Social Work with Group: An Empowering Approach for Solving Human Problems

Mohd. Shakil
Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, A.M.U., Aligarh.
Available at: shakilmswamu@gmail.com

Abstract:
Social learning is a pre-requisite to the changes that is inevitably involved in problem solving process. Change in individual, group or community depends upon their capacity to learn about new facts, attitudes and ways of behaving in differently particular circumstances. Problems are the needs which are not adequately met out by the needs-meeting facilities of our society. An apparent imbalance is seen in the person’s relationship with the world around. In this regard, Social work with group is a professional service that aims to work generally with the normal people to develop, enhance and strengthen their social functioning and capacities to establish and maintain their positive relationships with others. Professionally, Social work has its two methods to intervene the problems of people which are primary method and secondary method. Social group work is a part of primary method of social work profession that works with individuals in group. The perspective that is informed in this paper is to make social group work practice more effective based on scientific knowledge and professional skills. Thus, in the discourse of social work profession, this paper attempts to provide a linear understanding about social group work practice professionally. The paper is divided into seven parts. The first part deals with the introduction of social group work profession. The second part presents a view on the historical context and dynamics of social group work profession. The third part describes the significant roles of professional group worker. The fourth part focuses upon the empowering methods of intervention. The fifth part presents the professional skills in social group work. The sixth part deals with the social group work models. Finally, the last part presents the principles of social group work along with conclusion.
Key Words: Social group work, Dynamics, Methods, Skills, Models and Principles.

Introduction:
Social work is a practice oriented, professional and academic discipline that seeks to improve the quality of life and well-being of individuals, groups and communities employing scientific knowledge and skills. Its practice is processed through primary and secondary methods. Social work with group is a part of primary method of social work. The humanistic method of social work with group embodies the values and practices of social group work’s heritage and the social work profession. As a group approach, the humanistic method is used to assist clients with their preventive, rehabilitative and developmental goals. The humanistic group work method is employed by human service professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health workers, child welfare staff, activities and rehabilitation therapists, nurses, and special educators who assist people in attaining effectiveness and change in their interpersonal relationships and circumstances. The groups are currently run for victims of trauma or frail elderly persons, for persons with Alzheimer’s disease and groups for their caretakers, school children’s groups, substance abuse treatment groups, groups in mental health treatment and developmental disabilities, groups in HIV/AIDS. These groups thrive in hospitals, residential treatment settings, continuing day treatment programs, schools, settlement houses, and senior centers (Glassman, 2009).

Social work with group is ever an expanding area of practice. It is a unique, exiting, and dynamic way to assist people for making the changes in their lives that they themselves dream for. As distinct from the related social work methods of casework and community organization, social group work concentrates primarily on providing group experiences to meet normal developmental needs, to help for preventing social breakdown, to facilitate corrective and rehabilitative goals, and to encourage a citizen’s involvement and responsible social action. Characteristically, group work services involve small groups of members coming together with a “worker” on a more or less regular basis, usually as participants in a social agency or institution. Groups vary in size and composition. Participants include persons of all ages, races, and social classes joining together in natural as well as formed...
groups. Group work is based on many conceptual foundations. Its values can be traced to ethical and religious beliefs rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition; to the humanitarian movement, which found expression in the early settlement movement; and to the core of social work values and philosophy, which have evolved out of a long tradition of service to people (Alissi, 2003).

Group work practice is based on a concept of man as a constantly developing human being in necessary and significant interaction with other men. He is shaped by others and is shaping others. He presents an inseparable unit of physical, mental and emotional forces, again in interaction with others. Development does not cease with childhood but continues all through the life cycle. The basic needs beyond the biological ones are the needs to belong, to be an important individual and to participate. In the life cycle these needs must be fulfilled in a variety of changing small group associations. These associations have specific characteristics in different age periods. At each stage of development individuals must find fulfillment through qualitative group associations or they will be damaged in one way or another. No individual goes through the life cycle without some damage. Human beings have various capacities to deal with dissatisfactions and frustrations on their own. They need help at different stages of their development with their developmental task or with overcoming hurdles to them (Konopka, 1963).

The Historical Context and Dynamics:

Social group work is as old as social work itself. The group work approach emerged in the late nineteenth century as social work was taking initial steps to define its role and to gain recognition as a new profession. Together with social casework, group work was quickly recognized as an effective method of responding to human needs and of fostering social functioning. The Settlement House Movement played a critical role in the evolution and formulation of group work as a recognized method of social work. Indeed, the historical development of social work with group is rooted in the historical evolution of the United States and other western democratic countries. It conveys many of the values of society, such as democratic process and respecting and valuing the uniqueness of each individual. It makes use of the small
group as an agent of change, and promotes the idea of mutual aid as an important element in daily life. While group work was being formalized in social work, other professionals were also evolving approaches for working with groups. Some were focused on particular client groups or problem areas. These models seem to have real potential for assisting social workers in assisting their clients to meet needs. Some practiced primarily preventive method to work with children and young people from poor neighborhoods who were at risk of becoming involved in crime and other forms antisocial behavior. Others practiced developmental method so that groups would be seen as a microcosm of social living in which people could improve their social skills, enhance social functioning, and learn how to interact more effectively with others. Yet another view was that social work with group would be most effective in treatment settings such as mental hospitals, correctional facilities, and other agencies where clients with serious problems could be helped to solve their difficulties (Fatout, 1992).

