Human rights discourse during a short-term field placement abroad: An experience of social work students from Israel and India

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Abstract
The literature highlights the difficulty involved in integrating human rights and social work practice, especially among students who encounter extreme and unfamiliar social problems. Content analysis of narratives written by students during their field placement abroad contributes to identifying the conditions that are necessary to increase students' awareness of their own obstacles and difficulties in promoting human rights. The findings provide insights into the actions that need to be taken in order to enhance human rights knowledge and to better integrate it into practice. International field placement is recommended as a preferred setting for implementing social rights practice in global contexts.

Keywords
Field placement abroad, human rights, international social work, social work education

There is a general consensus regarding the importance of human rights and the need to integrate human rights discourse in social work training and practice. Nonetheless, the literature reveals that there is a gap between declarations about the importance of the issue and promotion of human rights discourse, particularly in social work practice (Hawkins and Knox, 2014; Kwong-Kam, 2014). It has been argued that this gap derives, among other causes, from the history of the profession and from the emphasis on dealing with poor, disadvantaged populations and providing for their needs following processes of urbanization, war, and globalization (Hugman, 2012).

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The tension between traditional social work, which tends to focus on needs-based assistance, and social work that focuses on ensuring human dignity and liberty by promoting human rights has been intensified by processes of globalization. In this context, emphasis has been placed on the need to balance the perspective of needs-based assistance, which prevailed in the past and continues to prevail among policy-makers, service providers, and many social workers, with the perspective of respecting and promoting human rights (Hugman, 2012).

Beyond the processes of globalization, there are differences of opinion regarding universalist perspectives of human rights versus perspectives of social relativism in human rights, especially in terms of their practical implementation (Healy, 2007). The most prevalent argument relates to the Western individualistic approach, which has shaped professional practice in various areas of the world (e.g. Dominelli, 2007) including countries which are defined as less developed, such as India (Castillo et al., 2014). These models have even been defined as a manifestation of imperialism that is not only ineffective, but actually infringes on the rights of non-Western cultures, is essentially a type of oppressive colonialism (Ife, 2001), and limits the ability of social workers to deal with social issues and social structures that are unbalanced and unequal (Singh et al., 2010).

Accordingly, it has been argued that emphasis on human rights may be perceived as intolerance. Furthermore, such emphasis may actually detract from those rights rather than promote them, unless it is based on cultural relativism – the transition from a feeling of foreignness to acknowledgement of differences represented in the environment (Healy, 2007), while also considering the balance between moral relativism and pluralistic multicultural societies (Gary and Webb, 2010). In that connection, Sali (2012) claimed that 'relativism can be even more dangerous, considering it privileges community and neighborhood, justifying atrocities against those who disagree with the oppressiveness of the tradition' (p. 811), which could lead to cleansing and genocide.

Reichert (2006) supported this view, as reflected in the following statement: 'Cultural relativism should be viewed critically and not be given an illegitimate priority over established principles of human rights' (p. 33). As such, not all cultural practices or policies place the same value on human rights, and social workers need to advocate for human rights while being sensitive to their clients' cultural contexts (Katiuzhinsky and Okech, 2014).

The professional literature underscores the importance of cultural competence and the need to train social workers in this field. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2001: 10) and the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) (2008) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) also acknowledged the importance of professional competence in advancing human rights. Cultural competence is a crucial skill in the field of international social work and goes beyond cultural sensitivity (Johnson and Munch, 2009). Garran and Werkmeister-Rozas (2013) claimed that cultural competence requires social workers to develop self-awareness of their position in society, their racial category, and their power and social privilege, which are essential when exploring and identifying the interpersonal dynamics of cross-cultural work. One of the dangers of social competence is that it is a 'contentious concept … based on knowledge and ways of knowing that are embedded in modernist Eurocentric ways' (Das and Anand, 2014: 110). This concern is reflected in the generalization of countries by their location in the global context, for example, 'South' versus 'North' (Razack, 2009) or 'East' versus 'West' (Lyngstad, 2013). This generalization ignores the fact that some southern countries are well developed (e.g. Australia and New Zealand), whereas some Northern countries are still underdeveloped (e.g. Georgia). Recent authors have chosen to use more specific terms to describe some of the differences between countries (Laylants et al., 2015; Nadkarni, 2013; Sims et al., 2014). For example, Nadkarni (2013) described the intention of student exchanges with the North as '[enhancing] the sensitivity and understanding of the problems faced by the populations living in less developed regions' (p. 256). In that description, Nardkarni did not use the term southern students, but chose more detailed and

clear language. In line with this perspective, the authors will use specific terminology when addressing 'developed' or 'less developed' countries in this article.

