

RPE Quality of Social Work Service in Tehran, Iran

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Abstract

The paper tries to explore and reflect an image of social work in Iran. As the socio-economic structure of the country is changing, and at the same time ageing of population is progressing, timely implementation of social work service should be of priority, and well practiced. The paper examines the roles and functions of 343 sample social workers functioning in Tehran. The main hypothesis of the paper is: "Quality social work improves the quality of life of the clients". The method of research mainly being empirical, it is preceded by theoretical and literature review. Findings indicate the quality of social work service in Tehran (Iran) in a quantitative order.

Keywords: Social Work, Protection, Client, Welfare, Well-being.

Introduction

Social work such as nursing seeks to diagnose and treat the response to the problems. Social workers quite similar to nurses are guided by an ethical and humanitarian philosophy in which every human being deserves respect, regardless of social, cultural, racial, economic, religious or other factors. Social workers as social nurses practice in the context of relations with the clients, families, or groups. In principle, social work services are given to people at all stages of life in the home, hospital, place of employment, school, or any environment where social work is needed. However, the progress or lack of progress towards the goal is determined by the client and the social worker, or so to say social nurse. Therefore, social work/social nursing is protective and preventive, and can lead the individuals to have healthy lives.

Method of Research

The research is based on a combination of theoretical frameworks and empirical realities. For the empirical part of the study 343 social workers were randomly selected from different parts and neighbourhoods of Tehran City. They were approached through direct interviews with the help of pre-designed questionnaires. The present research is based on the main hypothesis that: "Quality social work improves the quality of life of the clients". In the theoretical part, the author tried to refer to, and make use of relevant theories within reach. The data presentation is almost descriptive; reflecting the dimensions and qualities of social work in Tehran which is generalizable to Iran as a whole.

Global Perspective of Social Work

Social work is a profession for those with strong desire to help improve people's lives in different ways. It is a professional discipline pursuing development and promotion of social welfare (Ghandi, 2009:55). Similarly, social work has been defined as being concerned with the interactions between people and their environment which affects the ability of people to accomplish life tasks, alleviate distress and realize their aspirations and values, and the quality of which must ever be improving (Pincus and Minaham, 1973:9). Social workers establish a helping relationship with a client system (individual, family, small group, community). In this way, the author tries to prove the hypothesis. Social workers provide social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children, families, the elderly people, lonely widows etc. Similarly, in schools, social workers often serve as the link between students' families and the school to ensure the academic success of the students. While in the developed countries there are types of social workers who are trained and made ready to serve in specialized fields, the shortage of such professionals is easily felt in the developing countries such as Iran.

In the developed countries some social workers are self-employed; preferring to set up their own private practice in a manner similar to many physicians and lawyers. They usually work with all kinds of people including the poor, substance abusers, minority groups etc. While the developed countries are very experienced in the field, the developing countries including Iran still have a long way to go to be able to cope with their social work and social welfare needs in their societies.

Increasing needs and Social work

The concept of common human needs and social welfare as articulated by Towle (1965) includes those basic common needs which are necessary for the survival and development of all human beings. According to Towle those include physical well-being, personality development, emotional growth, development of intellectual capacity, relationship with others, and spiritual needs which are highly concerned with the functions of social work.

Helen Harris Perlman (1957:31), a social worker like Towle, emphasized the holistic nature of common human needs as such: "The person is a whole in any moment of his/her living. He/she operates as a physical, psychological and social entity, whether on the problem of his/her neurotic anxieties, or of one's inadequate income". He/she is highly affected by his/her physical and social environment. Therefore, it is the social work which can intervene and solve the person's problems.

Common needs are expressed and met in different ways by different groups of people (Berger: 1985). Human diversity refers the biological, psychological, social and cultural differences as observed among different people. However, some of the most significant types of diversity are gender, age, race, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, socio-economic level etc. All these create functions for social workers.

