

Fall/Spring 2023 Editorial: Learning to Improve in Anti-Racism, Health Care, Practice, and Education

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In the Summer/Fall 2023 issue of *Advances in Social Work*, we are pleased to present 14 original articles and recognize our 2023 reviewers. The articles, related to learning to improve in anti-racism, health care, practice, and education, are written by 48 authors from 25 universities and organizations originating from across the U.S. and Finland. We offer five empirical studies and nine conceptual/advocacy pieces for readers to explore new learning in social work practice, policy, and education. We also recognize and thank our 2023 reviewers. The 122 reviewers, representing 87 universities and organizations from 31 states and 7 countries, completed 142 reviews of 74 submissions.

Anti-Racist Social Work Practice

Addressing anti-racism learning, *Keenan* encouraged white social workers to engage in the RE/UN/DIScover heuristic, by which they hold themselves accountable for moving into awareness of personal barriers such as shame and denial as a way to become active anti-racists. When white social workers grow personally into their anti-racist commitments, their social work practice benefits, according to Keenan.

In response to ongoing blatant and violent racial injustices in the U.S., particularly the murder of George Floyd in 2020, CSWE established a Task Force to Advance Anti-Racism in social work education. In this article, *Fairfax, Rountree, Murray-Lichtman, Maldonado Moore, Yellow Bird, Albritton, Naseh, Izaksonas, and Williams*—nine members of the Task Force—described the process followed by the Task Force and presented a participatory exploration of themes in the work of the Task Force. The paper culminated with several recommendations to advance anti-racist social work education, including calling for a new Anti-Racism Commission at CSWE to ensure that anti-racism work persists. Fairfax and colleagues concluded that the EPAS must incorporate anti-racism policies, standards and practices, or otherwise, the profession will not meet its mission of social and racial justice.

Cornell reviewed the literature on anti-racist interventions to compile guidelines for three ways of learning: a course for master's students, a programmatic design to infuse anti-racist pedagogy throughout the MSW curriculum, and a two-day anti-racism workshop. Using six anti-racism intervention categories found in the literature, Cornell laid out ways to enhance both education and implicit curriculum.

Additional practical ideas to aid faculty in increasing their own awareness, capacity, and abilities to teach anti-racist pedagogy were seen in *Buzard's* article. Along with an acknowledgement of the oppressive history of the social work profession and its effect on social work education, accreditation, and the lived experience of educators, Buzard

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presented strategies to help social work educators improve their personal awareness, deal with resistance, advocate for anti-racist policies, and develop anti-racist pedagogy.

Lerner and Kim conducted a study on students' experiences with anti-racist education and practice. Forty-one students from a bachelor's, master's, and doctoral program participated in focus groups to reveal themes such as the importance of trust, the challenges of performative relationships, and working with conflict, accountability, and the consequences of mistakes. Suggestions for a future course to help white social work students develop skills for developing trust and improving relationships were offered by Lerner and Kim.

Innovations in Health Care

Health was the focus of the next two articles. *Simmons, Fisher, McNeish, Greene, Thompson, and Galea* studied the interprofessional education experience of 38 BSW students working in a Student-Run Free Healthcare Clinic. Students reported improvement in their written and verbal communication skills, confidence, and professional identity. Considering the need for free healthcare in our communities, as well as the need for skill building through service learning before the practicum, Simmons and collaborators advocated for more social work programs to provide similar opportunities for their students.

Another health-related need was identified by *Pattanaik, Schueths, Lawrence, Apenteng, and Dounis*, through their qualitative study about oral health in rural communities. They interviewed twenty-two older adults to learn how their communities had affected their oral health. Barriers such as transportation and lack of services were apparent, yet participants tended to blame individual choices for a lack of oral health participation. Pattanaik and collaborators advocated for policies that lower barriers and increase social supports for oral health care in rural areas.

Social Work Practice Innovations

The next six articles addressed issues in social work practice. *Reamer* developed a typology of boundary-related challenges faced by social workers, especially with the increasing use of digital and internet-enabled technologies. These challenges were differentiated by severity, from judgment issues to mistakes and actual misconduct. Reamer offered recommendations that can protect both clients and practitioners.

Deck, Eisensmith, Skinner, and Cafaro provided a systematic review of the literature on parents experiencing high-conflict divorce. Social workers who practice in the forensic arena at times must provide assessments or treatment to divorcing parents, and thus find themselves working with conflict resolution, mistrust, and communication challenges. Working with divorcing parents also brings the importance of understanding parents' characteristics, social networks, and satisfaction with agreements, according to Deck and collaborators. They advocated the importance of assessing the level of conflict to aid in both practice and policy development.

Another article about social work practice addressed client safety, as written by *Koskiniemi, Syyrilä, Mäntymaa, Ranta, Säilä, Vehviläinen-Julkunen, Pehkonen, and Härkänen*. In Finland, social service workers have the responsibility of assessing risks faced by clients, in areas such as physical, psychological, social, or economic safety. Koskiniemi and colleagues stated that this legal responsibility in Finland goes beyond what is found in other countries, which generally focus on abuse and neglect. In an analysis of four years of reports, the authors found clients' rights and physical safety to be two of the most-reported categories, and encouraged the development of a strong reporting system and culture for social service agencies.

Pierce and Black sought to connect the long-standing person-in-environment perspective of social work practice with the newly-emerged field of human neuroscience. Pierce and Black connected understandings of our nervous system and our environment through a new theory they called neurosocial interdependence, situating human neuroscience into the framework of the person-in-environment perspective. The authors advocated the use of neurosocial interdependence in both social work practice and research.

Social workers who practice in immigration will be particularly interested in the article by *Epps and Organista*, who wrote about the promise of community-based case management as a noncarceral approach to immigration proceedings. Epps and Organista stated that social workers can utilize community-based case management as a way to confront the mass detention crisis in the United States, positioned on social work's grand challenge of smart decarceration. Collaboration between refugee resettlement case managers and social workers can provide strong support to noncitizen clients, consistent with our social work values.

Examining the trajectory into professional practice was the task of the article by *Apgar and Dolan*. Taking a developmental perspective, the authors explored the professional evolution of social workers. Apgar and Dolan discussed the opportunities and challenges faced by social work professionals in early, middle, and late stages of their careers. The effects of education and regulation on social work practitioners were also addressed, with a call for social workers to be change agents for supporting their own careers.

COVID-19 and Social Work Education

The final article by *Boys and Swafford* returns us to the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to examine its effects on social work students in their educational experience. A combination of MSW and BSW students (43 total) were surveyed with both open-ended and quantitative questions for this exploratory study. Data collected in January of 2022 during the surge in the Omicron variant revealed a mix of student opinions and concerns about the disease. About half of the students were worried or extremely worried about the spread of COVID-19, and about half were only a little or not at all worried. Students reported a similar mixture of concerns from faculty, as seen in widely varying attendance policies. Boys and Swafford recommended that social work faculty engage in policymaking at the university level.

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We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals who reviewed manuscripts for *Advances in Social Work* in 2023. Without their time, commitment, and expertise, *Advances in Social Work* would not be possible.

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