

Church Collaborates with University to launch Social Work Degree Programme

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In order to facilitate the improvement of the quality of services in the development, social and social welfare sectors, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in collaboration with the Commission for Health of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) is set to launch the Bachelor Degree Programme in Social Work (BSW) with effect from July 2004.

The CBCI and IGNOU had earlier signed an MOU in February 2000 and established a Chair on Health and Social Welfare with the objectives of developing and launching programmes of study in the areas of HIV/AIDS, Family Education and Social Work. The Chair has already launched two programmes namely, i. Certificate in HIV and Family Education and ii. Diploma in HIV and Family Education, of six month and one year duration respectively. Over one thousand students enroll for these programmes each year ever since the launch of the programme.

Social Work Profession

Social Work is a profession dedicated to helping individuals, families, and communities in any given society. The main objectives of social work are to help people to develop their skills in the use of their resources and those of their communities in solving various problems confronting them. To put in brief 'it is a profession that aims at helping people to help themselves'.

Areas of Social Work Intervention

Some of the fields of service where social workers are employed include rural/urban/tribal community development initiatives, women's development, child development, mental health, physical health, services for the handicapped, non-formal education, social education, functional literacy, applied nutrition, village level workers), field instruction (ors), ICDS programme, youth development, income support programmes, schools, family services, addiction services, balvikas, employee assistance programmes, labour welfare, recreation programme, etc.

Role of a Medical Social Worker

The role of medical social worker in a medical team is as important as that of a physician. While the medical practitioner's role is limited to treatment of a patient, the social worker deals with the social, physical and psychological aspects of the patient who is under treatment. In fact it is the primary task of the social worker to supervise the arrangements

for the treatment of the patient. To the patient and his/her family, the social worker is a friend, philosopher and guide.

In recent times medical experts, academics, policy makers, social and medical researchers and the NGOs realize all the more that providing medical aid is not a one man business but a team effort which should include physicians, nurses, para-medicals and social workers.

Dealing with Social and Physical Discomfort

It is a fact that a patient with any physical discomfort has its own impact on the mind of the individual who becomes emotionally and psychologically disturbed. These mental disturbances can be more acute depending upon the economic, social and environmental aspects of the patient. In a developing country like India a substantial percentage of people still live below the poverty line. This alone speaks volumes about the economic hardship faced by an average patient. A majority of our people travel miles and miles before they can find a reasonably satisfying nursing home or a hospital.

Assistance to the Physician

An individual living in poverty, with disrupted social relations and poor social environment is doubly vulnerable to many types of diseases. The social worker is the right person who is professionally trained to understand all these aspects of a patient who needs care and treatment. In the process of treatment, the social worker studies the individual in relation to his/her family, social living conditions and the financial viability. This is very important in the treatment process. The social worker conveys relevant information to the medical practitioner who takes into consideration all these aspects while treating the patient.

Coordinating Medical Team

The social worker helps in coordinating the work of the entire medical team. He/she prepares the patient to accept the treatment prescribed by the physician. In certain instances, particularly cases like STDs/HIV/AIDS, the social worker explains to the client the need for undergoing laboratory tests. It is in fact a stupendous task for a social worker in India to handle HIV/AIDS cases because of the taboos attached to some of the routes of transmission such as sex and drugs.

The existing social structure in our country has hardly any other option about the care of people living with HIV than one's own family. However, most of the HIV positive people report that disclosing their HIV status brought about only despise and contempt from every quarter. In such situations, it is often the social worker from the health care team or an NGO who can come to the rescue of people living with HIV.

Persons living with HIV need care and emotional support. A social worker with his/her professional background is able to organize HIV/AIDS support groups. Through the

method of social group work, the social worker enables the HIV clients, share anxieties, find emotional support, and engage in the meaningful, creative, educational and recreational activities.

Need for Social Work Education through Distance Learning in India

There are several grounds for offering programmes of study in Social Work through Distance Learning:

- ✍✍ The Second “Review Committee on Review of Social Work Education: Retrospect and Prospect” of UGC strongly emphasized the need for expanding the scope of training social workers by offering courses on social work at the bachelor’s level.
- ✍✍ It has been the experience of governments - both Central and State - and NGOs to witness acute shortage of trained social workers at middle level for appointment, particularly in rural areas. With the expansion of social development concerns, there is an urgent need for specially trained personnel to organize and manage social development programme.
- ✍✍ There are thousands of persons already working in the development, social and welfare service sectors who do not have an opportunity to pursue their studies in social work. The open system of distance learning will help them to acquire professional education.
- ✍✍ Being a vocation oriented course, there is a good potential for employment in the case of candidates who have done courses in social work at the Bachelor’s degree level.
- ✍✍ Several states and union territories-particularly the North-Eastern States have hardly any institution for training social workers. The social service and rural/urban/tribal development sectors in these states have been adversely affected due to shortage of trained professionals.

There is dearth of trained employees with most of the NGOs. In the Study conducted by IGNOU, most of the respondents (NGOs) reported that they are engaged in a variety of social and welfare activities in rural and tribal areas. The mean number of employees with each NGO is about 54 while only about 7 employees have the qualification wise expertise in social work. Majority of the respondents expressed the view that the proposed programme of study in social work will be useful to their in service staff. A little more than half of the respondents prefer to have the programme of study in English medium while 25 percent expressed their preference for Hindi. In all 17 per cent expressed the view that the programme may be offered in both English and Hindi.

Bachelor Degree in Social Work (BSW)

The BSW of IGNOU will be available to interested candidates from across the country. This programme will be highly useful to people working at low and middle levels in NGO sector. Health Care Workers, Community based workers and people engaged in non formal education and counseling services will find this programme very useful.

Application forms can be collected from the IGNOU Regional Centres located in each state (usually state capitals) or from the internet www.ignou.ac.in The entry qualification is 10 + 2 or BPP from IGNOU. The programme is available both in English & Hindi. The fee include a one time registration of Rs. 100/- and Rs. 2500/- each for first, second and third year respectively. Although the programme is of 3 year duration one can complete the same within a maximum period of 6 years.

The BSW programme package consists of print, audio and video programmes prepared indigenously by the best of experts in various university departments and schools of social work from across the country. Although social work education was first started in India in 1936 by and large this profession continued to depend on books prepared in the west which are several decades old.

While the programme is being launched through Distance Learning Mode, the University has a well defined strategy to impart quality education and training. Towards this end, every student will be placed under the supervision of professionally qualified social worker for the Field Work Practicum. Apart from continuous assessment of the students through time bound assignments, the University will provide regular teleconferencing sessions, interactive radio counseling through AIR, Gyan Vani, FM channels as well as Gyan Darshan and DD-1. The DD-1, Gyan Dharshan and Gyan Vani will also be telecasting/broadcasting the various video and audio programmes prepared for this programme.