Drug Abuse from Social Work Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Social work plays a crucial role in restoring societal functions. This paper advocates for integral theory as a defining framework for the identity of social work. In the context of Malaysia, a nation characterized by its multicultural landscape and grappling with a two-century-long issue of drug abuse, the application of integral theory becomes particularly relevant. Through an in-depth case study, this paper aims to illustrate the practicality and efficacy of integral theory in addressing the complex challenges posed by drug abuse in Malaysia. The discussion delves into various facets, including social identities, ego development, ethnopharmacology, and the political climate of Malaysia, providing a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing drug abuse issue. By examining these elements, the paper seeks to underscore how integral theory can serve as a transformative lens for social work in Malaysia. Crucially, this exploration contends that integral theory is not merely a practical tool for establishing the identity of social work; it should also be regarded as the future trajectory of social work. As societal issues evolve, the holistic and inclusive approach offered by integral theory positions social work to effectively navigate the complexities and nuances inherent in addressing drug abuse and other pressing challenges in the years to come.

Keywords: Integral approach, drug abuse, substance abuse, social work, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Malaysia, a Southeast Asia nation with 33.2 million population, has persisting drug abuse issue for at least 200 years. This matter dating back in the era of British Malaya (the previous name of Malaysia) in 1800s. It inaugurated when the British colonial government approved the opium use among immigrants for the governmental profit (Arokiasamy & Taricone, 1992; Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). There were multitude of opium users registered in 1929 with the subsequent increase of 43.4% in 1941. The users plummeted from 52,313 to 75,017 in 12 years. Owing to the Vietnam war from 1955 to 1975, it initiated the consumption of heroin and cannabis among Malaysians. Heroin has grown to be the common drug in Malaysia (Kamarudin, 2007). Moreover, Amphetamine-type Stimulants (ATSs) is escalating into a lately challenge in Malaysia. Vicknasigam et al. (2009) reported 60% of opioid injecting users disclosed their ATS consumption was lifetime. Furthermore, drug trafficking exacerbates the drug abuse situation, which these two issues became the nation threats to Malaysia. This led to the government

incarcerating drug abusers. In addition, the offenders were given two (2) year drug treatment in prison. Nevertheless, the program led to a high relapse rate. There was 70% to 90% of drug users relapsed after the first-year discharge (Singh et al., 2013). To sum it up, Malaysia had led the effort to mitigate the national drug abuse issue, yet the outcome appeared to be poor (Abdalrazak et al., 2021).

Social work is an unequivocal profession to free society from drug abuse. Social workers are dedicated to restoring positive functioning in individuals, community, and even nation. Their efforts are comprehensive in addressing both the individual and societal aspects of drug abuse. At the micro level, social workers engage in drug addiction interventions. The interventions are evidence-based, such as motivational interviewing and behavioral therapy. They work directly with clients by providing them with counseling and therapy to break free the addiction of their clients. Alternatively, social workers recognise the importance of macro level intervention on drug abuse. They participate in drug abuse research, such as studying causes and patterns of drug abuse in society. Gaps in existing treatment approaches can be identified through social work research, which leads to a more effective strategy to tackle drug abuse in society. Besides, social workers play a critical role in drug abuse policy making at the macro level. They collaborate with policymakers to formulate policies that address harm reduction and prevention. As a result, social workers create a society that has low prevalence of drug abuse and support drug addicts in their recovery journey. Accordingly, social workers tackle drug abuse from both micro and macro perspective. Some social workers offer individualised interventions while others engage in research and policy making to create stable societal change. Their effort is indispensable in freeing society from drug abuse issues (Kirst-Ashman, 2016; Burke & Clapp, 1997).

