

PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK: A RECOGNITION SEEKING PROFESSION IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Social work is a profession having a history of about last six decades in the country and yet Social Work Profession has not attained the status among other professions like health, Judiciary and engineering. The present research study explores the understanding of respondents about the Profession of Social Work, and how they differentiate between Professional Social Work and Voluntary Social Work. Furthermore the expectations of the respondents regarding the professionalism, characteristics of a Social Worker for Professional Social worker and voluntary social worker as well are recorded. Through interviews primary data were collected. Our analysis shows that mostly people know about the professional and voluntary difference regardless of the specification of Social Work Profession but they consider that Social Work is a need for the society as other contemporary professions are

Keywords: *Professional social Work, Voluntary Social Work, Expected characteristics of a Social Worker, Need for society,*

Introduction

In the beginning, Social Work around the world was limited to the religious and humanitarian activities. However, as time passed urbanization and industrialization brought about a great change in the living style in every aspect of life, which brought a variety of economic, social & psychological problems. To deal with these issues, social work also developed from religious/humanitarian activity to a profession (Ansari, 2015).

Now, Social Work is recognized all over the world. Social Work profession is not merely concerned with individual and their personal

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problems but also with broader social issues such as unemployment and poverty (Ansari, 2015).

Although Social Work is not a new discipline, yet, it is not fully understood and recognized by many as such for number of reasons:

Firstly, the labor market demand for Social Work is very low as compared to other professions like Engineering, Business, Information Technology, and Anthropology among others, because social welfare services are either provided by the philanthropist individuals or in public sector, on not very large scale. Therefore, the public sector is the only employer of social workers. In addition, ministry of social welfare has historically been a low profile portfolio in Pakistan. All these factors lend no helping hand in recognition of Social Work.

Secondly, the reason of poor recognition of Social Work is that the concept of Social Work is not clear on the part of laymen. Mostly, people have seen charity/voluntary work going on around them in the name of Social Work, while professional Social Work is limited to couple of institutions in big cities. So it is hard for them to understand Social Work and what social workers do?

Thirdly, government policies and commitments and perception of the citizens about Social Work values vary from country to country and society to society as per the ground realities of a specific country or society. This variation at times is also a source of confusion and lack of recognition of Social Work.

Fourthly, there is very little indigenous literature on Social Work in the country according to Pakistani social and cultural realities. Most of the literature is borrowed from the U.S.A & U.K which cannot be implemented and cannot be practiced in full spirit in our country. When the theory comes into practice in our society, at times it creates conflicts and contradictions that further hamper the recognition of the discipline.

Fifthly, Social Work students have faced the very problem of not being recognized in the university as many of their friends and companions ask them about what is Social Work? What do they study? Where will they be employed after graduation? Do they just run NGOs or work voluntarily? How Social Work is different from disciplines such as Psychology and Sociology? This kind of questions scratch unfathomable blot in the minds of the Social Work students that why is Social Work not recognized like other subjects so far?

In the light of reasons discussed above, it was planned to conduct a survey of the understanding of Social Work. The scope of the study was limited to the Punjab University students because of the limited time, resources and the realization is that even educated segments of population knew petite about Social Work as per experience of the students, and a previous study on "Understanding of Social Work by the Teachers and Students of the Punjab University Social Sciences Department" by Pervaiz and Fellows (1977).

Literature Review

In the past individuals (motivated by religion) have helped the people in distress, destitute and deprivation and fought for the equality of all citizens, respect for the rights of others including the indigent, the handicapped the unemployed, the emotionally disturbed and those in need (Encyclopaedia of Social Welfare, 2006).

In course of time, the charitable work taken up by individuals and voluntary organizations came to be termed as Social Work .So, Social Work was historically associated with charitable and philanthropic work, had come to generally known as Social Work and its personnel were identified and designated as Social Workers (Encyclopaedia of Social Welfare, 2006).

Social Work has been taken as voluntary work as well in the past but the complexity of life and changing needs of the people raised the demand establishment of Professional Social Work. Now it is

recognized profession around the world (Khalid, 2000).

According to the National Association of Social Workers (2000); "Social Work is the professional activity of helping individual groups and communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and to create societal conditions favorable to their goals".

