

## The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** This study explores the role of social workers in fostering community cohesion and conflict resolution, focusing on their contributions to promoting social solidarity, empowering individuals, and facilitating sustainable development in Ogun State. Through a qualitative approach, the research examines the various strategies employed by social workers to strengthen social networks, mobilize communities, and address intergroup tensions. The study highlights the importance of community-based initiatives, such as collaborative projects, empowerment programs, and conflict resolution training, in building resilient and cohesive communities. Social workers' involvement in enhancing communication, cooperation, and trust within communities is shown to be pivotal in addressing key social issues, including poverty, discrimination, and mental health challenges. The study further underscores the significance of negotiation, mediation, and collaborative strategies in conflict management, aiming for long-term social harmony and peace. The findings suggest that social workers play a critical role in equipping individuals and communities with the necessary skills and resources to navigate social challenges, thus fostering sustainable development. The study calls for enhanced capacity-building initiatives, policy support, and resource allocation to strengthen social work interventions and improve outcomes for communities in need.

**KEYWORDS:** Social work, community cohesion, conflict resolution, and intergroup relations.

### INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural and unavoidable part of human existence; because humans pursue incompatible goals, interests, status, values, beliefs, that ultimately lead to mutual disagreements or conflicts (Aighovbios, 2018), thus remains a fundamental trait of a genuine society. Assefa (2005) noted, as long as there is a notion of society and existence of people, there is obviously bound to be conflicts; no matter the magnitude. Conflicts arise among individuals in various types of relationships and social environments. The presence of conflict often indicates that meaningful interactions are taking place, as the lack of conflict may suggest a lack of engagement. Conflict itself is neutral; it's neither inherently positive nor negative. Conflict is characterized by a clash of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, along with efforts to exert control over one another and negative feelings toward each other (Fisher, 1990).

Despite this, the conflicting actions and negative emotions are significant indicators of human discord. Conflict can cause significant destruction or considerable creativity and positive societal transformation (Kriesberg, 1998). Thus, it is crucial to comprehend the fundamental processes of conflict to enhance constructive results and reduce harmful ones. Various elements, including cultural disparities, distinct individual requirements, and the unpredictability of human actions, highlight the importance of addressing these conflicts (Ozungur, 2023). Effective conflict management is crucial for achieving peaceful coexistence, as it fosters community cohesion and promotes societal development. The way in which conflict is addressed ultimately determines if it leads to constructive or destructive outcomes (Fisher, 2000). Hence, social workers play pivotal roles in conflict resolution and community cohesion.

The Preamble to the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics explicitly states that 'the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty' (www.nasw.org). Social work resolves conflict even at a significant level which could occur between the client, social worker, family, state, and society (Ozungur, 2023). The resolution of these conflicts depends on successful implementation of conflict management techniques and principles in social work, with adequate consideration of the political, institutional, social, professional and socio-psychological factors surrounding the conflict. This paper briefly outlines several conflict types, the challenges faced by social workers, the role of social workers in

# **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria**

resolving conflict and promoting community cohesion, as well as the strategies implemented by social workers in Ogun state Nigeria.

## **Objectives of the study**

- To identify the challenges faced by social workers in mediating conflicts and enhancing intergroup relations within communities.
- To examine the role of social workers in fostering positive interactions and understanding among diverse community groups.
- To explore strategies used by social workers to promote community cohesion and reduce intergroup tensions.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURES**

### **Conceptual Review - The World of Social Work**

According to Mathbor, (2007) social work is a discipline that originated from grassroots movements that continuously dealt with unexpected shocks and utilized people's strengths. Social workers are well connected to the people they serve, know about their unique locations, are familiar with community resources and leadership potentials and are equipped with the necessary knowledge base for addressing issues at micro, mezzo and macro levels. The profession is highly grounded in the principles of social justice and human rights. Social work professionals utilize social capital concepts such as solidarity, social cohesion, social interaction and social networks, to enhance the capacity of individuals, groups, communities and organizations to ensure social development. In the profession of social work, social capital is a very important concept.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Social work:** Social work it is an academic discipline and practice- based profession concerned with meeting the basic needs of individual and families. To enhance human well-being and help meet basic and complex needs of people. Social work refers to a service and practice that uses psychological sciences in having interpersonal interactions with people, especially from deprived social groups. Social work ensures provides social welfare services to people in need, help to attain fulfilment and help to stimulate social change in the society.

