Social Work in Correctional Settings

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Introduction

Social Work is a fast developing profession. Its focus is on the interaction between individuals and systems in the social situation. Individuals are dependent on systems for help in obtaining material or emotional resources, services and opportunities they require to actualize their aspirations and to help them cope with their life tasks.

It has been asked by many whether principles of social work are applicable in correctional settings. The answer is in the affirmative, so different methods of social work, like casework and group work are applicable in correctional institutions besides probation and parole. There are restrictions, which the correctional settings impose upon the delinquent or criminal. Yet, if the correctional experience is to be useful one and social worker’s service a genuine helping, these limitations must be easily dealt with. Therefore, social work principles, based upon an understanding of the dynamics of the helping process, hold great promise for useful service in correctional settings.
Characteristics of Social Work in the Context of Correction

According to the Social Work Curriculum Study, “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. The activities can be grouped into three functions: restoration of impaired capacity, provision of individual and social resources and prevention of social dysfunction.” Hence, social work is a discipline, which takes preventive and remedial action on problems in several areas of society. It helps families in economic or emotional difficulty. It works in medical, and school situations. It seeks to correct the causes underlying delinquency and crime. The three functions of social work, restoration of impaired capacity, provision of individual and social resources and prevention of social dysfunction, are intertwined and interdependent.

Restoration can be curative or rehabilitative. Its curative aspects are to eliminate factors, which have caused breakdown of functioning, and its rehabilitative aspects are to organise and rebuild inter-actional patterns. Provision of resources can be developmental and educational. The developmental aspects are designed to further the effectiveness of existing social resources or to bring to full use the personal abilities for more effective social interaction. The educational aspect is structured to make familiar the public with specific conditions and needs for now or with changing social resources.

Prevention of social dysfunction involves early discovery, control, and elimination of conditions and situations, such as delinquency and crime, which potentially could
hamper effective social functioning. The two main divisions of prevention of social dysfunction are prevention of problems in the area of interaction between individuals and groups and secondly the prevention of social ills.

The underlying assumptions of social work in the context of corrections are:

1) Social Work, like all other professions, has problem solving functions and hence, it can help offenders in their treatment and rehabilitation.

2) Social Work practice is an art with a scientific and value foundation and, hence, correctional work is professional in nature.

3) Social Work as a profession came into being and continued to develop because it meets human needs and aspirations recognized by society. Hence, it assumes some of the socialization and control functions of society and helps the offenders to reshape their behaviour.

4) Social Work practice takes its values from those held by the society of which it is a part. However, its values are not necessarily or altogether those universally or predominantly held or practiced in society and hence, it emphasizes in treatment and rehabilitation of the offender.

5) The scientific base of social work consists of three types of knowledge:

   a) tested knowledge,

   b) hypothetical knowledge that requires transformation into tested knowledge, and
c) assumptive knowledge (or “Practice wisdom”) that requires transformation into hypothetical and then into tested knowledge. The correctional social worker uses all three types of knowledge, and carries a professional responsibility for knowing, at any time, which type of knowledge he is using and what degree of scientific certainty is attached to it.

6) The knowledge needed for social work practice is determined by its goals and functions and the problems it seeks to solve and, hence, they are applicable in the administration of correction.

7) The internalization of professional knowledge and values is a vital characteristic of the professional social worker, since he is himself the instrument of professional help and he helps the offender to change his behaviour.

8) Professional skill is expressed in the activities of the social worker. It constitutes his artistic creation, resulting from three internal processes: first, conscious selection of knowledge pertinent to the professional task at hand in order to help the offender; second, fusion of this knowledge with social work and correctional values; and third, the expression of this synthesis in professionally relevant activity to administer correction and to modify offending behaviour.

These assumptions constitute commitments for the social worker. It also means that the functions assigned to social work by society represent a two-fold responsibility. The first is to determine the professional activities through which it seeks to reach its socially approved goals and modify them as necessary in the light of changing social needs. The second is to exercise
discipline and control over practice that would keep its professional accountability. A problem developed in the area of social interaction, whether raised as a problem by the individual or by a group in the community, calls for the professional services of the social worker.

