Editorial

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Human rights issues around the world continue to dominate headlines. The crackdown following the attempted coup in Turkey saw more than 15,000 people detained, an additional 8000 arrested, and more than 60,000 fired or suspended, including teachers and university administrators. In Australia, abuses of youth in the juvenile justice system have been exposed, including their being stripped naked and being sprayed with tear gas. In the USA, in the waning days of President Obama's presidency, his core campaign pledge to close Guantanamo Bay prison will be unfulfilled. With these issues and many others, it is clear that human rights issues are at the core of social work.

The unprecedented global refugee and internal displacement crisis that affects almost every region of the world continues unabated. It is estimated that 59.5 million people were forced to leave their homes in 2014, 14.4 million of whom were refugees fleeing to other countries for safety, and a record-breaking 38 million were displaced within their own country because of conflict, violence, or disasters (UNHCR 2016; Bilak et al. 2015). Internally displaced persons and refugees are forcibly displaced by conflict, generalized violence, and human rights violations.

A surge of gang violence sweeping across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras has caused thousands to leave their

homes every month, and this region of Central America is now known as one of the most dangerous places on earth. Organized criminal and armed groups have used murder, gender-based violence, and other forms of cruelty to take control of the region. As a result, tens of thousands have sought asylum in the USA and neighboring countries. Over 66,000 leaving Central America are children who are unaccompanied by or separated from their parents, and another 66,000 are children traveling with their mothers (UNHCR 2015). To help address this, the USA is expanding its Central American minors program. Yet at the same time, they continue to deport youth back to the region.

Others have migrated to the USA seeking economic betterment. In the USA, approximately two-thirds of undocumented immigrants are from Mexico and Central America; specifically, about half are from Mexico and 15 % from countries in Central America (Passel & Cohn 2014). Lack of legal migration status impacts people in a myriad of ways, as explored by Becerra. He uncovered the negative impact that fear of deportation can have on employment, suffering, and confidence in the legal system to be fair. These negative impacts can have long-term difficulties for the person as well as their family.

While media attention focuses on attempting to gain refugee status, Weaver helps provide tools to more effectively serve those who are already here. Many of those who fled the conflict in Sri Lanka sought refuge in Canada and the USA. In order to effectively serve them, we must have an understanding of the traumas they endured, both that sparked their flight, as well as during and after it. Weaver tests a new instrument to gather information from this population to help us better understand the challenges faced.

Fedock and colleagues explore the topic of sexual assault within a prison setting, reminding us of the ways in which we violate human rights locally. While class action lawsuits have been brought and won on these violations, Fedock et al. go

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further and explore the long-term implications of the lawsuit. While positive outcomes included the financial settlement and meaningful participation in helping to address this abuse, negative outcomes also resulted, most particularly an environment of harassment and hostility within the prison by staff. The financial settlement also placed the women at risk of financial exploitation both by those outside the prison as well as within it.

Within the USA, the Council on Social Work Education (2015) states that social workers must be able to “advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.” Noting that U.S. social work students struggle with this competency, Davis and Reber seek to help educators in supporting students to develop the necessary skills to be human rights advocates. By reviewing students’ field contracts, they assessed what activities students and their supervisors were planning to utilize in their field placement to demonstrate their ability to be human rights advocates. They also developed questions that can be used to help students think about larger human rights issues faced by clients at their agency.

These articles, focusing on people from a broad variety of backgrounds, help provide important information to enable social workers to more effectively serve their clients. Whether we are working with those fleeing conflict from across

the world, or students seeking to develop the skills to become social workers, these authors help us be more effective at our jobs.

Shirley Gatenio Gabel and Susan Mapp, Co-Editors

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