Social work students from developed countries are often unaware of their privileged or powerful social positions (Julia, 2000), and there is a need to increase their awareness. This can be achieved through a process of self-reflection, which can increase the students' awareness of their own racial/ethnic identity and enable them to understand how much power and privilege are inherent (or not inherent) in their identities (Garran and Werkmeister-Rozas, 2013). Self-reflection is accepted as a major aspect of training social work students. Beyond this aspect, another question arises in light of the process of globalization: Will the international learning space promote assimilation of human rights discourse? Will this space support practice based on cultural relativism, which is consistent with the spirit of the times? The international space is used mainly in ISW, where social workers are involved in international efforts to assist populations in distress whose rights have been taken away (Healy, 2001). It is commonly held that ISW is a field that crosses boundaries and integrates understanding of global processes – processes which affect the implementation of social policies and intervention methods at the local level and beyond (Lyons et al., 2006). Studies have shown that international training facilitates acquisition of knowledge that encourages cultural sensitivity and cultural relativism. It enhances awareness of the patronizing attitudes among students from developed countries and provides them with special awareness of extreme poverty and large-scale distress, in addition to intensifying reconstruction of power relations. All of this is crucial for advancing human rights (Healy, 2008; Wronka and Bernasconi, 2012). However, as far as we know, researchers have yet to examine the extent to which the discussion and implementation of human rights have shaped the social work profession and been integrated as an essential aspect of ISW field work training. Specifically, few comparative studies have been conducted among students from different parts of the world who live in different cultural, social, and economic contexts such as the United States, Georgia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden, but as far as we know no comparative studies have been conducted among students coming from developed countries (visiting) and less developed regions (host) during short field placements abroad. To fill this gap, this study aimed to examine perspectives and methods of implementing human rights content in an encounter between social work students from two different countries – Israel and India.

Research goals and importance of the study

The main aim of the study is to gain insights into incorporating human rights discourse through a time-limited teaching intervention among two very different groups of students. Thus, the objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To characterize the issues relating to human rights discourse among students during a short field work program abroad;
2. To characterize the fostering and inhibiting factors that affect the ability to implement human rights discourse;
3. To characterize similarities and differences between the host and the visiting students with regard to human rights discourse and implementation of human rights at the time of the encounter.

Detailed description of the study: The program

The School of Social Work in Israel offers a 3-week international field work training program in collaboration with Institute of Social Work in India as part of the ISW program. The program includes compulsory theoretical and experiential courses which include human rights in ISW.

Regarding the field work training, students are required to work in Israel and in India, in addition to participating in a seminar on ISW in Israel and abroad. In India, the Israeli students participate in field work training together with the Indian students.

Most of the field work placements are oriented toward human rights (Manchary, personal communication 20 March 2013, social work in India). While the Israeli students are in India, both groups participate in an intensive psycho-educational course taught jointly by a local faculty member and the Israeli lecturer who accompanies the group from Israel. The course syllabus includes examination, awareness, and conceptualization of social work in a foreign country and an exploration of the similarities and the differences in social work in the two countries. The course, related to social issues that concern every country, exposes participants to Gandhi's social work and included lectures on the rights of women and children and on domestic violence in India.

Due to limited resources, the Indian students practice field work only in India and do not have the opportunity to train in Israel. Therefore, the Indian students are exposed to the domain of ISW through field work experiences, social encounters, and joint lectures with the Israeli students. It is an experiential mental learning experience that includes joint workshops and informal meetings, where the students from Israel and India learn together about ISW. This study was conducted while the Israeli students were visiting India as part of the above-mentioned ISW program.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 14 social work students enrolled in a field work training program in ISW. This number is considered sufficient for a study of this type – a naturalistic study (Baker and Edwards, 2012). Six were third-year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Israeli students (all women, aged 24–29 years) and eight were Master of Social Work (MSW) students from India (five men and three women, aged 20–32 years). Notwithstanding the different levels of degrees awarded by the two universities, all of the students in the program had field work experience and basic theoretical knowledge about generic social work and various intervention methods. For both groups of students, this was their first experience with an international learning encounter in the context of ISW.