Social Work Tasks in Tehran

The present research examines the nature of social work, and the role and function of social workers in Tehran mega-city. Though social workers are more to do with the regulation and monitoring of professional activity" (Banks, 2003), yet it is increasingly emphasized on the

core values on which social work as an activity should be based on. Social work as proposed by IFSW contains reference to human rights, and social justice (IFSW,2004). Social work is practiced in order to alleviate crises (Jones et al.,2004). Similarly, "the idea of the social worker as someone who works with or counsels individuals has been a recurrent and powerful notion in social work throughout its history (Younghusbands, 1959).

Understanding the socio-political factors which have influenced the development of social work or social services is necessary to know (Evers, 2003; Munday, 2003). There are a number of contextual factors to be acknowledged in our understanding of the role to be played by social work and social workers. To further clarify the matter, Iran needs to employ relevant social action and social planning in order to improve its social work activities. However, many developing countries including Iran need to develop relationship-building, interviewing,community assessment, decision-making and task planning in social work (Hardina, 2012).

The function of social work and the role played by the social workers in the contemporary societies has of course been influenced by major social changes which have occurred over the past two-three decades. Major demographic change such as the increasing low birth rate in Iran, and as a result, a move to a much older age structure, has changed the functioning of social work not only in Iran, but to some extent in other developing countries as well. As Munday (2003) points out, the significance of low birth rate means that in the future there will be a shortage of adult children to look after elderly relatives; the phenomenon which is almost appearing in Iran.

Similarly, the appearance of increasing poverty and social exclusion in different forms as some commentators argue (Jordan and Parkinson: 2001; Unison, 2004; Jones et al., 2004) need to be tackled through social work interventions. In the meantime, the identity crisis of social workers in a local authority setting are no longer able to effectively carry out preventive work is there (Jordan and Parkinson, 2001:217; Jones, 2004). Therefore, there is yet a lot to be done to familiarize the roles and functions to the social workers with special reference to countries like Iran.

A Cross-cultural Focus

Compared with the South Korean state of social work practice, Iran has still a long way to go to strengthen its social work practice. So far as Iran is concerned, much remains to be done both to increase its focus on intervention research, and to unravel the complexity of practice issues across the country. Over the past 20 years, the South Korean government has expanded its expenditure on social welfare from 2.90 percent in 1986 to 6.66 percent of the total annual government budget in 2006 (Choi et al.,2009). In addition, South Korea has at present a national pension, national health insurance, workers' compensation insurance, unemployment insurance, and long-term care insurance. The five social insurance systems are major components of the South Korean welfare state.

What Iran has to do, is to strengthen its potential and focus on:

- Social security
- Family and child welfare services
- Medical social services

- Services for people with disabilities
- Services for elders
- Services for young people
- Services for offenders

In Iran though annually over 300 social work students are graduated from public and private universities, yet they are not well distributed and accommodated according to their expertise (Shargh Newspaper, 2006). However, both Iran and South Korea have almost common social issues such as unemployment, digital gap, immigrant labour, poverty, financial instability, national pension system, caring for refugees, public health, family problems and so on, of which some are related to Iran and some are common for both.

Validity and Scope

The value of social work is generally associated with; working with individuals, face to face work, working with communities and community work, prevention and the like. In addressing developments in social work in countries like USA, Australia and New Zealand, Patron and O'Byrne (2000) outline the notion of constructive social work. The ultimate goal for nursing and social work leaders is to develop skills that will support their ability to lead affectively through complex challenges such as working within the constraints of tight budget, initiating health care policy change to eliminate health disparities, and improving health care outcomes at all levels of care (Marshall, 2010).

However, social workers confront various cases/problems during their professional careers. Those may include hunger, shortage of affection, problems of habitation, marriage-related issues, infertility-related issues, income/occupation problems and the like (Montakhab,1992:31).

Responsibility of Social Worker

Social workers must be aware of society's values and operate in accordance with the legal obligations. They must be able to balance the needs of the clients/ service users. As communities always include people who are vulnerable and who pose challenges for themselves and others, social workers intervene in situations where not to do so, could lead to a continuation or escalation of harm. They may even work with people who have no wish to use social work services. In the other hand, social workers may be involved in cases where a wide-range of resources may be needed. However, they have a role to play in promoting social justice and in identifying and addressing obstacles to social inclusion.

