

Need and Importance of Medical Social Work Practice in Pakistan with Special Reference to Karachi City

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Abstract

In this research paper, the researcher has attempted to define the medical social work philosophy and tried to relate with social caring obligation and value system of Pakistani people. This paper examines the development of social work with special reference to Pakistan. The main purpose of this paper is to understand how Medical social work is designed and implemented in Pakistan? What are the challenges and what are the administrative problems faced by professionals? The paper is divided into three sections, section 1) provides a brief introduction of social work education in Pakistan, section 2) cover the history of the profession with special reference to Pakistani pedagogies and 3) discuss the role of Medical social worker in the context of Pakistan. The succeeding portion covers the conclusion and recommendation. An attempt has been made for in-depth analysis of the various aspects of existing practices; identify the problems and prospects of Medical Social Work with especial reference to Karachi, an urban city of Pakistan. This study is an exploratory research and researcher employing qualitative methods to explore this issue.

KEY WORDS: Medical Social Work, welfare, Health care Institutions, Karachi..

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Social Work is a professional subject of global significance. It is all about working with people and seeing the whole person in the context of their current circumstances. Social work has an old discipline and has its unique combination of theory and field practices. This uniqueness marks this profession as extra ordinary distinction in the field of social sciences. Social Workers respond to both crises and emergencies as well as always ready to provide help in everyday life of individual, group or community. The goal of social work is to lead the human being into a successful life. However, the practice of Social Work consists of the professional application of social work values, based upon scientific knowledge in skills in human relations, and requires knowledge of human development and behaviour, as well as social, economic and cultural factors. Social Workers use a variety of skills, techniques & activities to assist individuals in making and sustaining positive change. As adviser, advocate, counselors, a social worker helps people to live more successfully within their local communities by helping them find solutions to their problems.

Medical Social Work is the branch of Social work which deals the problems of patients in health care Institutions. Medical Social Workers recognise that illness and admission to hospital may have a direct impact on the psychological, social, and emotional well-being of the individual and his/her family. Medical Social Work offers a service to all patients and families within the

hospital. They help people who are suffering with a medical problem, work with clients and their families to provide necessary services to make their lives easier for the duration of the client's illness and to help them deal with the consequences directly related to that illness. Medical social workers are trained in counseling and psychotherapy to assist patients with health issues and problems with everyday life. Medical Social workers are also facilitating the Patient's paper work, and provide guidance to the family through the entire process of Patient admission, hospital stay till their discharge from hospital. Hospital social workers report an increase in the severity of client problems, caseload size, paperwork and waiting lists for services (Whitaker, et al, 2006). They play an important role in linking up the medical and social services for facilitating patient's speedy recovery and rehabilitation in the community. Due to work load, for a doctor or a nurse, it is not possible to solve patient's psycho-social or sometime economic problems. It's therefore the medical social worker who play a vital role in handling patients these needs effectively and efficiently.

There is a significant amount of literature available on the importance of social work education, its fields and methods of practices, but most of the researches are conducted in Western societies. Unfortunately, there is not much contribution by researcher on this topic within Pakistani paradigm and, we are still left far behind compared to other nations. The main purpose of this paper is to understand how social work is designed and implemented in Pakistan? What are the challenges and what are the administrative problems faced by professionals? Employing qualitative methods this paper is Exploratory in its nature.

Concept of Medical Social Work Practice in Pakistani Pedagogical Context

Pakistan, a country situated in the Southern part of Asia is the 6th most populous country of the World, with its current population estimated at 156.26 million (Government of Pakistan, 1998). Pakistan is spread over an area of 796,000 sq.km and comprises of four provinces, namely Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan, Khyber pakhtun khwa; whereas Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Gilgit, Baltistan are working under federal government control. Pakistan is a developing country with a rapidly growing population. Pakistan, with a GNP of US \$ 470 per capita, central government expenditure on health is only about 1% (UNICEF, 1996). In the recent years, especially after independence, Pakistan has undergone enormous changes politically, economically socially. These changes have brought a large amount of uncertainty with in people's life. Providing better healthcare facilities are the primary responsibility of the Government. Provinces of Pakistan previously assumed overall responsibility for the implementation of health care services. Through a process of decentralization initiated in August 2001, however, districts began to assume responsibility for all public activities, including health care services.