**Community Cohesion:** Community Cohesion refers to the ability to function and grow in harmony. Community cohesion means sticking together with the emphasizes on shared values, opportunities for all individuals regardless of the background. Community cohesion focuses on the relationship between the individual, and their community and the wider society.

**Conflict Resolution:** Conflict resolution is a method to facilitate peace; conflict resolution in social work is to mediate disputes between parties. Conflict resolution refers to the method that is used to resolve disputes between two or more parties. Conflict resolution can further be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute.

**Intergroup Relations:** Intergroup is a term that refers to both individual and different groups interacting together. The oldest definition of intergroup was propounded by Sherif (1966) Intergroup relations is defined as the existence of various relation among different groups, ranging from the spectrum of intolerance and tolerance approaches.

### **Theoretical Framework - Social Capital**

Social workers utilize the concept of social capital in carrying out their professional duties. Loeffler et al. (2004) define social capital for social work as a process of building trusting relationships, mutual understanding and shared actions that bring together individuals, communities and institutions. Putnam (2000) notes that if people lack money then they can give time strictly out of self-interest that can be harnessed through social capital in communities that need help. Putnam's theory of social capital presumes that the more people connect with each other, the more they will trust each other and the better off they will be individually and collectively, because social capital has a strong collective aspect. The social and economic system as a whole functions better because there are ties among the actors that make it up (Vidal and Gittel, 1998: 15)

Snowden (2005) argues that community social capital reduces community the reverse is also true: community distress suppresses social capital. Snowden (2005) also states that in general, events in the community and in the larger society can affect levels of engagement, trust and reciprocity by supporting or undermining pro-social norms and related social practices. Because conditions can improve or deteriorate over time, these can facilitate or frustrate normative belief and practices. Moreover, social capital is not static. The effective utilization of social capital is crucial in the building of community and institutional capacities in disaster management projects. Social capital consists of such concepts as social networks, social contacts, social cohesion, social interaction and solidarity. Three major stages are involved in creating and sustaining social capital and they are:

- ❖ Bonding within communities
- ❖ Bridging between and among communities
- ❖ Linking through ties with financial and public institutions including international organizations

## **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria**

**Bonding within communities:** The utilization of social capital starts with bonding within the community. Social integration, social cohesion, solidarity, networking, two-way communication, sustained interaction between and among the members, effective coordination of community activities, collaboration on and support of members' activities, the fostering of leadership qualities and giving a hand to other community members are all useful attributes for this bonding. These attributes can be cultivated through recreational activities, religious and spiritual gatherings, political and institutional affiliations, economic and business activities, the physical infrastructure and buildings, and psychological and social supports.

**Bridging between and among communities:** The next level in social capital formation is that of reaching out to other communities in the society. At this point, groups and interested citizens can form a coalition to identify the needs and joint collaboration efforts required to meet them.

**Linking communities through ties with financial and public institutions:** Researchers like Mathbor (2007) have revealed that historic, longstanding relationships that are developed among different elements of communities, the government and other organizations, including financial institutions and voluntary agencies, have generally assisted in mitigating the consequences of natural disasters. Their effective-ness in working together has proved crucial in mobilizing a community's resources, expertise, professionals and volunteers, before disaster strikes and in the recovery work that takes place during and afterwards.

### **TYPES OF CONFLICTS**

In the study conducted by Hussein (2019), the categorizations of conflict were enlisted as Intrapersonal conflict, Interpersonal conflict, Intragroup conflict, Intergroup conflict, however, social conflict, institutional conflict and political conflict were identified as forms of conflict by Ozsungur (2023).

**Intrapersonal Conflict:** This conflict occurs within an individual which occurs as a result of objections or hindrance to expression of motives or drives and cannot take the appropriate decision. Conflict within an individual can occur where there is no connection between roles and value systems, which could be role conflict or goal conflict. - Hussein (2019).

