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Social Groups: Characteristics and Significance

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Introduction

Each day, we interact with groups, in one form or in another - we are born into and dwell in a group (family), we learn in groups (classrooms), we work in group (office, project teams), we interact with friends, and we also spend much in leisure groups. We learn, work, and play in groups. For that matter an individual's personal identity is moulded in the way in which we are perceived and treated by members of our groups.

As humans we are by nature inherently social and gregarious. Our life is filled with groups from the moment we are born until the moment of our death. Businesses, the Government, and the military are all interested in enhancing the productivity of groups. Educators too strive to understand how the classroom functions as a group. Drug abuse, delinquency, crime and mental illness are all being treated through therapeutic groups, and there is continued concern with making those procedures more effective.

To understand the breadth of group work practice, it is important to be familiar with the variety of groups in practice settings. Given the variety of groups, it is important to distinguish between them.

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Definition and Characteristics of Groups

Contrary to the conventional understanding, not every collection of people can be regarded a group. The Oxford English Dictionary defines group as "a number of persons or things regarded as forming a unit, on account of any kind of mutual or common relation, or classified together on account of a common degree of similarity."

From the sociological perspective, a group can be defined as two or more humans that interact with one another, accept expectations and obligations as members of the group, as well as share a common identity. Going by this definition, society can be perceived at the macro level as a large group, while a social group (e.g. family, club, and team) which is considerably small may be viewed as small at the micro-level.

According to Paul Hare, the defining characteristic of a group is social interaction. A true group exhibits some degree of social cohesion and is more than a simple collection or aggregate of individuals, such as people waiting at a bus stop. Characteristics shared by members of a group may include interests, values, ethnic or social background, and kinship ties. An aggregate is a collection of individuals who are present at the same time and place, but does not necessarily form a unit or have any common degree of similarity. Individuals standing at a street corner or the members of an audience at a music programme constitute aggregates, not groups.

Muzafer Sherif (1916-1982) formulated a more technical definition. According to Sherif a group has to be 'social unit consisting of a number of individuals interacting with each other based on certain elements:

1)   common motives and goals;

2) an accepted division of labour, i.e. roles,

3) established status (social rank, dominance) relationships;

4) accepted norms and values with reference to matters relevant to the group;

5) development of accepted sanctions (praise and punishment) if and when norms were respected or violated.

Based on the above definitions one may consider a few criteria to call a group a group:

- number of persons – more than one
- interdependence
- acceptance of roles and status
- similarity of goals, motives
- shared norms and values

Characteristics

Various other definitions given by different social scientists have emphasised on the various aspects of a group in various definitions. Based on these one may arrive at the quintessential characteristics of groups:

- **Interpersonal Interaction -** A group is defined as a collection of individuals interacting with each other; individuals are not a group unless they are interacting with one another (Bonner, Stogdill, and Homans)

- **Perceptions of Membership -** A group may be defined as a social unit consisting of two or more persons, who perceive themselves as belonging to a group. Its members define themselves and are defined by others as belonging to the group. Accordingly, the persons are not a group unless they perceive themselves to be part of a group (Bales and Smith)

- **Interdependency** - Group may be defined as a collection of individuals who are interdependent. Usually, individuals are not a group unless an event that affects one of them affects them all. It is questionable that a group could exist without its members being interdependent. (Cartright and Zander, Fiedler, and Lewin.

- **Goals** - Group may be defined as a collection of individuals who join together to achieve a goal. According to this definition, the individuals are not a group unless they are trying to achieve a mutual goal. The primary defining characteristic of a group is the craving of its members to achieve a mutual goal (Deutsch and Freeman).

- **Motivation** - Group may be defined as a collection of individuals who are all trying to satisfy some personal need through their joint association. Thus, individuals are not a group unless they are motivated by some personal reason to be part of a group (Bass and Cattell).

- **Structured Relationships** - A group may be a collection of individuals whose interactions are structured by a set of roles and norms. They share norms concerning matters of common interest and participate in a system of interlocking roles. Therefore, individuals are not a group unless their interactions are structured by a set of role definitions and norms (McDavid and Harari, and Shel and Sherif).

- **Mutual Influence** - A group may be defined as a collection of individuals who influence each other. Accordingly, individuals are not a group unless they are affecting and being affected by each other (Shaw).

Not all these characteristics are equally important and although it is impossible to gain consensus among social

scientists as to which characteristics are most important. However based on these characteristics we may define a group for the purpose of group work as:

A group is two or more individuals in face to face interaction, each aware of his or her membership in the group as well as of others who belong to the group, and their positive interdependence as they strive to achieve mutual goals.

Factors Influencing Group Formation

There are four major factors that usually influence our decision to join and remain in a wide variety of groups: attraction to members of the group; the activities, goals, or the task of the group; belongingness to the people in the group; and meeting needs or goals lying outside the group.

Attraction to the group most often grows out of proximity and the frequency of interaction. Your neighbourhoods, classmates, roommates, and friendship are largely determined by those who are in close proximity and also available for interaction. However, one must remember that proximity creates only the potential for attraction. Various other factors usually come into play when actually establishing a relationship. Similarities, especially attitudinal similarity or vibes, appear to be as strong in group formation as in interpersonal attraction. Several other attributes of groups render them more attractive to prospective members and thus contribute to group formation.

- prestige of a group; e.g. members who have positions of higher authority, aristocracy and eliteness

- possibility of cooperative relationships and joint rewards heighten the attractiveness of a group

- the degree of positive interaction among members increasing the range of personal and social needs being met.

- size of the group; smaller groups offer higher possibility for interaction, for sharing similarities, and for meeting individual needs

The *task* of a group, as experienced in its activities and goals, is the second factor influencing group affiliation. You join a photography club because you enjoy taking pictures, discussing and sharing that activity with others. You may even join a protest group to resist something that goes against your ideals; e.g. we join Green Peace to protest against environmental exploitation by Corporations, or, we may even join students' movements to protest against the hike in tuition fees or cut down in transport concessions because you cannot afford to pay more. Thus, you are gaining rewards directly through group membership. The social exchange theory (Homans, 1959; Gouldner, 1960) to group formation predicts that we join and remain in groups when the rewards for doing so outweigh the costs, thus yielding profits.

The third general factor of group formation is our *desire to affiliate* with the people in that group. We satisfy our need for affiliation through interacting with people, just as we meet our need for achievement through the activities and goals of the group. The fact that we affiliate for reasons of social comparison, in order to reduce anxiety, or to even to satisfy an innate craving, suggests that a group is a powerful forum for meeting our basic social needs and can yield a strong influence on our behaviour.

Group *membership* may help us meet needs that lie outside the group - thus, group membership may be a stepping stone to achieve an external goal, rather than a source of direct satisfaction. A college professor may regularly attend

meetings of a professional association to enhance the probability of promotion. A candidate for political office may join a host of community organisations to enhance his or her chances for election.

Plausible Explanations about Group Formation

Based on the various factors influencing group formation, the following may be hypothesized:

1) people join groups in order to satisfy certain individual needs.

2) proximity, contact and frequent interaction provide an opportunity to satisfy certain needs.

3) interpersonal attraction is a function of physical attractiveness, perceived ability of the other person (success or failure), need compatibility as well as various similarities - attitudinal, personality, economic, ethnicity, shared goals, etc.

4) individuals join groups if the activities of the group attractive or rewarding.

Types of Groups

All of us are simultaneously members of various types of groups. We are members of a family, members of friendship groups, members of work organisations and members of fan club or a even a religious group. Sociologists have attempted to classify is various types of groups as follows:

- **Voluntary vs. Involuntary Groups**

We may join a political party or a particular association (typical of an occupation).Such groups we join through our own choice and effort are *voluntary* groups. In contrast we are forced to join or are automatically incorporated as

members of certain groups without choice; e.g. we are automatically classified in groups as members based on sex, age, nationality, religion and ethnicity. These latter groups in which we become members by birth or without any choice are *involuntary* groups.

- **Open vs. Closed Groups**

Open groups are those groups characterized by changing membership. Here, virtually anyone can become a member. As certain members leave, new members are admitted, and the group continues. For instance, anyone can join the Hrithik Roshan fan club. On the other hand, there are some groups that maintain exclusiveness by restricting the membership and make it much more difficult to join. Only a few qualify to become members in such clubs. Such groups with restrictive membership criteria are closed groups; e.g. the mafia (underworld), Royal Enfield motorcycle clubs, night clubs, etc. Closed groups typically have some time limitation, with the group meeting for a predetermined number of sessions. Generally, members are expected to remain in the group until it ends, and new members are not added.

There are some advantages to open groups that incorporate new members as others leave, one of which is an increased opportunity for members to interact with a greater variety of people. A potential disadvantage of open groups is that rapid changing of members can result in a lack of cohesion, particularly if too many clients leave or too many new ones are introduced at once. Therefore, it will be better to bring in new members one at a time as and when opening occurs.

- **Vertical vs. Horizontal Groups**

There are certain groups, whose membership consists of individuals from all walks of life; e.g. religious groups may have members from all classes. Such a group may be

regarded as a *vertical* group. On the other hand, a *horizontal* group consists predominantly of members from one social class. Occupational groups of doctors (e.g. IMA); guilds or associations of persons of a trade e.g. electricians, carpenters, non-gazatted officers for instance are composed largely of members from the same social class..

- **Primary vs. Secondary Groups**

Cooley described *primary* groups as collectivities of individuals – as in the case of play groups, neighbourhood or village – "characterized by intimate, sympathetic face-to-face association and cooperation." A *primary* group is a group in which members develop close, personal, intimate and enduring relationships; e.g. family, neighbours, work associates, etc. Here, the members know each other very well, are greatly influenced by one another and feel closely related. On the other hand, *secondary groups* are characterized by contractual relationships and 'communication on indirect media' (Faris, 1937). These are 'relatively larger, relatively temporary, anonymous'; they are also 'formal, impersonal groups, in which there is little social intimacy or mutual understanding'and 'based on some interest or activity', and whose 'members interact on the basis of some specific roles.'