According to Khalid. (1982) and Shah, N.A, (2015): "Centuries ago the idea of welfare state began to influence the state policy and action. In most cases the state directly participates in the economic sphere. It controls and regulates wages, cost of living and prices, finances, credit, currency, foreign exchange, banking insurance, and several other matters are regulated and controlled for the benefit of common people."

Medical Social Work has undergone considerable changes in Pakistan since its inception (1947) and at that time, much of work was done upon the sponsorship or donations or aid basis of Philanthropists Khalid, (2011). At the early time of newly independent country which has the big target to rehabilitate the migrated people who were living in refugee camps in unhygienic environment. Most of time, the work was done on hap hazard and in emergency

situations without any planning for concrete action. People involved in social service were untrained, volunteer who perform this task on humanitarian basis.

According to Ms. Rehmatullah,S. (2002:288)“In 1953, Miss Anna Mo Toll, a Swedish, medical social worker visited Karachi, in response to the request from the Govt. of Pakistan to UN”. At that moment in time everybody was perplexed about the meaning and scope of “Medical Social Work” and concerned about its achievement in a country. Some health officials even felt that there was no need to train people especially for medical social work Ms. Rehmatullah, (2002:290) & (Malik and Sarfaraz, 2012:213).

With the passage of time, the situation has changed drastically and Medical Social Work is no longer highly dependent on the philanthropist and volunteers for funding, it is become a profession now –although there is a strong alliance continues to exist in many cases.

Current Practices of Medical Social Work in Pakistan

In developing countries like Pakistan, the situation of professional social work especially Medical social work is often in a poor stage. Although social work has been progressively recognized in some areas of Pakistan as a concept or as a profession, it is still felt by the masses as an act of 'good will' or charity inspired either by a sense of religious duty or simple piety. The definition of the term 'Medical social work education' has been the subject of much debate in Pakistani pedagogy .It is tempting to argue that Whether it is a Profession or not? In fact, there is a lot of confusion over the use of the term –meaning and scope, still most of the people are not aware of the fact that it is a professional subject which is based on scientific knowledge. History has witnessed that Pakistani people has a very rich tradition to help the patient visit them during their hospital. This practice is being considered as an important norm and moral obligation stems from Islamic ethical principles. It is interesting to note that in Pakistani society, people often not easily differentiated between professional and non-professional social workers. As a matter of fact, many cultures of Pakistani society, social workers are considered to be intellectually imperfect (weak or less intelligent).There is a self-created perception among people that doctors, engineer are being considered as highly intellectual and credible profession. the social worker as a profession have a social status less than equal to that of any other scientific Professionals and practitioner. Most of the people believe that there is no need of any expertise, skills or professional degree is require for doing social work. Anybody may practice or distribute charity, do reform work and be useful to any person or an institution designed to render social services. In general, the common man perception is that any good hearted person with wealth and desire to serve the distressed, the destitute and the poor person usually regarded as social worker. Ironically enough, in this modern era of technology, social changes seem to have motivated the situation as this filed have a lot of potential to change or improve human life.

In Pakistan, 3.1% of the gross domestic product is spent on economic, social, and community services; 43% is spent on debt servicing.(Government of Pakistan,2002)About 0.8% is spent on healthcare, which is lower than in Bangladesh (1.2%) and Sri Lanka (1.4%) (World Bank. 1998/99) In 2005 and 2006, less than 17\$ was spent on each Pakistani's health, which is very low based on international standards (Poullier JP et al, 2003) Healthcare statistics shows that healthcare workers include 91,823 physicians, 37,623 nurses, 4,175 dentists, 22,528 paramedics, and 5,619 female health workers. There are 796 hospitals, 93,907 hospital beds, 5,171 basic health units, 531 rural health centers, and 856 maternity and child health centers (Government of Pakistan,2001) The Pakistani healthcare system is neither competent nor

