

## **Contemporary Definition of Social Work**

At times people will ask you to “define social work” and this is not an easy task to be done. There are many forms of social work and so a simple and concrete definition of social work is not easy to come by in a sentence or two. Instead social work is a vast discipline that encompasses many modalities and methodologies. These far flung occupations include everything from humanitarian rescue missions, to helping families gain access to government assistance, to the counselling of those who are near death and their loved ones. A simple social work definition simply does not do justice to the myriad ways that social work touches the lives of people every day. The one thing this vast array of occupations has in common is that social work strives to better the lives of people whether at the individual, family, group or societal level.

One aspect that all of social work has in common is the intake or initial examination of both a client and their situation. This occurs at many levels from the intuitive to the thorough analysis of data that a client will provide. In the case of social work in a medical or counselling environment this can take the form of diagnosis of mental conditions that are noticeable in the way the client presents. This can also take the form of a careful evaluation of a client’s economic background in the case of a Family Support Worker trying to determine eligibility of a family for government assistance. The initial evaluation of a client during the intake process is the first point of contact and allows the social worker to get their bearings to better serve the client.

When a client is in crisis the social worker’s job is to effectively evaluate both the client themselves and also their current situation. This kind of analysis helps the Social Worker to understand what interventions will be most effective to aid the client. Sometimes it is simply a matter of connecting a client with resources such as government assistance in order to stabilize a situation that is purely economic in nature. In other cases, a client might be in need of medical or mental health care. Being able to effectively diagnose the needs of a given situation is a critical skill in social work.

Social work can also take on the form of acting in a counselling capacity. This can be as a mental health counsellor (commonly called a Licensed Clinical Social Worker or LCSW), a substance abuse or addictions counsellor. In all of these forms the goal of the social worker is to empower the client to be able to see their own inner strengths and build upon them so that they can overcome the challenges they are facing in their lives. All social work requires a high degree of empathy and excellent communication skills. However, the counselling sub-

discipline of social work relies upon these even more heavily than other fields within social work.

Social work can also take place at the group, community or societal level. By working with stakeholders in communities along with policy makers, the social worker can strategize on how to make communities a safer more empowered and integrated place to live. The development of public policy is an area where the social worker can achieve some truly large scale and impactful societal changes. By drawing upon social work theory and knowledge built up during one's social work education, the social worker can help a wide section of society to understand ways in which they can implement changes for the betterment of all involved.

Social work can also occur at the level of management. Social work usually occurs within the frame work of an organization with the possible exception of a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) who is working in a private practice. Within organizations there is a need for leadership and organizational decision making and this requires managerial positions. While the manager may not provide direct services to clients they are still performing a key role in the distribution of social work to the community at large.

As you can see, there is no one definition for the social worker, but rather there are many and varied roles that fall under the umbrella of social work. The common thread that unites them all is the desire to alleviate suffering and empower individuals, groups and communities to be able to make the most of their own talents and resources for the good of all involved.

### **Global Definition of the Social Work Profession**

#### **Core Mandates**

The social work profession's core mandates include promoting social change, social development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.

Social work is a practice profession and an academic discipline that recognizes that interconnected historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors serve as opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development. Structural barriers contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The development of critical consciousness through reflecting on structural sources of oppression and/or privilege, on the basis of criteria such as race, class, language, religion, gender, disability, culture and sexual orientation, and developing action strategies towards addressing structural and personal barriers are central to emancipatory practice where the goals are the empowerment and liberation of people. In solidarity with those who

are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion.

The social change mandate is based on the premise that social work intervention takes place when the current situation, be this at the level of the person, family, small group, community or society, is deemed to be in need of change and development. It is driven by the need to challenge and change those structural conditions that contribute to marginalization, social exclusion and oppression. Social change initiatives recognize the place of human agency in advancing human rights and economic, environmental, and social justice. The profession is equally committed to the maintenance of social stability, insofar as such stability is not used to marginalize, exclude or oppress any particular group of persons.

Social development is conceptualized to mean strategies for intervention, desired end states and a policy framework, the latter in addition to the more popular residual and the institutional frameworks. It is based on holistic biopsychosocial, spiritual assessments and interventions that transcend the micro-macro divide, incorporating multiple system levels and inter-sectorial and inter-professional collaboration, aimed at sustainable development. It prioritizes socio-structural and economic development, and does not subscribe to conventional wisdom that economic growth is a prerequisite for social development. An analysis of the existing definitions shows that social work can be characterized as a profession and scientific discipline devoted to:

- . helping people affected by social problems,
- . inducing social change in order to prevent or ameliorate social problems,
- . improving quality of life,
- . eliminating or at least alleviating oppression,
- . improving one's every day

Depending upon the nature of functions and roles performed by professional social workers, social work is defined differently by different authors and international associations of social work. Social work profession encompasses all the aspects of human life such as social, economic and psychological, simultaneously; it focuses on individual, group and community level. That is why there is variation in its definitions and some authors have put more emphasis on one aspect than the other and vice versa. Here are couple of definitions of social work given by individuals and international associations as well.

1. International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2014) defined social work as follows: 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 wellbeing”.

The given definition has divided the social work profession into two parts, first practice and second is academic one. Social work as a profession aims at positive social change which could result into social development and human welfare at large.

2. National Association of Social Work defined social work in these words

“Social Work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favourable to this goal. Social Work practice consists of the professional application of Social Work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible services; counselling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve processes. The practice of Social Work requires knowledge of human development and behaviour; of social, economic, and cultural institutions; and of the interactions of all these factors”.

The given definition has more emphasised on social functioning of individuals and groups. The definition makes it clear that social work profession has holistic approach for solution of range of social problems confronted by individuals, groups and communities. Since social work deals a person with problem with his/her total environment, therefore all the aspects such social, economic, cultural and psychological are taken into consideration and addressed by social workers.

3. A. Pincus & Minahan (1978) “Social work is concerned with the interaction between people and their social environment which affects the ability of people to accomplish their life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize their aspiration and values”.

In this definition, there is focus on interaction between individuals, groups and communities and their environment. Social Work as a profession aims at addressing those factors which create hindrances in the way of social development and at the same time, it promotes those factors which can positively influence social and human welfare.

4. Mirza R. Ahmed (1969) “Social work is professional service based on knowledge of human relations and skill in relationship and concerned with problem of intra-personal and or inter-personal adjustments resulting from unmet individual, group, or community need”.

In this definition, the author has termed social work profession as a professional service for which knowledge for human relationship and skill in building and soothing relationship has been given central attention. According to this definition, problem can be within the person and between different persons which needs services of social workers to overcome it.

5. Canadian Association of Social Workers defined social work in these words:

“Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. Social work is concerned with individual and personal problems but also with broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment and domestic violence”

Summing up the above given definitions, it can be said that social work is a multidimensional profession which aims at solution of all sort of problems faced by clients, be it social, economic or psychological, which create hurdle in the attainment of life goals. The definitions reflect that social work services start from an individual (social case work also known as micro social work) to group (social group work as called mezzo social work) and whole community (community development also called macro social work).

## Purposes of Social Work Profession

The social work profession aims at helping clients for moving toward specific objectives. The means of accomplishing those objectives, however, varies based on the unique circumstances of each client. Even so, all social workers share common goals that constitute the purpose and objectives of the profession. These goals unify the profession and help members avoid developing too-narrow perspectives that are limited to particular practice settings. To best serve their clients, social workers must be willing to assume responsibilities and engage in actions that expand upon the functions of specific social agencies and their designated individual roles as staff members.

According to Counsel on Social Work Education, the purpose of the social work profession is to “promote human and community wellbeing”. Furthermore, that purpose “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”. Hence, the pursuit of social and economic justice is central to social work’s purpose. **Social justice** refers to the creation of social institutions that support the welfare of individuals and groups. **Economic justice**, then, refers to those aspects of social justice that relate to economic well-being, such as a liveable wage, pay equity, job discrimination, and social security.

The purpose of social work is to enable children, adults, families, groups and communities to function, participate and develop in society. Social workers practise in a society of complexity, change and diversity, and the majority of people to whom they provide services, are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in that society.

Social work aims to maximize the development of human potential and the fulfilment of human needs, through an equal commitment to: Working with and enabling people to achieve the best possible levels of personal and social well-being; and working to achieve social justice through social development and social change. This involves:

1. Upholding people’s interests and rights
2. Working with individuals, groups and communities in the pursuit and achievement of equitable access to social, economic and political resources
3. Providing assistance to improve the well-being of clients. (Clients are individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged or have exceptional needs)
4. Raising awareness of structural inequities

5. Promoting policies and practices that achieve a fair allocation of social resources
6. Acting to bring about social change to reduce social barriers, inequality and injustice.

