

# New theories for social work practice: Ethical practice for working with individuals, families and communities

Robyn Munford and Kieran O'Donoghue (Eds.).  
 Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2019  
 ISBN 978-1-78592-158-2, pp.335, paperback, NZD67.09

*New Theories for Social Work Practice* reflects the significance of relationship and relational social work practices already central to Aotearoa New Zealand communities, and for future social work, both here and internationally. Written prior to the upheaval of a worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, this timely book considers emerging practices that are required in a time of significant worldwide change. This book explores new and emerging theories for social work practice in diverse fields of practice. The editors, Robyn Munford and Kieran O'Donoghue, both work at Massey University. This text follows their successful earlier edited text, *Social Work Theories in Action* (2005). Notably, the editors have gathered a book of relevant and unfolding ideas and thinking accessible to both local and international social work students and practitioners.

This book is divided into four distinct parts that discuss areas of practice including, but not limited to, working with older people, disabled people, refugees, Pacific communities, green social work, working in mental health settings and community-based organisations, and teaching ethical theory. The main aim of the text is to explore the emergence of new theories and practices that remain intrinsically imbedded in core social work values and principles of social justice and human rights. Three major themes permeate the book: client at the centre, relational practice, and context of practice, i.e., "social workers seeking out local knowledge and solutions" (p. 16).

A strength of the book was the use of case studies and reflective questions. The regular use of case studies and reflective questions throughout the chapters was a highlight providing constructive examples of social work in practice. These real-world situations enhance the usefulness of this book and describe how the social worker has interpreted the "problem" or the situation and offers the reader a perspective they may not have otherwise considered for their practice. The brief case studies help integrate the theories in everyday social work practice. While the case studies familiarise us with the significance of relational social work practices, the reflective questions may bring the reader to focus on their own relational style, strengths and opportunities for future engagements with clients. The individual authors, and the editors, insightfully ground the emerging theories in practical and genuine social work.

One critical observation of this text pertains to the lack of an Aotearoa New Zealand contribution on spirituality and social work practice. Sadly, consideration of a spiritual aspect to a person or family's wellness or experience is often given the briefest of mentions in many academic books. Although diversity, difference and Indigenous knowledge are represented well in this book, spirituality is, in my opinion, virtually missing. The one chapter on spirituality largely focuses on a Hong Kong Chinese theory Integrative Body-Mind-Spirit approach. While meaningful, this chapter seems out of step with the rest of

the book's alignment with Aotearoa New Zealand embedded knowledge and models. There is a small mention of wairua in the mana-enhancing chapter by Paul'e Ruwhiu, identifying that "wairua is the essence of a person" (p. 195). Perhaps this means there are no, or few, *emerging* Aotearoa New Zealand specific and effective social work practice theories that incorporate or acknowledge spirituality.

Overall, the book is uplifting and relevant. The social work approaches and examples of practice are aimed at students and practitioners both in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. The diversity of the fields of practice discussed bring a depth and richness to the topics covered and the present-day challenges being experienced in both the world at large and the world

of social work. I am convinced the book achieves what it set out to do: to inform and bring a fresh perspective on contemporary social work theories, practices and services. I would recommend this book to those who are seeking to update their understanding and knowledge regarding working with various individuals, families or communities in Aotearoa New Zealand or elsewhere. Aotearoa New Zealand practice approaches are relevant in many ways, not least, where holistic Indigenous approaches and contexts can teach us all the importance of relationships and client-at-the-centre of decisions that enhance positive social changes. Social work practice is rightly evolving. The origins of social work in social justice and human rights give a stable foreground to the way forward explored in this timely book.

Reviewed by **Carol Parkinson**, Practice Manager MANZASW