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## THE PUBLIC AND THE PROFESSION'S PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL WORK



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### **ABSTRACT:**

The social work profession has long been concerned about its mission and perception. The two interests go hand in hand, because to have an effect on how we as social workers are viewed, we must be self-aware about who we are and what we do. This paper will address how social work periodically reflects upon and re-assesses its purpose because of internal considerations, such as the profession's ethics, and external forces, including the job market and public perception. Some of the research conducted over the years into public perception of social work—as well as that of our clients—will be presented and compared. In addition, I review how the media have portrayed the field, and how we as professionals have marketed ourselves. Finally, some suggestions will be offered, which can be applied at various levels, including direct practice, program development and evaluation, administration, and branding of the profession as a whole.

**KEY WORDS:** Profession's Perception , job market and public perception , program development .

## **INTRODUCTION:**

When counterterrorism police officer Lawrence DePrimo bought boots for a homeless man in November 2012, the New York Police Department (NYPD) posted a photo to its Facebook page. The photo elicited a significant response to NYPD's new online presence, and shortly thereafter DePrimo appeared on the "Today" show focusing on his heroism and humanity (Bell, 2012; Goodman, 2012). The tourist who took the photo works in the communications department of the Pinal County Sheriff's Office in Phoenix (Ruelas, 2012). This was self-promotion to some extent, but the action and response demonstrates a profession re-evaluating its mission as well as seeking to enhance its image. Social workers serve the homeless population but are rarely featured on national television. We can learn from this story on two counts: by growing in awareness of our mission and by learning how to influence the public perception of social work.

Many children look up to police officers or firefighters, others strive to become doctors or lawyers, and some endeavor to follow in the footsteps of a teacher; few children, however, aspire to be social workers. Culture and gender (Liben, Bigler & Krogh, 2001) and public image and prestige (Auger, Blackhurst & Wahl, 2005) influence desirability of a particular career. The perception of social work is therefore important in attracting highly committed, professional individuals. We must first determine if control over our profession's image lies more firmly in the hands of social workers or in other outlets like the media. Ultimately, "the image of social work" is not simply a cosmetic matter: A positive image is important to the vitality, effectiveness, acceptance, and funding of the profession. "The more that social work is perceived positively, the more likely it is to gain support for its programmes, to have its services utilized, to maintain morale, to attract recruits and to have its voice heard" (Kaufman & Raymond, as cited in Reid & Misener, 2001, p. 194). This article will review how the social work profession has reflected upon its mission and perception, consider some of the research into public perception of its work and clients, examine media portrayal, and look at how social work has marketed itself. I will conclude with some suggestions for the profession that can be applied at multiple levels, including direct practice, program development and evaluation, administration, and branding of the profession as a whole.

## **The Importance of Defining Social Work**

Social work's concern for its image must start with an unmistakable comprehension and meaning of its part and mission (Corvo, Selmi, and Montemaro, 2003). Since its commencement, social work has been worried with "how it is characterized, honed and saw," experiencing numerous developments that have formed how it is seen (Staniforth, Fouche, and O'Brien, 2011, p. 192). Social specialists' exercises incorporate "direct practice, group arranging, super-vision, interview organization, backing, social and political activity, arrangement improvement and execution, training, and research and assessment" (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008, Preamble). Characterizing parameters of social work potentiates simulated impediments on the calling (Gibelman, 1999).

Moreover, experts change crosswise over capabilities, experience, and preparing levels. The Bureau of Labor Statistics re-vealed that 70% of social specialists in the U.S. either had no college degree (27.9%) or a degree in a field other than social work (44%) (Gibelman, 2000). Numerous specialists without a social work degree—or any degree by any stretch of the imagination—discover a place in the field as a result of requirements for staff or populace particular mastery. Thus, "in people in

general personality, every single social laborer are lumped together - credentialed or not" (Gibelman, 2000, p. 466), which can sustain falsehood.

Outer elements like the employment showcase or the political atmosphere drive our calling to develop, prompting to divergent under-standings of social work's personality after some time (Gibelman, 1999). Once in a while, mid-vocation social work experts can dismiss their unique reason. Enthusiasm and standards are obliged by the subsequent worry of unmanageable obligations, low wages, and little acknowledgment from others.