However, many writers described Social Work in different ways. Social Work can be described as a Professional Service which based on scientific knowledge of the related theory and professionals have skills in dealing with human relationships to help the individual, groups and the communities to acquire their social and personal satisfaction and independence according to their needs and resources. These activities are usually performed by a social agency or related organization (Friedlander, 1958).

The basic concepts of scientifically organized Social Work are universal. Their implication depends upon local conditions from place to place. Social Work is a dynamic activity that had developed out of, and is influenced by, evolving Social, Economic, and Political and Cultural factors. Social Work becomes a modern profession as well as a new discipline of Education (Khalid, 2001).

The main points reflecting relationship between Social Work and Social Welfare are; Social Work is a Profession and practice and Social Worker is highly trained professional practitioner, whereas Social Welfare are the services and programmes of welfare agencies, usually delineate and implemented by using Social Work methods and techniques. Social Work activities are directed towards assisting individuals in their use of Social Institutions like family, religion, economic, cultural, political institutions where social welfare services rendered to vulnerable groups that are socially , economically, physically or mentally handicapped or special groups like children, youth, or the aged. Social Work is a process and Social Welfare is the end result of Social Work process. Social Work is practiced to achieve Social Welfare. So, Social Work and Social Welfare are used as

synomously now a day (Encyclopaedia of Social Welfare, 2006).

Social Work as a profession is of a recent origin. It is dynamic and evolving in the 21st century and therefore no definition should be regarded as exhaustive. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW, 2001) "Social Work Profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing, utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems. Social Work intervenes at the point where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to Social Work".

According to this definition, practice of Social Work depends upon the culture, history and socio-economic conditions of any country. So the development and application of methods and theories of Social Work varies according to the environment of the societies and also the perception and behavior of the people specifically living in that society (IFSW, 2000).

Any profession depends upon the active participation of professionals. So in this way Social Work profession definitely affects from the social work that social workers do. The professionals play a vital role in bringing change, working for the welfare of disadvantaged groups and leading with the knowledge of methods and techniques of Social Work with skills to promote the profession from commencement to the zenith (Knezevic, 2001).

Social Work profession actually focused on the problem solving and bringing change according to the societal needs. Social Workers are the change agents of society. They not only bring change in society but also in the lives of individual, families and communities where they serve (Lyons, 2007).

Social Worker works by keeping in view the purposes of Social Work to achieve the task of welfare with the interaction of people and their institutions. This interaction affects the people's ability to fulfill their lives goal and to alleviate the stress among the people. Therefore, the objectives of Social Work are; to help people in enhancing their problem solving, coping and developmental capacities of people in community. To promote the effective system for human operations and provide people with the resources and services to link them with the system (IASSW, 1990).

According to Kohs in Khalid (2001) Social Work is multi profession and is an interrelated system of values, theories and practices. There are some values of Social Work. "The ten values regarded as the primary values of Social Work. The worth and dignity of man, the capacity of human nature to achieve full human potential, tolerance of differences, satisfaction of basic human needs, liberty, self direction, non-judgmental attitude, constructive social cooperation, importance of work and constructive use of leisure, protection of one's existence from the damages caused by man and nature".

These values are accepted as universally and these values can be converted into instrumental values or can be changed as in accordance with the country situation. The application of these values changed in poor as well as in rich countries (Khalid, 2001).

Social Work activities cannot be progressed without knowing the following Primary and Secondary Methods i.e. Case Work, Group Work, Community Development and secondary Methods are Social Action, Social Research and Social Administration.

According to Harish Kumar (2004) the Social Work Methodology base on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge that may derived research and practice evaluation, in which include local and indigenous knowledge specific to its content. Also "Social Work recognizes the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment and the complexity of people both to be affected

by and to after the multiple influence upon them including biopsychosocial factors” (Lyons, 2007).

So, the Social Work profession draws from theories of human development and behavior and social systems. These theories are proved to be helpful as to analyze complex situations and to facilitate individual, organizations, social and cultural changes. In addition practice of Social Work deals with crisis and emergencies and to everyday personal and social problems (Lyons, 2007).

