
UNIT 3 IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AS A VALUE OF SOCIAL WORK

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of human relationships as a value in social work;
- Explain human relationships as social capital;
- Discuss the systems approach to human relationships;
- Enlist the characteristics of an effective relationship; and
- Highlight the principles for using relationship in social work intervention.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The profession of social work is founded on the principles of social justice and human rights. In 2001, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) defined social work as profession aimed at promoting social change, problem solving in relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Social work is an interdisciplinary field that aims to make human lives better by reaching them in various possible settings such as hospitals, educational settings like schools, colleges and also, families. Historically and fundamentally, a significant area of social work practice is about addressing problems related to humans' social life and their existing relationships.

In July 2014, IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW General Assembly approved the following global definition of social work:

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“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels”.

This latest definition mentions ‘social cohesion’ as one of the important goals of social work practice. This goal is closely related to the previously mentioned goal that is ‘problem solving in human relationships’ which was emphasized by the 2001 definition given by IASSW and IFSW. This goal brings to forefront the value and importance placed by social work profession in human relationships and its significance as ‘social capital’ for addressing social issues. In fact, the NASW code of ethics mentions ‘the importance of human relationships’ as an important value for all social workers alike. It is considered to be an important component of the helping process deployed by social workers world over.

3.2 IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AS A VALUE AND ETHIC IN SOCIAL WORK

Social work is among the most value based of all professions. It is deeply rooted in fundamental set of values that ultimately shape the profession’s mission and practitioners’ priority. Social workers act in accord with these values. Values have been important in social work in several respects such as in identification of the nature of social work’s mission, finding methods of intervention and most importantly in resolution of ethical dilemmas in practice. Ethics in fact are values in operation. Ethical awareness is essential to the practice of social work. Ethical responsibilities flow from all human relationships, from personal, and familial to the social and professional. Thus, social workers’ ability and commitment to act ethically is an important aspect of social work practice while engaging with people. It is a must for social workers throughout the world to be guided by the principles of respect for human rights and a commitment to promoting social justice in their practice.

The awareness of ethical principles that reflect the profession’s core values is a prerequisite for establishing ethical standards to guide social work practice. Such ethical awareness is also essential to help social workers in situations when conflict or ethical uncertainties arise. The socialization of social work practitioners into social work’s mission and values requires that the knowledge of ethical principles that are the guiding principles for professional integrity be given to social workers in their training.

Deriving from the principles of human rights, in 1999 the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) published NASW code of ethics to identify core values on which social work’s mission is based and that must be part of ethical training of social workers. The six core values listed by NASW are:

1. Service
2. Social Justice
3. Dignity and Worth of the Person

4. The Importance of Human Relationships
5. Integrity
6. Competence

All of social work practice is rooted in these core values and these principles set forth ideals to which all social workers should aspire. The NASW derives ethical principles for social work practice from each of these core values. For example, the value 'importance of human relationships' is translated into an ethical principle that states that "social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships. Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities." It has been highlighted by the NASW that while these core value are universal to all contexts, it is important that these value and the principles that flow from them are understood and applied by social workers keeping in view the context and complexity of the human experience. The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice vary from country to country and from time to time depending on cultural, historical, legal and socio-economic conditions.

In order to effectively use relationships in social work practice, it is important for social workers to consider the following points:

1. An understanding of human relationships in the cultural context is essential. For example, there is a considerable difference in the way family as an institution operates in the western context and in the Indian context. So, the use of relationship by the social worker for any intervention must be culturally informed.
2. An understanding of the essentials of maintaining good relationships is needed by the social workers. Social workers can only use human relationships as vehicles of change by practicing good relationships.
3. The use of human relationships by the social worker is not just limited to the maintaining of relationships with the people in need or the justice seekers. While working in the service delivery systems, social worker also maintain and use their relationships with co-workers, own organizations, other stakeholder organizations that are closely networked together for the delivery of services and problem-redressal of people in need.
4. In the process of using relationships for social work practice, social workers are simultaneously improving human relationships at all levels in their practice. This is directly co-related to the skills of the social worker and his/ her competence to handle relationships.

