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This paper presents the findings from an innovative project funded by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and undertaken by an international team of academics investigating the development of a global curriculum for social work in the context of political conflict. Coupled alongside the emerging research and literature on the subject, our small-scale survey findings indicate support for the need for social work educators to address political conflict more systematically within social work curricula at both undergraduate and post-qualifying levels of social work education. This paper illuminates the opportunities for creative pedagogy whilst also examining the threats and challenges permeating the realisation of such initiatives. In this way, the implementation of a proposed curriculum for political conflict is given meaning within the context of IASSW's Global Standards for social work education. Given the exploratory nature of this project, the authors do conclude that further research is warranted in regard to potential curriculum development and suggest using a comparative case study approach with more in-depth qualitative methods as a way to address this.

Keywords: *Political Conflict; Social Work Education; Curriculum; Impact on Service Users; Social Workers*

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Introduction

Political conflict, especially when violent, has considerable and long-lasting implications for large numbers of citizens in our globalised and localised reality, for both existing clients of social work and their social workers (Ramon, 2008). However, thus far, this issue has not been widely recognised as a defined curriculum component within social work education. In most countries, it may not appear at all, or it will appear under the categories of 'disasters/international social work'.

It was against this backdrop that academics from several countries, all with past or on-going personal and professional experience of conflict, worked together in a quest to design a framework for an international social work curriculum on political conflict. The project was funded by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and aimed to produce detailed content and guidance for subsequent consideration by social work educators across the world.

This paper outlines the work which this group undertook in developing recommendations for an international social work curriculum on political conflict.

The contextual literature overview examines the diverse nature of political conflict, the prevailing themes about its impact on populations affected, the research evidence about the impact on social workers and other helping professionals, and the dilemmas that face practitioners. These include not only the knowledge and skills needed for interventions in very challenging situations but also the dilemmas facing social workers when working alongside colleagues or serving communities representing positions and viewpoints generally characterised as 'the enemy'.

Some ways forward in addressing these challenges emerge from this review, including a suggested focus on the contribution that service users can make to inform our understanding in this area in the context of social work education. Evidence is also presented from survey questionnaires, completed by educationalists, social work students and other key social work policy informants in different international contexts which have helped shape our recommendations for the development of a social work curriculum for political conflict.

Literature Context

Radical social work perspectives have long continued to call for recognition of the political nature of social work and for the profession to engage in political issues that address the underlying causes of oppression (Corrigan & Leonard, 1979; Craig, 2002) and political conflicts between different social factions (Burke & Ngonyani, 2004; Laird, 2004; Midgley, 1997; Mmatli, 2008; Shawky, 1972). 'Political' understanding and engagement takes a variety of forms including raising awareness and struggling against some of the socio/geo-political and economic issues pertinent to the social work profession: the role of neo-liberal capitalism on local, national and global relationships between 'First' and 'Third' world; the impact of globalisation and occupation on democracy, identity and culture (Amin, 2001; Sewpaul, 2006; Smith, 2008); issues of human rights, sexual orientation and genocide, violence (Kabeera &

Sewpaul, 2008) and displacement in the context of political conflict (Hölscher & Berhane, 2008) are but a few areas of concern. As Sewpaul and Holscher (2008, p. 294) argue, what this confirms is that 'social work is or must be a political endeavour'. There are, however, several international examples where social work has struggled to be politically active in challenging oppression and discrimination. Mmatli (2008), arguing that many of Africa's social problems are fundamentally structural and political in nature, claims that 'social workers in Africa lack the power to make things happen' (p. 300) and goes on to suggest that 'this inability to confront forces of disempowerment threatens the very existence of the social work profession' (p. 302). Hölscher and Berhane (2008), describing the challenges facing social workers and social work education in Eritrea, highlight the stark problems facing social workers when working within a macro-political and repressive ideology which does not recognise the rights of its citizens. A reflection of the latter was the Eritrean government's decision to close down the only university educating social workers due to its belief that it was producing 'disobedient nationals' (p. 315). Social workers in other countries affected by conflict such as Northern Ireland and the Middle East have also occupied politically distant stances (Duffy, 2012). Nevertheless, the impact of political conflict on social work practice and education has not been addressed until very recently. This section looks at the major themes addressed in the existing literature on social work and political conflict and points to the issues that require further attention.

The literature addresses the following three areas:

(1) effects of political conflict upon social work clients;
(2) effects on social workers themselves;
(3) attempts to incorporate the issues of political conflict in social work education and training in preparation for practice.

