UNIT 15 : FIELDS OF SOCIAL CASE WORK PRACTICE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In the previous units we have discussed the processes, techniques used and role of social case worker in bringing a positive effect on the client, this unit will give you an insight into the different fields of case work practice. Hence, after going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Apply the case process in various settings
- Explain the importance of case work in different circumstances

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Now that you have learnt about the concepts, process, tools and techniques of social casework, it is time to look at how to apply these concepts and techniques, where will you apply them (location) and with whom (client groups). Social casework situation comes into existence when a person comes to a professional seeking help in connection with some concern /problem /issue which he/she is not able to deal with himself. The professional, the social caseworker, views these concerns in the light of the person's total social environment.

15.3 DETERMINANTS OF FIELDS OF PRACTICE

Fields of social casework practice are broad areas or settings in which casework method is utilized to help individuals and families. Various fields can be determined on the basis of the following components:

a) Person-in-context : The context here includes the total social environment of the client- a male adult with visual impairment, a middle-aged woman abandoned by her husband, an orphaned child in a Care-giving Home.

b) The concern or the problem requiring help : Destitution, chronic illness requiring major changes in life-style, drug dependence, rehabilitation, trauma caused by riots or serious accident, bereavement, role conflict, displacement.

c) The human service organizations that provide the location for providing help, like, schools, hospitals, childcare institutions, short stay homes, institutions for the elderly and juvenile homes correctional institutions, and social welfare and development agencies. The mandate of these organisations is that of 'service', that is, to maintain and improve the general well-being and functioning of people.

Human Service Organizations are characterized by:

i) goals and objectives,
ii) specific client groups,
iii) personnel,
iv) programmes and services,
v) service delivery systems,
vi) material resources and networks.

The first two dimensions can be analyzed further from two perspectives:

A. The Needs Perspective

i. **Common human needs -** beside survival needs, every individual has needs for affection, for security, for achievement and for belonging (to a group).
ii. **Special human needs -** needs that arise because a person has

a disabling impairment, is suffering from a chronic illness requiring major changes in life style, has deficit of coping or social skills, needs arising due to traumatic experiences like accident, riots, natural calamities or needs of very young or old persons.

iii. **Socially caused needs -** those that arise due to certain conditions in society itself, for example, discriminatory practices, oppression, deprivation, or displacements due to large developmental projects.

The needs perspective helps the worker in understanding the source and extent of the problem as it applies in each case. It helps in knowing about the impact of the unfulfilled need on the client and his social environment. The worker is able to help the clients decide upon the action plan for dealing with their problematic situation by fulfilling the unmet needs.



The Life-span Perspective : An individual experiences a number of life changes as he/she goes through his life cycle, that is, from birth to death. She/he is seen as moving in life through a series of developmental stages, each stage requiring the individual to successfully complete some tasks before he/she moves on to the next one.

B. The Life-span Perspective

An individual experiences a number of life changes as he/she goes through his life cycle, that is, from birth to death. She/he is seen as moving in life through a series of developmental stages, each stage requiring the individual to successfully complete some tasks before he/she moves on to the next one. In most cases, human beings move through this cycle without major unsettling stresses. But if the person is not able to achieve this transition smoothly, he/she may find life changes stressful and is thus unable to adapt to the new demands. For example, a middle-aged man, gainfully employed, gets retired from his job. From a very busy life style with set routines, he now finds a lot of time at his disposal. How well he is prepared to deal with the life changes will determine the level of his emotional well-being.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Fill in the Blanks

a) A social case worker has to perform the role of a _____agent.

b) Human Service Organizations are characterized by_____ and objectives.

c) Discriminatory practices, oppression, deprivation, are _____caused needs.

15.4 FIELDS OF SOCIAL CASE WORK PRACTICE

As we have already stated that any discussion of fields of casework practice needs to look at two components:

a. client groups with some problem or concern; and

b. the setting where the clients get help with their concerns.

Let us first describe in brief the client groups and some of their characteristics.

The Individual : Person and his/her interaction with social environment are influenced significantly by a number of factors. These factors determine as to how different clients react to a similar situation /problem/ concern differently. Their expectations from the caseworker may also vary accordingly. Some of these factors are:

Age : The needs and concerns, problems and difficulties faced by a child are invariably different from those of a young adult or an elderly person. Again, how the individual--- of any specific age group --- looks at the situation under study, feels about it and wants it to be handled may differ according to the age of the individual.

Sex : The experiences and conditions of male and female persons in a given society are socially and culturally determined. The status in society (rights, privileges and power within the family and society at large), division of tasks, role expectation, role transitions, and role conflicts affect men and women differently. The stereotyping of image and roles tend to become oppressive and discriminatory for women specially.

