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# UNIT 1 SOCIAL GROUP WORK : HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objective of this unit is to introduce the practice of social work using groups. This unit will also discuss the evolution of group work as a method of social work practice and the dynamics of group process that takes place in the group.

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- describe the concept of social work with groups and define social group work;
- explain the historical development of group work as a method of social work; and
- understand and analyse the dynamics of group process that reciprocally influences the individual and the group.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Group work is one of the methods used predominantly in the context of the face-to-face group and which uses the group also as a medium of action. It is a unique, exciting, dynamic way to help people make changes in their lives that they themselves desire. Groups are used effectively by social workers today to help people of all ages and all walks of life, enhance their social functioning and to cope more effectively with their problems. Group workers are involved in all fields of social work practice and are to be found in mental health, family counselling, child welfare, substance abuse, disability, correctional and many other settings. They are critically important to members of clinical teams attempting to respond to serious mental and emotional social problems.

They also work in nonclinical settings in which they seek to foster social growth and enhance social integration. They work among children, youth and in community settings and are integral to community based programmes that seek to facilitate community cohesion and more effective community based response to social needs. Today small groups are considered as a useful instrument for community change and development

especially for the welfare and development of weaker sections, marginalized population. For instance, self help groups, micro credit and savings have become an integral programme in the field of women's empowerment and organisation of poor and marginalized people for socio-economic development.

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## 1.2 RELEVANCE OF GROUPS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Human interaction in society takes place in several forms. The most common form is interpersonal interaction between two persons— you and I. If we look at our daily routine, we will notice that a large number of our activities throughout the day require interpersonal interaction. At the same time, we spend a lot of time at work and at home in small groups.

Why should we worry about small groups? Why do we need to learn about them? At a general level, we all need to learn about small groups so that we can play our membership roles in different groups more effectively. Besides, there is a special relevance of groups to individual and community change and action.

The principle trait of working with groups in social work settings is that of mutual aid. It is believed that people grow and change as they relate to others, both in receiving and in giving help. A part of this process recognises that everyone not only can take from but also have something very important to contribute to others. Northen summarises the forces that are released by this mutual aid process that help individual growth and changes as follows:

- 1) **Mutual support:** When members are supportive of each other and receive additional support from the group worker, a climate is created in which members are able to express themselves and try out new thoughts and behaviours.
- 2) **Cohesiveness:** This dynamics results from the affective ties that the members develop with each other. A commitment to the group and to each other results from this force.
- 3) **Relationships:** The optimum condition to help members change requires a blend of support and challenge.
- 4) **Universalisation:** The members discover that he/she is not the only person who is feeling or behaving in this manner. There is solace in knowing that one is not alone.
- 5) **Instillation of hope:** Groups provide opportunities to relate to others who may be more optimistic and, in fact, may have accomplished some very important tasks and goals. The group as a whole, with the help of the worker, may convey some very positive expectations for the members.
- 6) **Altruism:** A great deal of self-esteem results from the members becoming aware that he/she does have something of value to give to others, whether it is a suggestion, the narration of an experience, or simply support and concern.
- 7) **Gaining knowledge and skills:** The group provides opportunities to learn from others and to try new ways of thinking and behaving in a safe environment.
- 8) **Catharsis:** Ventilation of feelings and exposing one's ideas to others who are accepting, frees energy, and the member can continue to work toward the desired changes.

- 9) **Corrective emotional experiences:** The group setting allows the members to correct earlier dysfunctional relationships by providing a primary group experience in which the person can reexperience and correct ways of feeling about and relating to significant others. Often this is accomplished by working through transferences with the worker or with other members. Transferences result when the member perceives another in the group as being like a significant other that they had experienced earlier in their life.
- 10) **Reality testing:** Groups provide a setting in which the members can test and compare their perceptions and feelings. This process promotes validation or corrections of distortions in perceptions.
- 11) **Parameter and pressure of group membership:** The experiences and norms of the group help the member to function within certain limits, often allowing him/her to reduce resistance to authority, accept necessary limitations and behave in a manner acceptable to others.

The participatory approach to development using different approaches like Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), for instance, rely greatly on the potential of groups as a medium for social change. In such approaches, ignorant, weak and unorganised people are organised into small groups; the groups are organised, informed, empowered and networked to deal with the exploiting elites who own and control the majority of the resources. This process of social change entails informing, mobilizing and organising the poor and the weak, so that they can identify, articulate and struggle for their common interests. This is best possible in small group situation. The relevance of groups to community change and development is three-fold.

