

**International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW-AP)  
Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE)**

Joint Regional Progress Report on the Global Agenda for Social  
Work and Social Development Commitment to Action (2012)

*Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People*  
2014 – 2016

Appendix II: Narrative Reports from the Asian and Pacific Region



**Theme:“Promoting Human Dignity and Worth of Persons.”**

**Title :** *“I have an identity of my own now. I’m known by my name and I have received appreciation and acceptance as an important part of this community”*-Ms. Shakunthala, 36 years: A case from Rural India.

**Authors:**\*Dr.SheejaKaralam, \*\*Ms Sangeetha George and \*\*\*Mariko Kimura

### **Background / context**

Rarely in historical or religious writings have a women been named and discussed as an individual except in terms of an exceptional ability or inability to fulfil family obligations. Women were rarely remembered as individuals, even when they did something memorable. (Rajkumar, 2000). Keeping in view the status of women in developing countries like India, the present case study of Ms. Shakuntala has been conducted to examine the empowerment of women in context of community Development project of Centre for Social Action (CSA) - a centre at Christ University, Bangalore., for promoting volunteerism and enabling students to develop as socially responsible citizens through developmental initiatives.

During the year 2003-10, Centre for Social Action (CSA) had implemented a community development project covering 14 villages in Jadehenahalli Hobli, Hoskote Taluk, Bengaluru Rural District in Karnataka state. The major focus of the project was on children and women empowerment under 5 major components namely 1. Early Childhood Care and Nutrition, 2. Strengthening Children Education, 3. Community Health and Hygiene, 4. Livelihood development and 5. Promotion of community based organizations (CBOs).In the beginning of the project intervention Ms. Shakunthala was one of the beneficiaries under Anti natal care and post-natal care support programme.

**Ms. Shakuntala**

Ms. Shakuntalawas born to a lower middle class agricultural family in the year 1982 in Baddhepalli village in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India. She completed her schooling at the government school in Baglur, Hosur and cleared her 10<sup>th</sup> grade with good scores.

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\* Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Christ University, Bangalore

\*\*IV Semester Student of Master of Social work Specialising in Community Development,  
Department of Social Work, Christ University, Bangalore



\*\*\* Professor of Social Work, Japan Women's University, President of IFAP, 1st Vice President, IFSW

She further attempted to pursue her education but was unable to do so as her parents found her a life partner and got her married to a man from Hoskote.

In 1998 she moved to her husband's home and started living the regular life every girl is expected

to. She had given up on her studies although she was smart and capable of achievements. By the year 2003 she was a full time house wife and mother of three, staying indoors and her world was limited to her family alone. Her In -Laws were conservative and only allowed her to move outdoors to graze cattle or fetch water.

The only interaction Ms. Shakuntalahad with the outside world and the community was when the women would gather and having a casual chat during the cattle grazing. It was during the year 2003 – 2004, one of these conversations that the other women mentioned about the self

Ms. Shakuntala

Help Groups and how they are functioning to be very beneficial for the members. Young Shakuntala instantly loved the idea but did not take the offers of the other women to join the group as she was well aware of what her In-Laws' reaction to her bold attempts would be. She was more educated than the other members and hence they kept asking her to join the group. Some members approached her

In-Laws as well but they refused to allow Ms. Shakuntala join the SHG. Once, her father visited her and discussed the same with her In-Laws. Ms. Shakuntala then was permitted to join the group, of course with a number of rules and restrictions that intended to safeguard the values of the family.

