

## COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK: AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*The strength of the theory that guides a discipline is dependent on the quality of its concepts and concept analysis. Concepts is inextricably linked with knowledge development. They exist at various levels of development: mature, partially developed or immature. Concept analysis entails an assessment process using various techniques to explore the description of a concept in the literature or to develop a concept from observational and/or interview data. This paper presents a literature based preliminary analysis of the concept 'community social work'. Grew up in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain and gained common currency by the publication of the Barclay Report in 1982, the concept 'community social work' is yet partially developed and requires a move towards maturity. This paper presents the concept analysis of community social work using Rodgers' evolutionary method. It depicts the understanding of community social work in terms of its significance, use and application through the identification of surrogate terms, related concepts, references, antecedents, consequences, and attributes of the concept.*

**Key Words:** Community Social Work, Social Work Practice, Community, Concept Analysis, Methods of Concept Analysis and Rodgers' Evolutionary Method

### Introduction:

Concepts are considered to be the 'building blocks' of theory (McKenna, 1997 as cited by Hanrahan, 2004) and when operationalized form the link between theory and practice (Morse et al, 1996). They form the foundation of a discipline and the essence of the philosophical underpinnings that guide a profession. The strength of the theory that guides a discipline is dependent on the quality of its concepts and on the nature of the hypothesized relationships linking these and in turn on the quality of the concept analysis. Concept analysis can provide a knowledge base for practice by offering clarity and enabling understanding, rather than mere knowing (Baldwin, 2008). According to Knafl and Deatrck (2000:39) concept analysis typically 'entails synthesising existing views of a concept and distinguishing it from other concepts' with the purpose of resolving gaps or inconsistencies in the knowledge base of the discipline (Cronin, Ryan and Coughlan). Across all disciplines, concepts are inextricably linked with knowledge development. Therefore, any practitioner, educator or researcher who is involved in the development of knowledge and theory for their discipline must ultimately address the nature of concepts and the role they play (Rodgers and Knafl, 2000 as cited by Baldwin, 2003).

Morse et al. (1996) stated that concepts used in a discipline should be "mature", i.e., they should be relatively stable, clearly defined, with well described characteristics, demarcated boundaries,

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specified preconditions and outcomes. They also mentioned that concepts exist at various levels of development or at different levels of maturity. Because knowledge is continually developing; new concepts are being introduced, and accepted concepts continually being investigated and refined. Some concepts are poorly defined with characteristics that have not been described, related preconditions and outcomes that are unspecified and that lack demarcation. Between the two extremes of immature and mature concepts, there exist partially developed concepts which may appear to be well established and described, although some degree of conceptual confusion continues to exist, with several concepts competing to describe the same phenomenon. In such cases, concept analysis is required to move a concept toward maturity. According to Morse et al. (1996) concept analysis refers to a process of inquiry that explores concepts for their level of development or maturity as revealed by their internal structure, use, representativeness, and/or relations to other concepts. Concept analysis entails an assessment process using various techniques to explore the description of a concept in the literature or to develop a concept from observational and/or interview data. Thus, concept analysis is a term referring to the process of unfolding, exploring, and understanding concepts for the purposes of concept development, delineation, comparison, clarification, correction, identification, refinement, and validation. Hupcey et. al. (1997 as cited by Hanrahan, 2004) stipulated that the ultimate purpose of concept analysis is to enable the researcher to delineate the phenomenon and to facilitate its operationalization to context of Community Social Work.

This paper presents a literature based preliminary analysis of the concept 'community social work'. The concept 'community social work' grew up in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain as part of a philosophy of decentralizing and de-bureaucratizing social work provision (Hadley and Hatch, 1981 as in Payne, 2005) and gained common currency in the British Social Services following the publication of the Barclay Report in 1982 (Hadley et al., 1987). The concept seems described but some degree of conceptual confusion exists with several concepts competing to describe the same phenomenon. Thus, it is a partially developed concept that requires development towards maturity. Further, a clear understanding of the concept is needed for it to be transferred effectively into practice. The paper attempted to clarify the understanding of the concept community social work by exploring the description of the concept in the literature using Rodgers' evolutionary method of concept analysis adopted from nursing profession. It describes community social work in terms of its significance, use and application through the identification of surrogate terms, related concepts, references, antecedents, consequences, and attributes of the concept.