## Key Concept in Definition of Social Work

### Social Services

Government services provided for the benefit of the community, such as education, medical care, and housing.

### Social Welfare

A system that provides assistance to needy individuals and families. The types and amount of welfare available to individuals and families vary depending on the country, state or region.

### Social Security

It is "any government system that provides monetary assistance to people with an inadequate or no income/ Government program aimed at providing basic needs to citizens who are retired, unemployed, or unemployable due to a disability or disadvantage.

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the [economic, social and cultural rights](#) indispensable for his [dignity](#) and the free development of his personality.

### Social Development

Social development is about improving the well-being of every individual in society, so they can reach their full potential. The success of society is linked to the well-being of each and every citizen. Social development means investing in people. It requires the removal of barriers so that all citizens can journey toward their dreams with confidence and dignity. It is about refusing to accept that people who live in poverty will always be poor. It is about helping people, so they can move forward on their path to self-sufficiency.

### Social Cohesion

It is defined as a cohesive society that... works toward the wellbeing of all its members. Fights exclusion and marginalization. Creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust.

### Social Change

It refers to any significant alteration over time in behavior patterns and cultural values and norms. By "significant" alteration, sociologists mean changes yielding profound social consequences.

### Empowerment

It is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.



**Liberation** is freedom from limits on thought or behaviour/ the securing of equal social and economic rights:

### **Well Being**

A good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity; welfare.

### **Social Justice**

Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.

**Human rights** are **rights** inherent to all **human** beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our **human rights** without discrimination. These **rights** are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

**Social inclusion.** The process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society

**Social exclusion** is the act of making certain groups of people within a society feel isolated and unimportant

### **Underpinning**

A solid foundation laid below ground level to support or strengthen a building. a set of ideas, motives, or devices which justify or form the basis for something

### **Oppression**

Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority.

### **Socialism**

A political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole. /Any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods.

## Contemporary Fields of Practice of Social Work

IFSW Code of Ethics (2004) states that:

*" Social workers should be concerned with the whole person, within the family, community, and societal and natural environments, and should seek to recognize all aspects of a person's life."*

### Environment and Social Work

“A form of holistic professional social work practice that focuses on the: interdependencies amongst people; the social organization of relationships between people and the flora and fauna in their physical habitats; and the interactions between socio-economic and physical environmental crises and interpersonal behaviours that undermine the well-being of human beings and planet earth. It proposes to address these issues by arguing for a profound transformation in how people conceptualize the social basis of their society, their relationships with each other, living things and the inanimate world” (Dominelli, 2012).

In addition, the mainstreaming of environmental considerations; a widening of the theoretical and practice base to ensure that social and environmental justice are considered integral to any environmental involvement by social workers; highlighting the need to think of innovative approaches to socio-economic development; and making disaster interventions core elements in the social work repertoire of knowledge, skills, capacity building and curriculum formulation.

### Disaster and Social Work

The specialization of a *social work* which is concerned with relation to *disasters* and crises situation. Disaster social work is the practice of social work during natural disasters. This field specializes in strengthening individuals and communities in the wake of a natural disaster. It includes working with the most vulnerable members of a community while strengthening the community as a whole in order to help with the recovery process.

### Terrorism and Social Work

The specialization of social work profession relating to serving affectees of terrorism. The affected individuals, families, organizations, and communities; responses of agencies and organizations to the needs of staff working with traumatized clients; and policy practice in response to restrictive government policies. Work with people affected by mass violence has emerged as a new field of practice within the profession.

### Gerontology and Social Work

Hughes and Mtejuka, as quoted by Thompson (1997), define ageism as "the social process through which negative images of and attitudes towards older people, based solely on the

characteristics of old age itself, result in discrimination". Gerontologists see ageism everywhere. The term refers to a negative attitude toward older people and the process of aging, which manifests in subtle and varied ways. Ageism permeates our personal and cultural expectations of older adults.

### **LGBTs and Social Work**

Social work profession teaches to challenge homophobia, "irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination" against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. However, my experience as an openly gay man unofficially taught me about a very different form of LGBT discrimination, one that was never really discussed in my social work program:

heterosexism. In this article, here are several approaches for combatting heterosexism in our practice. Heterosexism is defined as "discrimination in favor of heterosexual and against homosexual people," based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the only so-called normal, and preferred, way of living. Heterosexism is said to render our clients' "orientation, relationship, and life commitments invisible." We render our clients invisible when we fail to recognize the importance of LGBT relationships, by using assessment tools with outdated language (i.e. "What is your marital status?"), or by failing to recognize the importance of LGBT relationships through antiquated agency policies (i.e., "Family visitation hours are such and such."). Even more, we support a heterosexist standard within our agencies when we fail to use language of inclusiveness with our staff (i.e., "You're welcome to bring your husbands and wives to the agency holiday party.").

### **Human Rights and Social Work**

Human rights are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because s/he is a human being. Human Rights condenses into two words the struggle for dignity and fundamental freedoms which allow the full development of human potential. Civil and political rights have to be accompanied by economic, social and cultural rights

The social work profession shares a close relationship with human rights, because it adheres to values such as respect, dignity, and self-determination - values that are strongly embedded in the code of ethics for all practitioners. The client-social worker relationship has long been celebrated. The profession is highly regarded for challenging the inhumane treatment of vulnerable people, its commitment to challenge anti-oppressive practice, and most importantly, ensuring that vulnerable people are given a voice. Human rights are particularly

important for social workers when making decisions that concern the future care needs of individuals.

### **Spirituality and Social Work**

*Resistance to recognizing spirituality in social work practice diminishes as clients and clinicians raise spiritual issues and science studies the mind-body-spirit connection.*

*“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”*

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

The social work profession has never been one to shy away from controversial subjects. Because spirituality is at the center of existence for many people and its reach is so broad, it is ideally suited to be integrated into responsible and respectful approaches to therapeutic intervention with clients. The combination of spirituality and social work has implications in the areas of trauma, end-of-life issues, aging, illness, cultural competence, addiction treatment, ethics, relationships, forgiveness, chronic mental illness, the meaning of life, and attempting to answer the age-old question, “Why is this happening?” Social workers often address these issues in their own lives while helping clients face them. They are increasingly examining how their spiritual values affect practice of the profession, as well as how clients' spirituality impacts world view, coping skills, and ability to manage adversity.

### **Social Development and Social Work**

Developmental social work, which is also known as the social development approach to social work, emphasizes the role of social investment in professional practice. These investments meet the material needs of social work's clients and facilitate their full integration into the social and economic life of the community. Developmental social workers believe that client strengths and capabilities need to be augmented with public resources and services if those served by the profession are to live productive and fulfilling lives. Although developmental social work is inspired by international innovations, particularly in the developing countries, the book shows that it also has relevance to the United States and other Western nations. It also contends that developmental social work practice is not confined to community organization or other macro-practice interventions, and that developmental ideas can be implemented in mainstream fields of social work practice such as child welfare, mental health, aging, social assistance and correctional social work.

## **Criminal Justice and Social Work**

Forensic social work is the application of social work to questions and issues relating to law and legal systems. This specialty of the social work profession goes far beyond clinics and psychiatric hospitals for criminal defendants being evaluated and treated on issues of competency and responsibility.

While many mistakenly believe that forensic social work is limited to evaluating and treating criminal defendants in psychiatric hospitals, it is important to realize that the field is much broader to encompass all social services within the civil and criminal justice systems, whether defendant or client-based. According to the National Organization of Forensic Social Work (NOFSW), forensic social work is defined as the “application of social work principles to questions and issues relating to law and legal systems.” Under this definition, forensic social work is concerned with various types of litigation, including child custody issues, child neglect, spouse abuse, juvenile or adult justice services, corrections, and civil disputes.

## **Social Exclusion and Social Work**

Social exclusion ... involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

## **Industries and Social Work**

Industrial social work is one of the areas in which the social worker extend their skill and expertness in helping personnel managers in the industry directly and organizational development indirectly, by intervening the employee management.

## **Military and Social Work**

Military social work is a specialized practice area that differs from generalized practice with civilians in that military personnel, veterans, and their families live, work, and receive health care and social benefits in a hierarchical, socio-political environment within a structured military organization.