**Brief summary of activity / action being showcased (what was done, how it was done)**

She was enrolled in the Self Help Group promoted in her village by CSA. She was one of the active members in the group and never missed in participating in any trainings and meetings conducted by the project staff. Having educated up to SSLC the project staff motivated her to take the role of Health Care Worker in the project and performed well in her duties. Due to her experience, skills and knowledge gained in the project she has been selected as Accredited Social Health Activist worker in the local Primary Health Centre and attending all health related assignments in her communities. Her knowledge and skills in managing SHGs, micro finance, bank linkages, problem solving skills, book keeping, networking with various govt., and private service providers helped her to execute all her tasks better. When asked about the changes CSA has brought into her life, Ms. Shakuntala said, *“I was carrying my third child and I was very weak and CSA took initiatives to help me with nutritious food, they assisted the education of my 2 other children. More than anything else I have an identity of my own now”*.

**Outcomes**

At the end of the project period i.e., in 2010 June, when CSA decided to withdraw its support, selected 15 group leaders from SHGs and trained them in various managerial skills and handed over the responsibilities of continuing the project by their own. Initially they were struggling little bit but they are steady and strong now. The federation has been registered as

Ms. Sakunthala at her work place

Souhardhauder Co-operative society's act and Ms. Shakunthala is one of the executive committee members

as secretary. She has been given responsibility of managing the entire project in the position

of Community Organiser and paid monthly salary from the federation fund.



Presently she has been visiting all 12 project villages and has developed very good rapport with the communities. She monitors regularly the functions of Self Help

Groups, Cluster Level Activities, and Children Activity Centres etc. Has very good rapport with the line departments and brings schemes for the benefit of the poor. The Federation has Rs.75 lakhs generated through the micro finance grant (26 lakhs) given from the project fund which is very systematically managed and controlled by the federation members with the leadership of Ms.Shankunthala. She is the pillar of the project after CSA's withdrawal and CSA has lauded her effective role in making the project a sustainable one.

Ms. Shakuntala is an important member of her community, she is well known among both students and staff members at Christ University and Centre for Social Action for her heartening story and achievements. She said, more than anything else "*I have an identity of*

*my own now. I'm known by my name and I have received appreciation and acceptance as an important part of this community".*

*"Even in my family I am now looked at with respect and not as an object that cooks, washes and fulfils every ones commands." "There were days when I wished I could go back and study but now the village offered me a post in the Panchayat(The Local Self Government of Rural areas). I've been able to keep away caste prejudices and I feel complete and whole. My energy has been channelized into such a transformation in my family, in my village and community. People trust my words and seek my advice. I am no more that cornered teenager who didn't have a voice. And all this would be a dream if no CSA and its Volunteers." She added.*

### **Implications for ongoing professional practice / service delivery**

Self-help groups and micro-financing is impacting the lives of many people in the rural India. Ms. Shakuntala is a living example of these efforts. To move from being treated as a girl with restricted financial freedom, or rather no freedom, to a lady who deals with Millions together in a savings account, involves actively in the community activities, promotes small enterprises and leads many more women to empowerment is an absolutely noteworthy impact.

Ms. Shakuntala is one of thosevery fewempowered women and a role model in the development of women and their communities in her village. The role of her husband is also appreciable who extends all the support for her in attending her work without any jerk. She orients the students of Christ University about the project activities, strategies, networking and liaison, resource mobilization and co-ordinate the students' rural camps.

She is now proud to be a woman from a much marginalised family and scheduled caste community and says with tears that her status in the society has gone up comparatively. She never imagined that staff from government departments and banks will call her as “*Madam*”. But she made it with her hard work and networking. Community members call her as “*Akka*” (Elder sister) which is a respectable word in her community. Her commanding voice makes other leaders and members Ms. Mariko Kimura and Ms. Sakunthala very active and sincere in their work. She has been the bridge between CSA and the Federation and updates all the development works through reports implemented in the villages. This is one of the success story about the sustainable development intervention of CSA projects.

