



## CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic outbreaks have impacted the life of every citizen of India emotionally, economically and socially. The situation is intensely traumatic due to huge financial loss, loss of lives of dear ones and social crisis. At this time of emergency the role of social workers in managing the emotional needs and social needs of the people is inevitable required. The efficiency of social workers in the present scenario is highly questioned and so as the credibility of the professional discipline of the social work in India. It is essential to mould the education system and practices of social work according to the social needs of the people. In the post COVID scenario, the education system is definitely expected to be upgraded globally for the social welfare and the well being of the people and for the people.

**KEYWORDS :** Social work education, COVID-19, pandemic, social welfare

### INTRODUCTION:

COVID-19 is globally impacting unprecedented situation which has rapidly spread with no known cure till date. It is a human infection which is caused by SARS-CoV-2 originated in China and since then influenced many countries globally. World health organization (WHO) has considered the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 pandemic a global emergency.

In December 2019, Huang (2020) had stated that the first series of cases were encountered in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China which was earlier looked as acute respiratory illness of unknown origin. Further investigations by Lu (2020) revealed after the investigations that the acute respiratory illness was a consequence of infection by "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2" (SARS-CoV-2). On February 11, 2020 the infection was officially termed as corona virus (COVID-19) by WHO which was caused by SARS-CoV-2. WHO (2020) has updated that till 1 Nov 2020 the worldwide number of cases enrolled were 46,501,423 and number of deaths due to this pandemic were 1,202,031.

COVID -19 has influenced the mental and physical wellbeing of the population globally state by Ma (2020). The pandemic has definitely halt the economic and the social development to a major extent which is affecting the normal living of the general population. The government of every nation has allocated few important guidelines for the prevention and control of the infection. This pandemic situation is unique for the global population but every possible effort is been pursued to contain the infection and save as many lives as possible. As the pandemic has influenced the emotional, mental and financial aspects of the individual the role of social worker is inevitable.

Including the general population this pandemic has impacted the mental health of the warriors fighting for corona virus like health care workers, social workers and associate staff (Patrick, 2003). In these circumstances which are unique to all the social workers might need to face a lot of challenges which are recruited in the hospitals (Dane & Chachkes, 2001).

### Academic birth of social work education system in India

Social services practices were introduced in India with the vision of providing social services to the needy people by the voluntarily involved people. In 1905, Gopal Krishna Gokhale initiated the short term training of the social workers through

the servants of Indian society. Ranade (1987) suggested that social services can be established with the idea that a "missionary" approach is not solely sufficient for providing an effective social service in Indian based on the social condition. Therefore, the social service was initiated for those people who had interest in social service as a life time career. The motive for initiating training for social services in India was to deliver the knowledge of methods and techniques to the volunteers to perform the social welfare services. (Srivastava,1999).

### How established is the social work education system in India?

Social work education in India had faced a lot of challenges in terms of country's cultural, geographical, physical, social, ethnic and linguistic differences. This had put the social work education into challenging milieu in its journey to assure the well being of the people. The fact which has put forth the challenge is due to the fact that the social work in India could not contribute enough to bring forward the "Indianness" in its theory and practices (Francis, 2014)

Another challenge faced by the social work education in India was the way by which the academic curriculum is organized. As the present social reality a dual approach of "upstreamists" and "intervenists" was required that would reason out the causes and challenges in the existing system and also address the issue of immediate human needs and deprivations. These dual streams should work with the intention of providing well being for the people. Family centered social work intervention, rural social work and welfare services were not a priority in social work for many years.

A major factor that has played significant role in development of the social work education in India is the mushrooming of the huge numbers of institutions for the education prominently in the southern and the western regions of the country. Soon the social work education was commercialized in form of on campus, online and distant mode. But due to the lack of social work council the professional social work education and training in India was hindered.

Social work role in India is prominent in field like child health and well being services, mental health services an HIV/ AIDS education programs but in other fields the social work

education program needs to be upgraded as it has not been established in many fields like Medicine, law, dental, accountancy, nursing, rehabilitation and global emergencies of outbreaks of diseases.

### **Corona virus and role of social workers in India**

In India, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Delhi are among the hotspots of the coronavirus infection where the cases are touching the sky. The three preventive measures which should be strictly followed to contain the further outbreak involve the frequent hand wash, social distancing and constant wearing of mask in outdoors. These implementations become very difficult when the population is largely crowded with low socioeconomic conditions. Several of the family members live in limited space with poor water supply, sanitary conditions and food conditions.

Huge measures are been taken by the government at the physical level and micro level but impact of COVID-19 has traumatized the population where the people are facing loss of livelihood, financial crisis, depletion of savings, lack of hope of a solution in near future. The constant trauma and separation from the family members has made the people more vulnerable to anxiety, panic attacks, depression and other psychotic symptoms including the rise in numbers of suicide.

The aftermath followed by COVID-19 will be intense and serious as it has caused falling economies, unemployment, erosion of livelihood, serious mental health issues. The experience of COVID -19 has made people vulnerable to deteriorating mental and physical health which definitely needs intense psychosocial care.

Given the above scenario, the social workers/ counselors are crucially demanded that have to be in the forefronts along with the healthcare workers during disasters and pandemic. The social workers need to coordinate and provide the essential materials needed for the relief of the affected population.

