

EMERGING PERSPECTIVES OF ANIMAL WELFARE IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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Abstract: *Social work is a multidisciplinary profession and inclusion of animal welfare as a subject would involve rapidly with the core components of welfare science, ethics, laws and standards. Social work profession must include animal welfare and should be concerned about the welfare of all animals that are managed in some way by humans, and where we have particular responsibilities for their care. Over the time, welfare issues pertaining to working, performing, companion, zoo and lab animals have also received attention. A broader moral foundation that includes non-human animals and natural environments allows social work to come to a fuller fruition. Animal welfare requires social work intervention through advocacy, mobilization, social action, research, and human behavioural change towards animals. Social Work professionals can build capacities of stakeholders, policy makers, in taking socially responsible decisions concerning animal welfare and achieving five basic freedoms for animals including freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury and disease, freedom to express normal behaviour, freedom from fear and distress.*

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INTRODUCTION

Social work is traditionally human-centred in practice, even though for many the bond between humans and animals is the most fundamental of daily-lived experiences. Animal welfare is an emerging area of research and practice which is highly relevant for social work as evidence-based practice. Social work and animal welfare link the human-animal connection to welfare outcomes both as indicators of crisis and as therapeutic models. The strong bond between animals and humans is at the heart of two increasingly popular specialties in social work education.

Social work has a long and proud history of speaking out on behalf of, and of giving moral priority to the weak and vulnerable in human society, it is incumbent that social workers speak out and accord moral priority to animals, the most weak and vulnerable members in our communities (Ryan, 2011: 164).

According to Ryan, 'Darwin insists that humans and animals share a common ancestry with differences in mental and emotional capacities being one of degree, not kind (Ryan 2011: 13).

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The Journal of Animal Ethics is devoted to the exploration of progressive thought about animals. It is multidisciplinary in nature and international in scope. It covers theoretical and applied aspects of animal ethics of interest to academics from the humanities and the sciences, as well as professionals working in the field of animal protection.

Animal welfare education is a multidisciplinary subject that is evolving rapidly with the core components of welfare, science, ethics, laws, and standards. Social Work education involves imparting science-based animal welfare education through field work training and learning to build capacities of stakeholders in taking socially responsible decisions concerning animal welfare.

SCOPE OF INCLUSION OF ANIMAL WELFARE IN SOCIAL WORK PARADIGM

The field is gaining legitimacy and becoming increasingly popular. Social work is about providing counselling and advocacy for animals. Social work programs can get placements in all traditional social work settings where they can raise awareness about the human-animal connection. Below mentioned widens the scope of animal welfare in Social Work Profession:

i) Mistreatment of Animals as a Tool for Inflicting Violence

Roguski (2012) found that the mistreatment of animals was evident as a precursor and tool for inflicting violence or exerting power in a domestic situation. Qualitative and quantitative research revealed a number of situations in which cruelty or threat to animals manifests in family violence situations. Roguski (2012) also found that there is a need to view the co-existence of animal cruelty as complex and multifaceted, not just restricted to threats or actual harm.

Roguski (2012) found that when pets were abused or threatened, a number of responses/ results were observed including:

- Normalised violence/ psychological/emotional abuse
- Cruelty to animals as a punishment for unsatisfactory behaviour or in response to jealousy and as a threat to maintain ‘good behaviour’
- Hurting animals to avoid police attention
- Using pets as sexual objects
- Threatening violence to pets as a way of isolating the women and children from third-party support systems or keep women from leaving a relationship.

ii) Enhancing Quality Life of Humans with the Animal-Human Bond

Domestic and companion animals constitute a significant part of the contextual system

people are embedded in, and often form significant relationships in human's lives. How-ever, due to the traditional humanist bias of social work, anything other than humans in the human social environment tends to be ignored.

iii) Companion Animals are Part and Parcel of the Social Environment

The world within which social workers practise should, of necessity, serve to widen the scope of social work's moral compass. Animals who are considered members of the household can impact substantially on the dynamics of the family system, yet animals are usually absent from social work literature and codes of ethics.

iv) Inclusion of Animal Welfare/Rights as a Comprehensive Ecological Model

Social work practice, education, theory, ethics and values move from being exclusively human centred to include animal rights and welfare and the role of animals as family members within a holistic and comprehensive viewing of the ecological model.

v) New possibility of Social Work Areas

We need to develop new social work theory that gives consideration to animal welfare. With its humanistic emphasis, social work is blinkered to focus solely on humans even if animal abuse and neglect is present in real life cases. Social work educators and researchers should be introducing students to these new practice possibilities and researching their efficacy in the social work context to extend and deepen the social work moral compass, and enhance and develop the social work toolbox so it is more applicable to the full extent of the lived lives of our clients.

INTERVENTIONS REQUIRED BY THE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS

- The four core areas of study are the link between human and animal violence, grief and loss, animal-assisted interactions, and compassion fatigue management. Among the ways in which students put their skills to work in the field include advocating for safe havens for pets in abusive homes, developing pet loss bereavement programs, designing animal-assisted interaction programs, and helping veterinarians manage compassion fatigue.
- We must acknowledge the importance, benefit, and the value of animals," our target is the people, and by partnering with veterinarians and other animal-related professionals, we ensure that the animals are also being attended to."
- To give exposure to students to the study of human-animal relationships, providing them access to quality information about human-animal studies, and opportunities for how to get involved in it.

- Social Work educators must help to create and improve human-animal studies programs in universities and colleges.
- We provide faculty with an interest in human-animal studies with access to quality information about the field, and opportunities for how to get involved in it.
- To help to ascertain research priorities for the field, targeting topics that are under-researched, giving scholars venues to research and publish in those areas.
- To provide information and resources to help those who are working in areas of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and treatment of animal abuse to accomplish their goals.
- It would provide high quality, scholarly resources to animal agencies and animal service professionals to allow them to use the most effective practices for their work.
- It would also help to provide evidence-based, theoretically sound and useful knowledge about human-animal relationships to those who work to affect policy and practices involving animals.

CONCLUSION

“Human” limits our conception of moral concern too narrowly for the work that we do. As a profession, we need to expand that circle of concern to include more than just the human world: non-human animals and natural environments must be added. Expanding social work’s moral circle to include the non-human world is in fact not radical, but grounded in our traditional ecological perspective: non-humans and natural environments cannot be separated from the social environment that is the object of social work practice. First, we can take steps to become more informed about the ethical, legal issues and practical challenges that include the non-human world. We can expand social work ethics to include animal rights, environmentalism, and other moral concerns regarding the non-human world. Second, we can collaborate with professionals and activists to develop partnerships for social change, expand our own understanding of diverse forms and methods of social justice work, and create opportunities for shared advocacy. Third, we can adjust our own practices to make more environmentally-conscious decisions for animals’ perspective. One way is to make vegetarian or vegan food the default at social work conferences and events. Simply changing the menu raises consciousness about where food comes from and the ethics on our plates.

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