

Module 32

Role of Social Workers in Working with Families

-Intervention Skills-

Component 1 A

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Component 1B

	Description of Module
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Module Name	Role of Social Workers in Working with Families -Intervention Skills-
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Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To know the role of social workers engaged in working with families, To understand the various types of interventions applicable for working with families, and To learn the specific skill sets required for the application of suitable and relevant practices.
Key Words	Family social work, Facilitator, Mentor, Advocate, Catalyst, Counsellor, Redressal Mechanisms, Family Court, Family Counselling centres, Attending skills, Confronting skills, and Empathetic skills.

Quadrant 1

I. Introduction

Family is the oldest institution which has helped humankind to survive all these centuries. It is united by the ties of marriage, where the members interact and communicate with each other in their respective roles of husband and wife, mother and father, sons and daughters, etc. It provides an environment of love, belonging and security to its members, which guarantees them marital peace, fulfillment and growth. But today, the scenario is fast changing and the family is being threatened by many factors. In the current social scenario, marital relationships are under increasing strain and becoming complex and demanding more. There are growing instances of divorce, marital discord, demand for dowry, bride burning, violation of women's dignity, abandonment, neglect of intergenerational care, and so on.

This module presents a glimpse of the role of social workers engaged in working with families. It also briefs the learners about the intervention strategies that are applicable in practice and the specific skill sets required for practice in this field. The module will help the reader

- To know the role of social workers engaged in working with families,
- To understand the various types of interventions applicable for working with families, and
- To learn the specific skill sets required for the application of suitable and relevant practices.

II. Family - The Changing Scenario

Family, being an ancient institution, helped the sustenance of mankind in all their hardships and sufferings. Family provides the nurturing environment of love, belongingness and security which guarantees that the members will have a harmonious life, peace, fulfillment and growth. However, it does not mean that there would be no differences or provocations or quarrels about minor matters among the members of the family. Such quarrels have always existed between siblings, between parents and children or between husband and wife.

But today, the situation is fast changing and the family, a very precious unit of the society, is being threatened by many extraneous factors. The marital relationship is under increasing strain. As the years

roll on, it is becoming complex and more and more demanding. Present-day women are more educated and more economically independent and they contribute substantially to the workplace and the family. Yet, they are more vulnerable to violence today than before, due to various factors, particularly when violence is perpetrated by their own family members where the safety and security of the so-called home is taken away by those whom they trusted. In fact, violence against women is a global epidemic that kills, brutalizes, and harms women physically, psychologically, sexually and economically. It is one of the most persistent forms of human rights violation that denies women equality, security, dignity, self-worth and freedom.

III. Family Social Work

It is in this context that the practice of family social work becomes relevant to study and understand. Family social work aims at working with the individuals of the family who are in a strained and stressed situations. Social workers help families improve relationships and cope with difficult situations such as divorce, illness or death. They guide families through the counseling process by helping them identify problems, set goals and find suitable solutions to their troubles and tribulations. In a crisis situation, such as neglect, substance abuse or violence, they may also recommend a legal action, such as having children temporarily removed while the parents work through their difficulties.

IV. Role of Social Workers engaged in working with families

The social worker engaged in working with families is often involved in multi-tasking, taking up the appropriate role according to the need and issue at hand. Listed below are a few roles that social workers take up while working with families.

IV.1. Facilitator: Social workers initiate their role by simply facilitating and encouraging family members to communicate. Sometimes, families have barely spoken to each other for months by the time they seek professional help. The social worker acts as a neutral third party, helping family members share their fears, concerns or disappointments in a non-confrontational way. Probes are designed to help families to discover the underlying causes of their problems. For example, if a child is misbehaving, it may not be because he disrespects his parents, but rather because he is troubled by the stress in his parents' marriage. A social worker would help him articulate and vent these thoughts and disturbed feelings, so the entire family could discuss and understand perfectly that these are the disturbing factors hindering their peaceful living.

IV.2. Advisor or Guide: Social workers suggest immediate solutions, even if short-term, to help families work through problems or defuse potentially volatile situations. A social worker will often attempt to stabilize the family unit, including addressing individual members' issues, for interventions to be more effective. For example, if one family member has a serious drug or alcohol problem, the social worker may recommend undergoing or having a treatment facility before continuing with therapy. Or, if one family member has a mental illness such as depression or bipolar disorder, the social worker may advise him to visit a psychiatrist who can prescribe medications to help him manage his condition.

IV.3. Mentor: Social workers take up the role of a mentor and enable venting of mounted feelings that members face frequently or occasionally which disturb their peace of mind and peaceful living. Bottling up of feelings often results in undesirable consequences and hence channelizing them properly is one way to handle feelings and thoughts for behavior to be rational and appropriate. Social workers also provide guidance and support for the members of the family for amicable living.

