In implementing this responsibility, the supervisor also performs administrative, educational and supportive functions in interaction with the client in the context of a positive relationship. The supervisor's ultimate objective is to deliver to agency clients the best possible service, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in accordance with agency policies and procedures.

As a supervisor to other social work trainees, the case worker acts as enabler as it is his/her responsibility to help the social worker to manage his workload effectively and to achieve the goals of the organisation. The social worker performs the role of middle manager within the organisation and has to act responsibly in the interest of the organisation as well as the social worker. He acts as communication channel to both the organisation

and the social worker and ensures that they interact with each other. The supervisor not only has an administrative responsibility, but also has to provide the Social worker with professional support and guidance to ensure that he renders a cost-effective service to the client.

g. Communicator

Communication involves giving or receiving a message to another individual with conscious intent of eliciting and evoking a response and checking out its meaning. Communication refers to all behaviour, both verbal and non- verbal. Verbal communication includes spoken words, tone of the voice, voice quality etc. Non-verbal communication like facial expression, eye contact, body language, gestures etc. Communication is important because it helps to build a relationship between the social case worker and the client. The social case worker must have the ability to convey his message to his client and also he must understand the message and expression that his client convey to him. Case worker should able to analyse the non-verbal clues that are indispensible in human communication.

h. Environmental Modification

It is an important role of a case worker to modify the environment with which the client deals with may be on a daily basis. According to Hamilton environmental modification refers to all attempts to correct or improve the situation in order to reduce strain and pressure. Case work process generally involves bringing changes in their clients and their environment by modifying certain elements in both the system. Environmental modification refers to the means by which the situational modification and the interpersonal adjustment are achieved. The situational involves the family or any other segment of client's environment. The purpose is to minimize the external pressures or strains on individual and to improve the client's environment. (For example a case of client with substance abuse the case worker will have to work with the family and community through awareness about problems of substance intake).

i. Collateral contacts

A case worker is responsible to maintain collateral contacts for maximum effective therapeutic process with the client. A collateral contact is a source of information about the client's situation. It serves to support or corroborate information provided by a client. Communication with a collateral contact may be made in person, over the telephone, or by mail with client's significant others such as family members, colleagues, relatives etc. The purpose of collateral contact is to get additional information about the client or to verify certain information provided by the client. Collateral contact should be made with the knowledge and permission from the client. It is essential for the case worker to maintain collateral contacts with the client.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why is assertiveness important for a case worker?

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Q 2: Define collateral contact.

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14.5 ROLE OF THE CASE WORKER IN THE VARIOUS PHASES

The treatment plan is different in different case work, according to the change of the client, problem, situation etc. but every social case work is done through a same method. The case worker plays shifting roles throughout the various phases of case work process. As per the treatment plan designed for the therapeutic process of the client, the case worker

plays the following roles :

a. Support:-In the initial phase: Examines the various aspect of the problem, how the problem was brought to his attention. The case worker gives total psychological support to the client to improve his weak personality. The case worker makes a strong and good relationship with his client. The client will be prepared to share his problems with the worker. The client's personality will be respected and will be treated as a normal human being.

b. Diagnosis, Assessment and Clarification: the case worker will try to find out the client's personality, family background, personal history, family history etc. through these the case worker will get the client's childhood, lifestyle, and the present situation. Thus a personal history of the client is derived.

c. Insight: here the caseworker tries to find out the actual cause of the client's problem. Here the caseworker will give more confidence to his client.

Eg: in the case of a drug addict, the case worker should know what causes the client become an addict. The caseworker goes deep into the client's mind and finds out the root cause of the problem. It may be possible only with the help of the client and his family members, or other dear and near ones.

d. Identification and establishing treatment goals: here the case worker will find out the client's total personality and his problems. The caseworker identifies the client's strength and weaknesses. It will help in overcoming the problem. The treatment will also be planned according to the client's ability. The goals set could be 1. Prevention of break down, 2. Ego strengthening, 3.To conserve client's strength. 4. To restore social functioning. 5. To create opportunities for growth and development. 6. To increase capacity for self direction.

e. Developing treatment plan: Here the case worker, decides whether the primary thrust of the treatment should be system centered, person centred or both. The person centered would consider

whether the client needs adaptation in behaviour, thinking, and attitude.

f. Resource utilization: the case worker will use all the resources available to improve the progress of his client. He may make use of Yoga at times, and other times meditation. To an unemployed the caseworker may help to get a job. The caseworker's duty is to save his client to overcome his own problems.

g. Administration of practical services: it means to help the client in such a way that he could select and use the resources available. Case worker helps the client through the technique of discussion, information, clarification and direction.

h. Evaluation: after the completion of the above techniques the case worker should evaluate his work with the client. From that the case worker should record his work in detail and every aspect of the process.

During evaluation if it is found that his work is not satisfying he can make further corrections. This will also help him to do better follow up also. Thus he can correct himself and improve himself too.

i. Environment modification (Indirect treatment): even though the caseworker has saved the client from the present situation the problem may reoccur again. So he should make the client's environment also suitable for his personal growth. Eg: a drug addict/alcoholic though may have overcome the problem, the family and friends may not believe it. So caseworker should counsel the members too.

j. ***Direct treatment:*** here the case worker exerts his influence directly on the client. It is applied where the client is ignorant, anxious or weak in his ego strengths. It is given through counseling, therapeutic interviewing, clarification and interpretation.



