

# ARTICLES

## Needs for Social Work Knowledge Development in India

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This article starts with clarifying the concept and need for social work knowledge and then examines the progressive ideologies that have influenced social work knowledge. While discussing the methodological developments in social work research, the author identifies the status of social work knowledge development in India. The author then moves on to discuss the need for social work publications, the need for social work library, issues with Internet for social work knowledge dissemination and retrieval and the need for utilization/application of social work knowledge. The article concludes with a summary of the gaps identified, to be filled by the relevant systems.

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### INTRODUCTION

According to Kears (2004), 'data' is defined as input gathered through the senses; and 'information' as integrated data, which denotes a significant change in the environment. Information is converted to 'knowledge' by interconnecting it with known concepts and skills as part of achieving a goal. 'Wisdom' is knowledge about knowledge. Knowledge facilitates predicting, adapting to, and controlling both physical and social phenomena and change. Application of knowledge yields expertise, and additional analytical or experiential insights are said to constitute instances of wisdom (Britannica, 2001).

Knowledge as an individual, organisational, and societal resource is stronger today than at any other time in history. However, knowledge does not exist objectively. The meaning, validity and use of knowledge depend upon the ideological perspective for development of knowledge. Knowledge reflects the dominant ideology in society and has the power to contribute to social transformation. It is,

therefore, a major social responsibility to ensure socially transformative knowledge development and dissemination. Such knowledge development is particularly important for a profession with social responsibility like social work at its core.

## **CONCEPT OF AND NEED FOR SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE**

### **Concept of Social Work Knowledge**

Mattaini (1995) made a case that though professionals and non-professionals may share similar values, it is knowledge that is the most distinctive aspect of professional practice. Since 1915, when Abraham Flexner concluded that social work was not a profession because it does not have a knowledge base, pursuit for professionalism has led social workers to work hard for a scientific knowledge base as well as specialised skills, techniques and functions. In fact, leadership of caseworkers in knowledge development on specialised skills is one of the main reasons that led to their subsequent dominance in the profession (Hopps and Pinderhughes, 1987). The question to be addressed is, what is social work knowledge.

In the Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India, Herlekar (1968) used the term 'social work literature' to include such literature which is related to or useful to social work. She grouped social work knowledge into three areas:

- knowledge provided by social sciences, an area concerned with the knowledge of human beings in society, of human growth and behaviour and social problems;
- knowledge of fields and programmes of social work, concerned with the organisation, administration and operation of social welfare programmes; and
- knowledge of social work practice, concerning the methods, processes and professional skills.

In the American Encyclopaedia of Social Work, Khinduka (1987: 686) defined the knowledge base of social work more specifically.

The knowledge base of social work is a composite of knowledge produced indigenously by social workers themselves and, predominantly, of that derived from other disciplines... By analysing and evaluating their own practice experiences and by selectively borrowing and adapting concepts from cognate

disciplines and profession, social workers have developed various approaches [of intervention].

In my opinion, when the various social sciences study social phenomena/ issues/ problems in its varied dimensions, it is imperative for a profession such as social work to 'base' its intervention on social science knowledge, and not just use it at the level of 'borrowing'. However, if social work intervention is based on social science knowledge, the base knowledge cannot be conceptualised as comprising social work knowledge. On the other hand, if all knowledge produced by social workers is to be included into social work knowledge, the substantive definition of what comprises social work knowledge becomes less important. Another conceptual mistake that takes place, in the Indian context, is to assume that all that is published in the journals of social work is social work literature. A study of articles published in *The Indian Journal of Social Work (IJSW)* by Vijayalakshmi, Devi Prasad and Rao (1996) showed that social work professionals (educators/ practitioners) wrote less than a third of the articles published in the IJSW from 1970 to 1990.

Social work knowledge may be conceptualised as knowledge specific to the social work profession. It then covers various aspects of the social work profession such as its origin and a history of development; its paradigms, values, goals and ethics; methods, practice and process of intervention; case records; research and knowledge building; education and training; curriculum plans; field instruction; specialisations; educators and students; employment and human power; professional associations; and so on. Thus defined, it may include literature developed by an author outside of the profession. On the other hand, literature developed on any social phenomenon by a social work professional, which does not draw any link with the profession, may not be considered social work literature.

