THEORIES IN HUMAN SERVICES
FEM 3108

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TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED

- Definition of theory.
- Utilisation of theories in human and social services.
WHAT IS A THEORY?

- A coherent statement of assumptions regarding to a set of phenomena that provide a basis of explanation and prediction of those phenomena.
- Human behaviour and dysfunction.
- A theory includes:
  - Concepts
  - Facts
  - Principles - Related to the theory
  - Hypothesis - Assumptions

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**CONCEPTS**: Agreed upon terms developed by a discipline to describe the phenomena with which it is design.

**FACTS**: Aspects of relationships of the phenomena that have been empirically verified.

- **Empirical means**:
  - Derived from naturalistic observation or from experimental procedures.
  - Data that has been studied in systematic and valid manner.
HOW IS THEORY USEFUL IN CONTINUE

- Theory provides a guide for the kind of information needed.
- Theory provides a framework or organising and interpreting the phenomenon (assessment).
- Theory also provides a basis for designing interventions, developing solutions, access resources and evaluate outcomes.
- Theory influence how HSW view clients and communicate with them.

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HOW IS THEORY USEFUL IN HUMAN SERVICES?

- Theories enable HSW to use/draw on many/different approaches in work with different types of clients.
- Knowledge of theory can enhance the confidence of practitioners.
- Workers without a clear understanding of their own theoretical assumption risk collecting information that they would not or cannot use.
- Theories for SHS provides understanding of how:
  - Biological, social, psychological and cultural systems affect and are affected by human behaviour.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS USED IN HS AND SW

- System theory (e.g. Comptom & Gallaway, 1999; Pincus & Minaham, 1973).

- Ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

- Life model theories (Germain & Gitterman, 1980; 1996)
ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

- Used to understand the inter-relationships between people and their physical and social environments (Germain, 1979; 1983; Germain & Gitterman, 1995).

- Incorporated ideas from both:
  - General system theory
  - Ecological systems
Describe how human systems operate and interact with one another - a group of smaller systems, also part of a larger system.

When one system fails to function effectively and thus the whole system’s functioning is affected (relationships between systems).
ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM THEORY

- Focuses on how things fit together, how they adapt to one another.

- **Adaptation is:**
  - A dynamic process between people and their environments as people grow, achieve competence, and make contributions to others.

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COMPONENTS OF GENERAL SYSTEM THEORY

- Example of systems: Family, teams, work groups, community organization, service clubs, street gangs etc.

- **What make the system different?**
  - Patterns of relationships.
  - Purposes.
  - Attributes of their members have in common.
COMPONENTS OF GENERAL SYSTEM THEORY

- **Open systems**
  - Easily permeated boundaries between units.
  - Healthy open systems: clear boundaries - synergy.

- **Closed systems**
  - Closed boundaries: tightly knit.
  - Less able to derive positive energy - used up own energy
TRANSACTIIONS: INTERACTIONS AND INTERRELATIONS

- Human system-interaction with other systems and exchange resource.
- The need to focus on association among larger number of factors rather than cause and effect relationships between two factors.
- Example: Give and take, borrow and share, consume and dispose, and accept and dispose their own/resources from other system.
TRANSACTIONS

- Processes through which systems exchange information and energy.
- Energy is sent and received within 1 human system or between 1 human system and another
- Example: Exchanges between a child and its family, an employee and the workplace, a neighbourhood block and the city.
- This involves: Input, processing, output and feedback.
INPUT

- Refers to RESOURCES available within the systems and environment.
- Energy movement within system.
- Energy and information imported from component and environmental systems.
- Resources and opportunities available to the system.
PROCESSING

- Refers to the system’s **RESPONSE** to the energy/info (Resources) it receives.
- Involves:
  - Select, Organise, Analyse, Synthesise and Utilise
- Produce: Output/responses
OUTPUT

- Refers to both **PRODUCTS** or **WAYS** in which systems act on their environments.
- Outcomes of energy exchange
- Attitudes, behaviour and role performance
- Energy and information exported to components and environmental systems

**Actual output may differ from what is desired or other expected.**
FEEDBACK

- Response, Evaluation and Adjustment.
- Transmit further information by helping system to evaluate situations, make modifications or take corrective actions.
- Provide **reciprocal effect** of one system to another.
  - People are active participants in influencing their environment, but also the product of their environment.

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1. BRONFENBRENNER’S ECOLOGICAL THEORY (1979, 1989)

- Ecology – terms originated from biological sciences.
- Refers to interrelationships between living organisms and their physical and biological environments.

FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES:
- The environmental contexts of human functioning and the transactional relationships that occurs
- Focus on studying human in various social environments
• Believes that the social contexts of individual interactions and experiences determine the degree to which individual can develop their abilities and realize their potentials.

• Identify 5 environmental systems: Micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono.

• Within these systems – relationships and interactions take place to form patterns that impact human development
MICROSYSTEM

- Refers to the activities and relationships with others experienced by a developing person in a particular setting such as family, school, peer group or community.

- Family – the primary socialisers, the most significant impact on child’s development (i.e. abrasive, dysfunction family, lack of opportunities to manipulate objects, lack of language exposure).
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Family – the primary socialisers, the most significant impact on child’s development (i.e. abrasive, dysfunction family, lack of opportunities to manipulate objects, lack of language exposure).

School – place where children formally learn about society
• Teachers – the role models, motivation for learning, formal skills
• Peer group – children generally unsupervise; gain sense of who they are what they can do,
• Peer provides companionship and experience in cooperation and role taking
Neighbourhood/community – main setting for children to learn by doing. The available facilities determine the real experience they will have.

Media? Part of the microsystem?

☑ No: Bronfenbrenner - not a direct setting for children.
☑ Yes: present a setting where children can view the whole world - past, present, future, places and things, roles and relationships, attitudes and values
☑ Television provides models for behaviour.
MESOSYSTEM

- Consists of linkages and interrelationships between two or more of a developing person’s microsystems.
- Impact of this system depends on the number and quality of interrelationships.
- This system provide support for activities going in microsystems.
- Eg. When the style of interaction was similar to the school’s, in that both settings encouraged child’s participation, academic performance was enhanced.
Children are not actively participating but tend to affect them in one of their microsystems

Parents’ job, the school board, the city council

Effect are indirect, via the microsystems

Eg: Confirmative workplace- controlling parents; divorce – child expose to stress and impact from moving
MACROSYSTEM

- Consists of the developing person’s society and subculture with particular reference to the belief systems, life-styles and options, and patterns of social interchange.
- Eg; the middle/lower class, Hispanic/Asian ancestry, culture.
- Viewed as patterns, or sets of instructions, for exo, meso and microsystems.
- Democratic ideology – affect school, community, work environment.
• An exosystem – employers cannot discriminate when employing.
• Democratic ideology affect how schools communicate with families school.
• Mesosystem – schools must inform parents of policies, parents have the right to question those policies.
• Microsystem – children have to learn the principles of democratic society.
HIGH CONTEXT MACROSYSTEML

• Face-to-face interaction.
• Strong human support network.
• Identity through group associations.
• Less open to strangers – insider/outsider.
• Follow traditional roles.
• Guard against technology alienation.
LOW CONTEXT MACROSYSYTEM

• Verbal communication
• In-control, fragmented social relations with/in different people/settings
• Identity based on personal efforts and achievement
• Expect personal freedom, openness and individual choice
• Provides way of adapting, changing and using new technology
Focus on the influence of the significant agents (the family, the school, the peer group, the media and the community) on the developing individual.

The various interaction that take place between members in various settings (mesosystems), the various settings in which each agents must interact (exosystems), and the total environments where interaction takes place (macrosystem
BRONFENBRENNER’S ECOLOGICAL THEORY (1979)
2. LIFE MODEL THEORY – PEOPLE IN ENVIRONMENT

- Used the basis of ecological theory.

**Assumption:**
- The nature of the transaction between people and their environments is the source of human needs and social problems.
- Germain (1979) - Demonstrated its application across a range of social work.
▪ Metaphor of ecology
  ✓ People are interdependent with each other and their environment (physical or social).

▪ Reciprocal
  ✓ Each influences the other over time, through changes - continuous and reciprocal adaptations
  ✓ Aim of social work is to increase the ‘fit’ between people and their environment.
LIFE MODEL

PERSON
Following life course

STRESS unexpected internal response to Life Stressor

1st appraisal – serious?

2nd appraisal – resources?

LIFE STRESSOR

COPING

Feedback

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THE MODEL

- **People** – own unique life course

- **Life stressors** – transitions, events and issues – disturb fit with environment;

- **Disrupt** – capability to adapt or cope - incompatibility between individual needs/capacities with environment properties.