- 1) **Small groups are powerful vehicles for learning:** In a small group, we are able to share our experiences and reflect upon them. Others are able to give me feedback about myself in small group. The process of interaction with others provides the motivation to learn in a small group. This group acts as an arena for generating insights and analyzing experiences. The experiential nature of group work makes it imperative that members work and learn in small groups.
- 2) **Small groups are a basis for action and change:** In group work, learning is seen as a step towards change and new actions. Thus members can experiment with new actions in groups. They can then use those actions outside the group work situation. The nature of group work is such that it promotes collective action, and hence groups become the context for planning and understanding such collective actions.
- 3) **Small group is a building block of organisations:** Organisations of all types rely on small groups. People's organisations develop from the building blocks of small groups. When activists work with tribals and women and landless labourers to form their organisations, they start with small groups. Besides, village meetings, youth animation and camps are also examples of groups. Hence we can strengthen people's organisations by creating a strong base of groups. Thus as field workers we work with small groups in the field all the time. Our role in the field is largely a role of strengthening small groups and making them work more effectively.

Thus small groups acquire great significance in our work in the field. Groups provide the essential context of learning in group work. We learn in and through groups.

**Check Your Progress I**

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) How do groups help in the growth and development of individuals?

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**1.3 CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF GROUP WORK**

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Group work is a modality for bringing about change either in the environment or in the member’s intrapersonal or interpersonal relationships. According to Garvin social group work uses the group approach to accomplish the goals common to all social work activities: (1) to prevent members from developing dysfunctional ways of coping with their situation; 2) enhance member’s engagement in and use of artistic, social, intellectual and other endeavours; and (3) to rehabilitate members who have developed handicaps in their social and personal functioning.

One way of understanding what group work is about is by looking at what the group worker does. This is clearly explained in the report –Definition of the Functions of Group Worker (1949) of the American Association of Group Workers. It is reproduced below.

*“The group worker enables various types of groups to function in such a way that both group interaction and programme activities contribute to the growth of the individual, and the achievement of the desirable social goal.*

*The objectives of the group worker include provision for personal growth according to individual capacity and need; the adjustment of the individual to other persons, to groups and to society, the motivation of the individual toward the improvement of society and; the recognition by the individual of his own rights, abilities and differences of others.*

*Through his participation the group worker aims to effect the group process so that decisions come about as a result of knowledge and a sharing and integration of ideas, experiences and knowledge, rather than as a result of domination from within or without the group.*

*Through experience he/she aims to produce those relationship with other groups and the wider community which contributes to responsible citizenship, mutual understanding between cultural, religious, economic or special groupings in the community, and a participation in the constant improvement of our society towards democratic goals.*

*The guiding purpose behind such leadership rests upon the common assumptions of a democratic society; namely, the opportunity for each individual to fulfill*

*his capacities in freedom, to respect and appreciate others and to assume his social responsibility in maintaining and constantly improving our democratic societies.*

*Underlying the practice of group work is the knowledge of individual and group behaviour and of social conditions and community relations which is based on the modern social sciences.*

*On the basis of this knowledge the group worker contributes to the group with which he works with a skill in leadership which enables the members to use their capacities to the full and to create socially constructive group activities.*

*He is aware of both programme activities and of the interplay of personalities, within the group and between the group and its surrounding community.*

*According to the interests and needs of each, he assists them to get from the group experience, the satisfaction provided by the programme activities, the enjoyment and personal growth available through the social relations, and the opportunity to participate as a responsible citizen.*

*The group worker makes conscious use of his relations to the group, his knowledge of programme as a tool and his understanding of the individual and of the group process and recognizes his responsibility both to individuals and groups with whom he works and the larger social values he represents”.*

According to Staub-Bernasconi (1991), social work with groups have at least three meanings; (a) work within the group because it is the richest resource system for problem solving and help for its members; (b) work with a group, whose structure and process are the main subjective or objective problem area; and (c) work with groups as an instrument to reach goals outside the group in another social system. Added to this group work need not be confined to helping clients, but could also be used to help the individual group worker to become more effective in his/her work with the clients. It could even be used to help organisations to reduce, mitigate and manage intra and inter-organisational conflict. Thus group work methodology can be help not only the clients, but also the organisations to become more effective in helping its client groups to change the social environment. Thus networking, and collaboration with other helping agencies/agents, planning and social change can also be effectively accomplished through the use of group work technique.

Let us now look at how social group work is defined by different people.

