

Introduction to Mediation in Social Work Practice

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Received: 28/11 / 2023 ; Accepted: 08 /03 / 2024

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Abstract: We aim through this study to present the process of mediation as a professional practice adopted by social work, in pursuit of providing solutions to resolve conflicts that individuals and communities encounter in their daily lives. This is achieved by providing a broader understanding of the concept of social mediation, as well as the bases, mechanisms and skills adopted in the field of social work, including the stages of its implementation.

Keywords: Social Work; social mediation; Mediator; Both sides of the conflict; Mediation mechanisms.

الملخص: مدخل الوساطة في ممارسة الخدمة الاجتماعية

نسعى من خلال هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم عملية الوساطة كممارسة مهنية تعتمد على الخدمة الاجتماعية، سعياً إلى وجود حلول لتسوية النزاعات التي تعترض الأفراد والجماعات في حياتهم اليومية. يأتي هذا من خلال تقديم فهم أوسع لمفهوم الوساطة الاجتماعية وكذا الأسس والآليات والمهارات التي تعتمدها في مجالات الخدمة الاجتماعية إلى جانب مراحل تطبيقها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخدمة الاجتماعية؛ الوساطة الاجتماعية؛ الوسيط؛ طرفي النزاع، آليات الوساطة.

Introduction

Social work is considered one of the specialties in humanities that emerged as a result of the complexity of life and increasing pressures, amidst the developments witnessed by society. Whereby the latter faced many problems that traditional systems were unable to address. Social work is provided according to a set of professional activities performed by social workers and other professionals, with the aim of helping individuals and groups develop their capabilities and invest them in improving their social performance and strengthening their social ties. It is noteworthy that the latter is not stable, but is vulnerable to all kinds of tension, disorder, and disintegration. This led to the necessity of searching for mechanisms to maintain harmony between individuals and groups, rejecting differences, disputes, and intolerance of opinion. We state that one of the most important of these mechanisms is mediation that does not conflict with the objectives of Islamic teachings, as it calls and urges the spread of charity and tolerance among members of society.

Regarding mediation as a professional practice within the modern approaches to social work is due to the fact that the latter seeks “to provide services to individuals, families, and groups, and help them manage social problems, and alleviate or solve these problems” (Mohamed Al-Badawi Al-Safi, 2011, p18). Similar to what mediation seeks to provide in order to address conflicts and disagreements that arise between members of society, as they represent a dysfunction or disintegration in the interconnection between individuals.

Given the effectiveness of mediation in such problems, we discern that it has attracted the attention of many countries and organizations, as a means of facilitating dialogue and alleviating the intensity of conflict between the disputants, in an effort to find satisfactory and fair solutions to their differences. In light of this importance, the resort to mediation is no longer limited in its political and legal sphere. Rather, it is being used in the fields of social work, including in the family sphere in terms of family disputes, and in the school sphere in terms of school dropout, as well as in the medical and other spheres, under the name of social mediation.

The multiplicity of mediation sphere ascertains the difference in the nature of the conflict from one sphere to another. Conflict within the family is not the same as within the school or another social institution. “It is unique in its characteristics, level of intensity, and nature of its subject. However, it often shares many common characteristics with other conflicts. Such as feelings of anger, frustration and loss of communication” (Sukar, 2023 p20). A fact, which confirms the difference in the mechanisms for implementing social mediation.

Due to the fact that this type of mediation is a modern concept in the social field in general and in the field of social

work in particular, this study comes to delve deeper into the concept as an approach to social work, by answering the following questions:

Research questions:

- What is social mediation, and what concepts are relevant to it?
- What are the spheres of mediation in social work practice?
- What are the bases of mediation in social work practice?
- What are the mediation mechanisms in social work practice?
- What are the skill requirements for practicing social mediation?
- What are the procedures and stages of social mediation?

What is social mediation?

