

Reinvented Social Work Profession: Myths, Misconceptions, Critiques and Contradictions

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ABSTRACT

In 1936, social work education began in India when the Sir Dorabji Graduate School of Social Work was established. It has been 88 years since then, and there have been numerous changes and advancements in social work education, teaching, and professional practice. Each year, thousands of social work graduates complete their education. The discrepancy between social work theory and its application in the Indian context, the shortage of suitable job opportunities, the uncertainty surrounding social work education and career paths, and the lack of awareness among the general public have all contributed to the decline of social work in India. This article explores the misunderstandings, speculations, and contradictions surrounding the social work profession. It reviews peer-reviewed articles based on the author's experiences and observations in the field of social work, as well as the collection and analysis of secondary data to discuss the factors that hinder the advancement of social work careers in India and the misconceptions held by the public.

Keywords: *Social Work, Myths, Social Workers, Perspectives, Professional, Public Perceptions*

In common language, we usually say: There is no leaf that the goat does not touch, and there is no work that social workers do not do (there is no field that is not subject to social work). This may indicate scope for social workers in today's context. Working professionals are enlightened with demanded principles, values, skills, and tactics as they are eager to cook your food. Globalized society is known for its neo-innovative, escalating, and burning issues. Several emerging and worsening areas await upcoming professional social workers to test their technique and skills. In fact, these can also be seen as challenges, such as COVID-19, which shook the entire human society three years ago. Each person is unique in their talents, capacities, and capacity for change. However, some of the growth-hindering issues in his family and social milieu are what are holding him back. Social workers are continually trying to bring out this energy in people and make changes to develop their responsibility to inspire others or exercise responsibility in this manner. Every profession has its own set of professional standards in this day of globalization. Additionally, social work has established its own professional norms. Social workers are more exposed to social interaction as they work in society, and this includes citizens. A

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number of misunderstandings concerning social work and social workers are also held by various professionals, as well as the general public, hold a number of misconceptions regarding social work and social workers. These eventually came to be seen by the public as a sort of belief.

Over time, these get ingrained in people's thoughts as a sort of belief; however, it is a truth that they originate from incomplete or uninformed people rather than from professionals who have a thorough understanding of social work. It is the responsibility of social work academics and practitioners to provide accurate responses to common myths and misconceptions. The author has examined some of the most common global myths in this area. Their professional talents are suffering as a result of this.

Objectives

1. Exploring myths, misunderstandings, and truths about the social work profession.
2. Correcting misconceptions and inconsistencies by emphasizing accurate information about the social work profession, thus contributing to career advancement and progress.
3. Examining the roles, obligations, and tasks of social workers within the framework of the reputation, respect, and dedication of the social work profession worldwide.
4. Seeking to transform the social work profession by thoroughly evaluating national and global social work literature.

METHODOLOGY AND DRAFT ADVANCES STRUCTURE

This comprehensive article is the outcome of an extensive examination and evaluation of social work literature at both national and international levels. The preparation of this article involved a thorough review of social work literature, articles, and chapters. The author relied on secondary sources as the foundation for this article. A systematic search was carried out for this purpose. The material was meticulously assessed in relation to the title and objectives of the present article. Research articles and chapters were sought on platforms such as ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Academia.edu, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and other academic and scientific websites, and subsequently appraised in alignment with the article's title and objectives.

During the creation of this special research article, the research writer systematically searched for secondary sources on the Internet. The search encompassed international and national peer-reviewed journals, social work research literatures, articles, chapters, observations and comments, as well as websites of national and international universities and social work professional organizations. The obtained secondary data were then reviewed and analyzed in a systematic manner based on the title and purposes of the article.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A century after Abraham Flexner's (1915/2001) infamous speech conveyed his "dismissive attitude toward social work's professionalism," Gelman and González (2016) reflected that social work is again at a critical juncture. The fight for recognition of social work's professional status has been influenced by multiple factors, including negative public perceptions of the occupation. Social work has been criticized for strengthening a static, 'traditional', and sometimes even repressive view on positional power asymmetries, such as, for instance, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Burck & Gwyn, 1995; Dominelli, 2002, 2004, 2008; Sue, 2006). According to the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics, "The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being

and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.” Social work, as an applied profession, aims to promote social change, cohesion, and the liberation of people (Twikirize, 2022). Through micro, meso, and macro interventions (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