Social work always strives for an integrative and holistic approach (Specht & Vickery, 2021). The field recognised the intricate interconnections between individuals, environment, and social systems (Andreae, 2011). In order to increase the effectiveness in social work, social workers were called to examine the individual struggles of their clients and the related societal factors that contribute to the issues of their clients (Moreau, 1979). It leads the field to have integrated knowledge from various fields, such as sociology, psychology, public health, law, economics, and etc (Trevithick, 2011). Nevertheless, these theories from various fields are often exclusive and partial. They commonly lack a unified theoretical base, which is difficult to address both individual and environment simultaneously (Albers, 2001). It is an ongoing problem that could be due to the profession itself embracing a broad spectrum of philosophies, values, and practice. Social workers strive to integrate theories and knowledge to address the problem of individuals and environments effectively (Glaser, 2001). Hence, the field has been struggling with the identity itself to specify 'what is social work' (Zufferey, 2012).

Despite the social work field, social work itself also is fragmented even though the field was known for its holistic knowledge. Micro social workers focus on individual and family interventions whereas neglecting the macro aspect of the issue that impacts the individual. Oppositely, macro social workers concentrate on policy, research, and advocacy and overlooking the individual aspects of the issue (Imbrogno & Canda, 1988; Larkin, 2006).

2. Proposing an argument

The argument formed in the present paper employed the integral theory which correlates with the integrative disposition of social work. Social work integrates various knowledge fields into practice, in both micro and macro level simultaneously. Thus, a unified theory is needed in social work to include all social work theories, which encompass micro and macro level. Ultimately, it transcends all theories and provides a meta perspective towards a social issue. Integral theory is a proposed framework that unifies and transcends existing social work theories. It is also practical in solving social issues (Larkin, 2006). The present paper could also benefit Malaysia as the country is developing harm reduction policy, law enforcements, and drug treatments (Nawi, 2021).

2.1. Integral Theory

Integral theory was created by Ken Wilber in 1977. It is an exhaustive meta framework that integrates all major knowledge fields, including the soft and hard sciences, and the humanities. Due to its comprehensiveness, integral theory is being employed in over 35 fields, such as business, ecology, economics, psychotherapy, and law. The framework is crucial because it gives holistic comprehension of reality than the current alternative approaches. It has the potential to deal with complex issues more effectively in the modern world (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2009). The integral theory approach is being conceptualised into the 4-quadrant model (Starnino, 2009).

2.2. The Four Quadrant Model

The 4-quadrant model was created by Ken Wilber indicates the 4 existing dimensions of reality. These dimensions are 'I', 'We', 'It', and 'Its' (Wilber, 2006). According to Wilber (2006), the existing inquiry methods and theories can be organised into this model.

Figure 1: The Adapted Form of 4 Quadrant Model (Larkin, 2006; Wilber 2000)

'I' Individual Subjective Social work theories: Psychodynamic theory, developmental theory, cognitive theory, attachment theory, and etc.	'It' Individual Collective Social work theories: behavioural theory and biomedical interventions
'We' Collective Subjective Social work theories: Social capital theory, Weber's theory, Durkheim theory and etc,	'Its' Collective Objective Social work theories: Marx's theory, Parsons's theory, socioecological systems theory, economics theories, organisational theories, and etc.

The left side of the model embodies subjectivity, which encompasses individual and collective. It deals with realities that can be understood through subjective perspective.

Contrastingly, the right side of the model includes also individual and collective, but it relates to realities that can be perceived through objectivity (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2009). The 'I' represents

individual subjective reality, which encompasses thoughts, psyche, belief, attitude, and emotions. Social work theories such as psychodynamic theory, cognitive theory, and attachment theory can be categorised into this dimension. The We represents individual collective, which includes cultures and worldviews. The dimension consists of social work theories, such as social capital theory, Weber's theory, Durkheim theory and etc. The It represents collective subjective, which contains observable entities, such as human body. The dimension includes theories such as behavioural theory and biomedical interventions. The 'It' represents collective objective, which is the society and societal systems (Wilber 1997; Fisher 2003). Social work theories, such as Marx's theory, Parsons's theory, socioecological systems theory, economics theories, and organisational theories can be concluded into this dimension (Larkin, 2006).