3.3 HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AS SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital as a concept has gained considerable importance in the contemporary times as the concept of capital has been widened to include non monetary aspects of capital resources. For example, human networks and relationships are considered to be important non monetary and non financial resources. Social workers need resources for achievement of their goals and aims of the profession and organizations that they work with. One of the important resources that the social workers use in the achievement

of their tasks is human relationships and networks in problem solving and resource mobilization.

In relation to relationships, it is important to understand that the broken estranged relationships can bring considerable pain and suffering leading to a feeling and sense of despair about themselves, other people in their lives and the world around them. So, for this reason, building and maintaining healthy relationships that are functional is vital to help people reach their full potential.

Human relationships are also considered important social capital in social work because humans are resources for the national development. They form substantial part of the social capital that is considered as important as other types of capital and are discussed below:

1. **Financial Capital:** It includes income, credit and investments. It is a more popularly assumed to be the only capital source.
2. **Social capital:** It includes the benefits that come through relationships with people and institutions. It is created through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action. It is less tangible, for it exists in relations among humans.
3. **Natural capital:** It includes the stock of natural resources like air, water, forest, plantations, etc. It is the basis of all human economic activity. The notion of natural capital is gaining importance in view of the climate change and conceptual frameworks of sustainable development.
4. **Physical capital:** It includes actual physical things that people own, control, or have access to accomplish a task. It is created by changes in materials to form tools that promote production. It is wholly tangible because of being embodied in observable material form.
5. **Human capital:** It includes skills, knowledge, abilities and capabilities that aid in the development of other asset areas. It is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways. It is also less tangible as social capital because of being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by the individual.

The concept of human relationships as social capital is utilized in social work practice while addressing social problems associated with the human relationships like divorce and juvenile delinquency. Family and relationship issues are challenges across the lifespan which emerge as a major concern in relation to the transformation of the world. Some noteworthy examples are the issues related to the needs of following groups:

- Children and families
- People with Disabilities
- People needing health and mental health services
- People who are ageing
- People with drugs and substance abuse problems
- People suffering from violence within domestic and intimate relationships

In the process of helping people, social workers acknowledge the role of relationships in building the fuller potential of an individual. The primary role of social workers in this

process is to make human relationships and social institutions more humane and responsive to human needs.

They adopt various roles as an advocate, mediator, educator, etc., in order to maximize the use of human relationships to the advantage of person in need. The communication bridge that the relationships provide act as an imperative link- or point of human connection across the two worlds, that is the world of social worker and the world of service user, carer, or other person.

3.4 SYSTEMS APPROACH TO HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The work of a social worker cuts across various fields, that is to say, it extends to all humans. One is dependent on the other in one way or the other. Both Plato and Aristotle have emphasized that man [sic] is a social or a communal being. Humanists (humanist thinkers like Maslow and Rogers) have gone one step further to lay emphasis on humans and their relationships. They emphasize upon self and refer to the relationship as a mutual respect for individuality between the self(s) involved. Thus, I (self) is in relationship to I (the other self); and this other self can be the one in your family, neighbourhood or a social worker. Often one needs to maintain a harmonious relationship with the other(s) for maintaining a family order to worldly order to a universal human order.

Human relationships may be thought of as a series of concentric and overlapping radii of relationships of many types. The developmental theorists have emphasized the role of relationships in human development. One of the significant theories in this regard is the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems theory of Development. According to this theory, human beings live in a complex system of biological, emotional, cognitive and social elements. Persons also experience reciprocal relationships with present and past environments. The environment is conceptualized as a group of nested structures. Each structure is contained within the next and is a part of the whole. The person is in the center of the group of structures. Bronfenbrenner (1974) proposed that a person's development is affected by their surrounding environment. He divided the person's environment into five different levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Each of these systems is representative of the various human relationships and they are as follows:

1. **Microsystem:** The microsystem is closest to the person. Some of the closest human relationships are part of the microsystem making it the most influential system. It includes family, peers, religious institutions, caste affiliations and neighbourhood.
2. **Mesosystem:** The mesosystem consists of the interactions between the different parts of a person's microsystem. The mesosystem is where a person's individual microsystems do not function independently, but are interconnected and assert influence upon one another. These interactions have an indirect impact on the individual. The interactions between the parents and teachers of a child are an example of meso system.
3. **Exosystem:** The exosystem refers to a setting that does not involve the person as an active participant, but still affects him/her. This includes decisions that have bearing on the person, but in which they have no participation in the decision-making process. An example would be a child being affected by a parent receiving a promotion at work or losing his/her job.
4. **Macrosystem:** The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-,

meso- and exosystems characteristic of the culture in which the person lives, with particular reference to the belief systems, political beliefs, etc. For example, a child living in India would have completely different cultural environment vis a vis a person living in the western world.

- 5. Chronosystem:** This system encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the person but also in the cultural environment in which the person lives. For example, the upbringing of a person in the pre- independence time would be starkly different from that for the person in the present time.

This view of person-in environment as offered by the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems theory of Development is significant because the profession of social work is characterized by the consideration of all the systems and the reciprocal impact of persons and their environments. The job of social workers is about holistic service. The size and focus of the service depends on the nature of the problem, who is experiencing the problem and the best way to resolve it. For example, an adolescent experiencing depression might be seen individually by a social worker yet benefit greatly from work with the family and perhaps even becoming part of a group focusing on adolescent depression. It is possible that an unusually large number of adolescents in a community suffer from depression. The problem could also be caused by a lack of suitable recreational facilities, high crime rates or community wide problems with drugs and alcohol. It might then be a good idea for the social worker to also work with community leaders to create community wide change. In social work we work with systems, and as those systems pertain to our clients, for improving their social functioning, we may have to interact with a number of systems.

Social work is carried out within a network of human relationships. Indeed, it is human relationships and the many types of problems associated with them that are usually at the root of social workers' professional tasks. And it is this relational dimension in social work practice which often draws students into making it their career – fulfilling their wish to 'work with people'. The place of relationships in social work practice is of significance so as to explore ways in which workers can use relationships to promote creative outcomes in their encounters with people in need.

3.5 RELATIONSHIP AND SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Relationships have always been integral to social work both historically and fundamentally. These have been described in many ways under social work practice in terms of the case work relationship (Biestek, 1957), a therapeutic relationship (Sudbery, 2002), and in recent times as 'relationship- based social work' (Trevithick, 2003). Each of these is described below:

- 1. The case work relationship:** One of the most influential texts in the field of social work was entitled 'The casework relationship' by Felix Biestek (1957) who defined the case work relationship as "the dynamic interaction of attitudes and emotions between the case worker and the client, with the purpose of helping the client achieve a better adjustment between himself and his environment" (Biestek, 1957). The emphasis here is on individual change or 'adjustment', rather than external and environmental changes—on seeing 'people with problems not as problems'. Biestek also listed 'appropriate attitudes, knowledge and abilities' required of a social worker in terms of seven principles which include: individualization, purposeful expression of emotion, controlled emotional

involvement, acceptance, non-judgmental attitude, client's self-determination and confidentiality.

2. **The therapeutic relationship:** It is emphasized by Sudbery (2002) that all of social workers' concerns like welfare administration, advocacy, social action, practical assistance or social control endow them with the core responsibility for outcomes which are therapeutic, empowering and developmental. The key components of this relationship include attention to basic needs, response to aggressive impulses and the lessening of punitive self criticism. Such work requires a managerial supervisory function which supports and enables this use of therapeutic relationship.
3. **Relationship- based social work:** This approach emphasizes that historically the social worker–client relationship was considered central to effectiveness and good practice. The quality of the relationship that social workers strive to create, within a psychosocial perspective can be seen to be important in relation to eight areas of social work practice namely- assessment task and process; relationship difficulties; people who are vulnerable or reliant on others for their well-being; situations that require practitioners to be able to hold and contain anxiety; the relationship as a foundation for capacity building, empowerment and developing people's potential; and in relation to disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the population, how social workers can use the 'front-line' knowledge they have gained through the relationships they have created in political ways—to bear witness and report on 'social ills' as they impact on the lives of service users (Trevithick, 2003).

