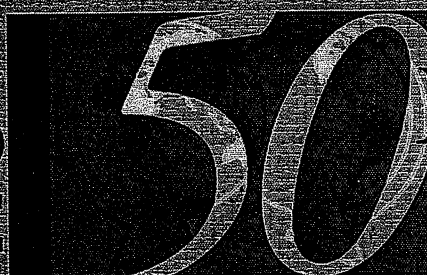


Social Work: Making a World of Difference

Social Work Around the World IV
in the year of IFSW's 50th Jubilee



Year Jubilee

Social Work: Making a World of Difference

Nigel Hall (ed.)



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This fourth edition of *Social Work Around the World* coincides with the 50th Jubilee of the International Federation of Social Workers and is due for launch at the 18th World Conference of Social Work to be held in Munich in August 2006 – the city where the revitalized IFSW was set up in August 1956.

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Editorial

This fourth edition of *Social Work Around the World* coincides with the 50th Jubilee of the International Federation of Social Workers and is due for launch at the 18th World Conference of Social Work to be held in Munich in August 2006 – the city where the revitalized IFSW was set up in August 1956. It was also born from a vision of IFSW's Secretary General Tom Johannesen for a celebratory issue that highlights the three major foci that emerged from the 2004 General Meeting in Washington – (1) social policy with a focus on poverty; (2) human rights; and (3) the public 'image' of the social work profession, all linked by the bridge of ethics. These major issues are all highly significant and reflect the broad interests of the global membership of IFSW. Ethics in particular has always been of major concern to IFSW and led to the setting up of the Human Rights Commission and Permanent Committee on Ethical Issues to help focus international attention on issues relating to social policy, poverty alleviation and human rights. The ability to mobilize public interest and commitment is linked directly to the way the profession is perceived, so the public persona and image of social work is very relevant to IFSW's mission.

This book contains a wealth of chapters on a great variety of issues, but all are linked through this ethical lens, which focuses attention on social work concerns from around the globe. Perhaps of key concern among these and which comes through in almost all the chapters, is the problem faced by social workers almost everywhere of being on the one hand employed to provide a functional service on behalf of employing agencies to 'clients' (individuals, groups or communities), while at the same time having a more profound responsibility to the demands of equity and social justice. Sometimes the two coincide and there is no problem, but at others the two face up in sharp relief to one another, creating a duality of expectation and an ethical crisis for the social worker. Even if there is no direct conflict, there is often an element of uncertainty and lack of clarity concerning how 'functionality' meets issues of social justice.

Several of the authors underline the ethical ambiguity in the power held by the social worker as part of a bureaucracy and their ethical commitment to the client. Grønningsæter in his chapter on the search for global ethical standards in social work

suggests that there is a tension, an ambivalence in the relation between the social worker and society, underlined by Lorenz's concerns: 'Do the social workers see the political effect of their actions?' It appears that sometimes they may not, particularly when their work is partialized and segmented, where they act in a rational ways, achieving this or that task, both to suit the client and the agency, but without appreciation of the wider picture and overview.

In a similar vein Weaver in her chapter on 'social work through an indigenous lens' notes that a changing societal context (more functional, linked to insurance funders) may lead social workers to pay less attention to the environment and its impact on clients. There is a danger that social workers could neglect the wider *societal* context of their work and thus their professional values, ethics, and mission. She emphasizes the importance of respecting clients, using for example the Maori concept of *cultural safety* – where helping professionals pay attention to the environment and wider societal values in ways that respect culture and display humility rather than arrogance. It is important that helping professionals affirm and empower their clients. Envall in his chapter on the dimensions of child poverty also has some concerns in this direction in a section entitled 'Inhumanity is creeping in,' when he quotes from a pediatrician at a major hospital in Stockholm where he was expected to authorize the transport of a severely withdrawn child to Azerbaijan as she and her family had not been granted asylum. The morality of the action was not questioned, just the functional and rational means of effecting this.