comprehensive to provide adequate services for the growing population.(Sharif KM.,2001) . In Pakistan, Most of the rural and urban people, live under poverty, are deprived from health services due to lack of doctors and nurses. People are still unaware about healthy life style and often their low economics background insists them to ignore their diseases at early stage. Under these circumstances, In Pakistan, many attempts have been made to improve the health conditions of the people through availability of trained personnel, adequate supply of medicines and establishment of health services.

The discussion about need and importance of medical social work practice in Karachi is closely related to the broader concept of social work development in Pakistan especially in Sindh Province. Medical social work has been a very productive field. It is the application of theory of social work is useful in addressing the problems relevant to clinical practice. Medical Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideas, and its values are based on respect for equality, worth, and dignity of all people. It focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential by enabling them to solve their problem on self-help basis. This is extremely complex process, which demands a systematic approach for developing the understanding about the Patient rights and their satisfaction. Globally, the scope of Medical Social work education, remunerative work and community affairs is very demanding especially in developed countries. However, in Pakistan, the profession is yet to gain adequate recognition from those individuals and institutions that matter. This tragedy is the root cause in the speedy growth of the profession in this country.

Pakistan has under-went a long socio-political conflict before and after 9/11 and even today, its citizens are facing great challenges that disturbing its way to achieve socio-economic development. Social development has not been an isolated process. There are a number of challenges on the way of progress in Pakistan like poverty, unemployment, unstable law and order or security condition, religious extremism, human trafficking that requires social treatment. As a Medical social worker we believe that social problems could alleviate some of the consequences and could be addressed properly if people understand their causes. social progress of any country or its process such as technical development ,the distribution of material and economical resources; socio-political issues and conflict cannot understood anymore without analyzing the social fabric of a nation.

Role of Medical Social Worker in Hospital Setting with Special Reference to Pakistan

According to Margaret Alston,(2001),“Social Worker asses the social circumstances of clients, establish the extent to which these have contributed to ill health, and alleviate these conditions; plan adequate care in community once people have been discharged from hospital; attend to those matters that may interfere with healthcare; and ameliorate the social distress, including of family and friend, caused by illness, disability, frailty, and death”.

In Pakistan, the Health sector suffers low efficacy for implementation of programs and insufficient funds and budget allocation with poor management, supervision. As a matter of fact, Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of literacy in the world, among the comparative socioeconomic countries. In health sector less budget allocation is causing great difficulties to meet the needy patients' requirement. In Pakistan due to rising cost of living which leads to a number of social, emotional , psychological and economic problems which increased rapidly. The situation becomes more serious if somebody from the family gets hospitalized due to chronic illness because mostly people are living in joint family setup. In Pakistan, like other developing or under developing countries, health care expenditure extends beyond the range of common man. The current political and economic climate has had a detrimental impact on

some aspects of Medical social work practice. In fact, the importance of medical social work as profession and its role in patient care and in human welfare has become a sort of mantra, a mum-and-apple –pie notion that few would provoke.

Current Situation of Medical Social Services in Karachi,Sindh

According to Ms. Rehmatullah,S. (2002): “People in Pakistan are charity –oriented-organized as well as personal. This charity attitude had to be channeled and demonstrated the only means of achieving.”

Medical Social Welfare officers are employed in hospitals to cater the need of poor and vulnerable patients in hospital. In Pakistan, Medical social welfare officers generally with the help of hospital administration, doctors and eminent philanthropist, established Patient welfare society in Hospitals and collecting donation. The government also provides financial support from Zakat Fund and Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal .

Zakat deduction was started in 1980. Later on, the system of Bait-ul-Maal was created from ‘transfer of receipt from tax, grants, from the federal, provincial, and local authorities, organizations international agencies, voluntary donations including sadqat, and Kahirat (personal charities). It is broad and well-planned infrastructure of an Islamic Public Assistance System Developed which provides much needed support to medical social work at every level.