Presenting the meaning of social mediation lies in defining it according to the literature that has dealt with it, and then extracting the most important characteristics that distinguish it from other concepts. In addition to presenting the most important concepts that are similar in meaning:

Definition of social mediation

It is a concept composed of two parts, mediation, and social, so it is mediation in its social dimension and implemented in the field of social work. Its definition is based in understanding and defining mediation first:

Linguistic definition of mediation: to mediate between two or more people, meaning mediation between disputants to resolve conflicts between them (Ben Muhammad Al-Omran, 2013, p97). Meaning searching for a compromise that satisfies both disputants in order to avoid

violence and intolerance between them. Notably, mediation in this sense was mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in the Almighty's saying: "Thus We made you a moderate community, that you may be witnesses to humanity, and that the Messenger may be a witness to you." (Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 143) .

Mediation is jurisprudentially defined as "a method of alternative solutions to resolve disputes by reaching an amicable solution to the conflict outside judicial means through discussion and reconciling perspectives at the hand of a neutral person" (Barbara, 2011, p528). This definition establishes that the mediation process is handled by a neutral person, the mediator, using the method of dialogue to reach an opinion shared by both parties to the conflict, so they accept it as a solution to the conflict.

It is also defines as "a process in which a third party assists two or more people reach a solution stemming from them regarding one or more issues" (A. Silikio, 1999, p21). Indeed, the resolution to a conflict stems from the parties in dispute and requires their agreement. As such, the mediator's intervention is limited to the proper guidance of the two parties to the conflict.

Since mediation is not obligatory, it is defined as "a voluntary practice adopted by the parties to the conflict, and it indicates the acceptability towards the mediator who assists the parties to the conflict until they reach a satisfactory agreement" (Dweik, 2016, p34). Meaning that it is a service contingent on both the mediator and the parties to the conflict.

It is also defines as "a means of resolving conflicts through the intervention of a third impartial and neutral party who clears the existing dispute by proposing practical, logical and binding solutions" (Abdul Hadi Al-Akyabi, 2017, 106).

This definition indicates that the intervening person (the mediator) is required to be neutral and impartial. He must possess the skill to guide and assist the conflict parties to make their own decisions.

Since conflicts often lead to the deterioration of social ties between individuals and society, which is reflected in their aggressive behavior, it is through social mediation that these relations can be rebuilt. Undoubtedly, conflicts in their social context constitute a dysfunction within the social structure. "Disputes and conflicts bring destructive emotions, which can be transformed into positive ones within the course of mediation, or the perspective on the problem can be changed. Mediation helps to understand one's behavior and see the vision of life without dispute." (Malgorzata & Marzena, 2018, p. 140).

Professional intervention in such social crises, under the name of social mediation, is necessary in order to improve the status of the relationship.

Subsequently, we conclude that social mediation is "the process of building and patching social ties and managing conflicts in daily life, in which a neutral and independent third party, through organizing debates between people and institutions, attempts to resolve a conflict or establish a connection, because it is based on a people-centered approach" (Guillaume Hofnung, 2007). In fact, mediation in its social dimension is a practice of social work, the goal of which is to maintain social ties. It is also a means of rebuilding the social fabric, and its presence is not limited to resolving conflicts only, but also to improve social life in general.

Not far from the previous meaning, social mediation is defined "as a natural output of the practice of social work

because its goal is to enable individuals in a situation of conflict to reconcile and it relies on theories, approaches to practice, and skills for analyzing problems and communication” (Mohamed Quraira, Mohamed Brion, and Al-Senussi Saleh, 2020, p32).

As for our definition of social mediation, it is summed up as an approach to the practice of social work in its various fields. Carried out by the social worker as a mediator, with competence and professional skill that qualifies him to manage conflicts and disputes, in an effort to reconcile the perspectives of the parties to the conflict, away from the courts. Thus, their disputes are settled in an amicable manner based on mutual consent.

Characteristics of social mediation

We conclude from the previous definitions that social mediation is:

- A voluntary practice, as it is carried out with the impetus of both parties to the conflict.
- It is carried out in the presence of a competent and professionally skilled social worker (mediator) that qualifies him to manage conflicts and disputes.
- A method adopted by the social worker as an alternative to the courts in resolving conflicts .
- The art of conflict management and the skill of solving problems.
- A confidential process, whereby the mediator is obligated not to reveal any information stated by both parties to the conflict, in an effort to gain their trust.