According to Mattaini (1995), practice wisdom is knowledge passed on from generation to generation of social workers, sometimes as a form of oral tradition. Experienced social workers have, often, learned a tremendous amount that can be of value to others. Mattaini identified two types of practice wisdom:

1. Explicit rules that are handed down by experienced practitioners to others that appear to work; and
2. Patterns of professional behaviour which may or may not be articulated, that have been shaped and refined over years of practice and serve as models for other workers.

Social workers also base their work on their own life experiences, personal and professional. Mattaini (1995) cautioned that there were risks associated with a reliance on such rules. For example, accepted rules sometimes grow more from what works for the practitioner than what works for the client. It is, therefore, important for the social worker to constantly monitor whether approaches rooted in this body of knowledge contribute to meeting the clients' goals.

### **Need for Types of Social Work Knowledge**

The social work profession needs different types of knowledge for its different functions, of practice, policy planning and administration, research and education, and training. Social work practitioners need transformative knowledge to understand exclusion and the knowledge domain of people they work with and the knowledge needed for their inclusion. They need to update themselves with developments in the field that impinge upon their practice. Social work educators need to know the latest knowledge developed in order to update their curriculum and the recommended reading; students need to know what to read for their assignments and prepare for the examination; and social work researchers need to comprehensively know the state of art of research in the field. Thus, the needs for different types of social work knowledge are as follows:

- Information on social work, welfare and development;
- Social work research;
- Organised social work knowledge for practice, policy planning and administration, education and training and research; and
- Bibliographic resources on social science, development studies and social work literature.

### ***Information on Social Work, Welfare and Development***

The following may be the main types of information on social work, welfare and development that social work professionals need to have access to:

- Directories of voluntary organisations, professional associations, international organisations, and academic institutions
- Policies, schemes and reports of relevant ministries, departments and commissions of the Central and the State Governments
- Indian Constitution, social legislations and human rights instruments

- Newsletters of social work professional associations for updates and reviews of social work education and practice
- Newsletters and bulletins for updates and reviews of voluntary work and government laws, policies and schemes, and so on.

### *Organised Social Work Knowledge*

Any literature can be considered knowledge only when it is cumulatively organised to link new literature to previous ones and to theories. This linkage could be in the form of application, adaptation, elaboration or critique. The social work profession has to base its work on the understanding of social phenomena as studied by various social sciences. Reality needs to be understood holistically in order to plan intervention. Multidisciplinary literature, developed as applied social science on issues and problems is more directly useful for social work.

Social work educators need knowledge necessary for teaching and training. Such knowledge can be organised in the forms of curriculum development, course compendia, teaching-learning resources, standards for social work education, and so on. Encyclopaedias and dictionaries are reference books, concisely prepared out of a range of primary literature, most useful for any discipline or profession. Organising social work knowledge is also essential for the development of a cumulative body of knowledge. Citations and referencing are, therefore, indispensable tasks in this process.

### *Bibliographic Resources on Social Science and Social Work Literature*

The purpose of secondary literature is to 'filter' the primary information sources, usually by subject area, and provide the indicators to this literature in the form of reviews, abstracts, annotations and indexes. These act as a gateway to several attributes of primary literature: authors, subjects, publishers, dates (and languages) of publications, and citations (Britannica, 2001). Social work educators and researchers need bibliographic resources on social sciences and social work literature.

## **PROGRESSIVE IDEOLOGIES AND SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE**

Modern ideologies of the Western white world have considered science as the exemplar for discovering 'truth', and 'truth' (often

described as reality) is equated only with the observable and the measurable. Scientism rejects every method of inquiry other than the scientific (Geiger, 1947). This ideology is challenged by emerging ideologies such as post-modernism, critical pedagogy and qualitative research.

The emerging ideology of post-modernism rejects attempts to apply the model of natural science inquiry in the social sciences (Rosenau, 1992) and critiques totality, reason and universality (Nicholson, 1990). Post-modernists recognise the highest ideals of modernity in the West as immanent to a specific historical time and geographical region and also associated with certain political baggage. Such a baggage includes notions of the supremacy of the West (Nicholson, 1990). In social work, high value has generally been attached to the American social work education model and American social work literature, which has now begun to be questioned. American social work literature travels round the world fast, following the adoption of the American model for social work curriculum by different countries. Although there is value in learning from other countries, there are problems inherent in adopting knowledge developed in one country for use in social work practice in another country (Desai, 1997).