Effects of Political Conflict on Service Users

The causes of political conflict are numerous: civil wars, wars between nations, clashes between ethnic groups and between political groups, within one or more nation states. Many are rooted in historical legacies of the colonial past and emerge from the redrawing of geographical boundaries as witnessed by the conflicts in countries such as Palestine, Israel, Northern Ireland, Kashmir and Sudan. Others may be related to more generic issues of poverty, economic and social deprivation and discrimination or to the more recent events, such as the breakdown of the Soviet bloc, and the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York of 9/11 which saw an unleashing of Islamophobia against Muslim communities across the world.

Despite the fact that Europe and the USA emerged from World War II and felt the aftermaths of attacks upon major locations such as London, Pearl Harbour and Hiroshima, the consequences of political conflict and war are rarely taken on board in social work literature. As Ramon (2008) and others (Campbell & McColgan, 2001)

point out, this neglect may be due to the reticence to touch upon 'political' matters in the interest of 'objectivity', 'neutrality' and 'professional identity', or to the mistaken or misguided notion that political conflict is absent in the West. The profound effects of the various tensions of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' on communities throughout the UK and beyond, not to mention the periodic social unrest in areas with higher concentrations of minority ethnic groups (e.g. the UK, Sweden, France, Germany), and the conflicts between indigenous and settled communities (as in Australia and the USA), or yet again the extant tensions of the West rooted in the 'war against terror', have all put paid to such erroneous ideas. Recent years have witnessed a growing awareness of the importance of incorporating political activity into social work training (Hamilton & Fauri, 2001). The importance of bridging the interface between the professional role of social workers and their political involvement in such situations is also recognised in research (Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2008; Shamai, 1999; Weiss, 2005).

Whatever the cause, political conflicts shatter and throw into total disarray the lives of individuals and communities; the devastating effects on economic, physical, psychological, cultural, political and religious conditions are all encompassing; the consequences are loss of home, nation, health, wealth, family and friends and, with it, the loss of social status, dignity and self-worth. It often results in enduring conflict between cultural, religious or national groups as many become victims of genocide, ethnic cleansing, civil war and rebellions; all accompanied by breaches of human rights and political corruption. For instance, the current conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Christians and Muslims, and Sikhs and Muslims to mention a few, are not only caused by present social relations between these groups, but are etched in history with deeply embedded feelings of hostility. We have witnessed the atrocities of genocide and ethnic cleansing in Croatia and Serbia and in Rwanda leaving countries in shock and trauma for decades, if not centuries to come. Despite the modelling of anti-racist, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice in exploring inter-ethnic/sectarian issues (Smyth & Campbell, 1996), social work and social work education/training have often failed to address the causes and effects of warring factions (Laird, 2004).

Though much overdue, the impact of such struggles has begun to be noted in social work literature. Ramon (2008) and others provide some insights into the impact of political conflicts originating from various sources. These include conflicts between warring factions within a particular nation state as in the case of Kenya between farming and pastoralist communities; the displacements of refugees within and between national borders (Cemlyn, 2008a; Herath & Lesnick, 2008; Wairire, 2008); the conflicts between indigenous and settled communities or between citizens of a single country (Duffy, 2009; Guru, 2010; Harms, Clarke, and Douglass Whyte, 2008), or those between despotic regimes and their subjected people (Sanchez, 2008), or yet again, hostilities between criminal gangs violating human rights in collusion with the state apparatus (Almeida, 2008).

Ramon (2004) and Baum and Ramon (2010) identified several concerns of people living in political conflict; these include learning to live with a heightened state of fear and anxiety, suffering from traumatic loss, bereavement, physical injuries and being subjected to punitive policies geared towards the surveillance, detention, deportation or dispersal of individuals and communities as they are separated from their children and families and left with little, if any, material support whist being hounded and rejected as 'foreigners' (Cemlyn, 2008b; Hayes & Humphries, 2004). Research also confirms the impact on students of living amidst political conflict. The need to address political trauma amongst students and practitioners is emphasised by Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel (2009a, 2009b) who also report high level of fears and decline among students in their social and academic functioning as a result of living in the midst of on-going threats. In addition, these students showed a greater tendency to use alcohol and medication and tended to seek more help than those living in other areas.