- A neutral process, through which the mediator strives to guide and assist both parties to the conflict to reach satisfactory solutions without bias towards either of them.
- Mediation focuses on the interests, needs and rights of the parties to the conflict. (Nnaemeka, 2019, p. 31)

Relevant concepts

In the literature on the concept of mediation, several concepts that are close to its meaning have been mentioned and we list some of them as follows:

Conciliation: similar to mediation, it is an alternative method of resolving a conflict, through which a third party (the conciliator) is chosen to learn about different perspectives, and then make the optimal suggestion, and the parties are free to accept or reject it. This is in contrast to mediation, in which the mediator is neutral and directs the parties to the conflict in order to help them find solutions that satisfy both parties.

Negotiation: A means of resolving conflict based on the art of communication and persuasion, used by one party to the conflict in order to convince the other. This confirms that it does not require a third party, unlike mediation. Negotiation, then, is a matter of “consensual bargaining between the disputant, no third parties but a dialoging between them to reach a beneficial outcome. It is a bargaining relationship between disagreeing parties to reach an agreement.” (Nnaemeka, 2019, p. 29)

Judgement: It is also considered an alternative means of resolving conflict, and the ruling issued is binding on the parties to the conflict, while mediation is characterized by the nature of an agreement and an amicable solution that satisfies both parties to the conflict.

We note that what differentiates other forms of settling conflicts and disputes from mediation is the role of the mediator as a third party to resolve these conflicts. This is confirmed by Spencer and Brogan: "It is different from other forms of alternative dispute resolution-such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, and early-neutral evaluation- in that the third-party neutral, the mediator, is present and assigned a number of qualities that are not as evident, or strictly adhered to, in the other forms of dispute resolution". (Spencer & Brogan, 2016, p. 3)

Spheres of mediation in social work practice

Social work, as a specialized professional practice, is concerned with several spheres, which are the same ones in which social mediation is practiced. The most prominent of these spheres are the following:

The family sphere (family mediation): In this sphere, the social worker intervenes as a social mediator in an effort to narrow the range of family conflicts and disputes. As well as to reduce aggressive behavior between the two parties to the family conflict. This is conducted "by employing his newly developed skills in managing negotiations to help the parties to the conflict reconcile their perspectives and settle their conflicts amicably, based on consensus and compromise, away from litigation" (Mohamed Rifaat Qasim, 2016, p469). In line with what was mentioned, we point out that family mediation, or seeking to find terms of agreement between the two parties to a family conflict, is tantamount to rebuilding family ties and restoring communication between its members, given that family conflicts are one of the problems that threaten the social structure of the family and its stability. Such disputes and conflicts often result in family disintegration and separation.

Family mediation is defined as a facilitating process to resolve the conflict, where the family mediator, whether an individual or a group, intervenes to assist the family in reaching solutions. To also alter their methods of communication and negotiation, to move from a position of adversity to a position of confrontation and then to a position of cooperation and integration. (Family Mediation Canada, 2003, p. 8) Notably, the most important family problems that fall within family mediation cases include the ongoing marital disputes, family neglect, as well as non-payment of alimony and other issues. The mediator in such cases seeks to build trust between the spouses and reach an agreement regarding their family disputes to avoid divorce and taking the case to court. However, he is required to be familiar with legislation and judicial procedures, including personal status laws, as well as the clauses of treaties related to human rights, as well as women and children. He must also use his professional skills, including the skill of conducting dialogue, conflict management, and problem solving. Such a process requires specialized training in the field of social work science.

The school sphere (school mediation): Social mediation is implemented in this sphere as well in an effort to help students and educationists address issues that impede the advancement of the educational process. School mediation is considered “one of the mechanisms that is resorted to by various educationalists and those interested in educational and learning issues to reduce the problems and difficulties experienced by the school, and “school dropout” represents one of them” (Al-Sibai, 2013, p16). We note in the same context that the problems and disputes that the school is experiencing among its various groups have increased the need for focus and research regarding mechanisms that help “understand these disputes and clarify their nature by bringing together all parties concerned with the school and coexisting within it” (Al-Sibai,

2013, p25). This is what school mediation works to achieve to address many school problems, including school dropout, school bullying, school violence, and others.