## Political Perspectives on Social Welfare

*We all want the same things in life. We want freedom; we want the chance for prosperity; we want as few people suffering as possible; we want healthy children; we want to have crime-free streets. The argument is how to achieve them...*

Political ideologies shape public policy debates as well as the social policy strategies developed to address “social problems.” The clashes among long-standing political traditions—conservatism, liberalism, radicalism, and feminism—reflect fundamental and often irreconcilable differences regarding social, economic, and political life. The four political ideologies are compared for their varied perspectives on several core issues that underpin social welfare provision, including human nature, need, the general welfare, social problems, racial inequality, and the role of government. The resulting distinctions provide social workers with a framework to more effectively assess social welfare policy. What do political perspectives have to do with social policy? Political perspectives will tend to influence that type and amount of social policy that will be allowed at a certain time.

Social work is a discipline involving the application of [social theory](#) and research methods to societal problems. It incorporates and uses other [social sciences](#) and political philosophy as a means to improve the [human condition](#) and positively change society's response to these problems, through understanding and acting upon their causes, solutions and human impacts.

### Political Perspective and Worldview

**Political Perspectives-** Social attitudes or ideologies. The four political perspectives are radical (far left), liberal (left), conservative (right) and feminist

**Worldview-** The beliefs and values of a group of people that are systematized enough to have a semblance of universality.

What does social policy have to do with social work/or other areas related to human service? Social policy has much to do with Social Work and the human service jobs. Social policy will dictate how human service workers do their jobs as well as how many resources social workers will be able to offer their clients.

### Main Political Perspectives-

**Conservative-** Want to keep the current structure and resist change. They believe change produces mostly negative consequences. They believe doing things in line with tradition. Conservatives take a pessimistic view of human nature. They believe individuals are self-governing; A person is responsible for their own behavior. conservatives try to preserve the

family unit. Conservatives believe society is fair, functions well on its own and is interrelated. Conservatives believe that the free market economy is best and that the government is to support, not regulate, the market.

**Liberal-** Liberals believe that change is good and it brings progress but moderate change is best. liberals believe that in human nature people are basically good but they need structure to reinforce good habits and impulses. Liberals believe that individuals are not all self-governing and that environment plays a part in the problems people face. Liberals view family as a changing structure that needs social and governmental support. Liberals believe that society needs regulation to ensure fair competition. Liberals believe that the government needs to step in to regulate the free market and that government programs are necessary to meet basic human needs.

**Radical-** radicals believe change is good, especially fundamental change in the system. Radicals believe that in human nature that people are basically good but they can be corrupted by institutions. Radicals believe that individual behavior is strongly influenced by social and economic structures. Radicals believe that the family is oppressive and that the changing family structure needs government support. radicals believe that society has huge inequalities of power of those with and those without, thus it needs changing. Radicals believe that the market economy is exploitive and inherently unfair; alternatives are mixed private and public economy or a socialist system.

### **What is liberalism?**

The central tenets of modern liberalism are the primacy of the individual, freedom, tolerance, a commitment to reason and debate, and a free-market economy. Liberalism is egalitarian; based on principles of democracy, classlessness, equality and openness, and is antonymous to oppressive and tyrannical authoritarianism. Liberalism advocates [civil rights](#) for all citizens: establishing justice through the protection and privileges of personal liberty. It includes the equal treatment of all citizens irrespective of [race](#), [gender](#) and [class](#). These core beliefs directly influence much of day to day life.

**Liberals** believe in government action to achieve equal opportunity and equality for all. It is the duty of the government to alleviate social ills and to protect civil liberties and individual and human rights. Believe the role of the government should be to guarantee that no one is in need. Liberal policies generally emphasize the need for the government to solve problems.

**Conservatives** believe in personal responsibility, limited government, free markets, individual liberty, traditional American values and a strong national defense. Believe the role

of government should be to provide people the freedom necessary to pursue their own goals. Conservative policies generally emphasize empowerment of the individual to solve problems. So, what is the difference between conservatives, liberals, and progressives when it comes to the Welfare State? Since the New Deal Act of 1935, the political structure that provides for the welfare of its people referred to The Welfare State has been hotly debated. What I present here are some of my notes from Dr. Laura Curran's *Social Welfare Policy* lectures at Rutgers University, summer 2012. As she observes, much of the vitriol results from differing beliefs and commitments concerning how political and economic institutions should interact or not. This post seeks to clarify some of the basic commitments and values that underpin liberal ideology and its social welfare policy. The same will be provided for conservative, and the progressive ideologies in posts 1 and 3.

Our current welfare state is based on the liberal ideology. Many conservatives and progressives consider the liberal ideology as it is embodied in today's policies as the Great Welfare State Compromise.

Classic liberal ideology upholds the ideals of capitalism and the free market, but argues that the state should intervene when necessary on behalf of disadvantaged groups, or to diffuse power when it becomes too concentrated in the hands of the few.

In contrast to conservative Laissez faire economics, liberal economics draw from Keynesian theory, which is derived from John Maynard Keynes, an economist philosopher whose views became very popular following WW II. Keynes viewed the capitalist marketplace as valuable in its promotion of economic growth, but also believed that it required judicious self-regulation and government control. Keynes was certainly not a radical leftist, but he did not believe the marketplace was by itself sufficient. Thus, the liberal "compromise" is precisely a compromise in that it calls for some free market regulations and interventions, but not nearly in the direction or to the degree that leftist or socialist ideologies call for. While liberal ideology values, favors, and endorses capitalism as the greatest means of economic growth and flourishing for both individuals and society, it also recognizes that even in times of great prosperity, many people are left behind and abused by the modes of production inherent to capitalism.

As a result, liberal ideology is committed to the notion that both federal and state institutions have a responsibility to promote equal opportunity and individual rights. In short, liberal democrats want to ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to participate in the marketplace to whatever extent and capacity they choose, whereas leftists or progressives are more concerned with ensuring the equality of circumstance and outcome.



Liberal ideology constructs social issues as what result from a complex network of intertwining factors. Like conservatives, liberals believe individual and family choices and behaviors are important contributors to homelessness, poverty, drug use, and criminality. But unlike conservatives, they also focus on how other forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, or unequal education, contribute to poverty and other social issues.

Consequently, liberals believe that social welfare is necessary if the worst effects of the market economy such as poverty and unemployment are to be minimized. This generally means that social welfare should function to preserve minimum standards of living in terms of income, nutrition, health, housing, and education. In doing so, individual and community well-being will be sustained.

Like conservatives, they agree that private welfare institutions such as family, neighbors, community, and churches play an important role in combating social issues. They differ from conservatives in believing that the only institution strong enough to provide ongoing protection to less privileged Americans is the federal government.

Liberalism thus serves as the “great welfare compromise” between conservatives and progressives and has formed much of what we understand today as our “welfare state.”

### **Liberal**

Support welfare, including long-term welfare. Welfare is a safety net which provides for the needs of the poor. Welfare is necessary to bring fairness to American economic life. It is a device for protecting the poor.

### **Conservative**

Oppose long-term welfare. Opportunities should be provided to make it possible for those in need to become self-reliant. It is far more compassionate and effective to encourage people to become self-reliant, rather than allowing them to remain dependent on the government for provisions.

## The Islamic Perspective on Social Work

### Introduction

Social work as a profession was introduced in the industrially underdeveloped Middle East countries in the early 1940's, at a time when their peoples yearned to achieve "national development" at the speediest rate possible. The road to become modern and to achieve development, it seemed, meant emulating developed countries: importing their goods and gadgets, and transplanting their institutions into the national soil (along with their underlying pre-suppositions, rationale, and guiding ideas). Social work looked so attractive, perceived to be "The Scientific" means for achieving the badly-needed social change and social reforms. The profession was introduced as a "social technology" applying "modern science" (social & behavioral) with the aim of tackling socio-economic problems swiftly and efficiently. American social work was seen as the most "advanced" in the world. A generation of idealistic social work educators enthusiastically embraced the American model and sought to master, and to keep abreast with the "latest" that American social work churned out, with gratitude. It was not long before social workers in the region realized that the socio-economic problems of their own pre-industrializing countries were vastly dissimilar to those of the post-industrialized countries, in which the imported models were developed. Even more significantly, the incongruencies between the basic assumptions on which the transplanted model was built and those of the local cultural/religious beliefs of the region became manifest. But very few social work scholars would at that time dare question the appropriateness of applying the celebrated, "advanced" American model. However, as more serious discrepancies became obvious, the gravity of the problem was recognized by more and more professionals, and the need for a serious solution to this problem was felt. But any suggested solution was expected to preserve the integrity of the transplanted model as is. Any solution was not expected to question the 'basic' assumptions of the now-standard American model, assumed to provide the profession with its reason for being. Moreover, that model lent social workers a basis for claiming the coveted status of professionalism. These considerations practically meant that any solution to the incongruence issue should do nothing more than suggest bits and pieces of changes here and there in the body of the imported model, and only as is utterly necessary. It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that social workers of that era suffered from a severe case of what we may call *Professional Imperialism-By-Demand!*

