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## **UNIT 5 THE SOCIAL GROUP WORKER'S ROLE IN GROUP WORK PROCESS**

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### **5.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit will help you to understand the social group worker's position in group work. This will explain you the role that group worker's play in group processes. This will also help you to know the group worker's role in different settings. The aim of this unit is to provide guidelines to see yourself in the role of group worker and effectively practice group work.

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- define the 'worker in' Social Group work;
- explain social group worker's role in Group work process; and
- distinguish the group worker's role in different settings.

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The worker is tremendously important in social group work. It is said and generally agreed upon that the key to effective group work lies with the worker. The worker in his helping role is responsible for the provision of guidance and help for the group. There is no single, universally applicable style of working in a group. A worker has to construct for himself a framework of concepts and knowledge especially relevant to group situations.

The overall function of all social workers in dealing with a group is to help its members accomplish group goal. While doing this the group worker performs various roles. The different specific roles performed by him are determined by the nature of the group, the group goal and the relationships within the group setting. In this unit, we discuss the various "roles," that the worker performs while dealing with group process in different field setting.

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## 5.2 DEFINING THE WORKER IN SOCIAL GROUP WORK

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The social group worker is a person with knowledge, skills and values. The group worker is primarily a “helping person” rather than a “group leader.” His influence is indirect rather than direct. He is not a boss who has the say, a teacher who knows better or an expert in the subject matter of the group. He works with the group at its own pace and provides methodological help as and when required.

The worker is not a part of the group but he enters into it when the individual in the group or the group as whole or both need professional help to fulfill their own purposes. It must be noted that social group worker is not needed in all the groups. Many groups, just as many individuals, will be perfectly capable of carrying out their programs by themselves and will not need professional help. The professional group worker, as part of a helping profession, will be used and should be available wherever help is needed.

The group worker’s role in the group work can begin at various stages in different groups. He may have to perform some role even before he actually meets the group. This is particularly true when a worker within an agency framework deliberately forms the group. His role in the formed groups can depend on the need and the help required by the particular group. The worker’s role will vary with different groups. This is because of the groups and the situations within which they operate. As a group worker one has to keep enough flexibility and adaptability, since an appropriate group work contribution in one group, or at one stage of a group’s development, may be totally inappropriate in another group or at another time.

### **Factors that Influence the Role of the Social Group Worker**

The worker needs to understand the group and the circumstances surrounding it before attempting to define the specific aspects of his role with it. The primary considerations, or factors, that influence the role of workers are:

- 1) the community setting,
- 2) the nature of the agency, its function and scope,
- 3) agency facilities and program,
- 4) the kind of group with which he is working,
- 5) the interests, needs, abilities, and limitations of individual members,
- 6) the skill and competence of the worker, and
- 7) the amount of help the group wants and its willingness to accept help from the worker.

These factors operate in every group situation. The extent to which the worker consciously studies them separately and in relation to one another will be influential at the point of role determination.

It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to describe the worker’s role as consisting of concrete techniques that can be applied with unvarying regularity to all group situations. With some groups the worker may carry a great deal of responsibility because the groups are newly formed and unfamiliar with ways of working together. He may refrain from carrying responsibility for the same group at a later time in its development. With one group the worker may make a definite attempt to help that group participate with other groups in the carrying out of some large undertaking. He assumes that it is ready

for such a step and sees the step as contributing to the group's basic experience in the agency.

The predominant constant factor that must be thoroughly understood by the worker is that he is always a representative of the agency. He is not a member of the group but rather a worker who has the responsibility of helping the group use the agency to fulfill all or part of its needs. His skill as a group worker is always put into practice within the accepted policies and procedures of the agency. What he does with the group will depend upon the basic method of work in which the agency believes. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance that workers interpret their role with the group relatively early so that the group may know what to expect from them. They should interpret the agency to the group and let the group know how the worker conceives of his task as a representative of that agency.

### 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) What are the factors influencing the role of social group worker?

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## 5.2 THE SOCIAL GROUP WORKER'S ROLE IN GROUP PROCESS

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In the helping process of group work, the interactions and relationships of the members to each other have much meaning. They are never static. They change in time, and in relation to specific situations. The changing interactions and relationships as well as all the developments and changes taking place in group are called group process. The social group worker's role in group work process can be best understood as a role of 'midwife', who provides help in delivery. He is a methodological helper, a catalyst. He makes his knowledge and experience available to participants during a group work process. It means the youth groups, treatment groups, adult groups where there is a need to improve relationships, groups that need help with understanding their own problems, and groups that need help in working toward the improvement of community services, they all need a professional group worker.