Joudeh (2008) a journalist, also notes the effects of the Israeli occupation on Palestinians as families experience economic difficulties, compounded by the accompanying depression, despair and feelings of worthlessness and emasculation. Duffy (2009) shows how the conflict in Northern Ireland resulted in economic deprivation, physical disability and mental health concerns amongst those affected.

Ellis (2006) discusses the effects of 9/11 on both the general population, but also on Muslim and 'Arab looking' populations generally, who subsequently became the subject of much vitriol. Brittain (2009) also looks at the effects of counter-terrorism policies on individuals and the families of those who have been detained, deported and imprisoned in the UK and the economic, psychological toll as they lose their heads of households and become increasingly marginalised and isolated by their communities.

Effects on Social Workers

Nuttman-Shwartz (2008) shows that political conflict has not just physical effects, but it is etched in people's psyches and emotions. It shapes their beliefs, identities and values and permeates social workers' practice. Ellis (2006) and Baum and Ramon (2010) confirm that, as human beings, social workers cannot be impervious to the violent imagery and the biased, resentful and vitriolic environments often produced by political conflict. Concerns about the ability of social workers to deliver services whilst living amongst fears for their own safety and that of their families in times of collective crisis have been echoed for some time (Campbell & McColgan, 2001; Lindsay, 2007) but are often not addressed in practice. Sweifach, Heft LaPorte, and Linzer (2010) and Banks and Nøhr (2011) explore the ways in which social workers deal with ethical concerns and complexities such as maintaining confidentiality in situations of conflict where different pressures from various agencies come to bear.

Social workers too can feel bitter and aggrieved against the 'enemy', the 'terrorists' or with groups opposing their own political interests and viewpoints. Under these circumstances, conflicts and tensions may arise between social workers from different

backgrounds within teams, as well as in encountering service users from the opposing sides. Seeley (2003) reports that, following 9/11, Arab and Muslim psychotherapists in New York found that some patients began to mistrust psychotherapists who became hypersensitive to the fact that patients could suspect them of terrorism or of being sympathetic to terrorism. Baum and Ramon (2010) referring to Israeli conflicts, note the distant and wary relationships developing between Jewish and Arab social workers, citing examples of Jewish patients in hospitals refusing to be served by Arab social workers.

Ellis (2006) reports on the policy directives given to service providers (public health, psychiatry, nursing, education, teachers)—to address anger, fear, rage, revenge, prejudice and concerns in the classroom; and to social workers (in conjunction with psychiatrists and public health professionals) to assess the impact of trauma and disaster on mental health. Sweifach et al. (2010) note the role of social workers involved in disaster relief which provides a human face amidst the beleaguered and grief-filled environment. Cemlyn (2008a) and Hayes and Humphries (2004) show examples of social workers engaged in advocacy and immigration campaigns to highlight the plight of asylum seekers whilst Hill, Mora, and Garcia (2008) show ways in which the lives of undocumented migrant workers can be made easier by social workers advocating for them and raising funds as well as creating clear and fair eligibility and assessment processes.

Baum and Ramon (2010) assert that there are several factors that can assist in de-isolating individual sentiments and experiences; one of the most important ways is to engage in organised discussions between workers where feelings can be freely aired and expressed. Eidelson et al. (2003) found that whilst working within the context of collective trauma and catastrophe presented concerns amongst psychologists (burn out, extreme anxiety and exhaustion), it also presented opportunities in terms of feeling more connected with their clients as they shared similar experiences. Commonality with clients can therefore help in professionals coming closer to, and being rooted in, the communities they serve (Seeley, 2003).

Social Work Education and Training

The aforementioned challenges posed by the impact of political conflict upon communities and social workers require that these issues are firmly addressed in social work teaching and in-service training programmes.

There are some programmes that have begun overtly to address matters of political strife and the rationale to make students (and academics) aware of the ramifications of conflict in the daily lives of service users and communities. Duffy (2006, 2009) called for recognition of the potential contribution from service users and carers in helping students understand the impact of conflict and highlight the mutual learning of involving service users and students together in this context.

Campbell and Duffy (2008) reinforce this call by urging social workers in Northern Ireland to explore sectarianism in safer ways which allow people to talk through their

emotions and the impact on their lives. These authors also provide examples of service user involvement on social work courses aimed at helping students better understand the profound impact of conflict on their lives. This can develop new forms of progressive social work knowledge and methods, which encourage more open service user involvement. Gordon (2009) describes how generic social work skills can be deployed when working with Palestinians and negotiating across check points in the West Bank in Palestine.