Instrument

During the 3-week program in India, the above 14 students attended four psycho-educational sessions led by the lecturers from Israel and India. At the end of each 4-hour session, the students were asked to write personal narratives focusing on the main issues raised in the group. These narratives were based on the students' personal reflections that included critical analyses of what happened and especially why it happened (Fisher and Somerton, 2000). These issues included the educational content, the international encounter within the group, and the encounter in the field work sessions, as well as the cultural and social encounters that took place between the students in the two groups. Specifically, each narrative included three parts: the first focused on the content of the meeting, the second was an open reflective part, and the third included critical reflection on the group, the self-processes, and the content. This narrative form is a common way to explore personal and educational processes in social sciences, including social work (Tuval-Mashiach and Spector-Marzel, 2010). The narratives were written in Marathi and Hebrew, and translated into English in order to create a common basis for content analysis.

Content analysis

Content analysis of the narratives was conducted by the two researchers – the Israeli faculty member who accompanied the students and an external, objective researcher previously involved in the program but not in the field placement abroad. The content analysis was carried out in three steps, according to accepted procedures: reading the entire text in order to identify the main voice, identifying meaningful content units, and identifying the main themes reflected in the narratives (Patton, 2002; Unrau and Coleman, 1997).

Data collection and ethical aspects of the research

The study was approved by the Institute of Social Work in India and by the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work in Israel. The narratives were collected while the Israeli students were staying in India in January–February 2012 and are in the possession of the researchers. The students from India and Israel consented to participate in the study and signed informed consent forms in accordance with the criteria of the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work in Israel. The narratives were anonymous, and the field work training and joint encounter sessions in the target country were not graded.

Findings

The narratives reveal three main benchmarks. The first benchmark relates to the representations that the students used as a basis for examining human rights. The second one relates to the impact of the students' encounters with reality and the outcomes of the learning process in the context of rights, universalism, cultural relativism, and the personal and professional conditions needed for implementing these aspects. The third benchmark relates to the changes that took place among the students.

Representations used to examine human rights

The students examined human rights on the basis of various representations: the fundamental values underlying their country of origin, the social work profession, and the provision of rights to refugees and immigrants. Throughout the discourse, there was constant tension between emphasis on rights versus provision of essential needs. The Israeli students, who were represented as coming from developed, affluent countries (where discourse on human rights prevails), criticized the lack of respect for human rights in Israel:

> In our country (Israel), there is a lot of discrimination and racism for a so-called 'Western' country. (Israeli student)

The students from India perceived charity and altruism as basic values of social work, which constitute the ethical foundations of the profession, as described by one student from India:

> As a social worker, I was not much aware about the importance of the social work field. But after spending my valuable five years as a student social worker, I feel that I have chosen the right field. I too feel that earning money is not everything in life … to lend one's helping hand to needy and distressed people is also very important in our life. (Indian student)

The statements indicate that the two groups stressed different aspects of social work and focused on different aspects of the discourse relating to the origins and social environment of social work.

The discourse of the Indian students focused on needs and was consistent with the local social and cultural perspective, which views the values of charity and altruistic assistance to needy populations as supreme values underlying the social work profession. In contrast, the Israeli students expressed a critical perspective, and their espoused orientation focused on human rights discourse. They argued that in Israel there is injustice and that there are situations in which human rights are violated due to discrimination and racism, although Israel is a democratic, developed country.

The students from India expressed positive perceptions of Israel, which they portrayed as a country that has coped with the entry of refugees and asylum seekers who are not part of Israeli society. They felt that Israel has granted the refugees basic human rights despite the difficulty and complexity of the situation, and that there is something to learn from this human rights orientation:

> Israel is facing so much internal difficulty … still the social workers there are fighting for the rights of the refugees and immigrants from the other countries. It is a thing to be appreciated. But here in India people are not even interested to fight for their neighboring people. Therefore they are hungry … (Indian student)

These statements indicate that both groups of students had knowledge and awareness of human rights and that they engaged in an internal discourse about the emphasis on human rights versus internal needs.

Encounter with reality

In the students' encounter with reality, there was a sense of ambiguity about the perception of universal human rights versus the perspective of cultural relativism, which takes the local reality into account.