CSA carries out community based development projects in many villages in Hoskote, Kolar, Bangalore urban and in other states. They focus on empowering the localities to confront their problems and overcome them through the resources they can find for themselves. Women like Ms. Shakuntala have enhanced their hidden potentials and also contribute to their communities impacting the lives of many more people. When asked about what she would like to say to the world and her counterparts, she responded immediately, “*Educate your girls, and allow them to*

*move out*”. Most women think they must stay at home and not cause disrespect to the family by doing bold things. They often think only men are supposed to be



active participants of the society. But they must come out, if they do they can change their family, their village, their community and it will eventually change the whole country. “*Girls*

*must be educated too. They must progress because they have that unique power and potential to lead the country into development.”*

**Anything else submitter wishes to convey**

There are many more women like Ms. Shakuntalain our country who need motivation. Many women are hoping for a chance to come their way to prove their capabilities. There will hopefully be many more women like Ms. Shakuntala who will continue to nurture more brilliant and efficient communities in the society. This world needs women like Ms Shakuntalawho work with determination and dedication at the same time who do not compromise on their family’s welfare. She is indeed an example to learn from. CSA’s support and efforts in this regard is immense and must be appreciated.

Reference:

Kumar, Raj. (2000), “Violence against women”, Anmol Publications, Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.

<http://csa.christuniversity.in>

#### **Speaker No.4 from Malaysia**

In the first place, the social work profession is not well recognised in Malaysia so MASW is placing current emphasis on promoting it in collaboration with the Government. This is also a way of promoting the values of the worth and dignity of people. Since 2004, MASW has been working with the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) to establish the National Competency Standards for Social Work Practice (NCSSWP) through the enactment of a Social Workers Bill. This was eventually approved by the Cabinet in April 2010. The United Nations Children's Fund of Malaysia supported the initiative and provided the funding to move it forward. The Draft Bill has gone through several consultations with stakeholders in government and non-government agencies but it is held up by certain political circumstances at the Attorney-General's Chambers at the time of writing. The MWFCD has assured that the Draft Bill is still on their agenda.

While pursuing the enactment of the Social Workers Bill, MASW has conducted several training with UNICEF funding to prepare stakeholders for the implementation of the Bill and the NCSSWP. With the engagement of an international social work consultant, a number of Training of Trainers workshops were held to enhance the social work knowledge, values and skills of social work practitioners and educators, and social welfare officers, specifically in child protection work and based on the Competency Framework. These trainers went on to provide similar training for other social work practitioners and welfare workers in both government and non-government agencies, and more training will be rolled out in the near future with UNICEF support.

For World Social Work Day 2015, MASW collaborated with the Society for the Promotion of Human Rights Malaysia (PROHAM) to hold a public discussion on *Promoting the Worth and Dignity of People*. The discussion concluded on 3 points:

- 1) MASW to continue with its training programme to build competency-based social work practice;

2) Social work practitioners and educators to work with other stakeholders on developing a policy framework based on promoting human rights;

3) MASW to enhance advocacy of human rights by partnering with the Bar Council, to promote the worth and dignity of people.

In addition to this, MASW also supported a charcoal art exhibition by Marisha Peter titled *Journey of Hope* which was organised by the Public Media Agency as part of the Migration Works Campaign 2015 to promote a positive perspective of migrant workers, their lives, their contributions to Malaysia and their human rights.

The University of Sarawak Malaysia (UNIMAS) in Kuching promoted the theme through a Fieldwork Assignment for its social work students titled: *Putting into Practice the Theme for World Social Work Day*.

For World Mental Health Day on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2015, MASW member presented a talk on 'Dignity in Mental Health – from a Social Worker's Perspective' where 80 people attended to commemorate the celebration organised by the Malaysian Mental Health Association.

