

**SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN CLERGY, TRADITIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SOCIAL WORKER**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Social workers provide services that tackle the needs of people, communities, and society as a whole. Given the constraints of limited resources and high demand, social workers may be required to engage in collaborative efforts with other professions in order to adequately address the needs of their clients. The clergy and traditional service providers are a group of professions who have made significant contributions to support social workers. Collaborating with faith-based organisations, such as clergies and traditional service providers, has the potential to greatly enhance internal operations and community service in the field of social work. This research primarily focuses on qualitative analysis and provides a comprehensive description of the process of social work, cooperation between clergies and traditional practices, and the findings of the needs assessment obtained from this collaboration. Therefore, it is advised that social workers proactively establish professional connections with pastors (clergies) and conventional service providers.*

**Keywords: Clergy, social worker, traditional service provider, client**

**INTRODUCTION**

Despite cooperation is clearly prevalent in the literature on social work practice, this paper examines it from a unique perspective. The reason for this is because the approach is a clear and deliberate effort to systematically include collaboration as a way for social work practice. The text starts by providing a clear definition of the word and elucidating its significance in the context of modern social work practice. The text discusses the conditions, antecedents, and stages necessary for effective collaborative practice. An illustrative case study is used to demonstrate the application of the collaborative approach in a particular service domain. The collaboration emphasises the present need for efficient teamwork, professional collaboration, and the improvement of current collaborative ties, including worker-to-client, worker-to-colleague, worker-to-agency, agency-to-agency, and worker/agency-to-community/society. Collaboration differs from previous traditions of professional rivalry and the absence of collaboration inside bureaucracy and between clergy and conventional service providers. These are no longer financially feasible at a time of significant reduction in social assistance, ongoing client demands, and the goal of delivering high-quality programmes. Collaboration also rejects a professional way of understanding knowledge that ignores other collaborating entities, such as conventional service providers, community or society, and faith-based groups (clergy), and the inequities that exist among them. In light of the prevailing neoconservative period, it is imperative to directly confront and prioritise these disparities, both in principle and in actual implementation, in order to effectively tackle the modern issues faced by social workers. Primarily, collaboration emphasises the necessity for professions, agencies or bodies, communities, and client systems to adopt a different approach - by combining resources, establishing connections, and forming alliances in order to reconsider existing practices and create novel solutions to swiftly evolving social issues (Lawson & Anderson, 1996). Previously, several cooperative endeavours were seen as optional. Currently, according to several proponents, it is essential to engage in cooperation in order to tackle societal problems that are too complex or extensive for any one organisation or field of expertise.

The origins of kindness and generosity may be traced back to religious organisations. thus, the inclination to assist others and, thus, the emergence of social welfare seems to have originated as a component of religion. African social welfare has been significantly influenced by religious ideas and practices. Religious organisations, such as the church, have consistently remained a significant setting for the practice of social work globally (Garland, 1992). Holt (1922) argued that the early church emerged as a response to the need for improved effectiveness in providing assistance to the physical needs of individuals. According to Garland (1992), the Church remains a prominent and powerful institution in this country's official social services, and perhaps more so in the unofficial social support and services provided to individuals and their families. This platform fosters an environment for individuals in the helping professions, such as social work and psychology, to engage in discovery and establish connections. These relationships provide a favourable environment for practice and a chance to support faith-based groups, such as churches, in better addressing the needs of its members and the wider community. Social workers and other helpful professions, including clergies in the Church and conventional service providers, have a shared objective of offering aid, direction, and support to those in need. However, there are also factors that might cause friction between them. For instance, several individuals in the field of helping professions do not hold religion in high regard and believe that churches do not have a substantial impact on human services. In contrast, many religious beliefs question the effectiveness of non-religious professions in providing assistance unless they include certain elements of the Christian religion (Plante, 2008). Given the shared interests and impact of social workers and other helping professions, it is important to establish tactics and techniques that promote cooperation in order to improve the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of their work. Various professions provide assistance to the social work practice via their specialised knowledge and skills. Throughout history, religious practices and congregations have consistently offered social benefits, despite the ongoing development of the secular welfare state. This includes both traditional practices and the Christian religion (Langer, 2003). This encompasses several aspects of clinical practice, such as providing counselling services, consulting with small groups, conducting marriage and pre-marriage sessions, and facilitating other relevant educational activities. In addition, they provide consultancy services to individuals with sizable congregations, oversee community ministries, and aid in the implementation of social action initiatives. Wolfer and Sherr (2003) classify congregational outreach services into six categories: immediate necessities (food, shelter, clothing), educational and health requirements (tutoring, after-school programmes), community development initiatives (neighbourhood associations, civic groups), evangelistic outreach, humanitarian endeavours in deprived areas or communities, and lastly, public advocacy. According to Plante (2008), the conventional service providers and pastors within the church contribute valuable resources to the collaboration with social workers. These resources include spiritual tools and traditions (such as meditation), processes of forgiveness, acceptance of others, and a strong commitment to volunteerism, all of which can enhance professional practice. Overall, religious and spiritual knowledge techniques, when used effectively, provide several resources to improve psychological, physical, interpersonal, and communal functioning within the field of social work. In addition, by collaborating with social workers, pastors, and conventional service providers, mental health practitioners create relationships, access possible resources for clients, and connect with an existing network of support. Undoubtedly, social workers have collaborated with the Church (Clergies) and conventional service providers, using various models and demonstrating clear instances of their joint practice and implementation in today's society. The question persists. Do members of the church still maintain their previous unfavourable opinions towards social workers and conventional service providers, or have their ideas evolved?