The ideology of post-modernism has brought about visibility to important ideological and structural forces, such as race, gender and class by acknowledging the question of power and value in the construction of knowledge and subjectivities. It has raised questions regarding how culture is inscribed in the production of centre/margin hierarchies and the reproduction of post-colonial forms of subjugation (Giroux, 1991). In modern society, knowledge, which sees truth as based in science, has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of 'experts' and the elite class they represent. The claim to truth gives rise to hierarchies of knowledge, which reinforce and legitimate the economic and social hierarchies. As Foucault put it, the truth-claim and the procedures for gaining access to that truth have historically privileged the pronouncements of trained experts over the discourses of 'ordinary' people. Underlying these elements of the power of expertise is the expert's lack of any accountability to the ordinary people affected by his or her knowledge (Sohng, 1995).

The political nature of knowledge is well illustrated by the fact that each of these privileged truths is being challenged; not primarily by alternative theories from the sciences but by the sociopolitical

movements that Foucault called the insurrection of subjugated knowledge. It provides forms of historical knowledge as a way of reclaiming power and identity for subordinate groups (Hartman, 1992). Transformative knowledge represents quests for knowledge that take account of perspectives, experiences and wisdom of the marginalised groups and excavate historically subjugated knowledge. In order to organise transformative knowledge there is a need to critically identify the ideological base of the literature, examine the process of exclusion and assure inclusion of the marginalised groups ([www.classes.csumb.edu/MAE/MAE637-01/world/elements/Transformative.html](http://www.classes.csumb.edu/MAE/MAE637-01/world/elements/Transformative.html)).

The post-modern understanding of the knowledge-power linkage has brought about a painful paradox for social work professionals. As professionals, social workers possess knowledge and are experts because of their knowledge, but the power in their knowledge can disempower our clients. As Hartman (1992) suggested, they need to be open to local knowledge and participate with them in the insurrection of subjugated knowledge.

From a socially critical perspective, knowledge is constructed within our historical and cultural frameworks. Knowledge, according to the critical theorists, is historically, socially, economically and politically conditioned (Toohey, 1999). According to Giroux (1999), critical pedagogy attempts to do the following:

- Create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge.
- Raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centres of power in schools and is concerned about how to provide a way of reading history as part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class and ethnicity.
- Reject the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes peoples' lived histories differently.
- Illuminate the primacy of the ethical in defining the language that teachers and others use to produce particular cultural practices.

The post-modern reaction to modern ethical theories recommends that moral thinkers should turn their attention away from the problematic to the person as a whole. People's goodness has to do, not with virtues, but with their integrated wholeness (Agarwal, 1998). The paradigm of qualitative research relies on such holistic analysis and

detailed description derived from close contacts with the participants of the study. Qualitative methodology tends to focus on techniques such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and hermeneutic analysis of texts. Moreover, techniques such as presenting extensive direct quotations so readers can make their own judgements and having several other researchers examine the raw data to ensure that the findings do not reflect a single researcher's biases are critical (Mattaini, 1995). The qualitative approach is more suitable to social work as both have similar holistic and participatory philosophy. This approach is useful to synthesise social theory, practice and research (Ruckdeschel, 1985).

## **METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH**

Traditionally, the ideal in social work research has been empiricism. However, as Austin (1979) stated, the legitimating of the social work profession has depended on social utility rather than on its scientific base. He concluded that social work was a profession based on organised practitioner wisdom and was not and probably would not be, a truly science-based profession in the foreseeable future. Goldstein (1990) noted that by adopting the scientific emphasis, intuition and common-sense ways of understanding were discredited. Emphasising the rigour of detached objectivity, scientism held little regard for subjective constructs such as morality, spirituality, and cultural or personal belief systems. Not the least, he said, a positivistic preoccupation with instrumental means tended to overlook the profession's commitment to certain social ends. Goldstein concluded that social work practice had to be an ever-changing and complex blend of theory, analogue, wisdom and art.

As education of social work research has traditionally been modelled on pure social research, social work students are trained for research, which can tell one the state of things as they are. They do not necessarily learn to carry out research that aims at bettering them. They, therefore, fail to see a direct link between research and practice. As a result of such training, most of the social workers think that they have nothing to do with research. Such training makes social workers poor researchers and poor users of research in the practice situation. This explains why practitioners generally do not document their own work and analyse it. Therefore, much of the contributions of social



work practitioners to theory building remain irretrievable for the purpose of social work education.

