

Chapter 1

Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare

LO 1-1: Define social work and social welfare.

Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, and communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal. Social welfare is “a nation’s system of programs, benefits, and services that help people meet those social, economic, educational, and health needs that are fundamental to the maintenance of society” (Barker, 2014, p. 402).

LO 1-2: Discuss various perspectives on social welfare (including residual, institutional, and developmental perspectives, as well as the concept of sustainability).

The residual perspective conceives of social welfare as focusing on problems and gaps. The institutional perspective of social welfare views people’s needs as a normal part of life. Society has a responsibility to support its members and provide needed benefits and services. The developmental perspective “seeks to identify social interventions that have a positive impact on economic development” (Midgley & Livermore, 1997, p. 574). Sustainability involves “development that meets the current needs of the present generations without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Mary, 2008, p. 32).

LO 1-3: Explain critical thinking (including a framework for examining a wide range of concepts and issues).

Critical thinking is (1) the careful scrutiny of what is stated as true or what appears to be true and the resulting expression of an opinion or conclusion based on that scrutiny, and (2) the creative formulation of an opinion or conclusion when presented with a question, problem, or issue. Examining and evaluating facts and issues involve three steps: (1) ask questions, (2) assess the established facts and issues involved, and (3) assert a concluding opinion.

LO 1-4: Explain the conservative-liberal continuum with respect to viewing the social welfare system.

Conservatism is the philosophy that individuals are responsible for themselves, government should provide minimal interference in people’s lives, and change does not necessarily mean improvement. Liberalism is the philosophy that government should be involved in the social, political, and economic structure so that all people’s rights and privileges are protected in the

name of social justice. Radicalism is the philosophy that the social and political system as they stand are not structurally capable of truly providing social justice, so fundamental changes in those systems are necessary.

LO 1-5: Examine your personal attitudes about some social welfare issues.

Responding to issues and questions regarding the importance of change and the responsibility of government can help an individual determine his or her personal stance on the conservative-liberal continuum. Social workers must continuously examine their personal values, on the one hand, and respect the values of their clients, on the other.

LO 1-6: Explain social work's fields of practice.

Fields of practice in social work include children and families, aging, disabilities, health, mental health, substance abuse, schools, and corrections. Other contexts for practice are occupational social work, rural social work, police social work, and forensic social work.

LO 1-7: Explore the process of choosing a career.

The continuum of social work careers includes baccalaureate social workers (BSWs), master's social workers (MSWs), and social workers who have doctorates in social work (Ph.D. or DSW). When considering a career, it's important to think about one's general orientation toward the future, the extent to which one is people-oriented versus non-people-oriented, the ways in which one would like to work with people, what majors are available, and, if appropriate, what type of social work one would like to practice.

LO 1-8: Discuss the uniqueness of social work.

Social work builds on many disciplines, including psychology, sociology, political science, economics, biology, psychiatry, counseling, and cultural anthropology. Social work is unique in that it focuses on people's most difficult problems, often targets the environment for change, stresses the need for advocacy on a client's behalf, stems from a core of professional values, and emphasizes the importance of working in a partnership with clients.

LO 1-9: Identify some relevant concepts in systems theories and the ecological perspective.

Important concepts in systems theories and the ecological perspective relevant to social work practice include system (micro, mezzo, and macro), client system, social environment, and coping.

LO 1-10: Describe social work education's goals, curriculum, and competencies.

The Council on Social Work Education's *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* require that accredited social work programs prove that students demonstrate nine competencies. These competencies along with their component behaviors are stated and explained. Courses offered in traditional social work curricula are identified. The core social work concepts of general practice, specialized practice, and field education are introduced.