With all this diversity Social Work is practiced in number of fields including Child Welfare, Women Welfare, Youth Welfare, Family Welfare, Welfare of the prisoners, Labor Welfare, Medical Social Work, Schools Social Work, Welfare of Senior Citizens, Psychiatric Social Work in Pakistan and around the World (Khalid, 2001).

The Profession of Social Work had been introduced in Pakistan in 1953 with the co-operation of United Nation Technical Assistance Administration. From the beginning Social Work becomes more complicated than elsewhere in the world because of the circumstances which occurred in the country at that time. The complications were in the sense that people’s attachment with customs and tradition and the late start on the path of progress in science, research and technology (Noon, 1963).

It started with highly idealistic positive changes in society but it becomes the victim of political and bureaucratic design of powers. In the process of establishment of services, the profession continues to be western oriented methods of problem solving and it still fall short of the original ideal of indigenous Social Work, literature of developing Pakistani methodology (IASSW, 2006).

Begum Liaquat Ali Khan, in the first Pakistan conference of Social Work held in Karachi in 1955, “the job of the Social Workers is, in reality, to create a sort of divine discontent, to help people themselves in recognizing their needs, in seeking out available facilities, in

initiating action, in establishing proper adjustment with each other and their surrounding and in general, solving their social problems” (Khalid, 2001).

Social Work in Pakistan has not yet attained a professional status as it is generally considered a charitable activity to help poor and needy people. It has been supported by religious perceptive and ethical maxims.

However, it is not very alarming as there is no International standard that regulate the profession of Social Work or accredit its educational programmes across the world. There are number of commonalities in Social Work throughout the world. Social Work practice and issues varying levels of financial and professional resources for example including Denmark, a high income country where Social Work is practiced in the context of a universalistic Welfare State, The Jamaica, a relatively resources poor country that has achieved respectable standards of health and education, yet where social workers now struggle with the impact of structural adjustment. In Armenia, the profession of Social Work has emerged since 1900 and has had to cope with war, extreme political changes and in Japan Social Workers address the problems of post-industrial consumer-oriented society that has undergone a demographic transition” (Healy, 2001).

Research Methodology

Quantitative research method was proposed for the study and Social Survey was adopted to conduct study as it is profitably used for opinion polling and enables researcher to take stock of existing situation. Both male and female students of M.A. / M.Sc., semester III session 2006-08, Morning, University of the Punjab, Lahore was the universe of the study. The researcher followed probability sampling method in order to draw a representative sample. From the probability sampling method simple random sampling method was adopted and elements were further selected through lottery system.

Post-graduate students of semester III, session 2006-2008, morning were target population. First of all the list of total departments offering master degree programmes in the University of the Punjab, Lahore was collected. 45 departments offering the said programmes, provided list of their regular students. Total students in these departments were found as 1889. The researcher took 30% sample out of total population i.e. 571 students. Procedure of drawing sample was, 30% of each list (enrolled students in any master programme) was drawn by applying lottery method.

Discussion and Analysis of Data

The presented and analyzed data were based upon the descriptive statistical analysis as it elaborated the frequency distribution which summarized the data. Majority of the respondents 559 (98%) have knowledge about Social Work and remaining 12 (2%) were unaware about Social Work.

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness of Social Work Practice

Awareness of Social Work practice	F	%
Yes	512	92
No	47	8
Total	559	100

This table shows distribution of the respondents regarding their awareness of Social Work practice. A large majority (92%) of respondents were aware of the fact that Social Work is practiced, while (8%) were not.

Table 2: Respondents' views about the Social Work Practice in Society

Practice of Social Work	F	%
With individual in need / distress	51	10
With marginalized communities	88	17
With excluded groups (such as poor, ethnic, women, children, refugees, disabled)	135	26
For research on emerging social issues (Govt. policies)	51	10
With populations at risk (of War, Natural calamities)	31	6
All of above	156	31
Total	512	100

This table shows the views of the respondents about Social Work Practice in society. Slightly less than one third i.e. (31%) respondents were of the view that Social Work is practiced in all the areas mentioned in the above table. (26%) respondents gave views that it is practiced (with excluded groups such as poor, ethnic, women, children, refugees, disabled), (17%) viewed that it is practiced with marginalized communities. While (10%) each said that it is practiced with individual in need /distress and for research on emerging social issues (Govt. polices). Only (6%) viewed that it is practiced with population at risk (of war, natural calamities).

