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STRIVING FOR SYNERGY: GENDER ANALYSIS AND INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA¹

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INTRODUCTION

This article argues that excellent social work practice is not possible in the current South African context without taking into account the issue of gender. Firstly, the meaning of "gender analysis" is explored. The historical roots of the gender disparity in South Africa is traced and the current status of women is outlined. Gender analysis is shown to be a useful tool to understand the developmental issues that are being faced today, and compelling reasons for incorporating gender into social work practice are explored in the context of contemporary South Africa. Resonance between gender analysis and indigenous social work practice are explored and clarified, and the relevance of gender analysis for indigenous practice is affirmed. The article concludes with a discussion of some of the possible reasons for the seeming absence of gender analysis in contemporary indigenous practice.

GENDER ANALYSIS DEFINED

Gender analysis is founded on the fundamental idea that, although sex is a biological marker, gender is socially constructed and refers to the identities and roles that individuals take on and are given in society (Oakley, 1972). Gender identities and roles are not fixed and universal, but change over time and across cultures and locations.

Gender relations are the social relationships between men and women in which women inhabit a subordinate position (Moser, 1993). This perspective recognises that both women and men have gender identities, and that these colour and affect all social interactions. These interactions are shaped by issues of power – even when interactions are not conflictual, they retain elements of power, as women's position in society is different to that of men's.

The ways in which women and men are gendered is a product of the interaction of racially defined categories, class, and geographical location, as well as political power relations and ideological factors such as religion. But individuals do not simply choose how they will be gendered. The possibilities open to an individual depend on the particular configuration of power within a gender system. (Serote, Mager & Budlender, 2001:156).

Taking account of these differing roles and identities, deconstructing the meanings these have for individuals and communities, and understanding how power relations help construct these meanings form the essence of gender analysis.

Gender analysis is not merely looking at and describing women's and men's different gender roles. This would be using the concept of gender in a depoliticised way (Meer, 2001), which reinforces power disparities. Rather, gender analysis should include exploring the meanings of these roles and the impact they have on women's and men's status and experiences. This then has direct implications for issues of power and ideology (Friedman, 2001). Gender analysis is not

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merely a *technique*; it has consequences and repercussions in terms of transformation and is, at its heart, a challenge to the status quo.

By using gender analysis as an essential tool in all interventions, social workers are rejecting a so-called "gender-neutral" approach to their work. "Neutrality" has been well discredited as a means of masking a subtle ideological stance which cannot be easily challenged owing to its unstated nature (Olkers, 1996). Gender neutrality most often translates into "gender blindness", a perspective that claims no allegiances, but is at its foundation male biased (Elson, 1995) as the norm remains undeconstructed and thus is reflective of the male experience, perspective and world-view.

In contrast to gender "neutrality", gender analysis is a means to bring not only differing gender identities, roles and expectations to the fore, but also to bring gendered power relations into sharp focus.

GENDER IN CONTEXT: IMPORTANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA?

History

Gender disparity in South Africa does not exist in a vacuum. It is intimately linked to the history of colonialism, apartheid and the growth of a capitalist economy. Colonialism brought with it the British understanding of the position of women and men in society. The colonialists both consciously and inadvertently imposed their understanding of gender relations onto indigenous groups, which meant an adaptation and distortion of local gender ideologies (Baden, Hassim & Meintjes, 1998). Traditional leaders were co-opted into the system of "controlling" the native population, which included formalising what is now known as "customary law" (Mamdani, 1996). This foreclosed the changing nature of traditional rule. For women this meant they were "locked" into formal subordination to men (Baden *et al.*, 1998).

This system was strengthened and advanced during formal apartheid rule. It was particularly reinforced by women's forced dependence on men due to migrant labour: the "Bantustans" could not sustain whole families agriculturally, but neither could men's migrant labour wages. Thus women had no other choice but to be dependent on both, as their freedom of movement was severely restricted. Furthermore, the expansion of customary law, which treated women as minors and the concentration of urban women in domestic worker positions (constraining women to the domestic and reproductive spheres), ensured that women remained in an inferior position to men. Subordinating women on the basis of their gender was one of the tools the apartheid system used to uphold subordination on the basis of race.