The "**Indigenization**" of social work movement emerged in the early 1970's as a solution to the issue of the incongruity between the imported model and local conditions. It carried the promise of legitimizing some freedom from the self-imposed, dutiful adherence to the 'most

advanced' American model. The 1972 succinct, though very general, definition of indigenization by Shawky as "adapting imported ideas to fit local needs", captures the essence of the concept, and is still being widely quoted. Indigenization attempted to avoid the hazards of blindly following the imported American model, without requiring any radical changes in its basic nature. But the problem is that this innovation suffered from two serious shortcomings: a) it implied that the transplanted model is in itself "basically sound", universal, worthy of being applied anywhere in the world, with 'minor' alterations; b) it did not subsume any specific procedure for identifying aspects of the imported model that conflict with the local realities, nor suggest any methodical course of action for their rectification. In 1978, I complained that the transplantation of social technologies to a different environment brings in very serious problems, showing how certain social welfare programs imported with the best of intentions into Egypt failed in one of three ways. Some just faded away leaving no traces, others kept a few specimens alive with drastic changes of function, while a few survived only after their workings were adapted to local conditions. These defects were not immediately recognized by many professionals. Some leading American academics even portrayed these as only temporary difficulties, similar to those of transplant rejection symptoms in medicine, which would soon resolve "through particular adaptations". Soon after, however, it became clear that indigenization was not a real answer to the incongruity issues facing the application of the Western model, particularly in Muslim societies. However, similar complaints were vigorously voiced by professionals in other parts of the developing world. Dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of indigenization became gradually more articulated and more widely shared. Renowned scholars providing consultation to international technical assistance programs to developing countries soon found, first-hand, that minor adaptations of the Western model would never be adequate. Some of those leading authorities such as Herman Stein declared that the methods, the structure, and the ideology of the profession are in fact "*shaped by the underlying social, economic, and cultural elements in each particular society in which it develops*". Statements such as these pointed the need for a more radical rethinking of the whole issue of indigenization. Today, after more than three decades of doubts and expressions of dissatisfaction, these fundamental criticisms of indigenization are becoming almost universally recognized. A recent work on *Indigenous Social Work Around the World*, had its Part One titled "Indigenization As An Outmoded Concept". The authors' justification of that statement is that the real issue is "...the development of culturally relevant social work practice and education...". They point out that "indigenization" carries a baggage that hardly can help the profession adequately reflect the

“contemporary efforts to deal better with diversity - being mindful of cultural sensitivity, competence, appropriateness, and relevance”.

*Authentization* of social work in developing countries, an appellation I suggested (for lack of a better translation of the Arabic term ‘*Taaseel*’) was introduced to replace the idea of indigenization, and to deal with its shortcomings. The word *Ta’seel* in Arabic literally means seeking direction from one’s own roots; to restore originality; to become genuine. Authentization of social work, then, indicates a process through which the profession becomes true to the nation’s identity, its defining characteristics, and its cultural and social realities, which enables it to profitably use what is pertinent of the accumulated contributions of other nations. Most importantly, authentization is directed at correcting the two main flaws of indigenization: (a) issues of incongruity and lack of originality, and (b) absence of a systematic methodology. Here is how authentization proposes to deal with these issues.

*(1) Incongruity and lack of originality.*

Instead of building local practices by “starting from” the foreign Western model’s constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method, embedded in foreign socio-cultural conditions, *authentization* meant for social work to develop its professional practices “starting” from its “own” national social and cultural realities. The rationale for this is simple. The imported model was developed to cater for the needs of peoples living under cultural, religious, and social conditions significantly different from those prevalent in the region. However, starting from “within” does not mean ending there. A salient feature of developing the authentized model is to benefit from any “compatible” elements found in the imported model – or of any other country’s experiences, for that matter. In this way, social workers in developing countries are expected, naturally enough, to do just what their colleagues in the West have historically done developing their own celebrated model from within. In this way, the authentized model’s originality and fidelity to its own peoples’ identity would be preserved. Its consistency with the realities of its local conditions would be maintained. At the same time, the profession would keep an open mind, to avail itself of any useful insights developed in other countries that share comparable social-structural conditions, or comparable cultural and religious identities.

*(2) The methodology issue.*

Authentication suggests a sequential procedure by which the task of rebuilding local social work practice would be approached. (Ragab, 1990: 46-47). The process involves the following steps:

1. Serious efforts would be directed at the methodical identification of the core *societal values* with a bearing on the workings of the social welfare system of the country.
2. Simultaneously, well planned efforts would be directed at the specification of *relevant facts* pertaining to the current realities of the country's socio-economic, political institutions.
3. Major *social problems* impinging on the lives of the people would be systematically studied and analyzed in relation to the functioning (or malfunctioning) of those socio-economic, political institutions.
4. In-depth studies would be conducted to identify the local, *indigenous "alternative" practices* and arrangements traditionally serving to fulfill the same functions performed by their imported counterparts. Those practices would be evaluated as to their appropriateness for dealing with today's conditions.
5. The above measures should pave the way for the creative task of the *integration* of these valuable "genuine" practices and arrangements, steeped in the country's history, its values and its societal make-up with whatever is found to be compatible in other nations' experiences.
6. The results from the above would be expected to help in the design of *authentic professional practices* and programs.
7. These should then be *field tested* by local practitioners and allied researchers through field demonstrations and field experiments, and then rigorously *evaluated*, before being adopted and widely *disseminated* through social work educational institutions.

Authentization of social work was, by its nature, comforting to professionals as it conveys a feeling of moving in the right direction. It looks "within" for guidance, instead of seeking inspiration from "without" its borders. It avails itself of the fund of trusted national experience and wisdom, rather than, lazily, copying incongruent experiences from others who may embrace very different worldviews. Besides, it directs the profession's activities towards solving the real-life problems felt by its own people. And, it was reassuring to find out that numerous other countries of the South were moving in the same direction. Of special interest was the "*reconceptualization of social work*" movement in Latin American countries, although it was deeply intertwined with political movements, with fervent "ideological" leanings, reflecting the nuances of each country's political scene. But that was to be expected by the proponents of authentization, which accentuated responsiveness to the legitimate aspirations of the local populations in each country. Or as Frederic Reamer put it: "Social work is among

the most values based of all professions. It's deeply rooted in a fundamental set of values that ultimately shapes the profession's mission and its practitioners' priorities"

### **Islam and social work**

As scholars involved in the *Authentization of social work* movement delved deep into examining the basic characteristics of their local cultural and religious heritage, they realized that their clients (and themselves) do embrace a worldview that is starkly different from that underlying Western social work. Issues of the "ontological" and "epistemological" assumptions on which the profession's practice theories rest were suddenly brought to the center of discussion, something social workers have always ignored, relegating to the realm of unnecessary philosophizing. After all, they reason, a profession is basically about "doing", thus being interested in techniques and skills for practice. But now, as they found how cultural and religious values do shape the client's worldview, his behavior, his problems and their solutions, there was no escape taking up these abstract issues very seriously –if they ever hoped for their practice to be effective.

Islam equips its adherents not only with certain theological teachings, but it is by its nature, as is often said, a comprehensive "way of life" that guides a Muslim's behavior in all phases of his life and its contingencies. It represents the keynote of his existence in this world, and beyond (the Hereafter). The clear conclusion, for many, was that if social work, would be effective serving its Muslim clients, it had to be "re-written" from an Islamic perspective! But that did not mean "writing off" traditional Western social work practice. It meant that its theories of practice should be submitted to rigorous scrutiny to ascertain the degree of each theory's *congruence with the Islamic ontology and epistemology*. But, of course, other aspects of practice which are merely technical and instrumental, would be utilized, even treasured. And in accordance with the Authentization methodology described above, any components which prove to be compatible with the Islamic worldview would be merged into the texture of the new "integrated" model. Then, the new syntheses would have to withstand rigorous field testing, if it is to be accepted as part of the new *genuine* conceptualization. The qualifier 'genuine' is meant to replace the label authentized, because the product would be then ready to be part of mainstream social work.