### **Collaboration and Social Work Theory**

For a significant portion of its existence, social work has emphasised the need of teaching and promoting cooperation between professionals inside and across different fields as a practical skill.

Ida Cannon, a theorist in medical social work, and Charlotte Towle, a theorist in public assistance, from previous generations, serve as exemplary illustrations. Nevertheless, this research adopts Talcott Parsons' (1957) system theory as its theoretical framework, which primarily focuses on social systems. Parson defines a social system as a collection of individuals who interact with each other in a situation that includes a physical environment. These individuals are motivated by their circumstances and their interactions are shaped by a system of culturally structured and shared symbols (Parsons, 1957). The crucial component of the system was the status or role complex. These attributes do not pertain to the person or the act of interacting, but rather they are components inherent in the structure. Which indicates that they have a certain place within the stratification model. The system theory in social work is founded on the concept that conduct is shaped by a multitude of interconnected influences. The elements included in this context are familial relationships, friendships, social milieu, socioeconomic status, and the domestic environment. The idea postulated that these and other variables have an influence on people's cognition and conduct. Consequently, analysing these social structures to identify and rectify inefficient components or include missing aspects within a particular system may have a beneficial effect on behaviour. In this specific theoretical approach to social work, professionals monitor and study the multiple systems that contribute to the subject's conduct and wellbeing. Subsequently, they try to enhance such systems in accordance with the distinctive circumstances of each person. Based on this analysis, we can infer that the position of this theory is significant in the study of social work and general life. System theory encompasses the evaluation of several elements. Therefore, among the several theories in social work, system theory stands out as a distinctive approach to understanding human behaviour by considering the complex interconnections between individuals and their surrounding surroundings. The theory is founded on the notion that an efficient system is built around the specific requirements, incentives, anticipations, and characteristics of the individuals residing inside the system.

### **Strategies to Facilitate Collaboration**

Multiple strategies are essential for facilitating a cooperative partnership. One method to start is by acknowledging the interdependence in the assistance approach. This means realising that pooling resources is not only important to address issues, but also to fulfil mutual needs and interests. While there may be other factors that might drive motivation, such as the expectation of a desired goal, the most crucial aspect is acknowledging that the current situation is inadequate and necessitates a collective endeavour to bring about change. Hence, it is important to establish a common understanding of the stakeholders' credibility and devote enough time, effort, and money (if required) to foster the connection. Consequently, it is necessary to have the authority and capacity to allocate resources and the ability to persuade others to do the same (Hendrickson & Omer, 1995). According to Benard (1989), human traits such as creativity, empathy, adaptability, invention, openness, patience, self-assurance, and readiness to take chances are considered significant. Over time, a collaborative partnership is characterised by its dynamic nature, where ideas of goals, power, conceptual structures, distribution of resources, accountability, and principles may undergo changes. At the beginning or end of a collaborative partnership, it may not be feasible to establish a common set of values and conceptual frameworks. However, seeing these occurrences as a continuous spectrum might help stakeholders understand the shared aspects and the potential for alignment of values and concepts. Challenges to achieving successful collaboration may arise from factors such as the desire to protect one's own territory, competition for roles, and confusion about roles, either at the individual or organisational level. Other obstacles may include strict adherence to inflexible rules by organisations or professionals, a lack of accountability to those who use social services, excessive bureaucratic control over social services, a tendency to react to crises rather than taking proactive measures, and a lack of trust among participants (Bruner, 1992). At the organisational level, there is a need for the inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders and the promotion of equality among them (Benard, 1989). It is important to apply these notions carefully