The status of women in SA today

Women in South Africa are definitely not free. The majority live in poverty and many cannot read or write. Millions do not have proper housing and no access to water, sanitation, education or health services. They are marginalised economically with no right to own land. Under customary law they marry and live their lives as effective minors subject to the authority of a male relative (Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Beijing World Conference on Women, September 1995; cited in South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000:9).

It is a common assertion that substantive gender equality is a luxury that can be addressed once the grinding poverty, economic underdevelopment, overwhelming unemployment, high levels of crime and the crisis of HIV/AIDS in South Africa are adequately under control (Samuel, 2001). But this attitude misses the central role that gender plays in shaping the social malaise that faces South Africa. This does not mean gender should be considered in *isolation*, separate from other social relations that are constructed by, and in turn construct, social life and meaning. Gender cannot be divorced from issues such as race, class, geography and sexuality. The point is not that gender is the *only* social relation of significance, but that it is one of the fundamental ways through which people relate and it thus cannot be ignored.

Although apartheid has now been abolished, the legacy of many years of racist and patriarchal rule has meant men still enjoy a superior position to women. A few examples should suffice to illustrate this:

- HIV/AIDS is the most serious health crisis this country has ever faced, with enormous implications for social and economic functioning. Yet women bear the burden of this epidemic to a far greater extent than men: "it is...women who are most susceptible to infection, have the highest rate of infection, get the most inadequate and inferior access to treatment, take most responsibility for caring for the sick and dying, and have the shortest survival rate" (Walker & Gilbert, 2001:3).
- Owing to their position in society women, and particularly black, rural women, are over-represented amongst the poorest sector of South Africa's population. Women make up 36% of all heads of households and the majority of these have dependants for whom the women care. In addition, the *Income and Expenditure Survey* of 1995 reported that "Over a third of rural women-headed households and 15% of urban women-headed households [are] amongst the poorest fifth of all households" (South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000:11).
- Women have little control over reproductive choices and reproductive health, which can have a grave impact on their personal health, independence and education. It is estimated that one in every three women in South Africa have had their first child by the time they are 18 years old (loveLife, undated).
- Violence against women is occurring in epidemic proportions in this country. In 1999 it was estimated that the incidence of rape for women aged between 18-49 years was 1300 per 100 000 women (Jewkes *et al.*, 1999 in Vetten & Bhana, 2001:4). Not only do large numbers of women experience violence that is directed at them *because* they are women, but every South African woman lives in *fear* of possible violence.
- Only 26% of African women between the ages of 15 and 65 were employed in the formal sector in 1999 and, of these, most worked in low-paying positions (South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000:17). Women account for only 25% of all managerial positions in South Africa (*Ibid.*).

These statistics show clearly that a pattern or a theme emerges when social issues are disaggregated using gender analysis: in this case, the inferior status of women in South Africa becomes clear. Therefore gender analysis helps paint a clearer picture that adds to an understanding of both the causes and the effects of social problems/needs.

Issues of culture

South Africa is a country with a wide diversity of race, class, ethnicity, language, religion and culture. Along with gender, these factors mediate everyday lived experiences as well as impact strongly on the meanings individuals give to these experiences. African customs intersected with religious practices, which were predominantly drawn from Christian teaching channelled through a strong tradition of missionary activity and colonialist practices. This complex connection reinforced "traditional" ideas of men and women's roles in relationships. This is particularly pertinent when considering the issues of violence in the home and sexual practices.

However, there is a need to move away from essentialising gender difference and legitimising gender disparity through so-called traditional "culture". Culture is important as a context of community history, identity and customs, but it is also dynamic and constantly changing. In fact, "'tradition' is not gender neutral. Men and women do not stand in the same relation to 'tradition', and do not necessarily agree on what is valuable and significant, or on what practices should be retained today and in what form they should continue" (Serote *et al.*, 2001:170). A major problem with the idea of culture is that it is all too easy to define it as a static and untouchable 'object', whereas it is actually a contested site of both identity and power (McFadden, 2001). Owing to apartheid's policy of reinforcing ethnic identities but breaking down social and community organisation (Mamdani, 1996), culture has unfortunately become an easily available tool in the struggle for power.