Wilber describes each dimension correlated with its own inquiry methods. The 'I' dimension held that truth can be claimed through subjective methods, such as phenomenology and introspection. The 'We' dimension associated with scientific inquires such as empiricism. Likewise, the 'It' dimension comprises collaborative and hermeneutics inquiries. Systems theory and ecological sciences instead belong to the inquiries of 'Its' (Starnino, 2009). It is notable that the quadrants are interconnected. In another word, the movement of one quadrant can influence another 3 quadrants (Wilber, 1998).

2.3. The Application of AQAL Model in Social Work for Drug Abuse in Malaysia

As aforementioned in this paper, Malaysia is multicultural country that has at least 200 years of drug abuse issue (Arokiasamy & Taricone, 1992). It is precisely a suitable case study of the integral theory application on drug abuse. It demonstrates the integrative approach of social work as well as serving as a guide of cultural competency for social workers.

2.4. The 4 Quadrants Model

"I' is the quadrant that studied most by clinicians. The applications in drug abuse treatment are psychological and religious interventions (Amodia, Cano, & Eliason, 2005). In Malaysia, there are interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy and spiritual drug addiction rehabilitation modality (Adam, Ibrahim, Ahmad, & Sudirman, 2011; Zakaria, Sasagawa, & Essau, 2021). The drug abuse treatment in the 'I' dimension often deals with cognitive, behavioural, and spiritual aspects of the clients. However, social identities of the client are getting more attention in the drug addiction treatment (Amodia, Cano, & Eliason, 2005).

Social workers should regard that the 'I' dimension can be influenced by 'we' dimension (Wilber, 1998). As a matter of fact, humans dictate their own identity based on their social groups. It is based on social identity theory (SIT) proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). SIT explains the adoption of social group identity is associated with the protection and enhancement of self-identity. When a group presents a threat to another group, the self-identification of an individual is enhanced. Often, SIT is employed in politic study (Islam, 2014). Malaysia reflects this phenomenon as this multicultural nation is built upon multiple ethnics with their own language and culture. During the era of British Malaya when Malaysia was colonised by the British government, the government shaped each ethnic's identity by their own profession. Malays was assigned to agricultural sector, Chinese were involved in business, while Indians were working in

the palm estates. This led to the unequal wealth gap between Chinese and other ethnics. Chinese were strengthening their wealth through business ventures whereby Malays and Indians were struggled with poverty. The tension between ethnic groups resulted in the riot of 13 May 1969. For the purpose of stabilising the harmony between ethnic groups, the government introduced policies such as new economic policy, national cultural policy, and national language policy. These policies are to eradicate poverty and disharmony between ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the ethnic tension from the past 50 years is still brought to the present time where each ethnic strives to maintain their own culture (Shamsuddin, Liaw, & Ridzuan, 2015).

Social identities are associated with drug use. Social groups that are approval of drug use increase the chance of the individual to consume drugs (Neighbors, Foster, & Fossos, 2013; Azman et al., 2021). Such phenomenon can be seen in Malaysia, different ethnicities have their own openness towards drug use. For instance, indigenous in Sarawak are open to alcohol use because they use it for social gatherings and festival. There was 30% of the indigenous adolescent reported when they drink alcohol, their parents did not see it as an offense. On the other hand, peninsular Muslims are forbidden to have alcohol because of their religion. Islam forbids their belivers to consume alcohol (Chhoa, Zakaria, & Abd Rahman, 2019). As a result, social workers should observe the way of 'I' dimension connects to 'We' dimension in the 4 quadrant models. In essence, the subjective individual is associated with subjective collective in integral theory.