**Interpersonal Conflict:** It is probably the most common type of conflict between two or more individuals. Which results from differences between two people. This is due to cultural difference, orientation, belief and general dispositions (Hussein, 2019)

**Intragroup Conflict:** This is a kind of conflict among the members of a group. This can occur when some members of the group decides to work to achieve a different goal as other members in the organization. Difference in goal pursuit or a change to structure or system can result in intragroup conflict (Hussein, 2019). This conflict happens at the organizational level. Such conflicts may also happen between leaders with their followers or between managers and groups of subordinates. Furthermore, other causes that lead to this conflict are personality differences, power tussle, prejudices, biases, difference in perceptions (experiences, education, backgrounds and education), power and status differences, clash of interests, lack of information, role in compatibility, stress and scare resources (Whetten & Cameron, 2012)

**Intergroup Conflict:** Conflicts arise between different groups in an organization each seeking to accomplish their objectives, are called intergroup conflicts. Organizations are composed of interlocking networks of sections, work teams, departments, individuals, departments or groups. The individuals tend to form various groups when there is a demand for that (Hussein, 2019). Since conflicts happen because of inherent factors in the structure of organizations. Therefore, the intergroup conflict may not be too much naturally personal. These conflicts may be happened by the absence of mutual decision making, rivalries in resources, and differences in goals or perceptions, misunderstanding, competitions and a set of boundaries by team members to others which establish their identities as a team. Conflicts arise among different functional groups inside the organization due to their different objectives and due to several fundamental differences between various units of an organization within its operations, processes or structures (Hussein, 2019)

**Intra-Organizational Conflict:** Intra-Organizational conflict has four types including vertical conflict, horizontal conflict, line-staff conflict and role conflict. They have distinctive features; however, they can overlap, particularly with the role one (Hussein, 2019). Examples are vertical conflicts arise among the organizational levels (e.g. the superior - subordinate conflicts). Such distinct personal characteristics are often based on distinct beliefs, ethics and values; the surfacing of which may create conflicts (Hussein, 2019).

**Inter-organizational Conflicts:** Inter-organizational conflicts occur among two or more organizations, especially when the organizations have a point of connection one to another. Inter-organizational conflicts can result as an escalation from interpersonal conflicts, when the two parties are representatives of separate groups. This in most cases, these are treated formally or by representatives of government or local authorities (Hussein, 2019)

## **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria**

**Social Conflict:** Social conflicts arise when the equilibrium of individual interests is disrupted. Benefits allocated to disadvantaged individuals, groups, and those in need of care can lead to discord. The distribution of social work responsibilities such as counseling, rehabilitation, care, and education through affirmative action may create issues concerning justice. This equilibrium is essential for the overall well-being of society. Individuals' perceptions of justice are influenced by how they view balance within this trio of conflicts. Therefore, social workers should pinpoint the balancing factors that contribute to social conflict arising from affirmative action (Ozsungur, 2023).

**Institutional Conflict:** Institutional conflict arises over time due to the incompatibility and opposing situations regarding needs, ideas, emotions, thoughts, principles, interests, and views within an organization. Factors contributing to institutional conflict include organizational culture, climate, relationships between the organization and its employees, leader-follower dynamics, employee-workplace interactions, job roles, professional relationships, teamwork, project management, administrative management, and inter-organizational relations (Ozungur, 2023). Any element that obstructs institutionalization can lead to institutional conflict. This conflict negatively impacts social work. Issues related to hierarchical structures within public institutions contribute significantly to conflict. This reliance on the central authority for defining roles and responsibilities can have a detrimental effect on the sustainability and quality of services (Ozungur, 2023)