at the various levels of intervention. Social workers may strive to diminish a client's power disparity by offering more chances for client engagement, client self-governance, and client choice (Dorfman, 1988). The process of transitioning to a collaborative partnership may encounter difficulties. Germain (1984) highlights that cooperation between two or more disciplines may go through many phases. Prior to the procedure, there is often a sequence of emotions including "disappointment, anger, and the continuation of inflexible disciplinary roles". The steps of realistic evaluation, accommodation, and integration can only occur once disciplines see how others may contribute to accomplishing common objectives (Germain, 1984). The most effective forms of collaboration between professionals occur when individuals have a diverse range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to a clear understanding of their own professional identity. This enables them to intelligently evaluate the roles of others and integrate themselves into the work environment using various communication and conceptual abilities.

### **Social Worker, Traditional Service Providers and Clergies' Collaboration**

The focus of our analysis is to examine the interaction between two distinct support systems, namely pastors (representing the church) and conventional service providers, including social workers. We will explore the approaches they have used and offer instances of clinical practice and its practical implementation. In this partnership, we will examine and analyse the necessary needs and capabilities for successful and efficient use. The prevailing paradigm often discussed and potentially used in Christian literature is the concept of church-psychology partnership. The majority of the studies seems to be centred on the idea of collaborating "with" the church rather than serving "in" the church (Bland, 2003). Collaboration is the act of two or more people working together, using their own knowledge, in order to solve an issue or assist one another (McMinn et al., 1998). The underlying principle of this method is the concept of reciprocal esteem, a deeply cherished value within the ethical framework of the profession and the purpose of the social worker. It is anticipated that this partnership will result in a product that is distinct, exceptional, and more valuable than what any of the contributing disciplines could achieve alone (Bland, 2003). Nevertheless, the amalgamation of two well-established fields is sometimes challenging and needs sagacity and perseverance. In order to achieve successful cooperation between conventional service providers, pastors, and social workers, it is necessary to overcome many obstacles that have arisen as a result of long-standing friction between these organisations (Bland, 2003). Obstacles have arisen due to professionals' lack of information of the teachings and concerns of these institutions, limited confidence in the professionals' practices, and the one-sided character of the connection (Aikens, 2000). At times, members of the clergy may see collaborating with social workers as more advantageous for engagement compared to conventional service providers because to their classification of exposure and practice. Plante (1999) has established a set of guidelines for cooperation across these institutions that he believes should be taken into account to promote a successful interaction with the social worker. They are:

1. A good understanding of their practices belief system,
2. A good knowledge of the unique language of that group,
3. The development of a network of key individuals within each belief system,
4. An expansion of the ways that professionals can effectively serve that specific group, and
5. The provision and application of the highest standards of professionalism and ethics.

The social worker's capacity to innovate in their approach to collaborating with other religious organisations, such as clergies, and conventional service providers, while establishing a mutually advantageous arrangement, may greatly facilitate cooperation. Tan (2005), a pastor and psychologist, asserts that psychology, as a significant influence on social work, enables the church to adopt a more holistic understanding of human beings, including their physical, emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions. Holt (1922) asserts in his seminal analysis of social work in religious institutions that religious experience cannot be isolated inside its own domain. The functioning of the church inevitably extends to the requirements and individuals in its vicinity. An

energetic kind of Christianity has consistently extended its profound concepts about God, redemption, and human responsibility into the everyday interactions of human existence. Engaging in social work may come naturally to the church, but it is important to recognise that the culture and goal of each organisation are distinct and seen differently. Although the church has distinct responsibilities and objectives, it has a lengthy record of engagement in social welfare matters. The origins of almost all contemporary social services may be traced back to their foundations in religious organisations. The early Christians were renowned for their benevolence towards one another. In the Middle Ages, monasteries served as sources of employment. Additionally, in 1850, Phoebe Palmer, a holiness missionary, established the Five Points Mission in New York City (Garland, 1992). The Methodist Settlement Movement in the mid-19th century established and operated outreach programmes that catered to the most marginalised residents of inner cities. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Baptist Training School Settlement in Louisville, Kentucky, and the Madonna Centre Settlement House in Chicago, both operated by religious organisations (Southern Baptists and Catholics, respectively), offered assistance and support to the immigrant and impoverished populations in their respective towns (Scales & Kelly, 2012). According to Garland (1992), church social work involves using the knowledge, ideals, and abilities of the social work profession to benefit the church.