In working with groups a social worker is expected to be knowledgeable and skillful in a variety of roles. The particular role that is selected should (ideally) be determined by what will be most effective, given the circumstances. We are presenting here some, but certainly not all, of the roles assumed by social group workers in group process.

- **Enabler:** In this role, the group worker is present with the group as a "helper," or "enabler," there to do things with the group rather than for or to the group. His

influence is indirect rather than direct. He helps individuals or groups to articulate their needs, to clarify and identify their problems, to explore resolution strategies, to select and apply a strategy, and to develop their capacities to deal with their own problems more effectively. As an enabler, the worker helps members revitalize and mobilize their own strengths and resources to cope with difficult problems.

- **Broker:** In the broker role, the worker identifies community resources, government schemes and programmes that may help group member to carry out their plans. Often the group members lack information about various resources and services available. As a broker, the worker helps members become aware of resources, eligibility criteria, and other conditions for using a particular service.
- **Advocate:** It is an active, directive role in which the worker advocates for a group. When a citizen's group is in need of help and existing institutions are least interested in providing services, then the advocate's role may be appropriate. In such a role, the group worker provides leadership for collecting information, for arguing the correctness of the client's need and request, and for challenging the institution's decision not to provide services.
- **Activist:** When the group is formed with the social goal, the group worker works as an activist. An activist seeks change; often the objective involves a shift in power and resources to a disadvantaged group. In the role of an activist the group workers are concerned about social injustice, inequity, and deprivation. The goal is to change the social environment to better meet the needs of individuals.
- **Mediator:** The social group worker is often a link between the group members, between groups, group-community and group-agency. As a mediator, the worker helps resolve disputes, conflicts, or opposing points of view within the group or between a member and some other person or organisation. The mediator role involves intervention in finding compromises, reconcile differences, or reach mutually satisfactory agreements. He works through the members of the group and occupies a position of liaison between the group and the agency. The social group workers use their value orientations and unique skills in identifying miscommunication and clarifying position. For example, in a group for adolescents in a residential centre, the worker might help two members resolve a conflict about their participation in a recreational activity. In another group, the worker might help a member resolve a conflict with a child-care worker.
- **Negotiator:** A negotiator brings together those who are in conflict over one or more issues and seeks to achieve bargaining and compromise to arrive at mutually acceptable agreements, somewhat like mediation, negotiation involves finding a middle ground that all sides can live with. However, unlike a mediator, which is a neutral role, a negotiator usually is allied with one of the sides involved. The group workers play this role especially while negotiating about time, venue, resources, etc. with group members, agency or community.
- **Educator:** One of the most important roles assumed by workers in helping members achieve their goals is that of the educator. The educator role involves giving information to group members and teaching them new skills. To be an effective educator, the worker must first be knowledgeable. Additionally, she or he must be a good communicator so that information is clearly conveyed and readily understood by the receiver.
- **Initiator:** An initiator calls attention to a problem – or even to a potential problem. It is important to realize that some problems can be recognized in advance. The

group worker with his experience and knowledge can foresee the potential problem areas and draw the group members' attention to address the issues. In this role he/her initiate discussion or action on the problem area. Usually the initiator role must be followed by other functions; merely calling attention to problems usually does not resolve them.

- **Empowerer:** A key goal of social group work is empowerment. In the role of empowerer the group worker helps the individuals and groups to increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and influence through improving their circumstances.
- **Coordinator:** Coordinators bring components together in some kind of organised manner. On behalf of the agency often the group worker assumes the role of coordinator for helping the group members to avail the services from different agencies. The group worker also at times coordinates between the group members, especially in the initial stage of group formation.
- **Group Facilitator:** A group facilitator is one who serves as a leader for group activity. The group may be a therapy group, an educational group, a self-help group, a sensitivity group, a family therapy group, or a group with some other focus. Facilitating discussion and helping group members to arrive at decision are important role that group workers play. As a facilitator he/she provides the methodological help. He/She does not discuss the method but he uses it for facilitating the group process. He/She does not allow himself/herself to become involved with the group and their problem. When required to express his/her own opinion, he/she at all times makes it clear when he/her is functioning as a group worker and when he/her is expressing his/her own opinion as a member of the group.
- **Communicator and Interpreter:** The group worker is a specialist in the "how" of communication between people. The group worker has to act as a communicator or interpreter, where interpersonal relationships have to be dealt with. The role of communicators is different from facilitating the communication in the group. In this role he/she actually helps the group or members to understand what is being communicated. At times she has to interpret or reword the phrases to explain to the members. For example where a group is starting from scratch, a group may be puzzled about, and even suspicious of its purpose and the role the worker, at this stage the group worker has to perform as a communicator and interpreter. Similarly, when the group members are not able to see the actual gains of being in the group or when their expectations from the group are very high, she actually makes things clear and simple.