**Political Conflict:** Politics involves activities related to the governance of states, societies, and groups, grounded in human and institutional relationships. Gaps in responsibility, ethics, and discipline during policy development can lead to conflict. These activities help establish principles concerning status and power. The effectiveness of administrative power over the governed relies on the implementation of these principles. Many conflict resolution strategies did not align with local customs and practices, making them less effective in fostering genuine reconciliation among community members (Olademo et al., 2021; *Best Practices on Resolving Land Problems in Ogun State - Justice Dashboard*, 2023). Likewise, the influence of ethnic militias and political factors often exacerbated conflicts, complicating resolution efforts and undermining peace initiatives. Social work plays a key role in shaping policies within the social domain (Ozungur, 2023)

### **Challenges Faced by Social Workers in Mediating Conflicts and Enhancing Intergroup Relations within Communities.**

Alexander and Charles (2009) refer to the fact that social workers' openness to mutuality and reciprocity in their relationships with clients is subversive of social work practice norms, which warn against dual relationships. This puts workers in a potentially untenable position, caught between ideals of professional behaviour and their relationships with clients (Ruškus, & Kiaunytė, 2012). Perhaps unsurprisingly, high levels of stress and anxiety were reported by many workers in these regions. Ramon (2006) also opined that social workers perceived themselves as merely meeting their professional responsibilities in the face of violence; the majority saw this in terms of fulfilling their duties as professionals. They were proud of their resilience, and of the contribution made by the profession to a threatened society.

### **Challenges of the Social Work Profession in Implementing Conflict Resolution and Social Cohesion Strategies**

Social workers in Ogun State face several challenges when implementing strategies to resolve conflict and promote cohesion among groups in Ogun state:

**Lack of Training:** Many social workers lack adequate training in the specific techniques outlined in the guidelines, which can hinder effective application in real-life scenarios. The level of training of professional social worker ought to be raised to standard. Social workers need to be sent on courses locally or internationally to keep up with modern trends in the field of social development. Advanced training will take the profession beyond mere activities to a height of professionalism. In addition, partaking in social work should be based on academic and professional qualification as mandated by the professional body (Alamu, 2022).

**Shortage of Personnel:** There is a shortage of qualified individuals in the field of social work in numerous locations, where some have yet to receive formal training in this area. While they may possess degrees in arts and social sciences, they lack a recognized certification in social work. Often, they depend on self-studying through textbooks and gaining experience through practical work. This lack of training is unprofessional and undermines the integrity of the profession. (Idyorough, 2013).

**Resource Constraints:** Limited funding and resources affect the ability of social workers to carry out their duties effectively, impacting their capacity to engage communities and facilitate conflict resolution processes (*Punchng. com*, 2024). In the works of Alamu (2022), it was highlighted that the government's approach to welfare programs is often seen as simplistic. The Nigerian government, under previous administrations, has provided inadequate funding for the social work profession.

**Resistance from Communities:** Some community members may be resistant to new methods, preferring traditional conflict resolution practices, which can complicate the acceptance of the guidelines. (*Punchng. com*, 2024). Communities may perceive social workers as representatives of government or external authorities with ulterior motives. Also, historical neglect or exploitation by institutions can lead to skepticism about new interventions (Alamu, 2022).

## **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria**

**Recognition and Support:** Social workers often struggle for recognition within the broader socio-political landscape, leading to inadequate support from governmental and non-governmental organizations. The lack of proper recognition for social work significantly hinders the advancement of the profession (Agwu & Okoye, 2021). In fact, Adebayo & Akinyemi (2021) stated that a good number of social workers are migrating out of the country in search of better opportunities due to the government's poor treatment of employees. The work performed by social workers, from providing information to policymakers regarding insufficient resources and their allocation, is significant and demanding, yet they are less recognized for. This factor poses a challenge that impedes the successful implementation of strategies aimed at resolving conflicts in Ogun State.

### **Social Workers and Conflict Resolution**

Research by *Punch Newspaper* (2024) and the *Justice Dashboard's Best Practices on Resolving Land Problems in Ogun State* (2023) highlights the pivotal role of social workers in conflict resolution, particularly through mediation. Recent initiatives, including guidelines formulated by the Ogun State Government in collaboration with the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law, emphasize the importance of effective communication and mediation in addressing family and land disputes. These efforts aim to reduce dependence on conventional courts, further emphasizing the critical contributions of social workers to societal harmony and development.