Reamer (2006), one of the most prominent topics that have been as meticulously discussed as the social work ethics scholars, argued that since the relevance of values and ethics to the profession’s inception, “social workers’ Indeed, the crucial role that values play in guidance was focused primarily on cultivating a setting for the mission of the profession and establishing values upon which the mission of social work practitioners’ priorities that have been articulated could be based” (p. ix). Over time, the profession by membership bodies and ethics scholars alike has nurtured and refined a set of values that have been given (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], meaning and purpose to generations of social workers, 1996; Reamer, 2006). Values are used to articulate workers’ careers” (Reamer, 2006, p. ix). (Derek Chechak). Indeed, social work has always differentiated itself from other professions because of its roots in social justice, equality, and fairness, so much so that a researcher (1994) called it the most normative of the so-called helping professions (Derek Chechak).

Definitions of Social Work

- 1. Global Definition of the Social Work Profession:** “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. The International Definition of Social Work (IFSW 2014) states that the role of the profession is to promote social change through the practice of focusing on human well-being, human rights, and social justice.
- 2. Council on Social Work Education, 2015:** The profession of Social Work is dedicated to promoting: human and community well-being. Guided by a person-in-environment framework, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally.

Ethical Responsibilities (<https://www.socialworkers.org>).

- 1. Social welfare:** Welfare professionals, such as social workers, aim to advance human welfare by promoting the growth and advancement of individuals, groups, communities, and the social environment. Social workers prioritize meeting the fundamental needs of individuals because H.H. Perlman said "problems are unmet needs."
- 2. Public participation:** Public participation is encouraged by social workers in order to ensure that the benefits of development initiatives and programs are accessible to the general public. Stimulating and facilitating people's involvement at all stages of development is essential for this purpose.
- 3. Public emergencies:** We become more aware of the significance of social work interventions during public emergencies, such as natural disasters, health crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic, where there is a greater need for high-quality professional services.

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4. Social political action
5. Social and political action
6. Through social and political action, social workers strive to ensure equal access to essential resources and services for all individuals to meet their basic human needs.

Value based profession

The ethics, values, philosophies, and principles of social work serve as its compass. Social workers who adhere to these practices transform society as a result of their dedication and specialization. The field of social work is founded on values. Why this is a value-based profession may be a mystery to others. Since it includes principles like integrity, human relationships, social fairness, individual ideals, and dignity. The ideals and dignity of the individual are valued in the practice of social work. Human values and connections have been upheld as being important. In their profession, social workers uphold values including individual dignity, human rights, honesty, and privacy.

Social work is impacted by the broader community and society. To comprehend social activities, we must first grasp community and social structures, as social workers operate within these contexts. It is a complex and extensive concept, requiring social workers to maintain a broad perspective. Within society, there are various individuals and groups from different communities, including those based on gender, age, religion, caste, culture, and geography. As social workers, it is essential to understand their backgrounds and identities before addressing their issues, as these problems and challenges are directly or indirectly influenced by these factors.

Interaction between person and environment

Through the application of social work methods, skills, techniques, tools, and theories, professional social workers aim to enhance people's lives by addressing the challenges they encounter in their surroundings. The social worker must have an ample range of knowledge and techniques that can be used to meet the unique needs of individual clients, client groups, communities and organizations at large. (Prof prathibha. J and Dr. Anil Prasad Bandela pp. 15).

