

SUBJECT: SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH GROUPS

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UNIT-5

Recording in Social Group Work

Writing and maintaining group work records is an essential element of professional social work. A recording well done saves the group worker the trouble of having to emphasize to the agency about the group's progress in various aspects. But how seriously does the social work fraternity take up recording or written communication? Let us read what experts have to say on this:

“We believe that it is important that social work educators, students and professionals focus on developing their written communication skills for a range of reasons. These include:

- Writing is a core mode of communication in many fields of social work practice. The capacity to communicate effectively in writing can enhance practice in many ways, from promoting inter disciplinary team communication to advancing the capacity to attract funds and influence policy

- Writing skills, like all professional skills, can be learnt. Just as social work professionals can develop effective spoken communication skills, so too their professional writing skills can improve through sustained attention and effort

- Written communication can represent complex matters better than speech can. So it is a vital tool for social workers, who are often involved in complex situations with individuals, families and communities and need to be able to convey the intricacies to others who may have limited first-hand experience of the specific situations. In addition, some professional writing tasks, such as completing tender documents, can require the integration of detailed and complex information in a succinct and cohesive format.

- Social workers' approach to writing should reflect the distinctive character of their professional purpose. This is shaped by the institutional context and audience, and must always be driven, at least in part, by professional knowledge and an ethical value base”
(Healy & Mulholland; 2007: 2-3).

Principles of Recording in Social Group Work

Recording in social group work aims to make better the quality of service to the members. The agency could assess the quality of its service, thereby understanding its efficiency. Group records are imperative in study, research and experimentation.

Principle of Flexibility: the record must be adapted to the agency's purpose because group work practice and agency purpose are inseparably interwoven

Principle of Selection: worker does not include everything in his record but selects significant material in the light of individual and group development

The Principle of Readability: form and style are important and that clarity of expression is essential for all written material

The Principle of Confidentiality: the record is a professional document and that as such its contents are guarded by as sense of professional ethics.

The Principle of Worker Acceptance: the worker must accept his responsibility to write records because of his conviction that records have value in rendering high quality professional service. (Trecker; 1955: 208)

Types of Recording in Social Group Work

Process Recording

Process record is one method by which you can record the content of an interview. It involves a written record of all verbal and nonverbal communication (based on the worker's best recollections) and a record of the worker's feelings and reflections throughout the interview. Audio or video recordings can also be used for the caseworker to (a) identify the client's feelings during the interview, (b) assess the client's feelings, or (c) present summary comments.

The process is continuous development involving many changes. It is a series of actions, changes or functions that bring about an end result. Process recording tries to record this development and activities. These developments are directly or meaningfully related to understanding the person in a situation and the intervention process. It is selective in its recording. Interactions with directed bearing or meaning for intervention are recorded, and the rest of the details of interactions are discarded. The focus is not on the development of the events but on the development related to understanding and intervening in the person's psychosocial life. In process recording, the process of helping is recorded, which includes the relevant conversations, observations and reactions of the worker in the developmental sequence. It gives an idea to the supervisor if the caseworker has used his knowledge of human behaviour and social situations, if his reactions to the client's verbal and non-verbal communication are appropriate and if planning for the future is consistent with the presenting condition. The usefulness of the process recording depends to a considerable extent on the ability of the worker to recall exactly what had happened and in what order and to look at the facts objectively to get at underlying feelings and meanings. Process recording is time-consuming, so it should be used carefully.

Process recording is a form of recording used frequently by the caseworker. It is one method by which the caseworker can record the content of an interview. It involves a written record of all verbal and nonverbal communication based on the worker's best recollections and a record of the worker's feelings and reflections throughout the interview. In this type, the interview process is reported and is a rather detailed description of what transpired with considerable paraphrasing. It preserves a sequence in which the various matters were discussed. It includes what both the worker and the client said and significant reactions of the client, and changes in mood and response. In this method, the interview and observation go hand-in-hand. It may be verbatim or non-verbatim reproduction.

Problem-oriented Recording

Problem-oriented record (POR) is a method of client case record-keeping that focuses on specific problems. The components of the POR are: (a) database, which contains information required for each client regardless of diagnosis or presenting problems, i.e., all history, physical findings etc.; (b) problem list, which contains the significant problems currently

needing attention; (c) plan, which specifies what is to be done about each problem; (d) progress notes, which document the observations, assessments, future plans.

It is a specialized form of documentation used to delineate problems identified and treatment goals in interdisciplinary settings. This system requires the recorder to identify the problem areas, assess them and then state what he plans to do about each problem. The ideal use of the problem-oriented recording is for all disciplines to record in the same interdisciplinary record on the same form. One of the primary purposes of recording in interdisciplinary settings is for documentation, but it is also intended to provide a means of exchanging information.

A problem-oriented recording is a method that focuses on specific problems. The components of this method are (a) database, which contains information required for each client regardless of assessment or presenting problems, (b) problem list, which contains the significant problems currently needing attention, (c) plan, which specifies what is to be done concerning each problem, (d) progress notes, which document the observations, assessments, and future plans.

