

SOCIOLOGY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

[Appreciating the Contribution of Sociological Knowledge for Social Work Practice]

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1.0 Introduction

The fact that social work is concerned with social change and problem solving is precisely why sociology is important to social work. Sociology offers important social theories and research findings, which provide explanations and critiques of human behavior, social actions and interactions as well as the institutions and the structures of society. Social workers are expected to plan their interventions which are evidence based and write their reports in a coherent way, justifying it using theory and research. The main focus of this paper is to highlight and appreciate the contributions of sociological knowledge for social work practice.

2.0 Understanding sociology

Sociology is one of the most popular courses in the field of social sciences which focuses on the study of the structure, developments, and functioning of human society. In doing so, it involves the study of community or societal issues also known as social problems or challenges. In other words, sociology can also be better explained as an academic discipline dealing with the study of the society as a whole, with patterns of social relationships, social interaction and culture of the day-to-day interactions

of people. While studying human society as a social science discipline, it also takes careful considerations of their interactions and the processes that preserve and change society as a whole.

Sociology is an exciting and illuminating field of study that analyzes and explains important matters in our personal lives, our communities, and the world. At the personal level, sociology investigates the social causes and consequences of such things as romantic love, racial and gender identity, family conflict, deviant behavior, aging, and religious faith. At the societal level, sociology examines and explains matters like crime and law, poverty and wealth, prejudice and discrimination, schools and education, business firms, urban community, and social movements. At the global level, sociology studies such phenomena as population growth and migration, war and peace, and economic development.

Sociologists emphasize the careful gathering and analysis of evidence about social life to develop and enrich our understanding of key social processes. The research methods and theories of sociology yield powerful insights into the social processes shaping human lives and social problems and prospects in the contemporary world. By better understanding those social processes, we also come to understand more clearly the forces shaping the personal experiences and outcomes of our own lives. The ability to see and understand this connection between broad social forces and personal experiences is what C. Wright Mills called “the sociological imagination”.

Sociology offers a distinctive and enlightening way of seeing and understanding the social world in which we live and which shapes our lives. Sociology looks beyond normal, taken-for-granted views of reality, to provide deeper, more illuminating and challenging understandings of social life. Through its particular analytical perspective, social theories, and research methods, sociology is a discipline that expands our awareness and analysis of the human social relationships, cultures, and institutions that profoundly shape both our lives and human history.

3.0 Understanding Social Work

Social work is basically a value based and practical oriented profession which is concerned and deals with helping and supporting people of various gender, groups and community who have different challenges and problems. In other words, social work can be further elaborated as a practice-based profession that concerns itself with individuals, families, groups, communities, and society as a whole in an effort to meet basic needs and enhance social functioning, self-determination, collective responsibility, optimal health, and overall well-being. The work of social workers spans over a variety of things supporting people either as a community or individually to overcome their social problems and to live comfortably in their environments.

Social work seeks to enhance the social functioning of individuals, singly and in groups, by activities focused upon their social relationships which constitute the interaction between man and his environment. These activities can be grouped into three functions: restoration of impaired capacity, provision of individual and social resources, and prevention of

social dysfunction. Certainly, the main focus of the social worker is on helping people improve their social functioning, their ability to interact and relate to others.

4.0 How Sociology and Social work related to each other

Sociology and social work are both interested in people, their interactions, and understanding these interactions. The sociologists are particularly concerned about the **how, when, and why** people behave as they do in association with others. They aim to pinpoint the social problems, conduct research, and do everything possible to understand interaction in human associations. The sociologist is particularly interested in the why of human interaction.

Social workers are interested in understanding people and how they behave in association with others; they are particularly concerned about helping these same people solve the problems they have and improving their social functioning. Whereas Sociologists generally spends most of their time in study and in hunting out the facts, social workers try to understand the client or the community, to make an appropriate diagnosis, and to proceed with treatment, thereby helping solve the problems and change the situations to bring about better adjustment.

5.0 The contribution of Sociology to Social Work Practice

5.1 Sociology study how humans interact with each other and how their environment works. Sociologists study the human society and social behavior through research of groups, cultures, and also institutions. They engage in detailed research projects, often using statistical and other

methods from the social sciences including interviews, surveys and observations in the field. Social Workers use sociological and psychological knowledge to understand and to solve the problems.

5.2 All social work activity is influenced by the society in which it takes place. It is therefore inescapable that understanding sociology should help social workers to make a more effective contribution to people's welfare. The different perspectives which constitute sociology are examined and the ways peoples' lives are powerfully influenced by social forces and 'social problems'. It is argued that sociological knowledge helps social workers to examine their assumptions and value judgements and develop their capacity to be questioning and discriminating about their methods and the policies which affect them and their clients.

5.3 Sociology as branch of social science focuses on understanding human behavior in social settings. Social work focuses on helping clients dealing with barriers to their pursuit of well-being from individual, group and society level from crisis intervention, remedial, prevention, policy and education. For sure, sociology provides an understanding of the relationship and interaction among individuals, groups, community and society and how they affect each other. These sociological information serves as building blocks of social work intervention strategies.

5.4 Knowledge of sociological theory and research helps social workers recognize the contextual and community factors that affect their clients' lives and behaviors. Without an understanding of how the social environment conditions peoples' responses to their situations, social

workers would be left with partial, individualistic explanations that are unhelpful in understanding what is going on, what needs to be addressed in peoples' behaviors and how to address those issues.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, sociology offers social work the opportunity to explore meanings beneath taken-for-granted assumptions about behaviors, action and social structure. It offers a knowledge and value base which is not rooted in individual pathology but instead seeks to understand individuals in the context of the broader structures which make up their lives (including social class, gender, age, 'race' and ethnicity) and the historical moment within which they are living.

Sociology also offers critical, reflective tools for social work practice. Sullivan (1987) describes these as three-fold: 1 the ability to take on the role of the outsider; 2 the skills of disengaging from our own existential concerns in order to better understand the phenomena we are observing; 3 the ability to place the phenomenon confronting us in the context of the social and economic as well as in the context of the individual and family.

Further readings

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