The 'Community' in 'Community Social Work'

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Abstract : *Community means different things to different people. There are numerous definitions and various theories used to analyze the concept of community. Community, in many ways represents a valid and meaningful social concept that has found a prominent place in social work practice. Community social work signifies 'the practice of professional social work with communities as target population or setting for interventions'. Communities are the context for community social work and community social work recognizes the diversity of communities. So, understanding different perspectives and dimensions of community is significant for effective community social work practice. This article reviews the concept, definitions and theories of community; and observes how it is understood generally in social work and specifically in community social work.*
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I. INTRODUCTION

The word community has been derived from two words of Latin namely 'com' and 'munis'. In English 'com' means together and 'munis' means to serve. Thus, community means to serve together. It means, the community is an organisation of human beings framed for the purpose of serving together. (Mondal, n.d.)[1]. The view of small community as a basic unit in society was most explicitly developed by Robert Redfield. For him, the little community had four defining qualities: distinctiveness, small size, self-sufficiency and homogeneity of inhabitants. (Worsely, 1970 as cited by Siddiqui,1997)[2]. Community means different things to different people. Some emphasizes the communality of the term and others explore the relational aspect of it. It can mean a geographic space, a geopolitical or civic entity, and a place of emotional identity. (Clark, 2007)[3.] 'Community' usually connotes people socially and cognitively encapsulated by homogeneous, broadly embracing groups (Hillery 1955; Wellman 2001a; Wellman and Leighton 1979; Wellman 2002) (Wellman, Boase and Chen, 2002)[4].

Nabeel Hamdi points out that the term community has both "social and spatial dimensions" (https://www.mcgill.ca/mchg/files/mchg/chapter2.pdf)[5]. A community could involve interaction among people with common interests who live in a particular area. Or it could involve a collection of people with common social, economic, political, or other interests regardless of residency. (Phillips and Pittman, 2008)[6]. Place and non-place communities represent two forms of "we-ness" and identity. Communities are undergoing great changes in transforming from locality-focused and horizontally organized communities emphasizing primary and holistic relationships and responsibilities to vertical integrated communities and extensions of a global economy. As we lose the cohesive traditional community, new models of communities are being formed, including the virtual community. (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7]. Hence, social work practice with communities require a sound understanding of community and different approaches to it. This review article examines the concept of 'community' in 'community social work' which is perceived as a comprehensive dimension of professional social work practice where communities are the setting for interventions in various fields. It reviews the concept, definitions and theories of community; and observes how it is understood generally in social work and specifically in community social work.

II. THE CONCEPT AND DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNITY

The concept of community, like many social science concepts, is a slippery, intricate, ideological, and multifaceted summary concept covering a range of social phenomena. The idea of community encapsulates issues of identity and belonging, similarity and difference, inclusion and exclusion, place and time, processes such as modernisation, and has been considered both a spatial and social phenomenon (Bell and Newby, 1971; Cater and Jones, 1989; Crow and Allen, 1994; Delanty, 2003; Johnston, 2000; Silk, 1999). (Clark, 2007)[3]. The concept of community captures the humanness, the passion, and the interconnectedness among people. It is a

much elusive concept due to its multidimensionality. (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7]. There are numerous definitions used to analyse the concept of community. Hillery (1955) and Bell and Newby (1971) found out 98 definitions of the term and Cohen (1985) has catalogued more than 90 different definitions of community used in the social sciences literature. The only thing that sociologists agreed on was that community had 'something to do with people'. (Krausova, 2006)[8]. The common elements in sociological definitions of community are geographic area, social interaction, common ties, and shared sentiments (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7].

Definitions of community mainly fall into two categories. In one, the main concern is place or neighbourhood. The rest, focus on the notion of relationship, of solidarity or communion, of interaction, which may go beyond a particular location. Willmott (1989) argues that it is legitimate to add a third understanding of community – that of attachment – as communities of place or interest may not have a sense of shared identity. Cohen's (1982; 1985) work around belonging and attachment is a great help in this respect. He argues that communities are best approached as 'communities of meaning'. In other words, 'community' plays a crucial symbolic role in generating people's sense of belonging (Crow and Allan 1994: 6). (Smith, 2001)[9]. Cohen (1985) emphasizes the emotional charging, personal identification, and symbolic construction of community by people. He conceives of community as "a system of values, norms, and moral codes which provoke a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its for people. . . . [Without meaning] many of the organizations designed to create 'community' as palliative to anomie and alienation are doomed to failure" (p. 9). The community, Cohen continues, is "the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of the home. . . . Community, therefore, is where one learns and continues to practice how to 'be social'"(p. 15). (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7].