- **Natural vs. Formed Groups**

Natural groups consist of members coming together in a spontaneous manner, on the basis of naturally occurring events, interpersonal attraction or the mutually perceived needs of members. Family, peer groups and street gangs are examples of natural groups. (Whyte, 1993). On the other hand, *formed* group are those groups constituted by any influence or intervention external to the group. Such groups are usually formed for a particular purpose. Therapy groups, encounter groups, committees and teams are examples of formed groups.

- **Formal vs. Informal Groups**

Formal groups are those groups that require someone to determine a task that needs to be accomplished, which requires some kind of organizational system, made up of various job roles, for which individuals are recruited (Artherton, 2003). Here, task is what matters, and everything else—particularly the individuals and the roles they occupy—may be changed. Informal groups work the other way round. A group of individuals meet: if they form a group, then they will informally allocate roles depending on individual preferences, and / or on talents. This collection of roles makes a system possible, and so occasionally they may undertake a task together, such as organizing a trip, or a night out or a party. It is the preferences of the Individuals which are paramount; tasks are incidental.

- **Treatment vs. Task Groups**

Treatment groups signify groups whose major purpose is to meet the socio-emotional needs of the group members. Such groups often aim at meeting the members' need for support, education, therapy, growth and socialization. Treatment groups include growth groups (e.g. encounter groups for couples, value clarification groups for adolescents, or educative groups for community women); therapy groups (psychotherapy groups, support groups for de- addicted or the sober) (Konopka, 1983); socialization groups (YMCA, half-way homes) (Middleman, 1982; Whittaker, 1985). In contrast, *task* groups come in existence with the purpose of accomplishing a goal that is neither intrinsically nor immediately linked to the needs of the group members, but rather, of broader constituency. The classic example for *task* groups in social work practice setting are Medical Teams, Treatment conferences convened to monitor treatment as well as Staff

Development (Programs). Some of the major difference between treatment and task groups include the following:

- members in treatment groups are bonded to their common needs, where as in a task group, the members are working towards accomplishing a task or a mandate which eventually might lead to bonding

- roles develop through interaction in treatment groups, while in task roles are usually defined based on competencies

- communication is open in treatment groups, while communication in task groups are focused around a particular task

- procedures in treatment groups are flexible, while it is formal and based on agendas in task groups

- self-disclosure is high in treatment groups, whereas it might not at all happen in task groups

- proceedings are confidential and kept within the context of the treatment groups, where as in task groups it may be open to public scrutiny

- success of treatment groups is evaluated on the basis of the group meeting the members' treatment goals, where as in task groups it is based on the achievement of task or a mandate

The type of group that we discussed last – formed groups as well as treatment groups – are of great interest to group work, as the groups that we come across in group work predominantly belong to this type of groups.

Other types of groups include the following:

- Reference Group - Individuals almost universally have a bond toward what are known as reference groups. These are groups to which the individual conceptually

relates him/herself, and from which he/she adopts goals and values as a part of his/her self identity.

- Peer group - A peer group is a group of approximately the same age, social status, and interests. Generally, people are relatively equal in terms of power when they interact with peers.

- Clique - An informal, tight-knit group, usually in a High School/College setting, that shares common interests. There is an established yet shifting power structure in most *Cliques*.

- Club - A club is a group, which usually requires one to apply to become a member. Such clubs may be dedicated to particular activities, such as sporting clubs.

- Household - all individuals who live in the same home

- Community - A community is a group of people with a commonality or sometimes a complex net of overlapping commonalities, often - but not always - in proximity with one another with some degree of continuity over time. They often have some organization and leaders.

- Franchise- this is an organisation which runs several instances of a business in many locations.

- Gang - A gang is usually an urban group that gathers in a particular area. It is a group of people that often hang around each other. They can be like some clubs, but much less formal.

- Mob - A mob is usually a group of people that has taken the law into their own hands. Mobs are usually a group which gather temporarily for a particular reason.

- Posse - A posse was initially an American term for a group of citizens that had banded together to enforce the law. However, it can also refer to a street group.

- Squad - This is usually a small group, of around 3-8 people, that would work as a team to accomplish their goals.

- Team - similar to a squad, though a team may contain many more members. A team works in a similar way to a squad

- Learning (groups) - Drs David and Roger Johnson of the University of Minnesota (the gurus of group work and co-operative learning research) identify three types of groups that can promote collaborative learning:

  - Informal learning groups -Ad hoc, transient, short-term groups that can be quickly formed and utilised in even a large lecture situation. Formal learning groups - The sort of groups that we would use to work on larger collaborative projects. This type of group work is more structured and requires much more planning. Formal learning groups generally include multiple opportunities for reflection on the group's progress.

  - Base groups (study group) - Self-selected groups of students who work together independently of specified class time or assignments.

Logistics regarding Groups

Group Composition

Whether a group should be homogeneous (consisting of members from similar age-groups, sex and socio-economic background) or a heterogeneous in membership, depends on the group's goals. In the context of social group work, given specific target population with specific needs, a group composed entirely of members of that population quite

similar in characteristics is more appropriate than a heterogeneous group. For example, let us consider a group composed entirely of elderly people. Such a group would be able to focus exclusively and deal more consistently on the specific problems that characterize their developmental period, e.g. loneliness, isolation, loss in income and eventually social position, rejection, deterioration of the body, atrophy in energy and so forth. This similarity among the members can lead to a great degree of cohesion, which in turn offers the possibility for an open and intense exploration of their life crises, leading to universalisation (as a principle) of their problems. Members are more likely to express feelings that have been once kept private. Moreover, their life circumstances create a bond with one another. Similarly, self-help groups (SHGs) for women also benefit greatly from the homogeneity of the composition of their group, enabling them to pursue the common goal of credit management (thrift-savings) or self-development in a concerted fashion.

Alternately, where it is desired to provide diverse, socially challenging growth experiences, a microcosm of the outside social structure is desired. In such an event, a heterogeneous group is best. Personal-growth groups and certain therapy groups tend to be heterogeneous. Thus, participant members are allowed to experiment with new behaviour and develop interpersonal skills with the help of feedback from a rich variety of people in an environment representative of everyday reality.

Group Size

There has been contesting views regarding the desirable size for a group. The answer depends on several factors: the age of clients, experience of the leader, type of group, and nature of the problems to be explored. For instance, a group composed of elementary school children might be

kept to 4 to 6, whereas a group of adolescents might be made up of 8 to 12 people. For a weekly ongoing group of adults, about 10 to 12 people with one leader may be ideal. A group manageable in size, is big enough to give ample opportunity for interaction and small enough for everyone to be involved and to feel a sense of "group."

Frequency and Duration of Meetings

Another bone of contention is regarding the periodicity of group meetings. Questions frequently posed include:

- How often should a group meet?

- For how long should a group meet twice weekly for 1-hour sessions? Or is 1½ to 2 hours once a week preferable?

With children and adolescents it may be better to meet more frequently and for a shorter period to suit their attention span. If the group is taking place in a school setting, the meeting times can correspond to regularly scheduled class periods. For groups of college students or relatively well functioning adults, a 2-hour weekly session might be preferable. A 2-hour period is sufficient to allow some intensive work yet, not so long that fatigue sets in. You can choose any frequency and duration that suit your style of leadership and the type of people in your group. For an in-patient group in a mental health centre, it is desirable to meet on a daily basis for 45 minutes. Because of the members' psychological impairment, it may not be realistic to hold their attention for a longer period.

Group Life-cycle

Other questions that have often intrigued us are:

- What should be the duration of a group?
- Is it wise to set a termination date?

For most groups (in the social work perspective) a termination date should be announced at the outset, so that members will have a clear idea of the time frame within which they would be operating. Groups in educational institutions typically run for about 15 weeks. This would be long enough for trust to develop and for work toward behavioural changes to take place. But it should not be so long that the group seems to be dragging on interminably. A major value of this type of time limited group is that members are motivated to realize that they do not have forever to attain their personal goals. At different points in this 15-week group, members are challenged to review their progress, both individually and as a group. If they are dissatisfied with their own participation or with the direction the group is taking, they have the responsibility to do something to change the situation.

Some groups compose of the same members who meet for years. Such a time structure allows them to work through issues in some depth, and offers support and challenge in making life changes. These ongoing groups do have the potential for fostering dependency, and thus it is important that both the leader and members evaluate the impact of the group on the clients' daily living.

Place for Group Meetings

Other questions concern the environment and ambience for group meetings. Many places will do, but privacy is essential. Members must be assured that they will not be overheard by people in adjoining rooms.

Groups often fail because of their physical setting. If they are held in a day hall or ward full of distractions, productive group work will not occur. You would require a room that is not cluttered up with chairs and tables and that allows for a comfortable seating arrangement. Members must be

able to sit in a circle. This arrangement lets all the participants see one another and allows enough freedom of movement that members can spontaneously make physical contact.

Dispersal and transformation of groups

Two or more people in interacting situations will over time develop stable territorial relationships. As described above, these may or may not develop into groups. But stable groups can also break up in to several sets of territorial relationships. There are numerous reasons for stable groups to malfunction or to disperse, but essentially this is because of loss of compliance with one or more elements of the definition of group provided by Sherif. The two most common causes of a malfunctioning group are the addition of too many individuals, and the failure of the leader to enforce a common purpose, though malfunctions may occur due to a failure of any of the other elements (i.e., confusions regarding status or of norms).

In a society, there is obvious need for more people to participate in cooperative endeavours than can be accommodated by separate groups. The military has demonstrated best as to how this is possible by its hierarchical array of squads, platoons, companies, battalions, regiments, and divisions. Private companies, corporations, government agencies, clubs, too have all developed comparable (if less formal and standardized) systems when the number of members or employees exceeds the number that can be accommodated in an effective group. Not all larger social structures require the cohesion that may be found in the small group. Consider the neighbourhood, country club, or the diocese, which are basically territorial organizations who support large social purposes. Any such large organisations may need only islands of cohesive leadership.