Social group work is a method of social work that helps persons to enhance their social functioning through purposeful group experiences and to cope more effectively with their personal, group or community problems (Marjorie Murphy, 1959).

Social group work is a method through which individuals in groups in social agency settings are helped by a worker who guides their interactions in programme activities so that they may relate themselves to others and experiences growth opportunities in accordance with their needs and capacities to the end of individual, group and community development (Trecker, 1955).

Group work is a broad professional practice that refers to the group setting. It involves the application of group theory and process by a capable professional practioners to

assist an interdependent collection of people to reach their mutual goals, which may be personal, interpersonal or task-related in nature (Association for Specialists in Group Work, 1990).

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) Explain the concept of social group work.

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## 1.4 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP WORK

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In order to develop a broad perspective concerning the potential uses of groups in social work practice, it is helpful to understand the developments that have occurred in the study of groups and in the practice of group work over the years. This historical perspective will also give you a firm foundation upon which a knowledge base can be built upon for effective group work practice.

Two types of inquiries have enhanced our understanding of groups. One type of inquiry has come from social scientists who have studied groups by experimenting with them in laboratories or observations of group’s functioning in community setting. The other type has come from group work practitioners who have examined how groups function in practice settings like social work, psychology, education and recreation. The results of both enquiries have led to improved methods of working with a variety of different types of groups.

A basic research question that was asked by social scientist concerns the extent to which being a part of a group influences the individual group member. The early findings suggest that the presence of others has a significant influence on an individual group member and tends to generate forces to conform to the standards of behaviour and judgments of individual members. Le Bon in 1910 referred to the forces that were generated by group interaction as ‘group contagion’ and ‘group mind’, recognising that people in groups react differently from individuals.

The concept of a primary group was also an important contribution to the study of groups. Cooley in 1909 defined a primary group as a small informal group such as family or a friendship group, which has a tremendous influence on member’s values, moral standards and normative behaviour. The primary group was therefore viewed as essential in understanding socialisation and development. Allport (1924) for example, found that presence of others improved task performance.

After World War I, social scientists also began to study groups operating in the community. One of the earliest was Frederic Thrasher (1927) who studied gangs of delinquents in the Chicago area by becoming friendly with gang members and by observing the internal

operations of gangs. Thrasher observed that every member of a gang had a status within the group that was attached to the functional role that the member played for the gang. Thrasher also drew attention to the culture that developed within a gang, suggesting there was a common code that all members followed. The code was enforced by group opinion, coercion and physical punishment. This work along with others have influenced the ways group work is practiced with youths in settlement houses, neighbourhood centres and youth organisations.

Later some group workers relied on naturalistic observations of groups of boys in a summer camp to demonstrate how cohesion and intergroup hostility develop. Social scientists also learned more about people's behaviour in groups from studies done in industry and in the United States Army.

During the 1950s an explosion of knowledge concerning small groups took place. The major themes that developed in the first half of the twentieth century includes conformity, communication and interaction patterns, leadership, interpersonal preference and social perception, that are important components while dealing with group process in social work. It is also important to mention the contribution of psychoanalytic theory, learning theory, field theory, social exchange theory and the system theory that explains group functioning, the details of which will be discussed else where.

Casework began in England and the United States in Charity Organisations in the late nineteenth century and group work grew up largely in English and American settlement houses. Group work was also used for therapeutic purpose in state mental institutions but much of the interest in group work stemmed from those who had led socialisation groups, adult education groups and recreation groups in settlement houses and youth service agencies.

It is often believed that group work is considerably younger than casework, but group work agencies actually started only a few years after casework agencies. The first course of group work was offered in the School of Social Work at Western Reserve University in Cleveland by Clara Kaiser. When she left for New York in 1935, Grace Coyle continued to develop the course. It was taught partially as a method and partially as a field of practice. By 1937 about 10 schools offered special course in social work. However, as Schwartz points out, the real historical differences between the two is that casework soon became identified with social work profession where as group work did not begin to become formally linked with the profession until much later during the National Conference of Social Work in 1935. In 1936 the American Association for the study of group work was founded with an aim to clarify and refine both the philosophy and practice of group work. By 1939 group work began to be treated as a separate subject at the National Conference of Social Work. The identification of group work with social work profession increased during the 1940s although group workers continued to maintain loose ties with recreation, adult education, and mental hygiene until the 1950s when group workers joined together with six other professional groups to form the National Association of Social Workers in 1955.