Thomas (1979) observed that, at best, social workers view the culmination of research as the drawing of conclusions from research findings that may have implications for social work intervention, or be worthy of utilisation research. They do not use research for the generation of interventional or other social innovations that direct applications in the social technology of social work. He further noted that social work had been slow to recognise that its social technology was subject to systematic rather than incidental and haphazard alteration. He also added that social work researchers and others in social work could participate actively in its generation.

Powers, Meenaghan and Toomey (1985) highlighted the need for a practitioner to make informed decisions. These decisions and subsequent practice behaviours are precisely the types of things that professionals should justify. They said that the ultimate test of effective knowledge building in any profession was the degree to which the body of knowledge was prescriptive. The social work profession, thus required knowledge-as-action. Such knowledge could be organised by linking social work practice wisdom with social science/work research/ theories or drawing implications of social science/work research and theories for practice, towards development of praxis. Knowledge for practice, policy planning and administration may be organised in the forms of handbooks, manuals, standards for practice and so on.

Social intervention research, systematic review methods, research syntheses and meta-analysis, evidence-based practice and action and participatory research are important methodological developments in contemporary social work research that guides social work practice.

### **Social Intervention Research**

Evaluation research gained increased importance in social work, in the 1970s, as a tool to ascertain accountability of social work organisations and programmes. Subsequently, single system designs and developmental research, both of which contain the element of evaluation, developed as methodologies in social work research. Single system design facilitates a formative type of evaluation of practice with a system, be it an individual, family, group, organisation, community or any other collectivity. The heart of single system design is collecting repeated information on the target problem alike time series research

(Bloom and Fischer, 1982). Thomas (1979) developed the paradigm of developmental research, which is a combination of the models of research and development and research utilisation. Analysis, development and evaluation comprise the phases of research utilisation. As translated to social work research, this R&D approach became known as social intervention research. As a research-development methodology, social intervention research has provided the profession with a systematic, cumulative research methodology for developing, refining, testing and disseminating research-based social interventions. Accordingly, rather than wasting research resources on the evaluation of poorly conceptualised interventions, this methodology has contributed to the development and identification of interventions of proven effectiveness (Mullen, 2002).

In the early years of evaluation research, there were many flawed attempts to identify and measure social intervention outcomes. However, with experience and increased methodological prowess, the science of outcomes measurement has developed into a sophisticated specialisation (Mullen, 2002).

### **Systematic Review Methods, Research Syntheses and Meta-Analysis**

While the outcome of a single evaluation may be cause for attention, one study does not establish a foundation for decision-making. In the early 1970s social work researchers used narrative reviews to summarise findings from groups of evaluations, sometimes using systematic methods and sometimes not. When few studies existed, this approach served the profession well. As studies increased, without explicit, systematic review methods, such overviews were subject to unknown bias. Accordingly, the development of systematic review methods as well as sophisticated, quantitative meta-analytic procedures has made it possible to specify, with greater confidence and precision, the combined outcomes of many studies. The growth of methodological sophistication in the review and syntheses of outcomes from multiple studies has been a singularly important methodological development in the move toward evidence-based approaches (Mullen, 2002).

### **Evidence-based Practice**

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is an emerging approach in the United Kingdom, which means any practice that has been established as effective through scientific research according to some set of explicit

criteria (Mullen, 2002). According to Gambrill (2003), EBP suggests a philosophy of practice and policy designed to honour ethical obligations to clients and students and an evolving technology for helping us to do so. Professionals have an obligation to inform clients about services found to be effective and to avoid harm. Concerns that practitioners were continuing to use methods found to be harmful was a key reason for the development of EBP. Evidence-based practice encourages transparency of what is done to what effect in all venues of interest including practice and policy, research, and professional education. It is designed to make decisions and the reasons for them • explicit. Evidence-based practice involves sharing responsibility for decision-making in the context of recognised uncertainty. It is this characteristic of transparency that is such a break with authority-based practice and policy, research, and professional education (Gambrill, 2003).

Gambrill (2003) further stated that EBP described a process designed to encourage integration of ethical, evidentiary, and application concerns. It involved a systemic approach to improving quality of services, including the following:

- Efforts to educate professionals who are life-long learners,
- Involving clients as informed participants who take part in the decisions made,
- Attending to management practices and policies that influence practice (that is, evidence-based purchase of services), and
- Attending to application challenges, including the implications of scarce resources.

Evidence-based practice and social care are designed to maximise flow of accurate information concerning the evidentiary status of practice-related claims, including information about harming in the name of helping.

