



Social Work Entrepreneurship As A Practice Model For Community Social Work In The Well-Being Sector: A Case Study Of 'Peace Hub' In Kerala

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Abstract: Community social work is a core dimension of professional social work practice that targets communities as both the setting and the focus of interventions across various fields. Social work entrepreneurship is an institutionalized practice model that integrates the professionalism of social work with the innovation and social commitment of entrepreneurship. This case study examines Peace Hub, a social work enterprise in Kerala, as an innovative practice model in addressing the well-being needs of different communities. Peace Hub integrates social work principles with entrepreneurial strategies to offer innovative well-being interventions tailored to the local contexts.

The study employed thematic analysis to identify and extract themes from key informant interview and document analysis. The key themes that have emerged include overcoming motivational challenges to be a social work entrepreneur, community interventions, and the well-being outcomes. By examining Peace Hub's journey from inception to present-day, this case study contributes to the broader discourse on innovative practice models for community social work and its role in fostering wellbeing in local contexts. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing the scalability of similar models, suggesting that community-rooted social work enterprises hold significant potential for addressing well-being challenges.

Index Terms - Social work entrepreneurship, community social work, practice model, well-being, Kerala, case study.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection of social work and entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical area of scholarly and professional interest, particularly in contexts where resource constraints challenge conventional welfare systems (Pradeep, 2021). Social work entrepreneurship represents a hybrid practice model that merges the values, ethics, and intervention methods of professional social work with the innovation, sustainability, and scalability commonly associated with entrepreneurial approaches (Mini, 2020; Pradeep, 2021). Within the well-being sector—encompassing mental health, psychosocial support, livelihood security, and community development—this integration offers the potential to deliver solutions that are contextually grounded, economically viable, and responsive to evolving community needs.

Kerala, India, with its high social development indicators, robust civil society networks, and history of community participation, presents fertile ground for such innovations in social service delivery (Mini, 2020). Yet, despite these progressive indicators, the state continues to face persistent and emerging challenges in areas such as mental health, social isolation, unemployment, and livelihood insecurity (Peace Hub International,

n.d.). These realities underscore the need for innovative, community-rooted practice models that go beyond reactive service provision to foster resilience, empowerment, and sustainable well-being.

Against this backdrop, Peace Hub—a Kerala-based social work enterprise—has operationalised the principles of social work entrepreneurship to design and implement interventions that blend professional social work methodologies with adaptive entrepreneurial strategies (Peace Hub International, n.d.). Founded with the mission of “transforming lives and communities through innovative well-being interventions,” Peace Hub employs a participatory, asset-based approach, delivering programmes tailored to the socio-cultural contexts of the communities it serves. Its services range from mental health support and life skills training to community mobilisation and livelihood development, reflecting a multidimensional understanding of well-being that encompasses psychological, social, and economic dimensions.

This case study situates Peace Hub within the wider discourse on innovative practice models for community social work in the well-being sector. Anchored in an integrated theoretical framework—Ecological Systems Theory, Empowerment Theory, Social Innovation Theory, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and the PERMA Model of Wellbeing—it examines how the organisation conceptualises, implements, and sustains its interventions. The study employs thematic analysis of key informant interviews and organisational documents to explore Peace Hub’s developmental trajectory, thematic priorities, and impact on community well-being. By analysing Peace Hub’s journey from inception to current operations, this article contributes to the growing body of evidence on the potential of community-rooted social work enterprises to address complex well-being challenges while maintaining economic sustainability and contextual relevance

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Community social work is a foundational domain of professional social work practice that prioritises the collective well-being of communities as both the target and the context of intervention (Twelvetrees, 2018). Unlike individual-focused approaches, community social work addresses structural, social, and environmental determinants of health and equity, promoting holistic development that integrates physical, mental, social, and economic well-being (Ife, 2016; Banks et al., 2020). Within this paradigm, social work entrepreneurship has emerged as an innovative practice model that integrates the ethical and professional values of social work with the creativity, sustainability, and scalability associated with entrepreneurship (Tan et al., 2019). This hybrid model leverages entrepreneurial strategies—such as diversified resource mobilisation, context-sensitive service innovation, and market-linked sustainability—while maintaining a core commitment to empowerment, inclusion, and social justice (Yunus, 2010; Defourny & Nyssens, 2017). In the well-being sector, innovation is critical, and practice models that are participatory, culturally relevant, and adaptable to changing needs are increasingly recognised as essential for community impact (Mulgan, 2006; Pestoff, 2014). Social enterprises in this sector often combine livelihood enhancement with psychosocial support, ensuring that improvements in mental health and social cohesion are reinforced by economic stability (Nicholls & Murdock, 2012). Kerala, with its high human development indicators and strong traditions of civic engagement, offers fertile ground for integrated models of social work and entrepreneurship (Oommen, 2010). However, despite this enabling environment, disparities in access to mental health care, livelihood opportunities, and inclusive development persist, particularly among marginalised populations. Community-rooted enterprises like Peace Hub address these challenges by embedding professional interventions within sustainable, locally adapted solutions, drawing on the region’s socio-cultural capital and participatory governance traditions (Devika & Thampi, 2012). While literature on social entrepreneurship and community development is growing, there remains a limited body of work on social work entrepreneurship as a distinct practice model, particularly in the well-being sector in the Global South. This gap underscores the importance of case studies such as Peace Hub, which provide empirical insights into how professional social work principles and entrepreneurial strategies can converge to create sustainable, scalable, and socially just interventions for community well-being.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This case study of Peace Hub—a community-anchored social work enterprise in Kerala—adopts an integrated theoretical framework that combines Ecological Systems Theory, Empowerment Theory, Social Innovation Theory, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and the PERMA Model of Wellbeing. This multi-theoretical approach provides a comprehensive lens for analysing the organisation's conceptual foundations, operational strategies, and pathways of impact.

