

## **Values and Principles in Social Group Work**

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### **Introduction**

'No man is an island unto himself' said John Donne and rightly so. Human beings were not meant to live alone. The process of growing up takes place in one or the other group; be it family, peers, neighbourhood or community. Man is a social being and cannot survive alone. Group life is thus, basic to human life. A group is a collection of human beings who enter into social relationships with one another involving mutual give and take.

Social Group Work is focused around a group; it emphasizes the intellectual, social and emotional growth and development of the members of the group. It is a process in which a qualified social work practitioner helps individuals in a group to have a satisfactory group experience through different programs aimed at enhancing their psycho-social functioning. It is through different activities in a group situation that an individual is able to discover her/his hidden strengths, talents and abilities. Social Group Work plays a vital role in the all round development of an individual, thereby contributes to the better functioning of the community and society as a whole.

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Social Group Workers have an ethical obligation to function within the confines of a theoretical base comprising of tested interventions and principles of practice. The Social Group Work as a method of social work has embraced a set of values which have been translated into certain principles which seek to govern the conduct of practitioners. We shall now take a look at the values and the principles that define the Social Group Work practice.

### **Values in Social Group Work**

Observations pertaining to the fact that groups influence the psycho-social and psychological makeup of man have been the bedrock of the theoretical and value base of Social Group Work. "All professions have value preferences that give purpose, meaning and direction to people who practice within them.....Professional values however do not exist separate and apart from societal values; rather professions espouse and champion selected societal values." (Hepworth and Larsen, 1992,) According to Northen (2007) values are abstract propositions about what is right, desirable or worthwhile. Values of group work refer to how the practitioner should view and treat people, their goals and how these goals should be reached during the process. In a profession, the values are translated into ethical principles of practice. According to the National Association of Social worker's (NASW) code of ethics "broad ethical principles are based on social work's core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of individual, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence. These principles set forth ideals to which all social workers should aspire."

The basic values of group work deal with human relationships. These basic values as conceptualized by Northen (2007: 77) are given below:

**Dignity and Worth**

Like in case work and community organization, an important value of Social Group Work is the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of each person. All persons should be accepted as they are and their special strengths recognized. They should be treated with respect irrespective of their differences and similarities and their integrity is of paramount importance. Every individual is unique and has an inherent worth, interactions with them as they use resources and opportunities should not hurt rather should enhance their dignity and individuality. Without fear of negative sanctions, they should have the freedom to express themselves. The group worker should recognize the value that every member no matter whatever are her/his drawbacks and handicaps has worth and deserves to be respected and treated as a dignified member of the society.

**Social Justice**

Inherent in all social work is the value of promoting social justice wherein all should have equal access to resources and opportunities. Everybody has the right to civil liberties and equal opportunity without discrimination as to race, ethnicity religion, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and capacities. They should have access to resources that are essential to meet their basic needs. They have the right to self-determination and to participate in making group, family, or organizational decisions within the limits imposed by the individual's culture and status. Individuals may sometimes need resources that are not available, the worker has to then take on the role of an advocate and take up their cause. S/he may organize support groups and self-help groups to help people cope with the difficult problems of their living.

**Mutual Responsibility**

The value of mutual responsibility is based on the conviction that people are interdependent for survival and fulfillment of their needs. Neither the individual nor the society can be conceived without each other. As individuals interact, they influence and in turn are influenced by each other. They are capable of helping one another. Group work builds on this interdependence, which can become a potent force for development and change. The worker is responsible for helping members to develop patterns of communication and norms of behaviour that foster mutual aid. Members should fulfill their responsibility to society by actively participating in the democratic processes.

Northen (2007) is of the view that though social workers are bound by ethical principles set forth in the codes of ethics, they need also to understand and differentially apply these principles, when working with groups.

**Principles of Social Group Work**

Principles are the fundamental truths tested by observation and experiment which guide action. Over the years from social group work practice, have emerged certain principles which provide a theoretical framework to the practitioners while working with people in groups. They provide a set of guidelines which help them achieve a certain level of competence by guiding practice. 'Social workers with groups have a responsibility to practice within the realm of the accumulated theoretical base, tested interventions, and ethical principles.' (Northen, 2007)

Social science theory is always in a fluid state, as it keeps changing and evolving. The principles of Social Group Work too will keep changing in tandem with our progressive experience and discovery of new insights into social group

work as a method of social work. Different authors have outlined different principles of working with groups from time to time, conceptualizing the important areas of focus for the Social Group Worker. It is not possible here to discuss all the principles put forth by different authors, therefore we shall outline the principles propounded by only two authors, reflecting the earlier and the modern day thinking, respectively.

