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## Crafting a Mindset for Social Work – Role of Educators

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**Abstract:**

*Social Work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems.*

*Social Work profession is dedicated to service for the welfare and self-fulfillment of human beings; to the development and disciplined use of scientific knowledge regarding human behaviour and society; to the development of resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; to the enhancement and improvement of the quality of life of people; and to the achievement of social justice.*

*Professionals in the field of Social Work need to possess a strong sense of passion and involvement with various issues as they function as the social change agents in the society. Students training in this discipline need to imbibe in themselves, an attitude to get disturbed by the realities of the world and also possess the skill to deal with the community, with their overall goal being creating a better world that boasts of social justice and equity amongst the people of all religions, regions, caste and creed.*

### 1. Introduction

The International Federation of Social Workers defines Social Work as that which ‘promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being’.

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. Utilizing theories of human behaviour 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.

As per "International Code of Ethics for the Professional Social Worker" adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers in 1976, Social Work profession is dedicated to service for the welfare and self-fulfillment of human beings; to the development and disciplined use of scientific knowledge regarding human behaviour and society; to the development of resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; to the enhancement and improvement of the quality of life of people; and to the achievement of social justice.

### 2. Scope and Purview of Social Work

Social Work is a profession that requires those pursuing it as students or practitioners, a high degree of motivation, commitment and integrity. It is a profession, unlike others, that entails understanding of the philosophy and objectives of the profession, and also the acquiring of skills and incorporation of values, ethics and attitudes by a rigorous training involving nearly equal theoretical and field work components..

Social Work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all persons 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.

The role of Social Workers is varied and many. They deal with a variety of common human needs and work to prevent or alleviate individual, group and community problems, and to improve the quality of life of all people. As a result of their particular role and responsibility in society, Social Workers are often the conscience of the community. Therefore, the value system, training and experience of Social Workers require that they take professional responsibility for various issues like promoting human rights, social justice and equity, non discrimination, peace and non-violence, care for the environment and possess a great amount of social responsibility. A concern with human dignity is integral to what Social Workers do on a day-to-day basis (Allan Borowski, 2007).

At the core of the process of Social Work is the mindset of individuals indulging in it. We find two kinds of Social Workers – ‘voluntary’ and ‘professional’/ ‘trained’ Social Workers. While ‘voluntary’ Social Work implies service done with no personal gains or remuneration, it has now taken on the connotation of having an innate passion for working for the betterment of the society. ‘Trained’ or ‘professional’ Social Workers are ‘focused’ individuals who have become so due to rigorous training attained through a thorough course curriculum. However, it is not just the qualification that ensures accountability towards society, but also the passion and inspiration to carry out the tasks demanded of them.

“The test of Social Workers’ commitment to its underlying values lies in the willingness to struggle on, in an often mundane day-to-day basis, to translate these values into deeds, as our professional forebears did individually and collectively (Reisch & Andrews 2002)”.

According to Lundy & Wormer (2007), ‘If we are serious about our mandate to uphold human rights, Social Workers, both professionally and individually, must raise their voices against social injustice wherever it is occurring’.

It is a profession that needs to deal with ever changing social realities and dynamics which have to be negotiated and renegotiated rather than solved or resolved which constitutes its success and challenge. In the changing social scenario with the increased challenges and tensions it becomes imperative that a degree of universality, scientific reliability, professional autonomy and moral accountability be ensured.

### **3. The Need for Angst and Empathy in the Trainees**

A Social Work trainee who would be expected to carry out the immense roles as elucidated above requires him/her to possess a great deal of motivation. This needs a robust ‘mindset’ that constantly inspires and motivates individuals to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of the society/community. The aspects that assist a person to join a course have to also fulfill his needs to sustain him through the course. Motivation gets strengthened by the resources around, awareness of limitations and the decrease in the gap between real and perceived objectives and results.

The Case Work principles that are mandatory for a Social Work trainee like acceptance and non judgmental attitude requires one to be open to others’ viewpoints, experiences and possess empathy towards the difficulties and hurts of others. Some possess these attitudes on their own by basically being sensitive and empathetic, while others need to be trained to inculcate these attitudes.

Ideology is a prime motivating factor by which our personal values get determined. The amount of involvement a person shows in Social Work is primarily determined by his/her level of disturbance with the existing social reality. Again, as individuals vary in attitudes, ideology also varies with time, place and person. It is not eternal. However, as long as the conviction is strong, working in a steadfast manner is possible.

