Social Work and Human Rights Conference

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Aims

• To highlight the role of social work and human rights
• To identify the on-going challenges of dual loyalty facing social workers
• To illustrate with research based on interviews in Australia and the U.K on immigration, and working with asylum seekers and refugees (adults and unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)).
Human rights principles.

• What does human rights based social work practice look like in real life?

• How do we understand Human Rights?
Human Rights Perspective

• Social workers help individuals realize their rights everyday and are ideally placed to help communities claim their collective rights.

• Disadvantaged people and communities are very often ‘social work’ service users. Social workers provide empowering, rights based practice that develops individual and community capacity.
Social work is a profession that is built on a code of ethics

• The pursuit and maintenance of human well-being.

• Social work aims to maximize the development of human potential and the fulfillment of human needs.

• Two of the key values and principles are: human dignity and worth; and social justice.
Key values and principles

• Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of every person and respect the human rights expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

• Social justice promotes the rights of all to basic needs; fair access to services and benefits to achieve human potential; and recognition of individual and community rights.

• First generation rights are civil and political rights, like the right to vote, freedom of speech, and freedom from discrimination, fair trial etc.

• Second generation rights are economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to health, housing, social security and education.

• Third generation rights are collective rights, such as the right to development and self determination.
Study looking at frontline workers working with AS and R in Australia and the UK (Robinson, 2011, 2013)

- Humanitarian NGOs and Voluntary Sector services
- Forced migration
- Health and social care
- Demands of the work: destitution, detention, UASC, temporary protection visas.
Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia and the U.K.

• UNHCR - international systems
• Humanitarian crises – NGOs responding to needs, reduction in state provided services
• Different systems in Australia and the U.K. - Humanitarian and ‘asylum’ national systems
• Comparative dimensions
Theoretical context

• Health and wellbeing of refugees
• Organisational issues
• Role of NGOs
• Psycho-dynamic approaches, vicarious trauma of workers.
• Power and conflict
• Policy
• Governmentality and surveillance, street-level bureaucrats
Service Systems in Social Work and Care for Refugees

• Social policy in the U.K. and Australia
• Medical Model (PTSD)
• Social model of health
• A continuum of care – early intervention to tertiary; survivors of torture, rape victims
• Impact on social policy and the distribution of resources
Legal frameworks/Immigration

- Historical context in the U.K. and Australia
- Current issues; role of UNHCR, humanitarian programs; UK Border Agency, asylum seekers; refugee onshore and offshore applications
- Key themes of encouraging and restricting labour force
- Debates about immigration and multiculturalism
- Social workers are having to adapt to a rapidly changing environment
Relevant Legislation - International

• Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948).
• European Convention on Human Rights (1950)
• UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees
• Protocol (‘the Refugee Convention’) 1967
• UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
• UNHCR’s Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied Children seeking Asylum 1997
Legislation and Guidance – National - UK

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children (Leaving Care Act) 2000
- Equality Act (2010)
- Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009
- Every Child Matters: change for children: statutory guidance to the UK Border Agency on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2009)
Legislation and Guidance – National - Australia

• The Migration Act (1958) (Cth)
• Migration Reform Act 1992
• Humanitarian Settlement Services (housing, education, health care, employment support)
• Detention for onshore applicants (increasingly community based)
• Women at Risk and Emergency Rescue visas; Special Assistance Categories (i.e. Burmese, East Timorese etc.)
Methods

• Qualitative method and analysis
• Interviews with workers in NGOs (30)
• Rationale for interviewing practitioners
• Not a ‘sample’ but a representation of views
• Staff recruited via contacts and networks
• Key themes identified by content analysis, narrative approaches and grounded theory.
Findings from the interviews.

1. Key issues facing Asylum Seekers and Refugees
2. Role of the frontline worker (tasks and activities)
3. Impact on workers (organisational, government policy, personal and professional impact)
Findings 1 Key issues facing AS and R

Key issues:

• Asylum procedures including detention, destitution, USAC, TPVs and the lived experience as a result of these practices
• Health care (physical and mental health)
• Racism
• Human rights abuses
Findings 2 Work practices of FLW

- Advocacy
- Community development
- Casework (and counselling)
- Policy development
- Research
- Education and training
Findings 3 Impact of the work

• Workplace stress.
• Conflicted positions within and between services.
• Powerlessness
• Personal stress and vicarious trauma due to exposure to AS and R narratives.
Discussion

- Tensions about professional roles and ethics
- Bio-legitimacy – Medical vs social discourses
- Power and control
- Funding – lack of awareness
- Resistance to policy
- Minimal organisational and professional support and development
Conclusions in the study – for Theory

- Sites of resistance for SW
- Exploration of governmentality
- Parallel processes of surveillance
- The construction of identity of the refugee and asylum seeker as a social process
Conclusions in the study – for Practice

• Improved training and development for frontline workers.
• Development and improved links between theory and practice.
• Further development of partnership working.
• Addressing discrimination and racism in services and the wider community.
Differences between Australia and UK

Australia:
• Detention; mental health, children, U.K.
• Destitution; Section 4, UASC legislation tensions

Social Work role
• Professional identity of social workers;
• Supervision
• Role in NGOs
• Partnership/interagency working
Conclusion

• SW is caught between two competing discourses: health and social care practice and immigration control as well as between service users and the organisations they work for.
• Increased managerialism in social work and care, including NGOs and voluntary sector.
• Despite the positive intentions of caseworkers; risk of burn out.
• Organizational literature limited in the field of forced migration; organisational culture, leadership, teamwork, caseworkers etc.
Social work commitment to human dignity

- SW highly motivated to working with AS and R
- They described rich work with an international focus
- Respect for cultural diversity
- Strong focus on human rights
- General concern for the welfare of AS, in particular about the destitution, deportation, and detention of this vulnerable group of service users
SW protecting rights.

• Social workers, with their strengths in reflective practice and learning from practice, are ideally placed to be arguing for better evaluation and evidence led policy to ensure rights and responsibilities are met.

• We are also ideally placed to disseminate information about best practice models and approaches – to draw governments’ attention to what is working with disadvantaged communities and to advocate for changes that will deliver the best possible outcomes and opportunities for service users.
Conclusions

- Ensuring voices of FLW are heard and the work is valued.
- Surveillance of asylum seekers and refugees, and parallel processes in services are problematic and must be challenged.
- Addressing barriers to joint working.
- Strategies to address racism and discrimination; micro, meso and macro levels.
- SW training specifically on forced migration – asylum seekers and refugees
Social workers are at the frontline of solidarity with vulnerable groups in all societies and international exchange of knowledge is necessary for dealing with trans-cultural problems (2007, p 240).

Human Rights

- British Institute of Human Rights: www.bihr.co.uk
- Liberty: www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk
- Amnesty: www.amnesty.org.uk
- Justice: www.justice.org.uk
- The Ministry of Justice: www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/humanrights.htm
- You can find out more about international human rights bodies from the United Nations Human Rights website: www.ohchr.org
References


• Briskman, L. (2013) Courageous ethnographers or agents of the state: challenges for social work *Critical and Radical Social Work* Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 51-66(16)

References
