Editorial

Professional work in the balance between care and control

by

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Engaging in social work with complex families, caring for the elderly, assisting immigrants, or promoting work inclusion demands that social workers skillfully navigate the delicate balance between providing care and exercising appropriate control in their professional roles. This situation necessitates a call to action aimed at enhancing the appeal of the social and care sector for recruitment and retraining initiatives. Service and care providers play a crucial role in delivering quality services to diverse user groups, but they grapple also with challenges such as increasing user demands, limited resources, demotivation, resistance, and power imbalances. Consequently, there is a risk of neglecting alternative perspectives such as self-employment, entrepreneurship, or the emergence of new professional roles, along with involving users in finding solutions for their well-being and more suitable care.

In this evolving environment, a critical reassessment is required to identify the types of professionals needed in the field of social work. It is essential to reexamine professional roles in social and care services, identify new skill sets demanded by the labor market, and navigate the complex interplay between care provision, resources, organisational structures, and power dynamics.

In this issue of the Journal of Comparative Social Work, we explore the complex relation between care and control in professional work, a dynamic intersection that shapes diverse contexts. Five articles and one essay featured collectively shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by professionals in social and care services as they navigate this delicate balance between their roles, caring responsibilities, and the need for control.

Hervie writes about *Migrant health care assistants' decision to work in long-term care: Experiences from Norway.* This article explores the situation of migrant care workers in a country with ageing population. An important question is: Why do unskilled migrant health care assistants decide to work in elderly care and what are their challenges? Data were collected from 13 unskilled migrant healthcare assistants and seven managers of long-term care facilities, using individual interviews, focus group discussion and participant observation. The article draws on ecological systems theory focusing on how interconnected factors might influence migrants' decision to work in elderly care.

To care for old people was regarded as meaningful when migrant healthcare assistants, stayed far away from their family of origin. This was influencing unskilled migrant health care assistants' decision to work in the elderly care sector. Cultural norms and values of caring for older people was emphasized. Other reasons for the choice of work were lack of recognition of former qualifications, and economic considerations. Sometimes migrant healthcare assistants were overqualified for this job. On the other hand, the author identified several challenges that migrant healthcare assistants face. These challenges are connected to a lack of career progression, temporary working contracts, low status, and poor wages. It is important for unskilled migrant health care assistants' well-being that they get better career opportunities. Policymakers should address the challenges its aged care workforce faces.

In the context of an aging population and evolving demographic dynamics, there is increasing pressure on the provision of care and services, both within Europe and on a global scale. There is a significant shortage of staff in social and care services across Europe. This shortage is particularly pronounced in the care sector that is often characterised by lower wages, demanding workloads, high stress, and informal or inadequate working conditions. The pressing question arises of how to attract skilled workers to the sector facing these challenges.

Willmann-Robleda & Tembo are writing about: *User involvement or aspirations management? Work counsellors' strategies in guiding newly arrived refugees into the Norwegian labour market.* Introduction programme highlight activation as a strategy to assist newly arrived refugees to enter the Norwegian labour market. Data in this article consist of 10 semi-structured interviews with work counsellors in various Norwegian municipalities.

The counsellors are using different strategies like: Reality orientation, working with the issue of demotivation and resistance and work to motive refugee women to enter the labour market. The article defines the counsellors strategy as aspirations management. To help refugees to focus on joining the labour market as soon as possible, they are told to shift their aspirations towards what is easy to achieve.

The counselors take into consideration the pragmatic perspective in various ways, weighing what is best for both the refugees and adhering to the norms within the Norwegian welfare state.

The article criticises some activation strategies, how counsellors use power and the lack of user-involvement. There is a shift in the policy from focus on refugees' duties rather than their rights. This highlight of the activation policy is a substantial shift in European welfare states.

Norstedt & Germundsson write about: *Self-employment and disability: The case of support for starting a business in Sweden.* The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Sweden has ratified, states that all countries should 'Promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business' (United Nations, 2008, article 27). The article provides knowledge about disability and self-employment. There is a distinction between self-employment and entrepreneurship, and thus this article is related to the qualities of being in work. The article promotes self-employment as one of many measures of work inclusion.