Hence, there are the following different ways of approaching the community question:
*   Communities based upon close geographical proximity (e.g. Mackenzie and Dalby, 2003; Staheli and Thompson, 1997),
*   Communities as localised social system binding social groups and institutions (e.g. Allen and Hamnett, 1995; Gandy, 2002; Miller, 1993), or
*   Communities as forms of communion based on a common identity or set of believes and practices (e.g. Lave, 2003; Radcliffe, 1999).

All however, appear united around attempts to understand 'belonging'. (Clark, 2007)[3].

Bellah and his colleagues define a community as a "group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton, 1985). The British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (2003), following Mattessich and Monsey (1997) define community more dryly as "people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live." Fellin's (2001) formal definition of communities is as social units with one or more of the following three dimensions: (i) a functional spatial unit meeting sustenance needs, (ii) a unit of patterned interaction and (iii) a symbolic unit of collective identification. (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7].

A review of the literature conducted by Mattessich and Monsey (2004) found many definitions of community such as: "People who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live" (Mattessich and Monsey 2004: 56). "A grouping of people who live close to one another and are united by common interests and mutual aid" (National Research Council 1975 cited in Mattessich and Monsey 2004: 56). "A combination of social units and systems which perform the major social functions . . . (and) the organization of social activities" (Warren 1963 cited in Mattessich and Monsey 2004: 57). These definitions refer first to people and the ties that bind them and second to geographic locations. (Phillips and Pittman, 2008)[6]. Nick Wates defines the word community as a group of people sharing common interests and living within a geographically defined area. Charles Abrams defines community as, "that mythical state of social wholeness in which each member has his place and in which life is regulated by cooperation rather than by competition and conflict". (https://www.mcgill.ca/mchg/files/mchg/chapter2.pdf)[5]. Newby (1980) defined community in three ways: (i) as a social system (a set of social relationships), (ii) as a fixed locality (a geographical area) and (iii) as the quality of relationship (a spirit of community). These aspects of community are interrelated, although Newby claims that they are distinct, and evidence of one does not guarantee the presence of the others. (Krausova, 2006)[8].

A community is a particular type of social system distinguished by the following characteristics (Cook, 1994)[10]:
*   People involved in the system have a sense and recognition of the relationships and areas of common concerns with other members.
*   The system has longevity, continuity and is expected to persist.

- Its operations depend considerably on voluntary cooperation, with a minimal use (or threat) of sanctions or coercion.
- It is multi-functional. The system is expected to produce many things and to be attuned to many dimensions of interactions.
- The system is complex, dynamic and sufficiently large that instrumental relationships predominate.
- Usually, there is a geographic element associated with its definition and basic boundaries.

III. THEORIES OF COMMUNITY

The concept of a community works on the age-old principles of 'unity is strength' and 'united we stand'. A group of people always has advantage over a single individual in getting his or her voice heard, especially in the case of have-nots of the society. (https://www.mcgill.ca/mchg/files/mchg/chapter2.pdf)[5]. Theories of community generally differentiate between the organic communities associated with the past and the more functional identity-based communities associated with industrial and post-industrial societies (Gilchrist and Taylor, 2012)[11]. According to Wilmot (1989), community exists in three broad categories. One is defined in terms of locality or territory; another as a community of interest or interest group; and thirdly, a community composed of people sharing a common condition or problem. (Popple and Quinney, 2002)[12]. Communities can exist without a territorial base (geography), and territories can exist without any communal ties or cohesion (social connection). Delanty (2003), in his overview of social science research on community, identifies four broad ways that the term has been applied (Clark, 2007)[3]:

1. The social and spatial formation of social organizations into small groups such as neighbourhoods, small towns or other spatially bounded localities
2. To the ideas of belonging and difference around issues such as identity
3. As a form of political mobilization inspired by radical democracy that prompts 'communities of action' to oppose social injustice
4. Technologically enabled networks constructing new types of social relationships, and consequently, new types of communities - 'virtual communities'

Tonnies' (1955) concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, Durkheim's (1964) concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity, Cooley's (1964) concept of primary group, theories of Durkheim, Marx and Weber are relevant to understand social relations within a community. As Tonnies pointed out, Gemeinschaft is intimate, private and exclusive living together, which Durkheim described as a type of social solidarity which he referred to as mechanical. Cooley described primary groups as those characterised by intimate face to face association and cooperation. According to Tonnies, processes of industrialization and urbanization have resulted in a shift in the makeup of social relations from gemeinschaft to gesellchaft, which meant a more impersonal, mechanical living together or interaction. This also implies that mechanical solidarity gave way to organic solidarity, which is based on a more specialized division of labour in society, rather than the fact of sharing common values and norms. Tonnies explanation was largely psychological, as he thought that the contrast he described arose from differences in individual attitudes and personalities, whereas Durkheim saw the division of labour and specialisation as the primary reason. (Siddiqui, 1997)[2].

