**Lecture Notes for Chapter 1: The Social Work Profession**

What is Social Work?

Social work is a helping profession, similar to counseling, psychology, and other human services. Social work is different, though, and addresses issues of economic and social justice through advocacy for individuals, groups, families, organizations, and communities that face disadvantages. Social work requires an understanding of politics and power, and requires the ability to assess human needs and the environment. A degree in social work is needed in order to call oneself a social worker, and many social workers also obtain various licenses and certifications. The core values, competencies, and responsibilities of social workers have been identified by the National Association of Social Work and the Council on Social Work Education. Since social workers serve a diverse clientele, it is important for social workers to have knowledge of multiple cultures, beliefs, and social identities.

There are multiple options for social work education and careers. Employment opportunities vary depending on the level of education achieved, such as BSW, MSW, DSW, or Ph.D. Social workers can obtain employment in multiple settings, and growth is expected in future employment of social workers. In any field of social work practice, interventions are categorized on the basis of the level of practice, or size of the client system, including micro (individuals), mezzo/maso (families, groups, and organizations), or macro (communities and society). Unlike many other helping professions, social workers consider the environment of the client or client system.

The Professional Social Worker

* Requirements - a professional social worker is generally considered to be someone who has received a social work degree and has become certified or licensed by the state in which he or she practices. Some jobs do not require licensure or certification.
  + Educational – bachelors, masters, doctoral degrees
  + Certification and Licensure – requirements vary by state
* Many social workers have achieved historical prominence.
  + Jane Addams, Dorothy Height, Frances Perkins
  + Del Anderson (veterans), Bernice Harper (hospice), Dale Masi (EAP)
  + Some well known individuals who are not social workers have a social work background, such as Samuel Jackson, Alice Walker, and Suze Orman.

Social Work’s Unique Purpose and Goals

* The central concern of social workers is to help people live meaningful, healthy, and successful lives. Social workers help people secure both tangible items such as food, water, or shelter, and intangible resources such as emotional, economic, and social support.
* Comparison to Other Professions - People often confuse social workers with other human service providers. There is some overlap, but social workers, as generalist practitioners, incorporate knowledge from other fields to serve clients and communities.
* The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has identified four major goals for social work practice, with a fifth goal added by The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).
  + To enhance people’s coping, problem-solving, and developmental capacities
  + To link people with systems that provide opportunities, resources and services
  + To promote the effectiveness and humane operation of systems which provide people with resources and services
  + To develop and improve social policy
  + To promote human and community well-being

Social Work and Human Diversity

* Social workers interact with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultivate an appreciation of human diversity. Some factors that influence values and beliefs include family, spiritual beliefs, culture, norms**,** race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, as well aslife stage, socioeconomic status, ability, and disability. These factors can lead to issues of social injustice and discrimination. Social workers advocate for justice and human rights for all people
* Intersectionality refers to the entirety of a person’s dimensions of difference and social identities. Most diversity includes a complex range or intersection of issues, not simply one.

Theory and Practice

* Social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior; of social, economic, and cultural institutions; and of the interaction of all these factors. The social work perspective emphasizes the importance of resilience, strengths, solutions, social justice, and safe, sustainable communities
* Social workers are committed to evidence-based practice, which means using a particular intervention for an issue, problem, or disorder based on the results of research.

NASW Code of Ethics and Social Work Values

The NASW Code of Ethicsserves as a social and moral compass to social work professionals. This Code has four sections--Preamble, Purpose/Overview, Ethical Principles, and Ethical Standards. The NASW Code of Ethics serves six purposes:

* Identifies core social work values
  + Competence
  + Dignity and worth of the person
  + Importance of human relationships
  + Integrity
  + Service
  + Social justice
* Summarizes broad ethical standards
* Identifies professional obligations when conflicts arise
* Holds the social work profession accountable
* Socializes new practitioners to social work’s mission, values, ethical standards and principles
* Defines unethical conduct and guides the ethical decision making process

Additional social work values include professional identity, self awareness, and advocacy (activities that secure services for and promote the rights of individuals, groups, and communities). Social workers are expected to know and care about clients’ environments. Awareness of clients’ environments is an important factor in the ability to advocate.

Social Work Education

* The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is the professional entity that accredits social work programs. CSWE has identified ten social work competencies that students in the discipline must acquire and demonstrate before they graduate.
  + Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.
  + Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.
  + Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.
  + Engage diversity and difference in practice.
  + Advance human rights and social and economic justice.
  + Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.
  + Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.
  + Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.
  + Respond to contexts that shape practice.
  + Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
* Social work degrees include a BSW, MSW, DSW, and Ph.D.
* Field work is required in order to obtain a degree. This provides an opportunity to practice skills learned in the classroom.
* After obtaining a degree, social workers may pursue a professional license or certification.

Social Work Practice

* Practice skills include assessing, strategizing, brokering, collaborating, intervening, linking, listening, and motivating, as well as an ability to pose alternative solutions, seek consensus, negotiate, and mediate.
* The social work profession’s dual purpose and responsibility is to influence social and individual change. Knowledge from a variety of disciplines, absorbed from formal classes and personal learning, helps social workers to assess complex situations and determine effective interventions.
* The main goal of social work is to empower people to grow and live healthy, productive, and meaningful lives. Social workers accomplish this purpose by working directly with people, organizations, and communities and by acting to change society. Most people who consider social work as their career choice do so because they want to help people and make a difference.

Multiple Practice Settings

* There are multiple settings in which a social worker can practice, including medical facilities, government agencies and non-profit agencies, corrections facilities, home health and long-term care settings, state and federal government, schools, community-based mental health agencies, faith based organizations, the military, veterans programs, corporations, and private practice.

Levels of Practice

Social work categorizes interventions on the basis of the level of practice, or size of the client system.

* micro – individual or couple
* mezzo/meso – family, group, or organization
* macro – community or society

Social Work as a Career Option

There is wide variety in social work income, based on level of education, type of social work, and employer. The expected growth rate for social work employment is higher than other occupations, with most growth expected in the areas of healthcare, mental health, substance abuse, and school social work.