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**POVERTY ERADICATION AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS****Mrs. M.T.R.S. Attanayake**

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**Abstract:** Social Work and Poverty provides a timely review of the key issues that social workers and service users face when working together to combat poverty. Lester Parrot first situates social work and poverty within a historical context, analyzing various poverty concepts and theories and how then can lead to practices that work against the oppression of service users. The effects of poverty are often reflected in a multitude of the vulnerable groups such as; youths, children, women, elderly, disabled, refugees, migrants, homeless and all those at risk. According to World Bank report of 2001, 21% of the World's population was in extreme poverty, and more than half of the world's population was in poverty. Extreme poverty is the result of permanent or long lasting forms of

precariousness that undermine the capacity of individuals, families, communities and population groups to assume fundamental rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. Consultations and involvement of individuals, families and population groups in poverty situations are key elements in poverty eradication and the role of governments and that of international cooperation are vital in the fight against poverty are mentioned as approaches to poverty eradication. Social worker can play a vital role to eradicate the poverty using social work approaches and methods.

**Key words:** Poverty, Extreme poverty, Social Work, Poverty Eradication, Ramifications of poverty

## BACKGROUND

Poverty status is determined by comparing the monthly real per capita expenditure to official poverty line. If the per capita monthly real expenditure is less than the value of the official poverty line, then that individual is considered to be in poverty. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) is the main data source used to calculate poverty indices for Sri Lanka. This survey is conducted by Department of Census and Statistics once in three years and the latest survey was conducted in 2016. This article provides information on poverty in Sri Lanka for 2016. The changes of poverty status over the survey periods based on the official poverty line which was established in 2004 and updated to allow the price changes using Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI) over the survey periods from 2002 to 2016. The method used to calculate official poverty line is called Cost of Basic Need (CBN) method. This poverty line is considered as an absolute poverty line and does not vary geographically. The Official Poverty Line (OPL) for 2016 is Rs.4,166. That is the real per capita expenditure per month for a person fixed at a specific welfare level with the consumption expenditure of food and non food items.

The Copenhagen Declaration describes absolute poverty as 'a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information'. The World Bank identifies 'extreme poverty' as being people who live on less than a day, and 'poverty' as less than a day. According to World Bank report of 2001, 21% of the World's population was in extreme poverty, and more than half of the world's population was in poverty. Extreme poverty is the result of permanent or long lasting forms of precariousness that undermine the capacity of individuals, families, communities and population groups to assume fundamental rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. Extreme poverty cannot be overcome by material aid and capacity building alone, nor can poverty reduction initiatives be successful unless they are based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and on the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights preamble.

Three levels of poverty have been identified; extreme poverty, moderate poverty and relative poverty. Extreme poverty occurs when families cannot get their basic needs for survival. They may be frequently hungry, lack safe drinking water, cannot afford education for their children, may lack shelter and have inadequate clothing. This level of poverty is most likely in developing countries. Moderate poverty occurs when families just meet their basic needs, while relative poverty refers to circumstances in developed countries when household income is below a given proportion of national income. Three dimensions of extreme poverty namely; income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion have been central concepts in the development of social work over the past century. Income poverty if chronic and severe, can lead to homelessness, hunger, lack of health care and suspension of parental rights. Development poverty epitomizes the non-fulfilment of rights and needs in the vital area of health, education and training, access to information and employment, while social exclusion is not only a violation of human dignity but a phenomenon that leads to isolation, alienation and a hidden existence. In developed countries, extreme poverty affects only a small proportion of the entire populations, but it is worth noting that

education and training are among the main tools that lead the way out of poverty in both developed and developing countries.

### **RAMIFICATIONS OF POVERTY**

The effects of poverty are often reflected in a multitude of the vulnerable groups such as; youths, children, women, elderly, disabled, refugees, migrants, homeless and all those at risk. Children suffer amongst other deprivations, from hunger and malnutrition. Half the deaths of pre-school children are attributed to the intersection between malnutrition and infectious diseases. Even in wealthiest countries, 40 to 50 million children are growing up in relative poverty. Women comprise the majority of those affected by poverty. They are afforded fewer educational opportunities, have maternal responsibilities and are subjected to forced labour, trafficking and other forms of violence. The elderly comprise the fastest growing segment of the world's population, and this group will quadruple by year 2050 from 600 million to 2 billion. The elderly are subject to poverty because of lack of work opportunities and in many societies there are no political or social arrangements for their security and survival.