Caste : In Indian society, caste based discrimination affects individuals and families across age and sex divisions, although females suffer the most. The low status because of belonging to lower castes results in deprivation, oppression, and lack of opportunity, depression, apathy and inertia.

Class : The income group an individual belongs to determine the life

goals and motivation for striving for change. Outlook towards life and problems of living are likely to affect persons belonging to: a) lower income groups; b) middle income groups; c) affluent groups; or d) those who are below poverty line.

Religion : In a pluralistic (multiple culture, language, caste, class, religion, etc) society like India, belonging to minority groups' religion has its own difficulties. Religion holds a very important place in an Indian person's upbringing. Understanding of religious beliefs, customs and moral values is essential in helping a person.

Region : People belonging to rural, urban or tribal areas tend to demonstrate specific response patterns and preferences in life. Persons hailing from a small city, a village or a metro city, are exposed to different stimuli. Their life experiences will, therefore, be different from one another. Their needs and expression of concerns may also be different. Following are the settings of case work preactice.

- **The Family :** Family is a special social group wherein members are bound to each other by blood or marriage. The main function of family is child rearing and growth and development of each member. Families fulfill their social responsibility by socializing children in the culture of the society. In fulfilling their functions, families interact with a large number of social systems and organisations like, kinship network, religious and economic institutions, schools, the work place, civic authorities, welfare and legal framework etc. Unique patterns of interaction - within the family (among members), and with outsiders evolve overtime. Family is a system wherein the experience of any one member affects the other members. A drug dependent son, a physically or mentally challenged child, the main earning member having problems at the work place, an elderly father / mother - all affect the social functioning of the family as a whole. Sometimes, the problem faced by one member is an expression of a serious problem with the basic interpersonal relationships, interaction and communication patterns within the family. Families go through a life cycle. Marriage takes place and children are born. Children go to school or work. The first child gets married - the daughter goes away or the daughter-in-law joins. The married son may or

may not stay with the parents. The parents grow old and die. The son continues with the family. With each change in the composition of the family and role transition, various stresses occur. Most often, families are able to cope with these normal transitions. But, some special situations cause a sense of inadequacy in the families and they are forced to seek professional help. Some of the problems, which put too much strain on family's coping mechanisms, are severe marital discord, domestic violence, child abuse, incest and redundancy (unemployment).

Let us now discuss some of these settings in brief to get an idea of what are their main features, what kind of problems or concerns they deal with and the kind of professional interventions Caseworkers provide to their clients - individuals and families.

- **Hospitals**

Doctors are the main professional groups in the hospital, responsible for medical care of the patients. The recognition of psycho-social and cultural dimensions of illness and hospitalization has enabled employment of trained social workers in the hospitals. Social Casework is utilized in the OPDs (outpatient departments), the Wards, and Special Clinics. The heavy work load of doctors in large Govt. Hospitals generally leads to lack of clear communication between the medical staff and the patients and their families. In such a scenario, the main roles expected of social workers are those of mediator; enabler; coordinator of services; case manager; mobilization of family, community and hospital resources; and acting as a member of the team of professionals. Working with the patient and his/her family is a major task of the social worker. Therefore, Social Casework is a primary method in medical social work practice

- **Institutions Providing Mental Health Care**

The caseworker works as a member of the team of professionals including psychiatrists, psychologists and occupational therapists. Psychiatrists are the main professional group in charge of care and treatment of the mentally ill or emotionally disturbed persons. The patients may be attending OPDs, day care, or may be hospitalized. The main tasks of the

caseworker are to maintain constant contact with the family of the patient; mediate between the doctors and the patient/family; provide counselling to the patient; assist in discharge and after care of the patient. The worker provides the necessary support to the family and helps the other family members understand the needs of the mentally ill person.

- **Working with the Chronically/Terminally Ill**

The patients who are suffering from chronic illness, like diabetes, asthma, and heart disease, need help in understanding their illness and the demands of the treatment, and adjusting their life-styles to the limitations imposed by the condition. The families of the patients also need support and guidance in dealing with the patient's condition that may have long-term implications for the entire family. In some cases, especially among those belonging to lower incomegroups, the financial burden may need to be eased out by identifying and mobilizing resources in the kinship network or community at large. While working with the terminally ill patients, the first dilemma the worker faces is to inform the patient and his family about the illness. The patients suffering from a terminal illness, like cancer and AIDS, have additional stress factor - the thought of impending death and anxiety about the family after their death.

The tasks of the caseworker include:

a) ensuring palliative care to reduce pain and discomfort,
b) talking about death,
c) involving the patient in planning for the family after his/her death,
d) providing opportunity to family members to talk about death and dying,
e) providing support--- emotional and material --- to the patient/ family. In the case of AIDS, the caseworker will need to tackle the issue of stigma attached with contracting AIDS and the possibility of infection getting passed on the other family members.

