**Why is social work important?**

According to British Association of Social Workers (BASW), social work is a profession that is centred around people. Social workers work with individuals and families to help improve their lives. They protect vulnerable people from harm and abuse. Also, they are supporting people to live independently (BASW, 2016a). Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a simple and universal definition of social work and to define the roles and functions of social work, which everyone is likely to agree with (Rwomire, 2011).

One of the most authoritative and most widely used definitions comes from International Federation of Social Workers:

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being." (IFSW, 2014)

Social workers registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) must work according to the code of practice. This ethical framework is to protect the public and to keep a register of health and care professionals who meet their standards for their training, professional skills, behaviour and health (HCPC, 2016).

The British Association of Social Workers also has a code of ethics for their members. Ethical awareness is fundamental for social workers; respect of human rights and promoting social justice are the basis of social work (BASW, 2016b).

Social workers often work with multidisciplinary teams and they can have various roles. Some of their main tasks are conducting interviews with individuals and families to assess their situation, offering information and support, maintaining accurate records and preparing reports and giving evidence in court (Prospect, 2015).

Social workers can hold statutory roles where they are responsible for enforcing the law, or they can have non-statutory roles usually in charities or in specialist roles, such as, providing support to homeless people and people with mental health issues (Prospect, 2015).

Brody (2010) highlighted numerous significant points from a document made by The College of Social Work Development Team, which clarifies the contribution of social work to the well-being and care of people and communities. According to Brody (2010), there is a wide range of situations where an individual or family might need social work support. For example, in the case of problems with family relationships or facing difficulties as a result of illness, disability or addiction. He stated that social work is the "safety net" of our society. Social workers help to protect individuals from harm to themselves and to others. They promote human development, security and social inclusion (Brody, 2010).

Brody (2010) pointed out that the purpose of social work is to encourage creative resolutions for the challenges vulnerable people face in their everyday lives. Social workers are responsible for identifying situations where they should become involved. Yet, often, there are no clear answers to many problems. The ability to understand conflicts of interest is a kind of essential skills which social workers must possess to achieve the best possible results for people (Brody, 2010).

Social workers need to possess many other abilities and skills in order to provide a service of high standard. Doel (2012, p. 137) suggested that social work does not have a single, unique skill. Social workers have wide-ranging skills, some of the main ones are: critical understanding of policy and challenge injustice, to observe, listen, communicate, organise, to express empathy and understanding, to give support and care, to transfer learning from one situation to another and pursue professional development. They deploy these skills in a variety of settings with individuals, families, groups, communities and organisations.

Cunningham and Cunningham (2008, pp. 14-15) stated that according to the functionalist perspective the social work profession is constituting an element of society that fulfils an important role in maintaining society. They are assisting service users to fit into the mainstream society more effectively. For example, parents who lack good parenting should be assisted to perform the parenting role more effectively. Cunningham and Cunningham (2008) noted that those who do not fit into society can be subject to social control functions of the social work role. This view can be criticised, because it places the source of all problems on the individual, requiring him or her to change rather than seeing the system in any way culpable.

Therefore, Cunningham and Cunningham (2008) highlighted that social workers must have a clear understanding of the unequal society and the way this affects the life of service users. Social workers must take into account both macro and micro perspectives when they intervene with individuals (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2008, p. 26).

As the social work includes a wide variety of helping roles in different settings, it is difficult to summarise it. However, it can be concluded that social work is an important element of society. By working with other disciplines, it is promoting well-being and it is contributing to the fully functioning of our society.

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