Summative Recording

Summative assessment summarises all the formative assessments carried out over a long period and makes statements about the client's progress. Practical assessment involves evaluation or decisions about the client's progress and gives us the information we need to plan for the next steps. This is called assessment for learning: it is the formative assessment, based on observations and other forms of evidence, which informs or guides everyday planning.

It is an entirely different writing style and is preferred for intake, transfer closing and other particular aspects of official agency records. The summary recording is selected for ongoing social work practice because it is much more briefer than process recording. Hence, it is much less time-consuming to write and record. However, summary recording requires more thought and planning on the worker's part because he must decide what to record and what to omit. Regular progress notes, periodic summaries (i.e. intake or transfer report) and special reports are usually written in summary style.

Summary records are short and easy to use when considering the whole service process. It tries to summarize the main events and avoid the details of all events. It includes entry data, social history, a plan of action, periodic summaries of important information, action taken by the worker and a statement of what was accomplished as the case gets closed. Summery recordings save time and labour when process recording comparatively is very time-consuming.

The summary recording is a suitable device for organizing and analyzing facts. It points to the meaning and the relative importance of the materials gathered. A detailed summary at appropriate intervals reduces bulk writing, clarifies direction and saves the worker's time. The summative recording summarises all the formative assessments carried out over a long period and makes statements about the client's progress. It is commonly assumed to be a review or recapitulation of material that has already appeared in the record. It typically arranged or may occur as a condensed chronological narrative.

Mrs Sheffield has defined summary in social casework recording as "A digest of significant facts in the client's history which has previously been recorded". A summary can be an assessment, a periodic summary or a closing summary. The closing summary is a summary made at the time the process of casework is terminated. To be most effective, it should be written by the worker who was responsible for the intervention at the time of termination. The periodic summary is simply the summary of information previously recorded and is made at more or less regular intervals or at the end of more or less definite episodes in the family history.

Goal-Oriented Recording

Under this type of recording, basic social history and background information is gathered and recorded. However, there is considerable emphasis on including the client in the assessment process, setting goals, and developing specific plans to reach the identified purposes. This approach leads to uniformity in social workers' recording and statistical reporting practices and forces staff to include the client as an active participant in the planning phases.

Verbatim Recording

It is the reproduction of factual data in the individual's own words. It is commonly used in casework because of its accuracy and objectivity. However, it should not become a mechanical reproduction of information because casework as art requires an intelligent selection and rearrangement of material. As a part of the worker's training, verbatim recording may be of value in developing objectivity.

Non-Verbatim/Narrative Recording

In the narrative recording, everything that has happened is recorded as it has occurred, whether positive or negative. It consists of all the statements, observations and comments of the worker. It is the narration of all the happenings and detailed accounts of the events in the narrative recording. The attempt of narrative recording is to reproduce all the situations.

The narrative recording has been and still is a predominant style of recording. It is the style found in newspapers and magazines. It is the way we speak of the day's events, it is the way we write letters, and it is the way we keep diaries. A narrative form of recording is preferred for reporting acts of practical helpfulness, events and most collateral visits or conferences. It may be used for the interview contents in all instances except when the process itself and the use of the Relationship have special significance.

Bales' Interaction Categories

Social Emotional Area: Positive Reactions

- 1 Shows solidarity, raises other's status, gives help, reward
- 2 Shows tension releases, jokes, laughs, show satisfaction
- 3 Agrees, shows passive acceptance, understands, concurs, complies

Task Area: Attempted Answers

- 4 Give suggestion, direction implying autonomy for others
- 5 Give opinion, evaluation, analysis, expresses feeling, wish
- 6 Gives orientation, information, repeats, clarifies, confirms

Task Area: Questions

- 7 Ask for orientation, information, repetition, confirmation
- 8 Ask for opinion, evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling
- 9 Asks for suggestion, direction, possible ways of action

Social Emotional Area: Negative Reactions

- 10 Disagrees, shows passive rejection, formality, withholds help
- 11 Shows tension, asks for help, withdraws out of field
- 12 Shows antagonism, deflates other's status, defends or asserts self.

Evaluating Social Work Programs

Evaluation is an important aspect of any social work service, treatment, or intervention. Evaluation is the process of determining the effects of a certain action and whether or not that action is worth its costs. Social workers should evaluate their programs frequently, not only at the beginning or ending phases of these programs.

Methods of Evaluation

Evaluations should be done in systematic ways. Social workers should use methods appropriate for the aspects of programs they are trying to evaluate. Recent studies show that social workers have historically not been able to conduct very effective evaluations of their programs. Some techniques for evaluation require training in order to understand the importance and mechanics of evaluation tools.