Sociologists and psychologists believe that individuals are shaped by society and are connected to their environment from birth to death. The environment, encompassing family, natural surroundings, and social settings, continually exerts influence on individuals. Environmental stimuli are limitless, resulting in a constant impact on human beings. The majority of an individual's challenges are attributed to their surrounding environment. What matters is how individuals react to these environmental stimuli. Therefore, the social work profession endeavours to enhance the interaction between individuals and their environment.

"Profession of social work came forth through the effort to address the person-environment interaction in the service of improving peoples' lives and facilitating transformation and growth through skilful interventions (Prof. Prathibha J. Mishra and Dr. Anil Prasad Bandela, 2015 pp.12)

Social work focuses primarily on addressing psycho-social issues

People become more vulnerable due to psycho-social factors, which further exacerbate issues within social parenting systems. These problems have a detrimental impact on economic, personal, family, and social aspects, ultimately affecting social well-being. Social work involves identifying the root causes of these psycho-social problems and addressing

them through a scientific approach. Social work plays a vital role in improving people's interaction, engagement, and participation within society. Efforts are made to assist individuals in enhancing their social engagement by connecting with others and social organizations. Social workers are instrumental in facilitating changes in individuals and social institutions to adapt to a rapidly evolving world (Prof. Pratibha J. Mishra & Dr. Anil Prasad Bandela, pp.13, 2015).

With its attention to both individual and environmental interventions, the social work profession has tended toward a more integral perspective since its beginning. Social work, at its most comprehensive, has committed itself to addressing the connection between clients or client systems and society, intervening to create change on both personal and environmental levels. Cited by Heather Larkin (2004), (Addams J. 2002).

Myths of Social Work

The field of social work is competitive, dynamic and constantly changing. However, despite the importance of skilled social workers today, there are a variety of unsubstantiated myths that surround the field. (Chapters Health System Social Work: Debunking Myths and Embracing the Impact)

<https://www.oasw.org> (OASW), www.niruta.org

1. Myth: Having a career as child welfare social worker only deals with the well-being of children.

Fact: As social workers work with a variety of populations in a variety of contexts, their scope of practice is actually quite broad. Social work is easy enough for anyone to do. A few members of the public are working and receiving publicity for their social work. In essence, they are employed in unrelated fields. Specialized training, education, abilities, and values are needed for social work. Thus, no one is able to complete this. It is a job that is exclusively performed by those with a bachelor's, masters, or doctorate in social work.

2. Myth: Social workers take children away from their families.

Fact: Modern circumstances have created a lot of difficult conditions for the protection of children. They have created an environment conducive to the all-round development of children. Child trafficking, child labour, child marriage, child malnutrition, sexual exploitation, physical and mental violence, abuse, desertion, their education, health, housing, nutritious food, etc., have hampered their overall development.

Social workers work in order to improve the conditions conducive for children to stay with their families for a long time. They do not remove the children from the family; instead, they add children to the family. The more children are out of the family, the greater the risk they are. Some anti-national hands get children and turn them into anti-socials. The Government of India has created a child helpline (1098) for the protection of children, in which social workers act as child counsellors.

3. Myth: Don't get paid well as a social worker.

Fact: Social workers may not receive high pay initially, but it is possible for them to earn a good salary early on in their careers. In the early stages, social workers can expect to earn anywhere from 18000 to 20000, and this can increase to a range of 60000 to 100000 with experience. Those who take on roles such as coordinator on regional and national projects, project officer, or senior manager in corporate sectors can earn a monthly salary ranging from Rs 60,000 to Rs 300,000. Large multinational organizations are increasingly hiring

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social workers to manage significant projects as part of their corporate social responsibility efforts. To secure these roles, social workers need to continually update their skills, knowledge, and experience in their respective fields. By doing so, they can ensure they receive a good salary for their work.

4. Myth: Anyone possessing a compassionate nature is capable of performing the tasks of a social worker.

Fact: Social workers are experienced and qualified experts with a bachelor's and master's degree in social work. Social workers assist individuals in improving their circumstances. Typically, social workers offer assistance to individuals of varying ages who are experiencing difficulties, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

5. Myth: You may need to visit a psychologist or psychiatrist for psychiatric treatment or mental health services.

Fact: Social workers are a large group of doctors who provide psychiatric treatment and other mental health services in the province.