However, despite this evident and clear need for the inclusion of religious concepts when providing services to Muslim clients effectively; and despite insistence that this inclusion should be performed in a systematic, verifiable fashion; many academics found it hard to accept that innovative approach. They adhered to the notion that mixing so-called "science" and religion was not "scientifically" sound. It was clear that most of those recalcitrants were

still stuck to the old 19<sup>th</sup> century “positivist” philosophy, almost unaware of the impact of the 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary developments in science, sub-nuclear physics, cosmology, neuroscience and psychology, which brought in dramatic changes in our view of the world and of ourselves. Space would not allow dwelling on these vast scientific discoveries or their radical consequences, but fuller accounts could be easily found elsewhere. (see, e.g. Augros and Stanciu, 1984; Capra: 1982; Ragab, 1993).

These exiting developments in science demolished the narrow materialistic/mechanistic views of the world we live in, and ushered in a post-positivist philosophy of science, more open, and anti-reductionist, that recognizes the effects of non-empirical factors. However, that reluctance to accept the mere idea of the inclusion of religion into the scientific edifice could be understood if we consider how some institutions as prestigious as the American “National Academy of Sciences” saw the issue at that time. A resolution by the Council of the National Academy of Sciences in 1981 stated that: “Religion and science are separate and *mutually exclusive* realms of human thought; whose presentation in the same context leads to misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief”. (NAS, 1984: 6, emphasis added). That NAS stance was only rephrased in 1999 saying, “... science and religion occupy two separate realms of human experience. Demanding that they be combined detracts from the glory of each” (NAS, 1999: IX). The 2008 edition only ameliorated the tone of the statement, thus avoiding the older hyperbole language. In the Muslim World, institutions such as NAS, and its stands on matters related to science are taken very seriously, even by those in the “social’ sciences. Nobody dares be marked as violating the prevalent scientific norms.

Fortunately, however, the significance of those marvelous 20<sup>th</sup> Century scientific discoveries, and their repercussions on the philosophy of science, began to be widely recognized and assimilated by certain pioneers in social science disciplines. Their innovative work (and the schools of thought they helped initiate), strengthened the “*Islamic perspective on social work*” movement’s confidence in pursuing the epistemic lines it was developing, against resistance from the old, outdated, reductionist school. In this respect, a short account of the contribution of two most important movements which did have a significant impact on the conceptualization process will be given here. The first landmark development took place within the Muslim world itself, that is, the “*Islamization of knowledge*” movement. The other, was more general, taking place in psychology and psychotherapy and beyond, that is, *transpersonal psychology and the spirituality in social work* movement. Both movements, each in its own way, were like tributaries which coalesced to provide the main current in the

construction of a coherent conceptual framework for the “Islamic perspective on social work”.

### **The Islamization of knowledge movement**

Leading scholars and officials in charge of education in the Muslim World became concerned about the standards and conditions of education in their countries. So in 1977, the First International Conference on Islamic Education was organized in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It was attended by 130 leading authorities in the field, including Ministers of Education, representing 40 Muslim countries. The prominent conferees discussed the state of the education industry in the Muslim world. The idea of “*Islamic Re-Orientation*” of education, from grade school to university levels, loomed large in the discussions, seen as a prerequisite for the advancement of education in the Muslim world. The conference papers were published under the title: “*Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective* (Naseef & Faruqi, 1981). The book noted the appalling state of education in the Muslim world, particularly in its uncritically importing educational philosophies, curricula, textbooks which do not reflect the Islamic worldview. It emphasized the need for a critical examination of all material taught especially in social science disciplines to assess the degree of their congruence with Islamic ontological and epistemological premises. It pointed out that there is a dire need for reform, and of even “re-building” of these sciences from an Islamic perspective. In 1981, the International Institute for Islamic Thought was established, and in 1982, it organized the milestone “Islamabad Seminar on the Islamization of Knowledge”, which produced the seminal work outlining a workplan for that Islamic re-orientation of all branches of knowledge in the Muslim world. (Al-Faruqi, 1982). The Islamization of Knowledge program he suggested was basically one of “*integration*” of a) the best of modern science, sifted out for congruence with the Islamic worldview; and b) relevant Islamic scholarship based on the two authoritative Islamic sources: the Holy Quran and the Sunnah (compendium of Prophet Muhammad’s sayings and deeds). This provided a new momentum to the movement for inclusion of Islamic concepts in social work practice (among other disciplines) by giving it added broad-based formal academic support.

Most importantly for social work, this wide-ranging recognition of the vital role the Islamic ontological and epistemological pre-assumptions play in the educational/academic enterprise sharpened the focus of the purview of the “*authentization of social work in developing countries*”. If its vague idea of seeking congruence with the local social and “*cultural background*” of the country concerned originally sounded satisfactory, that generalized formulation no longer seemed



sufficient. It was now clearer than ever before that “religion” had a pivotal role to play within that conglomerate called ‘social and cultural’. And this brought to the fore again the fact that Islam, by its nature as a way of life, has a lot to say not only about spiritual matters, but also about all aspects of a Muslim’s life, his social relationships, his problems, and their solutions.

### **The “Spirituality in social work” movement**

Social work had, for long, based its practice on Freudian and then, on behaviorist formulations, which served the interests of seeking the coveted status of being a science-based profession. As different as these two schools were, with adherents to each vehemently condemning the others, where representatives of one party portray their ‘scientific’ approaches as the “exact opposite” of the other (Eysenck and Rachman, 1965:XI), still social work continued unquestioningly to use both schools for theoretical guidance. Eventually, however, pioneering psychologists revolted against the blatant reductionism of both schools, and a new era dawned on our understanding of human beings: as “being human” after all! Abraham Maslow sharply critiqued both Freudian, and behaviorist (and positivist) theories (calling them “nontheories”)!! (Maslow, 1971: 321). His work, along with others, pioneered “Humanistic” Psychology, that seemed to be heralding in a real scientific revolution, in tandem with the dramatic, revolutionary developments in science and in the philosophy of science alluded to above. Those formidable scientific advances overran the old reductionist barriers and paved the way for the ascendancy of the mentalist/cognitive “Humanistic Psychology”. Robbins and her colleagues (1998: 360) pointed out that “Humanistic theorists were attempting to counterbalance the dehumanizing tendencies of the previously influential ‘first force’ of classical Freudianism and ‘second force’ of behaviorism”.

But Abraham Maslow asserted that Humanistic Psychology was not just a psychological theory, but part of a “more general philosophy and a movement”. He said in his Foreword to Frank Goble’s book *The Third Force* (1970, 2004: 6) that along with parallel advances in other fields, humanistic theorists are “developing a new image of man, a new image of society and of all its institutions...a new philosophy of science, of education, of religion, of psychotherapy, of politics, of economics, etc”. But then he declared that this Third Force, is only a harbinger of the *Fourth Force: Transpersonal Psychology*. He described it as a psychology and philosophy of the “person-transcending (transpersonal) and of the humanness-transcending (transhuman) ... which is born from within Humanistic Psychology, generated out of its own theoretical and empirical necessities”.

One of the pioneers of the new scientific discoveries, Nobel laureate neuropsychologist Roger Sperry, also described these developments as representing a “theoretical turnabout” in

psychology, in which this “new view of reality....accepts *mental and spiritual qualities as causal realities*... Instead of excluding mind and spirit, the new outlook puts subjective mental forces near the top of the brain’s causal control hierarchy and gives them primacy in determining what a person does.” (Sperry, 1988: 608-9, emphasis added). Robbins et al. (1998: 360), summarized the thrust of the theory by declaring: “In short, transpersonal theory *focuses on the distinctively spiritual aspects* of human experience and development” [emphasis added].

All these developments supported and broadened the scientific base of the movement for the integration of Islamic spirituality in practice. They helped legitimize the inclusion of the insights of faith and belief, even giving them salience among factors that determine humans’ behaviors and emotional life. Transpersonal Psychology was particularly significant by virtue of its recognition of transcendental and the spiritual factors. It was becoming clearer to social workers helping individuals suffering psychosocial problems that the “cognitive” approaches held a special promise for the including “Islamic spirituality” in their practice.