Grønningsæter also mentions his indirect cooperation with an organization 'helping' the so-called Travelers in Norway, who were put into camps; their children in institutions and their culture destroyed. He writes: 'The scary thing was not so much what we did, but how uncritical we were towards the established system'. Professional ethics must be related both to the intentions and the consequences of the intervention. Congress suggests that social work educators can best prepare students for ethical practice by bringing material about social work values, ethics and human rights issues into the social work curriculum – and that this should not only be practice at a micro level, but at a macro level that prepares them to assume policy and advocacy roles.

Another ethical problem that I have noticed in the agency I am currently working in has been whether we do really care *for* – or even *with* – people, or rather just 'help' them care for themselves. This agency has recently dropped the name 'Social and Caring Services,' preferring to call themselves 'Adult Services'. We seem to be moving quickly away from actual provision of service to taking on an intermediary role as brokers, linking people with other agencies and other sources of assistance. Of course this is a legitimate social work role and service users and carers have every right to organize and purchase their own services, but today the pendulum certainly seems to be swinging in the 'you do the caring' way. Grønningsæter notes this in his

chapter when he points out that some comments from IFSW member organizations – in the search for a new ethical document – stated that compassion and care are in contradiction to the principles of autonomy and self-determination. The latter values are quite definitely aimed for in social work practice, but whether people have the resources and opportunities available to them when they have caring needs is the critical question.

Banks provides an overview of codes of ethics from around the world and points out that since the late 1990s emphasis on social justice has become more apparent in codes of ethics – perhaps most clearly stated in the New Zealand/Aotearoa code which affirms the rights of the Maori people. Interestingly this links with Weaver's account of indigenous work among the Maori, where the issue of cultural safety, as previously mentioned, highlighted the importance of the values of respect and social justice. Banks asserts that social work ethics and codes of practice imply that social workers 'have a responsibility over and above just doing the job and following the agency's rules,' which means they have a duty to inform governments and agencies of inequalities and the need for policy changes.

The need to consider social justice issues for children is strongly advocated by Mouravieff-Apostol, in her chapter on the importance of birth registration in today's world. She points out that this is no mere administrative measure, but a profound 'passport to citizenship,' which unlocks schooling, health care, recreational facilities and access to broad social rights for the child. Lundy in a similar way observes that social workers witness social injustice and human rights violations on a daily basis, yet end up as 'stretcher-bearers,' taking care of the casualties, with little time to address the root causes of the problem. Lundy stresses that it is imperative that we develop social justice and human rights approaches to social work practice that respond to individual trauma and difficulties, while still promoting positive structural change. This suggests that a structural approach is called for that leaves behind the dualistic focus of individual change versus social change, that acknowledges that change in one part of the system can promote change in another.

Duyan's chapter on social work and HIV/AIDS points out that the history of human rights is that of the struggle against exploitation of one person by another and reminds us that the common aspirational document for governments and their citizens is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Duyan points out that HIV/AIDS provides a very complex panorama of ethical challenges and human rights issues that fundamentally require social workers to respect the values of the profession, in areas such as enhancing women's rights and the rights of equal access to health care and treatment. In writing about shaping the role and public image of social workers in Europe, Radulescu notes that the new social and political changes and challenges in Europe require social workers to be more actively involved in social issues and therefore in turn this will influence and shape their role in society. There

has been a tendency for the more complex areas of social work such as 'change agent, promoter of the social welfare, facilitator of social cohesion, and social developer' to become neglected. Radulescu focuses on actions being undertaken by social workers and their organizations from all over Europe to strengthen the profession. She contends that where social workers become involved with issues of social policy, social work budgets and societal responses to social problems, this has had a corresponding positive impact on the way marginalized members of the community are protected.

Kinyanjui acknowledges the unique role that social workers could play in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa, which have harshly impacted on the developmental goals of many countries in that region. Social workers' skills in conflict resolution, their 'closeness' to the people and their ability to forge partnerships and consultative networking are all useful – but they need to strengthen their own Associations and promote a more 'enabling environment' if social workers are likely to have any impact on reducing conflict. Mupedziswa and Ushamba directly confront this situation in their analysis of the bleak situation facing social workers in Zimbabwe where the profession has been seriously undermined by the negative political and economic situation in that country. Due to the collapse of the economy and a harsh political environment, social workers have left the country in large numbers and have been replaced by untrained personnel. Social work values and ethics have been compromised in the process. This reminds us that social work requires a facilitative, democratic and participatory environment if these professional values are to be respected – also lacking in some of the other settings explored in this book.