The understanding of 'community' through its social groups of neighbours, friends and kin (e.g. Fischer, 1982) merged with network research (e.g. Barnes, 1954; Bott, 1957; Granovetter, 1973), offers an alternative approach to understanding community (Bulmer, 1985; Wellman et al., 1988). In general, the term social network has come to be used in two ways; one simply refers to the number of people that a person knows, regardless of the links between these people. The other, more formal usage refers not only to the numbers of people a person is in touch with, but also the extent to which these different people also know each other (Wilmott, 1986). The resulting image; of a net surrounding an individual (or Ego), is termed the individual's network. Social network perspective has been lauded for shifting analysis and explanation of 'community' away from a (geographically bounded) social group to a collection of 'networked individuals': "We find community in networks, not groups… In networked societies: boundaries are permeable, interactions are with diverse others, connections switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies can be flatter and recursive… Communities are far flung, loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit and fragmentary. Most people operate in multiple, thinly connected, partial communities as they deal with networks of kin, neighbours and friends, workmates and organizational ties. Rather than fitting into the same group as those around them, each person has his/her own personal community" (Wellman, 2001; p227, cited in Larson et al., 2005).

However, it is important to recognize that 'social networks' and 'spatial communities' may be two different ways of pinning down the same term ('community'). It thus might not be a question of 'which approach is better', but rather, 'which approach is better for what kind of community'. Contrary to some ideas (e.g. Cairncross, 2001; Wellman, 2001), space still matters for everyday connectivity for four reasons. One, face-to-face contacts, and corporeal travel, continue to preserve the benefits of meetings in real time and spaces, even if such proximity is achieved less often than in the past. And of course, some people, in some places, still

communicate with others in their immediate social locale. In particular, home-based women involved for example in childcare, or social groups such as the elderly, young people, or the poor, may all have locally situated networks. Two, not everyone is connected to the internet, can afford the luxury of transnational travel, or even have adequate access to localized physical transport. Such individuals will continue to rely on face-to-face networks grounded in 'real space'. Three, individuals remain embodied in physical space, even when connected to the virtual realm of the internet. Even if this space is fluid (afforded by mobile technologies such as laptop computers or mobile phones), it is nonetheless a physical presence. And four, 'networks' remain placed. While Larsen et al., comment that "the reason why commentators like Putnam have found a death of communities is that they have looked for them in the wrong places" (2005; p23 my emphasis), they still hint that such communities exist somewhere. Even virtual networks remain located in a type of space, for as the emotional commitment of members of some online communities demonstrates, for many, 'cyberspace' has become a 'cyberplace' (Rheingold, 1993). (Clark, 2007)[3].

Atkinson and Cope (1997) speak of the 'fluid and overlapping membership of communities', but the complexity and close interweaving of communities is perhaps best captured by Etzioni (1993), who suggests that 'communities are best viewed as if they were Chinese nesting boxes, in which less encompassing communities are nestled within more encompassing ones'. Burns et al (1994) recognised that 'community is not a singular concept but in reality, represents a mere umbrella under which shelter a multitude of varying, competing and often conflicting interests'. Attempting to understand this complexity often results in labels being attached to different sections of the population. (www.sharedservicearchitects.co.uk)[13].

There are many theories that treat communities as natural organisms that are properly subject to natural law (Plato, 1945). Community development theory chooses to treat communities as conventional systems. (Cook, 1994)[10]. The very concept, social system, as applied to the community, refers to groups of people who reside and interact within a given area on the one hand, and a network of activities and services of a political, economic, educational, social, health or welfare nature on the other. (Gbismar, n.d)[14]. The community as a social system essentially views a community as a system of interrelated subsystems that perform important functions for their members. The community as a social system operates systemically, with its entities interacting and affecting one another. Following Warren's (1978) system analysis of community, it may be viewed community as "that combination of social units and systems that perform the major social functions having locality relevance" (p. 9). Warren conceived of community functionally as the organization of social activities to afford people daily local access to those broad areas of activities and resources necessary in day-to-day living. A community, in this definition, has a locality but needs no well-defined geographic boundaries. Warren proposes five critical locality-relevant social functions: (a) production-distribution consumption, (b) socialization, (c) social control, (d) social participation, and (e) mutual support. These social functions are required for survival and perpetuation of a community and its members. A community fulfils the functions through a pattern of formal and informal organizations and groups. (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7].