The use of group work in settlement houses and casework in Charity Organisations was not an accident. Group work and the Settlement houses where it was practiced offered citizens the opportunity for education, recreation, socialisation and community involvement. Unlike Charity Organisations that primarily focussed on the diagnosis and treatment of the problems of the poor, settlement houses offered groups as an opportunity for citizens to join together to share their views, to gain mutual support and to exercise the power derived from their association for social change.

Unlike casework, where there is a sharp distinction between the given and the receiver, group work evolved out of the idea of self-help, self-help of a group nature. While philanthropy was generally of middle class origin, mutual self-help as the name implies, developed from the need for mutual aid and support. As compared to caseworkers who relied on insight developed from psychodynamic approaches and on the provision of concrete resources, group workers relied on programme activities to spur members to action. Programme activities of all types were the medium through which group attained their goals. Activities such as camping, singing, group discussion, games and arts and crafts were used for recreation, socialisation, education, support and rehabilitation. Unlike casework, which was largely focussed on problem solving and rehabilitation, group work activities were used for enjoyment as well as to solve problems. Thus the group work method that developed from the settlement house work had a different focus and a different goal than casework method.

Differences between casework and group work can also be clearly seen in the helping relationships. Caseworkers sought out the most underprivileged victims of industrialisation, treating 'worthy' clients by providing them with resources and acting as good examples of virtuous, hardworking citizens. Although they also worked with those who were impaired and those who were poor, group worker did not focus solely on the poorest cases or on those with the most problems. They preferred the word *members to client*. They emphasised working with member's strengths rather than their weakness. Helping was seen as a shared relationship in which the group worker and the group members worked together for mutual understanding and action regarding their common concerns for the community in which they lived. As concerns were identified, group members acted to support and to help one another and the worker acted as a mediator between the demands of society and the needs of group members.

Shared interaction, shared power and shared decision making placed demands on the group worker that were not experienced by caseworkers. Group workers frequently had to act quickly during complex and often fast paced group interactions while remaining aware of the welfare of all group members. The number of group members, the fact that they could turn to one another for help and the democratic decision making process that were encouraged in groups meant that group workers had to develop skills that were different from those of caseworkers.

Between 1910 and 1920, those who were concerned with adult education, recreation, and community work began to realise the full potentials of group work. They began to understand that groups could be used to help people participate in their communities to enrich people's lives and to support those persons whose primary relationship were not satisfying. They became aware of the potential that groups had for helping people learn social skills and problem-solving skills. They began to use groups to prevent delinquency and to rehabilitate those who were maladjusted. The organisations that build the foundation of group work were the self-help and informal recreational ones: settlement houses, neighbourhood centres, Y's, the Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Jewish centers and camps. Latter designated as 'group work agencies' the new concepts that united these services are participation in small groups, the democratic way of life, community responsibility and membership in a worldwide effort.

Early in 1920 Mary Richmond realised the potentials of working with groups and wrote on the importance of small group psychology. Mary P Follett, a political scientist in 1926 wrote in the book—*The New State*, that solutions to social problems would emerge from the creation of groups in neighbourhood and around social interest. John Dewey, who developed the idea of progressive education also found the usefulness of small groups as early as 1933. According to him, social group work method was an

application of the principles of progressive education to small informal groups in leisure time settings. In fact, group work was very closely associated with community organisation method and its concept of citizen's participation.

During the 1940s and 1950s group workers began to use groups more frequently to provide therapy and remediation in mental health settings influenced by the psychoanalysis and ego psychology and partly of World War II, which created a severe shortage of trained workers to deal with mentally disabled war veterans. It was spurred on by the continued interest in the use of groups in psychiatric settings during the 1950s.

Although there was an increased emphasis in the 1940s and 1950s on utilising groups to improve the functioning of individual group members, interest remained in using groups for recreational and educational purposes, especially in Jewish community centres and in youth organisations such as Girls Scouts and the YWCA. During the 1940s and 1950s groups were also used for purposes of community development and social action in many different neighbourhood centres and community agencies. At the same time, there was an accompanying increase in the study of small group as a social phenomenon.

The years after the war saw an immense rise in group work literature. Gertrude Wilson's *Social Group Work Practice* (1949), Harleigh B. Trecker's *Social Group Work* (1949), Grace Coyle's *Group Work with American Youth* (1948) and Gisela Konopka's *Therapeutic Group Work with Children* (1949) appeared in a time span of only two years. These books made the attempt to clarify the orderly process of social group work as part of the helping function of social work on the wide scale from healthy to sick individuals and groups.