IV.4. Advocate: Social workers act as advocates and work on taking up the cause of their clients. They represent the client in different forms and advocate the benefit and well-being of the unit. During therapeutic sessions, they also take up advocacy roles for a particular member to represent his/her viewpoint that may play a crucial role in the dynamics of the therapeutic intervention.

IV.5. Catalyst: Social workers often act as catalysts in bringing about change in the family unit. The arguments placed, clarifications sought, communications held and therapies conducted all bring about a dynamic change process in the minds of the members for a decent, dignified, respected and peaceful living.

IV.6. Counselor: The social worker also takes up the role of a counselor, if need arises. The goal of family counseling is to help families create a home atmosphere where family members can communicate with and support each other through times of conflict, quarrel and disagreement with one another. A conflict can have many causes, including poor relationships, substance abuse, behavioral problems, or financial or work concerns. Conflicts can arise between parents and their children. They can also occur in the marriage. The social worker counsels the members and thereby enhances their family relationship.

A social worker trained in working with families has a special skill set. The goal of a social worker is to be an objective guide for family members and help them understand their relationships and roles in the

family. The family dynamics, or how family members relate to each other, will be carefully reviewed by the social worker. There is also a focus on communication patterns and behavior patterns among family members which would be clearly studied and identified by him. Therefore, the social worker will work with the family to establish healthy patterns of communication, find appropriate ways to express frustration and anger, and set boundaries.

V. Intervention Strategies

Intervention is a strategy adopted by social workers to involve with individuals, families and groups to enable them to meet their needs and issues. The main purpose of interventions is to aid clients in alleviating their problems and improving their well-being and healthy living, which in turn promotes peace, tranquility and good understanding. In working with families the intervention strategies adopted by the social worker often depend on the nature of problem and its dynamic impact on the individuals of the family. Listed below are few common disputes found among Indian families.

V.1. Reasons for Common Family Disputes

- Wife battering, dowry, bride burning
- Violent behavior of either of the spouses
- Egoistic behavior or inferiority complex
- Addictions and related behavior
- Abuse in all forms - sexual, verbal, physical, emotional or psychological
- Needless interference from in-laws
- Provocations and hurting each other by taunts, sarcasms and abuses
- Indiscriminate and insensitive attitude and behavior towards spouses
- Extra-marital relations by either spouse or promiscuity
- Doubting the integrity/character of the spouse

Source: NIPCCD, 2011

V.2. Redressal Mechanisms

The systems and strategies available to address these issues in families are as follows.

V.2.1. Family Courts

Family courts are a specialized type of courts entrusted with the disposal of cases concerning disputes relating to the family. In brief, these courts deal with litigation concerning marriage and divorce, maintenance, guardianship and the property of spouses. They are established under the Family Courts

Act, 1984. The objective of family courts (as stated by the legislature) is to promote conciliation and secure speedy settlement of disputes relating to their marriage and family affairs.

V.2.2. Family Counselling Centres (FCC)

The concept of family counselling was conceptualized by the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in the 1980s when there was a spate of dowry deaths. The Board spearheaded the campaign by setting up Voluntary Action Bureaus, which subsequently took the shape of Family Counselling Centres. The objective of the Family Counselling Centres is to provide preventive and rehabilitative services to women and families who are victims of atrocities and family mal-adjustments through crisis intervention and systematic counselling.

(a) FCCs at Police Headquarters

Family Counselling Centres are being run in some Police Headquarters premises under the administrative control of the State Social Welfare Boards. These FCCs were established with the objective of providing speedy crisis intervention to those women whose cases were registered in Police Stations.

(b) FCCs in Mahila Jails

Twenty-three FCCs have been set up in Mahila Jails in Bihar, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

(c) Pre-marital Counselling Centres

This new initiative is being implemented in Women Development Centres at various colleges in Delhi. They lay special emphasis on pre-marital counselling and deal with other areas of psycho-social crisis management for young women.

(d) Counselling Centres for Devdasis and Sex Workers

At present there are two FCCs working for the welfare of Devdasis and sex workers and their children, one each in Mumbai in Maharashtra and Belgaum in Karnataka. The Centres are set up with the objective of providing preventive services through awareness campaigns on STDs, AIDS and other health and legal matters and also rehabilitative measures for children of female sex workers.

VI. Family Intervention Strategies

The social workers involved in working with families engage in interventions such as emotion-focused intervention for couples, strategic intervention, intensive family preservation approaches, solution-focused brief intervention, psychotherapeutic approaches, family psycho-education and family stabilization.