In the 'I' dimension, the role of human development in drug addiction is often neglected by researchers (Amodia, Cano, & Eliason, 2005). Ego development theory is a significant topic but often overlooked by researchers. This is due to the intricate nature of drug use and its association with ego development is difficult for researchers to generate clear and concise hypothesis (Noam, Young, & Jilnina, 2015). There are various development scholars, such as Robert Kegan, Jane Loevinger, and Susanne Cook-Greuter (Wilber, 2006). The present paper selected Loevinger's ego development theory to explain its relation with drug addiction (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

Ego is an unified and structured personality assembly that an individual uses as a frame of reference for meaning making as well as managing life experiences (David et al, 2012). Ego development entails stages of self-reorganisation in progression. It diverged into 9 stages from E1-E9 and it categorised as pre-conformist, conformist, and post-conformist (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

Table 1: Levels of Ego Development and Examples (Hy & Loevinger, 1996)

Category	Stage	Description	Example: 'A wife should…'
Pre-comformist	E2 Impulsive	Societal rules and laws are poor understood; Actions were taken upon impulses; Exploit others for own personal needs	'...be good behaved.'
	E3 Self-protective	Can delay personal instant gratification; Able to comply rules for self-serving motive.	'...tidy the house if she is not in the workforce.'
Conformist	E4 conformist	Society's 'right' and 'wrong' is paramount to follow; belong to a group and exclude out-group	'...love her husband and nurture her

		members.	children'
	E5 self-awareness	The judgement of 'right' or 'wrong' depends on demographic differences; able to have self-conscious	'...feel she is needed and appreciated.'
Post-conformist	E6 Conscientious	'Right' or 'wrong' based on individual's emotions and feelings; able to feel guilt and concern about oneself in harming others	'...be a good parents, listener, lover, and business owner.'
	E7 Individualistic	Have a higher tolerance towards others who are different from oneself; able to differentiate inner world and outer world; capable to think in long term; having deeper and more intense interpersonal relationships	'...try to understand her marriage partner's feeling.'
	E8 Autonomous	Freedom from striving for over-achievement; searching for fulfilment in oneself; recognise human is complex; capable to tolerate paradoxes and ambiguity	'...develop oneself and try not to become everything to everyone.'
	E9 Integrated	Self-actualisation; not fully characterised	Not fully characterised.

There were studies highlighted its significance in drug abuse treatment which requires the attention of social workers. Suchman et al. (2008) concluded there were no opiate users, male nor female, were found in the higher ego development after reviewed available studies on drug abuse and ego development. Fineman et al. (1997) found women with low SES status and low ego development were more likely to engage in drug abuse compared to women with low SES status and high ego development. 41% of them are pre-conformist and 4% of them are post conformist. Luthar et al. (2001) studied the relationship between distress, ego development, and drug abuse. The study highlighted the negative association between ego development and drug abuse among minority women with low SES status. However, women with high ego development and high distress are more likely to engage in drug abuse compared to women with low ego development. Furthermore, Du Mont (1988) found ego development was negatively associated with risky behaviour, such as drug use among adolescent girls.

The major concern of social work is to be sensitive and responsive to the ever-changing human systems (Islam et al., 2019; Azman et al., 2020). Therefore, it is highly dependent on social workers' ability to understand the systems (Ali et al., 2020; Rashid et al., 2020). Human action is one of the complex systems which cannot be interpreted by social workers solely based on their perceptual clues, but many social workers interpret clients by their perceptual clues (Ali et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2019). Social workers should get into the client's frame of reference. Ego development is a supported theory to understand clients' frame of references. A sentence completion test can be distributed to clients to understand their current ego development. The intervention that tailors around the clients should be based on their ego development. For instance, clients who are at a lower stage of development could not reflect on their feelings, the social

worker should not talk about it as their development is not enough to understand the reflection of feelings. However, the social worker should formulate an intervention to open the client's experience to feeling his or her emotions. Nevertheless, social workers should note that higher development are not excluded from psychopathology, but they are more reflective in their personal experience (Young-Eisendrath, 1982).