For a functioning group to attempt to add new members in a casual way is a certain prescription for failure, loss of efficiency, or disorganization. The number of functioning members in a group can be reasonably flexible between five and ten, and a long-standing cohesive group may be able to tolerate a few part-timers. The key concept is that the value and success of a group is obtained by each member maintaining a distinct, functioning identity in the minds of each of the members. The cognitive limit to this span of control on individuals often set at seven. Rapid shifting of attention can push the limit to about ten. Beyond ten, subgroups will inevitably start to form with the attendant loss of purpose, dominance order, and individuality, with confusion of roles and rules. The standard classroom with twenty to forty pupils and one teacher is a rueful example of one supposed leader juggling a number of subgroups.

Weakening of the common purpose once a group is well established can be attributed to: adding new members; unsettled conflicts of identities (i.e., territorial problems in individuals); weakening of a settled dominance order; and weakening or failure of the leader to tend to the group. The actual loss of a leader is frequently fatal to a group, unless there was lengthy preparation for the transition. The loss of the leader tends to dissolve all dominance relationships, as well as weakening dedication to common purpose, differentiation of roles, and maintenance of norms. The most common symptoms of a troubled group are loss of efficiency, diminished participation, or weakening of purpose, as well as an increase in verbal aggression. Often, if a strong common purpose is still present, a simple reorganization with a new leader and a few new members will be sufficient to re-establish the group, which is somewhat easier than forming an entirely new group.

Benefits of Groups

Affiliation to groups carries certain implications, both constructive and detrimental. Given below are some of these:

1) In most circumstances, the productivity of groups is higher than that of the individuals. This synergy is best demonstrated in the form of team work whether it be in cricket, football or at work.

2) Groups are likely to make effective decisions and solve the problems better than individuals working alone. When problems are discussed in groups, there is a better probability for clarification out of which a variety of solutions emerge. It is for this very reason that we constitute committees.

3) It is through group membership that we inculcate values of altruism, kindness, compassion, responsibility and so forth. Family and peer groups are such primary groups responsible for engraving into us a wide range of such human values.

4) The quality of emotional life in terms of friendship, love, excitement, joy, fulfillment and achievement is richer in groups and helps in personal growth. A person who does not have any relationship with others will not be able to experience most of the emotions. The quality of everyday life is better in groups because of the advantages of specialization and division of labour.

5) Conflicts are absorbed better considering the possibility of sharing. Similarly, conflicts are managed more productively in groups owing to the peer support and a variety of ideas to problem solving.

6) A person's identity, self-esteem and social competencies are easily clarified and shaped by the

groups to which he/she belongs. Being a member of different kinds of groups provides you with an identity, e.g. a student, family member, caste, etc. Friendship (groups) offer opportunities to experiment with different kinds of behaviour without the threat of rejection thereby helping to develop the self- esteem.

Even while groups provide a lot of benefits, social scientists have also pointed out aspects of groups that are not very constructive. For one, people in groups are for reasons of anonymity and security, are more likely to take more extreme positions and engage in impulsive and antisocial behaviours. Another negative aspect is the tendency of groups to force their members to conform, in extreme cases even threatening the identity of the individuals. Social scientists also point out that sometimes group affiliations become so strong that group members turn hostile on non-members and other groups. Intense group behaviour may precipitate several conflicts in the society.

However, a proper understanding of groups and its proper application in dealing with groups within the context of social work will help us reap the immense benefits from using groups. Experiments conducted by social scientists have proved time and again the strengths of using groups for the development of the individual and society. That is the reason why an understanding of groups is crucial to the practice of group work. In the context of group work, groups contribute immensely to the personality development of individuals.

Conclusion

We constantly interact with groups that consist of individuals and for various purposes, every moment of our lives. Characteristically groups consist of two or more individuals mutually dependant, having similarities and

shared goals, etc. The dominant factors influencing group formation are prestige, commonality of tasks, desire for affiliation, and need satisfaction. Groups come in various forms depending on the context and the purposes they are constituted for. The most common groups are: Voluntary and Involuntary, Open and Closed, Formal and Informal, Treatment and Task, etc. There are frequently asked questions regarding the size of the groups, the duration of group life, the ideals regarding the meeting place, etc. all of which may be determined based on the context and subject to scientific bases. More importantly, groups are instrumental in moulding the individual's personality, as it provides opportunities for problem-solving, self-esteem building, conflict resolution and for that matter the socialization of the person in a society. To this end, groups become very much relevant to social group work practice

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Historical Development of Group Work

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Introduction

The old adage "no man is an island" indicates the relevance and virtue of human interaction. Mutual association helps human beings in refining and in evolving into a well behaved citizen, with concern for his fellow beings rather than thinking individualistically. It is by virtue of relationships that we maintain at various levels - in the family, at school, in the neighborhood and religious institutions - that we learn the basics of adjustments, sacrifice, compromise, understanding, etc. Klein (1972) observed that open social systems do not exist in a vacuum; they are a part and parcel of the environment and constantly interact with their surrounding.

Social group work as a basic method of social work, utilizes groups, group dynamics as well as the inherent synergy, in order to catalyse growth in the participating individuals. Social Work with groups represents a broad domain of direct social work practice (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004). Social Group Work has its acceptance in all the settings practicing social work. Middleman and Wood (1990) have noted that for the practice to qualify as social work with groups, four essential conditions must be met:

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the worker should focus attention on helping the group members become a system of mutual aid; the worker must understand the role of group process itself as the primary force responsible for individual and collective change; the group worker must seek to enhance group autonomy; the group worker helps the group members experience their groupness upon their termination.

In trying to understand the origins of social group work we need to start with clubs and recreation movements, which are the forerunners of social group work. In order to develop a broad perspective concerning the potential uses of groups in social work practice, it is helpful to understand the developmental milestones that have happened in the study of groups and its implications in the practice of group work over the years. Such a historical perspective will also give you a firm foundation upon which a knowledge base can be built upon for effective group work practice.

Understanding Groups

There have been in general two approaches that may have enhanced our understanding of groups. The first, came from social scientists who experimented on groups in laboratories or observed groups functioning in community setting. The alternate approach came from group work practitioners who examined how groups function in practice settings such as social work, education, group therapy sessions and recreation. Such an understanding has led to improved methods of working with a variety of different types of groups.

Social Psychology as a subject addresses to the basic research question that was asked by social scientists regarding the extent to which being a part of a group, influences the individual group member. Early findings

suggest that the presence of others did indeed have a significant influence on an individual group member; groups tended to generate forces that force individuals to conform to the standards of behaviour and judgments of individual members. Le Bon (1910) recognising that people in groups react differently from individuals, referred to the forces generated by group interaction as 'group contagion' and 'group mind'. Another aspect that might interest us is cohesion. *Cohesiveness* of a group is the extent to which members are attracted to (or want to remain in) the group (Wilson, 1978). Cohesiveness is the 'total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group (Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1950)'. In simple words, it is the measure of interpersonal attractiveness among the members of the group. Studies demonstrate that the 'satisfaction that members derive from associating with one another is only one reward that binds them to a group and therefore only one dimension of cohesiveness (Gross and Martin, 1952; Eisman, 1959; and Hagstrom and Selvin, 1965). Review of literature distinguishes other two types of rewards – *social interdependence* and *instrumental interdependence.* Social interdependence occurs where members are attracted to one another simply because of the perceived advantage involved in being with and interacting with other members of the group. Instrumental independence occurs where individuals are attracted to one another in order to jointly achieve some goal; e.g. teaming up to win a race or game, participation in struggles to displacement resulting from development, working in an orchestra (Jose, 2008).

The nature of the group too may influence the participating individuals. Allport (1924) for example, found that presence of others improved task performance. The concept of a *primary* group was also an important contribution to the study of groups. Cooley (1909) defined a *primary* group as

'a small informal group, equivalent to the family or a friendship group, which wields tremendous influence on member's values, moral standards and even normative behaviour'. The primary group was therefore viewed as essential in understanding the socialisation process and the development of the individuals involved. Faris E (1937) asserts three properties atypical of primary groups – face-to-face relations, temporal priority and a feeling of wholeness ("we" feeling). As against this *secondary groups* (a classification never mentioned by Cooley) are characterized by contractual relationships and 'communication on indirect media' (Faris, 1937). Weber attributed the evolution of secondary groups to the increased levels of bureaucratization, depersonalization and routinization happening in the society. Ferdinand Tonnies observed an "irreversible" moving away from the warmth of tribal life as experienced in small isolated communities to the cold urban anonymity. Accordingly, the *gemeinschaft* (characteristically similar to Cooley's primary group) was on the wane and would be superseded by contractual relationships of the *gesellschaft.*

Differentiating between Group Work and Case Work

The use of group work in settlement houses and casework in charity organisations was not accidental. Group work and the settlement houses where it was practiced, offered citizens an opportunity for education, recreation, socialisation and more importantly community involvement. Unlike charity organisations that primarily focused on the diagnosis and treatment of the problems of the poor, settlement houses offered groups to the participant citizens as an opportunity to join together to share their views, gain mutual support and to exercise the synergy developed as part of the group association, as an

opportunity for social change. Unlike casework, where there is a sharp distinction – in expertise, power and resources - between the giver and the receiver, group work evolved largely out of the idea of self-reliance, self-help of a group nature. This 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 individual oriented, psychodynamic approaches and on the provision of concrete resources, group workers relied on programme content and activities in order to spur members to action. Programme activities of all types became the medium and vehicle through which group attained their goals. Group oriented activities such as camping, singing, group discussion, games, as well as arts and crafts, were increasingly used for recreation, socialisation, education, support and rehabilitation. Unlike casework, which largely focused 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 goal distinct from the method of social casework.