In 1948 Harleigh B. Trecker wrote at great length about the principles of Social Group Work in his famous book 'Social Group Work: Principles and Practice' which is still read widely. The ten principles of Social Group Work as conceptualized by Trecker are briefly discussed below outlining the main points:

### **The Principle of Planned Group Formation**

The Social Group Work process uses group as a medium for providing services to the individual, hence the formation of a group is a prerequisite for a group worker. Whether a group worker works with groups already functioning or forms her own group, s/he should be aware of certain factors while forming a group so that the group becomes a positive potential for individual growth.

A group has to be formed in a planned way before initiating the group work process. From what is explained by Trecker we can say this principle comprises the following fundamentals:

- Groups like individuals are different, evolving, developmental and ever-changing and tremendously influential upon the behaviour of individuals.
- The group in Social Group Work must possess elements of conscious design and plan.

- The group worker should not seek to require all groups to be alike nor expect them to meet identical needs.
- The group worker's skill will be evident in the way s/he consciously gives aid at the point of group formation.

In India group formation can become a difficult exercise as the people may lack the motivation to join a group and may do so after much persuasion. So the group worker must have the skill to deal with the resistance of such members. The group worker should be equipped with an in-depth understanding of the client population, and pay attention to inter- personal compatibility and other factors such as age, caste, gender, socio-cultural background etc.

### **The Principle of Specific Group Objectives**

Specific objectives of individual and group development must be consciously formulated by the worker in harmony with group wishes and capacities and in keeping with agency function. The group worker should help the members achieve the overall objectives of social work through its own specific objectives, which are to assist individuals to grow and change; supplement emotional and social nourishment; promote democratic participation and remedy individual and social disorganization.

- Agencies and their workers must be aware of what people want from group experiences and help them to get it.
- The group worker who recognizes the need for consciously formulated specific objectives for individuals and groups becomes a purposeful, rather than an unfocused worker and makes the group work in a planned than haphazard exercise.

- Objectives, thus, become a controlling force in the life of the group and the group worker should have clarity about the specific goals s/he wants to achieve along with the benefits s/he is hoping the members would get.
- When the worker focuses on individual and group objectives, s/ he reduces the likelihood of permitting her/his own needs to get in the way of the group.
- S/he helps the members to see their strengths and limitations and set their objectives accordingly, in alignment with the agency's formulated purposes.
- The expectations and the aspirations of the members should also be given due weightage while formulating the objectives and activities planned accordingly.

### **The Principle of Purposeful Worker Group Relationship**

A consciously purposeful relationship must be established between the worker and the group members based on mutual acceptance. This principle is based on the premise that it is both possible and necessary to create an effective working relationship with a group before the worker can be of any help.

- Before the worker helps the group members to develop meaningful relationships with each other, s/he should first create a meaningful and purposeful relationship with the group.
- The worker's relationship with the group is a major tool, and the quality and strength of this relationship determine the extent to which the group can be helped to the fullest realization of its potentialities.
- When the group workers adopt the procedures suggested by this principle, they begin their work

motivated by an initial desire to understand the group as a basis for helping it.

- By encouraging the group to “be itself” and accepting it as it is, the worker becomes accepted and helpful to the group.

### **The Principle of Continuous Individualization**

Groups are different and individuals utilize group experiences in a variety of ways to meet their differing needs; consequently, the principle of continuous individualization must be practiced by the group worker. Each group has to be seen as unique, different from any other group, like the members in the group.

- When the group worker individualizes a group, she accepts the fact that human beings are naturally different.
- To work with groups in awareness of their differences as well as similarities is a reinforcement of the belief that people have a capacity to change, when given adequate opportunities for and help in changing.
- The worker should be ready for a variety of individual responses rather than a uniformity of response.
- S/he should accept the differences in individual ability and growth; strive to help individuals understand themselves and help them modify their behaviour towards those who have special needs.
- Individualization should be a continuous process on the part of the group worker who accepts the certainty of change.