- **Two stages of appraisal:**
  - Seriousness – harm, loss or challenges?
  - Measures – resources - ??
- **Coping** - changes (self or environment), exchanges btw person and environment

- **Feedback** – signals from the environment and own physical and emotional responses.
RESOURCES TO COPE

- **Relatedness** – capacity to form attachment.
- **Efficacy** – confidence in ability to cope.
- **Competence** – sense the have the needed skills or can get help from others.
- **Self-concept** – evaluation of self.
- **Self-esteem** – extent they feel significant or worthy
- **Self-direction** – sense of having control
• **Personal resources** – related to individuals
• Affected by the influence of people’s families and communities.
• Ability to use these interpersonal resources is affected by social factors.
SOCIAL FACTORS

- **Coercive power** - dominant group withhold power – personal/cultural features of client group.
- **Exploitative power** – dominant’s groups create technological pollution endangering health and well-being, especially poor people.
- **Habitat** - physical and social settings of the client.
- **Historical time** – historical context.
- **Individual time** – meanings that people give to their life experiences.
- **Social time** – events affecting the families, groups and communities that the client is part of.
AIMS OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN LIFE MODEL

- To improve the fit between people and their environment
- *How?* By alleviating life stressors, increasing people’s personal and social resources
- *End result?* Enable the client to use more and better coping strategies and influencing environmental sources so that they respond to people’s needs.
HOW TO ACHIEVE?

- **Building up** personal and collective strengths – main focus of action.
- **Emphasize clients** taking decisions and action on their own account.
- **The environment** and the demands of life course should be a constant factor in making decisions.
- **Practice** – evaluated, accumulated experience contributed to professional knowledge.
- **Sensitive** to diversity, ethnical and empowering, carried out through partnership between worker and client – reduces power differences between them.
3. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943)

- **Physiological**: breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion
- **Safety**: security of: body, employment, resources, morality, the family, health, property
- **Love/belonging**: friendship, family, sexual intimacy
- **Esteem**: self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, respect by others
- **Self-actualization**: morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts
DEFICIENCY NEEDS (d-needs)

- Represented by the lower four layers of the pyramid:
  1. Physiological (including sexuality).
  2. Security of position.
  3. Friendship and love.
  4. Esteem.

- With the exception of physiological needs, if d-needs are not met, the body gives no physical indication but the individual feels anxious and tense.
- The hierarchy moves upwards as soon as the previous level of need is satisfied.
PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Literal requirement for human survival.
- The needs: breathing, food, homeostasis, clothing, shelter, sex.
- If these requirements are not met (with the exclusion of clothing, shelter, and sexual activity) the human body simply cannot function.
With physical need relatively satisfied, safety need take precedence and dominate behaviour.

These needs have to do with people’s yearning for a predictable orderly world in which perceived fairness and inconsistency are under control, the familiar frequent and the unfamiliar are rare.

The safety needs manifest in – job security, saving account, insurance policies, reasonable disability accommodation and the like.

In short: personal, financial, health and well-being and safety net against accidents/illness and their adverse impacts.
LOVE AND BELONGING

- The third layer of human need are social needs which involve feelings of belongingness – friendship, intimacy and family.
- Humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, whether it comes from a large social group such as office culture, clubs, religious group etc.
- Need to love and to be loved by others.
- Absence: loneliness, social anxiety and clinical depression.
- Often overcome by physiological and security needs depending on the strength of the peer pressure.
ESTEEM

- All humans have the need to be respected and to have self-esteem and self-respect.
- Esteem presents the normal human desire to be accepted and valued by others.
- People need to engage themselves to gain recognition and have an activity/activities that gives the person a sense of contribution, to be accepted and self-valued, be it in a profession or hobby.
- Imbalance – result in low self-esteem or inferiorly complex
“What a man can be, he must be” – this form the basis of the perceived need for self-actualization.

This level of need pertains to what a person’s full potential is and realizing that potential.

Maslow describe this desire as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.

To reach a clear understanding of this level of need one must first not only achieve the previous needs but master these needs.
Unlike lower level needs, this need is never fully satisfied; as one grow psychologically there are always new opportunities to grow.

Self-actualized people tend to have need such as: truth, justice, wisdom and meaning.

Self-actualized people have frequent peak experiences which energized moments of profound happiness and harmony.
Self-Actualized person according to Maslow: "He possesses an unusual ability to detect the spurious, the fake, the dishonest in personality, and in general to judge the people correctly and efficiently"

Common traits amongst people who have reached self-actualization are:

- They embrace reality and facts rather than denying truth.
- They are spontaneous.
- They are interested in solving problems.
- They are accepting of themselves and others and lack prejudice.