A social worker or a counselor can definitely be approached as it is necessary to manage the well being and decrease the mental stress. The primary role of the social worker or counselor is to provide an extending hand to facilitate the access to medical services and social entitlements of the government and the civil society.

As the lockdown extended in the nation, which meant zero access to the non essential services that has kept the social workers and the counselors out of bounds. The people in the hospital are dying without the support of their loved ones and help which a counselor can provide. A mere presence, someone listening you or holding your hand can really make a huge difference to the people living in the lockdown phase, lying in the hospital or are in quarantine.

The role of a social worker in the pandemic is central and varies as in the different phases which are explained as follows by BASW (2020):

#### **From the beginning of the pandemic and ongoing**

- Sharing the information about minimizing the spread of the infection

#### **From the start and into recovery and reconstruction**

- Support and relief during the illness and their experience.

#### **As the early crisis eases, decrease in deaths and infection and the control measures are loosened:**

- Recognizing the emotional and mental trauma and provide emotional and practical support
- Dealing with pen up demand for social work services after school return, lockdown loosens and normalize behavior

### **Role of social worker practice in education sector in India**

The COVID impact is not only on the social and economic status of the nation but also influencing the education system worldwide. It has suppressed the education levels in most of the influenced nations and has forced the students to confine themselves to their houses. The role of social worker can be influential by providing their support to the educational committee to ensure the social protection of the students. Wholesome support is needed in this vulnerable situation for ensuring their social security and compliance.

In this situation caused by the COVID-19 it is essential for the social workers to act:

1. Efficiently through phone calls and video calls for the students and their families ensuring the support and to know their needs.
2. Efficiently in association with schools to support the teachers, students and families by providing different means of contact.
3. In exceptional situations by visiting their homes in person by using the necessary protection measures against the contagion.
4. Efficiently while following the good practices based on the professional deontology, law and ethics.

### **Is social work education system efficient for social workers to fight against COVID-19 pandemic?**

Every citizen of the nation is impacted significantly due to COVID-19 outbreak which has definitely given rise to chaotic traumatic situation. Financial losses, loss of jobs, social distance from the dear ones, stress and depression of being in lockdown leads to severe emotional, economical and social crisis. The people which are badly affected include the aged, poor, people with disabilities, migrants and daily wage workers.

In this pandemic the efficiency of social workers in dealing with this emergency and the credibility of the professional discipline were highly questioned.

Whether social workers are actually trained enough to deal with such global crisis?

Whether the social workers are trained enough to provide necessary interventions in such situations?

Due to lack of proper training and exposure the pressure was been reflected on government, police and medical personnel. Solomon Amadasun says, "Unless we expedite action to respond to the world's major challenges, our profession could continue to be called to question, first, by critics, citizens, and then our client-systems and ultimately ourselves". The social work education system is being questioned harshly which requires a proper roadmap towards reorientation of the system in the lines of Indian values, ethics and principles. The existing ideologies taught in the Indian universities to the social workers are proved insufficient in dealing with such pandemic.

The nationalist welfare societies and organizations in India are doing a remarkable job to ensure the social safety and social welfare of the poor and the needy section of the population. During the past disasters also the nationalist organization had done a pivotal role in management of the crisis and assuring the well being of the population. The notable organizations which had contributed majorly include Rashtriya Sewa Bharati, Vivekananda Kendra, Ramakrishna Mission etc. Their work and contribution were unfortunately not been documented in the literature for the reference of social work students to apply their initiatives, ideologies and practice models into practice of social work. Ultimately the social worker students are trained as per the European study models in India which is definitely not competent in the

situation of the country. Thus, it is essential to upgrade the education system of India social work as involve Indic human values to make the profession highly efficient in dealing with such adverse situations.

In the post COVID scenario, the social work order is surely expected to change globally. The slowdown of the economy of the India has drastically affected the social security and social welfare. The Indic model of social security is fulfilled with strong joint family system and kinship, temples, gurudwaras, mutts, civil society organizations and other such institutions as well as nationalist welfare organizations that are playing pivotal role during such crisis. Social work education system should incorporate such Indic human values in its routine curriculum as they are eternal universal values.

### Future perspective for development of social work education and practices in India

COVID-19 has shown gaps in preparation of the nation and the social workers for fighting against the pandemic in unison. The correct understanding of the role of social worker in such situation is mandatory which has been overlooked due to emergency crisis. It is definitely a great opportunity for this field to learn from this and assure the promotion of the role of social worker further in global emergencies like COVID-19.

Moreover, the role of social worker in such global emergency is inevitably very crucial and integral. Primary roles could be the spread of information to contain the outbreak and reduce the risk of infection. They could have a pivotal role in providing the direct support to the people and as many services as possible in the phase of lockdown.

The social work education and practices in India needs to revisited and realigned in the direction of need of the country based on the social requirement of the people of country. As these services are by the people and for the people of India, it is mandatory to upgrade the curriculum as per Indic values to secure the social needs and emotional needs of the people in such crisis.

### CONCLUSION

The present pandemic situation would surely revolutionize the social work education system and practices in the country as the present curriculum seem inefficient in fulfilling the essential requirements. The education system in India and all around the globe share monotonous approach which needs up gradation as per the individual values of each nation. It is essential to redirect the social work education system along with the emotional and social quotient of the people. Therefore, the need is really felt to break the chains of westernize education system of social work in India and built a holistic system for the people of India.

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