In Sindh, The Provincial Administrated Hospitals like Civil Hospital the medical social services projects are not functional due to shortage of resources. As compared to the government, the private sector is offering better health care services in the country. Few hospital who are running in private setup are being providing the Medical Social Welfare services in Karachi where the some qualified Medical Social welfare or non-professional officers are employed to cater the need of poor and vulnerable patients in private hospital set-up .In many cases, the financial assessment for non-affording or providing counselling services or Patient Satisfaction in not at satisfactory level in Private Hospitals. On another hands, the job of Social Welfare Officer in hospitals has led to a decrease in formal opportunities for practice in Sindh, a province of Pakistan, and as a result has led to feelings of isolation, loss of professional identity, and low morale among the social workers, students of social work who belongs to Karachi and Sindh.

In Pakistan, in the province of Sindh, there is a ban on Medical Social Services in Government Set up due to shortage of resources. The services of Social Welfare Officers who has been deputed in Federally Administrated hospitals are transferred.Consequent upon approval of 18th Amendment Act,2010 (Act No.X of 2010) in the constitution of Islamic Republic Of Pakistan, resultant abolition of concurrent legislative list and thereby devolution of Social Services (Medical) following Centre under the Ministry of Social Welfare & Special Education has been transferred to the Social Welfare Department Government of the Sindh vide Establishment Division Government of Pakistan Notification No .4-5/2011 dated 5th April2011.(source :Govt of Pakistan Notification 2011). Following are the details of institutions where the services of Medical Social Welfare officers have been transferred:

1. Social Services Medical Centre, National Institute of Child Health (NICH), Karachi.
2. Social Services Medical Centre, National Institute of Cardiac Vascular Diseases (NICVD), Karachi.
3. Social Services Medical Centre, Jinnah Post Graduate Medical Centre (JPMC), Karachi.

There have been many changes and difficulties emerging in the Medical Social Work practice in Sind after the transfer of Medical Project to Sindh government. Firstly, there is a ban imposed to the appointment of any Medical Social Welfare officers in hospital due to government shortage of funds to cater the needs of poor PATIENTS. Secondly, those who are transferred from federal government to the Government of Sindh are highly de-motivated as there is no job career for them. They have continue their job till there retirement without having any training or further Promotion.

Today, if we examine the current challenges of Medical social workers in the field, it is revealed that a number of non-financial constraints have played an equally important role in the underperformance of Social welfare officers working in the field. They are de-motivated and distracted from their work by conflicting interests. Weak governance, imbalance of human resource, lack of equitable service delivery, absence of social safety nets, lack of effective implementation of regulations particularly in a large un-regulated private sector are some of these factors having an adverse impact on their performance in the health sector . Apart from the problem of Government less investment in health sector, the practice of Medical Social Work or case work management is in a disappointing situation. These issues are complex and multidimensional, requiring immediate response. All the stakeholders including the government have neglected social welfare training institutions .It is need of the day to concentrate and establish social welfare project in all districts in the country especially in hospitals (both public and private).

Major types of services provided by MSWs to patients and their families include counselling services through individual casework or group work approach; close collaboration with other medical and allied health professionals for psychosocial assessment and formulation of welfare plans; provision of tangible assistance such as waiver of medical charges, making recommendations for charitable trust funds etc. They arrange Patient welfare activities are fund raising for under privileged patient's liaison with philanthropists & other charitable trusts distributing medicines & I.V.Fluids to the needy patients. They also organize periodic recreational activities for patients. A prime responsibility of Medical Social Worker in under develops country like Pakistan, is to Assists patients who cannot afford their medications nor have any health insurance. The main aim is to help and facilitate poor patients by providing free medicines or making arrangements for operations.

