**Lecture Notes for Chapter 6: Family and Child Welfare**

The definition of family has evolved over time and includes a diversity of family forms today. Families face multiple challenges, such as domestic violence, child abuse, and poverty. Social workers advocate for social legislation, policies, and social welfare programs to address the rights and needs of children and family members. In practice, social workers both assist with the day-to-day trials and tribulations of children and families, and identify ways to protect and advance their rights.

**Today’s Families**

The definition of what constitutes a family has changed. A family is a social unit containing two or more members. However, families can vary sig­nificantly by composition, complexity, and size. A family structure could or could not be based on **kin­ship**, which is common ancestry, marriage, or adoption. Traditionally, families were classified as a **nuclear family**, where one or more parents live with their dependent children apart from other relatives, or an **extended family**, where in addition to parents and children other relatives live in the same household or in close proximity.

**Diverse Family Forms**

* Divorce - In the United States, the probability of a marriage ending in divorce is between 40% and 50%. Divorce rates are lower for spouses with college degrees.
* Separation - Separated spouses maintain the legal status of being married. This is an important attribute with regard to medical insurance, taxes, and financial matters.
* Blended Families - A family unit with two married persons, children from previous marriages or relationships, and children (if any) from the newly formed marriage. Children often need to share time between two sets of parents.
* Single Parent Households - Single parents face challenges in caring for and financially supporting the children, however single parents having fewer everyday obligations and commitments to a spouse. Children in these homes often develop a sense of responsibility and independence at a younger age.
* Gay Marriage and Parenting - In 2004, Massachusetts was the first state to legalize gay marriage. Since then, many other states have passed legislation legalizing same-gender marriages. Other states legally recognize civil unions for gay and lesbian couples; civil union is a legal status that can be helpful with regard to child custody, family leave rights, and similar matters.
* Cohabitation - When two adults live together in a dwelling without legally formalizing their relationship through marriage, they are cohabitating.

**Family Problems**

Social workers intervene with various family-based problems and advocate for programs and policies that strengthen and enrich family functioning, and promote the rights and safety of children.

* Domestic Violence - a broad range of acts of violence (including assault, injury, rape) against family members. Domestic violence is typically an issue of power and control.
* Child Maltreatment – includes the abuse and victimization of children. Previously considered a private matter, it is now viewed as a public matter. Influences on this shift include professional organizations (social workers, nurses, schoolteachers, counselors, and legal advocates) bringing attention to the matter, and women entering the labor force in greater numbers who acquired newfound power to advocate for children’s rights.
  + **T**he practices, policies, and services put in place to promote child well-being and safety are generally referred to as child welfare. Child protective services,programs through which social workers, law enforcement personnel, and healthcare workers respond to reports of child maltreatment, are a key component in publicly funded child welfare agencies.
  + Types of child maltreatment
    - Physical abuse - hitting or punching, kicking, shaking, throwing, burning, choking, and stabbing.
    - Sexual abuse - engage sexually with a child or to exploit a child for sexual purposes. Examples of sexual acts include touching the genitals, engaging in sexual intercourse, penetrating the child, sexually exposing oneself to a child, and engaging in voyeurism if a child becomes exposed or is engaged in sexual acts.
    - Neglect – failing to meet a child’s basic needs, including physical, emotional, educational, and medical needs.
    - Psychological maltreatment – intentionally conveying that the child is worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or valued only in meeting another’s needs. Can include public embarrassment, verbal cruelty, intimidation, threats, and deprivation of love.
  + Social workers receive special training for detecting and documenting various forms of child maltreatment. They look for behavioral indicators of maltreatment, such as a child’s extreme passivity and withdrawal to avoid the attention and provocation of a caretaker.

**Child Welfare Services**

Public child welfare agencies typically serve large numbers of people, offer a variety of programs, and are less costly to clients. Public child welfare programs are often located in county-based departments of social or human services and include adoption, family life education, foster care, child protective, in-home family centered intervention, and residential services. Private child welfare agencies usually focus on specific problems and subpopulations, rely on pay for service, see fewer clients, and are less bureaucratic in nature.