Those involved in developing the “Islamic perspective on social work” followed with keen interest the North American movement to integrate “spirituality” into psychotherapy and social work in the last three decades. This important development represented a significant departure from the old materialist, positivist/empiricist perspectives which has long dominated the scene in the behavioral and social sciences, along with the helping professions which depended on them for their “knowledge” base. It was worth noting, for example, that the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) had in 1995 for the first time included content on spirituality, religion, and belief systems as basic curriculum components for the accreditation of schools of social work. It was also significant that -for the first time- a separate entry was devoted to “Spirituality” in the authoritative NASW *Encyclopedia of Social work* in 1997 (Canada, 1997 Supplement). The latest (20<sup>th</sup> ed., 2008) included under the *Human Needs* entry a subentry on “*Religion and Spirituality*”. The scene seems to be significantly changing in social work. Some reviews of the relevant literature report that: “attention to religion and spirituality is increasingly viewed as a relevant aspect of social work practice and a legitimate focus for research” (Kvarfordt and Sheridan, 2009: 385). Canada reports that in 1980s through 1990s in the USA “there was an increase of calls in the social work literature and professional conferences to reconnect with our roots in spiritual perspectives... Religion-specific approaches to social work continued ...but [he emphasized] the need for approaches to spirituality in social work that are respectful, knowledgeable, and inclusive of diverse religious and nonreligious spiritual perspectives. (Canda, 2002). These developments abroad,

among others, gave added assurance to those who have been for years involved in the “*Islamic reorientation* of social work” movement (see, Ragab, 1995: 291) to develop a framework for social work “*from an Islamic perspective*”. Some purists were not satisfied with that appellation. They preferred to use the term “*Islamic social work*”. But many felt that such overemphasis would be too parochial and may lead some to imagine that “*Islamic*” social work contained no ingredients but of Islamic sources alone, indebted to none, and –as an unintended consequence- being usable by none but Muslims! Social work from an *Islamic perspective*, they argued, is an open system, mindful of preserving its identity (what Talcott Parsons calls its “Pattern Maintenance” function), while at the same time keeping its borders permeable enough to fulfill the other function of “Adaption” to the external environment”, i.e. international social work.

### **Conceptual framework**

#### **Islamic Worldview: Human nature and sources of knowledge**

It should be evident from the above that the *Islamic perspective on social work* tackles ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues which are of concern to other academic and professional circles beyond the borders of social work. However, as a social work movement, it emerged in response to certain “internal” dynamics of a profession serving people living in the context of divergent cultures and in different lands. The development of this movement in the Muslim world was partly a reflection of the awakening in the post-colonial era to the pressing need for re-aligning curricula and teaching materials used in its educational institutions with its own Islamic worldview or *Weltanschauung*.

In the Islamic tradition, Allah (the One God of celestial religions) created the Universe and all that exists, seen or unseen. He created humans as special, dignified beings, with integral spiritual and *physical* constituent elements. He endowed them with countless blessings and capabilities. Salient among these are *sense* organs and *minds*, to help them make sense of their surroundings and accumulate useful knowledge needed for survival. However, because of the complexity of life situations and the limited capacities of the senses and the mind, God mercifully provided nations with guidance in the form of Divine Books, manuals to help them make it through this temporary, transient life, in the form of *Revelation*. The Holy Quran, literally the words of God, was revealed to prophet Muhammad, the last link in the familiar chain of theistic messengers of God. This Divine book was zealously kept intact, letter by letter, for more than fourteen centuries, guides almost one fourth of the world population today. The Quran is intended to guide humanity on how to make the correct choices in their

daily life, and as a source for True knowledge that transcends the limitations of the human mind and the senses. Many verses of the Quran refer to the valuable sense organs and the contemplating mind as great favors endowed on humanity by God. But other verses also point out their limits and limitations; hence the reference in the Quran to *Revelation* as an additional favor, a mercy from God, a light source, and a healing for the ailments of the Heart<sup>(\*)</sup>. The Quran repeatedly admonishes “all people” to critically use their senses and their minds, and to watch and observe and “look again” and discern thoughtfully into their “own selves” and into “the horizons” that they may appreciate the splendor of God’s Creation. But then, humans are called on to contemplate the content of Revelation to find ultimate Truths, un-tampered with, nor swayed by narrow interests or lowly desires. It is no wonder that Muslims living under such belief system have managed to lead the world in science and technology for centuries, when the west was suffering the Dark Ages. (see, e.g. Landau, 1958; Lichtenstadter, 1958; Watt, 1972). Needless to say that, unfortunately, that same Muslim world had slipped into an ebb of one of the those historical civilizational and cultural cycles for the last two centuries, suffering from deep decline and deterioration in many respects, especially in terms of science and technology.

### **Integralism**

On the basis of this very short account of the Islamic worldview, kept limited to our purposes and to available space, it should be clear that the Islamic tradition is grounded in the “integration” of knowledge generated through *sense* perception, mindful *reasoning* and Divine *Revelation*. It is important to point out here that the understanding (or the interpretation) of Scripture in Islam is not mediated through any “divinely” anointed authority or institution. Its interpretation is open to all qualified by their acquired learning and scholarship --whose opinion could be legitimately contested by other learned colleagues. Now, one can understand how Muslim social scientists and social workers appreciatively received the ‘Integralist’ ideas of Pitirim Sorokin. It nicely parallels the position held by the Islamic learned community on that matter for centuries. It also provides a basis for an innovative methodology which frees them from the shackles of the positivist ‘ideology’, so inimical to religion, inherited from the ‘old philosophy of science’.

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Verses of the Holy Quran in support of the statements contained in that paragraph are too numerous to be cited here. They could easily be found elsewhere; see for example: Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji (1982) *Al-Tawhid: Its Implications For Thought And Life*. Kuala Lumpur: IIIT.

On the basis of Sorokin's monumental work on social and cultural dynamics (Sorokin, 1957, 1985: 694-696) he described, diagnosed, and prescribed remedies, to the ailments of the modern disintegrating cynical sensate culture. In particular, he derided its 'exclusive empiricism' which led to a 'blackout' of culture, catastrophic to all aspects of our lives, and degrading anything of value. In his book *The Crisis of Our Age* (1941: 252-254) he describes how modern culture with its sensate *system of truth and reality* "led inevitably to the growth of materialism...more radical mechanisticism...growing hedonism, and sensuality in the world of values...flat empiricism, superficial positivism and vulgar utilitarianism ...". But then he asserts that 'The Way Out' of this crisis of our age lies, in an important way, in a transformation to the "*integral system of truth and knowledge*" (Sorokin, 1941: 255-260). In place of the reductionist, one-sided view of reality of the senses, integralism holds that we have to see the total *reality*, with its three basic components: (1) the empirical-sensory, (2) the rational-mindful, and (3) the 'superrational - supersensory'. (Allen, ed., 1963: 380-381). Integralism's stance on human nature is explained as follows: "[It] posits... that humans are three dimensional creatures possessing a body, a mind, and a soul. Each dimension knows the world differently ... The body learns through the senses and knows the world empirically. The mind seeks knowledge through reason and understands the world rationally. The soul or supersensory capacity exist independent of reason and the senses. It develops from intuition, grace, and God's revelation. Through it humans grasp the sublime or transcendent truths of their existence (Johnston, 1999: 27)".

The parallelism between Sorokin's mapping of the sources of truth and knowledge and the Islamic worldview on these sources (described above) is so striking as almost to be considered identical. Even more significantly, that same common ground, calling for the *integration of the best products of human ingenuity, and of Divine guidance* also coincides with the methodology of the Islamization of knowledge suggested by Al-Faruqi (1982). This unison set Integralism at the core of the conceptual framework for the inclusion of Islamic concepts in social work practice. But that innovative pursuit did not prove an easy task. Sorokin himself expected that the Integral 'transformation' process will be met with formidable resistance. He predicted, correctly, that it will take time to be assimilated and to be put to good use. It indeed took half a century for social and behavioral scientists to seriously call for the adoption of 'integralism' as a remedy for the 'crises' they and others belatedly admitted is plaguing their disciplines. Only recently, for example, Vincent Jeffries (1999: 36-37) declares that "there is *growing consensus* that these [social] sciences are in a state of crisis... A new and different

orientation is clearly needed to provide an answer to this crisis. This can be found in the ideas of Pitirim A. Sorokin ...Sorokin's advocacy of integralism can be regarded as an incipient *paradigm* which has the potential of moving the social sciences to higher levels of integration, understanding, and creativity.” [emphasis added]. Indeed, numerous works appeared in the last ten years on the themes of the crisis in the social sciences and society, on integralism as a promising solution in both arenas, along with receptivity by many religious traditions. (see e.g. Johnston, 2004; Nichols, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2012; Jeffries, 2004, 2005; Ferrer, et al. 2005; Jörg, 2011). A lot more was written recently in that connection, after scholars and intellectuals started taking notice of the abhorrent calamities and crises the world has seen in the last ten years, which Sorokin had predicted and described as if reading from an open book. But, for our purposes as social workers, it was Barry Johnston (1999:40) who recognized the three dimensions of the challenge, and the promising integralist response: the epistemological/theoretical, the methodological, and the practical (social problems). He writes: “Integralism challenges us to rediscover our core. It contains a historically grounded theory of social change; an epistemological foundation for a more comprehensive methodology; and a practical and theoretical emphasis on problem solving. As a classic sociological theory Integralism simultaneously provides an approach to systematic theory and a methodological framework that triangulates intuitive, rational and empirical understandings while maintaining a focus on social problems”.