The disabled in some circumstances are removed from society entirely to live in an institutionalized, marginalized and abused existence. Refugees, migrants, immigrants, homeless and ethnic minorities are groups experiencing similar exclusion from the opportunities of the major society and consequently suffer from poverty and other attendant indignities. Indigenous people are particularly at risk for poverty, are often stateless and lack a voice within the countries where they reside. Often invisible in large urban areas or segregated in distant reservations, indigenous people often suffer from high unemployment which contributes to their extreme poverty in developing countries or relative poverty in more developed countries. Urban and rural dwellers experience different, but equally oppressive, forces leading to poverty, urban dwellers from lack of competitive skills and rural people from lack of available work. Those who live in areas most vulnerable to natural disasters are usually poor. And as survivors they are left with no access to resources. The poor who survive armed conflict are generally displaced. Armed conflicts have been increasing within states, and most victims are civilians, poor and consequently made poorer. Widespread evidence confirms that pandemics and poverty are mutually interwoven and have disastrous consequences.

### **APPROACHES TO POVERTY ERADICATION**

Consultations and involvement of individuals, families and population groups in poverty situations are key elements in poverty eradication. Planning and execution of measures and projects aimed at lifting them out of poverty and extreme poverty, and assist them to gain self confidence are popular approaches that social workers have used in the past.

The role of governments and that of international cooperation are vital in the fight against poverty. Collaborating with other actors such as civil society, including community organizations and self-help groups, and the private sector among others, governments can lead the way by developing policies and initiation of sustainable actions to put an end or at least reduce significantly the incidence of poverty in the world. Although poverty means scarcity of resources to meet basic needs, many

sustainable strategies for reducing poverty are aimed at the fundamental causes of the situation, rather than only the provision of direct material support. Participation, self-reliance, sustainability, and empowerment are the key principles often applied by social workers in the design for poverty reduction strategies and in fostering social integration. Means – tested and universal income – transfer programs, such as social security benefits, have an anti-poverty effect in that they move some families whose pre-transfer income was below the poverty level to a point at or above the poverty threshold. The taxation system is also used, to some degree, to reduce poverty.

### **ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

In practice all over the world, social workers concern about poverty has increased because of their long history in working with the marginalized, or excluded, those lacking resources, scenarios which push them to poverty situations. At the micro level of daily practice, social workers are used to dealing with poverty and also with the risk assessment, working creatively and innovatively to help people (individuals and communities) to understand their situation and to change their behaviour and their environment, where possible. One role that derives increased attention is community development, which requires skills in community analysis, social planning, community organizing and social action. Community development requires the ability to foster economic opportunities for area residents through work on industrial retention, local business development, job training, and placement.

Another role is community practice which calls for social workers to help people to discover their own resources and their own ability to create influence and positive change. The importance of this has been underscored by realizing that poverty involves a complex set of interactions between personal characteristics and a community's resources and opportunities.

At times the role of social workers involves making tough judgments about risk to individuals and at times they have to use their ability and influence to protect the victims of poverty from themselves or from others. Examples include situations of domestic violence, child abuse or mental health. Social workers' long history of working with people in poverty situations and witnessing their changing behaviour illustrates the importance of integrating theory about professional values that respect people, their choices and decisions.

In this approach, community practice combines work with individuals and families with community work, focusing on enhancing resources and opportunities along with personal capacities and as individuals develop out of their poverty situations, so do communities, and the two become mutually reinforcing, creating a comprehensive and integrated model that addresses social and economic exclusion and social disintegration which is necessary for effective poverty eradication.

### **CONCLUSION**

International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) recognizes that human rights are fundamental to all persons, as individuals and collectives and these rights cannot be guaranteed when almost a billion people around the world live in extreme poverty. National and international social and economic policies must be directed towards reducing extreme poverty and pledges to advocate for policy

changes that would unconditionally support this goal. To work collaborating with governments, with other NGOs and Civil Society groups, with UN bodies and private sector to support and advance appropriate policies and strategies directed towards reducing poverty.

The rights of poor people to organize and promote economic and social development for themselves and their children. MDG that proposes to reduce by half the number of people living in conditions of extreme poverty defined as living with less than one dollar a day by the year 2015. All people are entitled to have their basic needs for food, clothing and shelter met and that political and civil rights have little meaning when these basic needs are unmet. Collaborate with others and use advocacy and community organisation skills to initiate and support social work efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Women and children are often most at risk of poverty, and children often bear the brunt of extreme poverty. Social workers play an important role in helping the poor and working to eradicate poverty. One of the guiding principles of social work is working for social justice, which lists poverty as a primary social problem, according to the National Association of Social Workers. Social workers provide assistance to the poor on both the micro, or individual, and the macro, or large-scale, levels.

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