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**INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION ON RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL WORK
AS A PROFESSION IN INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

The study, in the Indian context, deals with understanding how Social Work Education plays a vital role in the societal recognition of Social Work as an esteemed Profession. India being a transition society, faces many challenges in professionalising social work, which has its origins in the Educational arena. Hence, the need of the hour is to address issues in Social Work Education thereby formulating measures to make Social Work a recognized profession in India. The difficulty lies in the lack of a uniform foundation in Social Work Education and the significant gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application which stems out because of Western influence on Social Work Education. Unlike India, other countries provide licence for practising Social Work and due to the absence of a professional licence, there is no scope for Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) in India. The lack of prominent Social Work Associations and Forums is another area of concern. The market-driven demands challenge the ethical base of the profession which can be corrected by focusing more on Social Work education. The Indian patriarchal society provides ample space for gender discrimination at the educational level which extends to the workplace too. Society's understanding of the difference between Philanthropy (service) and Social Work also plays a crucial role in recognising the profession. Despite many colleges offering Social Work courses in India, the degree is still under-recognized by society due to lack of awareness about the course and hazy career opportunities. These issues and challenges are studied in depth in this research and feasible suggestions are put forth in order to be recognised as a professional Social Worker in India.

Keywords: Social Work Education, Professionalising, Western Influence, License, DSW, Associations, Market-driven, Patriarchy, Gender discrimination, Philanthropy.

INTRODUCTION

Social work education, established in the year 1936 in India initially adopted Western European models, despite the country's rich diversity. Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) led the way, offering postgraduate social work programs for nearly a decade as the sole institution in the field. University of Delhi's Delhi School of Social Work soon followed with a master's program, while the Madras School of Social Work and Lucknow University's Department of Social Work also contributed. In 1955, Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work aimed to address India's social issues. Universities nationwide gradually introduced diverse social work programs. IGNOU's 2004 undergraduate Social Work program marked a significant step. While social work in India mainly drew from Western approaches, adapting this literature to local contexts posed a challenge. Dr. Manshardt's advocacy led to schools and departments nationwide, though concerns about education quality, recruitment, and ethics persisted. Establishing an official code of ethics remained elusive, hindering integration into society. Fieldwork training and professional identity became pressing issues, complicated by varying standards among institutions. Public recognition lagged due to misconceptions about the profession's role. Research explored grassroots challenges, including gender impact and the absence of robust

social work organizations. Licensing and the emergence of the Doctor of Social Work (DSW) were also subjects of study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a Quantitative method and the tools used were two self-constructed Questionnaires. The first tool is for respondents with a Social Work background. The relevance of theory in fieldwork is assessed on a scale from 1 (much relatable) to 5 (not relatable), and the understanding of social work methods and their indigenous nature in the curriculum is explored. The questionnaire touches on awareness of the Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) and seeks comments on the absence of licensing for the social work profession in India. It evaluates the perception of social work as an employable course in India and whether the quality of students admitted can strengthen the profession, with a request for suggestions on criteria for selecting students. The second tool is for respondents from non-Social Work backgrounds and aims at understanding their awareness of the difference between Social Work and Social Service and their perspectives on Social Work as a profession.

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the Respondents

The respondents are primarily in their early twenties, with a few exceptions. This suggests that social work is a field that attracts young individuals seeking education or employment opportunities. The reasons for choosing a social work degree are multifaceted, including a desire to connect with people, work with communities, and make a positive impact on society. Some respondents mention the absence of mathematics in their decision-making, indicating a preference for a field that does not heavily rely on quantitative skills. Others highlight the alignment of social work with their previous studies, like sociology or literature, as a reason for their choice.

In terms of career aspirations, many respondents express a strong desire to work with communities, NGOs, or in human resources (HR) roles. This reflects the diverse career paths available within the social work field, ranging from direct community engagement to HR management and policy advocacy. Some respondents also mention a desire to pursue further education, such as Ph.D. It shows the relevance of social work education and the importance of understanding the perspectives and aspirations of individuals in the field to enhance the profession's effectiveness and impact.