To improve the quality of social work, the link between sociology and social work must be strengthened. There can be little doubt, however, regarding the importance of sociological theory and research for the development of the knowledge and theoretical base of social work practice. For example, social stratification, conflict theory, deviance, community development and dynamics, family studies, of the areas are some of the sociological theories/perspectives that have informed and directly influenced both the theory and the practice of social work (Meyer and Borgatta, 2012).

Social workers are therefore responsible for the assessment and management of complex and inter-connecting risks rather than simply risk avoidance. Similarly, the social worker's task is

to work alongside people to help them build resilience, maintain hope and optimism and develop their strengths and abilities. They must detach uncertainty from the approaching clients.

Problem-solving

Social work is an art, a science, or a profession that helps people solve personal, group (especially family), and community problems, and to attain satisfying personal, group and community relationships through social work practice (Farley and Smith, 2007:9). Social work promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Social work utilizes theories of human behavior and social systems. It contributes to the points where people interact with their environments. However, principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2001).

Development vs Social Work

While development is a complex concept both in theory and practice, it is very much associated with social work. At the individual level, development has the implications of increased skill and capacity, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Similarly, at the level of society, the concept connotes increasing capacity to regulate internal as well as external relations (Rodney, 1972). Thus, any nation may be said to be achieving some level of development, if its per capita output is growing faster than its population (Todaro and Smith, 2003). Additionally, Stutz and De Sousa (1998:543) note that the United Nations has devised a Human Development Index (HDI) to measure national human development of both developing and developed countries. The HDI comprises of demographic, social and economic factors.

In a nutshell, development is both material and social; material in terms of economic growth and increased productivity, and social in terms of qualitative changes in people's lives, attitudes, institutions and external relationships. Thus, through the application of social work, while different dimensions of development are achieved, poverty, inequalities, sufferings and injustice are aimed to end (Oxford Community Aid Abroad, 2001). Not only in Iran, but all nations need both social and economic resources to achieve national development. Thus, social workers are mandated to mobilize and deliver a wide range of services to their clients (Bernstein, 1995:54).

Theoretical Perspectives

Social work needs to express and articulate the theoretical frameworks which inform, structure and facilitate its operation (Coulshed and Orme, 1993). Social work discussions about theory have tended to be reactive. Similarly, theories in social work often include approaches such as person-centered counseling, family therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy, anti-discriminatory practice theory etc. (Davies, 1997). Another perspective is expressed as such; traditionally in social work as in other social policy areas, the social work profession tends to be interpreter of such knowledge at theoretical as well as practice levels. In social work, a distinct area of research developed which came to be called "client studies", pioneered by the book "The Client Speaks" (Meyer and Timms, 1970). The knowledge base of social work has been derived from social research conducted using traditional methods of inquiry which claim to be objective, neutral and value free, and to produce knowledge which

is independent of the persons carrying out the research (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Research has shown that agencies which profess not to use theory offer a non-problem-solving, drifting service (Corby, 1982:6).

There seems to be no bounds to the knowledge and skills required to do social work, despite the claim that, "any one with a kind heart can do it" (Olsen, 1986). The list of our roles and tasks continues to grow: practitioners have to be therapists, managers, reformers, researchers, planners, teachers and protectors. Personal qualities such as self-understandings, curiosity, determination, and ability to get along with people are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for productive practice (Jordan, 1984). We need a kind heart, common sense and uncommon sense (Gammack, 1982). Workers, clients and agencies contribute to some extent to any society's expectations and its political and social process by their own thinking and doing (Payane, 2005).

Findings

In conducting research the on social work tasks in Tehran City, some 343 social workers were approached. The data collected from the interviews indicate an image of social work in Iran.