3.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP

Caplan & Caplan cited in Hutchison (2014) listed the following characteristics of effective support system that are equally applicable to an effective relationship:

1. Nurtures and promotes an ordered worldview
2. Promotes hope
3. Promotes timely withdrawal and initiative
4. Provides guidance
5. Provides a communication channel with the social world
6. Affirms one's personal identity
7. Provides material help
8. Ensures adequate rest
9. Mobilizes other personal supports

Using relationships requires social workers to use themselves and thus requires an enhanced knowledge of the self. Self-awareness in the social worker is a major theme. Social workers' relationships with people are not neutral and free-floating. Rather, they are influenced and shaped by wider socio-economic, political and cultural contexts of legislation, or protocol, or departmental budgets. Social work is also influenced by cultural practices within a context that holds particular attitudes towards fundamental dimensions of life such as sexual relationships, child-rearing practices, roles associated

with gender, homosexuality, marriage and divorce, etc. The qualities such as listening and communicating are important in the context of a relationship.

3.7 PRINCIPLES FOR USING RELATIONSHIP IN SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

It is important to consider the following principles while using relationships for social work intervention:

1. Any recent role transitions that may affect social functioning. In such cases, assist families and groups to renegotiate unsatisfactory role structures. Also develop networks of support for persons experiencing challenging role transitions.
2. Always consider power arrangements and forces of oppression and the alienation that need social work intervention. Assist in the development of advocacy efforts to challenge patterns of dominance.
3. Consider the patterns of exchange in the social support networks of individuals, families and organizations, and assist to renegotiate unsatisfactory patterns of exchange.
4. Engage people in thinking about the environments while working in situations characterized by differences in belief systems, assist members to engage in sincere discussions and to negotiate lines of action. Assist clients in expressing emotional conflicts and in understanding how these are related to past events. Help them develop self-awareness and self-control.
5. Assist in locating and using needed environmental resources.
6. Consider the familial, cultural and historical contexts in the timing and experience of developmental transitions. Recognize human development as unique and lifelong.
7. Consider the variety of processes by which behavior is learned. Be sensitive to the possibility of learned helplessness when people lack motivation for change. Consider issues of social justice and fairness before engaging in behavior modification.
8. Be aware of the potential for significant differences between own assessment of the situation and the distressed individual's own assessment; value self-determination. Focus on strengths rather than pathology.

Check Your Progress I

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of this unit.

- 1) Describe human relationships as social capital.

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- 2) List out the characteristics of effective relationship.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

Social workers seek to sort out problems of people; most of these problems are social as these arise due to many social factors- these factors make it difficult for people to realize their full potential. The factors can be multi-fold such as poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunity, racism, regionalism, child abuse, crime and substance abuse, etc. These factors may affect one directly or indirectly, thus it becomes important to address such issues. Problems can be contextual too. One country may face one problem whereas another country may be facing different social problems.

Social work deals with both internal aspects (values, beliefs, emotions and problem solving capacities) and external aspects (the neighborhoods, schools, working conditions, social welfare systems and political systems that affect us) related to human conditions. By doing this, social work is able to provide a uniquely encompassing service to people in need by using human relationships to help in problem solving and maintaining social cohesion.

The “importance of human relationships” is listed by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), USA as one of the 6 core values that are foundations of social work profession. Social work professionals worldwide seek to promote, restore, maintain and enhance the well being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations and communities. In order to achieve such social cohesion, it is important to acknowledge the centrality of importance of human relationships between and among people as an important vehicle of change.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1)
 - Human relationships are considered important social capital in social work because humans are resources for national development. They form substantial part of the social capital that is considered as important as other types of capital.
- 2) Characteristics of effective relationship are:
 - Nurtures and promotes an ordered worldview.
 - Promotes hope.
 - Promotes timely withdrawal and initiative.
 - Provides guidance.
 - Provides communication channel with social world.
 - Affirms one's personal identity.
 - Provides material help.
 - Ensures adequate rest.
 - Mobilize other personal support.