The 'peculiar' position of social work within societal power structures (occupying the space between those with access to power and those who are excluded) is examined by Hölscher and Sewpaul from the perspective of South Africa. They are concerned that superficial managerialist solutions in a situation of overwhelming client need dominated by economic, corporate and neoliberal solutions create a hostile climate for social work, which changes its character into a 'more coercing and a more subjugated profession'. They suggest that critical reflection and dialogue (acts of 'resistance') are essential if social workers are to find their own voice and take their ethical and moral responsibility to its service users more seriously.

Lyons and Manion examine the situation that migration presents to social professionals who are involved in working with and supporting people with issues concerning relocation, integration or repatriation. In many cases social workers themselves are the subject of migration and can draw on their own experience. Many of the issues involved with migration – poverty, social exclusion, mental ill health and disability, for example – are similar to the core concerns that social workers elsewhere will face, but the migratory process itself adds other stresses and strains which can compound

these. Respecting the values of human rights and social justice issues of migrants – which have often been trampled on in the process – are very important.

If we are serious about bringing about change on a macro scale and becoming involved with social justice issues then what better forum for IFSW to engage in than the United Nations? IFSW has consultative status at the UN with ECOSOC and UNICEF and has made useful contributions, among others, in the areas of human rights, poverty, development and sustainable human settlements through UN-HABITAT. Cronin, Mama, Mbugua and Mouravieff-Apostol provide a very interesting account of the work that they do as IFSW representatives to the United Nations. This is work that the respective UN teams in New York, Nairobi and Geneva have quietly and diligently performed over a number of years, and their contribution is valued both by IFSW and the UN system. The authors point out that 'advocacy' would be a more appropriate word than 'consultation' for the work that they do of 'directly representing, defending, intervening, supporting or recommending a course of action . . . with the goal of retaining or securing social justice'.

Using a social model of disability and a value-based approach that starts from where the person is rather than from the perspective and views of the so-called 'expert,' Schormans champions the idea of opening up new ways to enact our responsibilities as professionals towards persons with communication disabilities, while avoiding labeling and stereotyping. She provides a fascinating account of social workers' responsibility towards persons who are unable to speak and who communicate in other ways.

A final word of warning comes from Clark and Woods-Waller who take a critical look at social work in the USA, which in their view is under attack from a conservative administration, diminishing the status and competences needed to address social ills. The National Association of Social Workers felt it important to ascertain what average Americans felt about social work and what they understood social workers did. Research studies indicated that while the general public understands the 'practice narratives' of perhaps higher profile professions (lawyers, doctors, police officers, etc.) and while they recognize some of the traditional functions of social workers, they find it more difficult to understand why social workers engage in advocacy and social justice issues. The Association has now embarked on a public education and marketing campaign to demonstrate the 'strength and value of one of the nation's most important professions'.

In recent years the internationally accepted definition of social work has come under scrutiny and a revised and updated definition of social work adopted by both IFSW and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). As Hare notes, hopefully this will encourage social workers across the globe to expand their vision of their profession in a more holistic focus on the 'complexities of people interacting with their environments'.

The authors of the various chapters of this 4th edition of *Social Work Around the World* have made a significant contribution to the discussion of social work ethics and values in a socially unjust world. They provide us with examples of the variety, breadth, complexity, and yet ultimately the simplicity of the social work values that underpin practice, and are a reminder to us all to keep alert and be aware when our professional value base is being side-stepped, neglected or deliberately avoided. This is as important today as we celebrate IFSW's 50th Jubilee as it was when the organization was first set up in the 1950s.

**Nigel Hall, Editor &
IFSW Rep. to Sage Publications**

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