* History of Child and Family Services –
  + Early 1800s - young children were often left alone to care and fend for themselves while their parents worked or sought work, sometimes traveling to the growing cities for work. By the mid-1800s government run institutions were being established to house abandoned and needy children.
  + Mary Ellen McCormack – victim of almost daily whippings and beating by her adoptive mother. Her case was brought to the attention of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, one of the only protective agencies in existence. Her case led to the creation of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) in 1874, which is believed to be the first child protective agency in the world.
  + 1960s - recognition of child abuse as a social issue occurred. Battered child syndrome was recognized as clinical condition, professionals were required to report cases of child abuse to authorities
* Parental versus Children Rights - Parents often assert the right to raise and discipline their children as they see fit. Some parents attempt to justify child maltreatment as a parental right.
* A Global Context for Child Protection – establishing widely shared definitions of what constitutes “abuse of children” is an ongoing challenge. Religious beliefs may include spanking.
* Key Child and Family Services
  + Child Protective Services – the “front lines” of child welfare, investigations
  + Family-Based Services – services designed to enhance and strengthen the family
  + Family Preservation Services – services to keep the family unit intact
  + Family Foster Care – children are cared for by a certified foster family
  + Family Reunification Services – enhance parental skills, address trauma
  + Adoption Services - permanent rendering of legal and parental rights
  + Residential Care – structure and stabilization in a non-family group setting
  + Independent Living Services – teenagers “aging out“ of family foster care services
  + Intensive Treatment – therapy and counseling in a non-residential setting
* Social Policy and Legislation Supporting Child and Family Services – services to children and families are typically mandated by state and federal laws. Sometimes legislators pass laws requiring services without providing the necessary resources. Examples of laws to promote child and family welfare include:
  + National School Lunch Program (1946) – free and reduced lunch for low income
  + Supplemental Social Insurance (1972) – children with disabilities plus low income
  + Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1974) – mandated reporting
  + Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975) – requires school services
  + Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996) - TANF
* Public Attitudes toward Services for Children and Families – there are two distinct viewpoints concerning social welfare programs and services.
  + Institutional or primary view of social welfare:Humans are inherently good but are confronted with challenging needs (for example, employment, healthcare, housing) and circumstances (unemployment, illness, divorce, loss of a loved one). Communities and society as a whole have a responsibility to help people by providing economic and social support services.
  + Residual or secondary view of social welfare: People, including the poor and down-trodden, should be responsible for their own lot in life and not expect government intervention. Social welfare programs should be limited to helping people only in the direst of situations and should only provide a safety net—that is, those services that spare people from perishing.
* Social Workers’ Attitudes Toward Child and Family Services - With the NASW Code of Ethics as a moral compass, social workers stay client-centered and resist imposing or reinforcing counterproductive belief systems concerning children and families. A large part of the social work belief system is belief in client self-determination and the inherent dignity and worth of each person and each family.

**Social Work in Schools**

School social work emerged in American schools in eastern cities (e.g., New York and Boston) toward the beginning of the 20th Century to both address student needs and promote quality educational experiences. In addition to counseling troubled youth, school social workers intervene with family members, school officials, lawmakers, and community leaders to identify ways to enrich the social conditions and the circumstances for student success. National and state policy has promoted the credentialing of professionals in school settings, which has led in turn to certification, licensure, and advanced training for school social workers.

* Challenges Facing School Social Workers
  + Violence and Bullying - up to 41% of students in the U.S. have been involved in bullying at school, either as a victim (23%), bully (8%), or both bully and victim (9%). Social workers are often part of a team at school that develops and implements bully prevention programs.
  + Poor and Homeless Students – may arrive at school hungry and sleepy. These students are at great risk of poor school attendance and performance. They may adopt maladaptive behaviors, experience social and cognitive setbacks, and are prone to poor grades and high dropout rates.
    - McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act - allows homeless children to start school in a new place without all their previous school records, documentation of residency, and immunization records.
  + Students with Physical and Mental Challenges - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandates a variety of supports and services for these students.
  + Teen Pregnancy - interrupts attendance at school and extra-curricular participation.
* Improvements in Education to Help Parents and Children – Schools are funded with a combination of state and local tax dollars. Therefore, students living in affluent areas are able to attend highly sought after primary and secondary schools. Students living in economically disadvantaged areas, disproportionately from racial and ethnic minorities, are relegated to struggling school systems.