During the decade of the 1960s the popularity of group services declined. The skills of group worker were then viewed as being more significant in the area of community organisation in organising youths and adults around important social concerns. Also during the 1960s the push towards a generic view of practice and the movement away from specialisations in casework, group work and community organisations, tended to weaken group specialisations in professional schools and to reduce the number of professionals who were trained in group work as their primary mode of practice.

During the 1970s interest in group work continued to wane. Fewer professional schools offered advanced course in group work and fewer practitioners used group work as a practice method. In order to increase practitioners awareness about the potential benefits of groups, group workers throughout the US and Canada came together and held the first Annual Symposium for the Advancement of Group Work in 1979. Each year since then, the annual symposium about group work has been convened.

Group work as a method of social work came to India in 1936 along with the introduction of professional social work education, ten years after its formal acknowledgement in the West. Even though there is evidence of the group approach being used in charity, imparting religious education through oral tradition, mobilising people for the freedom struggle against the British, social reform and in welfare strategies such as the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movement, there is very little documentation and theorisation based on it. All schools of social work in India teach a course/paper in social group work (sometimes alternatively titled as social work with groups) at the graduate and the postgraduate level.

There was an effort to develop some indigenous materials in group work by the then United Nations Social Welfare and Development Centre for Asia and the Pacific and the Association of Schools of Social Work in 1979. Compared to casework and community organisation, contributions in developing indigenous materials on group work are lagging even today. The Department of Social Work at the University of Baroda

developed and published some of the first records of group work practice in 1960. The Association of Schools of Social Work jointly with the Technical Cooperative Mission (USA) laid down minimum standards for group work practice. Two social workers who have tried to trace the historical development of group work in India, V.D. Mehta (1987) and Helen Joseph (1997), agree that the theoretical perspective taught in the schools of social work in India and the practice models are primarily American as in the case of social work itself.

The practice of social group work in India is generally limited to correctional and other residential institutional setting, hospitals and so on in the urban areas. The general activities undertaken were recreational, educational and cultural in character. Group work method was also practiced in community work, as in the case of Mahila Mondals and Yuvak Mondals, but it was primarily recognised as community work. Practice of group work is also given emphasis through the fieldwork programme in some schools. Students placed in agencies and open communities work with groups of children, youth, adults and elderly who are either 'sick' or healthy in urban and rural areas. For instance, the student of Visva Bharati placed in open communities organise groups of children and adults in the poor neighbourhood with a combined objective of socialisation, structured recreation, functional literacy, awareness generation on health and hygiene, environment and other socially relevant issues. In the recent years, groups of adolescent girls and boys are also been organised in the villages to deal with issues of life skill development including home management, reproductive and sexual health, sexuality, family planning methods etc., considering the social reality that majority of them will be getting married at an early age.

This brief review of historical trends in group work practice is intended to enable you to understand current trends in group work practice from a broad perspective. Today a remedial approach focussing on improving the functioning of individual group member continues as the preferred method of practice. This model of practice is based on problem identification, assessment, and treatment. The emphasis on mutual aid characteristics of group work also continues where the worker's role is to mediate between the needs of group members and society. Mutual aid and shared, reciprocal responsibility are appropriate in such settings such as short-stay homes and Nari Niketans that are designed to helping women in distress to live together, to support each other and to cope with distressing life events. It is also useful in community groups like mahila mondals, youth clubs and other community groups where reciprocal sharing of mutual concerns and the giving and receiving of support are central purposes. Professional social workers are also involved as consultants or facilitators of self -help groups that emphasise the mutual aid characteristics of a group.

**Check Your Progress III**

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.
- 1) Explain the major landmarks in the development of group work as a method of social work.
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## 1.5 GROUP PROCESS

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Small group process, the way groups' function, is an important content in group work. It is so because we need to know how small groups function, what are its key dynamics and how they can be made to function more effectively. Hence we also need to know how to facilitate small groups. Facilitation skills of small groups are necessary if we want to strengthen a group or we want to ensure that a group function effectively to accomplish its objectives. It is with this perspective that this section looks at group process.

In the helping process of group work, the client is the group member and the group as a whole. This dual focus changes the psychological climate fundamentally from that in a one-to-one relationship. A relationship may exist between the individual group member and the group worker; but at the same time the person is surrounded by equals, by people 'in the same boat'. Hence, the relationship of the members to each other has much meaning. This is never static. They change in time, and in relation to specific situations even if a helping person such as group worker is not present. This changing movement is called the group process. Marjorie Murphy defined it as 'the totality of the group's interactions, developments and changes which occur in the group's life'.