Table :1

Classification of Social Workers by Age and Sex in Tehran

Age	Total		Males		Females	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	343	100	89	25.95	254	74.05
Under the age 25	13	3.79	4	1.17	9	2.62
Age 25- 29	88	25.66	7	2.04	81	23.62
Age 30-34	79	23.03	19	5.54	60	17.49
Age 35-39	68	19.83	19	5.54	49	14.29
Age 40-44	45	13.12	18	5.25	27	7.87
Age 45 and over	50	14.58	22	6.41	28	8.16

Based on data collected, and according to the educational standards of the social workers, out of 343 social workers interviewed, 6 (1.75%) had finished higher secondary school, 36 (10.5%) has finished diploma, 229 (66.76%) had finished BA, and finally 72 (20.99%) of the social workers had finished their MA degrees or above.

Data collected indicate that out of the total sum of 343 respondents, 244 (71.14%) of the social workers had official and specialized certificates of social work, while 99 (28.86%) did not have official certificates for their jobs. Based on gender classification, 56 (16.33%) of male social workers reported to have official and specialized certificates, and 33 (9.62%) did not have any official and specialized certificates. So far as the female social workers are concerned, 188 (54.81%) asserted to have specialized social work certificates, whereas 66 (19.24%) of whom did not have the same.

The social workers studied could be classified affiliation-wise. Out of the total 343 respondents, 159 (46.36%) were affiliated to the welfare department, 63 (18.37%) were affiliated to Imam Khomeini support committee, 68 (19.83%) were connected to the ministry of health, and finally 53 (15.45%) were affiliated to private sector.

In one of the questions asked, the author came to know of the number of clients that the social workers visit per month. In that, 69 (20.12%) asserted to have less than ten clients per month, and 73 (21.28%) of the respondents stated to have 10 to 14 clients per month. Similarly, 68 (19.83%) of the sample social workers stated to have between 15 and 24 clients in an month, and eventually, 133 (38.78%) of the social workers asserted to have more than 25 clients monthly.

In another question the views of the social workers were searched as to which sex clients they approach per month. In response to this question: Out of the total of 343 respondents, 123 (35.86%) asserted to get more female referrals, 48 (13.99%) stated to get more male clients, and finally, 172 (50.15%) stated to have both male and female clients in equal numbers.

Social workers were also searched with reference to the type of problems raised by clients. In that, 54 (15.74%) stated that their clients had substance abuse problems, 136 (39.65%) of the given social workers stated that their clients had family problems, 73 (21.28%) of the respondents asserted that their clients were somehow ill, 64 (18.66%) of the samples expressed that their clients did not have regular income, and finally 16 (4.66%) of the clients declared that their clients had other difficulties.

Social workers were also investigated with regard to the type/quality of the illness of the clients in Tehran City. In that, 55 (16.03%) of the sample respondents declared that their clients had physical problems, 55 (16.03%) declared that the clients were involved with some physical and mental problems, 227 (66.17%) of the social workers had clients with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

In the present research, social workers have been classified according to the age groups of their clients as well. In that, the respondents asserted that 35(10.2%) of their clients were in age groups 15-24, similarly, 136 (39.65%) of the samples stated that the approximate age groups of their clients were between 25 and 34 years. 125 (36.44%) of social workers categorized their clients between 35 and 44 years of age, 30 (8.75%) of the sample respondents declared their clients' age-groups between 45 and 54. Finally, 17 (4.96%) of the social workers stated that their clients were of 55 years of age and over.

One of the other assessments as conducted on social workers is their study in terms of the insurance status of their referrals. In this part, 187 (54.52%) of the respondents asserted that most of their clients have health insurance, whereas 156 (45.48%) of samples stated that mostly their clients do not have health insurance.

Similarly, social workers were measured by number of times that clients refer to their social workers. In that, 19 (5.54%) of the sample social workers stated that the hold one sessions with their clients, 74 (21.57%) of the social workers asserted that they hold two sessions with their clients, 103 (30.03%) of the respondents declared that they hold three sessions with their clients, and finally, 147 (42.86%) of social workers stated to have four sessions and over with their clients.

