

# **The Social Work Theory Social Work Essay**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social work practice enables disadvantaged people to develop their full potential and enrich their lives. It is complex and challenging profession. Social workers deal with a variety of clients from different ethnicity, age, gender, disability and social inequalities. Use of theories in social work practice gives it a strong knowledge base. They provide a way of thinking and knowing.

In this essay I will discuss the inter-relationship between theory and social work practice and theoretical paradigms in social work. It will then explain how theories shape social work practice and vice versa.

## **INTER-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Theories always help to improve the social functioning of individuals by helping social worker and clients to understand conflicting thoughts and feelings. They also help social worker to maintain a focus on interplay between the person and their environment. There are many theories from psychology, biology, sociology and economics that provide strong knowledge base to the social work practice. These theories are related to human development, personality, family system, socialization and organizational functioning. Depending upon specific issue social workers can apply relevant theories to practice.

Theory and practice work alongside each other in social work practice. Theories explain certain behaviours and guides through ways of changing troublesome behaviour. There are many theories that can be used by a social worker in practice. The theory used by social worker in relevant situation should provide social worker with a framework to understand and explain client's behaviour, generalize client's problematic areas, identify knowledge gaps and intervene. Theories help social workers to understand individuals and make sense of the situation by having a set of guidelines.

It is important to choose relevant theory as it directly influences on social workers approach to clinical practice. Theories work as lenses for social workers to describe and understand client and their world and facilitate insight to bring positive change.

Clinical social work practice is defined as social work theory and method to resolve and

prevent families, individuals, groups focusing on psychosocial challenges. Practice is based on human development theories and focused on inequalities faced by vulnerable clients.

A social worker with a strong theoretical background is able to practice in a distress, relaxed, confident and competent manner. There are many theories that give a variety of interesting.

### **THEORETICAL PARADIGM**

Theoretical paradigm is an image of society based on fundamental assumptions and guides sociological thinking and research. A social worker is a helper or a change agent employed to bring changes for betterment of an individual, families group or communities. They are expected to be knowledgeable and skilled in doing so (Zastrow, 2010). To make any decisions or to take any actions the social worker requires professional knowledge. Social work is practised in relevance to theories and perspective model. Social workers own experiences, personal and professional, values and believes contribute to identifying situations, analysing them using relevant theory and making decisions in practice.

Decision making in social work practice is based on social workers perspective model or theory .Perspective is a broad way of viewing human behaviour in relevance to its interaction with environment, strengths, weakness, values and believes .It is a holistic view of individual's behaviour . In order to be able to make any decisions they need to identify cause, analyse them to find solutions to the situations and decide.

The Ecosystem perspective has been in practice since 1970s in social work. It recognises the relationship between environment and individual. In social work practice it helps acknowledge the influence of environmental and situational on disadvantage individual families or groups. The strength based practice emphasis on individual's self-determination. Regardless of individual's environment they have certain strengths, wisdom and knowledge. This approach is client focused and for a social worker to become aware of them, they need to show client that they are genuinely interested in helping and bringing a change. Social workers belief in clients and their strengths can explore solutions and resources (Poulin, 2016) Social work practice is identified by two broad theories, Explanatory theory and Interventive theory. Explanatory theory explains factors that shape human behaviours and Interventive theory facilitates changes in human behaviours .Theories provide a generalised idea to understand human behaviours in different circumstance and facilitate change (Lehmann and Coady, 2011).

There are many theories available for social workers to refer to in practice. In certain situations some theories are more applicable and appropriate than others.

Psychodynamic theory views root cause of most problems faced by individual as unpleasant, frightening and painful experience as a child. The goal of this theory is to acknowledge unconscious mind and make it conscious. It helps client's to interpret and develop an insight to their past influencing their present. Whereas the cognitive behavioural theories views maladaptive behaviours to be learned. Problematic behaviours and thoughts are learned in past and can be changed through positive reinforcement and behavioural-cognitive therapies. Humanistic theory views problematic behaviours as a result of losing their touch with aspects of their experiences. Social worker needs to get these clients to awake themselves to their painful realities and bring new meaning to their life (Lehman and Coady, 2011).

Perspectives, models and theories guide social workers to practice efficiently and bring changes. Theories give direction and purpose to the social work practice.

### **HOW THEORY SHAPES PRACTICE, AND PRACTICE SHAPES THEORY**

Social work aims to improve societal conditions and functioning. They work in a dynamic work environment which is constantly changing and challenging. They need to acquire a framework to understand a context, its complexities and be able to provide solutions (Greene and Greene, 2013). Theories provide objectives to social worker in enabling people to make their social circumstances better. Theory informs day to day practice and help social workers see familiar patterns and regularities in practice. There are many theories that explain human behaviours and factors influencing it differently (Howe, 2013). Some theories such as psychodynamic theory views human behaviours as product of unconscious minds experiences in childhood whereas on the other hand behavioural theory disregards notions of unconscious mind and views human behaviour as a collection of actions that brought favourable consequences and were repeated.

A social work theory explains human behaviours objectively but human beings are self-defining as well as socially defined. Theories in social work practice are just like maps suggesting routes to destination but which route is most appropriate and how to get to the destination comes down to social worker and his/her practice skills.

Social workers have ethical and professional responsibility to assist disadvantaged individuals, groups or families in the best way possible. They observe, assess, interact and intervene with



individuals and their environment. Social worker's practice wisdom plays an important role in practice along with theoretical knowledge (Teater, 2012).

The wellness model given by Mason Durie views four dimensions that should be considered while working with Maori clients- the spiritual, emotional, physical and extended family dimension. When working with Maori client's social workers approach should be in relevance to the four dimensions and appropriate theoretical framework is applied (Working with Maori, nd).

Social workers assess evaluate and reflect on their own practice and the use of theories to determine appropriateness and effectiveness of various theories (Teater, 2012). Critical reflection in social work practice helps workers develop self-awareness and evaluate their own practice professionally and personally, it facilitates high standard of practice yielding favourable outcomes (Maidment and Egan, 2015).

Social work practice is based on systematic and evidence based knowledge from researches and by reflecting on one's own practice.

Different theories inform practice and are developed further and changed depending on practice outcome. Practitioners use a variety of theoretical perspectives relevant to clients or practice by blending several theoretical approaches (Maidment and Egan, 2011). Relation between theory and practice is considered to be reflexive. Theories play a significant role in social work practice but at the same time social work practice is not a slave to theory (Maidment and Egan, 2011). Theories shape practice and practice shapes theory.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Social work is a profession that works for betterment of society. It promotes wellbeing by empowering clients, families or groups. They recognise the complexity of interaction and influence on human beings and their environment. It is practiced on knowledge base provided by various psychology theories on human behaviour. Theories provide explanation on certain behaviours and guides on intervention to resolve problematic behaviour. Social workers deal with clients, families or groups from a diverse backgrounds and social inequalities. Their practice is based on generalised framework of understanding human behaviour given by various theories and social work practice models. Social work practice and theories work alongside each other and are inseparable and neither does one dominate the other.