

Considering the physical environment

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The scope of social work often require its employees to deal with clients in the social environment, at home, or in their private space. However, the significance of acknowledging the physical environment as a tool which the social worker can utilize in assessing and understanding the client better is rarely taken into account. Irene Gutheil stresses that considering the physical environment is an important aspect of social work, and should thereby be incorporated in its practice. The general assumption is that the physical setting largely influences a person's activities, attitudes and behavior.

Physical components of a room, such as a lighted lamp or the nagging buzz of the air conditioning system for instance, do in fact contribute to whether a person chooses to feel relaxed, anxious, or restless, and so on. The concept of sociopetality and sociofugality - which, in simpler terms, refers to types of environments that are either encouraging or less welcoming to social interaction - categorizes the physical setting in terms whose instances we arethat we are well aware of. Social gatherings, birthdays, weddings, and so on are examples of a sociopetal environment which encourages communication and is receptive to social interactions.

Places like hospitals, jail cells, or the event of a funeral or wake; on the other hand, compels the opposite, and exemplifies the sociofugal setting. What social workers need to observe is that these assumptions and seemingly irrelevant observations are important points that need to be looked at and incorporated in assessing the client and practicing social work. Regarding the physical environment as a constant part of dealing with the client is a key element which is important not to be overlooked. Awareness of this reality

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will lead to greater effectiveness in social work practice, and ultimately benefit all involved.