In Pakistan, Medical social welfare officers generally with the help of hospital administration, doctors and eminent philanthropist, established Patient welfare society in Hospitals and collecting donation. The government also provides financial support from Zakat Fund and Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal. Medical Social worker also assists with patient transitions and discharge planning and they Performs psycho-social assessments. Patient Education is another very important job of MSW.The education Program for mainly focuses on promoting health and good quality of life as well as informing the patients about what is happening to him or her, how it has affected, what are the doctors' plans and how he has to adhere to treatment.

MSWs are deputed in hospitals and clinics to provide timely psycho-social intervention to patients and their families and help them cope with or solve problems arising from, illness or disability. As a member in the multidisciplinary clinical team, MSW plays an important role in linking up the medical and social services to facilitate a patient's recovery and rehabilitation in the community. Major types of services provided by MSWs to patients and their families include Psychosocial Assessments – Assessment of a person's problem solving, coping, emotional and developmental capacities in the context of their social and environmental

circumstances; Group Work (Educational & Therapeutic); Provide counseling services through individual casework or group; Working with families or carers and facilitating family meetings; Crisis intervention; Coordinate and collaborate with statutory and voluntary services regarding patients and their families or carers. Establish care links for referrals for community resources; Mediation and do advocacy for the patients, counsel them about their health status. Assessing Child Protection / Elder Abuse / Domestic Violence concerns and referring on as appropriate place; Establish relation between patient and doctor; Guides the respective doctor about the social economic condition of patient, so that doctor may be able to prescribe medicine in a better way. In the end we can say that the Job of MSW is very challenging which contributes every aspect of patients' needs i.e. physical, psychological, financial etc. Medical Social Worker helps the community by assessing their needs and organizes the people to plan programs and provide services in order to meet the needs of the needy patients. They also create social awareness for needy patients particular and community in general about the social causes of diseases, their prevention and amelioration. In short, Medical social work is in a position to shape the health care system through creative utilization of research-informed assessment and intervention tools and through development of innovative models of practice-based evidence

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study suggested the following recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders to; moving the Medical Social work profession into the mainstream of healthcare delivery in Pakistan requires immense effort on many fronts. There is a dire need to change the public image for meaning full and flourishing growth of the profession in the country. There is a great need to appoint social workers in different hospitals (in both public & private sector) to improve the quality of services for patients and well-being of Pakistan's population. It is suggested that Government of Pakistan may formulate a clear vision and appoints Medical Social Workers in Public Hospital across sindh province in each District Head Quarter Hospital as per the practices of other provinces of Pakistan. Furthermore, it is necessary to reshape the existing employment structure and design better policies for future. It is recommended that the modification in job Identification may be done and the term of Medical social work may be replaced as " Medical social work practitioner".

More evaluation research is needed in various health care settings regarding the effectiveness of Medical Social work in Pakistan. A well-established institutional mechanism is needed to improve the quality of life and well-being of Pakistan's population; which ensure effective implementation and strength the role of Medical social work practitioner. The study suggested In-services training of MSO at national and international level are needed. The federal Ministry of Health and the Provincial Department of Health and Ministry of Social Welfare have to play a critical role in this respect and take serious step on this matter. In this context; an updated or revised National Social Welfare Policy for strength the existing setup is also needed.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that in pursuance of new possibilities for a better and healthy world, it is important that state must empower Medical social work as profession by integrating policies and practices that support and nurtures' social work perspectives ,and approaches so that they can participate in an environment that respect their knowledge. More importantly, Association of Professional Medical Social Work Practitioner is need to be established in the country as there is no professional Association of social worker it is milieu to operate its professional identity and to deal and resolve the professional policy issues effectively.

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END NOTES

Zakat is a Religious Tax, lived on every Muslim Voluntarily paid by an individual to those found in need. Pakistan Bait-ul –Mal System (PBM) fulfills the aims and objectives of an Islamic Welfare State based on purely Islamic Tenants. In, Pakistan, in 1992 the Government set up Bait-ul-Mal, established as a separate body, a fund to provide assistance for the needy and destitute persons.