Additionally, studies highlight the importance of training social welfare officers in conflict resolution techniques, which can enhance their mediation skills and improve outcomes for families facing crises (Babatunde Fajimi; 2023, Ogbanga & Bukie, 2024). This approach aligns with traditional conflict resolution methods that are often more effective and culturally relevant (Ogbanga & Bukie, 2024). Assefa (2005) in his research states that as long as there is a notion of society and existence of people, there is obviously bound to be conflicts; no matter the magnitude. It is a natural and unavoidable part of human existence; because humans pursue incompatible goals, interests, status, values, beliefs, that ultimately lead to mutual disagreements or conflicts.

### **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing in Resolving Conflict and Promoting Community Cohesion**

The International Federation of Social Workers in 2014 states that one of the important roles of social work in the promotion of social cohesion, from a social justice perspective, is reflected in the global definition of social work as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people (IFSW, 2014). Further in line with the definition by IFSW, it was stated that one of the core mandates of social workers is to foster social cohesion or community cohesion on the basis of social work principles, such as social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity. The concept of social cohesion has been considered an important, yet challenging objective, for social work, in general, and community sport, in particular (Sabbe 2019)

Promoting community cohesion is frequently mentioned in the field of social work which plays a fundamental role in addressing various complexities that can be found in different groups and society (Diereckx., et al (2024). The need for social workers in community cohesion and conflict resolution was further necessitated by the withdrawal of the government to decrease support as regards to the effectuation of social justice and, to enhance structures that will promote community cohesion, solidarity and democracy in the state (Kelly, 2011; Lorenz, 2013; Morel et al., 2012).

However, in the work of Forde & Lynch (2015), it was suggested that social workers have to take the establishment of community cohesion as an important objective that will enhance development of post-welfare states, while putting a strong focus on individuals, and simultaneously focusing on the community as the grassroots to address social issues, through the use of community development programs. De Corte and Roose (2018, p. 10) describe the role of a social worker as a policy actor, in which there is the "need for social workers to establish linkages between their task of providing individual treatment to citizens and a more structural approach to realize broader social reforms". Lorenz (2013, 2016) describes this function of the social worker as a policy actor, as the renegotiation of the relationship between the private domain of autonomy and individual responsibility and the public domain of solidarity, equality and democracy.

Social workers facilitate programs that encourage cooperation and reduce prejudices, biased mind, and leveraging the Contact Hypothesis to foster peaceful interactions among groups. Furthermore, social workers implement directives that focus on economic collaboration, and cultural exchanges that help mitigate conflicts linked to resource competition, thereby strengthening socio-economic ties within communities (Babatunde Fajimi, 2023)

### **The Role of Social Workers in Fostering Positive Interactions and Understanding Among Diverse Community Groups.**

**Mediators:** Social workers often are called upon to mediate, that is, to assist disputants in managing conflict and creating solutions across such fields of practice as child welfare and mental health, such problems as custody and divorce, and in related areas such as public policy and education. Standards of practice for social work mediators have been established (NASW, 1991) as cited in Keefe & Koch (1999). Social workers play an active role in fostering dialogue and reconciliation as vital components of community-based peacebuilding. They facilitate open and inclusive communication, recognizing it as essential for understanding, healing, and rebuilding trust within communities scarred by conflict. By creating safe spaces for dialogue, social workers enable individuals and

## **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria**

groups on opposing sides to engage in constructive conversations (Brigg et al., 2022). They guide the process, ensuring participants can voice their grievances, concerns, and perspectives in a respectful environment (Hancock, 2017). Through these efforts, social workers help explore shared interests, identify common ground, and cultivate empathy among participants, bridging divides and fostering the development of trust (Kilmurray, 2023).

**Indigenous Participatory Approaches:** Emphasizing local customs in conflict management fosters community ownership and acceptance. Training community members in these approaches can improve engagement and effectiveness in resolving disputes. Social workers actively empower communities to shape and lead the peacebuilding process, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability (Kilmurray, 2023). By facilitating this involvement, social workers help communities identify the root causes of conflict and co-develop customized strategies for resolution and reconciliation. This approach ensures that interventions are deeply rooted in the community's unique social, cultural, and political realities, avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions and promoting sustainable outcomes.