Nuttman-Shwartz (2008), drawing upon two separate scenarios, demonstrates how in one situation through facilitation of open discussion of views and feelings about political conflicts and decisions, social work students from the two sides of the conflict in Palestine and Israel came to understand each other. In the other situation, Israelis, evacuating occupied territories, were able to come to terms with their new situation through similar open discussion in which they expressed their feelings of frustration, helplessness and humiliation, inclusive of having a frank discussion about the social worker's own beliefs and values about the situation. This raised questions of personal/political boundaries, social work professionalism and exposure of oneself, traditionally avoided by social workers.

Hence, social work has begun to tackle the issues of political conflict in its many facets, including the impact on service users, the effects on professional practice as well as in terms of the training of existing and future social workers. Nevertheless, the literature remains limited and greater research is needed as well as examples of pedagogic practice to build a more rigorous source of knowledge and expertise. We feel that this paper can contribute to this area.

Project Methodology

The project methodology was designed within the level of funding from the IASSW. Consultation was therefore limited to online options plus one face-to-face two-day meeting (which took place in March 2010) involving nine social work educators and researchers, mostly from the UK, but with experience of other societies in political conflict (Bosnia, England, Georgia, Germany, India, Israel, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Russia, Sri Lanka and UK). Utilising the existing literature in tandem with the personal and professional experiences which members of the group had, we set out in the first phase to outline both the key issues needing to be included in a curriculum on political conflict and the key stakeholders who should be engaged in this process. In addition to considering both learning needs and outcomes, the project team then agreed the following as core dimensions that would underpin this work:

(1) The importance of values, knowledge, skills and methods necessary for working with individuals, groups and communities affected by political conflict.
(2) Fostering human rights within acute conflict and in its aftermath and supporting social workers and social work students in building human rights-based practice.

(3) Learning from research evidence as well as relevant international testimonies and narratives, both from service users as victims and survivors of conflict and from social workers.
(4) Implications of working in a shared traumatic reality, including capacity building of affected groups.
(5) The role of social work in responding to political conflict and peace building.
(6) The ethical dilemmas faced by social workers, educators and researchers in political conflict contexts, including 'non-acute violent' contexts (e.g. working with refugees and asylum seekers).

Being aware that the above dimensions represent only the views of our non-representative *ad hoc* and self-selected group, we were keen to find out whether indeed these dimensions would be perceived as the most relevant by the international community of social work educators and social workers.

Although committed to the inclusion of service users' perspective, the limitations of the funding meant it was not possible within this project to embark on an empirical research of social work clients' views on this matter, though their known views culled from the literature were incorporated into the work of the group.

From the outset, the group thought that more than one methodology and method could have been applied to investigate this issue, and that a participatory action research framework and a mixed methods approach would have been the ideal option in terms of carrying out an in-depth study. However, this has been ruled out for the exploratory phase, that this project represents. Given the lack of any comparative research of this issue within social work, it seemed that a survey approach would be both feasible and achievable in order to provide preliminary mapping information for the purpose of more in-depth research. Therefore, the choice of a questionnaire is relatively easy to disseminate and to respond to internationally. The limitations of this methodological approach were clear, in that we would be unlikely to secure a representative sample, would end up with a self-selected group of respondents who have an interest in the topic, and run the risk of apathy that requests to respond to questionnaires often generate. The possibility of adopting a case study approach was also looked at, but this would have been equally limited not only in terms of representation but also in terms of coverage of the key areas whose relevance to this topic we wished to establish. Thus, we went for the 'broad brush' approach instead. In retrospect, each member of the group could have undertaken to attempt to administer the questionnaire to a group of students/workers/clients, though this would have entailed the need for ethical approval across different cultures.

The fact that only people who know English could respond to the questionnaire was another serious limitation, though it was piloted prior to dissemination by group members from different cultures in terms of its clarity of meaning. We were also cognisant that many social work educators in non-English speaking countries understand English well and thus would be able to respond to it.

The proposed curriculum outline was then consolidated into a questionnaire (available from the authors). Several versions of the questionnaire were designed, discussed and re-designed and a prolonged e-mail exchange facilitated opportunities for discussion, feedback and amendment among team members in regard to the fine-tuning of this aspect of the survey. It was then disseminated as widely as possible to include social work educators, students, social workers and service users. Dissemination took place during the second half of 2010, using the established networks of the IASSW and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), as well as team members approaching their own particular networks. Responses were anonymous, though some respondents opted to tell us their names and their motivation for responding. Thus, the dissemination was dependent on accessibility to the newsletters and websites of these two organisations, as well as the willingness of readers to fill in the questionnaire and to encourage relevant people they knew to do so too.