### **Action and Participatory Research**

O'Brien (1998) defined action research as aiming to contribute **both** to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and, concurrently, to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction. Accomplishing this twin goal requires the active collaboration of the researcher and the client, and thus it stresses the importance of co-learning as a

primary aspect of the research process. Several attributes separate action research from other types of research. Primary is its focus on turning the people involved into researchers too — people learn best, and more willingly apply what they have learned, when they do it themselves. It also has a social dimension — the research takes place in real-world situations, and aims to solve real problems. Finally, the initiating researcher, unlike in other disciplines, makes no attempt to remain objective, but openly acknowledges his/her bias to the other participants (O'Brien, 1998).

Following are the six principles of action research as identified by Winter (1989, cited from O'Brien, 1998):

*Reflective Critique:* The principle of reflective critique ensures that people reflect on issues and processes and make explicit the interpretations, biases, assumptions and concerns upon which judgments are made. In this way, practical accounts can give rise to theoretical considerations.

*Dialectical Critique:* Reality, particularly social reality, is consensually validated, which is to say it is shared through language. Phenomena are conceptualised in dialogue.

*Collaborative Resource:* Participants in an action research project are co-researchers. The principle of collaborative resource pre-supposes that each person's ideas are equally significant as potential resources for creating interpretive categories of analysis, negotiated among the participants.

*Risk:* The change process potentially threatens all previously established ways of doing things, thus creating psychic fears among the practitioners.

*Plural Structure:* The nature of the research embodies a multiplicity of views, commentaries and critiques, leading to multiple possible actions and interpretations. This plural structure of inquiry requires a plural text for reporting.

*Theory, Practice and Transformation:* For action researchers, theory informs practice, and practice refines theory, in a continuous transformation. In any setting, people's actions are based on implicitly held assumptions, theories and hypotheses, and with every observed result, theoretical knowledge is enhanced.

Originally designed to resist the intellectual colonialism of Western social research into the Third World development process, participatory research developed a methodology for involving disenfranchised people as researchers in pursuit of answers to the questions

of their daily struggle and survival. Based in Paulo Freire's ideology, participatory research is a means of putting research capabilities in the hands of deprived and disenfranchised people so that they can identify themselves as knowing actors; defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, and transforming their lives for themselves (Sohng, 1995).

Finn (1994, cited from Sohng, 1995) outlined three key elements that distinguished participatory research from traditional approaches to social science: people, power and praxis:

- Participatory research is people-centred in the sense that the process of critical inquiry is informed by and responds to the experiences and needs of oppressed people.
- Participatory research is about power, which is crucial to the construction of reality, language, meanings and rituals of truth. Participatory research promotes empowerment through the development of common knowledge and critical awareness, which are suppressed by the dominant knowledge system.
- Participatory research is also about praxis. It recognises the inseparability of theory and practice and critical awareness of the personal-political dialectic.

Participatory research is grounded in an explicit political stance and clearly articulated value base — social justice and the transformation of those contemporary sociocultural structures and processes that support degeneration of participatory democracy, injustice and inequality.

Professional social work associations are responsible for laying down ethical norms and monitoring them with reference to social work research. Most of the institutions for social work education in the United States are housed in universities that have Institutional Review Boards that also carry out this role.

### **Status of Social Work Knowledge Development in India**

Institutions for social work education have a major role to play in the development of social work knowledge. Social work educators are regularly in touch with the field as fieldwork instructors and also through their field action projects. However, the research methodologies useful for social work practice do not seem to have taken off in India. Social work educators, in most of the institutions for social work education, do not carry out research, for several reasons, such as research not being considered part of their

workload, priority given to contribution to development in the field of practice, lack of infrastructural support, and so on. Those who do carry out research seem to be more involved with research of the social phenomena that they are teaching and/or working with in the field. Citation and referencing are generally not given importance. As a result, researchers often do not disseminate their findings out of fear of plagiarism.

Generally, social work practitioners do not document their practice or undertake research, and if they do, they tend to carry out ad hoc studies, without linking them to the existing state of knowledge. Moreover, they do not publish their findings, and therefore, their findings do not become retrievable and do not get utilised by other social work professionals. Thus, they do not add to the body of social work knowledge.

Post-modernism has started influencing the ideological understanding of social work research in India. At the Conference on Towards People-Centred Development organised in India, it was emphasised that research took place within a social context and researchers, themselves, were part of the social context. This awareness highlighted the need to recognise that one's ideology, perspectives and values shaped research. In this context, re-conceptualising research is necessary, because the collection and expression of knowledge is an exercise of power (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, [TISS], 1997). Action and participatory research methodology is gaining popularity among social work educators and practitioners. Government organisations such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Indian Council for Social Science Research and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment do provide funds for such research.