**Drivers of capacity building and community-led development:** Providing training for social workers and community leaders on conflict resolution techniques, such as mediation and negotiation, enhances their ability to manage conflicts effectively and promote peaceful coexistence. Alamu (2022) was of the opinion that social workers who are professionals should be engaged in the training of other social workers to attain professionalism, as well providing training on social issues to community leaders and groups. Social workers take an active role in promoting community-led development by facilitating community-based peacemaking efforts that link lasting peace with socio-economic development (Carmichael, 2023). They empower communities to identify their own needs, priorities, and aspirations, recognizing that local stakeholders are best positioned to lead these efforts. Through capacity building and strengthening local institutions, social workers equip communities with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to drive and sustain their development processes.

**Strengthening Social Networks:** Facilitating connections among community groups can build trust and solidarity, which are essential for cohesive communities. Initiatives should focus on bridging gaps between diverse groups through collaborative projects (Babatunde Fajimi, 2023). Social workers play a crucial active role in strengthening social networks within communities, fostering connections that promote resilience, mutual support, and collective well-being. They actively identify existing social ties and facilitate the development of new relationships by bringing individuals and groups together (Tapani, & Sinkkonen, 2022). Through community engagement initiatives, social workers create opportunities for collaboration and shared experiences, building trust and cohesion among members.

Social workers also work to enhance communication and cooperation within these networks, helping communities address challenges collectively. They empower individuals to leverage their networks for support, access resources, and tackle common issues, such as poverty, discrimination, or mental health challenges (Tapani, & Sinkkonen, 2022). By organizing group activities, workshops, and support groups, social workers nurture environments where people can share knowledge, skills, and experiences, ultimately creating a stronger, more interconnected social fabric.

**Community Mobilization:** Engaging local volunteers in social mobilization efforts can increase participation in community development activities, ensuring that initiatives are relevant and sustainable. The important function of social workers in community development starts with addressing various social issues through community organization. Initially, it involves identifying the alignment between societal needs or goals and the resources at hand to address those needs (Chidanand, 2016). This process fosters the growth of cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices within the community. Additionally, community organizers should focus on cultivating skills among members of the profession and raising political awareness. As a result, community members will become more empowered, leading to both individual and community growth.

**Empowerment Programs:** Social workers in Ogun state facilitate empowerment programs that encourage community members to actively participate in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging. According to Strydom (2010), it was stated that a social worker plays an active and vital role in helping families and communities take meaningful action, access essential resources, develop critical skills, and adopt behaviors that they have collectively identified as pathways to improving their lives. By working collaboratively with the community, social workers support individuals in need, guiding them to overcome challenges and move from a state of dependence toward empowerment and self-reliance. Social workers actively promote local economic empowerment by implementing approaches that strengthen resilience and address vulnerabilities contributing to conflicts (Kilmurray, 2023). They prioritize initiatives such as vocational training programs, microfinance schemes, and support for small-scale businesses, fostering livelihood opportunities and sustainable economic growth (Carmichael, 2023).

**Conflict Resolution Training:** social workers play a significant role by providing training in conflict resolution and mediation; social workers further equip community leaders with the skills needed to manage disputes effectively, by promoting harmony among diverse groups in the community. The duties of social worker is not only to resolve conflicts but also to train groups and communities

## **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria**

on conflict resolution processes. Babatunde Fajimi (2023) pointed out that the importance of training social welfare officers in conflict resolution techniques, which can enhance their mediation skills and improve outcomes for families facing crises. This in turn covers for manpower shortage in the field of social work.

### **Strategies Used by Social Workers to Promote Community Cohesion and Reduce Intergroup Tensions.**

Working with conflict is often at the core of what social workers do. In fact, social workers are increasingly practicing conflict resolution as a profession, whether in small family settings or in larger groups (Rothman, 2001).