The findings of the responses received were then thematically analysed, following closely the dimensions identified above, which were translated into the specific questions in the composition of the questionnaire. The thematic analysis was carried out independently by two people, a junior and a more senior researcher, who read the text and analysed it according to the agreed coding system. There were no instances of disagreement as to the thematic analysis, perhaps due to the brevity of the majority of the responses. The brevity of the text also meant that a more elaborate form of thematic analysis was not an option.

The questionnaire itself, titled: Consultation Document: 'Social Work in the context of Political Conflict', included the following:

(1) an explanation of the nature of the document and its purpose;
(2) description of respondent's current role within social work;
(3) whether the topic should be taught, and/or, whether respondents had experience of teaching or learning about it;
(4) where on the curriculum it should be taught and at what level;
(5) suggestions for curricular content, including contextual knowledge, knowledge of political conflict, approaches to interventions by social workers, layers of intervention, policy, legislation, organisations to be involved;
(6) learning needs and learning outcomes.

Respondents were also encouraged to provide additional comments.

Findings

A total of 80 people responded ($n = 80$) from 16 countries, mainly from Europe, but also from countries such as Brazil, the Philippines and Zimbawe. While clearly neither a representative nor a big enough sample for the purpose of generalisation, the findings make for an interesting reading about a topic usually left out of the curriculum. Sixty-three per cent of the respondents came from the UK, followed

by 15% from Russia and 5% from Georgia. Sixty per cent defined themselves as students, 20% as lecturers and researchers, and 9% as social work researchers.

Eighty-five per cent of respondents thought it was necessary to include this topic in the social work curriculum, more so among non-UK than among UK respondents (93% vs. 77%). Reasons given for the inclusion in the curriculum include 'social work is political'; 'it is an issue that impacts the lives of so many of us anywhere' and 'political awareness is not enough. Social workers should have their abilities to understand and solve political conflicts recognised'. Reasons for non-inclusion include 'not relevant' and 'not necessary'. Typical comments supporting the latter positions were: 'I think that the social worker has no space in the heat of events'; 'the curriculum is over loaded'.

Half of the sample (50%) did not think this issue was sufficiently covered in the curriculum; 28% thought it was and 22% were not sure. Only 16% have been involved in teaching on this topic, mostly from outside of the UK, and 30% have been involved as learners. Slightly more than half (55%) thought it would be suitable for inclusion on qualifying level programmes, but 42% proposed it should be taught at post-qualifying level (continuing professional development).

The respondents are however divided equally as to whether the training should be integrated within the curriculum, part of the core social work curriculum or as an added on elective module. Fifty-seven per cent preferred to see this theme as a 'Social Work in Context' component, as compared to 28% who wanted it to be within learning sessions preparing students for practice, and 27% of respondents felt this should occur within 'Diversity Studies'. Teachings within 'Social Science', 'Disasters', 'Human Growth' and in the 'Introduction to Social Work' are other curricular options considered by a smaller number of people. Pertaining to the content of the teaching and learning itself, equal importance is given to topics such as 'Policy and Legislation' and 'Socio-political understanding' (39% vs. 36%), followed by 'Citizenship' (30%) and the 'Global Context' (25%).

In the section on knowledge of impact of political conflict, several issues receive very similar preference. Negative impact on maintaining services (31%) is followed by negative impact on vulnerable groups (30%) and difficulties in accessing services (28%). Considering teaching on interventions aimed at counteracting the impact upon access to and delivery of services, equal preference is given to both emergency interventions and those addressing basic needs (material, social and emotional) (30%), followed by inter-agency and inter-disciplinary work (28%) and community development (27%). Consequently, this is a theme where there is considerable diversity of opinion. Pertaining to layers of intervention, a similar picture emerges: 39% opt for 'Individual and Family Levels', followed by 'Communities' (32%) and 'Fieldwork Social Work' (31%). With regards to learning needs, those of Critical Reflection (39%), Training and Supervision (32%) and how to enforce Codes of Ethical Practice (31%) are prioritised.

