
UNIT 3: SOCIAL CASE WORK IN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the relevance of social case work in educational setting;
- Know about the current trends and challenges of social case work in educational setting; and
- Chalk out the future prospects for social case work in educational setting.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

‘The pen is mightier than the sword’, this statement holds true in all respect and hence, people all over seek to be educated as education is a lifelong learning process and is a fundamental human right. This is because educated people make informed choices and become dependent on their ability to take a decision. However, attaining complete and wholesome education is harder than it may seem. Bureaucratic functioning of schools, widening teacher-students ratio, class differences within the classroom, parent-child relationship, etc., can make individual learning impossible. The education system has realised the importance of seeking help from professionals other than teachers to meet the growing demands of the ever changing youth. These pupil specialist-social workers, psychologists,

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physician, special educators, etc., help the school to achieve the goals of wholesome education.

The social worker in particular has seen an increasing demand in the schools. Social worker and educator have common goals. Both aim to bring about holistic development in all learners, so that they become productive adults. Social worker's prime focus is on the individual child and his environment. In order to deal with the problems manifested by the child (client) the social worker uses social case work method. Social case work is a method of social work practised by a large number of social workers in different problem settings. It is based on knowledge, understanding and use of techniques that are skillfully applied to help people to solve problems. Social case work is a method of helping people individually through one to one relationship that taps personal and other resources for coping with problems. In recent times, social case work in educational setting has gained importance due to the changing pattern of adolescents in the educational set up. Comparatively, coming to school for help with the child's problem does not carry stigma that may have been associated with visiting a clinic or any other agencies.

Nowadays, parents are more competitive than the children themselves and therefore, there is a greater readiness to utilise the services of a qualified social case worker in the school.

For a more professional term we shall use the term 'client' to refer to students having problems in the educational setting.

3.2 SOCIAL CASE WORK IN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

The social case worker is a qualified professional who possesses the knowledge, skills and experience needed to work with individuals to solve their problems. These case managements may be done in different settings such as education, health, industry, etc. In this unit, we shall discuss the role of a social case worker with specific reference to the educational settings.

The case worker in an educational setting may be employed in schools, colleges, universities and other learning institutes. In such a setting, the social case worker works with the individual clients and his/ her parents to solve the problems. If need be, the teachers and the peer group and other significant people in particular extended family, siblings, etc., may be involved. It may not be the school policy to work with the parents always to solve the child's problems encountered in the school, but the professional knowledge of the importance of

parent-child relationship in the development of the child makes working with parents' imperative.

In recent times, problems faced by the clients have been addressed more religiously and schools all over have started to take an initiative to employ school social worker to deal with the clients' problem. This may be because the issues and problems faced by clients in the new age are more diverse and may be more complicated which then affects their academic, social and personal well being. Problems faced by the school going adolescents may include a) psychological b) academic c) social/ behavioural and d) emotional/personal. Addressing problems at an early stage helps to build a mentally and emotionally strong individual. The social case worker before working with the child assesses his/ her strengths in coping with the problems and may devise coping strategies to help the child. In most cases it may be best to work with the child alone but in certain case parents' involvement and active participation may expedite the healing process.

1. Psychological

Adolescence is a time of opportunity and change but also of vulnerabilities. The problems faced by adolescents during these times are not discussed openly in the society for fear of rejection. Some common psychological fears among clients are examination related stress, psychiatric problems which may not be diagnosed initially, over indulgence in technology out of fear of missing out on information, childhood abuse, taking the life of crimes to meet certain standards and even thoughts of suicide or attempted suicide due to inability to cope in school. These problems may take time to manifest in the clients but eventually when the academic performance gets affected, the cause may surface. Here, the social case worker works with not only the clients but also the parents to first evaluate the cause of psychological trauma. Once the cause is known the next step is to prevent further psychological trauma. The main aim of the social case worker is to improve the mental health of the victim and ensure perceptions of safety. The social case worker ensures safety by proving timely interventions with the help of the parents and this may be an on-going process. Here, both the parents and the child work together and respond to the psychological needs. The case worker along with the parents then evaluates the effectiveness of the crisis intervention and chalk out future interventions for the overall development of the child.

2. Academic

With the technological development in the society and a vast network of world wide web opened to clients, the most common difficulty faced by adolescents of school going age is academic in nature, i.e., retention of what is being taught and concentration, failing in subjects, under performance in class, etc. As compared to before, there are many things which take away the concentration of school going children in terms of virtual games, online sites and various other multimedia options, and books then take a back seat. This then affects the performance of the child in the class. A studious client may end up failing in most of the subjects due to lack of parental control at home and may end up being an under performer in school. There are also clients with special education needs. They may have conditions like dyslexia, autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc. These clients lack social adjustment skills, motivation, and self-management skills. In such a situation, the social case worker is of great relevance in the educational setting and helps the clients by teaching them effective study habits, effective memorising skills, effective note taking skills, handling examination anxiety, time management and relaxation training sessions. Here, the support of the parents becomes necessary in order to help the client maintain the exercises given by the social case worker and adhere to it.