It is in this way that women have been excluded from certain sites of power, especially social institutions, using the weapon of traditional culture (McFadden, 2001). This is not a diatribe against African culture, with an unstated intention of upholding the ideology of Western culture as "better", or even "neutral". Rather, this comment is intended as a warning against using an undeconstructed and emotive notion of "'Africanism' and respect for indigenous culture as a means of justifying patriarchal controls over women and young men" (Serote *et al.*, 2001:170). Culture and its effects are clearly an area where gender analysis can highlight the complexity of social life and meanings.

THE SOCIAL WORK IMPERATIVE TO ADDRESS GENDER

Gender as an analytical category can be seen as an essential tool in the developmental context of South Africa today. Moreover, there are other more specific imperatives for taking gender seriously in the social work context.

The policy imperative

The policy changes since 1994 in South Africa with regard to addressing gender disparity have been significant. The foundation for this lies in the Constitution, which guarantees gender equality and expressly permits affirmative action as a means to right past gender wrongs. Furthermore, a document entitled *South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* (2000), while it has yet to be formally adopted by Cabinet, has been developed as an intersectoral guide on principles to follow in achieving gender equity. These principles and guidelines include, *inter alia*, that:

- Women's rights should be seen as human rights;
- Women should be targeted by affirmative action programmes;
- Customary, cultural and religious practices are subject to the right to equality;

- All policy makers, strategic and operational managers should receive appropriate training to improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes in gender analysis
- (South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000:v).

Furthermore, South Africa has made a commitment to its people by ratifying a number of significant international instruments which give explicit guidelines with respect to addressing gender disparities, namely:

- The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a powerful international agreement;
- The implementation document developed by the fourth UN World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, called the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA);
- The Declaration on Gender and Development, 1997, of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). An addendum to this document was signed in 1998 and was entitled the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children. Commitments enunciated in these two documents include, *inter alia*, a focus on reducing gender disparity in political representation (a goal of achieving a 30% quota of women in governing and political structures by 2005 has been set), the control over productive resources (in order to address the level of poverty experienced by women), legislation and efforts to address unacceptably high levels of violence against women in the SADC region (Sadie, 2001).

In the spirit of the National Gender Framework and the agreements to which South Africa is a signatory, many pieces of national legislation have been revised since 1994 in order to reflect the national policy of promoting gender equality. However, although these policy and legislative changes are an indication of progress and reform, they represent *formal equality* for women and have done little to change patterns of social and economic disadvantage in South Africa. This is true for the millions of women who do not have access to recourse in the law when facing discrimination and for the everyday attitudes of sexism which continue to be held by those in power. The enthusiastic commitment in the broader South African society is not matched by the political will of those in senior government positions.

Social workers can make a significant impact in terms of the policy imperative: not only is there a policy framework in which to locate gender-sensitive indigenous social work practice, there is also the compulsion to use the integrity of social work values to ensure continuity between policy intentions and implementation – in other words, to ensure social workers support substantive rather than merely formal gender equality.

Pressure from the ground

The roots of the new policy initiative in South Africa lie in grassroots organisations and the strength of the South African women's movements. Women in South Africa have a long history of powerful collective organisation. The women's movement in South Africa is deeply rooted in the anti-apartheid movement and did not grow out of a bourgeois feminist ideology. But as ordinary women began organising as wives and mothers against a repressive racial system (for example, the women's pass protests in 1959), they began to develop a conscientisation of their position *as women*. For example, women leaders in the trade unions began to focus on the conditions of women workers, as their unique positions as women *and* leaders allowed them to see the specific problems women in the workforce faced (Baden *et al.*, 1998).