In correction, Social Work not only helps individuals, groups and community to solve problems, but also assists them to prevent offending behaviour and enrich daily living. So, the main focus of the social worker is upon helping people to prevent and control crime. The social worker usually works with clients on a conscious level, helping them to face realities and solve problems in preventing and controlling offending behaviours.

In correction, Social Work is an art because it requires great skills to understand delinquent and criminal behaviour. It is a science because of its problem-solving method and its attempt to be objective in determining delinquent and criminal activities and in developing principles and operational concepts to deal with delinquency and crime. It is a profession because it encompasses the attributes of a profession in dealing with offending behaviour.

**Values of Social Work in Correction**

Social work values are basically the values of democratic societies, which are mainly the worth of the individual, the inherent dignity of the human person, society's responsibility for contributing to the common good, etc. For the National Association of Social Workers, the following six values are listed basic to the practice of social work:

1) The individual is the primary concern of this society.

2) There is interdependence between individuals in this society.
3) They have social responsibility towards one another.

4) There are human needs common to each person, yet each person is essentially unique and different from others.

5) An essential attribute of a democratic society is the realization of the full potential of each individual and the assumption of his social responsibility through active participation in society.

6) Society has a responsibility to provide ways in which obstacles to this self-realization can be overcome or prevented.

These values are verifiable observations. When values are focused on ultimate assumptions about man and what is desirable for him, it becomes obvious that relatively few basic values exist. So the primary values of social work are:

1) Society has an obligation to ensure that people have access to the resources, services and opportunities they need to meet various life tasks, alleviate distress and realise their aspirations and values.

2) In providing societal resources, the dignity and individuality of people should be respected. All other values in social work originate from these primary values and contribute to the achievement of goals based on the primary values. The values dictate ways in which the worker should interact with others in carrying out his professional activities so as to actualize the primary values.

Knowledge of social work may be enhanced by consideration of some of its distinguishing characteristics. Social work stresses on the total person
Social work uses six basic methods. Among them casework, group work and community organisation are known as the primary methods. Social Welfare Administration, Social Work Research and Social Action are the secondary methods. All these methods are applied in correction in varying degrees. Casework involves a close face-to-face relationship, mainly on an individual basis in working with people and their problems. Group work utilizes the group as the tool to bring about desired changes in social functioning with troubled persons. Community organisation is the inter-group approach towards facing and solving social problems.

The worker-client relationship is the key in the social work process in correction. The social worker attempts to make it possible for the client to face and change his offending behaviour through this warm, accepting and understanding relationship.

In social work, four fundamental activities can be distinguished: assessing the problem, planning for solution of the problem, implementing the plan and evaluating the outcome. Assessment of the problem, such as delinquency and criminal behaviour, requires various evaluative steps, logically consecutive, but in practice, synchronized. In the light of this assessment, a plan of action must be structured. Implementing the plan involves rendering all the specific and interrelated services appropriate to the given problem situation in the light of the assessment and planning. Finally, evaluation determines the effectiveness of service in
the light of the expected outcome formulated as part of the planning activity.

**Correctional Settings and Task of Social Workers**

To deal with officially identified delinquents and criminals, every democratic society has created a system of correctional agencies. These agencies have been given the task of administering the penalties assigned to delinquents and criminals. These agencies are expected to protect the community during the offender’s period of supervised status by controlling his behaviour. Furthermore, they are expected to help the offender, so that he can return to normal status, better able to be a constructive member of the community.

Probation and Parole are the two main agencies in the correctional system. Different kinds of correctional institutions are as follows:

- Prisons
- Borstal Schools
- Schools for Juvenile Delinquents
- Remand/Observation Homes
- Beggar Homes
- Reception Centres, Protective Homes
- State Homes, Probation Hostels

The nature of the penalties, which these agencies administer, is essentially that of a handicapped personal and social status. This period of down-graded status is spent under supervision either in an institution or in
the community under the guidance of a correctional
social worker.