The dynamics of the group are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of each individual in it. The movement of the group – the group process, is seen in the relationship between its members. It changes in time; its quality depends on the degree of health and the maturity of the members and on the purpose of the group. The group worker must understand group formation. He/She must understand the necessity for subgroups and assess their place in the total group. He/She must know about the positions of members as isolates, leaders, or members of subgroups for the role of each member is related to the expectations of the group and to its values and mores. He/She must recognize the bond as a vital part of every group and realize that its degree is intrinsically related to group formation and goal. Finally, he/she must recognize conflict-solving and decision making as specific functions of groups, with a strong impact, in turn on individual development.

In all human interactions there are two major ingredients; content and process. The first deals with subject matter of the task upon which the group is working. In most interactions, the focus of attention of all persons is on the content. The second ingredient, process, is concerned with what is happening between and to group members while the group is working. There is a certain dynamic character to the functioning of the small groups. It does not remain static. It moves and change over a period of time. It is this dynamic character of small groups that makes it possible to change them. Group process deals with such items as morale, feeling tone, atmosphere, influence, participation, style of influence, leadership struggles, conflicts, competition, cooperation etc. In most interactions, very little attention is paid to process, even when it is the major cause of ineffective group action. Sensitivity to group process will better enable one to diagnose group problems early and deal with them more effectively. Since these processes are present in all groups, awareness of them will enhance a person's worth to a group and enable him to be more effective group participant (Balgopal, 1989). The following description will help you to analyse the dynamics of the group process that take place in almost every group.

**Participation:** One indication of involvement is verbal participation. Look for differences in the amount of participation among members.

- 1) Who are the participators?
- 2) Who are the low participators? Do you see any shift in participation? Do you see any possible reason for this in the group's interaction?
- 3) How are the silent people treated? How is their silence interpreted? Consent? Disagreement? Disinterest? Fear? Shy?
- 4) Who talks to whom? Do you see any reason for this in the group's interaction? How is this relevant in the larger environmental context?
- 5) Who keeps the ball rolling? Why? Do you see any reason for this in the group's interaction?

**Influence:** Influence and participation are not the same. Some people may speak very little, yet they capture the attention of the whole group. Others may talk a lot, but generally not listened to by other members.

- 1) Who are the members high in influence? That is, when they talk others seem to listen.
- 2) Who are the members low in influence? Others do not listen to or follow them.
- 3) Is there any shift in influence? Who shifts?
- 4) Do you see any rivalry in the group? Is there a struggle for leadership?
- 5) What effect does it have on other group members?

**Styles of Influences:** Influence can take many forms. It can be positive or negative. It can enlist the support or cooperation of others or alienate them. How a person attempts to influence another may be the crucial factor in determining how open or closed the other will be towards being influenced. The following are four styles of influences that frequently emerge in groups.

- 1) **Autocratic:** Does anyone attempt to impose his will or values on other group members; tries to push them to support his decisions? Who evaluates or passes judgement on other group members? Do any members block action when it is not moving in the direction they desire? Who pushes to 'get the group organised'?
- 2) **Peacemaker:** Who eagerly supports other group members' decisions? Does anyone consistently try to avoid conflict or unpleasant feelings? Is any member typically deferential toward other group members – give them power? Does any of the members appear to avoid giving negative feedback i.e., who will participate only when they have a positive feedback to give.
- 3) **Laissez Faire:** Are any group members getting attention by their apparent lack of involvement in the group? Does any group member go along with group decisions without seeming to commit himself one way or the other? Who seems to be withdrawn and involved and does not initiate activity but participates mechanically and only in response to another member's question.
- 4) **Democratic:** Does anyone try to include everyone in a group decision or discussion? Who expresses his feelings and opinions openly and directly without evaluating or judging others? When feelings run high and tension mounts, who are the members who attempt to deal with the conflict in a problem-solving way?

**Decision Making Procedure:** Many kinds of decisions are made in groups without considering the effects of these decisions on other members. Some people try to impose their own decisions on the group, while others want all members to participate or share in the decisions that are made.

- 1) Does anyone make a decision and carry it out without checking with other group members (Self authorised)? For e.g. she decides on the topic to be discussed and starts talking about it. What effect does this have on other group members?
- 2) Does the group drift from topic to topic? Who jumps topics? Do you see any reason for this in the group's interaction?
- 3) Who supports other members' suggestions or decisions? Does this support result in the two members deciding the topic or activity for the group (Handclasp)? What effect does this have on other group members?
- 4) Is there any evidence of a majority pushing a decision through over other members' objections? Do they call for a vote (majority support)?
- 5) Is there any attempt to get all members participate in a decision making (consensus)? What effect does this seem to have on the group?
- 6) Does anyone make any contributions that do not receive any kind of response or recognition (flop)? What effect does this have on the member?