**Negotiation:** Ruškus & Kiaunytė (2012) recommended that in conflict resolution, that there is the need for negotiation strategies that reflect an empowering, proactive, constructive, and optimistic method for addressing challenges, thus potentially leading to effective results or gradual progress over time. Social work practice involves aiding clients in fulfilling their needs and fostering functional, satisfying relationships. Keefe & Koch (1999) defined negotiation as “a voluntary conversation between two or more individuals aimed at educating each other about their needs and interests, sharing information, and developing a solution that addresses the needs of all involved. Employing negotiation strategies helps conflicting parties discuss their concerns and enhances their understanding of the issue from both perspectives. This illustrates that each party involved in a conflict is prepared to make concessions (Whetton & Cameron, 2014).

Negotiation process includes the following steps: identify the issue, examine the underlying causes, brainstorm possible solutions, and implement actions to resolve the matter. The negotiation steps are straightforward to understand, but putting them into practice during a real conflict can be challenging. According to Keefe & Koch (1999), not all participants in a conflict need to be present for the social worker to equip their client for effective negotiation. Given that the professional won't be there when the client applies the negotiation strategies, their role is more of a coach—helping the client get ready. The social worker can ready the client by showcasing effective communication techniques and by explaining the negotiation process (Keefe & Koch, 1999). In negotiations, social workers are positioned in the middle to work towards a mutual benefit while ensuring each side retains some aspects of their initial standpoint. The compromise strategy ranks second, following the cooperation strategy, as the most frequently employed approach by social workers and conflict resolvers (Alotaibi et al., 2020).

**Collaboration/Co-operation:** Effectively leveraging conflict can foster a conducive learning atmosphere. (Rabi, 2014) highlighted the importance of promoting collaborative strategies, as these approaches benefit everyone involved and enhance overall satisfaction among employees. In this context, each party in a conflict seeks to fully address the concerns of all involved, which is recognized as one of the primary strategies in conflict management and is relevant to social work. The cooperation strategy ranks among the most frequently implemented strategies in social work (Alotaibi et al., 2020). Collaboration as a strategy in social work fosters trust and the active participation of the diverse groups, and enhances working together to resolve difference, and promote cohesion (Aboyeji et al., 2021). Using the collaboration technique, emphasis is placed on active listening and empathetic communication, essential for understanding diverse perspectives and fostering cooperation (*Conflict Management Training*, 2024)

The cooperation/collaboration and win-win strategy is a deliberate and organized effort to optimize the objectives of both sides through cooperative problem-solving (Fisher, 2000). This approach prioritizes the needs and limitations of both parties instead of concentrating on tactics aimed at domination. The participants strive toward shared and overarching goals, which can only be achieved through combined effort. There is a focus on maintaining strong, long-term relationships between the parties instead of just seeking short-term compromises (Alotaibi et al., 2020). The win-win strategy demands a significant level of patience and expertise in interpersonal relations and conflict resolution (Fisher, 2000)

**Mediation:** Mediation involves transitioning the parties in conflict from concentrating on their positions to exploring their mutual interests – Keefe & Koch (1999). In the following discussion regarding the mediation process, the social worker tackles power imbalances by organizing the flow of information, thereby leveling the playing field for the less powerful individual or group. Agreements, which must be acceptable to both sides, can establish a power equilibrium and facilitate further changes in the interest of justice. In these negotiations, the social worker is guided by their commitment to social justice, ensuring that the process is empowering. A dedication to social justice does not undermine the mediator's role (Keefe & Koch, 1999). The National Association of Social Workers has established standards for mediators, framing it as a method of social work practice and describes it as "an approach to conflict resolution where a neutral and mutually agreeable third party assists participants in negotiating a consensual and informed resolution". According to Mayer (2018), “mediation naturally evolves from social work practice since its aim is to empower individuals in conflict to resolve their own issues, and it is rooted in fundamental social work theories and skills such as problem analysis, communication, and systems intervention”. If this assertion holds true, enhancing social workers' expertise through the development of mediation and conflict resolution skills would be beneficial – Kelly (2014). There are various roles for third parties that are particularly relevant for social workers. Typically, social workers act as formal third parties, meaning they are licensed, recognized as mediators by the parties involved, or legally designated to mediate, rather than serving as informal third parties (Keefe & Koch, 1999). Social workers possess training in areas like identifying and analyzing underlying interests, resource