### **The Principle of Guided Group Interaction**

Social Group Work is a method through which individuals in groups in an agency setting are helped by a professionally trained worker who guides their interaction in various program activities. The idea is that they relate themselves with others and experience growth opportunities in accordance with their needs and capacities.

- Interaction is a process whereby two or more persons are in a meaningful contact, whereby their behaviour is modified.
- When people are in groups, the possibility of interaction and inter-stimulation are always present.
- The main source of energy which propels the group is the interaction of the members and the group worker influences this interaction by the quality of her/his participation.
- As the possibility of inter-stimulation through interaction is always present in a group, the Social Group Worker must harness and consciously direct and utilize this natural social process.
- The presence of the worker whose role is to actively influence the type and the degree of interaction, converts the social process into the social group work process.
- The worker is primarily interested in helping to bring about individual growth and social development for the group as a whole as a result of guided group interaction.
- S/he enhances the potential for interaction by helping members to assume participating roles.

- The Social Group Worker uses methods that stimulate the group to the fullest possible analysis and understanding of their own situation and thereupon influence the social interaction of the constituent members of the society

### **The Principle of Democratic Group Self-Determination**

The Principle of self-determination is a core value of the social work philosophy and has to be practiced, irrespective of the method of working. In Social Group Work method, as in other methods of social work this principle is of great significance. The idea is to inculcate in the members an ideology of democracy.

- The group must be helped to make its own decisions and determine its own activities, taking the maximum amount of responsibility in line with its capacity and ability.
- The group has a right to make its own choices and the capacity to make satisfactory decisions.
- The aim of the group worker is to encourage an ever-increasing capacity on the part of the group to take responsibility for its actions.
- This principle assumes that groups can develop only when they are given opportunity to behave responsibly but it is to be consciously judged as to how much responsibility a group can be asked to assume at any point in its development.
- The group worker must first help the group to develop a conscious group-self before it can become responsibly self determining.
- The worker should give up any need to dominate the group and instead work with the group on the basis

of her/his ability to share her/his wide experience and competence.

### **The Principle of Flexible Functional Organization**

Every group has some informal organization of its constituent members that enables it to function. As the group is formed for specific objectives, it should also have a formal organization to help it achieve these objectives. This formal organization should meet a felt need, be flexible, adaptive and should change as the group changes.

- The principle does not imply that group worker should organize the group; rather she should help the group organize itself.
- The group should be encouraged to explore its needs, set its objectives and determine specific functions and helped by the group worker to make its own decisions.
- The worker should help the group to determine who should take the leadership assignments along with the qualifications and expectations, so that the members are aware of what the group expects from them.
- Not only the structural details of this formal organization, but the process through which the worker guides the group to have a formal organization is equally important.
- Group efforts which may be scattered and haphazard become focused when formal organization is made available, as it allows the energies of the group members to be properly channelized.
- Tasks and duties should be identified and allocated in an orderly manner and members helped and encouraged to assume responsibilities. The process to organize itself is an excellent vehicle for growth.

- The formal group organization should be simple, stable yet flexible, open to changes as per group needs.
- The experiences of the group members in solving the organizational problems are no less valuable than the other program experiences.

### **The Principle of Progressive Program Experiences**

Program in Social Group Work does not only mean the activities or events but is a broad concept that includes the entire range of individual and group relationships, interactions and experiences deliberately planned and carried out with the help of the group worker to achieve the group goals.

- The group worker should not impose her/his program plan on the group but help the group to develop its own program by extending to the group a variety of choices. S/he may only make suggestions as to possible programmes.
- The program development is a continuous process and grows out of group potentialities.
- This principle implies that there is starting point for all group programmes. Small beginnings can culminate into bigger and more challenging tasks as the group progresses.
- The program experiences in which the groups engage should begin at the level of member interest, need, experience and competence and should develop in tandem with the developing capacity of the group.
- The worker should help the group to enjoy a progressive series of program experiences in consonance with the group's potential and capacities. The group cannot be expected to do the same thing all the time.

- After success in simple activities, the group can be encouraged to move to more complex experiences.

### **The Principle of Resource Utilization**

This principle guides the group worker to utilize the available resources to enrich the content of the group experience for individuals and group as a whole. For this it is imperative that the Social Group Worker should possess knowledge about the resources available in the group, agency and the community. S/he should use her/his skill in locating and then acquainting the group with the various resources which can be utilized by the group for different programs.