### **Integralist theory building and research**

If it is established that reality encompasses more than can be apprehended by our senses and our reasoning faculties alone, and if we realize that ‘revealed’ knowledge can bring in a wholeness that may help confront the crisis of the social sciences (and even the crisis of our age), the next step is to arrive at an answer to the following important question. How can we systematically ‘integrate’ a) revealed knowledge with b) knowledge gained through sense perception and mindful reasoning? This question, and its answer, are vital for the construction of the conceptual framework for the Islamic perspective on social work practice. Since the early 1990’s attempts were made at dealing with this essential methodological issue, both conceptually and operationally. What was *urgently needed* was something like a *scientific revolution in social work* (Ragab, 1992). The situation was not trivial or localized. Thus, if the needed reforms were to be meaningful and credible, they had to be general in purview, open to all faiths; not to be a particular, parochial affair.

Among the attempts to delineate systematic steps for integrating religious concepts into theory building and research (Ragab, 1996) consisted of *creating initial ‘integral’ conceptual*

*schemes, from which hypotheses could be generated, to test their validity.* Naturally, any such attempt had to tackle the issue in the social sciences in general, as these do provide the profession -in important ways- with its knowledge base. So, this general blueprint was used to build the “Islamic Perspective on Theory Building in the Social Sciences”. It is worth mentioning here that other colleagues belonging to different religious traditions posed that same question raised above and came -independently- with a comparable general strategy. Jeffries for example, asked the question this way: “how to incorporate the idea of the truth of faith as expressed in religious ideas in a manner compatible with a naturalistic conception of science, which is limited to rational and empirical truth...”. He then aptly suggests this solution: “...appropriate religious ideas can be used as metaphysical value premises which guide various aspects of scientific endeavors, or they can be used as *concepts which are incorporated in falsifiable propositions.*” [emphasis added]

The key to that integrative methodology could be easily found in the generally accepted principle that scientific knowledge grows through a *dialectic of theory and research*, whereby theory guides research, and research tests theory. Research generates new facts or verified observations, which cumulate into empirical generalizations. But ‘facts’ alone cannot provide ‘understanding and explanation’, which constitute the goal of science. Facts, or ascertained observations, describe partial, fragments of reality, and thus, by themselves, cannot provide that kind of comprehensive meaning. Theorists bring these facts and empirical generalizations together and endeavor to give them meaning, to achieve that honored goal of science. But what do theorists do to bring a collection of facts together to make them meaningful? Authorities on theory building tell us that theorists use their *imagination* to achieve that goal. Dubin, in his pioneering work on *Theory Building* asserts that “a theoretical model is limited in no way except by the *imagination of the theorist* in what he may use as elements in building the model...”, and then it is the role of research to *test* its reality. [emphasis added]. George Homans also tells us that ‘a leap of imagination’ is required to bring observations together in a meaningful way. Indeed, Carl Popper’s *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* helped demystify the ‘old’ inductive image of science and its companions: scientism and false self-assurance! The following statement, tells us that great scientists are “men of bold ideas, but highly critical of their own ideas ... They work with *bold conjectures* and severe attempts at *refuting their own conjectures*”. That widely opens the door for the utilization of fruitful hypotheses wherever they can be found. Then it is for the falsifiability principle to be the arbiter of truth.

This notion provides the key for working out the solution for the issue of the utilization of religious concepts and ideas in theory and research. Social work research from an 'Islamic perspective' is simply justified as follows: if it is acceptable, or even desirable, in the world of 'theory building' to use creative imagination and conjecture, the utilization of ideas generated from revealed knowledge may prove to be as, or even more useful in that respect -- on the condition that any conceptualizations that include religious insights are to be subjected to rigorous testing and refutation as usual. With only one caveat: that our hypotheses would be tested in 'total' reality, rather than in its empirical aspect alone (a point that will be elaborated on below). In another vein, it should be clear that research here is not attempting to test the validity of Divine beliefs, but only testing the *integral composite* containing both our accumulated 'scientific' findings and our 'understanding' of the Islamic precepts.

On the basis of all of the above, we may now introduce the specific steps which may be used for the incorporation of Islamic insights into social work research.

#### **Phase I: Initial integral theorizing:**

1. The researcher starts by taking stock of *the Islamic worldview*, particularly as pertains to: God as Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds; to human nature; the ultimate meaning of humans existence in this world and beyond; the nature of social interaction and relationships; and societal arrangements in the Islamic tradition.
- 2- A systematic and comprehensive review of relevant *extant social work literature* would be carried out. The relevant literature should be subjected to a rigorous critique from the vantage point of the Islamic perspective, i.e. Islamic epistemology and ontology. A major problem that faces researchers at this point is that social work models or theories heavily depend on social science theories, which are not very famous for spelling out their ontological and epistemological presuppositions. Even then, social workers are not very fond of pursuing such issues dubbed 'philosophizing'. However, this should not deter their efforts to tackle the painstaking job – because the price of neglect at this point is too high: lack of validity. Next, any concepts, generalizations or insights that withstand the rigorous critical evaluation would be treasured and be used as part of the 'integral' theorizing.
3. A review of relevant material in *Islamic revealed knowledge* is conducted. As the researcher completes the previous step he emerges equipped with a clear delineation of the parameters of the subject under study as it is conceived of in modern literature. Now, the Holy Quran and the Sunnah would be searched for keywords about (or close to) the subject under



study. Then, or concurrently, contributions of early or modern Muslim scholars would be searched for relevant material.

4. The insights gleaned in the preceding steps from Islamic revealed knowledge would be used in conjunction with relevant modern social work literature which withstood the critique to provide an *initial integrated theoretical framework* for the understanding of the particular topic under study.

#### **Phase II: Validation through research**

1. Hypotheses would be deductively derived from the above initial integrated theoretical framework, for testing in total reality.

2. If the hypotheses thus generated are corroborated, this means that we have arrived at ascertained observations, which would be added to the repository of the unrefuted observations. This increases our confidence in the robustness of the initial integrated theoretical framework.

3. However, if the hypotheses were not confirmed, then this means that either: a) our understanding or interpretation of relevant aspects of revelation was, in fact wanting or incorrect; or: b) that our research procedures were wanting or inappropriately executed. All the particulars of the research design, measurement, and data collection would be vetted for any flaws or deviations from the standard procedure.

4. As a general rule, we do not expect contradictions between valid or correct interpretation of revelation on the one hand, and corroborated facts on the other. However, we have to remember that until today we are using data collection techniques geared to capture 'empirical' data, while testing hypotheses derived from the innovative 'integral' theoretical frameworks dictates devising appropriate methods and techniques which are capable of tapping 'total reality', as Sorokin had always reminded us. Beginnings of such, more sensitive techniques, are being suggested. A pioneering effort in that respect started as early as 1981, i.e. the compendium of new research methods and techniques compiled by Peter Reason and John Rowan, intended to be "A Sourcebook of the New Paradigm Research".

#### **Integralism in social work practice**

If the process of the integration of Islamic concepts described above started with a research topic or a research problem under investigation, the integration process in this section starts with a number of available practice theories. Our task is to select from the repertoire what is most appropriate for use in helping a specific client, or a category of clients. Of course, basically, the same general features of the process described above apply. Accordingly, the *Islamic Perspective on Social Work Practice* refers here to the methodical integration of: a) extant

social work practice theories, to the extent that they are compatible with the Islamic ontological and epistemological presuppositions, with b) relevant aspects of Islamic knowledge, values, and beliefs. As alluded to above, the rich Islamic heritage, rooted in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah, accumulated by scholars over the centuries, deeply impacts the life of a Muslim in all its facets, and in so many ways; starting from defining his identity and the way he sees himself, the world around him, and beyond... all the way to guiding him to the legitimate types of financial transactions, decent attire, table manners and even water conservation. For social work as a profession, that Islamic heritage contains tried and tested knowledge, values and deep spiritual insights, essential to working with Muslim clients in three ways.

- 1) it contains a general theory of *human behavior and the social environment*.
- 2) it offers a 'comprehensive', non-reductionist theory of the *causes* of 'psychosocial' problems.
- 3) it provides potent motivating techniques for helping Muslim clients *cope with their* problems.

So, in parallel with the general phases of the process of integration of Islamic concepts in 'theory building and research' described above, we will describe here the integration process when it comes to social work 'practice'.