Relevance of Theory in the Field

The majority of respondents seem to have varying levels of appreciation for the relevance of theory in fieldwork, with a notable number giving it a lower rating. This suggests that there may be differing perspectives on the practical application of theoretical concepts in the field of social work. It's worth noting that these ratings reflect individual experiences and perceptions, and there may be a multitude of factors influencing these assessments, such as the specific coursework, teaching methods, and fieldwork opportunities provided by their respective educational institutions.

Indigeneity of Social Work Literature

80.4% of the respondents feel that the curriculum is not indigenous and needs to be free from Western imperialism. On the other hand, 17.6% feel that it is becoming more and more indigenous these days due to the focus on Indian perspective in curriculum these days. The other 2% of the respondents are either not sure or feel its a mix of both Western ideas and indigenous methods.

The American influence on social work education in India has been substantial, particularly in emphasising curative social action over reform efforts and leading to a focus on methodological and technical aspects rather than broader developmental, preventive, and social action aspects. However, it's important to note that while there have been some changes in Indian social work education, they haven't blindly replicated American traditions. The American model, rooted in individualism, capitalism, social Darwinism, and the Protestant ethic, doesn't necessarily align with the values of

Indian and South Asian societies, resulting in limited emphasis on social action, social science, and reform in Indian social work education.

In contrast, social work practice in India draws from deep cultural and philosophical foundations, seen in ancient texts like the Vedas and Upanishads, which emphasise promoting social well-being and an individual's moral duty to contribute to community well-being. Bridging the gap between these indigenous traditions and modern professional social work approaches is a significant challenge. To address this, there's an urgent need in India to align social work more closely with cultural values and traditions, focusing on advancing social welfare. This shift requires integrating indigenous knowledge and practices into contemporary social work, ensuring that the profession remains rooted in India's rich cultural heritage while adapting to current challenges and needs, driven by a deep respect for cultural heritage and a commitment to societal welfare.

Licensing

The awareness of various social work associations among the respondents from Social Work background were studied. Notably, some respondents recognized well-established entities like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI), which are esteemed for their contributions to the profession. Additionally, some respondents mentioned educational institutions like MCC and TISS, highlighting their crucial role in social work education. However, the data also reveals a significant gap in awareness, with several participants expressing limited knowledge or confusion about specific associations. This underscores the importance of improving communication and information dissemination within the social work community in India to ensure that professionals and students have comprehensive knowledge of available resources and associations in their field.

Licensing is a crucial and standardised process that ensures the competence of social workers and safeguards the well-being of clients and the public. This journey typically starts with formal social work education at an accredited institution, either at the undergraduate or graduate level. Aspiring social workers then undergo supervised work placements to refine their skills under experienced professionals. The culmination of this process involves passing a rigorous licensing exam tailored to social work, evaluating their knowledge, ethical judgment, and ability to serve diverse groups effectively. Meeting these requirements grants social workers a license, legally authorizing them to practice within its scope, enabling them to provide professional care and enhance the well-being of individuals and communities.

The benefits of social work licensure are manifold. It plays a pivotal role in public safety, upholding high professional standards, and elevating the recognition and status of the social work profession. Licensure signifies that social workers have met essential qualification criteria, assuring the public of services from qualified professionals. It also establishes a structured mechanism for addressing grievances and complaints while safeguarding vulnerable populations reliant on social work services. Furthermore, it empowers social workers to actively engage in decision-making and advocacy, utilising their firsthand knowledge of community needs. Notably, the absence of licensure in the Indian context may stem from differences in regulatory frameworks, educational systems, and historical development. Nevertheless, discussions regarding the potential benefits and challenges of licensure in India remain an evolving aspect of the social work field.

DSW

54.9% of the Social Work background students are not aware of the existence of DSW. 45.1% of the respondents know the course exist but are not sure about the career opportunities revolving around DSW.

A Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) is a high-level doctoral degree in social work that focuses on practical aspects like clinical practice, leadership, and applied research within the field. It's tailored for social work professionals aiming to excel in these practical areas. In contrast, a Ph.D. in Social Work emphasises scholarly and theoretical research, contributing to the academic and theoretical knowledge

in social work. Ph.D. graduates typically pursue careers in academia, research institutions, or policy development. Both DSW and Ph.D. programs contribute to the profession but cater to different career goals, with DSW emphasising practical skills and leadership and Ph.D. focusing on theoretical and scholarly research.