The handicaps inherent in this status include:

- Loss of certain civil rights, such as voting, rights to
  enter into certain contracts, etc.
- Loss of liberty
- Restrictions on mobility
- Restrictions on privacy: i.e., the offender must keep
  in contact with the supervising officer and must
discuss most aspects of his basic social adjustment.

In correctional agencies, social workers may be known
by such titles as classification officer, treatment worker,
caseworker, group worker, diagnostic clinic worker,
house master, etc. Among these, in the social treatment
point of view, caseworker and group worker stand out
prominently. It is characteristic of the social work task
in the correctional setting that the worker may need to
engage the administration in identifying needed services
and in reformulating job description, so that the
correctional setting may benefit from a fuller use of
social work skills.

Social worker’s specific main tasks in correction are as
follows:

1) Act as the officer of the court or other quasi-judicial
   body to investigate and report about the offender
   and his social situation, contributing the results of
   such social observations in an appropriate and
   meaningful way to the making of legal decisions.

2) Supervise the client’s social activities in such a way
   that violations of the conditions of his status and
his success in meeting conditions are perceived and can be reported.

The general control plan provided in the status is individualized according to the client’s need for constructive social control.

Controls are provided by the social worker in such a way that the client is supported in viably conforming behaviour and inner growth toward self-control is stimulated.

3) Help the involuntary client to handle the stress produced by the law enforcement and correctional process constructively.

Become motivated to ask for and use help in the modification of delinquent and criminal behaviour.

Modify his behaviour in the direction of increasingly viable conformity with social expectations.

4) As the formal authority person in the delinquent or criminal’s life, work with either authorities associated with the client (parents, teachers, employees, social agencies, institutional personnel) in such a way that:

The problems of these authorities with the delinquent or criminal are alleviated.

The activities of the authorities support the delinquent or criminal’s efforts towards satisfactory behaviour.

The delinquent or criminal is more soundly linked with the resources of his groups and his community.

5) Administer a case load or group load in such a way that:
The social worker’s decisions are appropriate and responsible.

The decisions of other personnel in the administration of criminal justice are respected, implemented, and appropriately influenced by the social worker’s knowledge.

The necessities of legal and administrative deadlines are observed.

6) Enact a role in a multidiscipline agency involving shared decisions and teamwork obligations in partnership with:

- Personnel from other professions,
- Personnel in the same role as his, but with other educational backgrounds,
- Personnel with sub-professional assignments and backgrounds,
- Personnel from other agencies in the administration of criminal justice,
- Personnel in other agencies who have served the delinquent/criminal or will do so in the future.

7) Take a responsible part in the social change of the correctional institution and in the development of the field of service of the correctional institution, contributing from his professional knowledge and experience to the determination of policy.

8) Contribute to developing professional knowledge of social work in corrections.

The social worker helps the offender to change his offending behaviour, therefore he can relate
constructively to others and become socially acceptable. This is done through working with the individual to help him to change through better understanding of himself and by tapping his own strengths and resources; and through modification of his environment to bring about a more healthy social climate in which he has to live. The social worker encourages the offender to talk about his problems, to feel about them, and to come to an insightful understanding of himself, accompanied by socially constructive behaviour.

The tasks of the social worker in corrections include four particular aspects:

- Investigation for the purpose of securing information about the client's failure or success in meeting the obligations of his legal status.
- The use of controls to modify client's behaviour.
- Acting as a legal authority in the client's life with responsibility for value change.
- Correctional decision making.

Working with offenders, all these are important, especially when helping them to adjust better to society. The correctional social worker's most important task is to change the values and behaviour of the offenders, so that they begin to accept the values of the particular community. Therefore, social worker's aim is to help the offender, not to punish him. The goal is to utilize the knowledge and skills of the profession in a corrective manner, to rehabilitate the offender, to help him to help himself, so that he can return to and become a part of his society and to lead a constructive life.

The professional worker, who would be effective in work with delinquents and criminals in the correctional caseload, will require:
Knowledge of:

Delinquent and criminal behaviour as one form of deviance.