The difference 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, philanthropic, hardworking citizens. Although they also worked with those who were impaired and the poor, group worker did not focus solely on the poorest cases or on those with the most problems. They preferred the word (group) members to client. They emphasised on working with member's strengths rather than their weakness. Helping was perceived as a shared relationship within which the group worker and the group members together worked 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 – material as well as psychological – and to help one another. The worker on his part, acted as a mediator between the demands of society and the needs of group members.

There was a feeling of ownership among group members over the activities undertaken, while the group worker officiated as a facilitator. 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, especially 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 mutual help, and the democratic decision making process that were encouraged in groups, all meant that group workers had to develop skills that were versatile and much different from those possessed by caseworkers.

Case work began in charity organisations in England and the United States, in the late nineteenth century, while group work evolved largely in English and American settlement houses. Group work was also later incorporated for therapeutic purposes in the state run mental institutions (asylums). However, 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.

Historical Evolution of Groups

The context...

Group work was seen as a movement before it became a field. From a field, it became a method, and back to a field (Papell in Middleman and Goldberg, 1988). Group

work played an important role in dealing with a number of shifts happening in the U.S. in the late-19th century and early-20th century: the industrialization of the U.S.; large population shifts from rural to urban centers, and; the enormous wave of immigration, mainly to U.S. urban areas (Konopka, 1972; Garvin, 1997). The history of social work may be considered in particular focus is on three major phases: (1) the formation of a group work association, 1930s; (2) the merger into the National Association of Social Workers, 1950s; and (3) the rebirth of group work, 1970s.

All the same one may consider some developments occurring between 1910 and 1920, those who were concerned with adult education, recreation, and community work began to realise the full potential of group work. They understood better that groups could be used to help people participate effectively in their communities, to enrich people's lives and to support those persons whose primary relationship were not satisfying or dysfunctional. So did they become aware of the potential of groups for helping people acquire social skills as well as problem-solving skills. They began to make good use of groups in preventing delinquency and in rehabilitating those maladjusted. The organisations that built the foundation of group work were by nature self-help, informal and recreational ones; they were present in the form of settlement houses, neighbourhood centres, Y's, the Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Jewish Centers Camps and for that matter even in labour union organising in industries. Later designated as 'group work agencies', the novel element that united these services and appealed most were involvement in small groups, the democratic way of life, community responsibility and perceived membership in activities with implications at national or even global.

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'. Follett strongly believed in the power of the small groups formed in communities to solve social problems that neighbors had in common. John Dewey, who proposed and developed the idea of progressive education also found the usefulness of small groups as early as 1933. Dewey perceived social group work method as an application of the principles of progressive education to small informal groups in leisure time settings. Dewey, through his progressive education movement, advocated working with small leisure-time groups (Fatout, M., 1992). The influences of Follett and Dewey leading thinkers in group work reinforced an individualist perspective that became engrained in group work (Falck interview, 1998).

Formation of Clubs ...

The first form of group setting could be traced back to Sir George Williams, who organized the hard working labourers of Bridgewater draper shops, towards the Christian way of living. The success of such groups inspired the extension of such group setting to other draper shops or other young men, thereby giving birth to London's Young Men's Christian Association in 1844. Soon the ripples of YMCA reached the women and girls of Germany and England, encouraging them for Christian companionship. In England, similar movements, having less association with the church, originated in 1855 simultaneously in two places. These were directly led by women - Emma Roberts, who started a prayer union among her friends, and Mrs. Arthur Kennard, who started the General Female Training Institute in London for the nurses returning from Crimean

war. The successful working of these two organizations motivated Mrs. Kinniard and Miss Roberts to amalgamate both the organization under one head. Thus, the YWCA came into existence in 1877. Giving due consideration to the less fortunate woman, the privileged women in United States initiated many programmes over the years. One such notable movement was the formation of Union Prayer Circle by Mrs. Marshal O in 1858. This was transformed as boarding home in 1860, and later renamed as the Ladies Christian Union in 1866. Rooms were rented on top floor of the warehouses and equipped to meet the needs of the wage earners in New York.

In America, the Boston YWCA began as an effort of thirty women in 1866 focusing on temporal, moral and religious welfare of their fellow beings. Now both YMCA and YWCA have established themselves as pioneering organizations with active involvement in educational, recreational and religious activities for young men and women. It remains a fact that the publications from these associations that have significantly contributed towards literature of social group work. The contribution from these associations in providing skilled volunteers while practicing group work is tremendous.

The Settlement Movement

Social disorganization, the child of industrial revolution, demanded the formation of an organized body to meet the welfare needs of the people bearing the brunt of industrialization. The settlement movement owes its origin to Jane Addams, the founder of the Hull House in Chicago in 1889. The movement focused on the causes of poverty and functioned through three thrust areas ("three Rs") – Research, Reform and Residence. Jane and the other pioneers, who believed in the group approach, set the objectives of the movement as follows:-

1) The residents of the area could share their learnings of cultural and religious among the needy.

2) The identification of settlement workers with the local area

3) The responsibility of the group for social reform.

The congested immigrant population became the target of most of the settlement workers. There they could observe the changing conditions and needs of the people while matching the various resources to satisfy the needy. They provided a variety of services including educational, health and legal services, and also advocated changes in social policy. According to Rameshweri Devi and Ravi Prakash (2004) settlements have also served as centres for classes in English and citizenship, as well as for clubs which gave both older and younger immigrants the best of American culture.

Stanton Coit concentrated his activities in the formation of clubs in the neighbourhood, which would unknowingly develop deep bonding among the community members. He was the founder father of the Neighbourhood Guild, the first American settlement in 1886. Picnics and other recreational activities were taken up so that more youth would participate and develop the settlements to a structured informal association. Woods and Kennedy in the Settlement Horizon have commented that the settlement movements have provided ample opportunities for 'the actual interplay of association'.

The Playground and Recreation Movement...

The part played by recreation movement towards group living is note-worthy. The socialization process begins in a child when he starts to associate and accept another child to play with him. Even though the first municipal

play ground of U.S. was the English Village Green, group games were not entertained until the nineteenth century. In 1868, the first church of Boston came up with a vacation play ground, while the Washington Park in Chicago was opened for team games in 1876. But it was in 1885, with the beginning of a sand park in Boston by Marie Zakrzewska, that the play ground was chosen as a movement in the history of social group work. She got the inspiration for such a concept observing the children playing in sand piles in public parks. Soon playgrounds and summer camps mushroomed under the initiative of settlements, churches and schools. It is the success of play ground movements and the need for more tax supported play grounds that resulted in the beginning of the Playground and Recreation Association of America in 1906. Schools and other social agencies supported the movement highlighting the importance of such a group experience in the social and emotional growth of a child.

The World War Community Service organized during Word Wars I and II had greatly accelerated the recreation movement. Taking its origin from the privately owned small playground for the poor, the growth of recreation movements were far beyond imagination. It has grown to the extent that now it contributes the major source of the country's wealth.

The World Wars and after...

Post World War I, social scientists also began to focus on groups operating in the community. One of the earliest to do so was Frederic Thrasher (1927) who studied gangs of delinquents in the Chicago area. He studied groups by befriending gang members and observing the internal operations of gangs. Thrasher observed that every member of a gang had a *status* within the group connected to the functional role that the member played for the gang. Thrasher

also highlighted the role of culture that developed within a gang, suggesting there was a common code that may be followed by all members. 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 centers and youth organisations.

Some later group workers relied on naturalistic observations of groups of boys in a summer camp to demonstrate how cohesion and inter-group hostility develop and operate. Social scientists also learned more about people's behavioural in groups from studies done in industry and in the United States Army. Characteristically, workers in industries knit themselves into informal organizations in and about work, develop expectations that their jobs and work relations be limited to persons of a kind – gender, age, ethnic qualities, education and social class (Jose, 2008; Warner, 1947). Such assemblages (also referred as a "grid") manifest itself in places such as cafeterias where the employees sort themselves based on the rank, sex, age and place in the plant (Hughes, 1946).

Theoretical Bases

The 1930s witnessed the influence of small group theory especially the differentiation done by Cooley with regard to the Primary and Secondary groups. The proposition by Tonnies to differentiate between *gesselschaft* and *gemeinschaft* also aided a better understanding about groups. The 1950s witnessed an explosion of knowledge and development of theory concerning small groups. The major researchers included the likes of Bales, Homans, Bion, Lewin, Weber, etc. to mention a few. The major themes that developed in the first half of the twentieth century include 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.

A Glimpse of Professionalisation and the Development on Literature in Social Group Work

Although it is often believed that group work is considerably younger than casework, group work agencies actually started only a few years after casework agencies established their forte. The first course of group work was offered by Clara Kaiser, in the School of Social Work at Western Reserve University in Cleveland. When she left for New York in 1935, Grace Coyle continued to develop the course. Group Work was taught partially as a method and partially as a field of practice. By 1937 about 10 schools offered specialised courses 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. This remained somewhat informal until 1955 and the founding of the National Association of Social Workers (Toseland & Rivas, 1998). A small cadre of group workers (15-20 people) met in New York City in the early 1930s to have informal discussions. This group proposed a gathering of group workers at the NCSW. In 1936, the American Association for the Study of Group Work was founded with the intention of clarifying and refining both the philosophy and practice of group work. This group created the National Association for the Study of Group Work under the leadership of Arthur Swift. It was a 'missionary spirit' which motivated this early group (Kraft, p. 13).

By 1939, group work began to be treated as a distinct subject, markedly with the National Conference of Social Work. The identification of group work with social work profession became stronger during the 1940s although group workers continued to maintain loose ties with recreation, adult education, and mental hygiene until the 1950s. In 1955, group workers joined hands with six other professional groups to form the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

In fact, group work was very closely associated with community organisation method and its concept of citizen's participation. Later, during the 1940s and 1950s group workers began to use groups more frequently to provide therapy and remediation in mental health settings. This was significantly influenced by the increased interest in psychoanalysis and ego psychology and also partly due to the 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 social 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 interest in the study of small group as a social phenomenon.

