

UNIT 6

APPROACHES IN SOCIAL CASE WORK

APPROACHES IN SOCIAL CASE WORK: Casework: A Psychosocial Therapy, Functional Approach, Theory: Social Workers and Case Management: The Key to Crisis Intervention, A Day in the Life of a Social Worker, Team Work as Intervention Strategy, Communication is the Key to Successful Intervention, Best Practice Interventions, Case Work Recording, Avoid the pitfall: What do we mean by social case work recording?, What is the purpose of social work recording?

1. Casework: A Psychosocial Therapy

Known in academic circles as the 'bible' for clinical practitioners of social work, *Casework: A Psychosocial Therapy* introduces readers to the basic theory and principles in the practice of psychosocial therapy, along with attention to the historical development of the approach as it has been enriched and expanded over the years. The authors' approach reflects a balanced focus on people, their environment, and the ways in which people interact with their environment. Essential techniques including how to conduct initial interviews with clients, crisis intervention, arriving at assessments, and choosing appropriate treatment, are thoroughly explained, and often clarified with case studies and vignettes, preparing readers to assess social work clients from a variety of perspectives. The book is designed for the graduate-level student who needs to master the principles, theories, and approaches of the psychosocial approach to applied practice, but it may also be used to fit a variety of courses, including the Introduction to Social Work BSW student who is looking for supplemental information on the basics of clinical practice. Now in its fifth edition, *Casework* has been thoroughly revised to keep discussions clear and up to date. New material has been added throughout, including a greater variety of case studies, discussions about current topics such as the influence of ethnicity and diversity in the social work practice, changes in family life roles, changes in ideas and practice approaches, and a significantly updated bibliography for reference.

2. Functional Approach

Structural functionalism is a broad perspective in sociology and

anthropology which sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole. In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system." For Talcott Parsons, "structural-functionalism" came to describe a particular stage in the methodological development of social science, rather than a specific school of thought. Parsons called his own theory for action theory and argued again and again that the term structural-functionalism was a misleading and inappropriate label to use as a name of his theory.

3. Theory

Classical functionalist theories are defined by a tendency towards biological analogy and notions of social evolutionism:

Functionalist thought, from Comte onwards, has looked particularly towards biology as the science providing the closest and most compatible model for social science. Biology has been taken to provide a guide to conceptualizing the structure and the function of social systems and to analyzing processes of evolution via mechanisms of adaptation ... functionalism strongly emphasizes the pre-eminence of the social world over its individual parts (i.e. its constituent actors, human subjects).

Social Workers and Case Management: The Key to Crisis Intervention

Every day around the world, people are in crisis. They face problems and situations that they cannot deal with alone and the caring advocacy of the social workers that help them may be the difference between their ability to deal with the crisis or to "drown" under the weight of it.

A Day in the Life of a Social Worker

The Social Worker's day is typically filled with crisis intervention. The diversity of the needs of the patients assigned to them requires research, strategic planning and provision of individualized support to each client. In addition, the nature of their work requires confidentiality and emotional separation to enable them to carry out

their case management in a professional manner.

Team Work as Intervention Strategy

Working closely with a client and his or her family, the social worker must also work as a member of a team to provide the best outcomes for the client. Depending on the type of work engaged in, and the type and extent of support required, the types of teams the worker is part of may change considerably from client to client.

Communication is the Key to Successful Intervention

Case management requires the development of excellent communication skills to enable all members of the team, and the client to feel that progress is being made and that the client's most pressing needs are being successfully addressed. Social work can be a difficult and sometimes stressful profession, but ongoing education can provide skills in areas that would otherwise be potentially draining. Courses in communication, technology, team work and strategic planning are among the many options that can help provide all health care workers with advanced skills to assist them in their work.

Best Practice Interventions

When an individual is faced with a crisis, they may in certain circumstances need someone to make decisions for them. This is particularly true of children requiring protective services intervention. Their age and vulnerability mean that often they are incapable of making important life decisions.

But older individuals must be empowered to make their own decisions and this is the role of social workers working with adult clients. They offer an essential service in the provision of advocacy and information, ensuring that their client is in a position to be able to make informed life choices.

