

Social Work Practice With Individuals

Chapter 5

Work With the Individual

A Generalist Approach

- Social work with individuals is one of the main parts of a generalist approach to social work practice.
- Main focus is to help individuals help themselves.
- Traditional methods are frequently combined in practice where the workers may work basically with individuals and families and set goals that may also include a group or community effort.

Social Casework Defined

- Social casework is a method of helping people solve problems. It is individualized, scientific, and artistic.
- It helps individuals with personal as well as external and environmental matters.
- It is a method of helping through a relationship that taps personal and other resources for coping with problems.
- Interviewing and assessment are major tools of casework.
- It is biopsychosocial.

History of Social Casework

- Stereotyping, making broad generalizations about individuals and situations, is the antithesis of social casework.
- The “workhouse test” and “less eligibility” clauses of the infamous English Poor Laws are based on naïve and unfounded general assumptions, namely that all poor are poor because of ignorance, willful refusal to work, shiftlessness, and depravity.

History of Social Casework

- The Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor approached the problem of poverty individually (1843).
- The Charity Organization Society gave additional impetus to individualization and casework (1877).
- Preoccupation with social conditions external to the individual was characteristic of casework during the early part of the twentieth century.
- The thinking was that if the environment could not be changed, the individual should be removed from the environment, even if it meant separating families.

Trends In Casework

- By 1910, the introduction of psychoanalytic theory and depth psychology became the focus of casework and individual therapy came into its own.
- Emotions, attitudes, repressed conflicts, and the struggle within the unconscious became an integral part of social casework understanding and method.

Trends In Casework

- The social and economic needs of the Great Depression refocused sociological and reality considerations for social work and compelled action on the part of the federal government.
- The depression resulted in a healthy turnaround from emphasis upon psychological causation to the renewed study of economics, budgets, and environmental factors.

Trends in Casework

- There has also been renewed interest in the family, family dynamics, and the interaction of family members.
- The problem-solving method proposed by Helen Perlman is most widely used in social work today.
- Today's practitioner must be trained in a variety of disciplines in order to effectively view the client and decide how to intervene effectively.

The Practice Framework

■ Purpose:

- To prevent or ameliorate those conditions which contribute to the breakdown of a healthy relationship between the individual and their family, other associates, or the environment.
- Help people to identify and resolve problems in their relationships or to minimize the negative effects.
- To strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups, and communities.

The Practice Framework

■ Social Work Values:

- Assumes the inherent worth and importance of the individual and the interdependence between the individual and society.
- Emphasis is placed on the importance of respect for the dignity of the individual and on their ability to make important decisions.
- Self-determination is a basic right of the individual.

Social Work Values

- Value Assumption on Individual Worth and Capacity:
 - A “worth” value places the individual in a position of eminence. They are above objects and institutions, worth caring for because they are an individual.
 - Other values include respect, dignity, and opportunities to express individuality.
 - The value of “worth” suggests that the individual has the ability to guide their actions and the potential for determining goals and their achievement.

Social Work Values

■ Uniqueness Value:

- Belief in the individual's uniqueness and individuality suggest a casework approach of acceptance and the view of differences as assets.
- Strength in role relationships is viewed as coming from differences.

Social Work Values

- The Value Postulate of Self-Determination
 - Self-determination means that the client will decide whether or not to engage in the casework process.
 - Self-determination is affirmed, explicated and implemented at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the process.
 - Impositions that remove free choice and self-determination may damage the relationship and weaken the client's problem-solving resolve and capacity.

Sanctions

- Work with individuals and families is under the auspices of various governmental and private agencies that receive their sanction from the people.
- Governmental agencies are intended to express the will of the people.

Knowledge

- The theory underpinning for casework is derived basically from the profession of social work and from casework practice.
- Research contributes to the knowledge base and appears to be growing in sophistication and importance.
- The profession continues to recognize the contributions from the behavioral, social , and natural sciences.

Knowledge

- Pavlovian and Skinnerian psychology is a well integrated theory and readily applied to casework practice.
 - Behavior modification does not use a theory of personality.
 - It proceeds from assumptions about operant behavior and practice focused on observable behavior that can be researched and explicated.

Knowledge

- Social casework practice applies role theory.
- Learning theory, adult socialization, small group, cognition theory, general systems theory and the ecological perspective, and discoveries in biology and endocrinology are also adapted in casework.
- Although social work “borrows” from psychology, sociology, and from the biological sciences, the profession itself orders, arranges, adapts and determines the emphasis it will make of these contributions.

Knowledge

- Knowledge of the various services of the community is basic to the practice of social casework.
- The function and purpose of agencies and referral procedures, and increasingly the legislative process, all provide essential underpinning for the casework process.

Methods of Social Casework

- The trend in the new millennium appears to be selective eclecticism:
 - A greater utilization of elements from a variety of theories and blending of models.
 - Selective interventions that are empirically grounded.
 - A solution orientation with less focus on the inner problems.
 - Direct practice embracing more than casework.
 - A greater utilization of interventive approaches that can be measured and validated.