Social workers should also focus on the association between the 'We' dimension and 'It' dimension. Precisely, the ethnicity of individuals influences the physiology of individuals. Biological research has previously viewed the human body as unitary. In other words, human bodies were alike in the biomedical field and thus the treatments for patients were homogenous. Nevertheless, there is an increasing research recognition that different sexes and ethnicities have varied enzymes involved in the metabolism of drug (Amodia, Cano, & Eliason, 2005). Bhandari and Dutta (2018) hold ethnopharmacology which is the genetic attributes of individuals that determine their drug response is based on genetic, ethnicity and culture. This is due to the CYP2D6 gene that influence the enzyme activity when consuming drugs. There is 1% of Chinese who found have twice enzymes activity compared to normal metabolisers. Dietary culture is one of the most important factors in drug metabolism (Emmerich, Fatalo, & Acharya, 2016). There were studies on the drug metabolism of South Asians before after their immigration to England. Their metabolism of CYP1A2 substrates changed from low to high after immigration. This is due to high protein diet in Western countries enhanced the speed of metabolism among residents. Furthermore, medication is mainly produced by the Western Countries on the sample of young white males. Any outlier in the data has regarded as 'noise' (Bhandari & Dutta, 2018). Hence, social workers should pay attention to this issue and advocate the personalised medication based on ethnicities in Malaysia.

The approach of integral theory should address the political climate of drug abuse in the 'Its' dimension (Amodia, Cano, & Eliason, 2005). Malaysia was known as zero-tolerance to drugs and the country is changing its strict stance into more rational approach. According to dangerous drug act 1952, individuals who are convicted of drug trafficking act can be sentenced to death. In spite of that, the former Minister of Health, Dzulkefly Ahmad called for removing the death penalty and replace it with public health approach (Kincaid, 2019). For incarcerated drug addicts, Malaysia priortises rehabilitation programs in prison. Nevertheless, the result was poor. There is a large amount of drug users who return to prison multiple times throughout their lifetime. This is due to difficulty adapting to life outside of prison. They face discrimination and stigma after their post-prison life (Cheah et al., 2020).

Social justice should be incorporated into drug addiction treatment for social workers (Amodia, Cano, & Eliason, 2005). The foundation of social justice is a social movement which is based on anti-discriminatory practice. Social workers could select mental health survivors' movement in this issue. Mental health survivors' movement describes mental health system is highly oppressive and it may cause difficulties for individuals with mental illness (Thompson, 2002). It is important to note that drug addiction is a mental illness (Nussbaum, 2022). In Malaysia, low empathy and inexperienced mental health staff resulted a higher level of frustration among mental health patients (Low & Lee, 2015). Not to mention, the country is experiencing high discrimination against drug addicts, which causes them to have difficulties reintegrating into society. However, it is possible to lower the discrimination by educating the public that drug addiction is a treatable

neurological disease (Navanethan, 2021). Hence, it is clear to see that the 'Its' dimension influences the 'We' dimension as mental health survivors' movement changes the perspective of the Malaysian public (i.e., the 'we' dimension) and brings positive overspill effects towards drug addicts in Malaysia (ie., the 'I' dimension).

Social workers should take cautious step in addressing political climate in applying intervention on drug abuse issue in Malaysia. Social justice can be viewed can be confrontational in Malaysia. Many non-profit organisations depend on government funding thus any questioning towards the government can be misunderstood as opposing the government. Voice for human rights in Malaysia have been restricted over the recent years (Jayasooria, 2016).

3. Discussion

Social work has always struggled for its own identity, and it lack a unified theory to integrate all various fields (Zufferey, 2012). In order to resolve the issue, the contemporary social workers adopted postmodernism as the social work framework. Postmodernism describes knowledge as subjective, which is constructed by society. It highlights knowledge is interposed by culture, social, and political assumption (Halim et al., 2020). Likewise, the objective reality is deconstructed as knowledge has been understood through individual subjectivity in the view of postmodernism. The approach is beneficial to provide social workers the critical reflection on questioning their understanding towards social issues (Mattsson, 2014). For this reason, the major stance of postmodernism is relativism (Diaconu, 2014). Relativism viewed knowledge is highly dependent on societal contexts and individual experiences (MacFarlane, 2011). Nonetheless, relativism had went extreme that the philosophy itself claims there is no ultimate truth in the reality. This extreme relativism further leads the social work field into a state of no identity. In this contemporary world, Ken Wilber's integral theory offers integralism. Its intent is to advance a more valid and reliable reality where social work can honour existing inquiry methods and body of knowledge by demonstrating all partial truths are associated with each other's. It also provides integration of knowledge rather than adopting the usual eclecticism in social work (Thomas, 2004).