### 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) Explain the social Group worker's role as an enabler in group processes.

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## 5.4 ROLE OF SOCIAL GROUP WORKER IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

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We will discuss now the role the group worker performs in different field settings. As we are aware there are different fields of social work practice. Social work professionals in India work with community, groups, families and individuals who are elderly, delinquent, unemployed, or who have disabilities. The services of social workers are grouped within various fields of practice as they relate to addressing specific social problems, meeting the needs of client groups, or reflecting particular settings. The prominent settings include family and child welfare, health and rehabilitation, mental health, occupational social work, community development, education or school social work, social work in corrections, and aging or gerontological services. Social group work practice is possible in almost all the settings. The models may vary according to the needs and the nature of the setting. Similarly the role of the social group worker also will vary in different setting.

In this section we will take up a few important field settings for understanding the role of group worker.

### i) Social Group Worker in Community Development Setting

Certain features of the social group work in community settings have to be borne in mind when considering the role of social group worker. The primary objectives of social group work in community setting include: social integration of the community on a local neighbourhood basis through participation in self-help and mutual-aid programmes; motivating people to improve their living conditions especially those adversely affecting their physical and social development; creation of opportunities for undertaking programmes of economic betterment based on the maximum use of community resources and local initiative; identification and development of local leaders with emphasis on providing them organisational skills and enabling them to locate and fully utilize various technical, social and welfare services; and development of a sense of belonging to the community. The group work in community setting is in the form of self-help groups, recreational groups, action groups, etc.

The social group worker in the role of organiser needs all her skills in organising the various sections of a community into well-knit groups. She organises the group members to develop their personality through participation in recreational, cultural and other activities. In this role one of her primary tasks includes the development of responsible leadership from the groups organised by her. For the worker operating on a macro level, one of the major tasks is to work at an inter-group level. This includes the ensuring that inter-group rivalries are kept at the minimal level, fostering of inter-group cooperation, matching the objectives of each group and the objectives of the community as a whole, facilitating communication, etc. Another crucial role for the group worker is that of a 'resource person'. It requires her to be aware of various avenues within and outside the community, which could be utilized for enhancing the functioning of the group members. The group worker also has to become a vital link between the civic administration and the people, especially during the initial stages of his work. Subsequently, however, this role of a 'liaison functionary' has to be transferred to the group members.

In the performance of the above stated role, the social group worker in community setting also needs to play the role of a 'management expert'. In this role, she needs to impart skills to the group leaders and other members in the area of office management with special emphasis on skills in letter writing, filing procedures, basic accounting, writing records of meetings, and elementary public relations and fund raising.

## ii) Social Group Worker in Institutional Settings

In the institutional setting the social group worker makes a contribution through providing opportunities for constructive use of free time. Besides this her contribution includes the understanding of the group, nature of institutional living and makes it possible for many of the institutional residents to make a constructive use of the institution's services. Institutional living is group living. It consists of living groups, school groups, work groups, leisure-time groups, friendship groups, age groups, and a wide variety of other groups. The group worker's skills required in making constructive use of these group relations for the success of institutions. Some of the institutions that make use of the group worker's skill are correctional institutions, institutions for the mentally retarded and the handicapped, homes for the aged, and children's homes. The group worker perform different role according to the different function of the institution as well as to the personnel who are employed.

As said earlier, the group worker's role in an institution is not limited only to recreational aspects. Her knowledge and skills are helpful for the whole group living situation; she helps the institution in understanding the dynamics of group behaviour just as the caseworker brings to the institution their basic understanding of individual treatment. The social group worker in institutional setting takes on a specially helping role towards the other staff members like houseparent or counselor, since they are directly related to the group living process.

Another important role of the social group worker in any institutional setting is related to his direct work on some specific problem of the group, as for instance, discharge from the institution, intake into the institution, special behaviour problems, or problems around emotional needs that cannot be handled in the day-to-day group living situation. In this context the group worker's role is to supervise and coordinate special services which are not carried by the houseparent but which relate to the group living experience. It is important that the group worker coordinate these services from the point of view of social relationships as well as of treatment for the individual, so that in them the treatment focus is maintained.