3. Social/ Behavioural

Man is a social animal and cannot do without the help and support of another human being. We have studied that family is the first social unit of a child but what was not informed is that if the family is dysfunctional and disorganised then the child may grow up to be socially awkward and end up believing what he/she does or how she/ he behave is normal. Such behaviour may lead to more problems in the school where children from different family background and parenting practices come together. This may affect the performance of the child academically and she/he may be an under achiever in the school and outside and affect his/her relation with the peer group. In worse situations, it may even lead to the self-isolation of the child. The child may then grow up to be a social embarrassment for the family. Here, the role of the parents is more important than that of the child but the social case worker may have difficulty in working with the parents if the parents are not willing to accept that there is a problem in the first place. For the social worker, working with the parents is of

great help as it will help understand the root cause of the problem and work towards developing coping strategies for the child. In such a situation, the social case worker may involve the peer group (classmates) of the child and/or the school through some activities so that a bond is created and helps the child to come out of his/her social awkwardness.

4. Emotional/personal

Every human being has emotions, some are able to express it and some keep it to themselves. Those who are able to express emotions tend to have a better personal life and those who are unable to express emotions-good or bad-have problems in adjusting to life situations. Similarly, children also have emotional problems which may arise due to various factors such as: inability to handle stress, difficulty in handling negative emotions-anger, fear, rejections, etc, broken family, relationship issues, inability to handle stress of failure in class and to take decisions regarding career, subject choice, etc., substance abuse, victim of child abuse and so on. When a child is confronted with such a problem, his/her academic performance gets affected and gradually his/her relation with the peer group and eventually with the family gets worse. Some of the minor problems faced by children may be due to lack of proper coping skills and the social case worker may resort to teaching them life skills which may act as a preventive measure. For effective treatment, the social case worker must therefore be clear that his/her responsibility is to help the child to bring about a change in his/her attitude towards life and situations. The social case worker may conduct specific prevention programmes and deal with child abuse victims, children coming from broken family and substance abuse issues by involving the parents and the child in question. She/he may use selective/targeted strategies and may include intensive individualised interventions and refer the child to experts such as clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.

Check your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) Discuss the academic problems faced by students in today's contemporary time.

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3.3 TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS REQUIRED BY SOCIAL CASE WORKER IN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

Dealing with children requires a certain amount of expertise and hence it is not everyone's cup of tea to deal with children in educational settings with their myriad issues-big or small. A social case worker working in the educational setting should have set techniques and skills. We shall discuss the some of them here.

- Purpose and concern for client system-The social case worker should have a concern to find out problems of clients in the school, must talk to teachers and/or observe client and try an identify children with problems and help them solve the same. He/she should initiate the process by establishing a good rapport and aim at individualised action.
- Expectations- Expectation may be at three levels:
 - a) Expectation of the social case worker from the child with whom he/she does the intervention. This expectation may be in terms of how the social case worker feels about the child's ability to cope with the problems and the strategies.
 - b) Expectations of the child from the social case worker. This expectation may arise out of doubt from the child as to whether the social case worker will be able to help with the problem or not.
 - c) Expectation from the educational settings. This expectation may be from both the social case worker and the child as to how much positive support would they receive from the educational institution.
- Accuracy of empathy and clear communication- Empathy is the ability to understand other's feelings but it should never be confused with sympathy. The social case worker should have the ability to communicate effectively with the clients and perceive their problems sensitively.
- Genuineness and acceptance-The social case worker must be practical in nature and should not get overwhelmed with emotions. He/she must show and express genuine concern and have an honest approach towards the client.

- Authority-Showing empathy and an honest approach do not mean the social case worker should not be strong mentally. He/she should be in control and be able to handle any problem or difficult situation. He/she should possess strength and be helpful, and have knowledge and experience to guide the clients towards holistic cure.
- Active listening- During the initial sessions, most communication between a client and the social case worker in the educational settings tend to be non-verbal communication and this is the time when the social case worker has to be an active listener in terms of identifying the emotions that is being communicated to him/her and even the verbal messages.
- Paraphrasing- Sometimes during a session the clients may not be able to openly discuss or find a word to describe his/her situation. The social case worker can reword, restate or even summarise what has been communicated to achieve better clarity.
- Interpretation- The social case worker must reach beyond the stated problem and examine more deeply the problem situation at hand. This may provide the client with an alternative way of viewing the present problem and put the focus on the clients' strength.
- Self disclosure- A social case workers' disclosure of personal information to the clients may be sometimes therapeutic and help improve the client's emotional or mental state only if used methodically. But if use incorrectly it may signify incompetence and hamper the healing process.