At the same Conference, the need for an open dialogue and transparency between practitioners and researchers was emphasised, such that their roles are not narrowly defined. Social work practice and education are not just two different worlds but also with prejudices about each other. The practitioners feel that the educators live in an ivory tower with no base in the field while the educators feel that the practitioners are often irrelevant and outdated. The tension between the two can be minimised by regular and frequent interactions with mutual respect for each other's role in building up the social work profession. Interactions may be planned through workshops, seminars and training programmes, collaborative research projects, publications and so on (TISS, 1997).

The Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers prepared by the Bombay Association of Trained Social Workers (2002) lays down the following ethical responsibilities for professional social workers:

- Carefully select the topic for research considering its possible consequences for those studied, when conducting a research.
- Do not cause the respondents any physical or mental discomfort, distress or harm, through research.
- Consider the informants of research as co-partners in understanding the phenomenon.
- Share their research objectives with them and get their informed and voluntary consent, respect their knowledge and attitude about their life situation, and share/interpret the findings with them.
- Protect the confidentiality of the information shared by them and use the findings for their benefit, by recommending and promoting policies and programmes concerning them.
- Provide information and referral services to them, as and when necessary, during the process of data collection.
- Dissociate from or do not engage in any research activity, which requires manipulation, distortion or falsification of data or findings.
- Acknowledge in their written work, the published as well as unpublished material and discussions that have directly contributed to it.

However, there is no mechanism to monitor and regulate these ethical requirements either in the institutions for social work education or in the field of social work practice.

## **NEED FOR SOCIAL WORK PUBLICATIONS**

Publication is the major system for dissemination of any knowledge, because of its quality control system of style and review, copy-editing and proofreading, production and marketing network. As published literature is easy to acquire by libraries, it is easy to utilise it. This makes further development of knowledge possible.

Journals play a fundamental role in the development of all disciplines and professions. They create a record of how well professions meet one of the requirements of professions: possession of a body of knowledge. Journals serve to preserve and document the past, disseminate information from contemporary scholars, and aid the

development of the profession's knowledge base by identifying appropriate contributions and preserving them in an archival source (Lindsey and Kirk, 1992).

Social work journals can cover the following types of literature:

- Theoretical/historical/empirical/methodological/epistemological analyses
- Reviews of policies/programmes/legislation/voluntary organisations/professional interventions
- Curriculum development/Teaching aids
- Research summaries
- News from professional associations in social work
- Book reviews and media reviews
- Discussions, notes and interviews

### **Role of Social Work Educators**

For social work publications, the editorial boards, the editors and the referees should be drawn mainly from social work educators, who would be familiar with the state of the art criteria and process for review and further need for social work knowledge.

The editorial board should adopt a standardised editorial style or develop one. An editorial style includes norms for the organisation of the typescript, language, presentation style and the reference style. The importance of professional journals comes from their use of recognised norms judged by other experts, using pre-established impersonal criteria in an open intellectual arena (Kirk, 1999). The criteria used for acceptance of transcripts for publication are generally the following: contemporary relevance, contribution to knowledge, conceptual clarity and logic in analysis, readable language, sound methodology of research articles, implications for intervention, appropriateness of references, and originality. The editorial boards also need to lay down ethical guidelines for authorship, referencing, acknowledgements, using and promoting stereotypes, protecting confidentiality, accuracy of facts, and so on.

Referred publications mean that the transcript is processed by a two-way masked peer review by one/two referees. When the reports of the two referees do not match, the article is either sent to a third referee or the Editor of the journal reviews it. If the review suggests revision of the article, the authors are given time for revision and resubmission. The revised and resubmitted article is sent to the same referee for checking the revisions. Invited transcripts are not sent for a review. \_



A book editor or a guest editor for a special issue of a journal generally plays the following role:

- Invites abstracts of articles from prospective authors and sends the guidelines to be followed by the selected authors.
- Edit the hard copies of the accepted articles for subject matter and for the publisher's editorial style.
- Referee the articles received and suggest acceptance, revisions or rejection of the articles.
- Clarify the missing information and contradictions with the authors.
- Ensure that written permissions are obtained from copyright owners whenever necessary.
- Check the page proofs.