**Task Functions:** These functions illustrate behaviours that are concerned with getting the job done or accomplishing the tasks that the group has before them.

- 1) Does anyone ask for or make suggestions as to the best way to proceed or to tackle problems?
- 2) Does anyone attempt to summarise what has been covered or what has been going on in the group?
- 3) Is there any giving or asking for facts, ideas, opinions, feelings, feedback or searching for alternatives?
- 4) Who keeps the group on target or prevents digressing?

**Maintenance Functions:** These functions are important to the morale of the group. They maintain good and harmonious working relationships among the members and create a group atmosphere, which enables each member to contribute maximally. They ensure smooth and effective teamwork within the group.

- 1) Who helps others get into the discussion (gate opener)?
- 2) Who cuts off others or interrupts them (gate closers)?
- 3) How well are members getting their ideas across? Are some members preoccupied and not listening? Are there any attempts by group members to help others clarify their ideas?
- 4) How are ideas rejected? How do members react when their ideas are not accepted? Do members attempt to support others when they reject their ideas?

**Group Atmosphere:** Something about the way a group works creates an atmosphere which in turn is revealed in a general impression. In addition, people may differ in the kind of atmosphere they like in a group. Insight can be gained into the atmosphere characteristic of a group by finding words that describe the general impressions held by group members.

- 1) Who seems to prefer a friendly congenial atmosphere? Is there any attempt to suppress conflict or unpleasant feelings?
- 2) Who seems to prefer an atmosphere of conflict and disagreement? Do any members provoke or annoy others?
- 3) Do people seem involved and interested? Is the atmosphere one of work, play, satisfaction, taking flight, sluggish etc.?

**Membership:** A major concern for group members is the degree of acceptance or inclusion in the group. Different patterns of interaction may develop in the group which gives clues to the degree and kind of membership.

- 1) Is there any sub-grouping? Some times two or three members may consistently agree and support each other or consistently disagree and oppose one another?
- 2) Do some people seem to be 'outsider' in the group? Do some members seem to be most 'in'? How are those outsiders treated?
- 3) Do some members move in and out of the group, e.g., lean forward or backward in chair or move chair in and out. Under what conditions do they come in or move out?

**Feelings:** During any group discussion, feelings are frequently generated by the interactions between members. These feelings, however, are seldom talked about. Observers may have to make guesses based on tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and many other forms of non-verbal cues.

- 1) What signs of feelings do you observe in group members? Anger, irritation, frustration, warmth, affection, excitement, boredom, defensiveness, competitiveness etc.
- 2) Do you see any attempts by group members to block the expression of feelings, particularly negative feelings? How is this done? Does anyone do this consistently?

**Norms:** Standards or ground rules may develop in a group that control the behaviour of its members. Norms usually express the beliefs or desires of the majority of the group members as to what behaviours should or should not take place in the group. These norms may be clear to all members (explicit), known or sensed by only a few (implicit) or operating completely below the level of awareness of any group members. Some norms facilitate group progress and some hinder it.

- 1) Are certain areas avoided in the group (e.g. smoking, religion, talking about present feelings in group, etc.)? Who seems to reinforce this avoidance? How do they do it?
- 2) Are group members overly nice or polite to each other? Are only positive feelings expressed? Do members agree with each other too readily? What happens when members disagree?
- 3) Do you see norms operating about participation or the kinds of questions that are allowed (e.g., 'If I talk, you must talk'. 'If I tell my problems you have to tell your problems'?) Do members feel free to probe each other about their feelings? Do questions tend to be restricted to intellectual topics or events outside of the group?

### Practice Activity

Based on your field work practice with groups, explain the various aspects of group process that take place in the group.

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we started our discussion by saying that groups have a great potential for individual, group and community change and development. When we talk about social work with groups today, it conveys a meaning not necessarily restricted in bringing about change in the lives of individual member, but also change in the group as such and also change in the larger community or society at large. The group work method evolved out of the developments in the field of practice in social work and from the practice in other disciplines. Even though social group work came to India ten years after it was formally recognized as a method of social work in the West, the social work practitioners and educators in India had not contributed much to evolve a culturally relevant theoretical perspective and practice models.