Here we will come to know of the duration of problem-solving of the clients by the relevant social workers. In that, 59 (17.2%) of social workers enunciated that it took them less than

one month to treat their clients. Similarly, 114 (33.24%) of social workers stated that it took them 1 to 3 months to rehabilitate their clients followed by 99 (28.86%) of respondents who stated that they rehabilitate their clients between 3 to 6 months, and eventually 71 (20.7%) of the samples declared that they finish up with their clients within 6 months and above.

Post-treatment relationship between social workers and clients is noteworthy. Out of 343 respondents, 94 (27.41%) of social workers stated that they had no relations with the clients at all after their treatment, 92 (26.82%) of social workers stated that they kept contacts with clients for less than one month after their remedy, 58 (16.91%) of the respondents enunciated that they kept contacts with other clients for 1 to 3 months. Likewise, 38 (11.08%) of the sample social workers reported to be in contacts with their clients in the post-treatment period for 3 to 6 months, and finally 61 (17.78%) of the social workers asserted to be in contacts with their clients after their files are closed for 6 months and over.

In another question, the quality and place of social case work is searched. In that, 22 (6.41%) of the social workers reported that they treat the clients more at the elderly nursing homes, 140 (40.82%) of the social workers asserted to treat the clients at the scene/site, 56 (16.33%) of the respondents stated to interact the clients at their homes, and eventually 125 (36.44%) of social workers declared to treat the clients at the rehabilitation centres.

As the relation of social workers with young couples as clients is of importance, some questions were developed in this regard. In that, 37 (10.79%) of social workers reported to be very much in relation with young couples as clients, 64 (18.66%) of social workers stated to be much in relation with young couples as clients, 160 (46.65%) of the respondents reported to be in relation with young couples as clients to some extent, and finally 82 (23.91%) of social workers expressed to be very little in relation with young couples as their clients.

As divorce rate is currently quite high within the youth in Iran, some relevant inquiries were made in the present study as the objectives of the social workers' relation with young clients. In this connection, 51 (14.87%) of the social workers aimed to nullify the divorce intention of the clients, 111 (32.36%) of the social workers asserted to delay the divorce case of their young clients, 4 (1.17%) of the social workers preferred accelerating the divorce case of their young clients, and finally 177 (51.6%) of the social workers preferred and chose compromise within their young clients.

As many social workers are involved with elderly clients today, some questions have been set here to clarify their conditions. In this regard, 170 (49.56%) of the social workers said to be involved with lonely female clients, 38 (11.08%) of the social workers stated to be involved with lonely male clients, and finally, 135 (39.36%) of social workers expressed to be involved both with male- and –female- alive clients.

The paper has also investigated about the type of clients approached. In this regard, 59 (17.2%) of the social workers declared their clients to be elderly people, 17 (4.96%) of the social workers declared children to be their clients, 49 (14.29%) of the social workers declared young criminals to be their clients, and finally 218 (63.56%) of the respondents stated families to be their clients.

Conclusion

Social work service if improved, could highly boost the quality of life of all sorts of people with special reference to the ageing people. The paper gives us an insight to develop social work practice in Iran, wherein ageing people are increasing under the conditions that overall social, economic and cultural life is also changing. In order to enhance the quality of service on social work, we should ensure as to where the society is. Similarly, the existing services must be assessed, and further developments should be planned for. While the human needs are increasing more than ever before, social work services are necessary in all kinds and for all sorts of people regardless of age, sex, religion, race, caste and creed. While the holistic nature of common human needs such as the physical, psychological and social ones is the same, for those with organized social work service, they are responded, but for many including potential clients in Iran with underdeveloped social work service, they are not met. Under such circumstances many problems remain unsolved for such people in developing societies including Iran.

The paper enunciates how social work service is associated with a number of contextual factors which need to be acknowledged, before it is practiced. Similarly, due to the appearance of increasing change in social life, family life and social exclusion in Tehran (Iran), enhancing the quality of social work, and the quantity of social workers is remarkable. In this way, social workers can detach uncertainty from the approaching clients. In the present study findings have examined various indicators as expressed by the social workers such as age, sex, education etc. Similarly, data associated with various indicators of clients such as the difficulties, number of referrals, age, sex, characteristics of the clients etc. were assessed and measured in detail.

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