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Social Work Fundamentals

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Abstract

Social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change. As such, social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve. Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory and practice.

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CHAPTER 5

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Introduction

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Defining social work

The adopted international definition, which is constantly reviewed in tandem with developments in the profession, reads as follows:

Social work is a profession that promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

 (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2000).

According to the Social Workers Act 27:21 (Zimbabwe) First Schedule (Section 4(2), social work is a profession that

...promotes the welfare of human beings and the betterment of human society through the development

and systematic application of scientific knowledge of human and societal activities and social services. Professional social workers aim to satisfy the needs and aspirations of individuals and groups at national and international level, while constantly bearing in mind the need for promoting social policy. Their techniques include psychotherapeutic case-work, social- dynamic group-work and planned community intervention.

According to the same act, social workers have obtained at least a Bachelors Degree or a diploma in social work from any recognized university. The Act acknowledges auxiliary social workers i.e. people practicing as social workers yet they do not have an approved qualification.

History of social work

Social work emerged as a profession out of the early efforts of churches and philanthropic groups to relieve the effects of poverty, to bring the comforts of religion to the poor, to promote temperance and encourage thrift, to care for children, the sick, and the aged, and to correct the delinquent. Initially social work was focused on

relieving people of their problems but it has now grown to incorporate social development. Social development is a strategy that seeks to prevent social problems rather than cure them. Early social work started in America and Britain. Britain later exported it to its colonies including Zimbabwe. The School of Social Work in Zimbabwe was registered as a charity by a team of Jesuits led by Father Rodgers in 1963. According to Kaseke (2001, 1991) and Chogugudza (2009) the School's early programmes included a certificate in social work which was later improved to a diploma in social work. The diploma was developed into a bachelor's degree that was as well replaced by the current four-year honours degree. The School trains social work masters, and produces doctors and professors of social work. The School now falls under the Faculty of Social Studies and has been fully integrated into the University of Zimbabwe. In recent years, the improvement of Zimbabwe's higher education system has seen Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) offering a bachelor's degree in Social Work beginning 2010 whilst the Women's University in Africa (WUA) offers a diploma in Social Work beginning 2010.

Social work values

Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Since its beginnings over a century ago, social work practice has focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the profession's national and international codes of ethics.

The social work equation

Social work intervention may be represented as an equation consisting of people (social), problem and functioning.

The social dysfunction equation

Person + Problem = Social Problem

The social function equation

Person - Problem = Social Functioning

The social work process

Social Problem ————$\xrightarrow{\text{Social Work}}$———— *Social Functioning*

Theoretical basis

Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context (Beckett, 2006). It recognises the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them including bio-psychosocial factors. The social

work profession draws on theories of human development and behavior and social systems to analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual, organizational, social and cultural changes.

Principles of social work

Social work principles basically fall into 3 broad categories. These are:

Human rights and human dignity

Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the rights that follow from this. Social workers should uphold and defend each person's physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being by promoting participation, empowerment and self determination.

Social justice

Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work by challenging negative

discrimination, recognizing diversity and equity, challenging injustice and exclusion.

Professional conduct

Social workers act in accordance with the ethical code or guidelines current in their country which should be consistent with international guidelines.

Some practice guidelines include professional competence, being humane, having integrity, compassion and empathy, being people centered, accountable and ethical.

Local organisations

Council of Social Workers (CSW)

The Council of Social Workers (CSW) was established in accordance with the Social Workers Act: 27:21, Number 9 of 2000. The Act enables the CSW to regulate and protect the Social Welfare Environment for the benefit of the consumers of social work services in

Zimbabwe. The Council, as the supreme body for the social workers, seeks to exercise its mandate to promote and protect the welfare of Zimbabwean citizens in the first instance, hence regulate the professional conduct of all Social Care Workers, focusing on guiding the practice of professional social workers, influencing continuous social work education for all those in professional social work practice including auxiliary workers. In developing all these processes the Council bears in mind the on-going macro-environment existing in the country from time to time.