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The degree of influence may depend on the relationship between case worker and the client. Direct treatment is given through the following practices in case work:

- Counseling is personal help directed towards the solution of the problem which the client is unable to solve by self. It is a psychological help in which information and clarifications are used to make the client beware of the problem.
- Therapeutic interviewing: it is used where intra-psychic conflicts are present. Case worker's aim is towards personality growth, in the direction of maturing, competence and self-actualization. Case workers also use negative or positive reinforcement and systematic desensitization.
- Clarification: it is a form of counseling through which clarification of client himself, his environment, the public etc are provided to the client.
- Interpretation: the client may have unrealistic/strong emotions attached to the needs. The caseworker must interpret these factors and relate them to the problem.
- Psychological support: it is reducing tension and increasing self confidence and opportunity for expression.

k.Monitoring and Rehabilitation: monitoring gives important fee back to the caseworker and the client. He monitors whether the programme is succeeding, the goals have been achieved, modifications in the programme is required, etc. he evaluates the content of the programme and its effectiveness. Rehabilitation and follow up are very important components of the casework process especially in cases of drug addiction and alcoholism. The family and friends may not accept the client easily. Then the caseworker should help his client to stand on his own leg like help him get a job, start a business etc. The case worker should take the responsibility of rehabilitating the client, if he deserves that.

l.Termination and Follow Up: the last phase of the therapeutic relationship is termination and follow-up. Termination should not be abrupt. The frequency and amount of contact should be decreased gradually. The follow up should be planned on a progressively diminishing basis. One week, moth, six month etc. Thus, these are the roles the case worker plays in dealing with the client for his/ her betterment.

14.6 ROLE OF THE CASE WORKER IN PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

In case work, problem solving is the important part for which the client seeks help. It is all about what the client wants from this relationship? Clients seek solution to their problems, want to change behaviour, want others to change, want to handle anxiety or stress etc. They need to have a goal to work on. Counsellor's task it so to make them identify the goal first. The aim of counselling is to help the client develop abilities and attitudes to autonomously decide his actions. The final goal is to reach wellness and develop adaptive behaviour. At about the third stage in the counselling process, the focus is on problem solving and decision making. Problem-solving refers to a particular set of skills that can be used to define a problem, generate possible solutions to that problem, and achieve a positive outcome. Effective problem-solving helps client to avoid and resolve stressors.

Clients need assistance in the process of making rational decisions in their life. Some of them face difficulty in this area as they are worried of the consequences they have to face when a wrong decision is taken. They are also afraid to take decisions because of past failures in life. They feel that making good decisions involve risks in terms of finance, time, satisfaction etc and are not comfortable in indulging in any form of risk.It is here that counsellor supports them in this decision making process.

There are a few steps in problem solving:

i. **Determine challenges-** As a counsellor, it is important to give the client a chance to think these through and not to act immediately.

ii. **Specify problems-** The greater the specificity, the easier it is to brainstorm solutions and come up with a mechanism for resolving the problem.

iii. **Brainstorm solutions-** In brainstorming, you come up with as many solutions as possible and write them all down. Do not reject any ideas or try to think of just the best idea and think of all possibilities. Even ideas that are clearly impractical or not possible

may have elements that are useful.

iv. **Decide appropriate solutions-** Develop a short list and think of the pros and cons of each solution. Then it needs to be decided whether it is realistic and practical.

v. **Develop problem-solving plan(s)-** Develop a plan of action - this may require role playing. The client is encouraged to implement the plan.

The case worker's role in decision making is to help the client find the root of the problem, help the client identify alternatives and calculate the risks involved and encourage him to take rational decisions.

Human problems are the result of personal and environmental factors or the ingredients of personality and external factors are in constant interaction. A person is involved in a problem when due to these internal and external factors he is not able to hold in this fast moving world, and results in functional break down. Social case worker recognizes the importance of both internal and external factors and proceeds to give psychological understanding and set to right personality difficulties and offer concrete and material help to minimize the psycho-social pressures on the client.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is 'therapeutic interviewing?'

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Q 4: Why is counseling important in case work?

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14.7 LET US SUM UP

- Client-focussed, compassionate case workers are driven by deep values and beliefs, who advocate for clients and work to obtain needed resources to support client's capacity to learn and develop their own systems.
- An ideal case worker should be able to manage emotions and stay composed and positive under difficult circumstances and responding to conflict. The therapist should have the ability to think clearly and stay focused under pressure, adapt to harsh environment and thrive on continuous personal learning for the betterment of the clients and oneself.
- Case worker should assist the client to develop the necessary skills so that he can become self reliant and adjust in the society. Rehabilitation is important while working individuals in different cases.
- Communication is important because it helps to build a relationship between the social case worker and the client. The social case worker must have the ability to convey his message to his client and also he must understand the message and expression that his client convey to him.
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