The years post-World War II 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) all appeared in a time span of hardly two years. All these books set out to clarify the orderly process of social group work as part of the helping function of social work on the wide scope of applications ranging from the healthy to sick, individuals and groups.

The decade of the 1960s witness the decline in the popularity of group services. 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, weakened group specialisations in professional schools and reduced the number of professionals who were trained in group work as their primary mode of practice.

The interest in group work waned still further during the 1970s. Fewer professional schools offered advanced course in group work and fewer practitioners used group work as a practice method. The late seventies saw the reemergence of a professional journal, Social Work with Groups in 1978. Additionally, in 1978 social group workers formed a committee to host a symposium in honor of Grace Coyle which paved the way for an annual conference in subsequent years (Northen & Kurland, 2001). The conference planning committee was transformed into the membership driven organization, "The Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups" (AASWG, 2006). In order to increase practioners 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 on group work as a practice method has been convened religiously without fail.

Group work has also made inroads into the south-east Asia, especially India (to be discussed later) and China. Social work education in China has experienced a very rapid expansion over the past decade. Top Chinese leaders have advocated strongly for social work and in 2006, the government launched a series of new social policy initiatives aimed at professionalizing social work. This has provided an opportunity for researchers and educators to think about the possible impact and future challenges confronting the civil affairs sector and social work educators.

Group work has survived through difficult times. Its' resiliency is a testament to the persistence of the core of people as well as the strength of the method (Ramey interview, 1988). What kept group work going during the "quiet" years were the presence of individuals and legendary teachers and proselytizers of the like of [William] Schwartz [Saul] Bernstein, the [Sonia & Paul] Abels, and [John] Ramey" (Ephross interview, 1998). The people who came together to begin AASWG, with their "wonderful spirit of inclusion, validation and humanity that is imbedded in group work ideology" (Papell, 1997, 10) determined that group work should survive.

Group work ideology has stood the test of time because it is rooted in a clear understanding of the realities of human lives and the human condition. Concepts of citizenship, participation, community, mutual aid, and democracy are still powerful. According to Ephross (interview, 1998): "We were right then, we're right now." Middleman and Goldberg (1988, 234) remind us that "it is group work that has anchored and continues to anchor social work in its tradition of social reform and concern for oppressed people ..."

Significant Group Work Literature during the Last Two Decades

Carrell, S 1993 has written on group exercises for adolescents. The book also contains a manual for therapists. The exercises are useful for school social workers and group workers involved in life skills training. Morganett (1990) has written a book on life skills and group counseling for young adolescents. Rose, S & Edilson, J (1991) have also written a book on specific group work exercises for children and adolescents.

Toseland, R (1995) is well known for his book on Group work with elderly and family care givers. Hurley (1996) has developed therapeutic group exercises for the elderly. Pehroozi (1992) has presented models of Group Work in his book Social Work with Group. Berecher (1990) has developed an innovative concept called Telephonic Group Work. Breton (1994) has developed the concept of Empowerment Oriented Group Work in his book Social Work with Group. Brown, A and Mistry , T (1994) have focused on Group Work with mixed membership group highlighting on race and gender based issues. Coxe and Parsons, R (1994) have developed their theories on empowerment oriented Group Work practice with elderly. Glassman, U and Kates, L (1990) have written on the Humanistic Approach in Group Work. Nosko, A and Wallace, R (1997) have highlighted on gender based issues in Social Work Group.

During the last decade the following books on Group Work have contributed significantly to the understanding of Group Work

An introduction to Group Work practice by Ronald Tosland and Robert Rivas (2001). Encyclopedia of Social Group Work with groups by Alex Gifferman, Robert Salmon

(2008). Using Group Work by Mark Doel (2005). Social Work with group by Helen Northen & Roselle Kurland (2000). Perspectives on Social Group Work Practice, Alissi Albert, S (2001). The Essentials of Group Worker by Doel, Mark & Sawda, Catharine (2003). A Hand Book of Social Work with Groups by Gravin, Charles D, Lorriae M. Gulier (Ed) (2007).

Social Group Work in India

Group work as a method of social work came to India with the introduction of professional social work education in 1936, a decade after it was acknowledged as formal method of practice in the West. Even though there is evidence of the group approach being used in various contexts – in delivering charity services, imparting religious education through oral tradition, in mobilising people for the freedom struggle against the British, in social reform strategies as in the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movements. However, there is very little documentation or hardly any theorisation based on it.

All the schools of social work in India teach a course/paper in social group work (alternatively titled as "social work with groups") at both the graduate and the postgraduate levels. There was a brave attempt 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 could be traced back to the 1960s. The Association of Schools of Social Work jointly with the Technical Cooperative Mission (USA) laid down minimum standards for group work practice acted a benchmark to the developments in India. VD. Mehta (1987) and Helen Joseph (1997), two social workers who attempted to trace

the historical development of group work in India, 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 mandals* and *yuvak mandals*, 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 social work in Kerala placed in open communities are engaged in organising groups for children (*balasamithi*s) and also for adult women (*kudumbashree* self-help groups) in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Such groups have a combined objective of socialisation, structured recreation, functional literacy, awareness generation on diverse issues such as effective parenting, health and hygiene, environment and local self-governance as well as other socially relevant issues. In the recent years, groups of adolescent girls and boys too have been organised in the villages to deal with issues pertaining to 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. At present, a remedial approach focusing 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 mandals*, 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.

Conclusion

In all this we can see the increased use of groups and associations in work with young people and adults. Progressively over the years, there has been a growing appreciation of group process and sophistication in approach within adult education. Beginning with the club movement and later in the settlements, there had been an emphasis on social investigation, a concern to deepen methodology and a wish to connect this with wider developments in the social sciences. Club work with boys and girls had established a great store of practice wisdom about the organization and functioning of groups which reflected in the literature. Group Work had survived the challenges posed by the two World Wars and had grown substantially in terms of its practice and resources. The development of thinking and practice about working with groups subsequently shifted across the Atlantic and spread fast to most of Asia, especially in India. The impact of

psychology especially Psychoanalysis, the developments in thinking about human relations, and a developing literature about social groups aided its transition. The 'small group theory' and, in particular, the idea of the primary group - small informal groups such as families and play groups too became the cornerstone to social group work practise.

Group work has survived through difficult times. Alongside the professionalisation of social group work happened. Notable are the development of the AASWG, with their "wonderful spirit of inclusion, validation and humanity that is imbedded in group work ideology" (Papell, 1997, 10), the NASW etc. that were determined that group work should survive.

Group work ideology has stood the test of time because it is rooted in a clear understanding of the realities of human lives and the human condition. Groups as an idea aid the assimilation of the concepts of citizenship, participation, community, mutual aid, and democracy. Middleman and Goldberg (1988, 234) remind us that "it is group work that has anchored and continues to anchor social work in its tradition of social reform and concern for oppressed people".

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History of Social Group Work in India

Sreepriya

Introduction

Social Group Work is of recent origin in west as well as in India. Though social work and social welfare has been part of Indian history from time immemorial, professional social work emerged much later. Group work as a method of social work started gaining recognition only after social work attained a professional status. Group approach was being used in charity in ancient and medival India though it differed in its form, nature and methods. This chapter concentrates on the historical development of social group work in India in two different eras - the pre-independent and post independent India.

Development of Group Work In Pre-independent India

Group work practice in pre-independent India was not much organised, formal or systematic and is closely intervened with the unique features of Indian society. The essential functions of group work was carried out by the social institutions. Social institutions had a great command over the lives of the people in pre-independent India. The situations and experiences provided by these institutions benefitted its members and the need of external

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intervention by professionals or professional agencies was limited. The aspects of group work in pre-independent India found in all walks of life is briefed below.

Familial Scenario

Joint family system is unique feature of Indian Society and was the common practice in ancient days right from 2000 BC when the Dravidian traditions were established in India [1]. In a joint family three generations live together under the same roof. The management of the joint family rests in the hands of the elder member of the family. All its members have equal rights to income and property of the family though they differ in their earning capacity. This system provided its members economic support, emotional support, recreation, personality development, care to the less privileged group such as children, elderly and provided all its members opportunities for development.

The purpose of modern group work is also similar. Each group may have different specific objective depending on the needs and problems of the target group but in general, group work is expected to provide its members emotional support and opportunities for growth and development. The joint family system was also taking care of these aspects of its members. It could even be concluded that as the joint families were fulfilling all the responsibilities of professional group work, its need was not felt in the earlier days

Educational Scenario

Knowledge building is an important function of group work. In that sense the ancient Gurkula system can be equated as a form of group work. Gurukulam is yet another unique feature of ancient India. This system began in Vedic times(1500-600 BC)[2]. Under this system, a teacher possess

the nine qualities of bramana as mentioned in bhagavad gita (peacefulness, self control, discipline, purity, tolerance, honesy, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness). Proper motivation, proper disposition and natural qualifications based on in built attributes form an integral part of student's candidature and students must follow strict celibacy during the entire term[3].

Under gurukula system all round development of students is taken care of by Guru and student's must live in the house of mentor during the formative period. The centre of educational system lies on the principle of worshipping God. All subjects taught were from vedic literature and it contains all necessary knowledge of arts and science both material and spiritual. Contemporary group work is restricted to a group of people who share same need or problem or has the same objective. Similarly the gurukulas was confined only to one group. It is a group of Brahmin boys. They shared similar interests and objectives and strive together towards the attainment of their objective.