India has a long history of social work and social welfare. There is evidence of group approach being used in charity, imparting religious education through the oral tradition, mobilizing the people for the freedom struggle against the British, social reform, and in typically indigenous welfare strategies such as the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movements. However, the history of group work as a method social work practice can be seen only in the context of social work education in India. Group work started with the founding of the first school of social work in 1936, viz. the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work. Then, there was subsequently a rapid increase in the number of schools of social work throughout India and group work found a place in all of them along with case work and community organization (Bhattacharya, 2012).

The understanding of group dynamics is heavily influenced by the socio-technical system movement, the recreational movement, and the group psychotherapy movement. While there are other influences, these three movements have been instrumental in building the knowledge of how groups operate. The socio-technical system movement has a long history of using groups to humanize industrialized work settings. This movement started with the Hawthorne studies when researchers studied
how the organization of work and working conditions influenced worker’s productivity. A team at the Tavistock Clinic in England expanded the Hawthorne findings by conducting experiments on how groups can support workers and compensate for work conditions. These researchers argued that the work place should be democratized by allowing teams of workers to cross-train for any job and make critical production relating decisions. This democratization of production maximized interdependence, investment, decision making, and mastery among the workgroup members. The second movement, recreational group work, focused initially on youth-focused social and recreational groups. Social workers used groups in their community and shelter practices to help youth and immigrant families adjust to the United States. With the level of group knowledge expanding, Papell and Rothman (1966) identified three models of group work prevalent in social work: the reciprocal, remedial, and social action. The distinctions identify three critical influences in the group movement: groups seeking to change individuals, groups focused on empowerment and social change, and groups traditionally associated with the recreational movement. The inclusion of remedial groups was a reflection of the third movement starting to influence social work practice. The third movement is referred to as the group psychotherapy movement. This movement was heavily influenced by the writings of Freud (1922). While the recreation movement focused on the group as a whole, group psychotherapy focused on the individuals and how they responded in the group. Freud noted that the leader influences the group members and they, concurrently, influence each other. Many group therapists adopted a leader-centric focus based on an assumption that the leader must be strong to harness the volatile psyche energies of the group members (Ragg, 2012).

**Significant Roles of Professional Group Worker(s):**

Regarding the significant roles of professional group worker, one of the first widely accepted and more comprehensive statements was formulated in 1949 by the American Association of Group Workers (AAGW):

“The group worker enables various types of groups to function in such a way that both group interaction and program activities contribute to the growth of the individual and the achievement of desirable
social goals. The objectives of the group worker include provision for personal growth according to individual capacity and need, the adjustment of the individual to other persons, to groups and to society, and the motivation of the individual toward the improvement of society, and the recognition by the individual of his own rights, limitations, and abilities as well as his acceptance of the rights, abilities, and differences of others. Through his participation the group worker aims to affect the group process so that decisions come about as a result of knowledge and a sharing and integration of ideas, experiences, and knowledge rather than as result of domination from within or without the group. Through experience he aims to produce those relations with other groups and the wider community which contribute to responsible citizenship, mutual understanding between cultural, religious, economic, and social groupings in the community, and a participation in the constant improvement of society toward democratic goals. The guiding purpose behind such leadership rests upon the common assumptions of a democratic society; namely, the opportunity for each individual to fulfill his capacities in freedom, to respect and appreciate others, and to assume his social responsibility in maintaining and constantly improving democratic society. Underlying this practice of group work is knowledge of individual and group behavior and of social conditions and community relations which is based on the modern social sciences. On the basis of this knowledge, the group worker contributes to the group with which he works, a skill in leadership which enables the members to use their capacities to the fullest and to create socially constructive group activities. He is aware of both program activities and of the interplay of personalities within the group and between the group and its surrounding community. According to the interests and needs of each, he assists them to get from the group experience the satisfactions provided by the program activities, the enjoyment and personal growth available through the social relations, and the opportunity to participate as a responsible citizens. Since that time, revision and refinements have been a constant concern. Since that time, revision and refinements have been a constant concern (Fink, & et. al., 1968: 450).”
Empowering Methods of Intervention:

The main objective of social group work is to strengthen normal personality and socialization process. Group members avail of this opportunity if they find the atmosphere of the group congenial and interest promoting. Group worker’s success depends upon the degree of rapport he has built with the group members. In general, the following methods are used in social group work:

- **Empathy, Warm and Genuineness:** Empathy refers to perform the role or realize other’s problems as its own. The job of the group worker is to study the group members and mobilize them in such a way so that they may develop an insight of the problem. Warm is a non-verbal method of expression. The worker expresses this feeling by touching members, showing favorable facial expression and acting accordingly. This helps in creating worker’s acceptance by the group members and developing close relationship among group members. Genuineness means the appropriate method and media for the group activities to attain its objectives.

