

A rich selection of social work research

Ehara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini

My strength is not as an individual, but as a collective

This winter issue of Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work contains a rich collection of topics reflecting the diversity of research and scholarship being undertaken by social workers here and abroad. The full articles traverse palliative care, gambling harm, a reconsideration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs from a First Nations' perspective, interprofessional education, critical realism in social work research, and collaborative critical autoethnography. The research section is rounded off by a research brief on the development of a professional capabilities framework for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. We encourage the contribution of shorter commentaries and viewpoint pieces and this issue contains three such offerings: the first addressing harm visited upon children living with neuro-disabilities in the care and justice systems in Aotearoa; another exploring the ethical intersection of social justice, animal rights, the natural environment and climate change; the last exploring aspects of emotional intelligence. This breadth of offerings reflects the scope of social work attention across many fields of practice and scholarship.

Palliative care social workers are increasingly supported by good research to inform this specialist area of practice, and recent findings by Mary James and Kate Reid in this issue add to this important body of knowledge with a unique focus on the experience of those caring for loved ones diagnosed with a terminal illness. The authors of the article "Strengths of family carers: Looking after a terminally ill adult under 65 years of age," analyse interviews of people who were primary caregivers of life partners with life-limiting illnesses. The researchers were interested specifically in those dying at a younger age, and their

findings offer compassionate insight both into the challenges of this role, and the willingness and love with which people approach the demands of caring for an unwell partner. The authors build on the words of the participants, describing the "soul and spirit" of caring and of "looking heartbreak in the eye." They emphasise the all-important place of hope.

The role of social workers in this field of practice is to work collaboratively and holistically to ensure families have supportive networks, access to information and services, and support in making important, often very difficult, decisions. Understanding the needs of the caregivers and whānau of dying people enables social workers to nurture those who are unwell, but equally those who provide care. From this research, James and Reid describe themes of love, hope, family and resilience as among the qualities and strengths of carers, and reinforce the importance of identifying and validating the unique spiritual, cultural and physical needs of each individual and relationship. The authors conclude by recommending the use of strengths-based assessments in palliative care social work to support the emotional, spiritual and physical labour, the "love with gumboots on" task of caring for a dying loved one.

Wen Li Zhang, Christa Fouché and Peter Adams examine the issue of gambling harm within Chinese migrant communities. By interviewing people struggling with harmful gambling behaviour and affected family members, this study identifies pathways into harmful gambling and makes clear suggestions for ways to respond, grounded in the lived experience of people experiencing harmful gambling behaviour. The authors point out that medicalised

AOTEAROA
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WORK 34(2), 1–4.

approaches to gambling harm tend to focus intensely on individuals, missing the effects of the “social, cultural, historical context in which they live.” The findings suggest four stages of harmful gambling and pathways both into, and out of it. The first, *misconnecting*, stage relates to the experience of migration which often disrupts connection with familiar cultural, social and physical living environments, reduces social status, and provides a vehicle for socialising via the casino environment. People often were lonely and depressed before developing problem gambling, and casinos helped alleviate these emotions. *Disconnecting* was the next stage, and describes how people were able to “break away” from gambling after struggling with it for often a significant amount of time. Disconnecting included personal resolve as well as invoking casino exclusion policies, though these were only minimally effective. After breaking away, migrants expressed a “tricky journey to reconnect with what they referred to as ‘natural life’”. This journey consisted of having to *wake up*, *face up* and *climb up*. This involved recognising the myths of control promoted by casino advertising and realising the impacts on their families. This forced them to face up to the harm their behaviour was having on themselves and their families. “Climb up” refers to their decisions to change and engage in actions to make that happen and return to “natural life.” Incorporating Chinese cultural concepts, the return to a balanced lifestyle and maintaining harmonious relationships were the key aims. Peer support was essential to this process, as it provided both reminders of where they had come from and valuable socialising opportunities. This staged description of the process evidences valuable research for providers of gambling harm supports, as it provides an understanding of the points requiring the most support and the nature of those supports for Chinese migrants experiencing gambling harm.

In “Reconsidering Maslow and the Hierarchy of Needs from a First Nations’ perspective,” Elder Roy Bear Chief, Peter Choate and

Gabrielle Lindstrom, from Alberta in Canada deconstruct the notion that Abraham Maslow’s highly influential “Hierarchy of Needs” formulation fails to pay due attention to the knowledge derived from his association with the Blackfoot peoples of Southern Alberta. The authors maintain that Maslow’s own writings do not suggest that his work was significantly guided by his 6-week encounter with the Blackfoot, beyond some degree of humanising influence. It is argued that Maslow did not form any depth of appreciation of Blackfoot philosophy and that this orientation is consistent with the dominant Eurocentric practices of his time. The concept of hierarchical needs is not aligned with the Blackfoot world view and the concept of self-actualisation is understood very differently within the cultural frame of collective identity and reciprocity. Given that there is little conceptual correspondence, an exploration of the relevant history (in tandem with knowledge held by elder wisdom) reveals that the Blackfoot peoples do not consider that Maslow’s work represents their views. More broadly, readers are urged to be critically aware of ingrained cultural blind-spots: that theoretical concepts derived from one cultural and historical context may not be relevant to practice with populations steeped in differing knowledge traditions and world views.

Researching and innovating is an important area of scholarship for those whose practice is in professional education. Ashleigh Price, Lee Smith, Marcella Gregan, Susie le Page, Reuben Corlett and Bee Westenra present findings from a multi-method study on a trial of interprofessional education simulation activity conducted with students from three health and social service disciplines in one community polytechnic in Aotearoa New Zealand. The authors developed a pre-test/post-test design with a questionnaire and focus group. It was found that the participants from social work, nursing and paramedicine enjoyed the simulation, developed greater confidence in interprofessional communication

post-participation and reported increased knowledge of each other's scope of practice.