Confrontation-This enables a social case worker to point out certain discrepancies to the clients but it should be done co-operatively. Such confrontation can happen only when trust and honest relationship is established between the case worker and the client.

Check your Progress II

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

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

1) Why should a social case worker be an active listener?

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3.4 STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL CASE WORK IN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

The social case workers have to maintain certain standards to work with clients in the educational settings. Without proper standards the social case work will not yield any positive result and it may further hamper the personal growth of the client. The following are few of the standards to be maintained while working with the clients in the educational settings:

- a) The social case worker should maintain the confidentiality with regard to the issues of the clients. For the case worker, the client's interest should be of utmost priority. The problems discussed in private should be kept confidential.
- b) The social case worker must put into practice the professional skills, knowledge and competence attained to work towards the progress of the clients whose interests are of primary concern.
- c) The social case worker must ensure that there is complete involvement of the clients in all the intervention stages while dealing with their issues and if the need arises, the parents of the clients should also be effectively involved.
- d) The social case worker should actively participate at the client's level to provide for and coordinate the intervention strategies towards the treatment of the clients and his/her family.

There are also certain standards that have to be maintained by the social case worker while working in the system, i.e., educational setting, while delivering the intervention plan. Let us discuss some of them here.

1. The social case worker in the educational settings may have to intervene at the service system level to support the existing case at hand and to expand the supply of and improve access to needed services.
2. The social case worker has to be aware about the available resource and budgetary limitation in the educational settings and has to be responsible while undertaking the case work functions and activities.
3. The social case worker should participate in the evaluative and quality assurance activities that are designated to monitor the effectiveness of the service delivery system. He/she should ensure professional accountability.

Let us now discuss some of the personal standards that have to be maintained by the social case worker.

- a) The most important standard to be maintained is the qualification. The social case worker should be a qualified social case worker accredited by the council on social work education and should possess the knowledge, skills, sensitivity, empathy and experience necessary to successfully perform case work.
- b) The social case worker should maintain and develop intra-professional relationship in the educational setting among the different teachers and staff.
- c) The social case worker should take up reasonable caseload which will allow him/her to effectively plan, monitor and evaluate.
- d) The social case worker must provide for an effective intervention plan without putting too much burden on the parents or the client in particular for the smooth recovery of the client.

Check your Progress III

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

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

1) List any two standards to be maintained while working with the clients in the educational settings by the social case worker.

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

Social case work is a professional service carried out by professional case worker based on scientific principles. The social case worker in an educational setting is a qualified professional who works towards creating a relation between the client and the school. Social case work in the educational setting reduces the effect of environmental, social and institutional barriers that may impede the academic progress and success of a student. A social case worker is an integral part of the education system and provides support to students in elementary, middle and high school and beyond. They have been employed by the

educational institutions across the world since ages but in recent times, their importance has been recognised. In this advanced and diverse society most students tend to encounter challenges beyond the teachers and parents management and comprehension. Such students need support, guidance and opportunities to share their problems and be provided with an effective intervention alternative which can be provided only by the social case worker in the educational settings. The presence of the social case worker in the educational institutes also minimises the role of the parents but here, parents may also be involved depending on the intensity of the problems.

3.6 KEYWORDS

Education : The process of acquiring the body of knowledge and skills. It leads to lifelong learning.

Social Case Work : Social case work is a method of helping people individually through one to one relationship that taps personal and other resources for coping with problems.

Social Case Worker : A qualified professional who possesses the knowledge, skills and experience needed to work with individuals to solve their problems.

Empathy : The ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Paraphrasing : Express the meaning of (something written or spoken) using different words to achieve greater clarity.

Confrontation : A hostile or argumentative situation or meeting between two or more people.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1. The retention of what is being taught and concentration, failing in subjects, under performance in class, etc., are few of the academic problems students face in educational institutes. As compared to before, there are many things which take away the concentration of school going children in terms of virtual games, online sites and various other multimedia options, and books then take a back seat. This then affects the performance of the child in the class. Thus, the major problems faced by school children are the following:
 - a. Psychological,
 - b. Social / behavioural,
 - c. Academic, and
 - d. Emotional / Personal

Check Your Progress II

1. The client may not open up easily to the case worker and it may take a while before relationship of trust is established between the client and the case worker. Also, during the initial sessions, most communication in the educational settings tend to be non-verbal communication and this is the time when the social case worker has to be an active listener in terms of identifying the emotions that is being communicated to him/her including the verbal messages.

Check Your Progress III

1. The following two standards may be maintained while working with the clients in the educational settings by the social case worker:

- a. Maintaining the confidentiality with regard to the issues of the clients.
- b. Putting into practice the professional skills, knowledge and competence while working with the client.