### **Barriers to Collaboration**

Previous research suggests that there are several factors that contribute to the lack of extensive cooperation between Clergies, conventional service providers, and social work experts. Several of these obstacles are briefly highlighted as follows:

#### **Value differences:**

In their study, Furman and Fry (2000) discovered that a significant proportion of pastors consistently saw competing ideals between the social work profession and their own role as a key obstacle to making referrals. In a study conducted by Chaddock (2000), 81 psychologists and 56 pastors and traditionalists were polled to assess their values and how they believed these values influenced cooperation. The study used rating scales to measure their opinions, and it found a noticeable difference in the views expressed by the two groups. The pastor considered it reasonably necessary to share principles with social workers, but not with traditionalists. The clergy believed that values and moral obligations are the focal point of any organisation or partnership in institutional activity. Contrary to popular opinion, social workers undergo training to effectively integrate official practices with diverse views and values, with the aim of upholding client self-determination. The client's own development and exploration should occur independently, without the social worker imposing conflicting sets of values.

#### **Mistrust:**

According to Chaddock (2000), the disparity in evaluations between social workers, conventional service providers, and clergy regarding the significance of shared values and cooperation implies a lack of trust among professionals in these organisations. According to McMinn et al.'s (1998) research, trust was identified as a key barrier to cooperation, particularly between a pastor and conventional service providers. In addition, Taylor et al. (2000) discovered that disparities in values, namely the emphasis placed on client self-determination, hindered cooperation. Kays (1982) argued that the lack of trust between pastors and social workers, as well as other helping professions, may have underlying causes beyond differences in principles. A clergy may exhibit scepticism towards other institutions due to divergent interpretations and contrasting views among pastors about the essence of mankind. The secular social worker often views humans as fundamentally good or, at worst, neutral, shaped by their surroundings. They believe that individuals may improve and develop into better versions of themselves by their interactions with other people and the world around them. The clergy, in contrast, see humans as essentially wicked from birth, while the conventional

service provider views humans as innately capable of good or evil regardless of external influences. In addition, the social worker perceives the client's difficulties in connection to their internal psychology and their interactions with others, but the pastor interprets the client's struggles as indicative of the inherent depravity of humanity and the need for intense supplication to God.

### **Spiritual training:**

Paul et al. (2002), Grauf-Grounds and Backton (2007), and Furman and Fry (2000) identified many obstacles related to religion and spirituality that hindered pastors from directing their parishioners to other specialists, such as social workers. According to Paul et al. (2002), pastors are hesitant to send individuals to social workers and their services, particularly in cases related to marriage and divorce, because to their belief that there is insufficient biblical counselling available. Additionally, they saw the social work field as being secular and said that social workers lack the readiness to integrate spiritual elements or show reverence for spirituality. Their justifications included the notion that social workers would inadequately attend to spiritual requirements and that some of them hold the perspective that clergies and even conventional assistance providers are devoid of significance.

### **Obstacles Focused on Clergies:**

According to the available research, it seems that there are external obstacles that are beyond the control of social workers, which hinder pastors from engaging in collaboration with them. According to Percy (2011), pastors may have limited time for cooperation because of the obligations of their parish ministry. According to Stansbury and Schumacher (2008), African American clergy in metropolitan regions have a lower level of familiarity with mental health options in the community compared to their rural counterparts. Therefore, a lack of knowledge about available resources may impede cooperation. Furthermore, a member of the clergy must take into account their constraints and exercise modesty while working together. Percy (2011) suggests that clergy members may have a feeling of possessiveness and authority over their parishioners. Another obstacle to cooperation may arise from pastors' low Biblical literacy, which prevents them from recognising secular difficulties in parishioners and comprehending the importance of discussing such matters. In addition to having a restricted comprehension of secular matters, as noted by Stansbury and Schumacher (2008), clergy members may see secular concerns as being incompatible with their religious beliefs. Kays (1982) argued that clergy members may choose not to engage in secular matters due to a fear of being stigmatised.