Data is from semi-structured interviews with nine representatives from organisations that people can encounter when they are going to start and run their own business. The methodological approach is based on institutional ethnography and the identification of control and support in the area of work inclusion and social work.

The article explores professional roles and reflections about making decisions and support for self-employment. Work inclusion is a complex process where different professionals and organisations are involved. The conditions for self-employment among people with disabilities are related to the individual and societal level and also politics matter. Different factors are identified as relevant for work inclusion including efficient allocation of resources and the protecting the individuals these from risks connected to economy and health.

It is an ambition with the article to broadening the understanding of work inclusion as non-standard employment, for example self-employment is the norm in various parts

of the labour marked. It is important to identify how social workers and other professions both support and control people with disabilities in the process of starting and running run their own business. The article underlines that further research is needed on social innovations to promote new ways of professional practices. Institutional ethnographic research identifies disjunctures between the institutional practices and people's experiences, and identify ruling relations that impact the self-employed people with disabilities.

Salifu writes about: *Becoming a social worker: Personal and professional identity formation among social welfare officers in Ghana*. The article reflects on the relationship between the personal and professional identity of social workers. Twenty social workers from the Northern and Central Regions of Ghana were interviewed. This study contributes to knowledge about the role of social identity in the formation of professional social workers in specific contexts. Both professional principles and the statutory law are Western inspired. Thus, this study offers insight on local responses to the global spread of social work values and practices.

Perspectives from Ghana show that social workers are gatekeepers for state justice, in for example the most remote communities. Together with the family courts, social workers are significant actors in the resolution of disputes over family and child welfare. They mediate between the state and the community. The professional identity of social workers in Ghana are shaped by two major factors. One is the state and the relevant laws, and the other is the professional social work principles. In practice this involves a personal commitment to respect individual rights, especially related to women and children.

The change of personal identity is understood within the frame of social identity theory. The context is important because social workers identity is also shaped by their specific socialisation. As the article indicates, professionals experience conflict with the pre-existing social and religious norms and the persons who articulate them. As part of entering a professional group, they tend to distinguish themselves from non-practitioners. Social workers develop local authenticity into their professional practices.

Nygren, Christie, Muñoz Guzmán & Naujan. are writing about: *Welfare regimes and social workers' discussions of social problems and professional roles: a comparative study of Chile, Ireland, Lithuania and Sweden.* The article draws on different 'family policy regimes' to compare social work with complex families. Different contexts shape social work practices.

The article draws upon qualitative data from four countries, where social workers engaged in reflective discussions within a focus group format. The focus of their reflections centers on family complexity, using a fictitious case vignette as a reference point. This is the same vignette that is described in the essay (Oltedal & Nygren) in this edition of JCSW. There is a comprehensive description and analysis of social work with families in the actual four countries, related to literature and the data from the research project.

Summing up the findings indicates that the understanding of complex needs appears relatively individualised in Chile and Lithuania, while contextual factors were more pronounced in the Irish and Swedish material. Differences among countries are also evident in the roles of social workers: Chile emphasises a poverty-compensatory role, Ireland prioritises a risk-reactive approach, Lithuania adopts a more patriarchal risk-reducing role, and Sweden leans towards a rights-oriented social work role.
The article points out that apart from welfare differences, social workers across four analysed countries share a common work ethos in how they act within a frame of mixed expectations and the need to prioritise resources for the best interest of the people they work with.

Oltedal & Nygren are writing an essay about: *The use of vignettes in an international comparative social work research: In-practice and on-practice reflections on practices.* The Family Complexity project, a part of the NORFACE Welfare State Futures programme, compared family policies and family-based social work in various types of welfare states. Social workers from Bulgaria, Chile, Ireland, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Sweden and the UK participated in focus group interviews based on a *fictitious vignette*, which are descriptive realistic scenarios that allowed participants to analyze and discuss various aspects of family based social work practice.

In this project it is produced contextual data which makes it possible to study social work practices, though professionals' discussion related to the content of the vignette, and how they tell they would act more generally. To distinguish between in-practice and on-practice reflections, the essay gives us information on what is done in a real case, from more general information on principles and system norms. The methodology of this international project contributes to studying 'people working with people'.