The implementation of mediation in the school sphere as a pedagogical technique can be practiced by one or a group of school employees, or a group of students. They are required to grasp the skill of conducting dialogue between the parties concerned with the problem that hinders the progress of the educational-learning process. The parties may be from the group of students among themselves, or among the pedagogical group (teachers or administrators). The implementation of school mediation also requires an understanding of the underlying causes of the problems and clarifying their nature by bringing in the concerned parties who have an influence or involvement in their occurrence.

Therefore, school mediation can be learned by the student at school, if it is included as an educational course in his study program. The social worker may also specialize in the field of social work science.

Student sphere (student mediation): In this sphere, the mediator is from the category of students only, unlike school mediation, in which he can be from the category of school employees. Student mediation is defined as “a process of communication between individuals who share a specific problem, with whom a neutral and fair party cooperates” in an effort to uncover conflicts and conspiracy against the weakest and to prevent the escalation of violence between fellows within educational institutions, by discovering it and preventing with early intervention (Al-Ghatami et al., 2021, p218). This indicates that student mediation is a modern method adopted by students within their educational institution, to address the problems they encounter, including the threats to which students are experience from some fellows,

as well as physical, verbal, and psychological harassments, and other problems. As for the implementation of mediation in this sphere, it is conducted through the intervention of a neutral and impartial third party, which guides the parties to the conflict to solutions stemming from their own suggestions.

Bases of mediation in social work practice

Personal readiness: It means that the social worker (the mediator) is willing to serve others and help them solve their problems (Sayed Fahmy, n.d, p26). As well as having a sense of satisfaction and gratification from the practice of mediation under social work practice. The mediator's personal readiness is considered one of the indicators of competence in professional work.

Knowledge basis: It means that the social worker (mediator) possesses a set of knowledge about the research conducted to improve the professional performance of workers in the fields of social work in general and social mediation in particular. He must be familiar with knowledge derived from the social sciences, including sociology and psychology, “which enables him to understand the nature of conflicts, the dynamics of power and violence, patterns of communication in conflict and negotiation situations, the dynamics of negotiation in mediation situations, and issues related to cultural pluralism in society” (Mohamed Rifaat Qasim, 2016, p471). He must also be knowledgeable about the laws and procedures of mediation in all its spheres. In addition to religious rules and laws that call for reconciliation between people.

The value basis: It means that the social worker (mediator) possesses a set of mediation values, derived from cultural theories and attitudes, on which the mediation process is based, and are mainly represented in neutrality and confidentiality. Meaning, the mediator must commit to

objectivity and impartiality with both parties to the conflict. He must also maintain the confidentiality of the dispute subjects, and not disclose them to anyone outside the scope of the two parties to the conflict (Mohamed Rifaat Qasim, 2016, p472). Additionally, to commit to humility and fairness towards the parties to the conflict without prejudice in terms of religion and gender, and without bias towards one of the parties to the conflict.

Skills basis: It means that the social worker (mediator) possesses a set of skills, which help enhance his professional competence. He is required to have communication skills, “which are those abilities that enable the individual to use the knowledge and information he has to perform his role and achieve the objectives and functions of the communication process in the best possible ways and means to enhance his efficiency and improve his ability to work within the organization” (Sayed Fahmy, n.d, p26). Among them, we mention the skill of conducting dialogue, the skill of analyzing and interpreting information, as well as the skill of preparing a mediation report. In addition to the skill of guidance and assistance in reaching solutions, that satisfy both parties, to resolve the conflict.

Mediation mechanisms in social work practice

The embodiment of mediation in social work practice depends on employing a set of mechanisms, some of which are mentioned hereunder:

Communication: Mediation in general and social mediation in particular depend on the communication mechanism as “a symbolic and interactive method that serves mediation and creates psychological and moral support for individuals” (Mardassi, 2009, p142). However, effectively implementing this method to obtain the necessary

information from the parties to the conflict requires basic skills that are needed in a mediator. It consists of both listening and hearing, because the first is done using the ear while the second is done using the mind. It is feasible by focusing completely on what the speaker (the party to the conflict) is saying, and then the mediator goes over what he heard and listened to review the extent of his understanding of what the speaker said. We can also say that “good listening is the shortest way to understanding and grasping” (Abu Al-Nasr, 2009, p153). The mediator was able to identify the perspectives expressed by the speaker (the party to the conflict), and then discern the points that both parties share in order to reach a solution that satisfies both, which is confirmed by the following process.