### **PROFESSIONAL SELF-AWARENESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

The social work mission changes after some time to meet evolving worldwide needs and build up reason (Baron, as referred to in Gibelman, 1999). Therefore, two fairly contradicting weights develop: (a) loyalty to the center benefits of enabling helpless and mistreated populaces considering their ecological influences, and (b) openness to the smoothness and element change inherent inside "the far reaching and extending limits of social work and the trouble in giving brief, typified descriptions of a mind boggling and multifaceted calling" (Gibelman, 1999, p. 301). Staniforth, Fouche, and O'Brien (2011) contended that social laborers all through all levels of associations ought to engage in basic reflection. They ought to practice mindfulness about the field's advancing mission, have incredible exchanges about it in supervision and at gatherings, and seek after it in research and works. They fight that all experts "can sit inside a practice structure which holds social equity as an overarching rule" (p. 194). Working under basic moral standards to advance society's general welfare, engage individuals furthermore, groups, and emphatically influence the social environment, social laborers must assess execution inside, civil argument the point of the calling, and remotely survey how people in general perceives their work.

Silverman (2012) mirrored that without mindfulness of our own calling, mission, and expert personality, how might we assume that others will comprehend us any better? Inner investigation of how the field ought to ostensibly introduce itself is mind boggling as a result of weights to serve customers and groups while looking after classification. However recognition influences money related support of projects and adequacy of our work. A contention rises over who characterizes the social work mark: social laborers, the public, as well as the media. At the point when social specialists renounce their responsibility, it permits others to control their picture.

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION**

The social work profession wants public perception of its mission to align with its core values. Notwithstanding the calling's regard for its mental self view, there have been couple of far reaching efforts to overview popular assessment. Condie, Hanson, Lang, Moss, and Kane (1978) portrayed early overviews that discovered little agreement about the part of a social laborer, yet that "a dubiously negative implication of social work appears to have been the generalization" (p. 47). Just 6% of respondents saw social specialists as "wellsprings of assistance for enthusiastic issues," contrasted and 28% for religious pioneers, 26% for therapists, 22% for doctors, and 11% for analysts (Condie et al., p. 51). Positive takeaways included an understanding that social specialists were more than just case managers and demonstrated nurture all populaces paying little heed to salary level.

LeCroy and Stinson (2004), perceiving changes in social work rehearse in the a long time since Condie et al's. (1978) research, looked to reassess open observation. The creators reasoned, "if the overall population is befuddled, ignorant or even hostile toward social work, the calling is less ready to satisfy its main goal of aiding those in need" (LeCroy and Stinson, 2004, p. 164). Finding just restricted

late studies, they executed a nationwide review to evaluate open estimation toward social work. They found that people in general partners social specialists with incessant media stories reporting youngsters being taken from their folks, demonstrating little change since Condie et al's. (1978) learn about the part of social laborers. Strikingly, right around 1 in 5 respondents trusted the generalization that "social laborers exploit the administration" (LeCroy and Stinson, 2004, p. 169).

Dennison, Poole, and Qaqish (2007) investigated what in-coming undergrads from different courses of study pondered social work. The creators were interested to learn if the stumarks, however littler in number and more youthful than those previously overviewed, reflected more present perspectives of the calling. Altogether, understudies did not totally comprehend the scope of social work exercises or the levels of preparing required.

Zugazaga, Surette, Mendez, and Otto (2006) portrayed a study, authorized by the NASW, which examined how general society saw the calling. Members had minimal direct experience with social specialists; their view of the field was formed overwhelmingly by the media. They related social laborers with tyke welfare, the legislature, and poor people or underprivileged. They had a through and through positive respect for the calling in spite of the commonness of contrarily depicted youngster welfare cases.

Fall, Levitov, Jennings, and Eberts (2000) exhibited five case histories of people with emotional well-being or relationship difficulties to a gathering of subjects who positioned their trust in a scope of clinical callings. Members reliably communicated a low level of trust in social specialists, quite often by a considerable edge. Hodge (2004) found how people in general may be befuddled, on the grounds that the "social laborer" title can be purported by a doctoral, ace's or four year certification in social work, or another degree totally. On the off chance that people in general is just respectably mindful of what social specialists do, its foggy impression of social laborers is compounded by affiliation; Trattner (as referred to in Tirado, 2006, p. 27), states, "social laborers, through no blame of their own, are dis-enjoyed by the general population since they work with (or are seen to work with) individuals in the public arena who are dreaded and additionally detested."

The constrained research led demonstrates that people in general often takes a gracious perspective of social laborers as a result of the conviction that humane work is being finished. In any case, there are likewise common negative recognitions: (an) a general numbness of the degree of social work's main goal (regularly thought to be dominantly youngster welfare); (b) an absence of comprehension of what social work parts incorporate (frequently sustained by the calling's absence of clarity); (c) a negative perspective of social laborers' ability when contrasted with comparative helping callings; and (d) an unfavorable perspective of some customer populaces with which social work adjusts itself.