In terms of Learning Outcomes, the respondents opt for focusing on contextual issues, such as the socio-political background (34%), how conflict may be overt or

obscured (28%) and the legal instruments (28%). Preferred generic indicators of learning include understanding (35%), awareness (34%), knowledge, skills and critical reflection (28% per each indicator), highlighting that all indicators are perceived to be important. Furthermore, 30% of the participants offered general comments and these focused on the importance of the topic and suggestions about where it should be best placed within the social work curriculum.

Implementation: Curriculum Development and Delivery

Applying the findings of both the emerging research and literature on the subject and from our small-scale survey, there would appear to be support for the need for social work educators to address political conflict more systematically within social work curricula. However, several questions arise such as: for whom this curriculum applies; should political conflict be added to a standard curriculum, already perceived to be overcrowded, or should it be optional, or further still, should it be part of continuing professional development studies? Though framed as 'ideals' (p. 15), IASSW (2004 Global Standards for social work education at qualifying levels) provides some degree of legitimation to the notion of integration of learning, by which we may be guided. The standards are clear that as social work 'does not operate in a vacuum', social work programmes should be developing professionals with a critical understanding of political and global factors (IASSW, 2004, p. 2.7) and with awareness of how political injustices impact on human functioning and development globally and nationally with particular regard to infringement of individual human rights (IASSW, 2004, p. 4.1.1).

IASSW (2004) sets out four conceptual components of core social work curricula which are viewed as universally applicable: *The Domain of the Social Work Professional; The Domain of the Social Work profession; Methods of Social Work Practice and the Paradigm of the Social Work Profession (pp. 6–8)*. The emerging themes from the findings of our questionnaire and our review of the literature can be mapped effectively to these four components to accommodate an integrated focus on political conflict within standard qualifying curricula. Respondents to our survey identified a wide range of opportunities across the curriculum in which this subject may be addressed in relation both to learning themes to inform social work practice and learning how to intervene ethically and effectively. Educators developing their curricula on political conflict would need to select relevant examples and sub-themes to emphasise the distinct national political context and history in which their programme is situated. This may include programmes delivered in recent or sudden onset conflict situations, chronic and enduring conflict situations, situations where there is heightened conflict during a chronic conflict and post-conflict situations. It is likely that all programmes should be taken into account the impact of globalisation and issues resulting from forced migration of peoples.

In particular, a curriculum on political conflict needs to first concern itself with what IASSW terms the *Domain of the Social Work Professional* (2004, p. 4.2.2). It is in

this domain that the need is highlighted for social work students to examine critically the relationship between their personal identification, beliefs, values, histories and ideologies and the professional role of a social worker and the ethics in social work practice. Our survey highlighted the need to promote critical reflection and ethical practice. Interestingly, developing professional resilience did not figure in our results though perhaps this may be inferred in the mention of 'supervision' by 32% of respondents. In the political conflict curriculum, educators will need to devise strategies to enable students to explore these aspects safely and fully and to enable students themselves personally to challenge their conscious or unconscious cultural absorption of any politically oppressive and discriminatory ideologies or practices and be critically self-reflective. The literature review notes some examples of pedagogic experiments in this area (e.g. Campbell & Duffy, 2008: Campbell et al., 2012; Coulter, Campbell, Duffy, & Reilly, 2012; Duffy, 2012; Nuttman-Shwartz, 2008) with particular reference to political conflict. Literature from other fields such as social work ethics also provides pointers (e.g. Banks & Nøhr, 2011), which offers a useful selection of ethical dilemmas and commentaries including those from social workers working in situations of political conflict. The impact of practising in-conflict and post-conflict situations on social workers themselves needs to be attended to, pointing to the importance of developing workers' skills in self-care and utilising professional support networks such as professional supervision in their practice.

Such learning may be undertaken concurrently with studies related to the IASSW's *Domain of the Social Work Profession* (2004, p. 4.2.1) in which students develop their historical and current understanding of the profession within a national and global context. This could include an opportunity for students to learn about and debate the causes, events and impact of political conflict within their own societies. The literature review highlights factors to which educators will need to attend. The history of any conflict is likely to contain biases and contention and both educators and learners may have pre-formed personal views which need to be made subject to critical professional reflection. Personal service user and carer narratives and testimonies provided by those affected by political conflict (and arguably by former protagonists in post-conflict situations), if thoughtfully managed, may provide a powerful learning method in promoting socio-political understanding and analysis. Educators will, however, need to ensure that these contributors to learning programmes are fully supported in line with good practice (see, Duffy, 2006; Levin, 2004). Survey respondents mentioned a wide range of curriculum areas in which the topic could be addressed. For example, standard social work studies on the legal and policy context of practice, human rights, humanitarian law, international conventions and the role of supra-national institutions (e.g. The United Nations) might support the political conflict curriculum if educators select practice examples for students to work through related to advocacy for human rights. In developing students' understanding of frameworks of human functioning, behaviour and development within the social environment, educators could include consideration of the impact