#### **Method:**

Concept analysis is a pragmatic and rigorous approach to defining concepts that can make a significant contribution to knowledge and by implication to practice. Since social work discipline lacks specific concept analysis methods, one of the methods developed in the nursing profession, where concept analysis is profuse and related literature is ample, is adopted for the analysis of community social work. Through paradigmatic evolution, different approaches to concept analysis have developed in nursing profession. The four most generally adopted concept analysis methods are (Morse et. al., 1996):

- 1) Wilsonian (1963/1969) methods of concept analysis, that is those adopted by Walker and Avant (1983/1988/1995) and Chinn and Jacobs (1983/1987) and Chinn and Kramer (1991) and further modified by Schwartz-Barcott and Kim (1986/1993) and

Rodgers (1989/1993)

- 2) Qualitative methods for concept analysis
- 3) Critical analysis of a concept using the literature as data, and
- 4) Quantitative methods for concept analysis

Here, for the analysis of community social work, Rodgers' evolutionary method of concept analysis -- one of the Wilsonian derived methods of concept analysis-- is selected. The rationale for choosing this method is based on its focus on the application of concepts in practice and on the roles of concepts in knowledge development. Also, it is a systematic method for concept analysis with a clearly defined process.

Rodgers (2000a) method of concept analysis has been termed evolutionary and centres on the idea that concepts evolve in a cycle of phases: significance, use and application (Cronin, Ryan and Coughlan). It includes a review of the data for the purpose of identifying the following elements (Fraser, 2011): surrogate terms, related concepts, references, antecedents, consequences, and attributes. The process involves following steps [Source: Evolutionary concept analysis activities (Rodgers, 2000, p.85) (Ghadirian et al., 2014)]:

- Identify the concept of interest
- Identify surrogate terms and relevant uses for the concept
- Identify and select an appropriate realm for data collection
- Collect data relevant to identify the attributes of the concept and the contextual basis of the concept including interdisciplinary socio-cultural and temporal variations
- Analyze data regarding the above characteristics of the concepts
- Identify an exemplar of the concept, if appropriate
- Identify implications hypotheses and implications for further development of the concept

#### **Materials:**

A literature search was conducted based on the key word 'community social work'. According to Rodgers (1989, 2000), an appropriate setting and sample should be identified for concept analysis. In a literature based analysis, the setting refers to the time period to be examined and the disciplines or types of literature to be included (Rodgers, 1989, 2000) (Weathers, McCarthy and Coffey, 2015). Since there is not plenty of literature mentioning the concept or term 'community social work', all the books, book chapters, articles and other electronic sources identified were considered for the analysis. Mainly the contributions of Barr in Lishman (2007); Butcher (1984); Chow (2015); Coulshed and Orme (2006); Delgado (2000, 2011); Delgado and Humm- Delgado (2013); Forde and Lynch (2014); Glasby (2005); Glison, Dulmus, and Sowers (2012); Hadley, Cooper and Dale & Stacy (1987); Hadley and Leidy (1996); Holiček, and Baldwin in Leskošek (2009); Itzhaky and Bustin (2002); Koutra (n.d.); Lavan (2008); Midgley and Livermore (1998); Pawar (2014); Payne (1983, 1995, 2005); Roivainen (2004); Stepney and Popple (2008); Taylor and Roberts (2013); Teater and Baldwin (2012); Watts in Lishman (1991); York (1984) and the website of Canadian Association of Social Workers were selected as data sources for the analysis.

### **Analysis and Results:**

Review of the literature through the process of Rodgers' Evolutionary Method of Concept Analysis provided knowledge of similar terminologies, related concepts, emergence, features, application and use of community social work. Data related to those contents are organized under the corresponding elements mentioned in Rodgers' Evolutionary Method.

#### **1. Surrogate Terms**

According to Rodgers (2000) surrogate terms are words used with similar meanings or have commonalities with a concept (Fraser, 2011). The analysis could identify six surrogate terms for community social work that are alternatively used to denote 'professional social work practice with communities'. They are:

- Social Work Practice with Communities
- Community-Orientated Social Work
- Social Work in the Communities
- Social Work Community Practice
- Community-based Social Work
- Social work approaches in community practice

#### **2. Related Concepts**

Related concepts are concepts that have some relationship with the concept, but do not have the same set of attributes as the concept (Rodgers, 2000 as cited by Fraser, 2011). The analysis identified seven major concepts which are related to community social work viz. community care, community empowerment, community participation, community work, community practice, community development and community organization.