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is an association of social workers which was established to advance the interests of the profession. The NASW is an affiliate of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). The NASW has not been very active, having been affected by the twin effects of brain drain and economic challenges. However, from 2010, it re-emerged and is currently on a revival path. Current developments

include having a full time secretariat, an office, a full board and a clearly defined line of activities. It has also established a student body, the National Association of Social Work Students (NASWS) with active members at University of Zimbabwe and Bindura University.

International organisations

International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is a global federation of national organizations of social workers (unions or associations). It is striving for social justice, human rights and social development through the development of social work, best practices and international cooperation between social workers and their professional organisations.

International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)

The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) is the worldwide association of schools of social work, other tertiary level social work educational programmes, and social work educators. The IASSW promotes the development of social work education throughout the world, develops standards to enhance quality of social work education, encourages international exchange, provides forums for sharing social work research and scholarship, and promotes human rights and social development through policy and advocacy activities. IASSW holds consultative status with the United Nations and participates as an NGO in UN activities in Geneva, Vienna and New York. Through its work at the UN and with other international organizations, IASSW represents social work education at the international level.

International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)

The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) is a global non-governmental organisation which represents a

wide range of national and international member organisations that seek to advance social welfare, social development and social justice. ICSW has the highest level of consultative status with the United Nations in relation to the work of the Economic and Social Council. ICSW's high level of consultative status within the United Nations ensures that the organisation is consulted and involved in important social development issues being discussed by the United Nations. ICSW undertakes research and organises consultations to help analyse problems and develop policies. Each of its global biennial conferences covers a very wide range of issues. Other forums, seminars and workshops are convened on specific topics.

Methods of social work

Social work addresses the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society. It responds to crises and emergencies as well as to everyday personal and social problems. Social work utilises a variety of skills, techniques, and activities consistent with its holistic

focus on persons and their environments. The social work profession utilizes 5 basic methods: casework, group work, community work, administration and research.

Casework (social work with individuals)

This includes primarily person-focused psychosocial processes like counselling and clinical social work.

Group work (social work with groups)

Encompasses family treatment and plural focused therapy.

Community work (social work with communities)

This intervention includes community organisation and engaging in social and political action to impact social policy and economic development as well as efforts to help people obtain services and resources in the community.

Administrative social work

Administration of agencies providing social services is another method of social work. Such agencies include the Department of Social Services, various government and non-government organisations.

Social work research

This involves various forms of research to understand the interaction between people and their environment and how social workers are reacting to such scenarios.

The eclectic nature of social work

Social work is diverse, dynamic and holistic (Morales, Sheafor, and Scott, 2010). This makes it eclectic. This is seen in its methods, principles and practice guidelines.

Diversity

Social work borrows background knowledge and strategies from fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, statistics, geography, biology, politics, administration, ecology,

law, development studies, gender, education and many others.

Dynamism

Implementation of social work varies from time to time depending on cultural, historical, and socio-economic conditions.

Holistic

The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice will vary from country to country.

Multifaceted

Social work utilizes various methods and techniques to achieve its objectives.

Various practice settings

Social workers are found working in social services departments as welfare or probation officers, in hospitals as medico or clinical social workers, in penury

institutions, in schools, in teaching settings, war zones, and various other settings practicing as researchers, consultants, relief workers, gender activists, child welfare officers, community development workers and many others.

Conclusion: challenges confronting Zimbabwe social workers

Social workers predominantly work with poor people and this is not an easy task given that resources in the Zimbabwean society are limited (Chogugudza, 2009). Further, resources are limited because most communities prioritize economic development at the expense of social development. Resultantly, there is even poor recognition in terms of remuneration especially in public practice settings. This gives other challenges, like being accountable in the face of a shortage of resources. On top of these dilemmas, protecting the rights and promoting the interest of service users and careers is often a contested terrain. Finally, ethical conduct is a complex regulation that is often flouted.

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