



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Professional Social Work Interventions in Healthcare: Safeguarding Patient Rights and Strengthening Grievance Redressal Systems

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## Abstract

Healthcare systems are increasingly challenged to uphold patient rights, ensure transparency, and establish effective grievance redressal mechanisms in the face of complex institutional structures and power imbalances. Within this context, professional social workers play a critical role as advocates, mediators, and facilitators of patient-centred care. This paper examines professional social work interventions in healthcare settings with a focus on safeguarding patient rights and strengthening grievance redressal systems.

Grounded in social work values of social justice, human dignity, and ethical practice, the study explores how professional social workers contribute to awareness creation, rights-based advocacy, transparent communication, and conflict resolution between patients, families, and healthcare providers. The paper highlights key intervention strategies such as patient counselling, informed consent facilitation, documentation support, ethical mediation, and institutional liaison, which collectively empower patients to voice concerns and seek redress without fear of discrimination or retaliation.

Special emphasis is placed on the role of social workers in designing and operationalising accessible grievance redressal mechanisms, including patient help desks, grievance committees, and feedback systems within healthcare institutions. By ensuring procedural transparency and accountability, social workers help bridge gaps between policy frameworks and lived patient experiences. The paper also discusses challenges faced by social workers, including systemic constraints, role ambiguity, and limited institutional recognition, while emphasising the need for capacity building and policy integration.

The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach drawing upon existing literature, professional practice frameworks, and healthcare ethics guidelines. It argues that professional social work interventions are indispensable for strengthening patient-centred healthcare delivery and institutional accountability. The paper concludes by advocating for the formal integration of professional social workers into healthcare governance structures to enhance patient rights protection, transparency, and responsive grievance redressal systems, thereby contributing to equitable and ethical healthcare outcomes.

**Keywords:** Professional Social Work, Medical Social Work, Patient Rights, Grievance Redressal System, Healthcare Ethics, Patient-Centred Care, Hospital Social Work, Healthcare Governance

## Objectives of the Study

The present study titled “Professional Social Work Interventions in Healthcare: Safeguarding Patient Rights

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and Strengthening Grievance Redressal Systems” aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine the role of professional social workers in safeguarding patient rights within healthcare institutions.
- To assess the level of awareness among patients regarding their rights in healthcare settings.
- To analyze the accessibility and effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanisms available to patients in hospitals.
- To study the contribution of medical social workers in facilitating communication between patients, families, and healthcare providers.
- To evaluate the impact of professional social work interventions on patient satisfaction and grievance resolution processes.

- To identify the challenges faced by medical social workers in implementing patient rights protection and grievance redressal mechanisms.
- To suggest measures for strengthening professional social work practices and improving patient-centred grievance redressal systems in healthcare institutions.

## Research Methodology

### *Nature of the Research*

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. It aims to describe existing professional social work interventions in the hospital setting and analytically assess their role in safeguarding patient rights and strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms.

### *Research Approach*

A mixed-method approach is used:

- Quantitative methods to assess awareness, accessibility, and satisfaction levels among patients.
- Qualitative methods to understand lived experiences of patients and professional insights of medical social workers.

This approach enables a holistic understanding of both structural mechanisms and human experiences within healthcare settings.

### *Universe of the Study*

The universe of the study includes:

- All patients who received inpatient or outpatient services at Parul Seva Ashram Hospital during the year 2024
- Medical Social Workers and healthcare staff involved in patient welfare and grievance handling

## Sample Design

### *Sample Population*

- Patients (In-patients and Out-patients)
- Medical Social Workers (MSWs) working in the hospital
- Hospital administrators / grievance committee members (where applicable)

### *Sample Size*

- Patients: 120
  - Medical Social Workers: 8–10
  - Administrators/Committee Members: 5
- (Sample size may be adjusted based on feasibility and ethical clearance.)

### *Sampling Technique*

- Patients: Purposive sampling
- Professionals: Total enumeration / Purposive sampling

## Hypotheses of the Study

On the basis of the objectives and variables of the study, the following hypotheses are formulated:

### *Null Hypotheses (H<sub>0</sub>)*

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between professional social work interventions and awareness of patient rights.
- H<sub>02</sub>: Professional social work interventions do not significantly influence the accessibility of grievance redressal systems.
- H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant association between social work interventions and patient satisfaction.
- H<sub>04</sub>: Professional social work interventions do not significantly affect the timeliness and effectiveness of grievance resolution.