Economic Scenario

In the economic front a unique and multifaceted form of organisation emerged known as guilds. The guild system began in the early Buddhist period,i.e., in the 5th century and continued through the Mauryan period[5]. The guilds played a vital role in the socio-economic structure of ancient India. As more and more people became craftsmen, people of the same craft began to band together. They found that they could do more than any one of them alone could do, so they banded together and began an organisation called guild. Different crafts and artisans formed different guilds.

The purpose of guilds were to make sure that its members produced high quality of goods and were treated fairly.

Guilds succeeded in passing many laws that controlled competition among merchants, fixed policies and wages and limited the working hours and ensured that the craftsmen were properly trained. These guilds also supervised community projects, various undertakings helped amass huge fortunes and Kautilya prescribed methods of extracting money from guilds in times of need by state. Guilds in ancient India played an important role in protecting the rights , welfare and privileges of a particular group which is yet another function of group work[6] .

Religious Scenario

Caste system is also a unique feature of Indian society which was established during 1000 BC – 600 BC [7] . Caste commands much importance in Indian social life even today. Caste system provides identfication to its members and determine their social status. Caste rules govern the social and familial life of its memebrs. It provides psychological support to people. Over the years, changes have taken place in the traditional caste system along with social changes and through sanskritization and social legislations. Even today in a democratic system caste is capable of acting as a pressure group. Though caste system has its own de-merits and brought about social discrimination to its members caste gives a sense of belongingness and strength to work for their common needs and welfare and hence can be considered as an aspect of group work.

The Christian missionaries also require special mention in the context of group work in pre-independent India. Missionary activities started in British India. The devoted service rendered by christian missionaries and impact of christianity were significantly instrumental in bringing about a change in the out look of Indians, especially

towards the then prevelant social evils like sati and social prohibition of widow re-marriage. Christian missionaries are an organised group of people engaged in the evangelical work of spreading the gospel, were active in the colonial period. Since then christian missionaries visited India at different times.

The education mission began to flourish since early 1900. In 1928 Bandel church was entrusted to the Roman Catholic group of the salesians of Don Bosco. Throughout the colonial period and after , they established branches of Don Bosco school. The christian missionaries followed humanitarian ideas and emphasised the social development of people.

Christian missionaries laid emphasis on improvement of indegeneous language and literature and spread of education as preparatory work to evangelation. The need of reform of hindu social institutions was also advocated by Serampore trio. They were instrumental in passing of laws. Serampore was the pioneer in the field of printing and publication also. They also championed bengal peasant's cause. Contact with the village reality made them aware of the anamolies of the colonial land revenue policies and judicial system. The christian missionaries worked for creating public opinion in England and India in favour of reforms in the socio-economic system in India.

Missionaries were the first to get over the gender bias regarding admission of women missionaries to the CMC. In 1877, the women missionaries were admitted as full members with the same status and rights of men. Such inter-denominational missionary conferences were formed in Bombay, Madras, Banglore between 1845-58. The Jesuits have also made substantial contribution in India whereby they have secured a place of prominence for themselves and the Catholic Church. They extended their

activities to various fields like religious, spiritual, political educational, scientific and technical progress, etc. They still continue their activities with a missionary zeal.

Though caste system and activities of Christian missionaries can not be equated with group work in its professional aspect, they can still be considered as beginning of professional group work because they mobilised groups and adopted a group approach in addressing problems and development of various target groups and areas such as women, peasants, education, technology, etc.Their activities targeted specific groups and provided support and developmental opportunities for specific groups.

Political Scenario

Political scenario of Indian society in ancient times was dominated by the ancient rulers. All of them adopted a welfare oriented approach towards their subjects and undertook several works of public utility. But there were not much of political organisations or associations or groups to which lay men were members of. Such associations emerged in British India along with the rise of national movement. Though there were lots of social evils prevailing in the society at that point of time, the issue that required immediate intervention was political freedom for the nation; the fruits of which would be equally beneficial to the entire nation.

Indian National Congress and Gandhi needs special mention in this context. The birth of Indian national congress marked a new political awakening. Inspired by the words and writing of Mahatma Gandhi people from various walks of life joined congress and it became a mass movement. Along with advocating political freedom, they also addressed better status for women and sarvodaya which meant upliftment of all sections of society. To attain

this Gandhi preached and practiced the constructive programme. The leadership of Gandhi and his activities through Indian National Congress and sarvodaya could bring people from various sections together and work towards a common goal, the ultimate aim of which was total welfare.

Social Scenario

In the pre-independent India there were a lot of reform activities at individual and group level. Some of the earlier reform activities are briefed below.

The crusade against sati started by the Serampore missionaries culminated in the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy who succeeded in passing laws for the abolition of sati. He started Atmiya Samaj in 1815 later on grew into Brahma Samaj which advocated abolition of caste system, sati, promotion of equal rights for women , etc. These efforts were not only reforming the Indian hindu society but was also oriented towards the welfare of under privileged group called women, children, untouchables, and so on.

Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar was the first to launch a movement against the prohibition of widow re-marriage by establishing that it was not in contravention to the preaching of hindu scriptures and it was a result of his incessant efforts, especially of an appeal made by him to the government in 1885, that the Hindu Widow Re-marriage Act was passed in 1856. Justice Ranade pursuing the cause of widow re-marriage formed Widow Marriage Association in 1861 which was aimed at promotion of widow re- marriage.

In 1875, Arya Samaj was established to fight against idolatory, caste, child marriage, favour of widow re-marriage and abolition of untouchability by christian

missionaries by permitting the re-admission of converts from Hinduism. In 1882, Arya Mahila Samaj was organised by Pandia Ramabai- an Indian christian missionary with a view to improve the condition of women. As these reform movements were organised movement for the welfare of under privileged groups, they can be considered as the earlier stage of development of professional group work.

The aspects of group work prevalent in pre-independent India mostly lacked scientific knowledge. They mostly arised out of situational needs. There was no uniformity in the principles, methods and techniques adopted. This approach of helping people was later modified when social work developed into a profession in west and its influences were seen in India also.

Development of Group Work in Independent India

Social group work as a method of social work practice can be seen only in the context of social work education in India. Group work began with the founding of the first school of social work in 1936- the Sir Dorabji Tata School of Social Sciences. Soon after schools of social work was established in Delhi and Baroda and social work education received academic status and group work was recognised as one of its courses. The Baroda School of Social Work published the first records of group work practice in India in 1960. The Association of Schools of Social Work in India, jontly with Technical Co-operation Mission led down the minimum standards for group work. There was subsequently a rapid increase in the number of schools of social work throughout India and group work found a place in all of them along with case work and commuity organisation. The strong position for group work in academic resulted in the practice setting also[9]. Today,

social group work is practiced in various social work settings. The practice of group work in institutional and community settings in independent and contemporary India is analysed below.

Group Work in Institutional Setting

The feature of group work in institutional setting is that it caters to the needs of /or solve the problems of the beneficiaries of a particular institution. Group work developed through its practice in various settings as follows.

Group Work in De-addiction Centres

Addiction is a serious social problem affecting human beings and even the society at large. Social work intervention with addicts can be done at different levels like control, prevention and treatment. Social Group Work has a major role to play in these areas along with other methods of social work.

Therapy Groups are important for their treatment. Alcoholic Anonymous is a good example of group work for drug abusers. AA consists of memebrs of similar problems who help each other by sharing their experiences, motivating, guiding and inspiring each other. An addict is put into de-toxification process at first and then put into AA group. Ther person passes through various stages in AA group which starts with an awareness building and acceptance of the problem and ends with assertive training. There can be group activities for the family members of the addicts who share similar problems. Through this group activity their problem solving capacity can be enhanced and emotionqal support can be provided.

Family therapy, yet another form of group work is also used sometimes in treatment. Under this technique the groupworker meet the entire family as a group to help them workout their problems together. These practices of group work are commonly found in the de-addicion centres all around India.

Group Work for Youth Welfare

The attainment of political independence in 1947 marks a definite stage in the progress of Indian Youth. Political parties continued to count on student leadership. Student wings were organised by all of them in universities and colleges and these groups addressed the common needs and problems of student community through organised efforts. Some of the youth organisations to channelise youth power for nation building in independent india are Bharat Yuvak Samaj, NCC, establishment of Large number of rural youth clubs, etc. There was also an emergence of a few non-official youth and students organisations like the YMCA, YWCA, the Scouts and Guides , etc

Nehru Yuvak Kendra's establishment in 1972 as a part of the sixth five year plan needs mention in the context of historical development of group work in India. This was meant to serve as a focal point in the district for rural areas. The activities undertaken are youth leadership training, camps for community service, cultural, recreational and vocational training, etc. On the non – official front, a significant step was the opening of the Vishwa Yuvak Kendra in 1969 as a national centre for the training of youth leaders and workers for promoting awareness of the need to develop youth organisation and youth services.

Group Work in Schools

School social work is gaining importance these days. Most of the private schools today, employ school social workers and are giving stress to the personality development aspect of children. Group work is the widely used method of social work in schools. Generally groups in schools are task oriented groups. The entire group share a common goal and activities are planned in such a way that they work together in attaining the group goal as well as their individual goal through group activities. The areas that are normally covered in group work in schools are career guidance, motivation, awareness, value education, leadership building, team work , etc. The group work practices equips the children to learn through experiences and mistakes especially when workshops are conducted. Some of the schools that effectively use groupwork in India are T.I. School, Chennai, Good Sheperd School, Ooty, Choice School , Cochin, Christ Nagar, School, Trivandrum

Group Work in Hospitals

Group work practices an integral part of social work practice in hospitals in both medical and psychiatric settings. The first medical social worker in India was appointed in early 1930s at J.J. Hospital, Mumbai. Mostly treatment groups are found in hospitals. Group work techniques are used in psychiatric settings for the possible patients for skill development. It is also used to provide their family members emotional support and also to enlighten them on the approach to be adopted towards the patient and how to deal with social stigma, stress and depression.