The Psychological and social strains, which, in various constellations, press individuals towards such behaviour.

The body of techniques, which is learned by the offender in order to commit offences and to protect himself in dealing with community authorities.

The diagnostic approaches now in use and the problems inherent in applying them to the correctional caseload.

Skills in:

Identifying the social as well as psychological strains effective in the causation of offending behaviour.

Modifying the offender’s environment, so that strains toward conformity are substituted by those, which press toward criminal deviance.

Attitudes of:

Acceptance of delinquent and criminal deviants without condoning anti-social behaviour Scientific interest in the contributions of social structure to causation and treatment as well as in psychological determinants.

Readiness to work experimentally and without undue discouragement in a field where present knowledge is limited, prognosis is uncertain, and failures frequent.

These knowledge, skills and attitudes help the professional social worker to deal more effectively with the offender, i.e., for the reformation and rehabilitation of the offender.
Next is the specific functions of the correctional social worker. He helps to strengthen motivation of delinquents and criminals. Through talking with them sympathetically and understandingly, the social worker aids them. The correctional social worker allows the offenders to ventilate their feelings. Most offenders need to share with someone, in confidence, their inner feelings, their fear and frustrations, as well as their hopes and aspirations. In correctional settings, the social worker provides a safe emotional climate in which offenders can express and verbalize them.

The social worker provides needed information to offenders in correctional settings. By giving information, the probation and parole officer can help offenders to make decisions. The probation officer does not make decisions for the probationers, but he helps them to consider rationally, their problems and the alternatives which they have.

By defining situations and problems, the social worker helps the offender. He assists the offender not only in thinking about a problem, but also in feeling about the situation. The social worker also assists the offender in modifying his environment. With his knowledge of community resources, the social worker is able to help the offender and his family to tap different kinds of financial and social resources to meet their needs.

Reorganising behaviour patterns of the offender is an important function of the correctional social worker. This also includes helps for sexual deviants, chronic alcoholics and drug addicts and those who have deep personality problems.

Facilitating referral is another important function of the correctional social worker. Referral may be made to a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, school teacher,
physician, lawyer or other professionals, who may help the offender with a particular problem. The social worker's comprehensive knowledge of the community resources is used to advantage in making referrals.

**Social Casework in Correctional Settings**

In correctional settings, improvement of social functioning is achieved by means of mobilizing the capacities within the offender. The mobilization of inner capacities and environmental resources is accomplished primarily through the relationship between the caseworker and the client. The relationship, which is established during the period of treatment process, enables the client to work towards a constructive solution of his problems.

Social casework is an art in which knowledge of the science of human relations and skill in relationship are used to mobilize capacities in the individual and resources in the community, appropriate for better adjustment between the client and all or any part of his total environments. So, casework is the process of dealing with the individual case. It is concerned with the individual in relation to his social environment and aims at his successful adjustment.

A professional casework relationship is one that enables the client to express facts, attitudes and feelings with a guaranty that the worker's response will be geared to the client's need, not to the worker's need. The caseworker is responsible for facilitating communication, both verbal and non-verbal, without which no relationship can be established and developed. This relationship is connected with the treatment process.
The two types of casework treatment currently used in correctional settings are the supportive treatment method and curative treatment. The former requires the use of a number of techniques that help the client to improve his functioning within the framework of his established ego mechanisms of defence. The latter requires the use of different techniques that help the client to improve his functioning through modification of selected ego mechanisms of defence. The outward form of the client’s behaviour and selected internal process are modified.

In correctional institutions, caseworker keeps the relationship a realistic one, using the possible elements in the relationship to motivate and influence the client towards a maximal solution of his problems. Thus, in the correctional settings, the caseworker’s activity in respect to motivation is directed towards reducing the strength of factors inhibiting the client’s use of help, towards identifying and utilizing the constructive motivating forces that the client has already developed. This is for the purpose of adaptation and mastery and towards offering opportunities that may induce constructive motivation, where it does not exist.