of war and conflict on human development and health; factors that promote individual and group resilience; adverse reactions and mental health issues caused by the lived experience of political conflict and loss and exacerbated for those with pre-existing conditions. World Social Work Day may also be an ideal annual opportunity for social work educators to encourage reflection among their students on the challenges which many societies face in dealing with war, conflict and oppression and the associated impact on the nature and provision of services. In the current context of global recession, where public services are increasingly rationed, this might also include, for example, promoting thoughtful debate about the provision of services to forced migrants and learning from specialist service providers. Engaging students in developing local activities in support of global action and events, such as the 60th Anniversary of the UN Refugee Convention (2011), might further assist in awareness raising and framing subsequent practice as well as developing an understanding of historical and current economic and political relations between nations that underlie political conflicts.

In learning *Methods of Social Work Practice* (IASSW, 2004, p. 4.2.3), frameworks such as problem solving, systems perspectives, strengths perspectives, anti-oppressive social work and post-colonial approaches (Healy, 2005) might also be used to explore evidence informed and critically reflective social work responses to individuals, families and communities affected by political conflict. Educators would need also to highlight relevant research pointing to the efficacy or otherwise of some methods of intervention in situations of political conflict (e.g. single session 'crisis debriefing' was not found to be useful as an early intervention after exposure to conflict, in comparison to having several such sessions; Bonanno, Brewin, Kaniasty, & La Greca (2010), WHO (2005)).

The survey findings also pointed to the need to consider inter-agency and inter-disciplinary work in the political conflict curriculum. It is arguable that social workers are uniquely qualified to act as 'boundary spanners' (Williams, 2002) between individuals and a range of service providers in political conflict contexts in order to promote a holistic response to the needs of individuals, families and communities. Boundary spanners (a term drawn from organisational literature) are characterised by their ability to network across organisational boundaries, using relationship building skills. Learning skills of co-ordinating and networking between service users and service providers, and building and sustaining relationships between different service providers (such as education, health, housing and justice, including national and international non-governmental organisations) are part of the standard social work curriculum and this might be extended to consider the application of such skills in responding to political conflict and articulating a distinct social work role. Learning about the application of effective communication skills, influencing and motivating skills, bridging and mediating skills and facilitative leadership through worked examples and practice experience specifically framed to examine professional responses to political conflict could be used to develop confidence in these roles. A key social work role in situations related to political

conflict is to identify, assess, prevent and respond to threats to protection of particularly vulnerable groups including children and vulnerable adults, with attention also being paid to issues such as gender-based violence, the vulnerability of minority groups, and the need to minimise harm related to substance and alcohol misuse. Again, applying standard learning about protection of children and vulnerable adults to consideration of responding in situations of conflict might promote students' awareness of the transferability of their learning to different contexts and situations.

Standard pedagogic methods can be used by educators to develop students' capacities to respond in situations of conflict including case studies, problem posing methods, simulations, learning from published sources and practice placement learning. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which was established in 1992 in response to the General Assembly resolution 46/182 which called for strengthened co-ordination of humanitarian assistance, has produced useful Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007). Educators may find it helpful to apply IASC frameworks in relation to protection and human rights standards and the community mobilisation and support to develop trainee social workers in using transformative approaches to respond both at community and individual levels. The IASC guidelines (2007) contain helpful 'action sheets' which can assist educators in developing learning programmes and links to key resources. Other relevant resources include the IASC's (2005) *Guidelines on Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings* and the Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies' (2010) *Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery*.

Finally, IASSW's fourth component of core curricula, the *Paradigm of the social work profession* (2004, p. 4.2.4) provides a set of epistemological concepts which are fully congruent with developing curricula for political conflict. Not only do they draw attention to 'changes in socio-structural, *political* and economic conditions that disempower, marginalise and exclude people' (p. 12), but they also emphasise the importance of advocacy, capacity building and empowerment, respect for diversity, utilising strengths perspectives, and 'knowledge about and respect for the rights of service users' (p. 12). Those developing curricula with a focus on political conflict can use these precepts to underpin learning in the other three domains.