As an activity never before embarked on and therefore a historical milestone, MASW is managing a project in partnership with a private corporation to facilitate access to basic education for a group of Orang Asli children on an island accessible only by boat. In October 2014, MASW was engaged by Glaxo-Smith-Kline to manage the Horlicks' *The School Journey Initiative* which "aims to champion the cause of making the often difficult path to an education easier for children around the world, by inspiring communities to get active, by involving partners and volunteers to make a tangible difference, and by supporting it with a substantial global communication and funding program". The project required MASW to employ a social work manager and an Orang Asli teacher (who was given training by an early child care educator), and also to purchase a boat, to launch introductory classes for a mix of more than 30 children of varying ages on the island. The project will be managed for 2 years initially. To be

expected, it took a while to obtain the cooperation and agreement of the Orang Asli head of community for this project to run. For MASW, this is another avenue for promoting the worth and dignity of people.

From all the activities reported here, MASW hopes to see the following possible outcomes:

- Increase in understanding of social work knowledge, values and skills;
- Higher quality of social work practice;
- Recognition of social work as a profession;
- Development of job market for social workers;
- Openings for social work jobs in new fields of practice, i.e. schools, industries.

In terms of the commitment from both Government and non-government organisations as to the training of social workers and other stakeholders, there are several constraints:

- Low emphasis on funding training programmes;
- Difficulties in accessing training programmes by practitioners;
- Availability and affordability of suitable and relevant training programmes;
- Institutional commitment to training of personnel;
- Lack of training institutes, especially for NGO workers.

Nationally, there is also a need to develop social work policies and structures to support and sustain the professional development of social work through an autonomous Malaysian Social Work Council when it is established with the enactment of the Social Workers Act.

## **New Zealand perspectives**

**How social integration, cohesion, and relationships can support the wellbeing, dignity, and worth of older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals.**

**David Betts PhD Candidate – Research Abstract**

### Background

Social work practice and policy is concerned with the realities of ageing national and international populations. The increasing demands on an already over-worked and under resourced aged care sector can contribute to either a reduction in the quality of services, or an emphasis on community and individual resources. Social workers have an obligation to promote the dignity and worth of all people, and the increase of older individuals necessitates a focus on the social, political, and cultural rights of the ageing population. In particular, this requires an active promotion of respect for diversity, life experiences, and varying identities. Yet there is an often over looked demographic within the older population, that is; the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community. The unique needs of older individuals who identify as LGBTI are not often acknowledged by retirement facilities, health care professionals, and can be equally marginalised within social work education, practice, and policy.

This invisibility can in part be attributed to a consistent ageist belief that older people are non-sexual beings, with no discernible or relevant sexual and gender identity. Even when sexuality is acknowledged, it often assumes a heteronormative perspective, or comes with homophobic perceptions. Considering the heightened risk of mental health and wellbeing concerns that LGBTI individuals face, and the increased uptake of services by older individuals, it is arguably important that social work practice, policy, and research is prepared to examine how best to support and empower this population.

### Aims

This social work research from New Zealand assesses how social integration, cohesion, and relationships can support the wellbeing, dignity, and worth of older LGBTI individuals. The goal of this research is to examine how the quality and quantity of social connectedness, as expressed by older individuals who identify as sexual and gender minorities, impacts on their own sense of wellbeing.

## Method

This research has been conducted by completing semi-structured interviews with older individuals (60 years and above) who identify as sexual and gender minorities. These interviews focus on the areas of; social connections and relationships, personal experiences of wellbeing, and historical and contemporary experiences of stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion. Semi-structured interviews were used to encourage the lived experiences of the participants to be reflected in their own narratives and language.

In total 31 participants have been interviewed from around New Zealand, in both urban and rural locations from the North and South islands. The participants include gay men, lesbian woman, bisexual individuals, transgender people, and one intersex person. The ages of the participants range from 60 to 82, with a gender split of 16 men to 15 women.

After the interviews were transcribed applied thematic analysis was used to draw out key codes, ideas, and themes that the participants discussed in relation to the research topics. These themes were then clarified and applied to the question of 'what is the relationship between social capital and wellbeing for the older LGBTI population?'