#### **Step I- Taking stock of relevant Islamic concepts**

If we expect to be able to help Muslim clients overcome their psychosocial problems effectively, we cannot assume that they typically think and act in exactly the same way as 'the client' is supposed to think or act under the Western model or practice theory. The most notable feature of concern here is the Islamic view of *human nature*. As we hinted above, in Islam human beings are dignified beings 'created' by the Almighty God, with spiritual and bodily components, and endowed with free will. Each human being lives on this earth for a limited predestined time span, where he is continuously being 'tested' on how he uses his God-given free will: for good or evil. On the basis of the results of the tests, he receives his rewards or punishments in the eternal Real Life (the hereafter). The Quran, the words of God, kept intact in the Arabic tongue (no translation) word by word since it was revealed, provides divine guidance to humans in all facets of their lives. The words and deeds of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, provide humans with specific guidelines on how one should conduct himself correctly in this life in its daily details. Now, taking stock of these precepts should afford us the basis for selecting (or modifying)

congruent models or practice theories which would be appropriate for working with Muslim clients.

## **2. Selection of a practice model for integration**

The inventory of current practices and practice theories would be subjected to attentive assessment as to their degree of congruity with these Islamic principles. The ontological and epistemological assumptions on which these practice theories or models are based should be rigorously critiqued. We have shown above how Maslow pronounced his judgment –on the basis of careful assessment– about the first two ‘forces’ in psychology, Freudianism and Behaviorism, on which social work has depended for decades, dubbing them ‘nontheories’ (himself being for long an ardent behaviorist!). Fortunately, the latest theoretical frameworks reflecting the post-positivistic, post-materialistic ‘New Story’ of science are more open to acceptance of the spiritual and religious factors, and consequently are more congruent with the inclusion of Islamic concepts. With the recognition of the mentalist and cognitive factors by Humanistic Psychology, and the recognition of the transcendent and the ‘spiritual’ factors by Transpersonal Psychology, social work research took notice of the potentialities for the inclusion of Islamic tenets into the cognitive-behavioral model.

But it is important to point out that the incorporation of Islamic concepts in social work practice entails making certain modifications in the way ‘standard’ procedures and techniques are carried out. For example, the ‘professional relationship’, the cornerstone of the helping process, when informed by the ‘Islamic’ perspective, certain relevant Islamic precepts apply that would significantly modify its nature. The Islamic perspective introduces the concept of the client being seen as the worker’s ‘brother in faith’. It follows that the worker, answerable to the All-Seeing and All-Hearing God, has the ‘duty’ to serve him and to protect him as humbly and as caringly as is humanly possible. The worker is rewarded by no less authority than God, both in this life, and in the hereafter, in accordance with the degree of his adhering to these admonitions. While, at the same time, if the client is a non-Muslim, the worker, also answerable to God again, should offer him the best ‘traditional’ services his client is entitled to, in fairness and without imposition, or any attempt at proselytization that exploits his need for help.

## **3. Field testing and modification**

Once the process of inclusion of the Islamic precepts into such models or practices is completed, these integral innovative practices are ready for testing. The testing of the innovative integrated models or practices usually of the ‘intervention research’ variety that

takes place in real life situations and institutions. Maslow, noted that revolutionary developments such as these (his reference was to Transpersonal psychology) require such types of research, declaring: “Clearly the next step for this psychology and philosophy is research, research, research—not only in the laboratory, but more importantly, in the field, in society, in factories, in homes, hospitals, communities, even nations” (Maslow, in his introduction to: Goble, 1970: 6). Naturally, we would not expect, at our early attempts at building integrated models, to use ‘pure experimental’ designs to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. It would be more appropriate to use strategies of the ‘formative’ types the evaluation, that allow for modifications and additions of new details while conducting the experiment. But as the innovative models matures, with manuals produced, more stringent ‘experimental’ designs should be used. On the basis of the results, the innovative practices would be modified, and the cycle repeated until satisfactory levels of effectiveness are reached.

#### **4. Dissemination and education:**

Successful models and practices, standardized and codified, reports describing them would have their way to conference presentations and professional journals. In this way they would be exposed to critical reviews and wide deliberations. In time, the products would find their way to textbooks and other material to be infused in social work education. In-service training could carry them to social workers already in the field ...etc. in accordance with the normal cycle of professional knowledge production, dissemination, and assimilation.

#### **Summary and Conclusion**

We have shown how Muslim countries of the Middle East region in the post-colonial era embraced Western social work, perceived of as the application of the most advanced scientific knowledge to help carry these countries through their burdensome task of ‘national development’. The transplantation process was seen in terms not dissimilar to the importation of material products and gadgets – ready for instant use. But soon after, it became clear that ‘social technologies’, imported to help effect changes in the lives of ‘human beings’, living within different social and cultural conditions, with different religious traditions, was a different matter. Symptoms of the transplant’s failure to thrive became widely noted. Incongruencies between the Western model of practice and the local conditions became acutely felt. Attempts to find some way out of the dilemma were afoot. ‘Indigenization’ of social work suggested minor adaptations in the imported Western model

but was soon found lacking. The discrepancies were much deeper than originally thought. 'Authentization of social work in developing countries' suggested a reversal of the direction. It looked for guidance -first- in the genuine, the tried and trusted heritage of the country. It called for identification of the country's distinctive social structure and exploration of its social problems. Then it would become plausible to turn to others to benefit from their experiences. This sounded more promising as it starts from 'within', as it holds to what is genuine and original as a guide to discriminating, wise selection of the most appropriate experiences from 'without'. However, authentization proponents are not unaware of the initial contribution of American social work which provided them and the world with a general scheme, a frame, and supporting structure for the building of a modern, noble profession. And they are aware of the fact that they have to be as industrious as their colleagues abroad in filling in the contents fitting for their societies.

But then authentization efforts in Muslim countries soon found that the religious teachings of Islam, which guide a Muslim in all aspects of his life, played a most significant role both in acting as '*protective*' factors of psychosocial problems, and in helping stave off 'risk factors'. But the profession, with its dependence on so-called value-free, positivist social/behavioral sciences -a materialist 'philosophy' noted for being inimical to religion- was not receptive to the inclusion of anything spiritual or religious in a science-based profession. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the social sciences came to absorb the revolutionary discoveries in the physical sciences that changed our view of the world and of ourselves. This led to a number of dramatic developments in the social/behavioral sciences on the one hand, and in the educational establishment in Muslim countries on the other. These breakthroughs helped the Authentization movement outgrow its old vague formulations, and to focus on the utilization of Islamic concepts in practice.

One of the most encouraging developments that helped in this transformation legitimizing inclusion of spiritual and religious factors was the emergence of Maslow's (among others) Humanistic Psychology, which matured into Transpersonal Psychology. On the epistemological front, Sorokin's 'Integralism' with its emphasis in the integration of the truth of *faith* with *rational* and *empirical* truths provided support for the integration of Islamic concepts in working with Muslim populations. Al-Faruqi's Islamization of knowledge provided a general strategy for that integration process. Last, but not least, the advances made by the North American 'spirituality in social work' movement had a special significance for the ongoing work on the 'Islamic Perspective on social work'. These movements, and concepts derived therefrom, coalesced to help put together a cogent

conceptual framework that systematically guided the process of inclusion of Islamic concepts in social work practice. That conceptual framework is not meant to be reinventing the wheel. The integration process uses the generally accepted 'dialectic of theory and research' to create innovative constructs that combine Islamic insights with appropriate extant theories and practices, which would be subjected to rigorous verification and testing of their effectiveness.

It is worth noting here that the general approach of the Islamic perspective on social work is distinguished by its openness, and its possible use by any other spiritual or religious tradition. An important feature of that approach is that whatever concepts derived from Islamic sources used in the creating of the 'integrated' social work theory and practice are non-dogmatic and nonexclusive. They are open to complement, or to be complemented by, 'validated' knowledge, wherever its source may be. Another important feature is that any 'product' of that integration of Islamic knowledge and values in practice is not seen as sacred, nor immune to criticism in any way. These integrated conceptual constructs are expected to be open for methodical validation, and rigorous testing of their effectiveness, in line with the generally agreed scientific principle of 'self-correction'.

It should be clear that this approach would be comfortable with the premise that "there is room for many types of social work across widely divergent contexts... though its mission may take various forms and expressions in different countries". It goes "beyond indigenization and authentization", in that it is 'proactive' in nature and that it is built on the principle of 'multidirectionality'. It may be emphasized here also that the spirit of this approach is harmonious, in most respects, with the requirements for the "movement of internationalizing spiritually sensitive social work" suggested by Canada (2002).