IV. SOCIAL WORK AND COMMUNITY

Community, in many ways represents a valid and meaningful social concept that has found a prominent place in social work practice (Beckley et al., 2008; Nicotera, 2007). Lyon (1999), Netting, Kettner and Mc Murty (2004), Popple and Stepney (2008) and other scholars have argued effectively for the importance of community as the content for all forms of social work practice. (as cited in Delgado and Humm- Delgado, 2013)[15]. The social work ecological model's emphasis on person-in-environment places communities as objects of social work intervention as much as individuals, families, and groups (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7]. In the description and analysis of society, in social work literature, the term community is used to denote a particular spatial or geographical unit. In social work terminology, it is used to represent a target population, within a certain geographical locale. (Siddiqui, 1997)[2]. In the social work perspective, communities are entities in which citizens can organize or be organized to address mutual concerns and improve their overall quality of life (Kirst-Ashman, 2007)[16].

Musil (1998) on the basis of work Popple (1995), Willmont (1986) and Hedley (1997) summarize meanings utilization of the term community by social workers. They mark so - those, who share disadvantage – a category of disadvantaged people (clients). This term implies, that it is a groupment of individuals, between them needn't exist relationships, in sense of a sociological concept it is not a community. In his opinion, in social work, the term community expresses (Krausova, 2006)[8]:

- a category of disadvantaged people – unorganized groupment of people who need a help
- a community of interests – organised interest association, that express its interests and work on them
- a service community – organised connection inhabitants of community, that are able afford a help with a network of professional organizations
- a municipality – that means a social space, in which are built relations between providers of services and disadvantaged, who are able establish their interests and support their realizations by an activity/action

Communities are always the context, if not always the content, of social work practice. For social workers to be effective, need to understand how community affects the lives of the people. The importance of community calls for a community based social work practice. The postmodernist social work theorists such as Pardeck, Murphy, and Choi (1994) assert that: "Social work practice, simply stated, should be community based…... [Community] is not defined in racial, ethnic, demographic, or geographic terms, as is often done. Instead a community is a domain where certain assumptions about reality are acknowledged to have validity". Social work practice is about using the community and using naturally occurring and socially constructed networks within the social environment to provide social support. There are four perspectives of community for a community based social work practice: Community as People: A Socio-demographic View (the utility of socio-demographic information is for social planning purposes and to understand the community), Community as a Social System, Communities as Local, Global, or Virtual Networks and Community as an Arena of Conflict (suggests that conflict and change are characteristic of communities and it brings power and politics to the fore). (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011)[7].

With the premise that "communities" should be broadly defined as groups of people who form a distinct social unit based on location, interests, or identification, emerging communities for social work education and practice are: Online Community (in the context of social media's appeal to young people), Green Communities (global warming and the aim of preserving a healthy environment), Gray Communities (growing population of older adults), Devastated Communities (natural disasters and communities in need of disaster relief), International Communities (focusing on solutions to global poverty, disease, and infant mortality), Innovative Communities (social innovation often takes place internationally and has taken several forms like social entrepreneurship), Cinematic Communities (film and other visual arts happen to be some of the most effective public education and advocacy tools available today), and Business Communities (in some cases, social justice requires business strategy- more consensual models of community organizing that involve business leaders in a collaborative fashion) (Marx, 2014)[17].

V. COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK

Community social work signifies 'the practice of professional social work with communities as target population or setting for interventions'. The philosophy and practice of community social work drew from pluralist community work ideas of working in small areas called 'patches', and from the skills acquired through working with informal networks (Barclay, 1982; Hardley et al., 1987 as cited by Popple, 1995)[18]. Smale and Tuson (1990) argue that community social work can be a particularly relevant way of organizing social services to provide community care services (Coulshed and Orme, 2006)[19]. The emphasis on the community rather than the individual is considered as one of the values of community social work. Its approach is devolving power to local communities and using workers with a detailed knowledge of the local area to enable local communities to take part in the caring process (Glasby, 2005)[20]. True community social work approach is based on the needs of the community and on the empowerment of its members. Community social work aims to develop a wide range of methods of intervention which are responsive to community needs. It seeks to develop more local participation in determining the nature and style of provision of social work services for the community. According to Bennet (1986), working in harmony with both formal and informal social networks in communities; focus on the type and nature of relationships between individuals, families, organizations and groups and the community; and recognition that the bulk of care, supervision, and control in the community is undertaken by members of the community are the key components of community social work. (Watts in Lishman, 1991)[21].

Community social work focuses on the inter-relationship with and support for formal and informal networks in communities (Holiček and Baldwin in Leskošek, 2009)[22] and on the needs of small communities; and seeks to engage those communities in providing locally responsive services that meet identified needs (Payne, 2005)[23]. It involves the dialogue concerned with shaping and amending services in response to the needs and growth of communities (Hadley et al., 1987)[24]; and understanding the power dynamics and social relations that govern the relationships between various structures and diverse communities. Community social workers help communities function, through developing community awareness and building community capacity. (Canadian Association of Social Workers)[25]. Asset driven community social work was conceptualized as being an integral part of community capacity enhancement (Delgado and Humm- Delgado, 2013)[15]. The organizational features of community social work practice include an emphasis on the importance of working with people in their informal networks and the empowerment of individuals and communities (Hadley and Leidy, 1996)[26].

The Barclay Report (1982)[27], which was notable for the case it made for community social work defined community as "a network, or networks, of informal relationships between people connected with each other by kinship, common interests, geographical proximity, friendship, occupation or the giving and receiving of services—or various combinations of these". In recommending community social work, the Barclay

Committee believed that the community is both the provider as well as the recipient of social services and that orientation to community is vital if the services are to be directed to individuals and groups within the context of their social relations with others…., as stated by the Seebohm Committee in 1968 for a community approach. The examples of community social work given by the Barclay Report fall into two broad categories: in the first, the focus is upon locality and in the second, the distinguishing feature is a shared concern or problem (Barclay Committee, 1982)[27] and Hadley et al., (1987)[24] stated that community social work acknowledges the variety of communities and the kinds of relationships within them. So, it can be comprehended that the concept of community in community social work can have any of the following dimensions:

- Spatial
- Social
- Relationship
- Virtual

- Civic
- Commonality
- Identity
- Intentional

While the spatial dimension of a community focuses on the geographical divisions like urban or rural in which the community social work is practiced, the civic dimension can be understood from the political divisions such as panchayat or municipality. The social system, social networks and social interactions among the people creates the social dimension of a community. Relationship dimension of the community can be understood in terms of affiliations or associations among the people. The unity or we feeling among the people based on their common features indicates the commonality dimension of community. The virtual dimension of community involves technologically enabled relationships and networks. The groupment of people, based on functional or emotional identity give rise to the identity dimension and that based on particular interests for specific actions or purposes indicates the intentional dimension of community in community social work.

Community social work includes the concept of community in its name itself. By community social work, the Barclay Committee meant formal social work which seeks to tap into, support, enable and underpin the local networks of formal and informal relationships which constitute their basic definition of community, and also the strengths of client's communities of interest (Barclay Committee, 1982)[27]. Thus, communities are inseparable from community social work. Community social work is perceived as a way of thinking, a dialogue, a process, an attitude of mind and an approach for making changes in the communities. It works through individuals and groups for the wider benefit of the community. It is a comprehensive dimension of social work practice with communities, embracing all the aspects of intervening in and with communities.

VI. CONCLUSION

The move towards community social work is the start of development of a close working partnership of social services with citizens, focusing more closely on the community and its strengths. Community social work rests upon the understanding of the nature of community and the meaning and form of social care (Barclay Committee, 1982)[27]. The concept of community is often associated with a number of elements, such as geographical location, common characteristics or ties, social interactions, networks and relationship and shared sentiments (Hardcastle, 2011 as cited by Baldwin and Teater, 2012)[28]. It is impossible to talk about, community today without taking into account all these aspects. Communities grow and change over time and the challenge for community social workers continues to be one of reducing oppression and promoting social justice orientation in the context of rapidly changing communities, societal values and global contexts (Glison et al., 2012)[29]. Communities are the context for community social work and community social work recognizes the diversity of communities. So, understanding different perspectives and dimensions of community is significant for effective community social work practice.

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