Needs Assessment

The first iteration of program evaluation in social work is called "needs assessment." Needs assessment can be done on multiple levels. The most common level of **needs assessment** is performed on the community level. This type of evaluation analyzes the availability of resources to help community members with certain problems. For example, social workers will not develop completely unique and independent community-wide programs for substance abuse disorders if community leaders or other institutions have formed their own programs to help with these illnesses. Needs assessments can also be performed on client groups, individual clients, and organizations. If one or two problems are relevant for enough people in a group, a wide program can be used to treat common symptoms or issues faced by all members.

Needs assessments are done systematically. They rely on data collected from various types of sources, including:

- surveys
- census records
- financial records
- community infrastructure records

- community meetings

Similarly, needs assessments for individuals or families can rely on different records that have comparable data. For example, social workers can use medical records, appropriate financial records, information volunteered by their clients, and their own observations. In any case, analysis of the information and data presented by records can provide a baseline for social workers to build upon. This data can also be compared with the data of future assessments to depict progress.

Formative and Summative Assessment

Once needs assessments have been conducted, programs are instituted to address the needs of clients and potential clients. Throughout the life of the program, evaluations are conducted to analyze the client's improvement and the success of the program in achieving its goals. The two main styles of assessment of clients are formative and summative.

Formative assessments analyze the progress of the client so far and frame their achievements in a timeline that stretches into both the past and the future. **Summative assessments**, on the other hand, are given when social workers want to focus on the present by themselves. They are mostly given at the end of the program or the end of a phase of a program. Formative assessments focus on the current understanding of the client and bringing it to where it should be. Summative assessments focus on the end knowledge of the client.

Yet another way to discuss the difference between these two types of assessments is that formative assessments focus on how the understanding and progress of a client compare to those expected by the program. Summative assessments focus on the end results of the client's participation.

Cost-Effectiveness

A **cost-effectiveness assessment** is an essential part of every social work program, but they are especially helpful when programs are sponsored by external sources. Cost-effectiveness assessments demonstrate to stakeholders that social workers are using their funds responsibly. These assessments are related to the formative and summative assessments discussed above. Data from these assessments can be anonymized, aggregated, and interpreted to show the effects of funding. Cost-effectiveness assessments should be performed fairly regularly to ensure that cost-effectiveness is as high as possible.

Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes assessments are related to summative assessments. They could be considered aggregate reports of individual summative assessments of clients. They are also comparable to formative assessments because they compare these outcomes to the goals set by the program. Often, these assessments are not standardized. However, if they are standardized they can more effectively illustrate the efficacy of the program.

Types of Evaluation

Main types of evaluation are process, impact, outcome and summative evaluation.

Before you are able to measure the effectiveness of your project, you need to determine if the project is being run as intended and if it is reaching the intended audience. It is futile to try and determine how effective your program is if you are not certain of the objective, structure,

programing and audience of the project. This is why process evaluation should be done prior to any other type of evaluation.

Process evaluation

Process evaluation is used to “measure the activities of the program, program quality and who it is reaching”³ Process evaluations, as outlined by Hawe and colleagues will help answer questions about your program such as:

Has the project reached the target group?

Are all project activities reaching all parts of the target group?

Are participants and other key stakeholders satisfied with all aspects of the project?

Are all activities being implemented as intended? If not why?

What if any changes have been made to intended activities?

Are all materials, information and presentations suitable for the target audience?

Impact evaluation

Impact evaluation is used to measure the immediate effect of the program and is aligned with the programs objectives. Impact evaluation measures how well the programs objectives (and sub-objectives) have been achieved.

Impact evaluation will help answer questions such as:

How well has the project achieved its objectives (and sub-objectives)?

How well have the desired short term changes been achieved?

For example, one of the objectives of the My-Peer project is to provide a safe space and learning environment for young people, without fear of judgment, misunderstanding, harassment or abuse. Impact evaluation will assess the attitudes of young people towards the learning environment and how they perceived it. It may also assess changes in participants’ self esteem, confidence and social connectedness.

Impact evaluation measures the program effectiveness immediate after the completion of the program and up to six months after the completion of the program.

Outcome evaluation

Outcome evaluation is concerned with the long term effects of the program and is generally used to measure the program goal. Consequently, outcome evaluation measures how well the program goal has been achieved.

Outcome evaluation will help answer questions such as:

Has the overall program goal been achieved?

What, if any factors outside the program have contributed or hindered the desired change?

What, if any unintended change has occurred as a result of the program?

In peer-based youth programs outcome evaluation may measure changes to: mental and physical wellbeing, education and employment and help-seeking behaviours.

Outcome evaluation measures changes at least six months after the implementation of the program (longer term). Although outcome evaluation measures the main goal of the program, it can also be used to assess program objectives over time. It should be noted that it is not always possible or appropriate to conduct outcome evaluation in peer-based programs.

Summative evaluation

At the completion of the program it may also be valuable to conduct summative evaluation. This considers the entire program cycle and assists in decisions such as:

Do you continue the program?

If so, do you continue it in its entirety?

Is it possible to implement the program in other settings?

How sustainable is the program?

What elements could have helped or hindered the program?

What recommendations have evolved out of the program?