6. Myth: Social workers are "good doers" who interfere in people's lives.

Fact: Social workers are highly skilled professionals who help people solve problems that affect their daily lives. The goal of social work practice is to enable people to solve their problems in a better way and lead a satisfying life in the community.

7. Myth: The field of social work addresses depression.

Fact: Social work is a rewarding profession as it involves working with challenging populations in difficult circumstances and finding various ways to support them through anticipated changes in their lives, ultimately leading to a sense of fulfilment in helping communities and individuals.

8. Myth: There is no career progression in social work.

Fact: Social work offers diverse career opportunities across industries such as multinational companies, prisons, child guidance centres, NGOs, correctional agencies, hospitals, psychological counselling centres, and schools, providing employment in a variety of organizations and potential career advancements for social workers in different roles.

9. Myth: A career in social work does not necessarily mean that you will be distributing welfare checks.

Fact: In reality, social workers generally do not work directly for welfare agencies, although they may have clients who receive welfare payments for various reasons.

10. Myth: Engaging in social work involves acts of charity and altruism.

Fact: Social workers strive to address problems by providing professional and scientific assistance to individuals. The ultimate objective of social work is to empower individuals, groups, and communities to become self-sufficient through education and self-help, with the goal of finding lasting and scientific solutions to economic challenges through social work processes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the one hand, social work has a long history of employment across borders; nonetheless, Examining the beliefs, misunderstandings, and various viewpoints that people hold about social work and how they affect the field as professional social workers demonstrates their

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care and dedication to the field. Moreover, it will aid in straightening the crooked paths for professional advancement. What false beliefs about social work and social workers in the workplace do the general public, other professionals, and colleagues hold? And how may that impede one's ability to advance professionally? To ascertain that, a number of writers have offered expert research presentations. Professional social workers who are new to the field of social work and prepared to implement various services and schemes of social work are motivated by the aforementioned factors to have suspicious, ambivalent, and negative attitudes towards their professionalism. This includes existing social workers as well. Without a doubt, this will cause social work to suffer professionally.

Social work in India is at the pinnacle of professional construction thanks to the involvement of social workers, the government, and the general public, despite a number of obstacles. It is undeniably difficult for social workers to retain their professional standing, which comes down to attitude and career orientation.

Despite the fact that the word "*social worker*" is widely known, its interpretation is influenced by a variety of personal, societal, religious, and geographic elements. It is preferable to comprehend it in a professional setting, nevertheless. Social work is a career that comes and helps, and social workers are in a position to aid those who are in need and have problems. But it wasn't until after obtaining professional jobs that it became a significant career.

Social work is a dynamic field with the elegance of fresh innovation; it is neither passive nor closed. Several recent global advancements have improved the standing of social work, such as mandatory registration, statutory status access, government funding, and opportunities. Regardless of their role, or employing organisation, social workers often experience stigma and discrimination from the public, other allied professionals, each other, and sometimes from the people they are striving to help (Jordan, 2004; Lecory & Stinson, 2004; Leigh, 2016).

Social work and social workers face numerous misconceptions, speculations, and contradictions worldwide, including in developed countries where the profession originated. These criticisms and oppositions come from individuals with varying levels of education and understanding of social work, which poses significant challenges and hinders the profession's growth. These misconceptions are driven by speculative ideas rather than facts and are perpetuated by a range of individuals, including educated professionals, those with limited knowledge, and those indifferent to the field of social work. Regrettably, even those who spread myths, speculations, and contradictions about social work and social workers have likely received assistance from social workers at some point.