Associations

The awareness of various social work associations among the respondents from Social Work background were studied. Notably, some respondents recognized well-established entities like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI), which are esteemed for their contributions to the profession. Additionally, some respondents mentioned educational institutions like MCC and TISS, highlighting their crucial role in social work education. However, the data also reveals a significant gap in awareness, with several participants expressing limited knowledge or confusion about specific associations. This underscores the importance of improving communication and information dissemination within the social work community in India to ensure that professionals and students have comprehensive knowledge of available resources and associations in their field.

In India, the growth of social work education and practice has given rise to several professional organisations dedicated to advancing the profession. Among these, the Indian Society of Professional Social Work (ISPSW), established in 1970, stands as one of the oldest and focuses on uniting social workers, fostering discussions, and promoting indigenous interventions. The Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI), formed in 1959, aims to strengthen social work education but operates on a voluntary membership basis. The National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI), founded in 2005, is non-profit and focuses on enhancing professional standards, education, research, advocacy, and resource development. Additionally, various regional associations address local needs. While recommendations for a National Council for Social Work Education have been made, it is yet to be established. These organizations collectively contribute significantly to the advancement of the social work profession in India.

Market Driven

68.5% of respondents have said that Social Work should be considered as a profession. 12% have straightforwardly said no for the same. 19.6% are not sure if Social Work should be considered as a profession or not.

The data highlights the role of the market and financial considerations in shaping perceptions of social work as a profession. Some respondents express doubts about social work's status as a profession due to concerns about income and financial stability. They suggest that the market-driven nature of many professions, where earning potential is a significant factor, may not align with the ideals of social work, which often prioritises service and community well-being over financial gain.

In contrast, others argue that social work's focus on societal issues and its commitment to addressing complex problems make it a legitimate and necessary profession, regardless of income potential. They contend that social work's value should not be solely determined by market forces but rather by its contributions to the betterment of society. Therefore, the varying perspectives on whether social work qualifies as a profession reveal the complex interplay between professional attributes, financial considerations, and the broader societal values that influence how social work is perceived.

Quality of Student intake

78.4% of the respondents feel there is a need for evaluating the students during their intake for the course, as it will highly impact in strengthening the profession and have provided their valuable suggestions as follows. Selecting students for a social work course necessitates a careful evaluation of multiple dimensions to ensure they are well-suited for the profession and capable of making a meaningful impact. It begins with assessing their passion, commitment, and understanding of the field, filtering out those unrelated to social work. An important aspect is their ability to work with diverse

populations and understand the communities they will serve. Descriptive examinations and a foundational understanding of social work principles further refine the selection process.

Considering candidates with a background in social sciences provides an advantage due to their existing social consciousness. Aligning with the purpose of working for the betterment of society and having awareness of career prospects in social work are vital indicators. Evaluating critical thinking through submitted papers on pressing social issues and weighing prior field experience and assignments related to social issues help in gauging their problem-solving abilities.

Interviews, academic performance, interest, willingness to learn and grow, possession of professional skills, service-oriented mindset, flexibility, empathetic thinking, and dedication are additional aspects to consider. Starting awareness and education about the profession at the school level can generate interest and attract candidates genuinely dedicated to the profession. These comprehensive criteria ensure that the selected students are not only academically qualified but also possess the essential qualities and dedication necessary for a successful career in social work.

Gender and Social Work

Social Work like teaching and nursing, has long been perceived as predominantly female. This perception is rooted in historical gender roles. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that despite the majority of women in social work, men often hold managerial positions within the profession. This is again due to the existing patriarchal structure in Indian society.

Williams (1995) sheds light on this phenomenon, describing it as a "glass escalator" for men in female-dominated professions. Men in such roles tend to benefit from preferential treatment during hiring processes, receive mentoring from male colleagues, and are actively encouraged to advance in their careers. Furthermore, men often carry their gender privilege with them when entering female-dominated fields, enjoying advantages despite their numerical minority (Williams, 1992).