In correctional settings, the social caseworker attempts to establish a relationship which, over a period of time, frees the individual to express his feelings, muster his ego strength, change his anti-social values and become a law-abiding citizen. Thus, relationship is the core of social caseworker’s contribution, along with the use of community resources. It means that the caseworker accepts the client, understands and respects him. The client gradually develops feelings towards the caseworker, and shares his ideas, emotions, and worries. Then, through a bond of warmth and support, changes are effected. The caseworker is non-
judgemental, sensitive to the needs of the offender, and conveys a feeling of respect for the integrity and individuality of the offender, regardless of his criminal conduct.

The helping process depends upon a relationship between worker and client within which the client may, if he is able and willing, be encouraged to ask, receive, and use help in clarifying his own wants and purposes, in relation to the resources available to him and in mustering his own powers to achieve his chosen ends. In many instances, the offender is likely to express his needs about concrete situations, such as the way he left things at home, or the job he left behind, or some details of institutional life, such as change of work assignments, or living quarters, or a suspected discrimination against him in privileges. The basis of the client’s complaints may be real and may furnish a specific issue upon which the caseworker and the inmate of a correctional institution can work together. But casework with offenders is not primarily concerned with the individual offender as a separate entity apart from his surroundings. Nor is casework primarily concerned with the social environment and its improvement. Casework, however, has a general interest in both the offender and the environment, since its goal is to find a means of adjustment and an equilibrium between the two. For the successful accomplishment of this task, the caseworker must understand the offender, his capacities and abnormalities and he must know the social situation, its resources and dangers. Furthermore, his knowledge must be broad enough to go beyond the offender involved and embrace the scientific principles, which lie at the back of personality development, behaviour, and the social forces, which govern family and community.
There are five basic assumptions underlying casework, which are applicable in helping the offender:

1) Every individual must be seen as a person of dignity and worth.

2) Behaviour, whether acceptable or unacceptable to the community, expresses a need of the individual.

3) An individual can and will change his behaviour if the right help is given at the right time and in the right amount.

4) If the offer of help is given before the problem becomes seriously aggravated, the response is likely to be better.

5) The family is the most influential force in the development of personality in the crucial early years. The emphasis in casework varies from case to case, since the cause of maladjustment may lie primarily with the individual, or with the environment, or in some combination of these personal and social factors. The casework may be directed at strengthening the personality, in order to increase the capacity and understand the offender. This is true, for instance, in the case of those who suffer from nervous and emotional disorders, from frustrations and conflicts, which prevent successful adjustment in any situation. In other cases, the emphasis may be directed at the change or enrichment of the environment, to eliminate harmful conditions and make use of helpful resources. This is true, for example, in the case of children who live under conditions in delinquency area, where adjustment is difficult for even the most normal type of personality.
In attaining both immediate and ultimate goals, three fundamental processes are seen interplaying at every point, the use of the resources, assisting the offender to understand his needs and possibilities; and helping him to develop the ability to work out his own social programme through the use of available resources. Therefore, casework is a joint action in which both the caseworker and the offender take part and in which, they develop a definite relationship.

In correctional settings, casework has been in use over a considerable period of time, especially in relation to probation. In other correctional settings, especially in institutions, not only is casework a later development, but it is very difficult to apply. The prison or Borstal School programme is one of mass treatment and often casework is neglected.

**Social Group Work in Correctional Settings**

Group work with delinquents and criminals is often seen as a powerful technique for modifying behaviour and attitudes. Although demanding and sometimes complex, group work is based on some rather simple and well supported observations about how people grow and interact. Social group work is a method of rendering service to persons, through providing experience in groups. Development of the person towards his individual potential, improvement of relationship and social functioning competencies, and social action are recognized as purposes of social group work. The worker functions within a framework of ethical and social values. In social group work, the worker helps members and group to use their abilities and strengths. The worker uses himself in different ways in relation to specific objectives. The group member and the group
are inextricably interrelated and the condition of each is bound to affect the other.

There can be three main reasons for the use of the group in treatment of the delinquent and the criminal:

- First, the dynamics of the offender himself.
- Second, the specific correctional setting in which he finds himself.
- Thirdly, the specific purpose for which society has put him into the correctional setting.