The advantage of utilising IASSW's core conceptual components to develop a political conflict curriculum is that this would resonate globally for social work educators, who would then be able to develop their curriculum to include specific focus on issues relevant to their national context. Furthermore, these themes can be built on to develop specialist, in-depth studies for qualified social workers including developing research agendas on effective practice. Sharing educational practice, resources and pedagogic research in this area globally would add increasing depth to this endeavour, connecting again to IASSW's injunction for 'specific attention' to be paid to the 'constant review and development of the curricula' (2004, p. 3.5).

Conclusion

Based on our survey and the critical review of the literature, our findings resonate with previous research in this area (Baum, 2011; Denov, 2010; Guru, 2010; Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2008) that in our globalised world, it is important for social workers to be trained in how to deal with the issues associated with political conflict and its aftermath effects.

Nonetheless, we are aware that there will be challenges in how such a curriculum can find expression, particularly in countries experiencing on-going political conflict or in those that are recovering from such difficulties such as South Africa and Northern Ireland. This paper has already shown examples in such countries of the potentially disempowering implications that can occur when social workers occupy politically distant and neutral positioning; however, we also cannot understate the real dangers that can face social workers in such contexts. We do, however, contend that a social work curriculum on political conflict may yield opportunities for social work students and future practitioners to practice in a way which advocates for human rights, social justice and solidarity which Hölscher and Berhane (2008) believe is particularly important in countries with repressive regimes. Mmatli (2008) lends weight to this position in arguing that 'the potential role of social work education in preparing graduates to include political activism in their practice cannot be overstated' (p. 306). Mmatli cites from Egan (2002) who argues that such political activism will also necessarily entail a commitment to human rights-based practice to foster skills in policy practice and user participation. Other authors have endorsed the importance of social workers needing to have practice skills relating to political conflict (Baum, 2011) and supervision (Nuttman-Shwartz & Shay, 2006) and in sensitising policy makers to the effects of this reality on our society (Shamai & Ron, 2009).

The fact that our survey data suggest support for such curriculum innovation is of itself encouraging; however, even in this relatively small-scale survey, scepticism is expressed about how this can realistically occur within an already stretched social work curriculum. The current IFSW definition of social work orientates social workers to engage directly with those issues which threaten social justice and human rights, and the IASSW framework, as a conceptual paradigm for a proposed curriculum, has the potential to navigate social work students towards practice consistent with its globally accepted value base. However, as indicated in the literature review, there can be a gap between core social work values of human rights and aspirations of anti-oppressive practice, and their practical implementation. The complexity of conflict and post-conflict situations, combined with other pressures on social work such as budget restrictions and managerialism, can therefore distort social work values (Cemlyn & Nye, 2012). Nevertheless, it is also important to consider the benefits that can occur from more direct engagement with political issues and the possibilities for creative practice that this may lead to (Shamai & Bohem, 2001).

We cannot, however, undermine the challenges which may need to be overcome. For example, if we move towards the involvement of service users and carers in the sharing of testimony and narrative about the impact of conflict on their lives, this may be met with resistance if students perceive such people as being from 'the other side' (Dekel & Baum, 2010, p. 1940). Such perceptions may become particularly acute whilst conflict is an on-going background feature of the educational context. Teaching colleagues may also need to address and manage their own issues in terms of listening to testimony with which they may fundamentally disagree. However, lessons learned in promoting knowledge and practice to work in on-going active conflicts particularly in Israel (Baum, 2011; Shamai & Ron, 2009) need to be expanded and adapted to other situations and places taking account of specific historical roots and current manifestations of conflict. Being realistic about such challenges may unlock opportunities for new types of positive engagement, as recognised in the earlier literature section.

This has been an exploratory and small-scale project which, despite such limitations, has uncovered findings which should contribute to the debate in looking at ways in which social workers can become more politically engaged and active. Mmatli (2008, p. 307) concludes his important paper by asserting that 'social work education should impart appropriate knowledge and skills for social workers to participate politically and become effective agents of social change'. We believe that a social work curriculum on political conflict has the potential to deliver in doing so; however, we would recommend that further research is needed perhaps using a comparative case study approach with more in-depth qualitative methods to further explore and refine the requirements of such a curriculum to contribute to the types of changes that are needed.

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