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## 1.7 KEY WORDS

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**Group** : A group is a collection of more than two persons who have a common objective (though not every member may know it fully or agree with it), a stable membership (a relatively fixed number of people who remain members of the group over a period of time), has a clear boundary (in terms of physical space and time) and who are placed in relation to each other in specific role and status relationship.

**Method** : Method is a conscious procedure, a designed means of achieving a goal. It is an orderly, systematic, planned way of working with people.

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## 1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Balgopal, P. R. (1989), '*What to look for in groups*', presentation at the Department of Social Work and Psychology, National University of Singapore, Fall.

Joseph, Helen (1997), '*Social work with groups: A literature review*', Indian Journal of Social Work, Vol. 58.2.

Mehta, V. D. (1987), *Group Work in Encyclopedia of Social Work in India*, Vol 2, Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi.

Toseland, Ronald and Rivas, F. Robert (1999), *Introduction to group work practice*, Allyn and Bacon, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Trecker, H. B. (1955), *Social Group Work – Principles and Practices*, Association Press, New York.

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## 1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress I

- 1) Groups provide the best way for interpersonal interaction that helps in the growth and development of the individual members. Individual members play different roles in the group. Through the group process, they learn more about their own behaviours and the consequences of their behaviour on other members and the group as such. The climate that is created in a group will lead to mutual support of individuals. The members will be able to know each other and will be able to share their feelings and experience that will help relieve ones tensions and fears. It also creates an opportunity to learn from others and thereby gain new life skills and knowledge. The members will be able to test and compare their perceptions and feelings that promote validation or correction of distortions in perceptions. In short, one can say that group provide scope for mutual support, commitment to others, skills in restoring relationships, universalisation of personal problems or issues, instillation of hope, a feeling of altruism, catharsis, correct emotional experience, reality testing and to reduce resistance to authority and behave in a way acceptable to others.

### Check Your Progress II

- 1) Social group work uses the group approach to accomplish the goals of social work. Today, social group work is meant to have three different meanings: (1) it helps its members in problem-solving by working within the groups; (2) it helps to develop the group as such by working with its structure and processes; and (3) it intervenes in the outer system using group as an instrument. Thus group work will provide opportunity for personal growth according to individual capacity and need; help in the adjustment of the individual with other persons, to groups and to society; motivate individuals towards improving the society and help to recognise her own rights, abilities and differences of others.

In group work, individuals who share similar needs or problem are formed into a group, usually under the initiative of an agency. A professional helper, called the group worker, will guide and assist the interactions of the group through different programmes and activities to reach a mutually agreed goal that could be personal, interpersonal or task-related in nature. During the group process, the members will learn to share, to suggest and to work together for the growth and development of individual members and the achievement of the established group goals. Group work aims at the development of the individual members adjustment with other members, to group and to the society. In the group process, members share and interact with each other and often express their feelings about the larger social system. This basic knowledge proved them a chance to sit together, plan and take collective action for the betterment of the society.

### Check Your Progress III

- 1) Two streams of enquiries — one on the study of groups in laboratory and community settings and the other in the practices of group work — have led to the development of social group work as a method of social work. The study of groups have shown that groups have a significant influence on individual group members and tend to generated forces to conform to certain set of behaviours and self-judgment. It has also led to the understanding of the various group processes like socialisation,

(and anti-social), conformity, group cohesion, communication and interaction patterns, leadership, interpersonal and social perception, inter group hostility and task performance. Understanding of all these led to further the group work practice.

The historical growth of group work began simultaneously from those practitioners who led groups for socialisation, recreation, adult education, youth development and community work in the settlement houses, neighbourhood centres, Y's, the Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Jewish centre and other youth service agencies. Even though social group work was taught in the School of Social Work at Western Reserve University since 1935, the identification of group work with social work profession can be said to be confirmed only in the 1950s. The American Association for the Study of Group Work, founded in 1936 had helped in clarifying and refining the philosophy and practice of group work. Following the World War II, due to the shortfall of manpower, groups were used in mental health setting influenced by psychoanalysis and ego psychology. During the 1940-50 period groups were also used for community development and social action. A considerable quantity of literature developed by social work practitioners helped clarify the philosophy, aims and objectives, principles and process, which in turn helped in obtaining a distinct status within social work.

With the introduction of professional social work education in India, group work began to be taught in the schools of social work. Even though there was evidence of using group approach to community work in India, not much of documentation is available to give group work an Indian taste. There is an agreement that the theoretical perspectives and the practice models in India are primarily American as in the case of social work itself. There are small efforts to develop need based group work practice in India and to make it culturally relevant.