Human rights: Universalism versus relativism. The Israeli students' perspective was reflected in their feminist approach. Therefore, they were always critical of issues relating to social construction, social status, and sensitivity to others. However, in their examination of this perspective in India, they were reluctant to insult students from the other group because they were afraid that in the context of cultural relativism the concept of universal human rights as they understood it would not be interpreted in the same way by the students in the other group:

> I am from a very feminist family. My mother taught me to believe that women are equal to men, and that the sky is the limit for women. (Israeli student)

> There are many things I'd like to ask in a direct way, but I can't do it because the questions are based on my perspective of India and are not based on neutral knowledge. For example, [I'd like to ask about] women's status, or about why people in India accept things as they are and don't struggle. I hope we'll meet a few more times so that I'll be able to ask questions without being afraid of insulting anyone. (Israeli student)

The students from India faced a similar dilemma. The existential distress faced by the population in India often did not enable them to realize universal rights or even to ask questions about people's well-being and about their feelings:

> According to me it is just because here in India poverty and illiteracy are found at a mass level … How can we ask a child his/her feelings when he is unable to have food at least once in a day? So we need to focus

on the problems of basic needs. After that we can go for [deal with] their further development. (Indian student)

The students' encounter with the other group created a situation of ambiguity regarding the meaning of universal rights versus cultural relativism. In addition, the students began a process of self-examination, which included increased awareness of their stereotypes and cultural competence, rather than only considering theoretical knowledge about these perspectives.

Self-examination: Awareness of stereotypes

From the beginning, the students were given an opportunity to examine their stereotypes and how those attitudes affected their thinking:

I didn't want to reveal to the group that I had some misconceived ideas and images of Jews – that they are religiously fanatic, and could possibly have some anti-feeling towards Christians. But … coming together [in this program] has cleared and purified my mind of the bias and prejudice I had about Jews … (Indian student)

I said that I started the sessions with a blank page, eager to fill it with information, pictures, and culture … This was purely my intention … but I found that during the encounter, stereotypes colored the margins of that blank page … The stereotype in my mind was that the people [in India] are poor, that they have limited resources, and that they lack power. (Israeli student)

The students' narratives indicate that their stereotypes prevented them from being open and inhibited their cultural competence. When they became aware of their stereotypes, they were able to engage in a process of self-examination and acknowledge their personal, social, and racial status as well as their power advantage.

Self-examination: Awareness of lack of resources

The students from India were asked to share Indian culture with their Israeli guests, as reflected in food and cultural performances. During one cultural event, a young girl was walking on a tightrope at a high altitude without any safety net, and her father was giving her orders from the ground. The Israeli students were unable to respond spontaneously to this incident as they were used to doing in Israel. They felt paralyzed because they understood that children's rights were being violated, but they were not familiar enough with the rules and norms that prevailed in Indian culture. It was these two conflicting forces – violation of children's rights, on the one hand, and lack of awareness about the local culture, on the other – that created this sense of paralysis. The Israeli students felt that they were not familiar with local perspectives of human rights and raised questions such as the following: Do the local leaders allow children to work? Was the father's behavior toward his daughter accepted in India? Was the girl's dangerous work normative in the state of Rajasthan? This unclear situation caused the Israeli students to examine the reactions in the environment and take action accordingly:

I felt like I didn't know about the girl's background; I had no idea whether this is accepted in her culture, whether the Indian students think this is OK, etc. I felt that it's very important to know more about the situation before I take action. But I also felt so guilty that I didn't do anything about it and that I just went on with things and enjoyed myself. It made me think about how I will react in the future to situations that are unclear to me, situations where I feel helpless … What is the right thing to do in these situations? It left me really confused. (Israeli student)

In addition to the sense of helplessness that was created by the knowledge that the Israeli students lack the resources to take any action, they felt that their hands were tied. This feeling made them indifferent to their surroundings:

> All of a sudden, on our free day after we toured a shrine, I saw two poor women doing construction work. I was aware of the poverty and pain around me – but somehow I wasn't willing to see it. It was really difficult for me to deal with the feeling of guilt, so I acted like an indifferent person. (Israeli student)

Like the Israeli students, the Indian students felt weakened and oppressed by the political and social reality, as well as by the professional reality they encountered in India. This feeling undermined their self-confidence and generated intense fear about the way the Israeli students perceive them:

> Many times I feel sad [and] helpless towards a person who is in a risk/danger zone/ or die [death] situation. As a social work student, I have additional responsibility, but at many points I am handicapped, I am unable to resolve the problem. Because of fear I have even stopped raising [my] voice [about] many social problems. So it creates a feeling of irritation in my mind. I am totally in a confused state [about] what to do or what not to do. I [am] feeling frustrated because of my inability [to act]. (Indian student)

> I have always perceived a foreigner [as] a person who is more knowledgeable and holds a higher status in thinking, creating, achieving, etc. … we also got to know that they don't have slums like us … so a thought came to my mind that what will they think [when they] see our slum areas, what impression will they carry about us? (Indian student)

The encounter of the students in both groups with the other culture created a sense of low value and helplessness. Above all, they understood that they still lack cultural competence. That is, they do not have the ability to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other factors in a manner that recognizes and affirms the value of individuals, families, and communities:

> I thought about how most of the Israeli and Indian students talked about their sense of helplessness in the encounter with social problems. So my first thought was 'Is the sense of helplessness that many social workers in Israel and throughout the world feel when they cope with social problems a social problem in itself?' How can a social worker engage in social work, when the raw material is a social problem and they feel helpless, tied down? (Israeli student)

Through the process of self-examination, the students became aware that all humans are equal. This ability, which includes integrative recognition of universal human rights based on a relative perspective, enabled the students to develop the cultural competence necessary to implement human rights.

Social competence: Changes

In the joint encounters, the students in both groups came to acknowledge and understand that people are equal, irrespective of religion, skin color, or social status. This realization is an essential stage in the process of granting human rights and making this discourse part of the social worker's tasks:

> Till now my love for my country and my people inspired me to do social work. But T & J (Israeli students) showed me the true colours of humanity that bring out the social worker in us … According to T, 'if we fail to uphold our values, resort to discrimination, and cease to treat human beings as human beings we corrupt ourselves'. Indeed, so true! I had probably never thought of something like this … I felt like a frog in the well, now suddenly exposed to a whole new world with myriad shades of colours. (Indian student)

> The more I grow and develop, the realization that above all people are human beings has taken shape and intensified. That is, when I come face to face with a foreign person I see a human being. He may look different – religious, etc. – but he is a person just like me who has feelings and he has a right to this. My colleagues in the Indian group and my Israeli colleagues only strengthened this feeling. I felt grateful to be part of the encounter, and I hope I'll learn as much as possible to do good for myself first of all – afterwards, the sky is the limit. (Israeli student)

The recognition that all people are human was accompanied by a call from the members of both groups to change the existing reality. Evidently, the students felt and hoped that their collective effort and the efforts of the social workers would make it possible to change reality at the political, economic, and cultural levels in order to create a better world:

> Other issues were to bring about a change, as 'J' said – '[to] change in the reality'. I understood – or rather she made me understand that she was mentioning a broader approach like the mainstream system itself … political, … economic, … social and … cultural change. But can a social worker bring about such a large change? I am of an opinion that yes, with the right approach and a collective effort [it is possible to] change … reality, whether … [in] human rights efforts or in international social work. (Indian student)

> It warmed my heart that the group of students from India and Israel took a break from the external madness and stress … During the session, fantasies raced through my mind about this group of students and maybe other groups in the world joining together as a significant force to change not only the local society but also the world … I have been thinking a lot about the concept of choice and power … the power to choose … and maybe the power to change something in someone else … The question is, what will we really do with this, with our feelings … where do we channel them? That's a choice, and it's power. (Israeli student)

Discussion

The findings indicate that the students from both countries came to the international encounter with theoretical knowledge and awareness of human rights discourse. Over time, they moved constantly between human rights discourse and discourse on needs. This fluctuation derived, among other causes, from the different educational backgrounds and values that each group brought to the encounter. However, the fluctuations also resulted from the students' encounter with reality. The findings elicit several reasons underlying the uncertainty about how to implement human rights: fear of harming one another because of not knowing the codes and culture of the other group, stereotypes that characterized the attitudes of each group, and the confusion and uncertainty that the students experienced with respect to their attitudes about universalism versus relativism. These findings support Reichert's (2011) argument that the difficulty in implementing human rights practice derives from the complexity of integrating the principles of universalism and human rights with the principles of cultural sensitivity. This difficulty also relates to the complexity of the situation resulting from moral relativism, which is one of the basic principles underlying the social work profession.