The group workers in institutional setting carry out his role for referral to recreational and group association resources in the community. She also maintain liaison with volunteers, if the institution uses them and work with groups of relatives of institutional residents. For further understanding we will discuss here social group worker's role in some of the institutional settings

## iii) Social Group Worker in Clinical Settings

In the hospitals and clinics, the social group worker becomes a member of a team composed of the medical doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist, nurse, and social caseworker. In such settings with a defined treatment goal, the purpose of the service becomes much more specific than in the community setting. As service is more "pinpointed," the methods and role of group worker also become more specific.

Social workers in medical setting extend direct services by using group work and casework methods. In the medical setting the social worker carry out group work and performs various roles:

- i) enable patients with similar problems to come together and so feel less isolated and alone in facing their problems;

- ii) bring about a feeling of belongingness and bring a part of a community which would give them the courage and confidence to adjust to the larger community outside;
- iii) work through problems in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance;
- iv) use the group as a therapeutic agent for emotional growth and attitudinal change through the process of mutual sharing.

iv) **Social Group Worker in School Setting**

The school setting is definitely a group setting, and teachers work with groups. Schools employ social worker on their staff in order to help children whose problems in the school have their genesis in social and emotional factors in the child, in his family, or in his social environment. Many schools in India are recognizing the importance of school social worker's role as caseworker, counselor and group worker. The school social worker works with four parties: the child, the family, the school staff and the community. While working with them he/she uses his knowledge and skills of casework and group work.

The school social worker has to perform a variety of functions in the educational setting. While doing this one of the roles he perform is social group worker.

In the role of social group worker he promotes group adjustment through group work activities. He organises group work activities in the form of recreation, role-plays, story telling, group exercises, etc. to increase the capacity of social participation and constructive group interaction in the school children. Through guided group interaction the worker promote relatedness, belongingness and the feeling of identification among children. This also helps in the improvement of their social adjustment and the development of their personality.

Working with special student groups, the school social worker expand practice with specially formed groups of children and teen-agers experiencing difficulties in social and academic adjustment. He gives special attention to students who underachieve, disrupt, drop out, or are withdrawn from meaningful peer involvement. He ensures that lonely, isolated, and handicapped children have an opportunity for constructive participation in special interest or recreational groups.

Another important function of the school social worker is to conduct value education classes and leadership development programmes. Through the group work activities he orient the children about cooperation, teamwork, role taking, etc. The school social worker uses the group work method while assisting or leading special interest groups in activities such as dramatics, puppet-making, other hobbies, or community service projects. He performs important role in motivating students to participate in varied activities that broaden horizons and expand relationships with peers and adults.

v) **Social Group Worker in Institutions for Children and Adolescents**

In our country both the government and voluntary organisations offer institutional services for children and youth. We have observation homes, orphanages, homes for the street children, etc. These institutions are not the places in which children and/or youth are kept only to be fed, clothed and perhaps restored in a family. The most important part of institutional care lies in daily group living situation which can be used constructively for the purpose of socialisation and teaching the life oriented skills to the children.

The group worker's role in children's home is one of the most important areas of work. She deals mostly with the children and adolescents to whom the group situation is crucial even in life outside of the institution. In the absence of family these children need all the services given to children in their own homes and some additional ones related to their anxieties, loneliness, and planning for life outside the institutional services. The quality of group living is therefore as vital as the educational, clinical and other specialized services attached to the institution.

The functions of the social group worker on the institutional team are twofold: to help with the group living situation and to conduct special groups. His role includes the tasks such as:

- i) direct group work with formed groups of children inside the institution.
- ii) work with parent groups, where possible.
- iii) being responsible and helping with the recreational programme as part of group living.
- iv) supervision and coordination of child care takers (sometimes called house parents).
- v) supervision of volunteers who work with groups of children placed in the institution.
- vi) responsibility for referral to resources for group association in the community, when the child is in the institution as well as when planning for his release.
- vii) responsible participation in diagnosis of individuals and in decisions regarding placement in the institution, grouping of children, treatment plans, and plans for after-care.
- viii) the social group workers sometimes conduct discussion or activity groups with a therapeutic purpose with children who have strong negative feelings or difficulties in relating to adults.