Table 3: Respondents' views about the Mode of Social Work Practice

Mode of Practice	F	%
Professional	137	25
Voluntary	157	28
Both	265	47
Total	559	100

This table shows the respondents' views about mode of Social Work practice. Almost half the respondents (47%) regarded the mode of Social Work practice as both profession and voluntary. However, around one fourth each exclusively regarded it as voluntary practice

(28%) and professional practice (25%).

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of Differentiation between Professional and Voluntary Social Work

As per the respondents' views about mode of Social Work practice, almost half (265) respondents (47%) regarded the mode of Social Work practice as both profession and voluntary. However, around one fourth each exclusively regarded it as voluntary practice (28%) and professional practice (25%).

Differentiate	Professional		Voluntary		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Skills	254	96	11	4	265	100
Code of ethics	143	54	122	46	265	100
Fear of God	24	9	241	91	265	100
Body of knowledge	220	83	45	17	265	100
Attitude	147	55	118	45	265	100
Financial incentive	190	71	75	29	265	100
Motivation	157	59	108	41	265	100
Reward	156	59	109	41	265	100

This table consists of the responses from 265 respondents who thought that Social Work is practiced both as professional and voluntarily. They were, further asked to differentiate between the professional and voluntary Social Work. A large majority of the respondents were of the view that practice of professional Social Work requires certain skills (96%), body of knowledge (83%) and financial incentive (71%), while these are not of much worth in voluntary Social Work. On the contrary large majority (91%) emphasized fear of God among voluntary Social Workers as the essential point of differentiation between voluntary and professional Social Work. However, there was not much difference of emphasize in terms of code of ethics (54% for professional and 46% for voluntary), attitude (55% for professionals and 45% for voluntary),

motivation (59% for professionals and 41% for voluntary) and reward (59% for professional and 41% for voluntary).

Table 5: Respondents' Idea of a Potential Social Worker

Potential Social Worker	F	%
Religious personalities	22	4
A person who have sympathy for others	242	43
People with vested interests	29	5
Prescribed / designated functionary of any organization	14	3
A person with professional training	100	18
A person with ample resources	17	3
People who want to identify them with a particular group	31	6
Any body	104	18
Total	559	100

This table is about the distribution of respondents as per their idea of a potential Social Worker. A little less than half respondent (43%) decided that Social Worker is the person, who have sympathy for others, (18%) each have totally opposite views from each other that is anybody can be a Social Worker and only professionally trained person, remaining one fourth have different ideas such as, people who want to identify them with a particular group (6%), people with vested interest (5%), person with professional training (18%), and people with ample resources (3%).

Table 6: Respondents' Idea of Possible tasks of Social Worker

Possible tasks	F	%
Delivery of service/s	158	28
Advocate people's rights	180	32
Run some sort of office	23	4
Run an NGO	198	36
Total	559	100

This table is about respondents' idea regarding the possible tasks of Social Worker. Around one third (36%) of all respondents thought that Social Workers run NGOs. Another one third (32%) were of the view that Social Workers advocates people's right while (28%) considered delivery of services and (4%) declared to run some sort of office as possible tasks of Social Worker.

Table 7: Respondents' Idea of Relationship of Social Work with other Fields

Agency / Organization / Departments	Yes		No		Don't know		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Donor agencies	410	73	49	8	100	19	559	100
Non-government organization	456	82	44	8	59	10	559	100
Community based organization	325	58	55	10	179	32	559	100
Trusts	339	61	53	9	167	30	559	100
Missionaries	143	26	13	24	281	50	559	100
			5					
Government Welfare Department	458	82	24	4	77	14	559	100