- **Self-disclosure:** The worker expresses his own experiences before the group members. It helps them in understanding their problems and learning to ease from tension and anxiety. The time, content and nature of self-disclosure one important and the worker keeps in mind the appropriateness of these factors in accordance with group situation.

- **Disclosure of Confronting Behavior:** Sometimes the behavior expression of a member of the group is different than what he says. For example: he says that he is not angry with anybody in the group but his voice and word expression show that he is angry. The worker clarifies these situations to group members and warns them not to allow such situations to be happened.

- **Investigation:** The group worker prepares for an interview schedule for the group the group members in order to know the internal and external feelings of the members.
This helps the worker to diagnose the problem of the group members.

- **Support**: It is a psychological strategy which is used to empower or restructure ego power in the members of the group. The worker provides an opportunity to the group to express his feelings and clarifies the positive and negative aspects of these feelings. He takes interest in group activities and helps at the time of need. He enables the group to take his own decision for the program and its implementation.

- **Cognitive Restructuring**: Cognitive restructuring refers to complex strategy for changing perceptions of emotional sets which seem to impede the group members’ abilities to be changed. Sometimes, group fails to arrive at a decision due to complexity of problems. At this time, group needs such help so that it may perceive the reality. It is the worker who extends them help.

- **Role Playing**: Role playing is a kind of method through which group members gain knowledge of their roles and other’s roles. Through role playing, a member expresses his feelings, thoughts and action in reference to others. This method is used to know the reality of life conditions.

- **Partialization**: Social group worker divides the whole problem into many parts and takes up one by one for its solution. He directs the group to organize activities accordingly. Thus, he enables the group to work in such a way so that it does not have unnecessary tension. This process helps the group to understand that the problem can be solved (Misra, 1994).

### Professional Skills in Social Group Work:

Social work with groups is a method in the profession of social work through which individuals in groups are helped by a worker to relate themselves to others and to experience growth opportunities that are in accordance with their needs and capacities.

The basic skills in social group work are:

- **Skill in Establishing Purposeful Relationships**: The group worker is required to be skilful in gaining the acceptance of the group and in relating himself to the group on a
positive professional basis. He is also supposed to be skillful in helping individuals in the group to accept one another and to join with the group in common pursuits.

- **Skill in Analyzing the Group Situation:** The group worker must be skilful to judge the developmental level of the group to determine what the level is, what the group needs, and how quickly the group can be expected to move. He must also be skilled in assisting the group to express ideas, work out objectives, clarify immediate goals, and see both its potentialities and limitations as a group.

- **Skill in Participation with the Group:** The group worker is supposed to be skilled in determining, interpreting, assuming, and modifying his own role with the group. He must also be skillful in helping group members to participate, to locate leadership among them, and to take responsibility for their own activities.

- **Skill in Dealing with Group Feelings:** The group worker must be skillful in controlling his own feelings about the group and must study each new situation with a high degree of objectivity. He is also required to be skilled in assisting groups to release their own feelings, both positive and negative.

- **Skill in Program Development:** The group worker is to be skilled in guiding group thinking so that interests and needs will be revealed and understood. He is also to be skilled in helping groups to develop programs with what they want as a means through which their needs may be met.

- **Skill in Using Agency and Community Resources:** The group worker must be skillful in locating and then acquainting the group with various helpful resources which can be utilized by them for program purposes. He must also be skilled in helping certain individual members to make use of specialized services by means of referral when they have needs which cannot be met within the group.

- **Skill in Evaluation:** The group worker is to have skill in recording
the developmental process that is going on as he works with the group. He also must be skillful in using his recorders and in helping the group to review its experience as a means of improvement.

Professional group work skills represent the worker’s conscious application of knowledge, understanding, and principles in working with individuals and groups in defined situations in such a way that change takes place in the behavior of the individuals and the group (Trecker, 1955).

