

Family Social Work

The family provides important support for the individual in society. It caters for the physical, effective and emotional needs of the individual. It provides the individual with social and educational support.

The family is also responsible for rearing and protecting children. It is the basic unit of socialization and cultural transmission, since children acquire their fundamental values and attitudes from their families. Indeed, it is the social cell in which human beings are born, and where they learn to become members of a wider human society. However, the family is also where many interpersonal conflicts occur, problems develop, and individuals suffer. All families have difficulties from time to time. Some families have resources to solve their problems while others do not.

When a family is no longer able to deal with its problems, and cannot provide the basic physical, security, effective and emotional needs of its members, we call this kind of family 'dysfunctional'. There are many reasons why a family becomes dysfunctional. Among others, they are alcoholism, drug addiction, physical illness, death, war, poverty, unemployment, mental illness, spouse abuse, child abuse, divorce and separation, and polygamy.

This unit aims at enhancing the participants' knowledge and understanding of the basic concepts related to family life. As we discuss the importance of the family, we also note the problems that may prevent the successful functioning of the family.

What is Family Social Work?

Family social work involves utilizing a wide range of tools to help vulnerable families cope with problems both big and small. Family social workers may help families cope with day-to-day stressors, such as concerns about money, in a healthy and productive manner. This might involve placing parents in a

financial literacy class and providing them with continued guidance as they resolve their money issues.

The field is also concerned with a variety of more serious factors that lead to family dysfunction, from physical and emotional abuse to homelessness to drug problems. Family social workers commonly place families in danger into safe housing, provide assistance gaining employment, and coordinate care for individuals that are addicted to drugs.

A relatively unique factor about family social work is that it takes a systems approach to identifying the nature and extent of the problem. This approach also informs the manner in which strategies for overcoming those problems are developed and implemented. Social workers are interested in the systems approach regardless of their employment setting, which can vary widely from a school or a social services agency to a hospital or private practice.

For example, if a family's primary concern is the anger problems of a child, family social workers would not just focus on that child but examine his or her functioning within the family system. How the child interacts with each member of the family would be explored to determine the role of those interactions in the child's display of anger.

Family social work and related disciplines are borne out of the concept of helping people help themselves, which became a popular example, of charity organization societies in the late 19th century. The development of social work as a profession is typically attributed to these early attempts, often by women, to resolve the specific issue of poverty.

However, after the conclusion of World War I in 1918, many of these women and other volunteers helped veterans cope with the traumas of war and assisted their families in coping with the struggles of their loved one. Thus began the

journey of social work to becoming a systems-based approach to helping families overcome obstacles in their lives.

What Does a Family Social Worker Do?

The field of family social work focuses on providing support services to families who must overcome obstacles to achieve optimal family functioning. Trained in a number of areas, including communications, counselling, and advocacy, family social workers are employed in a variety of public and private settings and work with a myriad of clients. Family social workers may assist couples in adopting a child, find resources for victims of domestic violence, or help parolees reintegrate into society after serving their sentence.

Family social workers typically help families overcome obstacles in their lives, ranging from abuse to poverty to addiction. They focus on assessing the needs of the family and offering various types of support, both to individual family members and to the family as a unit. Supports may include counselling, advocacy, and coordination of resources.

For example, a family social worker assigned to a homeless family would work to secure the family temporary housing. The social worker would consult with parents to arrange for job interviews if one or both are unemployed. For the children in the family, the social worker might procure needed school supplies and arrange for transportation to and from school. If a family member struggles with addiction, one-on-one counselling might be undertaken.