## Sources of Data

### *Primary Data*

- Structured interview schedules with patients
- Semi-structured interviews with MSWs and administrators
- Observation of grievance redressal procedures

### *Secondary Data*

- Hospital records and grievance registers
- Patient Rights Charter
- National Health Policy documents
- Journals, books, and government guidelines related to healthcare social work

### *Tools for Data Collection*

- Structured questionnaire (patients)
- Semi-structured interview guide (MSWs & administrators)
- Observation checklist
- Case vignettes (selected grievance cases)

### *Variables of the Study*

- Independent Variable: Professional social work interventions
- Dependent Variables:
  - Awareness of patient rights
  - Accessibility of grievance redressal systems
  - Patient satisfaction
  - Timeliness and effectiveness of grievance resolution

### *Area of the Study*

The study is confined to Parul Seva Ashram Hospital, Vadodara, Gujarat, during the year 2024.

### *Data Analysis Plan*

#### *Quantitative Data*

- Percentage analysis
- Tables and graphical representation

#### *Qualitative Data*

- Thematic analysis
- Narrative interpretation of patient and professional experiences

**Table 1:** Impact of Professional Social Work Interventions on Patient Rights and Grievance Redressal (N = 120)

Sr. No.	Indicator	Response Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Awareness of Patient Rights	High	72	60.00
		Moderate	34	28.33
		Low	14	11.67
2	Accessibility of Grievance System	Easily Accessible	68	56.67
		Partly Accessible	38	31.67
		Not Accessible	14	11.66
3	Satisfaction with Support from Social Worker	Satisfied	75	62.50
		Partly Satisfied	32	26.67
		Dissatisfied	13	10.83
4	Effectiveness of Grievance Resolution	Effective	70	58.33
		Partly Effective	36	30.00
		Ineffective	14	11.67

**Ethical Considerations**

- Prior permission from hospital authorities
- Informed consent from respondents
- Confidentiality and anonymity ensured
- No harm or coercion to participants
- Sensitivity towards patients' physical and emotional conditions

**Limitations of the Study**

- Study limited to one hospital setting
- Time constraints
- Findings may not be generalized to all healthcare institutions

**Significance of the Research Design**

- Evidence-based assessment of medical social work practice
- Strengthening institutional grievance redressal systems
- Policy-oriented recommendations for patient-centered care
- Contribution to healthcare social work literature in India

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Table 1, Impact of Professional Social Work Interventions on Patient Rights and Grievance Redressal (N = 120)

**Interpretation of the Table**

- Majority of patients (60%) showed high awareness of patient rights.

**Table 2:** Plan of Action for Social Work Intervention

Sr. No.	Area of intervention	Activities	Responsible person	Time frame	Expected outcome
1	Patient Counselling	Individual and family counselling, emotional support	Medical Social Workers	Daily	Improved coping and satisfaction
2	Rights Awareness	Display rights charter, conduct awareness sessions	Social Workers	Monthly	Increased rights awareness
3	Grievance Redressal	Operate help desk, assist in complaint filing	Social Workers / Admin	Ongoing	Timely grievance resolution
4	Advocacy	Represent patient concerns in committees	Senior Social Workers	Quarterly	Enhanced patient voice
5	Documentation	Maintain case files and grievance records	Social Workers	Continuous	Transparency and accountability
6	Capacity Building	Training on ethics and laws	HR / Social Work Dept.	Quarterly	Improved professional skills
7	Interdepartmental Coordination	Regular coordination meetings	Hospital Management	Monthly	Better service delivery
8	Family Support	Family counselling, referral services	Social Workers	As Needed	Reduced family stress
9	Digital Support	Introduce grievance tracking system	IT / Admin	6 Months	Faster complaint processing
10	Monitoring & Evaluation	Review intervention outcomes	Quality Cell / Admin	Bi-Annual	Continuous improvement

- More than half (56.67%) found grievance systems easily accessible.
- 62.5% respondents were satisfied with social work support.
- 58.33% perceived grievance resolution as effective.

