

Psychiatric Social Work Practice in Disability and Rehabilitation Field in India

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ABSTRACT

It is a well-known fact that the mental illnesses comprise a substantial amount of the disability which can be equally or more disabling than general medical conditions. Psychiatric Social Work is working with severe or chronic mental illness major part of psychosocial intervention will be assessment and rehabilitation. So, they are directly involved in disability and rehabilitation practice. In contemporary situation Psychiatric Social Work teaching training and practice in disability and rehabilitation field in India must be regulated by RCI and for the same, we need a constant, combined and coordinated effort.

Keywords: Psychiatric Social Work, disability, rehabilitation council of India

Disability and rehabilitation have been a core area practice since the inception of Social Work profession. A policy statement on persons with disability of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) clearly outlined the role of Social Work in the field of disability, "Social workers work with individuals with a disability, with families who have a child or family member with a disability as well as with communities both domestically and internationally. Our work in these spheres encompasses direct practice, group work, community development, policy practice, research and advocacy. Social workers have played key roles in the development of anti-discrimination legislation, policies that support persons with disability and the development of disability programs. Social workers work alongside people with disabilities and families to realise social inclusion, community living, employment, family support, and rehabilitation.^[1]

There are numerous of literature defining clearly Social Work practice in disability and rehabilitation field like Australian Association of Social Workers paper on 'Scope of Social Work Practice Social Work in Disability.'^[2] In many parts of the western country and the United State it is well organized and regulated by the professional bodies. However, in India, there is no such exclusive regulatory body existing so far.

In India, the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is given the mandate to regulate and monitor services provided to persons with disability, to standardise syllabi and to maintain a Central Rehabilitation Register of all qualified professionals and personnel working in the field of Rehabilitation and Special Education. It was set up as a registered society in 1986. On September 1992 the RCI Act³ was enacted by the Parliament and it became a Statutory Body on 22 June 1993. The Act was amended in 2000 to make it more broad-based.^[4]

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RCI registering all qualified professionals under various categories and one of category is 'Rehabilitation Social Workers' but as per the criteria lead down to register the professional social workers under this category is hard to fulfil except Master of Arts in Social Work (Disability Studies & Action) from one particular institution that is Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. It is mandatory to submit an authentication letter signed by the course coordinator or head of the department from where the applicant has acquired the degree; saying that, "The above-mentioned course is recognized by the Rehabilitation Council of India, New Delhi vide their approval order no. _____ dated _____ (Copy Enclosed)"^[3] but institutions providing the proscribed qualification (P.G. Diploma in Social Work/M.A. in Social Work/M. Phil/Ph.D. in Social Work) are not recognized for conducting such courses. Master in Rehabilitation Science is also fulfilling the illegibility criteria for Rehabilitation Social Workers which is a different emerging discipline; why it is kept here is difficult to understand.

"The RCI Act also prescribes punitive action against unqualified persons delivering services to persons with disability."^[5] Statutory warning keeps coming through print and electronic media on regular basis about "working without RCI registration in Govt./ Non-govt organization/private practices is an offence under RCI Act no. 34 of 1992 U/S 13⁽³⁾." [] Most incongruity is on the one side "unqualified persons cannot practice as Rehabilitation Professionals anywhere in India, and they are not eligible to work in the Government or private sector. Unqualified persons found serving the disabled persons without RCI Certification should be prosecuted before the Court of Law under section 13⁽³⁾ of RCI Act, 1992" but for registration with RCI in the category of 'Rehabilitation Social Workers' needs "minimum 5 years of working experience in the field of rehabilitation for the disabled is required for the candidate possessing the following qualification as mentioned in the Code No 10. (P.G. Diploma in Social Work/M.A. in Social Work/M. Phil/Ph.D. in Social Work)" that means one has managed to work illegally for 5 years then he/she can apply to be legal professional by registration.^[3]

The situation becomes more complex when it comes to Psychiatric Social Worker (PSW) though it is a globally accepted specialization of Social Work RCI is not convinced by this fact. I myself applied for registration on the bases of the M.Phil. Psychiatric Social Work but the application was returned with a not that, we don't recognize this qualification for registration of the category of 'Rehabilitation Social Workers'. In India, M.Phil. Psychiatric Social Work is most recognized qualification for Psychiatric Social Work[] apart from Master in Social Work with specialization in Medical and Psychiatry.

M. Phil in Psychiatric Social Work is a two-year full-time professional course after getting trained, Psychiatric Social Workers are competent enough to deal with various psychosocial problems related to mental illness, mental retardation and substance abuse in child adult and aged population in outpatient and inpatient settings. In various training institutions particularly in the department of Psychiatry in a medical college setting, they are also getting exposure to persons with various medical or health conditions. Some of the psychiatric institutions are having a wide range of rehabilitation services and programmes. Since this course is purely hands-on experience based (which is something like as an action based project in Social Work) where they are actively and directly involved in patient management more and more to rehabilitation reintegration, family and community-based care interventions. There is a substantial part of their course curriculum or learning is related to disability and rehabilitation.

It is a well-known fact that the mental illnesses comprise a substantial amount of the disability which can be equally or more disabling than general medical conditions. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995^[7] has included 'mental illnesses in its ambit the definition of disability; In the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) 2016, the list has been expanded from 7 to 21 conditions.^[8] A PSW with M. Phil in Psychiatric Social Work is fully or partly tainted in dealing with psychosocial problems among mental illness, intellectual disability (mental retardation),

specific learning, disabilities autism spectrum disorders, chronic neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease among the scheduled disabilities in the RPWD Act, 2016. If any professional is working with any severe or chronic mental illness, major part of psychosocial services will be assessment, intervention and rehabilitation. So, they are directly involved in disability and rehabilitation practice.

It is awkward to understand why and how RCI in not come in force to regulate the teaching training and practice of Psychiatric Social Work. In 2008 at Bangalore, in an informal discussion with me, RCI Chairman, Major General (Retd.) Ian Cardozo agreed that there is an enough scope to regulate PSW by RCI and he suggested to proceed for the same. I raised this issue in 27th annual general body meeting (AGM) of Indian Society of Professional Social Work (ISPSW) held at Bheemavaram on February 2009. In the next year AGM of ISPSW I wrote a letter to one another member who was going to participate in raising this issue and getting support from other fellow members. During the 1st Indian Social Work Congress of National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) held at Delhi on 23 - 25 February 2013; in a session which chaired by the Assistant Director (if I am remembering correctly) elaborated how to include any particular course in RCI; there must be sufficiently disability and rehabilitation related issue more specifically equivalent to one semester. He also expresses favourable views to include Social Work under rehabilitation professionals. During 31st AGM of ISPSW on 4th January 2013 at Manipal and Again, 35th AGM of ISPSW on 8th February 2017 I raise this issue and tried to get support from fellow members on this issue. Unfortunately, there was not enough support and mobilization of mandate to execute the further action

During 2011-13, I was member of board of studies of M. Phil in Psychiatric Social Work at Institute of Psychiatry, Kolkata; syllabus was modified and disability and rehabilitation related issue were inserted sufficiently, plan was to introduce one full paper of disability and rehabilitation in place of case reports submission which can be internally assessed pertinently but it was not worked out completely. Some professional having the

concerns and they might be making effort accordingly but to get the desired outcome has not been seen yet. In contemporary situation Psychiatric Social Work teaching training and practice in disability and rehabilitation field in India must be regulated by RCI and for the same, we need a constant, combined and coordinated effort.

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