In India, there is a prevailing negative public perception of social workers, which is a cause for concern and is supported by recent statistics. The decline in the number of individuals pursuing social work courses and securing jobs in the field is evident, with a significant decrease in student enrollment in reputable social work schools in Karnataka. Many colleges offering social work degrees have also ceased operations, except for a few prestigious universities and schools.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the proliferation of colleges and institutions, shortage of qualified professors, inadequate teaching and training quality, absence of fieldwork training opportunities at the rural and taluka level, lack of localized and consistent

social work education literature, privatization of education, corruption in awarding social work degrees, and preferential treatment in grading by some universities are all contributing factors. Additionally, the lack of resources and discrimination based on native language are significant issues. These factors, among others, have led to varying perceptions of social workers based on personal, social, economic, and familial conditions within the public. When directly questioned about the tendencies and roles of social workers, the public generally holds positive opinions. Understanding the importance of public perception in this context and its impact on different societal levels is crucial. Upon careful review and analysis of these factors, it becomes evident that addressing these public perceptions is an urgent matter. The supportive findings from various researchers in this area serve as compelling evidence.

Key Points about Social Work and Social Workers

A) Theory and Evidence Based Social Work Practice

An organized collection of ideas designed to elucidate a specific phenomenon is known as a theory. The formulation of theories usually occurs in the absence of empirical evidence. In evidence-based social work practice, social workers adhere to established pathways based on the existing or accessible good evidence. These pathways represent the most effective approaches. Carol L Langer, Cynthia Lietz (31 December 2014).

1. The social work profession is important in helping the weaker sections of the people living in society.

Social work involves assisting individuals from marginalized communities (women, children, Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), elderly, disabled, poor, poor migrants, those living with HIV/AIDS, unorganized workers, drug addicts, illiterates, etc.) and those facing social and economic hardships. Social workers utilize various methods, skills, and theories to facilitate access to government programs, welfare services, and other support systems. These may include employment and training opportunities, financial aid, healthcare services, and housing assistance.

2. Social workers have a significant impact on the lives of individuals.

The main purpose of social work is to assist individuals who are facing challenges, have been neglected, oppressed, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, or belong to vulnerable groups. This is achieved by offering suitable and evidence-based solutions to help them attain economic, social, educational, and physical well-being and ensure their long-term development and stability.

3. Social workers play a substantial and valid role in the advancement of society and the nation.

No matter where you go, in any country around the world, the work carried out by social workers holds significant value. Their contributions to the development of society and the country are highly regarded.

4. They have actively contributed to creating positive societal changes by offering solutions to significant social issues like housing, migration, poverty, unemployment, prostitution, slums, alcoholism, and drug addiction, as well as addressing the needs of children, women, and the elderly.

5. Social workers are perceived as aiding themselves and their families.

Social workers engage in working with individuals, families, and communities through the utilization of specific approaches, including individual social work, group social work, and community organization methods. This allows for the provision of scientific, suitable, and sustainable resolutions to the challenges faced by individuals, families, groups, and communities. Challenges such as poverty, unemployment, alcoholism and drug addiction, suicide, physical and mental health issues, adoption, and divorce are significant problems for individuals and families.

6. Working with socially marginalized people

The upper class consistently oppresses people who are socially marginalized, subjecting them to discrimination and oppression. Human rights violations persist in this community, posing a significant challenge for social workers. Social workers address this issue through activities like policy development, social work research, and social governance and action. Global socioeconomic, ecological, and political challenges result in, among others, diverse communities where intolerance and injustices such as oppression and marginalization are visible. The very nature of social work is to provide services to individuals and groups within their natural settings to promote the well-being of the community and its members.

Social work is committed to improving the interaction among individuals, among institutions, and between people and institutions to enhance the general quality of life (Steven P. Segal and Jim Baumohl, 1981).