Methods of Casework

■ Psychosocial Model:

- One of the first models employed developed by Gordon Hamilton and her associates from the Columbia School of Social Work.
- Cause and effect relationships are identified between the individual and environment.
- Ego psychology and the behavioral sciences provide important underpinning for practice
- Model has a Freudian theory base.

Methods of Casework

■ Functional Model:

- Developed at the Pennsylvania School of Social Work in the 1930's.
- Emphasis was on the relationship, the dynamic use of time, and the “use of the agency” function.
- The psychology of Otto Rank provided underpinning for functional approach.
- Diagnostic categories have tended to be avoided as having limited usefulness.

Methods of Casework

- The Problem-Solving Method:
 - Identified with the work of Helen Perlman at the Chicago school in 1957.
 - The purposes of the process are to free the client for investment in tasks related to the solution of the problem, involve the client's ego in work designated to deal with the problem, and to mobilize inner and outer forces in the service of satisfactory role performance.

Methods of Casework

- The Behavioral Model:
 - Began to be incorporated in the 1960's
 - Practice applying to this model lends itself to research since behavior to be modified is observable.
 - Symptoms are the same as other responses in that the behavior is mainly respondent or operant.
 - Problematic behavior is learned through the process of conditioning.

Methods of Casework

- Task-Centered Casework:
 - Developed at the University of Chicago in the 1970's.
 - Designed to solve specific psychosocial problems of individuals or families in a short-term, time-limited form of practice.
 - Caseworker and client reach an explicit agreement on the particular problems to be worked on and also the probable duration of treatment.

Methods of Casework

- Generalist Practice Model:
 - Based on a problem-solving model from a systems or person-in-environment perspective.
 - This model is applied with the unique qualities, values, and ethics espoused by social work.

Problems in Social Casework

- Social casework addresses itself to the solution of problems that block or minimize the effectiveness of the individual in various roles.
- Social workers are frequently confronted with situations in which the casework objective may be that of helping a client use a service.

Casework Process

■ Study

- In the study phase, the client is engaged in presenting the problem.
- The key is engagement.
- Client makes the important decision of whether to enter treatment.
- Emphasis on the interaction is on the here-and-now and on the problem not as might be perceived by the worker, but as experienced at the moment by the client.
- Data gathering and history taking concentrate on relevance.

Casework Process

■ Study:

- Contacts during the initial phase may be among the most dynamic of the entire process.
- Client is likely to feel most helpless and vulnerable and most available to the helping process.
- Sympathetic listening, demonstration of acceptance, reassurance, demonstration of confidence in ability, and judicious stroking are powerful tools of the social worker and can be highly therapeutic.

Casework Process

■ Assessment:

- Provides a differential approach to treatment based on individual differences and needs.
- An individual's strengths need to be identified and utilized as part of the change process.
- Assessment is fluid and dynamic.
- Assessment begins with a statement of the problem by the client.
- Results in an understanding of the problem.

Casework Process

■ Assessment:

- It includes initial impressions that are confirmed, modified, or rejected in the light of additional information.
- It includes judgment about the strength and limitations of the individual in coping with the situation.
- Treatment planning and treatment itself are guided by assessment.

Casework Process

■ Assessment:

- There is mutual agreement of the worker and the client in assessment.
- Goals must be congruent with the client's needs and the availability of services. These goals are respected, supported and reinforced.

Casework Process

■ Intervention:

- Intervention or treatment begins with the first contact.
- The study process is treatment when it helps the client to clarify the problem and to make changes from this understanding.
- The relationship is the mainspring of social work intervention.
 - Warmth, caring, and congruence have been identified as essential qualities.

Casework Process

■ Intervention:

- Skills include interviewing, recording, letter writing, referrals to other agencies and services, and helping the client to use personal and other resources.
- Efforts support and strengthen the client's ego through emotional catharsis, reassurance, clarification of the problem, and sympathetic listening.

Casework Process

- Intervention (basic principles):
 - Right to determine own course of action within the limits of their capacity to make sound choices.
 - Acceptance of client as is, implying acceptance in their capacity to change.
 - Relate to strengths rather than pathology.
 - Seeks to understand the person and to help plan for constructive change.

Casework Process

- Intervention (basic principles):
 - Knowledge about the client's family and its situation is used responsibly.
 - Professional responsibility for the welfare of the total family
 - Responsible not only to the client but to oneself, the agency, the community, and the profession.
 - Innovations of professional activities must be consistent with casework goals.

Casework Process

■ Termination:

- The ending or limiting of a process that was commenced when the agency agreed to enter into the interventive process aimed at delivering a service to a client with a problem.
- A time when the client can look back with satisfaction on what has been accomplished.
- Signals that the worker has confidence in the client's ability to learn to cope with situations and grow.

The Multi-Systems Approach

- One of the newer approaches to social work.
- Affirms the interrelationships of the individual to an interlocking network of systems each influencing the other.
- Takes into consideration the importance of the systems impacting and being impacted by each other.