Moreover, the findings highlight the need for students to deal with the burden posed by distress and lack of resources. These cardinal problems, which are often associated with life and death

issues, limited the students' ability to promote human rights and raised philosophical questions. It appears that for the students from India, the emphasis on relativism and the pressure to provide for basic needs in the local context were among the causes for the gap that was found between human rights discourse and basic needs discourse as well as among the factors that prevented the students from implementing human rights discourse. More specifically, in light of the vast size of India and the conditions of extreme poverty, the students there are flooded by existential questions. Hence, it is hard for them to see beyond providing for basic needs, and their ability to implement human rights is limited. These findings are consistent with the call of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) president 'to encourage international faculty and student exchanges, particularly between programs in the South … [for students from] the North in order to enhance sensitivity and understanding of the problems faced by the populations living in less developed regions' (Nadkarni, 2013: 256).

The importance of understanding the emphasis on relativism in less developed countries has also been expressed by Singh et al. (2010):

> [The] social issues facing India encourage social work educators to face philosophical questions within the Indian context, such as 'What does it mean to be human?' and 'what is the nature of human being'? These questions need to be examined within the context of global capitalism that transcends the local [context] and often undermines the support systems of communal Indian society. (p. 868)

The Indian students were naturally drawn toward providing for the needs of the population, as they raised philosophical questions. It appears that in order to implement practice that focuses on human rights, they needed to examine how they would deal with the gap between the two approaches. That is, they needed to consider the collectivist orientation and its implications for India on the one hand, versus the individualist orientation as reflected in the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on the other (Healy, 2007); as reflected in one Israeli student's narrative,

> Our way of thinking [the Israeli social workers] is different from theirs [the social workers from India]. Our world view is deeply rooted in the values of self-fulfillment, individualism, 'what makes me feel good' … They [the social workers from India] talked about dedication, helping others …

In contrast, the Israeli students were concerned with professional dilemmas that lack a definitive solution. For example, these dilemmas related to universal perspectives, relevance, and international knowledge as well as to the feeling of being alien and fear of insulting others. As a result, it was difficult for them to act on their human rights perspectives, as reflected in the sense of helplessness and paralysis that they experienced when they saw the Indian girl walking on a tightrope without a safety net while her father was giving her instructions from the ground.

Both groups of students came to the encounter with stereotypes about each other, despite the preparations and prior knowledge that they had acquired in their respective countries of origin. In this connection, two questions arise: whether the students had acquired sufficient knowledge before their encounter with the other group and whether they were emotionally prepared for the encounter. The findings reveal that the students lacked knowledge and are consistent with criticism voiced in the professional literature. Dominelli (2007) argued that 'despite the relevance of human rights to all countries, social work educators have failed to make this issue an explicit and central part of the social work curriculum' (p. 21). Similarly, Kwong-Kam (2014) contended that the social work profession has forgotten the 'social' aspect and the need to restore social justice and promote human rights. According to Kwong-Kam, knowledge provided about policy, welfare, and tools for

taking action at the level of policy is insufficient. In line with this assertion, Spiro's (2010) findings indicate that the concepts of social justice and anti-oppressive practice are not adequately emphasized in social work training in Israel.

Beyond the theoretical knowledge that is lacking, it is possible that the intensity of the international encounter undermined existing knowledge about equality, universality, justice, and related topics. However, it is also possible that there was a deficit in training or a failure to assimilate and internalize the new knowledge as accepted in extreme issues in social work training (e.g. Cunningham, 2004). The findings reveal that the responses of the students from both groups were characterized by withdrawal and indifference. The students felt that they lacked resources, and they relied on the stereotypes that they held at the beginning of the encounter as well as on 'familiar knowledge that they brought from home'. Previous research (Nuttman-Shwartz and Ranz, 2014) has revealed that the students needed to experience an emotional process in addition to a cognitive process in order to understand and assimilate cultural sensitivity and relativism.

In contrast, findings of a study conducted among students from Australia show that a 2-week ISW training program in India raised the students' awareness of human rights, among other issues (Bell and Anscombe, 2012). It appears that the interpersonal experience, the process of learning through observation, and the collaborative professional activity among students from different cultures and backgrounds helped them acknowledge each other's differences.