Holon is the major concept in integral theory. It was coined by Koestler (1968) and popularised by Wilber (2000). The concept is to describe systems that are simultaneously the whole and the parts of a larger system. For example, an apple is a whole and also a part of an apple tree. Each holon conserves its own autonomy as a whole while concurrently having interconnection with other parts. Hence, when an individual maintains her impartiality, she interacts with other contexts (e.g., culture and politics) in unison (Wilber, 2000). Likewise, the one dimension moving in the 4-quadrant model of integral theory impacts the other 3 dimensions (Wilber, 1998).

Meanwhile, most social workers adopted the ecological system models which help them to recognise individuals develop within the family, society, and nation (Schweiger & O'Brien, 2005). The ecological systems model was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1989). It is a framework to understand the way individuals develop and their interactions with the environment. The model emphasises the multiple layers of environment that influence the development of a human. It consists of 5 systems, which are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Nevertheless, the models themselves could not provide specific strategies to

intervene on the issues of clients (Wakefield, 1996). Furthermore, the model emphasises more on the 'its' dimension, which is still not a fully integrative model. The 4-quadrant model provides mutual interaction between the individual and the environment, there is no need for compartmentalisation between the individual and the environment when social workers implementing interventions. Social workers may employ integral theory to obtain a meta perspective that can ground the practice on a public issue (Larkin, 2006).

The case study of the present paper demonstrates the application of a public issue based on integral theory. Drug abuse is a difficult public issue, especially in Malaysia (Abdul Razak, 2021). The present paper demonstrated the singular issues that faced by Malaysia (e.g., multiculturalism and discrimination) and using the 4-quadrant model to solve the drug abuse issue in social work perspective. The model showed the 4 dimensions are influential to each other's in drug abuse. In another word, the partial truths of drug abuse, such as concluding the issue to individual, society, or nation can be integrated into one unified view. Thus, the improvements in one dimension from the 4 quadrants showed the improvements in another 3 dimensions. It is to notable that 'Its' dimension is highly influential towards the other 3 dimension in drug abuse issue, especially in Malaysian context. Malaysia had announced its stance on drug abuse from stringent to public health approach (Kincaid, 2019). According to McVay et al. (2004), drug treatment is effective in cost. It is also able to reduce drug abuse and recidivism significantly compared to incarceration. For Malaysia, the nation could produce better outcomes for individuals (I.e., I dimension and it dimension) and society (I.e., we dimension) when they adopt drug addiction treatment and gradually transition away from imprisonment.

The 4-quadrant model of integral theory gives social workers a comprehensive view on a social issue, especially the drug abuse issue in Malaysia. The theory allows social workers to understand deeper on the issue and to develop a more effective intervention. Integral theory also provides social work with a solid and reasonable identity. While integral theory is a relatively new theory, it has the potential to shape the future of social work.

4. Conclusion

Malaysia is experiencing a serious drug abuse issue. The drug issue has persisted since two (2) centuries ago in this country. Social work is a critical profession to mitigating this issue. However, it faces its own challenges. Social work is a diverse field that integrates various knowledge and practices from different disciplines. This approach leads to a lack of identity.

Integral theory, especially the 4-quadrant model, offer a better approach for social work to shape its identity and effectively addressing the drug abuse issue in Malaysia. The 4-quadrant model is a meta theory that is able to integrate existing theories, practices, and inquires. Also, it shows the interaction between individuals and environments (I.e., the mutual interaction between the 4 dimensions). The model helps social workers to develop a more inclusive and integrative approach to addressing drug abuse in Malaysia. By adopting integral theory, social workers can develop the identity of social work and have more effective interventions towards a public issue.

Ethics Statement

Fundings

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflict of interests.

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