



# An Analysis on Public's Perception of Social Work

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**ABSTRACT:** This article primarily focuses on the public's perception of social work amongst the ordinary people of Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. In this article, the ordinary peoples view on the educational qualification needed to be a social worker, gender preference of social worker, tasks and areas of practice of social work and Perceptions on registration and educational requirements are addressed. This study has looked at how the public perceives social workers and the profession of social work. This study reports results of a survey in which 30 members of the public in Coimbatore were asked about their beliefs and impressions about social work and social workers. Study findings demonstrate that members of the public surveyed appeared relatively less informed about what social workers do, and were not clear about social work profession in their views. The goal of this research is to tell social workers about how to best address misconceptions about the profession.

**Keywords:** Social Work, Social Worker, Profession, Public, Perception



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## 1. Introduction

Social work which began in the 20th century with roots in voluntary philanthropy and grass root organizing. Roles played by the social workers sometimes may lead to confusion among the common man about the exact role of social professionals.

Social workers respond to social needs existed long before then, as evidenced primarily by a long history of private charities and religious organizations. Social work focuses on working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities to assist them in functioning better in their social environments.

The following is the definition approved by the IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW General Assembly in July 2014: Global Definition of the Social Work Profession

*"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing."*

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Sushil Chandra (1954) defined social work as

*"a dynamic activity undertaken by public or private effort in the implementation of social policy, with a view to raise the standard of living and to bring about social, economic, political and cultural wellbeing of the individual, family and group with a society irrespective of its stage of social development."*

This definition portrays social work as a dynamic activity dealing with all the aspects of social life.

Indian Conference of Social Work (1957) unanimously defined social work as *"a welfare activity based on humanitarian philosophy, scientific knowledge and technical skills for helping individuals, groups or community, to live rich and full life."* The above definition suggests that social work is a welfare activity which has a scientific basis in dealing with the problems of individuals in the society.

## **2. Methodology**

This article is based on the study conducted by the author in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. This research aims at exploring and understanding the perception of the public on social work practice and profession. A self-prepared questionnaire was used for the survey.

The research participants were aged between 21 and 55, and this article is based on the response of self-selected 30 participants. There were 12 questions in the questionnaire, with a mixture of statements using a Likert response, closed and open questions. The data were analyzed using statistical tests.

Demographic questions were asked in regards to gender, age, qualification, and if the respondent or anyone in their family had used social worker- services previously. Within the sample, 60% of respondents reported being male, 40% female, and none as transgender.

Regarding age, there was a good distribution respondent of age from 21 and over to below 55. Of the respondents in the study, 43.3% are graduates, 36.6% are post graduates, and 20.1% are professionals related to medical field.

## **3. Results and discussions**

The results and discussion in this section are grouped thematically. These include perceptions of social work; aspects related to registration/license and education, and personal experiences/views on social work profession.

### **3.1 Perceptions on the social work profession**

There were two questions posted to respondents to know the perception of social work profession. The first question asked participants to state the first sentence/word that came to mind when they

heard the word 'social worker.' Most responses were linked to social work role or tasks while some were more descriptive of the person or profession. The most common response was 'counseling' with 63.3% of respondents providing an answer along these lines. The next most common response that is 20% was related to the implementation of social welfare policies. Children/youth help was mentioned by 10% of the respondents and 7% mentioned about help at old age.

The second question asked was "is social work a particular gender dominated the profession", and the majority of participants, i.e., 90% responded as not, while 10% believes it is a female-dominated profession.

### 3.2 Perceptions on registrations and qualifications

Survey respondents were asked to respond to the statement 'I believe that social workers are professionals and should be registered as doctors, and nurses. Of respondents, 84% stated 'yes', while 16. % stated 'no'.

The second statement was "I understand the difference between a social worker and a psychologist." Of respondents, 94% stated 'no', while 6. % stated 'yes'. Only respondents in the medical profession could state the difference between the difference in profession of social worker and psychologist.

The third question was, "At a minimum, what level of education is needed to be a social worker?" What the 90% of the respondents think is postgraduate level, and 10% thinks it as graduate level.

### 3.3 Personal experiences/views on social work profession

These questions were included in the study to understand the reach of social work profession. The first question was "have you or your family members ever taken the services of a social worker?" the results were shocking that 100% of the respondents claimed that they hadn't taken the services of a social worker. This indicates that the profession has not gained that reach.

The second statement "will you suggest social work course/profession for your dear and near ones? 100% of the respondents were clear to the point they will not suggest social work as a profession for their dear and near ones. The respondents said that the fewer job opportunities and low pay are the reasons why they don't suggest social work profession

These findings are important because they suggest that in order for social workers to improve their public image, the best things they could do would be to disseminate correct information about the profession Knowing what is significantly associated with a more positive perception can help social workers be able to target public image campaign strategies that are more likely to show results (Mena Report, 2017).

## 4. Conclusion

This study is seeking to discover what knowledge the general public has about social work,

And what the general public's perception of social work is, The results show that the general public has an average amount of knowledge about social work. When it comes to opinion, the majority of participants have either neutral or negative view of the profession as they think the opportunities are less and pay scale is less. The profession has not reached the un-reached, the more extensive public. Like any other professional social work has to be socially relevant and useful, clearly showing its genuine concern for and demonstrating its competence to serve the society, and it has to reach the people. The society should be aware of social work profession.

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