Abstract

The usage of the word social work and social worker are inconsistent among the Sümi tribe of Nagaland because Social work or Aqho- Aho Kumla is all about individuals, groups, who render voluntary service as a gesture of solidarity whenever there is a need in the community. On the other hand, social worker or Aqo- aho –sakiphemi are those individuals who work voluntarily for the welfare of the community.

In tribal societies, social problems were solved within the context of a traditional system, which had always been an integral part of social life of tribes, including the Sümi tribe. It is evident that the traditional knowledge of social work practice exists and is derived from Sümi people’s way of coming to know. This traditional system was a social institution, characterised by strong family ties, chieftainship, clan, and other traditional institutions, assured the security of its members. Thus, the researcher felt it imperative to know what the Sumi community did a hundred years ago (and even today), when there were (are) no trained social work professionals. What is social work to them? Who is a social worker? How and what kind of knowledge, skills, and wisdom did the community posses to solve their basic problems? Considering these questions, the researcher felt the need to explore the historical and the socio-cultural aspect and knowledge of social work practice from the Sümi tribe perspective.

Though not always recognised, ethnography and social work advocates a surprisingly similar goal: to understand the human experience as it is lived, felt, and known by its participants (Goldstein, 1994). The researcher felt that in some important respects, this work is similar to that of the ethnographer who seeks to understand the culture of another society and critically examines the frames of reference internalized from his or her own culture (Scott, 1989). The ethnographic approach helped cast light on Sümi tribe social work practice, by understanding the participant’s distinctive frame of reference and helped in providing information about settings and situations essential for this study. The study was carried out in the predominant area of the Sümi tribe, that is, Zunheboto district of Nagaland. The researcher selected two urban pockets of Zunheboto town - New colony and Amiphoto colony - and two villages, namely, Ghuvishe village and Asukhomi village.
The study found that Social work as profession among the Sümi tribe is still at a budding stage and has not been recognized by the people. Nevertheless, there is a gradual development and changes in functioning of social work agencies and the workers due to external forces such as Protestant and Catholic Christian missionaries, government agencies such as Social welfare Department, District Rural Development agencies, and Non Governmental organizations. Though it is too early to claim Sümi tribe model of social work, Social workers must understand contemporary roles of indigenous people’s families, and communities. The researcher believes that findings from this study will help social workers, academicians and other community practitioners to measure and target their interventions more effectively, and develop strategies to enhance organizational capacity while working with Sümi people.