

Editorial

The complexities in social work practice

by

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An understanding of the social work profession starts with an intense appreciation of the person that the social worker serves, the context where this is done and the processes involved in offering services, as well as who is employed to do these services (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2008). Complexity lies at the heart of social work practice since social workers, wherever they work, deal with complex life situations in their practice. As Payne (2008) observed, if situations were not difficult in various ways or complex in their ramifications, people would often manage them without calling on help from a social worker. Khoo et al. (2020) and Gümüşcü et al. (2020) have explored the complexity concept in social work, and how it can be exemplified in child welfare services as we do with other welfare services. Payne's (2008) suggestion to deal with such complexities is to identify where these complexities lie and use theory to work on solutions that can solve such complexities, which is this issue's contribution.

We are glad to invite our readers to this issue, which has a focus on understanding and suggesting solutions to the complexities of social work practice. To some degree, all the articles in this issue have a focus on the complex interactions between the micro and macro, in addition to an examination of what happens in the course of social work intervention. This issue tackles different angles of social work practice, starting from the person involved in doing this practice and through exploration of gender implications and the collaboration with other professions in helping services users, as well as the processes involved in helping service users and the importance of paying attention to each stage of the help process. Thematically, it is about street children, male immigrants in care services, NAV users with a multicultural background and work with the reintegration of prisoners after prison.

The first paper is a review of the literature on street children, entitled: *Four decades of Brazilian and international research on street children: A meta-narrative review*, written by Marit Ursin and Irene Rizzini. The authors' focus on influential and illustrative articles that have set the premises for the development of the field, both in Brazil and internationally. The authors also identify some overall tendencies in which street children have been described, debated and theorized, through the study of Brazilian and Anglophone literature on street children. Through the exploration of a vast amount of literature on street children, the article provides a nuanced picture of

the topic in covering a long period of time. The analysis presented and the themes discussed in this article are crucial for bringing research into current debates about street children.

Parenting practices vary across the globe, and are informed by, among other factors, cultural norms, religious orientations, socioeconomic factors, globalization, and, according to recent trends, scientific knowledge. In many Western countries, parenting practices have attracted state intervention in the form of child welfare services who work on ensuring children's well-being, but also influencing parenting standards. In the second article, *Mothering Practices in Cambodia: Making Sense of Physical Disciplining*, the authors Tale Steen-Johnsen, Nicole Dulieu and Ann Christin Eklund Nilsen focus on physical discipline in child rearing among Cambodian mothers in light of the concept of cultural scripts for parenting by Barbara Rogoff. The authors examine how physical discipline practices are negotiated, changed and justified. It is interesting to see the shift in parenting practices, as they note that even though physical discipline is rooted in traditional consideration for correcting behaviours considered unhelpful, impolite or disrespectful, there seems to be a change as these mothers become aware of current debates and knowledge about the harmful effects of physical discipline. This portrays the emerging changes in the intersection between established ways of life and new knowledge, which is crucial for future research on parenting practices in different contexts.

The third article, *Activating the person in the changing situation: A dynamic analytical approach to labour activation*, written by Helle Cathrine Hansen and Erika Gubrium, explores the complexities that surround the person in the changing situation as social workers help service users to integrate into the labour market. This article portrays the various factors at play like time, biography and institutional movements as social workers navigate the complex task of labour activation. While the authors acknowledge the common language used in social work practice of activating the person, they bring us to another important aspect that highlights further complexities surrounding activation policies, and that is focussing on the changing situation the person is in. The authors place an emphasis on studying the changes, especially in relation to how the situation changes in labour activation, to help bring out the personal history and how the interactional meeting with the institution affects- and is

experienced by the user. It is interesting to see how social workers can bring out more of the dynamics at play by having a more holistic situation. The authors argue for the application of a more dynamic view of social work practice in order to counteract the system's tendency to standardize and streamline encounters with- and assessments of service users. It can be concluded that exploring these dynamics would consequentially bring about improvements in understanding the factors that need to be considered to successfully implement labour activation.

The fourth article from Vyda Mamley Hervie, Eunice Abbey and Nana Kojo Dadzie is entitled, *Gender Perspectives of Male Immigrant Healthcare Assistants in Norway*. The article explores male immigrants' experiences of working in a traditionally female-dominated profession as care workers. The authors employ participatory parity (Fraser, 2008) and perspectives of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as theoretical concepts to get on the trail of how male migrant workers position themselves in care roles often dominated by females. This article explores notions such as gender and class, specifically with regard to how they reinforce structural power relationships that affect a sense of self and opportunities for interaction in the care sector. While studies about gendered professions often point to the relevance of including the underrepresented gender in any given profession, this article deals with the important topic of examining how the underrepresented gender experiences their work in a sector dominated by women. The authors' analysis points to the stereotypical images of gender, which may lead to experiences of vulnerability and a sense of lacking self-respect, but also the discomfort of being men working in a sector dominated by women. The authors further argue for the need for social work as a profession to adopt measures and strategies geared towards challenging and addressing gender stereotypes and prejudices that define the relationship between men and women.

The fifth article is entitled, *The significance of interprofessional and interagency collaboration in reintegration after prison: A qualitative study exploring Norwegian frontline workers' views*, written by Bjørn Kjetil Larsen and Sarah Hean. The article explores the complexities surrounding rehabilitation strategies in Norwegian correctional services. Social workers are usually faced with multifaceted tasks as they coordinate with other welfare providers in helping offenders in their rehabilitation

phase, as well as reintegration into society. The authors explore frontline workers' views of interprofessional and interagency collaboration when working with offenders suffering from substance abuse issues in their reintegration after prison. The article sheds light on the importance of focussing on structural and personal relationships as frontline workers collaborate with other professionals. The authors introduce relational coordination as a model that helps to facilitate work processes, in which multiple providers are engaged in carrying out highly interdependent tasks. While the article emphasizes the procedural side of collaboration, it also points to the interrelatedness of the relational and communication dimensions in relational coordination as important aspects for the success of interagency collaboration. This article is also an important contribution and solution to Payne (2008), which calls for using theory to unpack the complexities that exist in social work practice.

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