VI.1. Emotion-Focused Intervention: This intervention is basically aimed at enabling the members to let out their hatred and negative emotions and channelize them appropriately. The social worker aims at skillfully handling the emotions and revealing the true meaning hidden behind them. They are also enabled to excavate and make the other members understand the underlying need, purpose and impact of such emotional outpours. This helps family members to take stock of things and revive relationships and look forward to new ways of mending relationships and leading peaceful lives.

VI.2. Strategic Intervention: This is an approach which involves meticulous study, analysis, diagnosis and planning for the interventions to be undertaken by the social workers in working with the families. It is a systematic approach and involves meticulous preparation and scheduling according to the nature of the problem and the need.

VI.3. Intensive Family Preservation approach: This intervention aims at ensuring the preservation of relationships of the members of the family. The frictions and divisions that have erupted among the members of the family are identified, barriers are highlighted, misunderstandings and misinterpretations are clarified and relationships are strengthened. The social worker aims at rejuvenating and preserving the family ties and strengthens the bonds between the members for a healthy relationship and peaceful living.

VI.4. Solution-focused brief Intervention: These interventions are used to bring about solutions to the existing problems in the family. They are very brief and focused and aim at alleviating the situation and providing the best possible remedies or solution to the issue at hand. Therefore, the social worker needs to work rapidly and cleverly for solution-focused brief intervention.

VI.5. Psychotherapeutic Interventions: These interventions are used in situations where the members of the family or individuals may need deep psychological help. It is a clinical therapeutic process of working with individuals to enable healing from within. It often extends over a period of time.

VI.6. Family psycho-education: This involves briefing and educating family members on the situation or condition of a member of the family for supportive well-being of the individual and the family.

VII. Skills Required for Practice:

Basic skills sets employed by social workers engaged in any helping process can be listed as follows:

Listening, Interviewing, Communicating, Motivating, Problem solving, Conflict resolution, Empathizing, Decision Making, Collateral, Contacting and Networking

Apart from the above basic skills, social workers working with families need the following skills for effective practice:

VII.1. Attending Skills: It is the act of truly focusing on the individuals who come for help. Conscious efforts need to be taken to be aware of what the client is saying or trying to communicate.

VII.2. Confronting Skills: An attempt to make a respectful invitation to the client to consider discrepancies. This is to help the client become more integrated and consistent in his behavior and in his relationships with others.

VII.3. Information Sharing Skill: Providing the client with knowledge and information that is pertinent to his problem. This is to make the client well-informed about the facts he needs to know in order to cope effectively. The information should be factual, clear and comprehensive.

VII.4. Skills in Interpreting Non-Verbal Clues: Getting the meaning of the client's non-verbal clues to his or her underlying feelings and motives. It helps the social worker to get additional information about the client's thoughts and feelings and project warmth and sensitivity towards the clients. The social worker can watch for inconsistencies during this process.

VII.5. Empathetic Listening Skills: The basic listening skills include observation, the use of open and closed questions, and the use of encouraging, paraphrasing, summarization and reflection of the client's feelings. It includes the process of tuning in carefully to the client's message and responding accurately to the meaning behind the message. It involves entering the inner world of the client. The social worker conveys understanding, concern and empathy, avoids interpretation, and suspends judgment.

VIII. Summary

- ❖ For the past few decades, sweeping changes in male-female relations, sex norms, birth rates and divorce rates have been occurring at an accelerating rate among all segments of the population.
- ❖ People today become sexually active early, marry late, have fewer children and divorce more frequently than in the past. Non-traditional alternatives to marriage such as live-in relationships, single mother or one-parent families by choice have emerged along with a variety of other experimental arrangements.
- ❖ It is clear that the present trend is alarming, where traditional family norms have become blurred and new guidelines for courtship and marriage have not yet been clarified.
- ❖ In this time of ambivalence and flux, social case workers face the formidable challenge of ensuring that they will be relevant and effective in their practice in helping troubled families cope with the old and new dilemmas present in family life today.
- ❖ Social case workers help families with strained relationships and marital discord and provide the warring factions of the family with a platform to discuss their problems and to find solutions.
- ❖ Social case workers play the role of a facilitator, guide or adviser, mentor, advocate, counselor, and catalyst in the process of problem solving.
- ❖ There are some common problems found among the Indian families as well as some socio-legal mechanisms to address these problems.

- ❖ The social workers involved in working with the families engage themselves in adopting interventions such as emotion-focused intervention for couples, strategic intervention, intensive family preservation approaches, solution-focused brief intervention, psychotherapeutic approaches, family psycho-education, and family stabilization.
- ❖ Social case workers employ the basic skills such as listening, interviewing, communicating, motivating, problem solving, empathizing, conflict resolution, decision making, collateral contacting, and networking in their interventions.