### **4. Role of Social Work Educators**

The Social Work student should have an appropriate blend of courage and commitment to handle the challenges and tensions of the changing social system and also the tolerance and serenity to accept his/her helplessness to resolve all challenges. He should be trained to critically analyze his success quotient and rectify personal limitations if any.

Social Work educators play a significant role in crafting the mindset of Social Work trainees and provide them with inspirational motivation and help them imbibe the values of the profession and contribute towards a better society.

Educators motivate students through their learning oriented innovative teaching methods including didactic lectures, group and interactive learning, by providing the students exposure to situations that raise their sensitivity level, evoke empathy and attitudes of non judgmental attitude & acceptance, by being good role models, more so in respect of ethical and humanitarian values, by providing opportunities for independent learning through small projects, education focusing on learning through doing rather than just reading, teaching certain subjects like disability, human rights etc. through practical learning and organizing quarterly meetings with field agency personnel for discussion of students’ training needs.

Social Work educators have to equip and strengthen students with a robust mindset to face the realities of the environment without getting unduly disturbed and teach him/her to slowly feel the ground rather than leap into it. Educators should help students to reconcile to the fact that results are slow and hence provide platforms for discussion of endeavours with co-practitioners or co-professionals, to elicit support, derive motivation and enhance or strengthen his conviction.

To ensure professional training, the field work practicum must supplement theory where skills get refined. Educators need to aim at igniting the intrinsic goodness of the individuals meant to serve for which opportunities for exposure to realities is a must. But can we assure that students of Social Work possess this quality? Not always. As persons who need to bring about social change, the education must be more relevant and restructured. It should help students face realities and act as change agents. To ensure commitment on the part of students opting for education, a 3 month structured system or exposure to social realities prior to admission could be imparted.

Field work review meeting in the form of individual and group conferences should ensure that students develop skills of critical thinking and reasoning, self reflection and introspection; attitudes of openness to new experiences and paradigms, recognition of the relationship between personal life experiences and personal value systems and also dealing with ‘burn out’ quickly and appropriately.

Ample opportunity for exploration of avenues of intervention, guidance at every major step with constant supervision in the initial stages of field work training providing freedom in respect of ‘process’ of intervention with periodic motivational boosts would go a long way in producing thorough bred Social Work professionals.

To protect the purity of purpose and objectives of the Social Work profession, autonomy to Social Work curriculum needs to be given so that educators can decide the criteria for holistic training and assessment of individuals. Social Work professionals could also recommend that ethics and values of Social Work be inculcated in elementary and high school education though in small measure.

To say that inspiration is permanent is idealistic. For professionals in the field of education and practice, 'burnout' is a dangerous but a common phenomenon. One should not succumb to this but try various strategies and ways of de-stressing oneself by socializing, taking a break/vacation, managing stress, being surrounded by positive persons in crisis, using humour and relieving oneself of the 'low' feeling and sense of helplessness. Clear demarcation between personal and institutional/professional goals needs to be made. Periodical meetings need to be held with people of similar ideology, faith or cause to help pursue the cause.

### **5. Current Trends in Social Work Education**

An alarming issue that faces all of us is that there is mushrooming of numerous schools of Social Work within a limited geographic region, but inadequate or almost nil Social Work training institutes in some parts of India. There are practically nil fieldwork agencies to accommodate students, thereby denying the students the most relevant opportunity of learning from the field. The large number of students posted at these agencies for field work training places a tremendous burden on the agencies and issues like confidentiality, privacy etc. are compromised when dealing with clients. Another alarming fact is the opening of colleges offering Social Work as a degree through distance mode. This could lead to a lot of compromise being made in the teaching and field work curriculum.

Without a regulatory body in Social Work, training standards and quality get hugely compromised and uniformity in education, field training and also evaluation process cannot be maintained. It is of critical importance that care is taken to ensure common standards of training with regard to core purpose and objectives, programme curricula, including field work, selection and recruitment of Social Work students and values and ethical codes of conduct of the Social Work profession.

### **6. Conclusion**

For the profession of Social Work to last and for the continued commitment of individuals who work for a cause, it is important to necessitate sound training in the curriculum. The educators have a significant role in encouraging and instilling in students a sense of self esteem and pride with respect to the Social Work profession. It pains to see some of our Social Work colleagues even upon completion of their training have a very poor image of both self and the profession.

Thus, it is extremely important and necessary that we derive our self esteem needs from within the profession and sustain it through constant growth efforts at personal and professional fronts that not only ensures enhanced contribution to the profession,, but also improves the self image in our own eyes as well as in the eyes of others.

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