7. Working with socially marginalized people

The upper class consistently oppresses people who are socially marginalized, subjecting them to discrimination and oppression. Human rights violations persist in this community, posing a significant challenge for social workers. Social workers address this issue through activities like policy development, social work research, and social governance and action. Social workers have consistently served as the cornerstone of social development in India. The contribution of social workers has always been to the development and upliftment of society in India. Social workers made many efforts so that people from every section of society, like women, old age people, scheduled castes, tribal, disabled, third gender, weaker sections, etc., could become economically, socially, politically, and mentally strong. (Dr. Tulika Sharma). One of the key responsibilities of social workers is to promote social empowerment. Dr. Tulika Sharma identifies the following *six* attributes of social workers in her article (Role of Social Workers in Social Empowerment)

1. Independence: Many people face numerous problems, each with its own underlying causes. These problems have impeded people's ability to be self-reliant. Social workers encourage individuals and communities to strive for self-sufficiency by addressing their own challenges.

2. Shift in mindset our thoughts have a significant impact on our lives. Negative thinking can detrimentally affect our physical and mental well-being, leading to increased problems. Social workers work to alter an individual's thought patterns, aiding them in recognizing their challenges and needs and devising an action plan.

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3. Utilizing available resources effectively

Social workers encourage client to maximize the use of community or environmental resources by combining them in the problem-solving process. These resources can include natural, financial, human, organizational, or experiential assets.

4. Raising awareness and providing education

Social workers raise awareness among socially marginalized and disadvantaged groups to help them take advantage of the programs, schemes, and services offered by various government and governmental agencies.

5. Fostering both internal and external qualities of an individual

Every individual possesses internal or external qualities. By promoting these qualities, social workers enhance strengths and confidence.

6. Addressing social issues

He has played a key role in advancing social progress by identifying effective remedies for various challenges that pose risks to society, resulting in negative impacts on individuals and communities. Creating policies social workers have a significant impact on shaping social guidelines that contribute to social progress and well-being. They serve as a link between citizens and the government, comprehending the people's requirements and requests.

Suggestions

The importance of having certified social workers with a strong education, training, qualifications, skills, and knowledge is emphasized to address the issues and challenges in present-day Indian society and to safeguard the public. These individuals will be capable of delivering high-quality social work services to the public or to Clients. It is crucial to focus on a nationally standardized curriculum, teaching, training, and high-quality education. The profession must have a structured and consistent set of values and policies in place to safeguard and promote its integrity (Prof. Pratibha J. Mishra & Dr. Anil Prasad Bandela (2015).

Prospects and Future Perspectives

The social work profession is anticipated to experience significant growth, thanks to the support and collaboration of public institutions, professional organizations, and social workers. Although there may be numerous misconceptions about the social work profession in Indian society, changes in its status have gradually emerged over time. Through the efforts of professional organizations and social workers, these misconceptions are being replaced by facts, leading to visible and unique transformations. Social work contributes to career advancement.

India's population growth leads to increasing needs, expectations, and problems, highlighting the crucial role of the social work profession and professional social workers in addressing these challenges.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, social work has emerged as a relatively new and vibrant profession. Change has been brought by the efforts of social thinkers, activists, and pioneers in India. The social work profession is now more important than ever due to the variety of issues that are arising in contemporary society. Even though social workers are becoming more prevalent in the private sector across all domains, their jobs come with a number of difficulties. Emerging

challenges arise in new societal contexts, which also attract new professions. Solving social problems is related to social work.

Scientific, technological, medical... Thus, social work by stepping up the 'hammu bimus' (Hammu Bimmus) (Kannada word) is the profession in the middle of the many 'punkanu punka' (Kannada word) series of professions. Despite the fact that social work has expanded internationally, social workers are fostering the profession's growth in many emerging nations and communities, where it is growing as if "old roots are new shoots." Since society is everything to us, we are social engineers, protectors, promoters, society is our workplace, our lab, our guru, our learning, social progress is our objective, and so on. Public tend to recognise the challenges of social workers face around working conditions, staff shortages, workloads, resource restrictions, and government failures to tackle the root causes of social problems. public generally felt that the work that social workers do is worthwhile, and the status of social workers was seen as comparable to teachers, nurses and the police (Joe Hamlet, 2024).

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Conflict of Interest

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