This table is about distribution of the respondents as per their idea of various organizations / agencies / departments with Social Work. Majority of the respondents (82%) related Social Work with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), (10%) were not sure if there is any relationship between the two, while (8%) declared that NGOs have no relationship with Social Work. NGOs have no relationship with Social Work. Similar majority of the respondents (82%) related Government Welfare Department with Social Work. (14%) did not know about any relation between the two. While (4%) see no relation between the two. Almost three fourth of all the respondents (73%) could relate Donor Agencies with Social Work, (19%) were not sure and (8%) didn't see any relationship between the two. More than half of the respondents (61%) could relate trusts with Social Work, (30%) didn't know if there was any relationship and (9%) didn't relate it

with Social Work. Again more than half of the respondents (58%) related community based organizations with Social Work, (32%) were not sure, and (10%) didn't relate it with Social Work. Half of the respondents (50%) were not sure if there is any relationship between the Missionaries and Social Work, (26%) related it with Social Work and (24%) didn't relate it with Social Work.

Table 8: Respondents' Knowledge about any Welfare Services

Knowledge	F	%
Yes	281	50
No	278	50
Total	559	100

This table shows the knowledge of respondents about Welfare Services. Half of the respondents knew about some welfare services and half did not.

Table 9: Respondents' Description of the Welfare Service, they know about.

Service Description	F	%
Medical Services	34	12
Residential Services for needy people	17	6
Women Development	12	4
Child Protection	42	15
Multiple Services Like Edhis'	168	60
Disaster Management Service	8	3
Total	281	100

This table is about distribution of the respondents as per their description of welfare services they know about. Interestingly, more than half the respondents (60%) described multiple services like Edhis'. Remaining (15%) described child protection services, (12%) described medical services, (6%) described residential service for the needy people, (4%) described women development services, and (3%)

described disaster management services.

Table 10: Respondents' views about the Characteristic s/he found in the Social Worker

About the experience of respondents regarding meeting with a Social Worker, 332 of the respondents which are about (59%), had experience of meeting with a Social Worker and (41%) did not.

Characteristics of Social Workers	F	%
Devoted	62	19
Sympathetic	63	19
Well groomed	15	5
Innovative	13	4
Facilitating	24	7
Cooperative	54	16
Professionally trained	77	23
Adherent to agency regulations	7	2
Oil Tongue	13	4
Authoritative	4	1
Total	332	100

This table shows the distribution of those (332) respondents, who have personal experience of meeting / dealing with Social Workers. They were asked about the characteristics they found in the Social Worker. Highest ratio of the respondents (23%) declared that they found the Social Worker as professionally trained. One fifth of each declared that the Social Worker were devoted (19%) and sympathetic (19%). A similar ratio (16%) viewed that they found Social Workers as cooperative. Remaining (7%) found Social Workers to be facilitating, well groomed (5%) and innovative (4%). However, some respondents found Social Workers to be oil tongue (4%) and authoritative (1%).

Table 11: Respondents' Opinion Regarding Expected Characteristics of a Social Worker

Expected Characteristics of Social Workers	Professional		Volunteer	
	F	%	F	%
Professionally trained	383	68	38	7
God fearing	29	5	261	47
Unbiased			57	10
Humanitarian	43	8	50	9
Well groomed	20	4	25	4
Devoted	12	2	50	9
Facilitating	23	4	19	3
Adherent to agency regulations	15	3	6	1
Analytical	6	1	8	1
Realistic	6	1	12	2
Tactful	13	2		
Authoritative			5	1
Others (Oil tongue, Innovative)	9	2	28	5
Total	559	100	559	100

Above the table shows respondents opinion regarding expected characteristics of professional and voluntary Social Workers. Majority of the respondents (68%) responded that professional Social Worker should be professionally trained whereas professional training was not considered as important for volunteers (7%). In comparison, almost half the respondents (47%) emphasized that voluntary Social Workers should be God fearing, whereas it was not considered that important for Professionals (5%). Other expected characteristics of professional Social Workers were humanitarian (8%), well groomed (4%), facilitating (4%), devoted (2%), and tactful (2%) among others. Similarly, voluntary Social Workers were expected to be unbiased (10%), humanitarian and Devoted (9%) each, well groomed (4%), facilitating (3%) and realistic (2%) among others.