## Key Themes

This research is in the process of pulling out a variety of diverse themes and life experiences of the participants who took part in this study. Key among these was the central importance of strong, flexible social connections to achieving a positive sense of wellbeing. It was thematically consistent across the range of participants the a varied and versatile social network, which could consist of relationships with friends, families, intimate partners, and social groups, not only bolstered an individual's sense of wellbeing, but acted as a protective factor against negative stigma, stereotypes, and past experiences. This protective ability was not only related to generalised wellbeing, but was often directly cited as assisting in the day-to-day management of mental health concerns and illnesses. The versatility of these relationships and social connections was evidenced in a number of ways, presenting not just as a form of emotional, interpersonal support, but providing practical, financial, and even advocacy based resources. Due to the higher prevalence of wellbeing concerns for sexual and gender minorities, along with both historical and contemporary stigma in the form of homophobia and heteronormative attitudes, it is vital that social workers recognise the

inherent strengths of these relationships and work to build social cohesion, development, and integration for this demographic.

Concurrently with these themes of strengths and community resources, there was another common occurring narrative in this research. The majority of the participants reported a heightened level of apprehension about entering aged care facilities, or being dependant on services as they aged. While fear of losing independence or being reliant on services can be common for older adults, for these individuals it was directly tied to their LGBTI identity and previous experiences of discrimination. This apprehension is not only causing active distress, but is also resulting in some older LGBTI adults considering alternatives to residential care, either relying on their own support networks, or advocating for specific services for sexual and gender minorities. While these are potential options, they will not be available to everyone, and it is crucial that residential services are challenged to promote LGBTI friendly and appropriate services, and that social workers are aware of this concern, in order to advocate for the dignity and worth of these individuals to be promoted in aged care services.

While these are only two examples of emerging themes, this research has also explored the areas of; the impact of natural disasters on the formation and maintenance of social connections, how social support impacts on 'coming about' and supporting dignity, along with discourses that highlight the various intersections of ageism, homophobia, and transphobia in generalised and LGBTI specific social networks. This study is arguably important as it is highlighting an area that is not often addressed by social work education, policy, or research. It has implications for the development of social work practice not only in New Zealand, but internationally, in regards to promoting the social, cultural, and political rights of older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals.

## **Indigenous Communities and Indigeneity**

### **Huhana Clayton-Evans**

I reflect on the world as I have come to know and understand it. I am tangata whenua and I have turangawaewae thanks to my whakapapa through both my parents. My turangawaewae is where I belong and I keep my fires burning (ahi ka) which amongst other things, I have obligations and responsibilities for. My whakapapa (in written form) goes back

to our gods and their cosmic parents Ranginui and Papatuanuku who evolved from Io the Supreme.

While growing up I heard the word indigenous and asked the person who used it what did it mean and I was told that I was indigenous because I was a native of New Zealand and I belonged here. I remember asking what a native was and the answer given was, Maori. I took it on board because I remembered our primary school was called Rotokawa Native School which got changed to Rotokawa Maori School. Today it is called Rotokawa Primary School.

In 2011, I heard the word indigeneity for the first time and I asked the person using it what did it mean. The Maori woman said that she was struggling to grasp the meaning as well because it seemed to mean a lot of things.

In 2015 I think of indigenous people as having more in common with each other than differences compared to those who are not. We treasure our whakapapa from earth to the heavens. We feel a connection to that which is seen and unseen in our worlds and beyond the veils, positive and negative, light and dark. We consider ourselves as guardians of the whenua not owners. We remember and acknowledge the living and the dead. Our language is inclusive, (we, our, us as opposed to I, me, mine). As a people we have become the minority outcasts on traditional lands and our customs and cultural practices have been so undermined that it's a wonder they still exist at all. Our health education and justice issues are similar as is our experience of racism. Dwindling traditional resources including our turangawaewae, tikanga and te reo has elicited a fervent quest to reclaim them back and more importantly we want to be self-determining. We name it 'indigenous rights'. I venture to call this brief snap shot 'indigeneity'.

Nga mihi ano.