

Field Work in Social Work Education: As Engine for Women Empowerment

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“Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately good nation”.

- Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The rises of feminist ideas have, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition throughout the world in recent times. Access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of these women's rights movements.

Women empowerment:

The term ‘*women empowerment*’ conveys different meanings in different contexts. However, in general it is understood to be a process of consolidating, maintaining or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular cultural context. It is basically the process which tries to change the nature and direction of those systematic forces which marginalize the women.

It is a process of awareness and capacity building so that the women have a greater participation in the decision making process and thus can have a control over the transformative processes. The process of women empowerment is not a war between man and women but an umbrella of efforts aimed at achieving a harmonious restructuring of the power relations between them.

Women empowerment as a process of redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women was introduced at the third International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. Since then the women's empowerment as an issue has raised at almost all international platform like the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio

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De Zenario in 1992, at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, at the International Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, and at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 where empowerment was seen as an objective of social and economic development.

In short women's empowerment is a dynamic but a constant phenomenon which in the initial phase aims at women's liberation, freedom and equity and later has a long range goal focusing on full realization of their human rights and fundamental freedoms so as to ensure that they participate, fully and equally in the political, civil, economic, social and cultural life.

Perspectives on women empowerment:

As the phenomenon of empowering women has gathered momentum nationally and internationally, new perspectives have emerged on this issue. The "**radical gender perspective**" is based on the premise that "women suffer because they are women" and the gender-ridden beliefs and practices put women at a distinct disadvantage. Therefore women's empowerment calls for the adoption of a gender based perspective where women have to be viewed worthy of self-respect and dignity.

The "**enablement perspective**", also called as the "**capacity perspective**" is based on the premise that if the women's are educationally, economically and politically empowered, many of their problems can automatically be solved. The educational empowerment of women is the first step towards equality and justice to women and similarly, the economic empowerment of women is a necessary condition for enabling women to seek justice and equality.

The "**legal entitlement perspective**" on women's empowerment relies on the fact that the constitutional measures and other specific provisions concerning women's empowerment bridge the inequality gap between men and women.

Under the "**social change perspective**", it is necessary that widely held norms, values, attitudes and beliefs against women must be changed it is believed that various problems confronting women are embedded in the wide variety of existing institutional arrangements

Social work – a humanitarian profession:

National Association for social worker has defined social work as a "Professional activity of helping individual, group or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favourable to this goal"

The scope for practicing social work as private profession in India is next to nil. Petty political party workers who also call themselves social workers appear to be doing better. The image of a social worker amongst the general public is such that if a trained social worker were to introduce himself/herself the response coming from the opposite person most likely is to be: I am a social worker too. If we look at the methods of professional social work, they talk of helping people individually (social case work method), helping people in groups (social group work method) and helping people's communities (community development method).

Field instruction is truly the **heart of social work education**. It is where students learn to apply the theory they have been taught in the classroom. It is about teaching, learning, and

contributing to individuals, groups, and communities. Students are the most important part of the field instruction process and are regarded as adult learners who must take a great deal of the responsibility for the education they receive in the field setting. Fieldwork also allows students to build an understanding and appreciation of the many ways a scientific and analytic approach to knowledge building informs and is informed by professional practice. Field work is one, which is been used as engine by graduate students of social work to empower women.

Social work intervention:

The social work profession is getting recognition in India with all its limitations. It requires awe-inspiring vision to transform a rather unknown temple town into a thriving educational township. This credit goes to Dr. Mohan Alva, the founder and chairman of Alva's Education foundation®, because of whom Moodabidri has become an epitome of social engineering in modern India. Alva's college of Social work is empowering women by utilizing the resources present and students are provided an opportunity for developing their professional skills'. Social workers look at issues in context and find solutions within the interactions between people and their environments.

Social work interventions used by graduate social work students inempowering women are:

Training programme:

Women are motivated to attain various training programme to work for them self and fellow beings with collaboration of NGO's like ACTION AID, ADHARSHA and Sri Kshethradarmashtala self help groups.

Social group work:

The main aim of Social group work method is to attain social justice and empowerment of people. The clients hesitate to discuss about their personal problems would be encouraged to do so when she is allowed to share her problems with another person who has similar problem.

1. Making clients to have informal discussion among themselves
2. Concretizing the general discussion
3. Providing socio emotional support by taking discussed matter as a base.

Social work students are made to avail the opportunity to impart their knowledge to the whole group.

Campaign:

The campaign about various social issues will be done by the students of social work by forming human chain. By which the whole society is made aware about the laws which are there to protect women when they are exploited, this is a type of intervention which creates concern among others to respect and protect women.

Counseling:

Counseling is given to the women's families and to stabilize their socio economic and

emotional condition by considering their overall development.

Counseling given is intended to help, immediately and throughout the course of rehabilitation of women one who have undergone exploitation in the following way

- By enhancing their self esteem, “helping them to feel good about themselves”.
- By helping them to explore their situation so that they will be better able to understand and anticipate events.
- By increasing their sense of feeling in control.
- By enabling them to develop coping strategies.
- By enabling them to make decisions for themselves.
- By supporting families emotionally and socially.
- By enabling families to find their own support systems.

Case work:

Students used to refer the case found in the field work in the starting phase but afterwards there was good response from clients they started to motivated to other women to come front and work for them self.

Working with the family of HIV/AIDS infected women:

- In regard to HIV/AIDS there is necessary to have a sessions with family members because most of them will be rejected by their own family members.
- Family members of all clients are made to have informal conversation as a part of group work then discussed issues are taken by group worker for discussion then they will be made to understand the misconception and they are motivated to face the stigma with confidence by which clients will be getting positive stroke to live. Educating the family members in matter of health and illness and for allaying anxiety of family members.

Providing employment:

The +ve people are helped to get their employment for their economic stability by giving them opportunity to work in NGO's with which college has collaboration.

Micro finance:

The HIV/AIDS women clients are saving money Rs. 100 per month with intention of using that in there critical conditions or during their hospitalization by visualizing their future.

The parameters of women's empowerment on which the BSW students work in their field work are

1. Building a positive image of women by recognizing their contributions to the society.
2. Polity and the economy
3. Developing their critical thinking ability::
4. Fostering decision-making and action through collective process

Enabling women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health: Especially reproductive health. Women are made to attend self employment programme by which they are able to make very informed decisions about how their economic conditions should be improved.

Education has been regarded as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in the society. It not only develops the personality and rationality of individuals, but qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves their socio-economic status even though Mangalore is having high literacy rate there are women who don't know to sign.

5. Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes
6. Providing information knowledge and skill for gaining economic independence
7. Enhancing access to legal literacy and information relating to their rights and entitlements in society with a view to enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas.

Conclusion:

Indian women have mastered anything and everything which a woman can dream of. But she still has to go a long way to achieve equal status in the minds of Indian men. To be truly present with someone as they attempt to make sense of life and its meaning is a challenge and a privilege.

Our students express their experience in these words

"I have tried to learn from the strength and courage of many women and most important lesson learnt is to appreciate how precious and how delicate life and love can be, as hope is indeed a resilient bird with the sweetest of songs."

The desire of Indian women can be best summed up in the following lines of 'Song of an African Women':

I have only one request.
I do not ask for money
Although I have need of it,
I do not ask for meat . . .
I have only one request,
And all I ask is
That you remove
The road block
From my path.

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