Similarly group work practices are common in medical setting especially with terminally ill patients. Supportive therapy is provided to both the patients and their family members through group work. Group work provides them

opportunities for catharsis, enables them to deal with feelings of grief, anxiety, stress, loneliness, etc. the group work process also enables them to participate in the treatment process in a smooth manner.

Group work practices are common in neonatal clinics and diabetic clinics these days. In neonatal clinics, the stress is on hygenie, nutrition, family planing, proper care for new born, etc. It concentrates mostly on awareness building where as in diabetics clinic, the stress is on diet control and the consequences of diabetics. The group will give its members strength to conform to diet and provide emotional support.

The immense scope of group work has been realised by both government and private hospitals and a growing practice of group work is seen in the hospitals today.to mention a few J.J. hospital- Mumbai,Government General Hospital-Chennai, NIMHANS- Banglore, etc

Group Work by NGOs

Non Government sector is a reckonable force in the field of social welfare always in India. NGOs are highly active in providing services to specific target groups through the processs of institutionalisation and through communities. Institutional services are provided to various target groups like women, children, aged, mentally or physically challenged, etc. In all these centres, social workers adopt group work approach in skill development, building self confidence and self esteem, motivation, goal achievement, building awareness and in short in the overall development of social work. Examples of such organisations are Spastic Society of India, SCARF, Chennai, Asha- Home for mentally Challenged children, Banglore, MV Foundation for street children, Hyderabad, etc.

Group Work in Correctional Institutions

Government institutions are aware of the need for social work intervention with under privileged and disadvantaged groups. As a result in all government homes for such category social workers are appointed. Group work is used to bring about attitudnal change, behaviour modification, goal setting, group counselling, etc. In other government homes such as children's home, home for women, mentally ill, etc also social workers are appointed. The practice of group work in majority of the government homes in 'India is not very effective due to the ill effects of bureaucracy

Group Work in Community Setting

Group work is a prominent method of empowerment in community setting . Community organisation can be achieved through the formation and building up of small groups. Some excellent examples of group work in community settings are given below

Anganwadi

Anganwadis are part of the ICDS project implemented by the Government of India in 1975 as part of the national policy for children[10]. This is a highly suceessful project. Through anganwadis , the educational and health needs of children and women in rural community are catered to. Anganwadis provide basic education and meals to the children. The anganwadi workers also form women's groups of the locality and give them health education. They stress on the health and nutrition of the pregnant women and children upto seven years in the locality. Awareness programmes and developmental programmes are conducted for the adolescent girls in the locality. It is thus seen that group work is a method and tool for the development of target groups in community based programmes.

Self Help Groups

Self Help Groups are a popular method of group work practice found in community. The Self Help Group is a viable alternative to achieve the objectives of rural development and get community participation in all rural development programmes. SHG is a viable organisation set up to disburse micro credit to rural women for the purpose of encouraging them to enter into entrepreneurial ventures.[11]

Self help groups are voluntary gatherings of peers who share needs or problems that are not being addressed by existing organisations, institutions or other types of groups. The broad goals of a self help group is to bring about personal and or social change for its members and society. All of these groups emphasise face to face interaction among members and stress a set of values or ideology that enhances a member's personal sense of identity[12].

Self help groups play an important role in women empowerment and social development. One area where SHGs have played an important role is in the micro credit. The SHGs distribute micro credit to the rural women for the purpose of making them enterprising and encouraging them to enter into entrepreneurial activities. Their credit needs are fulfilled through SHGs. The women led SHGs have successfully demonstrated how to mobilise and manage thrifts, appraise credit needs, maintain linkages with banks and enforce financial self discipline. Thus SHGs undertake entrepreneurial activities at a smaller level with minium capital required. SHGs enhance the equality of status of women as participants, decision makers, and beneficiaries in the democratic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life.

An example for the success of SHGs is revealed through the study conducted by N. Laitha and Dr. B.S. Nagarajan in the three districts(Dindigul, Madurai, Theni) in Tamil Nadu. The study provides ample evidence to the fact that organisation of women in the form of SHGs has laid the seeds for the economic and social empowerment of women through the strategies of organisational savings, rotational credit system using their resources, facilitating regular interaction, exchange of information and exposures within and across these groups to enhance the mobility and awareness linking SHGs with external credit sources and government programmes[13] .

Kudumbasree

Kudumbasree is a typical and successful example for group work practice in community setting. What the Kerala Government desired when it formulated 'Kudumbasree' (Prosperity of the Family) in 1998 was absolute sweeping off of elementary poverty from Kerala through the social and economic empowerment of women. Now Kudumbasree has grown into the largest women - empowering project in the country itself. In 2006 – 07, 37,69,403 families became members of Kudumbasree through 1,79,403 ayalkoottam (neighbours gathering) Rs. 826 crore thrift was deposited through them. It was also possible to give loan to the tune of Rs. 2075 crore. Kudumbasree is not targeting just economic improvement only. It has the sublime objective of enabling the poor to implement their own initiatives in health, education and cultural activities. Kudumbasree' is the source of power for the new generation women of *Kerala* these days. This women empowerment organization was established by the government to strengthen the women power and to show them the right path to grow their self-confidence and significantly improve their way of living to be independent. With such an initiative now it is learnt that more than 90 percent of women in *Kerala*

have gained their self-confidence after being associated with Kudumbasree[14].

These women also informed that their standard of living and social status also has improved a lot after their active participation in Kudumbasree. They are now more aware of their rights, and the right way to lead a healthy life. It also gave the women from lower society or caste the courage to stand up with others and lead a confident life. It guided these women to enhance their financial status by increasing their savings and plan accordingly. Kudumbasree also made women to improve their reading habits, discussion skills and also to develop their decision making quality. Along with that it imparted education to those women who were illiterate. In short the women have shown the right path for a better tomorrow by this social organization. At presents thousands of women are associated with Kudumbasree, giving a new perspective to their life with a bright vision.

The Business Line has reported on March 24th, 2008 about the Kudumbasree units of Kochi that they have decided to widen their activities here to cover the collection and processing of household refuse and marketing of consumer products. As many as seven units of Kudumbasree have decided to launch its activities here before April 15. This follows the directive of the Ombudsman for Local Bodies, Mr Justice K.P. Radhakrishna Menon, to the Kochi Corporation to opt the units in the collection and processing of garbage from households. At present, five such units are functioning in the city. The Kudumbasree units need the support of the corporation for identifying land for setting up garbage processing units. Each unit would require at least 20 sq ft to 50 sq ft. Kudumbasree is also seeking the co-operation of resident associations in extending its operations to new areas as they will have to ensure the payment of user's fee to the garbage collecting

units, senior officials of the Kudumbasree Mission said. The refuse collected from households will be sold to the scrap dealers in the city[15].

The authorities are also planning to convene a meeting of the resident's association in the city to find out which all associations are willing to engage the Kudumbasree units for the collection of garbage. Kudumbasree has also plans to market its produce through the network.It is gradually building up in the city. The district authorities are also imparting behavioural training and personality development programmes to the members of the units for equipping them to take up the challenge professionally. They will also be issued ID cards and these steps would increase the acceptability of the team members among the general public, the officials said. The team members, working on shifts, will also be deployed for collecting and remitting the various service bills of the city dwellers. Once the programme goes full throttle, it will reduce the workload of the cleaning staff engaged by the Corporation, as the units will take care of the waste generated by the households.

Conclusion

Group work approach to social development has always been part and parcel of the Indian social life. The socio-religious institutions in India at all times adopted a group approach for the welfare and development of the society though the development of professional group work in India is a recent phenomena. Today in India, group work practice is popular social work method adopted at both institutional and community level. The milestones in the development of group work in India at different times are briefed in this chapter.

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4

Social Group Work as a
Method of Social Work

Joseph Varghese

Introduction

Social group work is a primary method of social work. In this chapter we briefly see how social group work became a part of social work and how it established itself as a method. We will discuss the concepts by first understanding what social work and group work are and the present trends in group work.

Social Work and Group Work

Group work is a method of group leadership used in organizing and conducting various types of group activities.

Giselle Konopka defines group work as a method of social work which helps individuals to enhance their social functioning through purposeful group experiences and to cope more effectively with their personal, group and community problems.

Trecker gives the following definition " Social group work is a method in social work through which individuals in many groups in a variety of community agencies settings are helped by a worker who guides their interaction in program activities so that they may relate themselves to

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others and experience growth opportunities in accordance with their needs and capacities to the end of individual, group and community development".

Allan Brown says "group work provides a context in which *individuals help each other*; it is a method of helping groups as well as helping individuals; and it can enable individuals and groups to *influence* and *change* personal, group, and organizational and community problems."

A definition of social work prepared by the National association of Social workers in 1956 considers five attributes as being basic to the practice of social work. These attributes are:

1) Values

2) Purpose

3) Sanction

4) Knowledge

5) Method

All these attributes influence each other. Values of social work practice influences the purpose of social work and method used to achieve them.

You are already familiar with various definitions of social work and social group work. Here we review some of the definitions of group work.

We will see how the each of these attributes finds its expression in practice of group work. We will also see briefly how historically social group work and social work evolved separately and how in course of time group work became accepted as a method.

Values

The values of social work are rooted in the democratic and humanitarian principles. The inherent value of the human being and his dignity regardless of his status, position and his actions are recognized. Social work believes in equality, justice and freedom. Social challenges structures, institutions and practices which prevent individuals, groups and communities from realizing these goals. Therefore it can be said that human rights values are important part of social work values also. Another important value is the recognition that everyone has the inherent capacity to resolve his or her problems. Thus given the right conditions that person can successfully resolve his problems. The values of social work are codified as professional ethics which is implemented by the professional body. The principles of social work such as principles of acceptance, individualization, self determination, confidentiality, non judgmental attitude and controlled emotional involvement are derived from these values.

Group work values are the same as the generic values of social work. Gisela Konopka describes the three humanistic concerns of group work. They are (i) individuals are of inherent worth.(ii) people are mutually responsible for each other; and(iii) people have the fundamental right to experience mental health brought about by social and political conditions that support their fulfillment.

