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Editorial

Envisioning social work education beyond its limitations!

Rajendra Baikadi

As I write this editorial for this issue, the world is celebrating the social work profession, education and practice, with a central focus on 'Shared future for transformative change'. Nine years ago, in 2015, world leaders subscribed to 17 sustainable development goals with the aim of achieving a just, equitable and sustainable future by 2030. To achieve these goals, care, respect, and collaboration among different communities and societies are important. The society in which we live today experiences innumerable challenges contributed by both internal and external environments. Accelerated economic development, a focus on private enterprises, and an uncontrolled income gap result in widespread inequality and imbalance among different communities across the globe. The need and relevance of social work as a helping profession is more now than ever in our global society! However, in many countries, social work, as a profession, has been seriously overlooked and downgraded due to a lack of acceptance by the public, a lack of state recognition and an absence of professionally established standards (Sajid, S. M et al. 2020). Further political dispensation is leading to non-social workers handling social work/welfare ministry and their inability to understand the significant contribution of social work to human and social development (Baikady et al. 2024).

The central themes of some of the articles in this issue are related to global social challenges such as mental health, children in conflict with law, child abuse, sustainable development goals and the welfare of tribal communities. Social work professionals across the globe work with vulnerable people, groups and communities through advocacy, social action, social movements

and policy practices to bring desirable social change. In the following sections, I attempt to address some of the pressing social problems that need social work intervention in our contemporary global society.

SDG 3 aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; however, the number of people experiencing various forms of mental health issues is increasing both in developed and developed countries. More than half of the population living with mental disorders in low- and middle-income countries receive no treatment (World Health Organization: WHO, 2019). Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the later part of 2019 resulted in increased emergence of mental health for all ages across the globe. People living with chronic and life-threatening illnesses, disability and impairment require special care attention and life support to manage their vulnerabilities. Social workers trained in health and mental health specialities contribute to the welfare and protection of people with illnesses. In their article, Shubhangi Namdev Mane and Jaimon Varghese outlined the critical role of social work intervention in safeguarding the mental health of children experiencing violence.

Social work plays an important role in an unequal world. Reducing inequality in all its form is one of the major challenges facing our ever-evolving global society. Uncontrolled and unaddressed inequality in any society can cause a wide range of social, economic and political problems. Furthermore, the impact of inequality on vulnerable communities, such as children and youth, may be related to reduced life expectancy, high infant mortality, poor educational attainment, low social mobility, increased levels of maltreatment and violence, and problems related to mental illness. SDG 16 aims to build a just and equal society by providing access for justice to all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The attainment of SDG 16 goals in every society is important, as children and youth from disadvantaged communities across the globe face a number of challenges that increase their vulnerability. Some of the authors in this issue address challenges faced by children and youth. An article by Ms. Priya Paul in this issue explores the impact of social media on children and their wellbeing.

The remaining articles examine the status of left-out parents, children in

conflict with law, wildlife conservation and the sustainable development of livelihoods. Each of these authors explore the role of social work in addressing urgent social problems, and these evidence-based studies may also inform the development and advancement of social work education in India and abroad. Since the beginning of social work development in the West, social work educators and researchers have described and researched the development and extension of social work education in a wide variety of areas. Today, social work has grown into a very powerful and respectable position in a number of countries in the West, where as social work as a profession is still struggling for recognition and has not crossed the infancy stage in the Global South.

To conclude, I emphasize the importance of evidence-based studies focusing on social work education, practice and research in different sociocultural and political contexts. I remind my fellow social work educators, practitioners and policy makers that we have not explored enough about the potential of the state and the state's role in advancing social work education and practice in the majority of countries. In several counties, social work curriculum teaching and practice do not build the political knowledge, skills, and theoretical understanding of social work graduates.

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