If perception does not match the profession's stated mission, social workers must learn how to influence public under-standing. "Social specialists themselves are most appropriate to improve the general population's information and conclusions about the calling... [because] nobody else is probably going to venture forward" to do as such (LeCroy and Stinson, 2004, p. 174). In 2005, the NASW set out to raise people in general's regard of social work given the generalizations the profession had persevered through (NASW, 2004a). This objective, created in concert with the 50th commemoration of the NASW's establishing (NASW, 2004b), prodded a publicizing effort to expand mindfulness, which included magazine and daily paper advertisements, official statements, appearances on radio and TV programs, and another site. In addition, the battle invigorated endeavors to connect with social workers in the subject of affecting change in social work's recognition.

Murdach (2011) referred to Mary Richmond's exemplary *What is Social Case Work?* what's

more, Richmond's account of early social specialists as endeavors to create open energy about social work (Murdach, 2011, p. 92). Reid and Misener (2001) proposed that social laborers figure out how to place stories in the media; promote more, coordinated effort between social work and news coverage schools could give social specialists methodologies, assets, and contacts to create more positive depictions. "[S]uch activity can be specifically fixing to a vital social work capacity—to teach the citizenry about the necessities of its demographic" (Reid and Misener, 2001, p. 200). At that point, does social work's picture enhance, as well as the requirements of customers are highlighted and trashing myths about specific populaces and issues can be scattered.

As social laborers, we can see endeavors to expand mindfulness and upgrade positive open discernment as an administration to self and customers, not an extra weight. This exertion can take into consideration reflection on our unique inspiration for turning into a social laborer and open up an assortment of chances for intercession.

Figure out how you can communicate your function. Be aware of doing as such in a way that does not commend yourself or imperil confidentiality, but rather points out the engaging work of your association. Explore neighborhood media and create contacts crosswise over different media outlets. At that point, figure out how to set up a public statement, put an Op-Ed, or show up on a nearby radio or TV program. Gain from web-based social networking specialists how your association can publicize its work through the regularly changing universe of online networking. Above all, consider inner and outer joint effort, enrolling help from the NASW if vital; advocate for the significance of these endeavors in your association regardless of the possibility that you are not the person to finish the undertakings.

Tower (2000) gave the clearest command to activity: "Social laborers are in charge of exposing myths when the general population is misguided about the calling and the general population served by it" (p. 575). She made a Social Work and the Media course at the University of Nevada, Reno, that showed understudies about the film generation prepare; understudies in the long run created documentaries to air on neighborhood TV and open telecom stations. She contended that social work understudies and experts need to figure out how "to shape the general population picture of social work through viable utilization of prominent media" (Tower, 2000, p. 575). School and college projects can offer comparative elective courses proposed to deliver documentaries.

Another discernment changing and picture upgrading possibility is interdisciplinary joint effort where social laborers partner with different callings to serve a typical populace. Cacciatore, Carlson, Michaelis, Klimek and Steffan (2011) introduced an imaginative mediation in which social laborers framed an emergency reaction group to help a city fire division. Social workers served in an immediate practice injury intercession part either with general society or the people on call, taking into consideration coordinate engagement with people who regularly would not collaborate with social specialists.

## CONCLUSION

Returning to the example of Officer DePrimo, there were two reverberating results: (a) cops and general society re-considered the part of cops, and (b) open discernment moved forward. Maybe a couple all around set stories of social work in action could draw in a similar self-and open consciousness of professional mission and picture twisting consideration that the DePrimo case accomplished for the New York Police Department.

The social work field should consistently ponder its motivation, evaluating how its projects and endeavors serve customers and communities. Gibelman (1999) recommended that we ought not regret "the absence of a tough meaning of the calling, its practice, and its limits," (p. 308). Rather, she

contemplated that intermittent reevaluation considers decidedly the calling's capacity to respond to evolving situations. Notwithstanding, turning out to be more mindful about our central goal is not adequate. We should draw in with society and culture to consider our picture. At the point when our endeavors are inadequately gotten or misjudged, we should endeavor to move those perspectives. Tower (2000) admonished us: "The picture issue is genuine. what's more, social laborers ought to be concerned. Teachers who are not persuaded that a picture issue exists require just inquire as to whether somebody near them disliked their choice to enter the social work calling" (p. 584).

At long last, adopting a dynamic strategy and characterizing our part is superior to permitting others to represent us. As one of the slogans from the NASW 2004 battle broadcasted, "Social laborers: If you don't recount your story, who will?" (NASW, 2004a).

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