### **Findings of the Study**

Based on the analysis and interpretation of data collected from patients, medical social workers, and administrators at Parul Seva Ashram Hospital, the following major findings emerged:

- A majority of patients demonstrated a moderate to high level of awareness regarding their basic healthcare rights due to regular counselling and guidance provided by medical social workers.
- Professional social workers played a crucial role in facilitating informed consent, explaining treatment procedures, and assisting patients in understanding hospital policies.
- Most respondents reported that grievance redressal mechanisms such as help desks, complaint registers, and feedback systems were accessible and functional.
- The presence of trained social workers significantly improved communication between patients, families, and healthcare providers.
- Patient satisfaction levels were found to be high where continuous social work support was available.
- Social workers actively assisted patients in documentation, referrals, and follow-ups, which reduced procedural delays.
- Ethical mediation by social workers helped resolve conflicts amicably and minimized legal and administrative complications.
- Despite their contributions, social workers faced challenges such as heavy workload, limited staffing, and lack of formal recognition in hospital decision-making processes.
- Training opportunities related to healthcare laws, patient rights, and grievance handling were found to be limited.
- Institutional support for integrating social work services into governance structures was observed to be inadequate.

### **Conclusion**

The present study on "Professional Social Work Interventions in Healthcare: Safeguarding Patient Rights and Strengthening Grievance Redressal Systems" reveals that professional social workers play a vital and indispensable role in promoting patient-centred healthcare and institutional accountability.

The findings demonstrate that social work interventions significantly contribute to enhancing awareness of patient rights, improving accessibility to grievance mechanisms, increasing patient satisfaction, and ensuring timely and effective resolution of complaints. Through counselling,

advocacy, mediation, and institutional liaison, social workers empower patients to voice their concerns without fear of discrimination or retaliation.

The study also highlights that structured grievance redressal systems supported by trained social workers promote transparency, trust, and ethical practice within healthcare institutions. However, challenges such as role ambiguity, workload pressure, and limited institutional recognition continue to affect the optimal functioning of social work services.

Overall, the research establishes that professional social work interventions strengthen the linkage between healthcare policies and patient experiences, thereby promoting social justice, dignity, and equity in service delivery.

The study concludes that the formal integration of professional social workers into hospital governance, policy frameworks, and grievance committees is essential for building responsive, transparent, and rights-based healthcare systems in India.

### **Suggestions of the Study**

#### ***Institutional Strengthening***

- Hospitals should formally integrate medical social workers into administrative and policy-making bodies.
- Clear role definitions and job descriptions should be developed.

#### ***Capacity Building***

- Regular training programmes on patient rights, legal provisions, and ethical standards should be organized.
- Workshops on counselling skills, conflict resolution, and documentation should be conducted.

#### ***Awareness Generation***

- Patient Rights Charters should be displayed prominently in local languages.
- Orientation sessions for newly admitted patients should be introduced.

#### ***Improvement of Grievance Systems***

- Digitized grievance tracking systems should be introduced.
- Time-bound grievance resolution mechanisms should be enforced.

#### ***Human Resource Development***

- Adequate recruitment of qualified medical social workers should be ensured.
- Workload distribution should be rationalized.

#### ***Monitoring and Evaluation***

- Periodic audits of grievance redressal systems should be conducted.
- Patient feedback should be systematically reviewed.

### **Policy Advocacy**

- Social workers should participate in state and national healthcare policy forums.
- Professional associations should advocate for statutory recognition.

### **Proposed Plan of Action**

Table 2, Plan of Action for Social Work Intervention

### **Implementation Strategy**

#### *Formation of Social Work Intervention Committee*

A multidisciplinary team including social workers, doctors, nurses, and administrators.

#### *Resource Allocation*

Provision of adequate staff, workspace, and budget for social work services.

#### *Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)*

Development of guidelines for counselling, grievance handling, and documentation.

#### *Training and Orientation*

Regular induction programmes for new staff and refresher training for existing staff.

#### *Stakeholder Participation*

Involvement of patients, families, and community representatives.

#### *Monitoring Mechanism*

Monthly reporting and performance review.

#### *Feedback System*

Periodic patient satisfaction surveys.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research article. The research was conducted purely for academic and scholarly purposes, and no financial or personal relationships influenced the research outcomes.

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