## **The Role of Social Work in Enhancing Community Cohesion and Conflict Resolution through Intergroup Relations in Ogun State, Nigeria**

development, and option generation, making them well-equipped to address mediation and conflict resolution issues. The new guidelines promote mediation over litigation, aiming to resolve disputes amicably without court intervention, thus reducing the burden on the judicial system (*Punchng.com*, 2024). Recommendations advocate for community justice services and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms, promoting mediation and negotiation to alleviate the burden on conventional courts (Olademo et al., 2021)

**Role Playing:** Role playing plays a crucial role in aiding participants to comprehend conflict behavior, serving as a method for skill enhancement, process practice, and understanding conflict analysis. Every phase of role playing—preparation, introduction, action, and processing—holds equal significance for achieving its primary objective, which is to cultivate skills necessary for resolving conflicts. Keefe & Koch (1999) stated that social workers engaging in repetitive practice of both negotiation and mediation, followed by reflective evaluation of the experiences, is essential for building both confidence and competence in clients. Establishing a trusting environment where participants feel comfortable sharing personal conflicts and fully participating in role playing presents a challenge for the instructor. Additionally, it is important to allocate adequate time for repeated practice, along with providing feedback, discussion, and analysis (Keefe & Koch, 1999).

**Supervision:** To address conflict within or between a group, it is essential to obtain external assistance that is both methodologically sound and professional. A social worker involved in a multi-faceted approach to a social issue navigates intricate organizational changes, encounters conflicts, and deals with emotional responses. To address these challenges, it is crucial to foster and support the social worker's self-reflection, ensuring the environment and supervision provide professional guidance. Supervision serves as a tool to enhance reflective practices, enabling the individual (social worker/manager), the team, and the group(s) to comprehend both internal and external conflicts, which are influenced by individual circumstances and professional relationships. Through supervision, conflict is transformed into a discernible and reflective entity, empowering the social worker to foster constructive interactions, even in complex and contradictory situations within the field of social work (Ruškus & Kiaunytė, 2012)

### **CONCLUSION**

Social work practice emphasizes the dynamic relationship between individuals and society, with a primary focus on enhancing the quality of life for both. The profession operates on the premise that, despite the persistent challenges faced by individuals and their environments, human beings possess an inherent capacity for growth and development. This capacity positions individuals as agents of change who can shape their lives and contribute to building cohesive communities. Social workers must adopt a proactive approach, preparing for potential disasters rather than reacting after they occur. In Ogun State, social workers play a critical role in conflict resolution and fostering community cohesion. Utilizing their skills in mediation, negotiation, collaboration, advocacy, and empowerment, they address fundamental issues such as poverty, unemployment, and cultural differences, thereby promoting sustainable peace and social harmony. Through partnerships with local leaders, government entities, and community stakeholders, social workers build trust, facilitate dialogue, and encourage inclusive decision-making. Social work not only addresses immediate conflicts but also bolsters the community's ability to withstand future challenges, paving the way for enduring development. To enhance their effectiveness, it is essential for policymakers to prioritize capacity-building initiatives, provide adequate resources, and create supportive frameworks for social work interventions in tackling complex social issues.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

To improve the effectiveness of social workers in conflict resolution and community cohesion in Ogun State, it is recommended that the government invest in comprehensive training programs to equip social workers with modern conflict resolution techniques and ensure professional certification. This should be coupled with efforts to address the shortage of qualified personnel by encouraging formal education and certification in social work. Additionally, greater financial support and resources should be allocated to social work initiatives, with emphasis on fostering collaboration among social workers, community leaders, and local government. Promoting mediation and alternative dispute resolution methods should be prioritized to reduce reliance on formal courts. Furthermore, social workers should be empowered to engage communities in culturally sensitive, participatory approaches that build trust and ownership of conflict resolution processes.

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