Diagnosis and prediction: The mediation process depends on the ability to diagnose the situations of both parties to the conflict. This is feasible by the mediator’s knowledge of the subject of the conflict. By clarifying the ideas and demands of the two parties to the conflict, if they are ambiguous. To use the interrogative skill, by requesting details from both parties to the conflict and clarifying it using open-ended questions with interrogative forms –who, what, where, why, when and how– to gather information. Together with closed questions, which lead to a yes or no answer, or to a specific one, in an effort to clarify the speaker’s point of view and refine the statements (A. Silikio, 1999, p277). Thus clarifying the points of view and then summarizing the subject of the conflict in terms of points of disagreement and points of agreement, which helps the mediator distinguish the advantages of the proposed solutions to resolve the conflict.

Accompaniment: It serves as the foundation for social mediation. This is due to the presence of positive interaction with the parties to the conflict. The interaction enables

responsiveness between the mediator and both parties to the conflict, and secures their trust and respect for him and his job performance. In addition to bringing the parties to the conflict together with the mediator, this accompaniment also lessens their level of fear and violence.

Skill requirements for practicing social mediation

Skill is the cornerstone of social work practice, as it enables the mediator, as a social worker, to apply his knowledge and experience to better understand the issues behind the conflict, and to establish a positive interaction with the parties to the conflict. According to the literature on the concept of skill in general, and within the professional context of social work, skill is defined as the ability to perform a specific activity effectively and continuously over a period of time (Thompson, 2000, p. 81). In addition to the ability to use and implement professional knowledge, it allows for distinguished and successful professional performance. Therefore, it is crucial for the mediator to use a set of skills during his performance and practice of mediation, the most important of which are as follows:

Skill of conducting dialogue: It is also a skill predicated on other skills. The first is the skill of delivery, through which the mediator demonstrates his ability to speak to others by employing words that elicit their respect and appreciation. As well as the listening skill, through which he also proves his ability to understand and carefully consider what the speaker is saying. In addition to giving each party in the discussion, complete freedom to express their point of view without interruption or bias.

Skill of asking questions: The mediator must be able to ask questions that help the parties to the conflict provide facts and information that clarify aspects of the subject of the

conflict, and help provide details that explain the position of both parties.

The skill of drafting a mediation report: It lies in the mediator's ability to outline the information he learned during his interviews with the parties to the conflict, in –individual and joint– meetings. While drafting the report he must point out the demands of both parties to resolve the conflict.

Social mediation procedures and stages

According to Karl A. Slaikeu., one of the researchers in the field of mediation, said that the latter is conducted in five stages, which we summarize as follows: (A. Slaikeu., 1999, p80-81)

The first contact stage: In this stage, the mediator is appointed as a third and impartial party to assist and guide the parties to the conflict to reach a solution to the problem at hand that satisfies both parties.

The opening meeting stage: It is the session where the mediator and the two parties to the conflict are introduced. Moreover, outlining the rules that must be respected for the mediation process to be successful and to reach solutions that satisfy both parties to the conflict. Through this meeting, the mediator also explains the mediation procedures, assuring both parties of his commitment to confidentiality and objectivity.

Holding closed (individual) meetings: Wherein each party is heard separately with the aim of gathering information about the conflict issue and noting each party's demands. At this stage, the mediator asks open-ended questions that allow each party to narrate the facts, using mediation mechanisms and communication techniques, such as good listening and everything related to the skill of conducting dialogue, so that

each party recognizes the extent of interest in hearing what is being said. At the end of the meeting, the mediator takes notes.

Holding joint meetings: This is the session organized by the mediator, in which the parties to the conflict exchange opinions directly as a means of conveying messages between them. In order to avoid violent confrontation between the two parties to the conflict, the mediator seeks to ensure that one party does not sit opposite the other at the mediation table, but rather makes sure that each party is next to the other. (Consult illustrative paradigm for the mediation session). In such meetings, the mediator is able to take notes that help him diagnose the conflict issue and then predict solutions that satisfy both parties.

