

## Types of Group in Social Group Work

This topic describes a significant sample of the types of groups in which social workers may become involved. This list is not exhaustive; only the activity of the helping professional and the client group served will provide such limits. However the groups discussed here are frequently encountered by social group workers.

### Recreational Groups:

The objective of recreational groups is to provide activities for enjoyment and exercise. Often such activities are spontaneous, and groups are practically leaderless. The group service agency (such as YMCA, YWCA, or neighborhood center) may offer little more than physical space and the use of some equipment. Spontaneous playground activities, informal athletic games, and an open game room are examples. Some group agencies are providing such physical space claim the recreation and interaction with others helps build character and prevent delinquency among youth by providing an alternative to the street.

### Educational Groups:

The focus of educational groups is to help members acquire knowledge and learn more complex skills. The leader generally is a professional person with considerable training and expertise in the subject area. Examples of topics include child-rearing practices, assertiveness training, techniques for becoming a more effective parent, preparing to be an adoptive parent, and training volunteers to perform specialized task for a social service agency. Educational group leaders often function in a more didactic manner and frequently are social workers. These groups may resemble a class, with considerable group interaction and discussion being encouraged. The case example shows how assertiveness training can be taught in an educational group.

### Task Groups:

Task groups are formed to achieve a specific set of tasks or objectives. Social workers are apt to interact with or become involved in a variety of task group. A *board of directors* is an administrative group charged with responsibility for setting the policy governing agency programs. A *task force* is a group established for a special purpose and is usually disbanded after the task is completed. An *ad hoc committee*, like a task force, is set up for one purpose and usually ceases functioning after completion of its task.

### Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Groups:

Both providers and consumers of social services may become involved in groups concerned with problem solving and decision making. (There is considerable overlap between task groups and

these groups; in fact, problem-solving and decision-making groups can be considered a subcategory of task groups).

Providers of services use group meetings for such objectives as developing a treatment plan for a client or a group of clients, deciding how to best allocate scarce resources, deciding how to improve the delivery of services to clients, arriving at policy decisions for the agency, deciding how to improve coordination efforts with other agencies, and so on.

Potential consumers of services may form a group to study an unmet need in the community and to advocate the development of new programs to meet the need. Data on the need may be gathered, and the group may be used as a vehicle either to develop a program or to influence existing agencies to provide services. Social workers may function as stimulators and organizers of such group efforts as well as participants. One type of problem-solving group is *nominal group*, which can be helpful in identifying problems.

In problem-solving and decision-making groups, each participant normally has some interest or stake in the process and may gain or lose, depending on the outcome. Usually, there is a formal leader of some sort, although other leaders sometimes emerge during the process. Three issues are of importance to problem-solving and decision-making groups: group versus individual decision making, groupthink, and decision by consensus versus decision by majority vote.

## Self-Help Groups:

Self-help groups are increasingly popular and are often successful in helping individuals with certain social or personal problems.

Self-help groups are voluntary, small group structures for mutual aid and the accomplishment of a special purpose. They are mutually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and personal change. The initiators and members of such groups perceive that their needs are not, or cannot be, met by or through existing social institutions. Self-help groups emphasize face-to-face social interaction and the assumption of personal responsibility by members. They often provide material assistance as well as emotional support; they are frequently cause-oriented, and promulgate an ideology or value through which members may attain an enhanced sense of personal identity.

## Therapy Groups:

Therapy groups are generally composed of members with rather severe emotional or personal problems. Leadership of such groups generally requires considerable skill, perceptiveness, knowledge of human behavior and group dynamics, group counseling capacities, and ability to use the group to bring about behavioural changes. Among other skills, the group leader needs to be highly perceptive regarding how each member is being affected by what is being

communicated .considerable competence is needed to develop and maintain a constructive atmosphere within the group. Similar to one-to-one counseling, the goal of therapy group is generally to have members explore their problems in depth and then to develop one or more strategies for resolving them. The group therapist generally uses one or more therapy approaches as a guide for changing attitudes and behaviours; these approaches include psychoanalysis, reality therapy, learning theory, rational therapy, transactional analysis, client-centered therapy, and psychodrama.

Group therapy is being used increasingly in social work. It has several advantages over one-to-one therapy. It is generally easier to change the attitudes of an individual in a group than in one-to-one counseling. Group pressure can have a substantial effect on changing attitudes and beliefs. Furthermore, group therapy permits the social worker to help more than one person at a time, with potential savings in the use of professional effort.

In essence a group therapist uses the principles of one-to-one counseling and of group dynamics to work with clients to change dysfunctional attitudes and behavior.