**Social Group Work Models:**

Group work’s goals and objectives or purposes determine the group work model employed. Three such models have been pioneered by Papell and Rothman (1966):

- **Social Goals Model:** In the social group work, groups, serving the social goals model, are formed and continued because of socially determined interests, which if attained, bring about important social gains for the group. This model is closely identified with the group interest and effort. More recently, this model has been used in addressing social problems accompanying community development and growth. The social goals model includes the following principles guiding practice: *Clarification of agency policy, Positive use of limitations, Identifications with agency goals, Determination of appropriate issues for collective action, and the weighing of alternatives for action and their consequences.*

- **The Remedial Model:** The remedial model which also refers to a model of treatment tends to be clinically oriented. The group is used as an agent of change. The group worker facilitates the interaction among members of the group to achieve change for the individual. He/she applies knowledge and skill in helping individuals to gain self-awareness and improve social functioning. The group supports the member, encouraging new and more appropriate modes of functioning. Intervention is reality focused and addresses the problem of dysfunction in the group and within the full range of the individual’s relationships. The treatment group is widely used in mental hospitals, correctional...
institutions, family service organizations, counseling services, schools, health care facilities, and in many other agencies.

- **The Reciprocal Model**: In the social work profession working with group, the reciprocal model serves both the individual and society. It sees the individual largely as an abstraction that can be studied, understood, and treated only in relation to the many systems and subsystems of which he/she is a part. It views the individual as being created, influenced, and modified by his/her relationships, social institutions, and the interdependency between society and the individual. Theoretical sources of this model come from systems theory, field theory, social psychological theories of behavior, and the practice principles that are a part of generic methodology for social group work (Skidmore & et. al., 1991).

**Principles of Social Group Work:**

Trecker (1955), in his book entitled *Social Group Work: Principles and Practices*, has explained the principles which are the guidelines for the social worker for working with group:

- **The Principle of Planned Group Formulation**: In social group work, the group is the basic unit through which service is provided to the individual, consequently, the agency and worker responsible for the formation of groups or the acceptance into the agency of already formed groups must be aware of the factors inherent in the group situation that makes the given group a positive potential for individual growth and for meeting recognizable needs.

- **The Principle of Specific Objectives**: In social group work, specific objectives of individual and group development must be consciously formulated by the worker in harmony with group wishes and capacities and in keeping with agency function.

- **The Principle of Purposeful Worker Group Relationship**: In social work with group, a consciously purposeful relationship must be established between the worker and the group members based on the worker’s
acceptance of the group members as they are and upon the groups willingness to accept help from the worker because of the confidence the members have in him/her and in the agency.

- **The Principle of Continuous Individualization**: In social group work, it is recognized that groups are different and that individuals utilize group experience in a variety of ways to meet their differing needs; consequently, continuous individualization must be practiced by the worker. Groups and the individuals in the groups must be understood as developing and changing.

- **The Principle of Guided Group Interaction**: In social group work, the primary source of energy which propels the group and influences the individual to change, are the interaction or reciprocal responses of the members. The group worker influences this interaction by the type and quality of his participation.

- **The Principle of Democratic Group Self-determination**: In social group work, the group must be helped to make its own decisions and determine its own activities, taking the maximum amount of responsibility in line with its capacity and ability. The primary source of control over the group is the group itself.

- **The Principle of Flexible Functional Organization**: In social work with group, the process through which the worker guides the group in setting up formal organization, should be flexible and should be encouraged only as it meets a felt need, is understood by the members and can function accordingly. The formal organization of the group should be adaptive and should change as the group changes.

- **The Principle of Progressive Programme Experiences**: In social group work, the programme experiences in which the group engages should begin at the level of member interest, need, experience, and competence and should progress in relation to the developing capacity of the group.

- **The Principle of Resource Utilization**: In social work with
group, the total environment of agency and community possesses resources which should be utilized to enrich the content of the group experience for individuals and for the group as a whole.

- **The Principle of Evaluation**: In Social Group Work, continuous evaluation of process and programmes in terms of outcomes is essential. Worker, group and agency share in this procedure as a means of guaranteeing this greatest possible self-fulfillment for all (Misra, 1994).

**Conclusion:**

Social group work being an empowering approach for solving human problems is a modern discipline of academics and practice. The aim of social work with group is to solve problems of adjustment by developing individual’s personality through the group process. The problems of group members are solved by developing the personality and behavior of individuals as well as using the different group process. To intervene the problems of group members, the professional group worker needs to be acquainted with dynamics, methods, skills and different models of social group work. The worker is also supposed to be abide by the principles of social group work to understand his/her role well accordingly. The ultimately purpose of social group worker is to prepare the group members for social change in their own life as well as in society.

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About the author:
Mr. Mohd. Shakil is pursuing Ph.D. in the Department of Social Work, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh since November, 2012. He is also availing Senior Research Fellowship under the scheme of UGC (SRF-UGC). His research topic is “Children of Incarcerated Mothers: Study of District Jails of Aligarh and Etah, Uttar Pradesh”.