There is still a strong and vocal women's movement in South Africa today and it has remained a voice for those on the ground, rather than reflecting middle-class interests. Its focus has changed from anti-apartheid action to organising around women's practical and strategic needs in the current context and working towards substantive equality for women in South Africa. The idea that with political and racial liberation there would also be a lifting of gender constraints has been thoroughly discredited and demands for gender equity from community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been increasingly vocal in South Africa. More recently, there has been an insistent call from some quarters for men to get on board in addressing disparities of power in gender relations. Social workers have a crucial role to play here in responding appropriately to the needs expressed by the community. There is clearly a critical mass demanding that gender disparities be taken seriously.

Practice excellence

Shifting the focus much closer to home, social workers need to re-evaluate their core values and question why, up until now, a commitment to gender equality has been so under-emphasised in generic social work practice. If social work is, at its centre, about equity and social justice (Ife, 1995; Drower, 1991; Osei-Hwedie, 1996a; Sewpaul, 1997), a whole *system* of social inequality affecting half the world's population cannot be ignored. All that this implies needs to be scrutinised: striving for gender equity means social workers must engage in a challenging process of social change and take more seriously their social action role. Social workers' *own* beliefs have to be continually interrogated to ensure that wide gaps between personal and professional values are not tolerated.

The principles of participation, self-determination and empowerment are all central components in understanding and eliminating gender disparity through social work practice, principles that also help define the essence of social work (Biestek, 1957; Ife, 1995; Gray, 1998). In truth, if these core values and principles are genuinely and effectively applied, gender analysis would be a natural and routine tool in social work practice as a means of unveiling otherwise invisible power dynamics which render our services ineffective or less effective. In other words, social workers are compelled to take gender identities and disparities seriously if they want to offer service excellence.

GENDER ANALYSIS AND INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Indigenous social work practice

Indigenous social work practice, described simply by Midgley (1981) as "appropriate" practice, is a process by which the profession embraces local relevance and moves "from being an instrument of social control to an instrument of social change" (Mupedziswa, 1992:21). This process has meant the conception of social work in South Africa has had to undergo a transformation. The policies of the post-apartheid government reflected in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the White Paper on Social Welfare (1997) have meant a re-alignment of social work core foci from remedial and individualised work to community and social development work.

This new perspective has been theorised/conceptualised in slightly different ways. Indigenous social work has been defined

- within a strongly radical framework (where structural change, fairness and equity are key components);

- in a social development context (where growth, development, self-reliance and economic and social independence come to the fore, an emphasis officially recognised by the White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997);
- via a post-modern perspective (where diversity, pluralism, participation and the circularity of power relations are acknowledged) (Sewpaul, 1997).

VALUE CONGRUITY BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PRACTICE AND GENDER ANALYSIS

All three approaches contain principles and values congruent with gender analysis and gender-sensitive practice; the principles of indigenous practice cannot be achieved without the deconstruction of gender relations.

Indigenous social work practice in Africa, and specifically in post-apartheid South Africa, is about contributing towards and maintaining the strengthening of community linkages, networks and community capacity, and striving for a just society (Hutton, 1996). This cannot be done by uncritically accepting the "norm" as the reality for *all* members of that community. Facilitating social change is about ensuring that the client system has both the opportunities *and* the capacities for redefining and constructing their lives in ways that better contribute to their well-being. By ignoring the ways in which power is enacted in communities along gender lines, and the complexities this brings in terms of motivation for and capacity to change, guarantees an incomplete and possibly inequitable view of the interests and needs and the solutions for a particular community.

A key element of indigenous practice is social integration (Osei-Hwedie, 1996b) or broad community participation. Without gender analysis and concomitant gender-sensitive practice, social workers have no way of establishing whether the development objective is truly shared across the community, as gender has remained aggregated, constructed, uninterrogated. Theory and experience dictate that under these circumstances it is women's voices that are silenced and the "community" message is broadcast by those in power in that community, usually men. Thus decision making and community choices are dictated by those in sites of power and development is enjoyed by only those with access to community, institutional and cultural resources.