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) situates human development within nested environmental systems—micro, mezzo, exo, and macro—each influencing individual and collective outcomes. In line with this perspective, Peace Hub operates across multiple levels: delivering individual counselling and psychosocial support at the micro level, facilitating community engagement and peer networks at the mezzo level, and contributing to advocacy and policy dialogue at the macro level.

Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000) emphasises processes through which individuals and communities gain mastery over their circumstances, grounded in critical awareness, participation, and capacity-building (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Peace Hub's participatory, volunteer-driven, and leadership-oriented model reflects this principle, enabling community members to take active roles in designing and implementing interventions.

Social Innovation Theory (Mulgan et al., 2007) explains the emergence of novel, effective, and sustainable solutions to social problems. Peace Hub's hybridisation of entrepreneurial strategies with professional social work methods exemplifies this, generating locally tailored, scalable interventions that respond to context-specific needs.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (DFID, 1999) links well-being and resilience to the development of five forms of capital—human, social, physical, financial, and natural. Peace Hub operationalises this by enhancing human capital through skills training, strengthening social capital via community networks, and fostering livelihood security through capacity-building and resource mobilisation.

Finally, the PERMA Model of Wellbeing (Seligman, 2011) identifies five core elements of flourishing—Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. This psychological framework enables assessment of Peace Hub's impact beyond economic outcomes, capturing dimensions of holistic well-being achieved through its programmes.

By synthesising these five theoretical perspectives, this framework positions Peace Hub at the intersection of systemic responsiveness (Ecological Systems), empowerment and agency (Empowerment Theory), creative problem-solving (Social Innovation), economic resilience (Sustainable Livelihoods), and holistic flourishing (PERMA). Such integration not only strengthens the analytical depth of this case study but also supports critical discussion on the scalability and adaptability of similar community-based well-being initiatives in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine Peace Hub, a social work enterprise in Kerala, as an innovative practice model for addressing community wellbeing. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for capturing the depth, complexity, and contextual nuances of the organisation's operations, aligning with Yin's (2018) assertion that case studies are particularly suited for exploring contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts. Data collection drew on two primary sources: key informant interviews and document analysis.

Key informant interviews were conducted with the founder of Peace Hub. A semi-structured interview format was adopted to provide flexibility for the participant to narrate experiences, while still addressing the study's core objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This approach facilitated the elicitation of rich, descriptive accounts of Peace Hub's strategies, challenges, and perceived impacts.

Document analysis involved systematic review of organisational records—such as annual reports, project descriptions, training manuals, and other relevant materials. This allowed for data triangulation, enhancing credibility and enabling a deeper contextual understanding of Peace Hub's development from its inception to present operations (Bowen, 2009).

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. This process ensured a rigorous and systematic interpretation of both interview transcripts and documentary sources.

Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, confidentiality of responses, and anonymisation of identifiers. These measures adhered to accepted ethical guidelines for qualitative research (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001) and ensured the protection of participant rights.

V. FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of interviews and organisational documents revealed three interlinked themes that collectively define Peace Hub's approach as a community-rooted social work enterprise. These themes capture the organisation's entrepreneurial journey, its community-based operational strategies, and its holistic impact on wellbeing.

1. Overcoming Motivational Challenges to be a Social Work Entrepreneur

Peace Hub's inception was shaped by the founders' commitment to combining professional social work values with entrepreneurial drive. However, the early stages were marked by motivational challenges, including uncertainty over financial sustainability, societal scepticism toward social entrepreneurship, and the difficulty of building a professional identity outside conventional social work employment. The founders overcame these barriers through personal resilience, peer mentorship, and gradual capacity building. This persistence transformed initial doubts into a sense of mission, reinforcing their belief in the viability of socially driven enterprise models within the social work profession.

2. Community Interventions

At the core of Peace Hub's operations is a commitment to context-sensitive community engagement. Interventions are designed in close consultation with community members, ensuring that programmes address locally identified priorities. Activities range from mental health awareness campaigns and psychosocial support services to livelihood training, youth skill development, and women's empowerment initiatives. The organisation adopts participatory methods—such as focus groups, peer education, and collaborative project design—which foster local ownership and strengthen social capital. This grounded, inclusive approach ensures interventions are both relevant and sustainable.