#### vi) **Social Group Worker in Services for the Aged**

The social group work with the aged is organised at both the community as well as the agency level. The group worker's work is usually direct with specific groups. At times the worker has to work indirectly with the group of volunteers working for the aged. In both the cases it is the establishment of special groups in order to make a contribution to group living. Many of the problems of the aged are intensified when they enter in an institution. As all institutionalized people, they feel that they are removed from the normal community life, which centers on the family. They often have some impairment of their capacities. Self-respect is especially threatened. Therefore, the purposes of group work with the aged are usually:

- i) to raise the self-esteem of the participants.
- ii) to give an opportunity for planning.
- iii) to become a part of their own small community and, if possible, a part of a larger community.
- iv) to establish a group bond that may replace the warmth of family relationships.

The functions of the social group worker in community based agencies giving service to the aged are:

- i) working out a program for different kinds of groups as per the needs with this age group.
- ii) direct work with certain groups of the aged, especially those who present problems in relationships.
- iii) as in all group work, some contact with individuals outside of the group, but more intensively in the particular age group.
- iv) training, coordination and supervision of volunteers or part time workers in programs for the aged.
- v) consultant to committees of older citizens in relation to social action in their own behalf, if requested to do so.

In the institution for the aged, the functions of the social group worker are:

- i) direct work with formed groups for the purpose of specific help to those who cannot easily enter the group life of the institution;
- ii) responsibility for the stimulation of a rich and varied programme in the institution designed to allow for satisfaction of individual needs and to counteract the feeling of segregation from the community which may appear in an institution. This is usually done by either being a consultant to the staff of one or several institutions.

<p><b>Check Your Progress III</b></p> <p><b>Note:</b> a) Use the space provided for your answer. b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.</p> <p>1) Describe the social group worker’s role in clinical settings.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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## 5.5 LET US SUM UP

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The aim of this unit was to help you understand the social group worker’s role. You are now familiar with the group worker’s position in group work situation and her primary role in social group work. Now you know that the group worker’s role varies depending on the nature of group goal, the setting in which group is operating, nature of the agency, the interest, needs, abilities and limitations of group members, etc. You will be able to describe some of the roles that group workers play in group work processes. Social group work practice is possible in most of the field settings. We discussed social group worker’s role in some of the important settings. You are now equipped with the knowledge and understanding to distinguish the group worker’s role in different settings.

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## 5.6 KEY WORDS

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- Field Settings** : The surroundings or environment and the situation in which individual is offered social work services.
- Group Worker** : A helping person with knowledge, skills and values
- Institution** : An organisation or establishment devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or programme.
- Role** : A part played by a person while performing the functions
- Group Process** : The totality of the group's interactions, developments and changes, which occur in the group's life.

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## 5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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- Douglas, Tom (1979), *Group Processes in Social Work*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
- Konopka, Gisela (1954), *Group Work in the Institution*, Association Press, New York.
- Konopka, Gisela (1963), *Social Group Work: A Helping Process*, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.
- Trecker, Herleigh B. (1970), *Social Group Work, Principles and Practices*, Association Press, New York.

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## 5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress I

- 1) The social group worker's role depends on the groups and the situations within which they operate. The primary factors, that influences the roles of workers are:
  - i) the community setting
  - ii) the nature of the agency, its function and scope
  - iii) agency facilities and program
  - iv) the kind of group with which he is working
  - v) the interests, needs, abilities, and limitations of individual members
  - vi) the skill and competence of the worker and
  - vii) the amount of help the group wants and its willingness to accept help from the worker.

These factors operate in every group situation. The extent to which the worker consciously studies them separately and in relation to one another will be influential at the point of role determination.

### **Check Your Progress II**

- 1) The social group worker has to perform various roles in group process. In the role of an enabler the worker helps individuals or groups to articulate their needs. She helps the members to clarify and identify their problems. Instead of providing ready made solutions helps the group members to explore resolution strategies, to select and apply a strategy, and to develop their capacities to deal with their own problems more effectively. As an enabler, the worker helps members revitalize and mobilize their own strengths and resources to cope with difficult problems.

### **Check Your Progress III**

- 1) In the setting the social worker while carrying out group work, performs various roles focused on the tasks such as :
  - i) to enable patients with similar problems to come together and so feel less isolated and alone in facing their problems;
  - ii) to bring about a feeling of belongingness and bring a part of a community which would give them the courage and confidence to adjust to the larger community outside;
  - iii) to work through problems in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance;
  - iv) to use the group as a therapeutic agent for emotional growth and attitudinal change through the process of mutual sharing.