### **Status of Social Work Publication in India**

Two editions of the Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India have been published, the first by the Planning Commission in 1967 and the second by the Ministry of Welfare (now the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) in 1987. The third edition is long overdue but has not been a concern for the Ministry. Several social work books have been published by the Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI), the TISS and commercial publishers. The ASSWI has not published any book since 1981 and the TISS has not published books since 1997. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, social work professional associations and academic institutions need to revive their concern for production and dissemination of social work knowledge.

Institutions for social work education publish five journals: The Indian Journal of Social Work (by TISS), Contemporary Social Work (by Department of Social Work of the Lucknow University), Perspectives in Social Work (by College of Social Work of Nirmala Niketan) and Social Work Review (by Faculty of Social Work of M.S. University of Baroda). The National Journal of Social Work is being published by The Indian Society of Professional Social Work. Social Work Forum was published by the Indian Association of Trained Social Workers; when it closed down, its publication also terminated.

How much of this literature contributes to a systematic body of relevant social work knowledge, to meet the needs of social work functions, remains to be ascertained. Very often, review of the existing literature and referencing is not considered very important. Moreover,

there is no system of regularly developing annotations, abstracts and indexes for social work literature in India. Search of Indian literature is more difficult than search for American literature for which such systems are efficient. One, therefore, still comes across master's and doctoral theses, which state that these are exploratory studies because no previous Indian literature exists in that area.

The market for social work books and journals is limited as their major consumers are libraries of institutions for social work education. Bookstores are not interested in selling such specific areas of literature. Social work educators, students and practitioners generally do not buy books or subscribe to journals. If relevant social work knowledge is developed, efforts need to be made to publicise them to the appropriate users and motivate them to buy them.

Several social work educators, practitioners and activists carry out practice-based research. However, efforts are not made to link it to the existing body of knowledge and the production is made in the unpublished form. These are, therefore, not available for new learners or for methodological discussion and advancement. This becomes a limitation to the development of a body of knowledge.

## **NEED FOR SOCIAL WORK LIBRARIES**

Libraries of institutions for social work education need to acquire and facilitate retrieval of the following:

### 1. Social Work Literature:

- All Indian social work literature, that is encyclopaedia, books, journals, bibliographies, annotations and abstracts and newsletters and bulletins published, in English and the local languages
- All the social work encyclopaedia, dictionaries, annotations, abstracts and reviews published abroad
- All the publications of local, national and international social work professional associations
- All the International social work books and journals
- Select social work books and journals published abroad on basic social work subjects and fieldwork practicum
- Select books on optional/ specialisation/ concentration subjects of social work

### 2. Government Documents:

- Census data
- Five-Year Plans

- Policies, Schemes and Reports of relevant ministries, departments and commissions of the Central and the State Governments
  - Publications of the United Nations (UN) and other international organisations working in India
3. Books on Development Studies and Social and Allied Sciences
  4. Directories of voluntary organisations and their published and unpublished literature.
  5. Newspapers and news magazines.

In-house Documents:

- Faculty research reports and publications
- Student term papers/ research reports/ dissertations/ theses

An annual index needs to be prepared of the acquisitions by the library. Inter-library exchange and linkages with the Information Library Network (INFLIBNET) should be facilitated. Literature can be made available on alternate media for visually disabled persons. Book banks can be facilitated. Archival and out of print reports and books need to be digitalised. An advisory committee needs to guide the functioning of the library comprising the head of the Social Work Education Programme, library staff and select social work faculty members.

In spite of a need for a range of forms of literature for social work, books and journals are still considered the main media of knowledge for social work by publishers and libraries. Government and UN documents and NGO reports are not important in the traditional library system. The libraries generally get books and journals and, that too, the foreign publications more easily than the Indian ones. Literature for social work is generally developed and disseminated by the Western countries, predominantly by the United States and in English. It is not surprising then that in the lists of required reading of many schools of social work one still finds more American and old books than Indian and recent books/articles. Development of a profession requires a local and regional context and language orientation as well as international perspectives. However, Indian social work professionals, by and large, do not write; all that they write do not get published; and a lot of published literature does not get marketed. Social work educators and practitioners are generally not in the habit of buying books or subscribing to journals. Students are also not encouraged to buy books. Libraries, therefore, become a major source of retrieval of social work knowledge.

As social work libraries are generally small and poorly funded, most of the above facilities are not available with them as of now. There is a dire need to rejuvenate the social work libraries. As there is a trend of NGO documentation centres being established, there is a need for the NGO documentation centres and institutions for social work education to coordinate acquisition and retrieval of indigenous and practice-based social work knowledge.