- The worker serves as a liaison between the group and the community and her/his ability becomes apparent in the skill with which she draws upon the environment.
- S/he not only helps to stimulate the group to action but also helps them to discover and use the agency and community resources and those within the group. She must ensure that the members procure the required material for the smooth conduct of the group sessions.
- S/he should take initiative in mobilizing both material and human resources and oversee the utilization of the available resources by the members for the common good.

### **The Principle of Evaluation**

Continuous evaluation of process and programs in terms of outcomes by the worker, agency and the members is not only desirable, albeit essential. Carefully maintained records can facilitate proper monitoring and evaluation.

- The social group worker should carry out the evaluation of the outcomes in a carefully planned manner.
- Maintaining records in a systematic and orderly way aids the evaluation process.
- Evaluation carried out in an objective and neutral way helps in revealing the extent to which the group has been successful in achieving the group goals.
- A feedback from the members along with the observation and assessment of the worker help the group members develop insights into their strengths and weaknesses.
- Evaluation should be done at the end of each session and at the time of the termination.

According to Siddiqui, the evaluation of the group work generally focuses on the following points:

- What group goals have been achieved?
- What individual needs have been met?
- What programme and activities have been successful?
- What are the shortcomings?
- What changes will help improve the effectiveness of the intervention?

“Without continuous evaluation objectives become outmoded, programs become static and groups fail to meet needs. It is the fundamental obligation of every worker and every agency to rethink and reorganize its practice in the light of thoughtful evaluation.” (Trecker, 1955) p. 219

Reflecting the modern perspective, different from the earlier conceptualization focusing on the therapeutic power of the group, we have Sharry who in his book 'Solution Focused Group Work' has put forward some principles of Social Group Work which we have listed below:

- 1) Focusing on Change and Possibilities
- 2) Creating Goals and Preferred Futures
- 3) Building Strengths, Skills and Resources
- 4) Looking for What's Right and What's Working
- 5) Being Respectfully curious
- 6) Creating Co-Operation and Collaboration
- 7) Using humour and Creativity

The principles as underlined by Sharry show a shift in focus from problems to solutions, self-help and competence. He emphasizes the therapeutic objective and power of group, which he calls solution focused brief therapy.

## **Conclusion**

Social Group Workers have an ethical obligation to function within the confines of a theoretical base comprising of tested interventions and principles of practice. The aim of this chapter was to make the learner understand the values and principles a professional social worker should follow in group work practice that help in achieving the goals of profession. Social group work as a method of social work has embraced a set of values which have been translated into certain principles that govern the conduct of practitioners. According to the National Association of Social worker's (NASW) code of ethics "broad ethical

principles are based on social work's core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of individual, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence. These principles set forth ideals to which all social workers should aspire."

The basic values of group work deal with human relationships. These basic values profess belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, social justice and mutual responsibility. Everybody has the right to civil liberties and equal opportunity without discrimination as to race, ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and capacities. The value of mutual responsibility is based on the conviction that people are interdependent for survival and fulfillment of their needs.

From Social Group Work practice over the years, have emerged certain principles which provide a theoretical framework to social group worker while working with people in groups. They provide a set of guidelines which guide practice. Different authors have outlined different principles of working with groups from time to time, conceptualizing the important areas of focus for the Social Group Worker. Trecker has listed the following ten principles:

- The Principle of Planned Group formation
- The Principle of Specific Group Objectives
- The Principle of Purposeful Worker Group Relationship
- The Principle of Continuous Individualization
- The Principle of Guided Group Interaction
- The Principle of Democratic Group self-Determination
- The Principle of Flexible Functional Organization
- The Principle of Progressive Program Experiences

The Principle of Resource Utilization

The Principle of Evaluation

Reflecting the modern perspective, focusing on the therapeutic power of the group, Sharry in his book 'Solution Focused Group Work' has put forward the following principles of Social Group Work :

Focusing on change and possibilities

Creating goals and preferred Futures

Building strengths, skills and resources

Looking for what's right and what's working

Being respectfully curious

Creating co-operation and collaboration

Using humour and Creativity

As social science theory is always in a fluid state and keeps changing and evolving, of Social Group Work too will keep evolving in tandem with our understanding of Social Group Work as a method of social work.

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