Moreover, the unique nature of the international setting in which ISW students are trained is known as a space that enables

> a deeper cultural permeation by actively and intentionally placing students in unfamiliar and uncomfortable environments … Being detached from the comforts … students are forced – or, more precisely, motivated – to experience everything indigenous, from food and routines to values and practices. (Kim, 2015: 10)

The findings show that these conditions enhanced the development of cultural competence. Although this process of development had not been completed during the actual experience, it provided the students with tools to continue examining themselves and their attitudes regarding oppression and power relations, with the understanding that the process of examination is essential to the promotion of human rights (Garran and Werkmeister-Rozas, 2013; NASW, 2001: 7). Notably, both groups experienced a process of learning that yielded similar results. Moreover, the Israeli students worked in a foreign environment that was completely detached from the environment and culture they were familiar with. From their perspective, the international setting required learning under extreme conditions in an international arena. This was an intense situation, in which everything around them (the field work setting, the group of students from the host country, and the environment they lived in) constituted a cognitive and emotional challenge. As the findings indicate, this was the main force that generated understanding of universalism versus cultural relativism and cultural competence, and that allowed for social change while implementing and promoting human rights. However, the findings also show that the change was not only among the visiting students. Notably, the students from India experienced a parallel process in which they increased their awareness of factors, difficulties, and conditions related to implementation of human rights.

Before concluding, several limitations of the study need to be mentioned. First, the sample of students was small, and the study was conducted over a limited period. Therefore, the results might not fully reflect the processes that take place in encounters between students from developed and less developed countries. The second limitation relates to the theoretical assumptions. In addition, the fact that the participants in one of the groups were visitors may have affected the students' behaviors, feelings, and interpretations, although the researchers in this project considered the cultural and group aspects to be most salient. Nonetheless, it might be worthwhile to examine this

encounter in homorganic groups (e.g. in traditional and/or modern societies) and from a wider variety of perspectives in future studies.

Another limitation is that the study was based on reflective reporting of the sessions rather than on written documentation or summaries of the meetings. In addition, all of the narratives were written in the mother language and required translation. Although we used an English expert to translate the narratives in order to be as close as possible to the original, and edited for clarification only, quite possibly some ideas might have been left out from the original Marathi and Hebrew due to subtleties of language. Finally, although the Indian students represented various geographical areas of India, they were from different regions of the country. Hence, it is likely that the findings would have been different if another population of students had participated in the study.

It should also be noted that owing to the use of different terms to describe countries and regions in the world, professionals should reexamine their repertoire of definitions. Notably, some definitions relate to the geographical location of countries in a global context (northern/southern, eastern/western), whereas others categorize countries as developed, less developed, or underdeveloped. The use of these terms might lead to misconceptions and convey generalized perspectives of countries and regions that do not accurately reflect the complexity of the global world. In addition, these perspectives might perpetuate cultural and intellectual imperialism and discourage the development of indigenous models while promoting dominant Western ideas and practices (Hokenstad, 2012).

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study contributes to the growing body of literature and research which informs education and practice of ISW. The findings highlight the importance of short-term international field placement social work training as a basis for understanding fundamental concepts of the profession – universalism, cultural and moral relativism, and human rights. Concomitantly, the findings underscore the lack of operative definitions and tools to implement these perspectives. The findings reflect the process of socialization that students experience with regard to issues involving implementation of human rights. Furthermore, the findings show that in the extreme environment of ISW field work training, it would be better to enable students to experience processes of self-awareness and professional awareness of social and personal problems. It seems that they need to increase their knowledge in order to create new knowledge that is 'beyond a given place' but is adjusted to the reality that their clients are dealing with. In this way, the findings highlight the trends of critical reflection and self-reflection in the process of training for the social work profession. Future research should be broader to further examine the findings that indicate that when ISW training is accompanied by self-reflection and critical reflection, it allows students to challenge existing paradigms, ask questions, and experience a process of integration. Such future research would also examine whether it is possible to hold conflicting but complementary views that are based on perceptions of needs and human rights, universalism versus cultural relativism, and micro- and macro-level intervention while developing cultural competence that provides a basis for implementing practice based on a human rights orientation. These approaches also highlight the need to formulate and implement pluralist perspectives in the profession in general and in field work training in particular, where the perspectives of cultural competence, cultural relativism, and universalism are translated into operative terms.

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