### **Cases and Examples Collaboration between Church and Social Work Practice**

Church cooperation is evident in the fields of psychology and social work, and may be seen globally. Galloway (2003) identifies three programmes created by pastors to address the specific needs and concerns of church members. The Church Collaboration and Counselling Service were created with the intention of integrating counselling services inside the church, with pastors use the local congregation as a means to foster spiritual growth. In the United States, specifically, the Shelby Alliance of Faith-based Efforts (SAFE) seeks to utilise churches as a means of avoiding sexual assaults. The Lawndale Christian Health Centre is a branch of the Lawndale Community Church situated in a marginalised area of Chicago. The organisation offers healthcare, psychological support, and other relevant social work assistance to those who have limited resources and alternatives (Serrano, 2003). This relationship extends beyond the borders of the United States. The Londrina Bible Seminary in Brazil collaborates with local churches to provide services such as counselling, clinical supervision, consulting, marital enrichment, and continuous training (Edwards, 2003). The University of Cambridge in England is now working on the Psychology and Christianity Project, which aims to create two programmes, Church Consultancy and Pastoral Care, to provide assistance and enhance the resilience of local congregations. Church Consultancy is used to aid clergy in improving their communication, collaboration, conflict resolution, and goal-setting skills. On the other hand, Pastoral Care aims to increase the personal and pastoral growth of individuals

via a customised course specifically built for the purpose of assisting churches as caring communities (Savage, 2003). Howell (2005) created a five-week programme aimed at instructing the local congregation on the dynamics and patterns of depression. Holland (2010) highlights the efforts of The Riverside Church in New York City, which operates a Social Service Ministry that offers aid to those in need. This includes services such as a food pantry, a programme for educating barbers, distribution of clothes, provision of housing, and HIV testing and support. Choi (2003) emphasises the significance of the Korean American Church as a supplier of social services. According to Choi (2003), it has served as a substitute family for Korean immigrants as they navigate their financial, cultural, and spiritual adjustment to this nation. Tirrito's (2003) Faith-Based Community Action Model offers a framework to support churches and other faith-based organisations in creating community action programmes in collaboration with social work practice.

## CONCLUSION

The core values of the social work profession, including service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence, align with the primary objective of social work, which is to improve the overall well-being of individuals and address the fundamental needs of all individuals, with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). The research already provides evidence of the feasibility of cooperation between pastors and social workers. Although this research did not specifically investigate the cooperation between clergy and social workers in isolation, it did examine the collaboration between social workers, clergy, and conventional service providers. The public's perspective of social work and social workers is crucial, since LeCroy and Stinson (2004) argue that social workers cannot effectively carry out their purpose of providing care to others if the general public lacks knowledge, is unclear, or has negative attitudes towards the profession. The credibility of a profession diminishes when there is a decrease in public support for it. The research revealed that poor impressions of the profession might lead to significant repercussions, including a loss of credibility, social stigma associated with seeking assistance from social workers, a fall in the number of individuals pursuing the profession, and a reduction in the availability of services. The perception of pastors towards social work remains uncertain due to a noticeable dearth of study on this subject. Gaining insight into the prevailing attitudes of clergy towards social work and conventional service providers may provide social work practitioners useful knowledge.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has analysed and scrutinised both historical records and newly gathered data from previous research inquiries. The report incorporates analysis and suggestions derived from the mean priority and frequency of answers. Based on such information, we have formulated the following suggestions:

- Given the limited availability of social service resources and the increasing need for services such as social interaction care, it is imperative for social workers to persistently cooperate and enhance collaborative endeavours with clergy and traditional service providers. This will enable them to effectively cater to the needs of people, communities, and society as a whole. Collaborative endeavours achieved via the establishment of relationships.
- Social workers should actively pursue connections with pastors and other conventional care providers in order to establish professional partnerships.
- Social workers should give education on the many roles they play, community needs, and effective strategies for addressing societal concerns. Their main objective is to enhance the well-being of people and meet the needs of the community and society.
- Social workers should also establish connections, educate religious leaders and other service providers, and take the lead in joint endeavours. When this occurs, the relationship will eventually provide benefits for clients, communities, and society.

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