- **Schools**

Schools are institutions for formal education, with a fixed routine, set syllabus, and a well-established pattern of teaching and learning. Teachers

are the main professional group and they spend the maximum time with students. Schools vary in size--- from small single teacher schools in the villages and tribal areas to large bureaucratic organizations with thousands of students. Schools may offer primary, middle, secondary or senior secondary education. Again, some may be Government schools/aided by the Govt. or fully private independent schools. Despite progressive and child-centred educational philosophy, schools are characterized by emphasis on syllabus (information content), formal examination system for evaluating achievements and formal teacher child relationships. In this context, the child very often is not able to get his basic human and educational needs fulfilled. This situation proves to be stressful to the child. Due to preoccupation with syllabus and maintaining discipline, teachers are unable to individualize the child's situation and there is a 'problem child' at hand. Hence, there is recognition of need for individualized Social Casework Service to help the child. School, however, offers an excellent opportunity to Caseworkers for offering preventive and promotive interventions beside remedial service. Transition of the child from entry to passing out from school coincides with the child's own maturation process. By anticipating the demands and stresses of a particular age group, appropriate interventions may be planned so as to avoid unnecessary emotional turmoil. By helping in the development of personality and life and social skills, the Social Caseworker can achieve the status of a partner in the educational process. Despite of its being a secondary setting of Social Casework Practice, the Worker can easily demonstrate the vital contribution of Professional Social Work to fulfillment of educational goals of schools The Social Caseworker works as a liaison between the family and the teacher. He/she acts as a mediator, enabler, teacher (giving necessary information), advocate (to highlight the negative impact of school norms and practices on the child), change-agent for the school's systems and procedures, and as a consultant for the staff of the school in matters regarding children's needs and well-being.

- **Residential Institutions**

There are situations when individuals have to be removed from their natural environments and placed in residential institutions. Some of the institutions where social casework is practiced are as follows:

a. **Children's Homes :** Children who are destitute, orphans, or have run away from home and cannot be sent back home; those who are violence, risk to health (e.g., healthy children of leprosy patients) or moral danger are generally placed in children's homes.

Most of these Homes operate under the provisions of Juvenile Justice Act and, therefore, provide custodial care. Children are committed for specific periods. There is sometimes a feeling among inmates that they are under detention. Only in a small number of cases adoption and foster care services are or can be offered. Homes, run by the Govt. or voluntary organisations, are expected to provide custody and care to the children.

Social Worker is an important professional here. Social Caseworker is expected to help each inmate adjust to the life within the Home and achieve psychosocial development. As the children have often gone through traumatic experiences before they are placed in Homes, it is very important for them to come to terms with their life, talk about it and get over the pain and the sense of betrayal. The worker is expected to provide care and help children develop positive relationships within the institution, and prepare for life after the stay in the Home is over.

b. **Correctional Institutions :** These include homes/ special schools for the delinquent, prisons, remand/observation homes, beggar homes etc. The main task of the Social Caseworker is to help those in conflict with law by enabling them to understand themselves and their relationship with others. They need to understand what is expected of them as members of society. The aim is to rehabilitate these persons - to help them in such a manner that they can engage in socially constructive activities once they go back to their homes. The worker helps the clients change /modify their values (so that they are in line with the social values); change their behaviour and response patterns. The residents of these institutions often have a

feeling of hostility towards society or they suffer from a sense of inferiority and inadequacy. Social Casework aims at correcting these attitudes and feelings by modifying the clients' immediate environment, working with their families and maintaining a supportive professional relationship with them. The Caseworker works as a member of a team of professionals like, probation and parole officers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and vocational counsellors and educators.

c. Homes for the Aged : The number of old age homes have been increasing in cities. The stresses and constraints of urban living have often led to adult children opting to send their aging parents or relatives to residential institutions. The residents in these homes need nursingcare, understanding and emotional support. The caseworkers in these institutions help the residents cope with loss of the loved ones, illness, lack of energy, loneliness, loss of economic independence and the thought of approaching death. The caseworker enables the client maintain his/her self-esteem. He/she also helps the family deal with suppressed or open feelings of guilt so as to encourage them to maintain cordial relation with the client. The worker needs to identify and mobilize community resources like motivating and orienting volunteers to spend time with the residents, talk to them and attend to their simple errands.

d. Residential institutions for women : Short stay homes, rescue homes, nari niketans, widow homes etc. are some of the settings where casework practice takes place. Most of the inmates are those women who are destitute, abandoned or battered by their husbands, widows with no relative to give them support, victims of crimes including prostitution or kidnapping. These residents need to build their skills - vocational and social - to become independent persons capable of taking care of their lives. The caseworkers try to bring about conciliation between the client and her family, if any. Where marriage is indicated, pre-marital counseling is provided.