**Diversity and Family and Child Welfare**

* *Age*- Young children are especially vulnerable and dependent upon family members for affection and basic needs, including food, shelter, clothes, and medical attention.
* *Class-* Children living in economically challenged circumstances struggle with obtaining a safe living environment, quality childcare or schooling, proper nutrition, suitable clothing, reliable transportation, and other basics.
* *Ethnicity-* Members of a particular ethnic group also share values and expectations about individual behavior.
* *Race-* Despite decades of advocacy for desegregation, school systems in the United States remain segregated on the basis of race and social-economic status. The inability for all students to attend schools characterized by quality instruction, extra-curricular activities, and integrative support with family members is one form of structural discrimination and institutional racism that persists in the United States.
* *Gender-* Mothers often assume custodial responsibilities for the children. Women face unique and demanding situations and rely on child and family services for support in ways that often differ from their male counterparts.
* *Sexual Orientation -* Marital and parental rights for gays and lesbians are currently grounded in state law and amidst change. In part, this is a social justice issue involving the ability for parents and children to be treated the same regardless of the sexual orientation of the parents.
* *Intersections of Diversity -* It is not unusual for parents and family members to represent several types of diversity.

**Advocacy on Behalf of Families and Children**

During the 1970s, recognition of the need for child advocacy led to strengthening of the services and programs serving children and families. The child welfare advocacy movement advanced the following major themes:

* Child development is influenced by interaction with families and transactions with other social systems (e.g., schools, child care providers, courts, medical providers, and court systems).
* Society has a responsibility for and obligation to children.
* Child and family services are a matter of right and entitlement.
* Children have rights in relationship to the social systems affecting them.

It has taken many decades to implement the conceptual shift from rescuing and saving children from unfit parents to the development of comprehensive, integrated child and family services that support the healthy physical and emotional development of children and families.

* Current Trends in Advocacy for Child and Family Services - The contemporary social worker is moving away from viewing advocacy for children and families as mainly a social work responsibility toward viewing it as an interdisciplinary collaboration.
  + Children’s Advocacy Centers offer a seamless continuum of services to families entering the child protection team. They can decrease the trauma experienced by child victims of abuse and improve the efficiency of the investigative process.
* Dynamic Advocacy and Family and Child Welfare - For social workers involved and child and family services, the “best interest of the child” is a primary consideration. Cries for help can take a number of forms (e.g., acting out, bed wetting, withdrawal, pleading or frightened facial expressions, clinginess, and physical distance).
  + Social and Economic Justice – Guardian Ad Litem pro­grams appoint individuals to speak and advocate on behalf of children in court sys­tems. School social workers advocate for changes in policies, pro­grams, and personnel in educational systems to benefit students.
  + Supportive Environment – Residential location impacts access to extended family members, employment, public transportation, healthcare, education, daycare, social services, shopping, and recreation. Exposure to crime and pollution are also based on residency.
  + Human Needs and Rights – Children deserve the right to successful childhood development, and it is the social worker’s professional and ethical responsibility to pursue social change for one of society’s most vulnerable population groups.
  + Political Access – The availability of supports is a political issue, based on dominant belief systems. One way that social workers may advocate for more funding and resources is by becoming more involved in the political process

**Your Career and Family and Child Welfare**

When working with children and families, social workers may be protective service workers, information and referral specialists, therapists, or program professionals. In each of these roles, social workers collect information and rely upon data to inform best practices. Social work roles that require expertise in using date include:

* *Program evaluators* - provide information to help make decisions about the aspects of service programs that work best for children and families and the ones that need to be adjusted.
* *Advocates* and*educator* - educate the public, politicians, administrators, and other decision makers concerning the experiences and problems of children and families.
* *Community organizers* **-** gather and rally consumers of services, professionals, and community members to promote changes in policies, practices, and laws to address the needs of children and families.

All of these roles depend on the ability to use qualitative and quantitative research skills to collect and analyze information.

* **Qualitative research** - data that is descriptive in nature and not quantified into numbers, gathered through methods such as case studies, focus groups, observation, interviews, and archival research.
* **Quantitative research** - data that is converted into numbers and analyzed statistically, gathered through methods such as surveys and checklists.