These values find its expression in the practice of group work. Group work emphasis on voluntary participation by the members. Group workers are sometimes do work with involuntary groups due to statutory or agency demands. But that is not the norm. Secondly, the social worker values the decisions made by the group-the

principle of self determination. The group members are encouraged by the group workers to participate in the planning and implementation of group activities, even if there are disagreements between the group and the worker regarding the effectiveness of the activity, the worker will not impose her decision on the group. Negotiation and discussion are the means that the worker uses to help the group understand her point of view. Similarly, decisions regarding the group have to be made by the group using democratic methods. Participation by all members is stressed. everybody has equal right to contribute to the discussions in the group. fourthly, the group has to maintain the principle of confidentiality- members' opinion and feelings which are shared in the group should be kept confidential and should not be revealed outside the group. However the group worker unlike the caseworker has to depend also on the group members to achieve this aim. Therefore often a confidential clause is attached in the contract. Social workers take special care to ensure that confidentiality working with children who have difficulties in doing that.

Purpose

The purpose of the group work is the way in which it contributes to society and derives its legitimacy. People and agencies accept groups as a method by assessing to what degree group work is able to achieve the aim it has set for itself.

The aims of group work according to Alan Brown (1992).

a)   Individual assessment

Groups are used to assess individual behaviour. This assessment is based on the data made available by worker's assessment, member's assessment and group member's assessment. Group assessments can be used to obtain

data in juvenile delinquent centres, residential care centres and centres for elderly care.

b) Individual support and maintenance

Groups provide psychosocial support to the members who are undergoing stressful situations. Groups are formed for individuals suffering from disability, caregivers of dementia patients and students with learning difficulties.

c) Individual change

   i)   Control of deviant tendencies in the individuals. For example, child abusers can be training to exercise control over their behavior.

   ii) Socialization of individuals to learn social skills for living in the community.

   iii) Improvement in interpersonal relations

   iv) Improvement in the economic area. For example, self help groups.

   v)   develop better self concept and feelings. for example women in neighbourhood discussing common problems

   vi) personal growth and development encounter group and T group.

d) Educational, Information-giving and training groups

e) Leisure/ Compensatory groups for recreation and enjoyment.

f) mediation between individuals and social systems. For example, group worker may prepare the patients for discharge by training them to live outside the agency.

g) group change and/or support. Working with natural or existing groups to improve a specific aspect of the group or to resolve a problem. Family therapy to improve the communication is one example.

h) Environment change Groups formed to demand facilities and services from government and non governmental organizations.

i) Social change. These groups raise the consciousness of the members, organize them and help them fight unjust structure in the society.

Sanction

Social group work as a method of social work is recognized as a primary method by various professional bodies - National Association of Social Workers, British Association of Social Workers, Australian Association of Social work and others.

Group work is used in various settings of social work- health settings, school settings, industries, families and child agencies, de-addiction centres, communities, homes of elderly and juvenile reform centres.

Group Work Education

An international study on the presence of social group work in Schools of Social work in different countries of the world reveals the following. Of the 135 schools that participated in the survey the number of teaching faculty was 2497 and 174(7percent) were group work instructors and teachers. Group work was taught both as a separate course and as part of generic courses. the emphasis of group work in most places seems to be on individual needs such as support, therapy and self development. (Mayadas et al.)

In India, group work is suggested as a separate paper in UGC model curriculum. Most universities and colleges teach group work as a method in India

Method

Method means "a way of doing things" "a set of skills and techniques". But then everybody has a way of doing things which is based on his/ her theory of action. His assumptions regarding the situation guide his actions.

A use of the method distinguishes itself from the spontaneous actions of a non professional in the following way

1) It is informed by the value system of the profession which has been arrived at by consensus of the members.

2) The method is used deliberately and purposefully by the profession to attain the treatment goals

3) Its practice is supported by the knowledge base which constantly increases by research and sharing of knowledge by professionals

4) It is recognized as a method by competent authorities.

5) The practice of the method helps the clients and through it the society.

According to Schwartz a profession should have three attributes-

1) A function to perform in society to which it is held accountable.

2) Performance of this function involves certain modes of activity- a certain pattern of actions.

3) These actions are performed within the systems in which it takes place.

Further, Schwartz says that "method is function in action".

Now what are the tasks of social work in our society?

Schwartz identifies the following tasks-

1) Search for common ground between the client's perception of his own need and the aspects of social demands with which he is perceived.

2) Identify the obstacles which prevent people from harmonizing their own self interests and the needs of others.

3) Provide data-ideas, facts, value concepts which are not available to the client who will help him resolve the problems.

4) Give the client a new vision (hope) and confidence about the future.

5) Maintain a professional relationship with the client.

Advantages of Group Work

1) Groups are natural places in which people live and grow. Families, peer groups, workplace groups and neighbourhood groups are central to the social life of an individual. If these groups have significant influence on our personalities, can't groups be used to change the behaviour of the members? Group work aims at achieving these aims in different settings.

2) Group members who have similar interests and problems can help each other by sharing their experiences and their problems. The principles of mutual aid and self help are emphasized. Group work's major advantage over casework is that each member becomes a helper and a helped in the group. Thus help is given and taken in a spirit of equality.

3) Group members empower members by increasing their consciousness and awareness. People's personal

problems are made public and when it becomes known that large number of people is involved. Solutions are then discussed and further actions planned and implemented.

4) Groups are used to elicit opinions of the members in the agency regarding the services provided.

5) Group work is able to show in practice the democratic principles.

6) Group work is very effective for certain groups of people like adolescent, children and women. These groups find it more comfortable to get help in groups as their need for security and belongingness is fulfilled in groups.

7) Group work is economical and time saving as a number of clients are treated at the same time.

Disadvantages of Group Work

1) Confidentiality is difficult to achieve as personal knowledge is shared with the group.

2) Forming groups can be difficult. Members often drop out, are absent and do not cooperate which can lead to dissolution of the groups

3) Agencies do not fully support group work as they are not clear about its usefulness.

4) Group work often degenerates into games and fun neglecting the treatment process.

5) Group needs resources like common time, place and resources.

6) Individual attention is missing and non participating members become lonely.

7) Group work can further the stigma and discrimination that the members face in society as they become identified with the group.

8) Professional expertise is often missing as group work is seen as being general skill everyone can master.

Knowledge

Knowledge is defined as the ability to understand.

The knowledge base of group work has been constantly increasing. The main sources of knowledge for social groups has been

1) **Knowledge of groups from other disciplines**

Sociology, psychology and social psychology study groups especially small groups. C.H. Cooley(primary and secondary groups), G.H.Mead(in groups and outgroups), Robert Merton(reference group), Kurt Lewin (group dynamics), Moreno(sociometry), Elton mayo(importance and influence of groups) and Simmel are pioneers in the field of the study of groups. Asch, Sheriff Festinger, Kresch and Tuckman have made significant contributions increasing our understanding about groups, its influence on the members, group development etc.

Another important source as in casework has been psychoanalytical school which has contributed group therapy.

2) **Knowledge from the Practitioners**

Gisela Knopoka, Grace Coyle, Josephine Klein, Gertrude Wilson and Gladys Ryland were earlier contributors to the group work practice. They documented their experiences and formulated the basic practices and rules of group work. Grace L. Coyle's (1948) *Group Work with American Youth: A Guide to the Practice of Leadership*, and Gertrude Wilson

and Gladys Ryland's (1949) *Social group work practice; the creative use of the social process* were the earliest texts. Presently journals Social work with groups, Small Group research and Group workers are published to disseminate the knowledge of groups.

3) **Knowledge from research**

Research in group work has been relatively less than in other areas of concern in social work. Most of the group work literature available is anecdotal and descriptive accounts of practice (Mayadas and others in Gravin; 2004, Brown 1992).

A study on the research work done on group work in the 1980s reveals that most research was done in the area of cognitive behavioural interventions among children. Researches on other approaches and for other clients were less. Further researches done were of groups which consisted of brief, highly structured, time limited and homogeneous clients. The relevance of these research findings to other groups require further analysis. In India the situation of research in group work is the same. Research based articles of social work are limited. A small number of PhDs have been done on the subject and these are mainly on the clinical side.

Three models have evolved in social work practice. Papell and Rothman (1966) have suggested three models:

remedial - where the aim on the part of the work/agency is individual social adaption.

reciprocal - where the aim is to strengthen mutual aid and to mediate between individuals and society.

social goals - where the concern is to further social justice often through collective, social action. (Mark Smith, 2008)

Thus there is a constant growth of knowledge regarding social group work and how to integrate theory with practice.

The knowledge base of group work has increased by the development of new research tools for evaluation of group work practice. A major lacuna in social work has been the lack of evidence on the effectiveness of its methods. In other words social workers have not been able to show conclusively those professional social worker skills and techniques applied deliberately in different situations have made significant difference to the clients. The growth of evidence based social practice is a response to these lacunae.

Social group work practice has also been influenced by these trends. New research methods have been identified which address this problem. (Gant in Gravin, 2004.)

Present Trends in Group Work

1) Technology mediated group work

Many support groups are forming group on line. For example women suffering from breast cancer have online support groups. Most of these support groups offer information on the problem and about treatments methods. They also provide accounts of people who have dealt with the disease successful. Often there are sections called Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) where doubts and clarifications related to the problem/ disease can be asked. These websites are maintained by hospitals and support groups.

Conclusion

Social work as a profession and academic discipline is expanding. But there are still unanswered questions about the effectiveness about its methods even within the

profession. Research based finding has done little to clarify the position. It maybe because of the methodology that these researches use. Or it may be that the complexity of human behaviour makes it difficult to prove changes in persons. Group work as a method of social work seems to have the same problems. Social workers have to often rely on their personal experience and observation to establish that the method helps clients.

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