Conclusion of mediation: After being presented to both parties to the conflict, possible solutions are discussed in order to reconcile their perspectives and thus reach solutions that satisfy both parties.

Conclusion

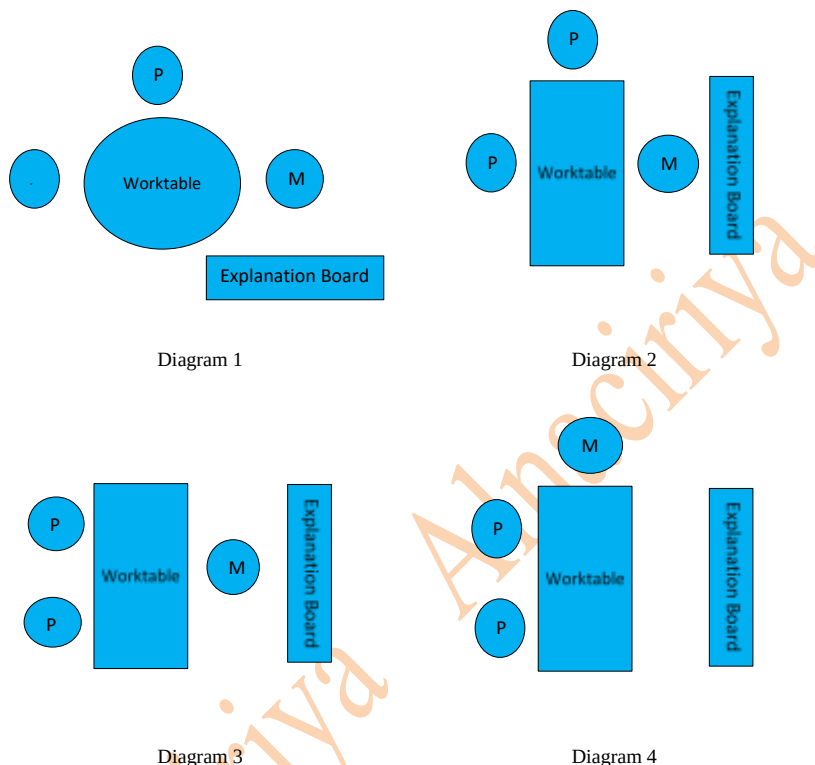
We conclude that social mediation, as an approach to the practice of social work, can be adopted as one of the modern mechanisms used to address many problems without resorting to the courts. It is characterized by reaching solutions rapidly, as well as enabling the parties to the conflict to choose solutions to their problems, under the guidance of the social worker as a mediator.

It also became clear to us from the above that social mediation, like any mediation based on principles and values, is contingent on both the mediator and the parties to the conflict. The former is required, while accompanying the parties to the conflict, to be neutral and objective regarding their issues, and to main their confidentiality. He must also

possess various professional skills to conduct the mediation process, the most important of which is the skill of effective communication, which is based on hearing and careful listening in an effort to diagnose the conflict issues, and then guide the parties to the conflict to reach solutions that satisfy both parties. It also requires the parties to the conflict to submit to the rules imposed by the mediator for a successful mediation process.

Clearly, this approach to social work practice concerns different spheres, the most important of which is the family, where the mediator works to narrow the range of family conflict and disputes, such as family neglect, marital disputes, and all that threatens its stability. In addition to school, which is no less important than the family field, wherein, the mediator aspires to help students and educationalists address the problems that they encounter and that impede the progress of the educational process .

Finally, it should be noted that the mediator in such spheres could receive specialized training in the field of social work. As it will provide him with all the knowledge and skills that will help him implement mediation and respect its stages in all fields of social work. Therefore, we suggest that academic institutions take interest in such topics that call for spreading the culture of mediation as an alternative means of resolving conflict. As well as including it in educational programs at various levels, and incorporating it as a specialty of social work.



Illustrative diagram of the mediation session (Karl A. Slaikeu, 1999, p99)

P: Party to the conflict

M: Mediator

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