The ever increasing subscription cost of learned journals, decreasing value of the Indian Rupee against major foreign currencies, and stagnant library budgets during the last one decade or so are some of the major factors that have compelled libraries to reduce their collection of journals to a very minimum level. This has been, directly and indirectly, affecting the academic and research work in the universities in our country. No library today can hope to hold every item required to meet the needs of its users under the crisis faced due to resource crunch. Hence, sharing of resources using computer networks has become a necessity. To overcome this situation and to make optimum use of the existing collection of some of our resourceful libraries, the UGC has launched the Document Delivery Service under the INFLIBNET Programme. Under this service, six university libraries will serve as Document Delivery Centres and deliver, on demand, copies of papers from learned journals, conference proceedings, and other materials available in their collection at a nominal cost. This service is provided on 'No Profit-No Loss Basis' and is expected to be prompt.

## **INTERNET FOR SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION AND RETRIEVAL**

The limitations of marketing of social work literature and the limitations of social work libraries will probably not remain such a problem in the world of information and knowledge increasingly being dominated by the Internet. The explosive growth of communications networks after 1990, particularly in the scholarly world, has accelerated the establishment of the 'virtual library'. At the leading edge of this development is public-domain information. Residing in thousands of databases distributed worldwide, a growing portion of this vast resource is now accessible almost instantaneously via the Internet, the web of computer networks linking the global communities of researchers and, increasingly, non-academic organisations. Internet resources of electronic information include selected library catalogues,

collected works of the literature, some abstracting journals, full-text electronic journals, encyclopaedias, software archives, demographic registers, daily news summaries, environmental reports, as well as hundreds of thousands of electronic-mail and bulletin-board messages (Britannica, 2001).

ERNET India, a scientific society under the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of the Government of India in partnership with the UGC is setting up UGC-Infonet. Under this programme it is proposed to use information and communication technology and the Internet to transform the learning environment from a mono-dimensional one to a multi-dimensional one. The UGC-Infonet will be a boon to higher education in several ways:

- Be a tool to distribute educational material and journals to the remotest of areas.
- Be a resource for researchers and scholars for tapping the most up-to-date information.
- Form a medium for collaboration among teachers and students, not only within the country but also all over the world.
- Be an Intranet for university automation.
- Encompass entire university systems for most efficient utilisation of precious network resources.

While the Internet has made global information and knowledge easily accessible, it has thrown open a new challenge to the Indian social work professionals to learn to critically evaluate this knowledge disseminate Indian social work knowledge through this worldwide web, which is also dominated by the American literature; and develop a new system of professional conversation and enhancement of social work knowledge across the globe in the electronic mode.

## **NEED FOR UTILISATION/APPLICATION OF SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE**

The paper stresses that social work needs transformative knowledge aimed at inclusion of the marginalised groups. The types of knowledge needed for social work functions are information on social work, welfare and development, social work research, organised social work knowledge, and bibliographic resources on social sciences, development studies and social work. Development of all these types of knowledge need to be strengthened, in particular, participatory research on social work practice and its synthesis have yet to take off in India. Another gap is in the area of bibliographic resources in the form

of annotations, abstracts and indexes of published as well as unpublished social work research in India. Publication and libraries, with focus on social work knowledge, are imperative, as these are indispensable institutions for dissemination and retrieval of knowledge in any area. The systems that have played a role in development and dissemination of social work knowledge and, therefore, can fill these gaps are the institutions for social work education, government organisations, NGOs and social work professional associations.

Social work knowledge needs to be developed so that it can be utilised or applied for carrying out social work functions. Whether the knowledge is appropriate for such utilisation is determined first by the author who develops it, second by the publisher through his/her peer review process before accepting it for publication, and then by book reviews by peers after the book is published. At the user's level, there is again an informal process of review for the purpose of selection. For the functions of practice, policy planning and administration the user reads the literature that one finds available, readable, relevant and usable at the personal level. The recommended reading list of books and articles, approved by the respective university's board of studies would be an indicator of the utilisation for teaching-learning. However, utilisation of knowledge for research or further knowledge development is a formal process. Literature review, citations and referencing are indispensable processes for preparing research proposals and reports, whether by educators or students. Now that the UGC also places emphasis on citation index of faculty members in quality assessment of universities, social work educators will have no choice but to look into this aspect of knowledge development and utilisation.

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