If you feel that the field of social workers might be a career for you, why not check into one of the online training courses that are offered. You won't just learn a new skill, but will become a part of a movement that is all about helping others.

Case Work Recording

There has been a significant change in the nature of case recording, which in many ways reflects the wider changes in social work. Staffing levels, increased user

involvement and increased accountability to service users, the organization and profession, are all factors which have influenced the development of the case record and recording practice.

The traditional case record reflected the interaction between the practitioner and the service user, in the context of the service user's history and current situation. At its heart was the relationship between the practitioner and service user. Traditional case records were 'often written in an abstract discursive style for a sophisticated professional audience' within the agency. Practitioners were reluctant to restrict their professional autonomy by establishing 'clear and specific criteria for the clinical (practice) record'.

In the absence of any definition by practitioners, the way in which the case record developed to meet the changes in legislation and social work practice was led by organizational and managerial requirements. Whilst, the shift to more structured, focused and evidenced recording has been both welcome and necessary, concerns have been expressed that using case recording simply to evidence individual and organizational accountability neglects its value as a practice tool.

'The case file is the single most important tool available to social workers and their managers when making decisions as to how best to safeguard the welfare of children under their care. It should clearly and accessibly record the available information about the child and the action that has been taken on the case to date. Reference to the case file should be made at every stage of the case and before any significant decision is made'.

The case record should be more than a complex diary of the practitioner's actions and the response of the service user. To use it in such a way is like buying a video recorder and then only using its clock to tell the time. Practitioners should use case recording to support analysis and reflection.

Using recording for analysis requires practitioners to assess the weight that should be given to information gathered. To do this practitioners should draw on their knowledge from research and practice combined with an understanding of the child's needs within his or her family and/or the context in which the child lives.

Analysis provides a clear direction to ongoing records and assists practitioners

in identifying what information should be recorded. However analysis often takes place outside day to day recording and is facilitated by specific formats. Initial and Core Assessments, genograms, ecomaps, social histories and case summaries are all examples of formats that support analysis. They require practitioners to organize, manipulate and evaluate the information gathered in the case files. They provide an opportunity to assess the child's needs, monitor progress, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and to identify patterns that would may not immediately be apparent.

Often case recording can become almost a subconscious activity, like driving a car along a familiar road. You arrive but can't say exactly how you got there. The regular use of tools for analysis in the case record keeps recording a proactive activity that supports ongoing assessment, planning and intervention.

Avoid the pitfall

- Do not record simply **what** is happening, use analysis to move beyond this to hypothesise and explain **why** particular situations and events are occurring.
- Use genograms, ecomaps, chronologies and assessment records to help you to organise and to analyse information.
- Use case summaries as a way of reviewing progress and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.
- Use training, journals and articles to keep up to date with developments in research to inform your practice.

What do we mean by social case work recording?

We mean all the written material contained in the social work files of people using social work services. Social work files may be wholly or partly electronic or they may be in hard copy.

Recording is a crucial part of day to day social work practice and takes up a substantial amount of practitioners' time. Recording involves:

- * writing down the work you do;
- * noting the progress people make towards their desired outcomes;
- * including the views of the person;
- * analysis and assessment; and

- * the life history of the person and its interpretation.

Good records are an essential tool for practitioners to reflect on their ongoing work with people and plan future work. When shared with the person whose file it is they encourage transparency.

Recording is also part of the code of practice for social services workers 1 published by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The purpose of this code is to set out the conduct expected of social service workers and to inform people using social work services and the public about the standards of conduct they can expect from social service workers. Recording comes under section 6:

'As a social service worker you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.'

What is the purpose of social work recording?

- * documenting the involvement with the individual;
- * informing assessment and care planning;
- * enabling practitioners to review and reflect on their work;
- * assisting practitioners to identify any patterns;
- * ensuring accountability of staff;
- * meeting statutory requirements;
- * providing evidence for legal proceedings;
- * enabling continuity when a new worker takes over the case;
- * providing performance information;
- * forming a biography - for example, for a looked after child to read at a later date to provide them with their history;
- * providing evidence for inquiries or reviews; and
- * assisting partnership working between workers and people using their services.