#### **3. References**

References is the term Rodgers (1989, p. 334) uses to refer to the "events, situations, and phenomena" to which the concept has been applied (Fraser, 2011). The following references of community social work indicate its wide applicability.

- Matching resources with needs
- Community resources development
- Development programs and projects
- Community based research
- Community capacity enhancement
- Identifying and working with community assets
- Facilitating social and economic development
- Rebuilding and producing social capital
- Prevention of social problems
- Development of neighbourhood services

- Support for Citizens' Initiatives
- Establishing networks of support
- Community assessments and interventions

#### **4. Antecedents**

Antecedents are the events or phenomena that occur prior to or have been previously associated with the concept (Rodgers, 1989 as in Fraser, 2011). The antecedents identified for community social work gave a clear picture of its emergence. They can be broadly classified into three categories:

##### i) Social changes

- Changes in local conditions
- Erosion of the pluralistic democracy
- People disadvantaged by social networks and structures

##### ii) Critique of social work's effectiveness

- Failure of casework to improve the lives of service users
- Failure of traditional community work
- Critique of traditional methods of organization and intervention

##### iii) Developments in the social work profession

- Emphasis on social work roles in community care and social care planning
- Move towards more community oriented methods in social work
- Belief that people acting together have a great capacity to improve their own circumstances
- Relearning the skill of utilizing local knowledge in a culturally sensitive way
- Encouraging local participation in defining the nature and style of social work services
- Change of practice relationships from relationships of a more traditional professional power to one that is more collaborative and empowering

#### **5. Consequences**

Consequences are the phenomena that result from the use of the concept (Rodgers, 1989 as cited by Fraser, 2011). The following consequences of community social work specify the effects of community social work.

- Need responsive services
- Growth of the community
- Social justice and equality
- Expansion of the quality and impact of participatory efforts
- Communities gain control over their lives

- System Modification
- Visible and accessible social work service

## **6. Attributes**

According to Rodgers (2000), attributes are key characteristics, which constitute a “real” definition of the concept and he asserted that a cluster of attributes compose a concept (Fraser, 2011). The attributes of community social work help to understand the meaning of community social work with an emphasis on its peculiarity.

- Localization
- Collaboration and Partnership
- Team work
- Collective responsibility
- Community participation
- Work with formal and informal local networks
- Empowerment
- Identification, mobilization and utilization of community resources
- Decentralization and integration of social services
- Formal social work practice
- Proactive and Preventative in nature
- Emphasis on mutual aid and self-help
- Simultaneous emphasis on community and the individuals and groups within communities
- Aspects of administrative process
- Dialogue
- Networking

## **Discussion and Implications:**

There is uncertainty in the use of terms to denote professional social work practice with communities. The identification of six surrogate terms that are alternatively used to denote ‘professional social work practice with communities’ also indicates the inconsistency in the use of terms in social work. Even though ‘community social work’ lacks a comprehensive definition or a definition at all, the results obtained through the analysis of the concept evidently express the nature of professional social work practice with communities. But it doesn’t rest on any one of the methods or fields of social work; instead it is a comprehensive dimension of social work practice with communities. The concepts related to community social work provides a clear indication of its significance in embracing all the aspects of intervening in or with communities. It can be understood from the antecedents that the changes in the social conditions, critique of the effectiveness of social work practice and the developments happened in social work profession are the major causes for the rise of community social work. Society is dynamic and communities are complex; so, to work with communities in the society, social work profession

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and discipline needs continuous appraisal of its methods and practice, which in turn will contribute to the theory. Clarity of concepts used in a profession is significant for the development of theoretical and practical knowledge. The awareness of social work professionals regarding the need for analyzing the key concepts used in social work and undertakings of concept analysis can help to achieve agreement and consistency in relation to the use of terminology in the profession.

**Conclusion:**

Concept analysis helps to understand concepts across various disciplines and contexts. The literature based concept analysis of community social work provided a clear picture of the depiction of the concept in literature. The analysis based in Rodger's evolutionary method could clarify the concept in terms of its relevance and applicability with implications for social work profession. However, empirical or observed data if analyzed can contribute more to the development of the concept in terms of contexts and practice. It is hoped that this concept analysis will support practitioners and academics to evaluate and promote the concept of the community social work and its practice.

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