Additionally, when examining wage disparities, data shows that the gender pay gap exists within health and social work, with men earning an average daily wage of 350.40 compared to women's 338.88, resulting in a wage gap of 11.52. This gap is particularly concerning as it has widened to 26% in healthcare, caring services, and social work (Sengupta and Puri, 2021). This gender pay gap reflects broader issues of gender inequality, including overrepresentation of women in low-paid positions and higher rates of intimate partner violence experienced by women. An egalitarian society can exist if and only if issues like these are addressed. Consequently, addressing gender inequality in society is not just a moral imperative but also a fundamental aspect of social work practice.

Social Work and Social Service

66.3% of the respondents have an understanding that Social Work and Social service is not the same but are not able to clearly distinguish between them. 16.3% of the respondents feel that both are same and 17.4% are not sure about the difference between Social Work and Social Service. The responses from individuals underscore a prevailing distinction between social work and social service. Social work is commonly regarded as a formal, professional field requiring specialised education, while social service is seen as voluntary work driven by personal interest. Payment and qualifications often differentiate the two, with social work often involving compensation and specialised degrees. Additionally, social work is considered to have a broader scope encompassing research, counselling, and policy development, while social service is viewed as more specific assistance within communities. Government and organisational involvement are associated with social service, while social work can exist both within and outside such structures. The motivation behind social work may include expectations or benefits, whereas social service is often driven by selfless altruism. These distinctions reflect the diverse perspectives on the roles and characteristics of social work and social service.

69.2% of the surveyed individuals express the belief that social work qualifies as a legitimate profession. However, it is noteworthy that despite this majority opinion, there exists a significant lack of comprehensive comprehension regarding this designation. Many perceive social work as a

profession primarily due to its association with a standardized curriculum or educational program, which they have heard about. Furthermore, respondents hold the perspective that the altruistic principles underpinning this profession could potentially be subject to misuse, thereby significantly compromising the core mission of the social work field.

SUGGESTIONS

Social work students have the potential to greatly strengthen the social work field through active involvement in community projects, advocacy, and reflective practice. They witness the positive impact of social work principles in action and can shape policies to align with these values. Advocating for updated curricula, practicing ethical principles, and emphasizing fieldwork equips them with practical knowledge, which they share with peers and communities to raise awareness. Engaging with professional associations and staying digitally literate enhances their capacity for positive change. Overall, social work students contribute significantly to the field by applying empathy, proposing innovative methods, volunteering, and raising awareness.

To strengthen the social work profession in India, the government can take several strategic steps. This includes formalising social work education with standardized curricula and accreditation, increasing public sector job opportunities in areas like education and community development, and establishing governmental organizations focused on social work. Investment in education and training, clear licensing standards, and a dedicated government department for social work are essential. Reserving positions for Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates, promoting awareness, and fostering practical exposure through community programs are crucial. Collaboration with NGOs, integrating social work into government offices and policies, curriculum revisions, faculty support, research promotion, regulatory bodies, and self-employment support all contribute to enhancing the profession's recognition and effectiveness, recognizing the valuable contributions of social workers to society.

Improving social work practices within NGOs in India involves prioritising impact, training, and ethical standards. Addressing root causes of community issues is vital for lasting change. Professionalism, policy advocacy, and meaningful internships enhance the social work sector. Collaboration, transparency, diverse hiring, and optimised funding are crucial. Education, skill application, infrastructure investment, and innovation are key to advancement. India should engage in international social work organisations and conventions to promote equality, human rights, and sustainable development, aligning with global commitments for social protection, decent work, and education while empowering local communities to engage with governments on social and welfare matters.

CONCLUSION

Social Work in India is at a critical juncture. To strengthen the profession, there is a need for standardised education, increased job opportunities, and governmental support. Collaboration with NGOs, curriculum revisions, and promoting awareness are essential steps. Additionally, social work students play a vital role in advocating for change and applying ethical principles in their practice. The social work profession in India has immense potential to address societal challenges and contribute to positive change. However, it requires concerted efforts from stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, associations, and students, to ensure its growth and effectiveness. Ultimately, the recognition and advancement of the social work profession in India hinge on a shared commitment to its core values and the well-being of society

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