There is a phenomenon appearing in the delinquent, which shows that one of his outstanding identification as well as support is the group. This phenomenon is certainly closely related to the age of most of the delinquents, since all adolescents seek their status far more in the group of contemporaries through closeness with adults. The use of the group work method becomes, therefore, essential because the delinquents can often not be reached otherwise. He must be approached in his own group with the security of the surrounding other delinquents. The purpose and goals of the group related to this understanding are many:

1) The strengthening of the security of the offender in the framework of the group, so that he does not feel alone and helpless, but also moves towards not being wholly dependent on it.

2) The strengthening of the offender’s independence by helping him to actually participate in group discussions, not to submit to a gang leader or a powerful sub-group.

3) The introduction of an adult who represents the values of a society they often reject, but who, because of his accepting attitude, represents adult
security and love. The delinquent can meet this adult in a group, while still feeling the support of his contemporaries and relating in different degrees of intensity. It also provides an opportunity of gaining satisfaction in the need for adventure and experimentation in various ways that are accepted by the society.

4) An opportunity to gain inner resilience and status within the group through accomplishment in activities accepted by the society.

In group work in correctional settings, the programme media should be varied. The group members must allow for outlet of hostility, and not reduce the group to unacceptable behaviour. Programme should allow, at times, for the individual need of withdrawal by letting a group member do something for himself without feeling guilty that he does not participate, but help him feel accepted by presence in the group.

Besides the help with outlet of feelings, a programme should include the opportunity for real achievement. It should strike a balance between more individual and more cooperative projects, according to the readiness of the group members. It must also allow for pure enjoyment and aesthetic satisfaction. In these days, the use of the group as a tool in correctional work has been recognized more and more. The guided group interaction technique can serve as a sort of spear-head around which many activities, can be organised in an effort to get at the inner life of the person.

**Social Workers in Police Departments and Courts**

In certain European countries, United States of America and in Japan, professional Social Workers work with the Police, especially in their youth bureaus. Social
workers help police to understand properly the delinquents whom they apprehend. They also help the police to develop a rehabilitative attitude rather than a punitive one.

Social workers play a major role with the police in trying to prevent delinquency and crime. Professional social workers generally believe in preventive aspect of delinquency and crime. The rationale behind this is that if more time and talent can be put into preventing anti-social behaviour in the first place, the society, as well as individuals and families will be much better off. With the help of the social worker, police work with delinquents in recreational activities and clubs to prevent delinquency and crime.

In India, professional social workers are attached to juvenile courts, performing the role of probation officers. They have various functions in the juvenile court. Conducting investigations to find out various causes and facts in a violation of law is an important function. A social worker can generally be objective and can secure a picture of the total situation that is helpful to the court.

In juvenile courts, the magistrate makes decisions based on the report submitted by the probation officer. Investigations are usually related to the delinquents, but most often, involve the family close relatives and other key persons in the lives of the accused.

Another important function of the social worker is to represent the court after the magistrate has made the decision. Probation involves regular interviews and contacts between the probation officer, who is the social worker, and the offender. The social worker tries to use his knowledge and skills to help bring about desired changes and modifications in the behaviour of the offender who is in probation.
Conclusion

Juvenile delinquency and crime are major problems of modern society. Social work has an important role to play in the control correction and prevention of delinquency and crime. Social work attempts to help the individual, his family and the community to face and solve delinquency and crime through the utilization of individual, family and community resources.

Casework, group work, and community organisation are the basic processes utilized by the social worker in correctional settings. The correctional social worker is given authority in order to change the way offenders (clients) express values in action. All social workers work with offenders in terms of values. More than any other function, the correctional social worker’s task is defined in terms of changing values of the delinquent or criminal, so that they become suitable in action with the values of the society.

The social worker helps, particularly the police departments, courts, probation, institutions, parole and prevention. Therefore, professional social work in correctional settings is a comprehensive constructive social attitude, therapeutic in some instances, restraining in some instances, but preventive in its total social impact.

References


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