Lynne Park and Shajimon Peter start their article noting that, while critical realism (CR) provides a unique and robust philosophical framework for social work researchers by attending to the role of individual agency and social structure, little practical guidance is available regarding how the ontology and epistemology of CR can be applied as a methodological framework for qualitative research. Aiming to address this gap and extend the conversation amongst researchers, Park and Peter explain what CR is in relation to other ontological and epistemological positions and provide some practical suggestions for CR-informed research. To illuminate the potential, the authors draw on relevant examples from Park's study that examined the causes of trust among Korean migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Also with a strong methodological focus, Trish Van Katwyk and Catherine Guzik from Ontario, Canada, report on a collaborative critical autoethnography that explored decolonising social work, community engagement and ethical practice through seeing and doing. Critical autoethnography can be an effective method of praxis for social workers given our commitment to social justice and equity. The authors write about their learning through the facilitation of three digital storytelling projects with youth living in three different Nunavut communities. By engaging in a collaborative critical autoethnography, they were able to attend to the ways in which they entered communities, paying particular attention to the ways in which white supremacist colonial thought influenced their training and their location within larger structures shaped by colonisation. The consequences of that colonial history and practice shaped the daily lives and opportunities of the Inuit youth engaged in the digital storytelling.

In a research brief article, Neil Ballantyne, Liz Beddoe, Kathryn Hay, Jane Maidment, Shayne Walker, and Caitlin Merriman report

on the methods used in the last phase of the Enhancing Readiness to Practise project to co-produce a professional capabilities framework. Building on a literature scan and data from earlier parts of the study, the authors engaged a range of key stakeholders in co-production workshops using a structured, participatory, "World Café" approach. Materials from the co-production workshops identified seven core values that underpinned capable social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and identified 10 core capabilities with a clear, professional practice focus that were strongly supported by workshop participants.

Anita Gibbs' viewpoint article explores the ongoing harm visited upon children living with neuro-disabilities in the care and justice systems in Aotearoa New Zealand. The analysis is informed by the authors' extensive theoretical and research-based understanding and her personal experience of supporting a whānau member within the care-justice system. Over half the children in the system are thought to be living with neuro-challenges. Gibbs responds to the argument that the cost of appropriate assessment and treatment is prohibitive by clearly illustrating that the downstream social and financial costs of non-intervention are much greater. The connection between care journeys and justice involvement is highlighted. A criminal justice frame that is focused on notions of consequential reasoning and responsibility fundamentally misunderstands the nature of neuro-disability. It is suggested that a broad, disability-rights-based approach could generate a quantum shift from punishment to an informed support-centred model of practice. It is argued that earlier comprehensive assessment needs to be supported by training initiatives which equip social workers and other relevant professionals to work competently in this area. The development of specialist care teams is proposed and range of practical strategies which can be used by whānau seeking to support and advocate for neuro-diverse children and young people are outlined.

In “For the future of all life, the Code of Ethics is the key” Kerstin Hagena, Alina Hagena and Luis Arevalo bring together discussion of animal rights, the climate emergency and the future of humanity on the planet through the lens provided by the principles of the Aotearoa New Zealand code of ethics. The viewpoint piece, which aims to stimulate some robust discussion arises in the convergence of the authors’ collective response to what they regard as insincere rhetoric emanating in discourses of agriculture, climate change, animal rights, sentience and the survival of humanity. The authors argue that, based on a case established with reference to the seven *pou* in the code of ethics, the social work profession should advocate for a just transition from meat and dairy industries to plant-based industries. This, they argue, would be well aligned with the code of ethics, specifically the notions of upholding social justice for all, human rights, self-determination, respecting diversity, the protection of rights and freedoms and the recognition of sentience across all the Earth’s beings. In doing so the authors argue that social work in Aotearoa New Zealand would be the first profession in the world to tackle the biggest contributor to the climate change crisis.

In the third viewpoint article, Hawa Matthews discusses the concept of *emotional intelligence* and its importance in social work education and practice. Drawing on literature, she argues that emotions can influence moral decision making in social work and may act as moral markers and motivators for both practitioners and students. She makes some recommendations about the inclusion of emotional intelligence in the social work education curriculum

and in social workers’ ongoing professional development.

Finally, this issue contains three book reviews. In a rather unusual move, we include two reviews of the same book in this issue of *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*. Earlier this year Ian Hyslop published *A Political History of Child Protection: Lessons for Reform From Aotearoa New Zealand* (2022). We wanted to offer two different perspectives on this important new book and we are pleased to publish two reviews, one by Kerri Cleaver (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe, Waitaha) a researcher/educator at the University of Canterbury and the other by Tony Stanley (National Practice Advisor Design, Oranga Tamariki). While book reviews may sometimes be items we scroll past in our reading, I do commend these two reviews to our readers. Both ask for us urgently to learn from Hyslop’s scholarship and both urge careful, considered and yet passionate reform if we are to move forward in our journey to improve the lives of whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the last review, Lesley Pitt reviews *Finding Your Ethical Research Self: A Guidebook for Novice Qualitative Researchers* by Martin Tolich and Emma Tumilty. Pitt writes that the central theme of the importance of an ethical compass in qualitative research makes this a useful text for educators, researchers and students.

Liz Beddoe

Editorial Collective

References

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