Debate and Discussion

A note on Social Work Education (indirectly talks about the profession also) in the light of present day realities.

A question comes to mind that....

Is Social Work Education a Panacea for the Present Societal Challenges?

Globalization impacts on all countries, adversely affecting developing countries such as India. Global and national standards for Social Work Education should develop appropriate perspectives addressing the negative feelings of communities.

The education system in India in general and particularly in Karnataka has grown greatly over the decades. Social Work has emerged as one of the major academic discipline of late. Several universities have set up separate schools or departments in this subject. Social Work is a discipline involving the application of social theory and research methods to study and improve the lives of people, groups and societies. It incorporates and uses other social sciences as a means to improve the human condition and positively change society’s response to chronic problems. Social Work is a profession committed to the pursuit of social justice, to the enhancement of the quality of life and to the development of the full potential of each individual, group and community in the society. It seeks to simultaneously address and resolve social issues at every level of society and economic status, but especially among the poor and sick. Social Workers are concerned with social problems, their causes, their solutions and their human impacts. They work with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.

Emergence of Social Work Profession

Social Work as a defined quest and profession began in the 19th century. This was in response to societal problems that resulted from the Industrial Revolution and an increased interest in applying scientific theory to various aspects of study. Eventually an increasing number of educational institutions began to offer Social Work Programmes. The settlement movement’s emphasis on advocacy and case work became part of Social Work Practice. During the 20th century, the profession began to rely more on research and evidence-based practice as it attempted to improve its professionalism. Today social workers are employed in a many of pursuits and settings. Professional Social Workers are generally considered those who hold a professional degree in Social Work and often also have a license or are professionally registered. Social Workers have organized themselves into local, national and professional bodies to further the aims of the profession.

Professional Interventions

There are three general categories or levels of intervention. The first is Macro Social Work which involves society or communities as a whole. This type of Social Work Practice would include policy forming and advocacy on a national or international scale. The second level of intervention is described as Mezzo Social Work Practice. This level would involve work with agencies, small organizations and other small groups. This practice would include policy making within a Social Work Agency or developing programmes for a particular neighborhood. The final level is the Micro level that involves service to individuals and families.

There are a wide variety of activities that can be considered Social Work and Professional Social Workers are employed in many different types of environments. In general, social workers employed in clinical or direct practice work on a Micro level. Social Workers who serve in community practice are occupied in the Mezzo or Macro levels of Social Work.

Need to have critical look at Social Work Education in the era of LPG? (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization)

As an Education institution, what it should do to improve the present situation;
• Consolidation of the developments that have occurred in the liberalization, privatization processes in different areas of Social Work and their documentation.
• Incorporating the essential elements of Social Work Services in the programmes of welfare agencies for children, youth, women and the aged.
• Amalgamation of social work programmes with programmes of labour welfare and personnel management in industrial settings.
• Strengthening community efforts to organize rehabilitation services in community
• Enlisting Social Service support from student service organizations.
• Development of models of training in social work.
• Broadening the field work placements for trainees to include community agencies in addition to the present postings.
• Developing specialized fields like Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Social Work with Children, Family...

- Conducting systematic research- exploratory, descriptive, experimental and evaluation studies-on issues related to Social Work and Development of indigenous models.
- Development of the departments into a centre for advanced studies and research in Social Work, thus making it as an apex bodies for Social Work Programmes for welfare agencies and Universities.

Research in Social Work

The current state of Social Work Professional Development is characterized by two realities. There is a great deal of traditional social and psychological research (both qualitative and quantitative) being carried out primarily by university-based researchers and by researchers based in Institutes, Foundations or Social Services Agencies. Meanwhile, many social work practitioners continue to look to their own experience for knowledge. This is a continuation of the debate that has persisted since the outset of the profession in the first decade of the twentieth century. One reason for the gap between information obtained through practice opposed to through research, is that practitioners deal with situations that are unique while research concentrates on similarities. The combining of these two types of knowledge is often imperfect. A hopeful development for bridging this gap is the compilation, in many practice field, of collections of best practices which attempt to refine research findings and the experience of respected practitioners into effective practice techniques. Although social work has roots in the informatics revolution, an important contemporary development in the profession is over coming suspicion of technology and taking advantage of the potential of information technology to empower clients.

Are there institutes for excellence in Social Work Education?

Social Work higher education and funding for excellence which will enable it to design, carry out and evaluate three areas of innovative educational development:

- Learning for effective practice- to improve the balance between learning in the workplace and on campus.
- Assessment- to ensure testing methods and flexible yet rigorous
- E learning- to develop and promote new learning resources
- Shape the future Social Work education by driving up standards and ensuring that Social Services work force equipped to meet the needs of 21st century society. If we are to attract more people into a career in Social Work then we need to offer first class training and education.

- Underpin teaching excellence.
- Establish projects to develop and support learning and best practice.
- The Institutes should drive these improvements and build on other important initiatives already under way to improve the recruitment, retention and support of social services staff.
- Commitment from and collaboration among the other Institutes/Universities to transform Social Work education in Karnataka.
- Meeting the high standards.
- Registration of Social Workers, as well as social work employers and ultimately people who use Social Work services.
- The Institutes should play an important part in the future of Social Work Education and the educational system should welcome this initiative.
- Look forward to working with the institutes towards a better qualified work force and improved protection for the public.
- It is vital that one another work together to raise the professionalism and status of Social Workers, and encourage more people into Social Work as a career.

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Sanitation

Over 250 crore people across the world lack access to improved sanitation, with nearly 120 crore practising open defecation, the riskiest sanitary practice of all. According to a report released jointly by World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF, the poor sanitation situation is a big threat to children's survival as the faecal-contaminated environment is directly linked to diarrhoeal disease, one of the biggest killers of infants under the age of five.

According to the report, presently 87 per cent of the world population has access to improved drinking water sources, with current trends suggesting that more than 90 per cent will do so by 2015. The number of people practising open defecation dropped from 24 per cent in 1990 to 18 per cent in 2006. The report also highlights disparities within national borders, particularly between rural and urban dwellers. Worldwide, there are four times as many people in rural areas-approximately 74.6 crore-without improved water sources, compared to some 13.7 crore urban dwellers.

The report, however, said that the situation has improved with more people now using improved sanitation facilities, which ensures that human excreta is disposed of in a way that prevents them from causing disease by contaminating food and water sources. "Though the practice of open defecation is on the decline worldwide, 18 per cent of the world's population, over 120 crore people, still practise it," the report said. In southern Asia, some 77.8 crore people still rely on this risky sanitation practice, it added.