Table 12: Respondents' Knowledge about any Department / Institution of formal Social Work Training / Education

Knowledge	F	%
Yes	453	81
No	106	19
Total	559	100

This table shows the knowledge of respondents regarding any department / institution of formal Social Work training / education. Majority of (81%) had knowledge about the department / institution of Social Work education and around one fifth (19%) were unaware.

Conclusion

The source of knowledge for most of the respondents was the department of Social Work, at the University, offering master's degree in Arts like any other subject. But there were some who thought that it is a science degree or practice oriented discipline.

Almost all the respondents declared Social Work as important for society in terms of socio-economic development of the country, as a source of meeting needs of the people and being relevant to Pakistani social realities.

A large majority of respondents were aware of the fact that Social Work is practiced and almost one third of all the respondents thought that it is practiced in a variety of fields (i.e. with individuals in need / distress, with marginalized communities, with excluded groups such as poor, women, ethnic minorities, children, refugees, disabled), for research on emerging social issues (govt. policies) and with populations at risk (of war, natural calamities).

In terms of the mode of Social Work practice, almost half of the respondents regarded Social Work practice as both professional and voluntary. But the other half had two different opinions. From

amongst them, half the respondents regarded it professional practice exclusively and the remaining half as voluntary practice, which shows that respondents were not sure about the mode of Social Work practice in terms of voluntary and / or professional.

In terms of differentiating the practice of professional from voluntary Social Work, most of the respondents were of the view that professional Social Work requires certain skills, body of knowledge and financial incentives which were not considered of much worth in voluntary Social Work. Whereas, majority emphasized fear of God, code of ethics and certain attitude as essential characteristics of voluntary practice of Social Work.

Regarding the expected character of professional and volunteer social workers, more than two third were of the view that professional social worker should be professionally trained whereas almost half were of the view that voluntary social worker should be God fearing which supported their earlier views on characteristics of professional and volunteer social work.

However, when it came to the question that who could be a social worker, around half of the respondents perceived social worker as somebody who have “sympathy for others”. Further, it was declared that social worker could be “anybody”. So, majority of respondents were not sure, despite the fact that they had certain views about essential characteristics of a professional social worker vs. voluntary social worker.

This response was further strengthened when a variety of tasks were included as possible tasks of social worker including running NGOs, advocating people’s rights and delivery of certain social services among others.

In addition, the majority of respondents related government welfare departments with Social Work as well as NGOs, donor agencies, community based organizations, and missionary organizations.

Further, exactly half of the respondents were aware about any welfare service and for slightly less than two third, it was the Edhi's multiple services. All these responses indicate that majority of the respondents did not clearly differentiate between professional and voluntary Social Work.

However, respondents have somewhat clearer knowledge about potentials sectors in which social worker could be employed including institutions for individuals and groups with particular needs (such as children, aged, women and disabled), social / community development sector, physical and mental health and public works. Also, they ranked Social Work at highest priority amongst contemporary professions including medical, art and design.

Respondents' high esteem of Social Work and clarity about potential fields of employment was not based on any assumptions, as more than half of the respondents had personal experience of meeting a professional social worker and half of them found social workers trained, devoted and sympathetic and cooperative professionals. Majority thought that both men and women do Social Work and it is not a gender specific profession.

Respondents acknowledged the Social Work contribution in almost all different fields in Pakistan (like economy, health, politics, education, fashion, family, religion) and the contribution of Social Work in historical events in the life of the country including 2005 earthquake, though, in official documents, there is not any empirical / documented evidence of that as yet (ERRA, 2008).

In terms of suggestions and / or recommendations about recognition and promotion of Social Work, not much innovative recommendations came forward; one fourth suggested to conduct seminars and only one fifth respondents recommended that Social Services should be enhanced for further recognition and promotion of Social Work (Ansari, 2015). People were confused and not sure

about the difference between Professional Social Work and Voluntary Social Work. They were of the view that charity for God fearing and for virtue is Social Work that could be done by anybody who has sympathy for others because they have no clear picture of Social Work Profession. For this, it is suggested that various seminars should be conducted for awareness-raising about the Professional Social Work on different levels. On the other hand some of them emphasized on the enhancement of Social Services for the promotion and recognition of Social Work Profession.

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