3. Well-Being Outcomes

Peace Hub's interventions have generated multi-dimensional wellbeing benefits across its target communities. At the mental health level, accessible counselling and awareness programmes have helped reduce stigma and improve coping strategies. At the social level, strengthened peer networks, increased civic participation, and improved community cohesion have emerged as notable outcomes. At the economic level, skill training and livelihood support have enhanced income-generating capacity and financial resilience among participants. These outcomes demonstrate Peace Hub's capacity to integrate psychosocial support with socio-economic empowerment, fostering a holistic model of wellbeing.

Collectively, these findings position Peace Hub as a pioneering example of how social work entrepreneurship can overcome initial motivational hurdles, implement deeply rooted community interventions, and achieve tangible wellbeing outcomes. This integrated model holds promise for replication in other local contexts, provided adaptations are made to suit socio-cultural and economic realities.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight how Peace Hub's practice model effectively operationalises an integrated theoretical framework drawing upon Ecological Systems Theory, Empowerment Theory, Social Innovation Theory, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and the PERMA Model of Wellbeing. The three core themes—overcoming motivational challenges to be a social work entrepreneur, community interventions, and well-being outcomes—demonstrate the multidimensional and context-responsive nature of this approach to community social work.

Overcoming Motivational Challenges to be a Social Work Entrepreneur aligns with Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000), particularly in its emphasis on personal agency, self-efficacy, and resilience in overcoming systemic barriers. The entrepreneurial journey within a social work context requires navigating resource constraints, socio-cultural expectations, and policy limitations. Peace Hub's ability to sustain its mission despite these challenges reflects the empowering potential of social entrepreneurship, wherein both the organisation and its community stakeholders build capacity and agency (Peredo & McLean, 2006).

Community Interventions demonstrate strong connections to Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Social Innovation Theory (Mulgan et al., 2007). By tailoring interventions to the socio-cultural and economic realities of specific communities, Peace Hub addresses the interrelated influences of micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level systems on wellbeing. The application of innovative service delivery models—combining participatory engagement with entrepreneurial strategies—embodies social innovation principles, producing locally relevant and sustainable solutions (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008).

Well-being Outcomes are best understood through the dual lenses of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (DFID, 1999) and the PERMA Model of Wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). Peace Hub's interventions address mental, social, and economic wellbeing simultaneously, building human, social, and financial capital while fostering positive emotions, engagement, supportive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This holistic perspective ensures that wellbeing is pursued not only as an economic outcome but as a multidimensional construct encompassing psychosocial and relational domains (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012).

The potential for scalability of Peace Hub's model lies in its integration of all five theoretical frameworks. Ecological Systems Theory ensures that scaling is context-sensitive; Empowerment Theory underscores the need for fostering community ownership; Social Innovation Theory supports replication through adaptation; the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework ensures economic and resource stability; and the PERMA Model reinforces the centrality of sustained wellbeing outcomes. However, the study's findings also emphasise that scalability must preserve the balance between innovation, sustainability, and contextual grounding to avoid the dilution of community-specific effectiveness (Seelos & Mair, 2017).

In sum, Peace Hub's hybrid practice model demonstrates that community-rooted social work enterprises can effectively address complex and interconnected wellbeing challenges. By embedding theoretical principles into practice, the organisation bridges the gap between professional social work and sustainable entrepreneurship, offering a replicable framework for other contexts while preserving sensitivity to local needs.

VI. CONCLUSION

This case study of Peace Hub demonstrates that social work entrepreneurship can serve as a viable and innovative practice model within the well-being sector. By integrating professional social work principles with entrepreneurial strategies, Peace Hub has developed interventions that are contextually grounded, economically sustainable, and adaptable to evolving community needs. Anchored in empowerment, ecological sensitivity, social innovation, livelihood sustainability, and holistic well-being, the organisation has effectively addressed both immediate psychosocial concerns and long-term structural challenges in diverse communities across Kerala.

The findings indicate that community-rooted social work enterprises can address service gaps left by conventional welfare systems, particularly in resource-constrained environments where local capacities are strong. Through a participatory, asset-based approach, Peace Hub fosters agency, resilience, and social capital, thereby creating conditions for enduring well-being outcomes. Its hybrid model offers valuable insights into how mission-driven social enterprises can maintain the delicate balance between social impact and financial viability, ensuring both continuity and scalability of services.

For policymakers, practitioners, and scholars, this study underscores the importance of recognising and supporting social work entrepreneurship as a complementary strategy to public welfare systems. Replicating and adapting such hybrid models in diverse socio-cultural contexts could enhance community resilience, promote sustainable development, and extend the reach of well-being interventions. Future research should examine the long-term impacts, cost-effectiveness, and transferability of such approaches, thereby contributing to the global evidence base on integrating social work and entrepreneurship for inclusive and sustainable social change.

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