At the most fundamental level generic indigenous social work practice in the form of social development, and gender analysis in the form of relevant gender-sensitive practice, hold at their core the same vision and value: transformation of the social order as a means to redistribute power and resources to the marginalised.

Gender analysis resonates deeply within indigenous social work practice. This revelation does not mean rejecting all social work theory to date and rewriting professional identity. Social work and gender analysis *are* compatible and "present theory can be transformed within a clearer, more unified understanding of particular goals and values" (McNay, 1992:53).

Effective use of gender analysis in indigenous practice

Challenging gendered power relations

Gender analysis needs to be routinely used in all social work practice as a means to question and challenge the power relations of the social norm. This involves challenging the social worker's *own* beliefs and views, as well as challenging structures and institutions in society and challenging the client system.

- **Challenging the social worker**

Challenging the social worker must begin at the level of social work education. The intention of this would be not to produce value clones, but to give students the chance to explore their *own* gender identities and their consequences at an early stage. It is essential to help students make the links between human rights, self-determination, power disparities and gender. Educators need to encourage future practitioners to move away from essentialising culture as a means of reinforcing power and the status quo in an environment that does not require them to *discard* their culture or own beliefs, but rather as a means to raise their consciousness about the links between gender expectations and women's low status in their communities. These challenges should take place at the theoretical, practical and experiential levels, and be integrated into all areas of social work education rather than being presented in a separate "gender" course.

At the practice level social work should not be a routine task: grappling with the issues this work constantly exposes and continually trying to genuinely be "with" our client systems means consistently challenging one's own thinking. This is applicable to the issue of gender. Although self-challenge should be an ongoing personal task, this must consciously be stressed through challenging qualified workers in supervision and in postgraduate courses.

- **Challenging structures and institutions**

As advocates, the rights of social work clients are paramount and deserve assertion. Social, political and economic institutions often incorporate a culture that reflects mainstream ideology rather than stated policy. As discussed previously, "neutral" policies and practices generally translate into gender blindness and male bias. This process ensures that many social structures and organisations are geared to serve the "average" human – unconsciously conceptualised as a *man*. Not only this, but institutions can often reinforce gender stereotypes, for example, a development project that targets potential commercial farmers and thus targets men; an urban child-health education programme that targets only women. Social workers must challenge gender blindness in organisations, including reflecting upon how their own organisations reinforce gender inequality.

- **Challenging the client system**

Striving for social justice and facilitating the process of empowerment cannot genuinely occur without some form of challenging of inequitable power relations during social work practice. Social workers must use gender-sensitive practice to

- Avoid dehumanising practices through colluding with current power structures;
- Support alternative gendered solutions in self-determination (e.g., a woman doing a *man's* job);
- Actively challenge clients holding onto power at the expense of others (e.g. challenging men's assumptions of sexual rights).

Direct Practice: gender planning in the project cycle

Using development projects or community work as a basis for discussion, what is known as the "Project Cycle", should include gender analysis and a gender perspective at every stage.

(a) The needs assessment stage

The needs assessment stage should include a consideration of the following as a means to ensure that the community's needs are comprehensively represented and to encourage genuine community participation from the start:

- Identifying gender roles in the community in terms of productive work, reproductive work and community involvement. A simple way is to help the community document different activities, resources and responsibilities that apply to women on the one hand and to men on the other;
- Identifying the gender needs that relate to the roles and responsibilities of women and men;
- Identifying the level of conflict and co-operation in the gender relations of this community (Sen, 1990);
- Identifying sites of gender power. In other words, being clear about when and where groups or individuals control decision-making or wield power because of their gender;
- Identifying the differential access women and men have to local institutions, such as representation on community structures or access to resources like credit.

(b) The project proposal stage

Gender consultation when planning a project is essential. This means consultation with *all* groups who constitute action or target groups, or who are going to be affected by the project. These groups should be disaggregated by gender. Furthermore, women should be *supported* in defining their own needs by ensuring that the context and style of the discussion are accessible to women and by using techniques to enable women to start identifying their practical and strategic positioning and thus their needs (for example, by documenting and sharing life histories, using photographs of the women themselves to encourage discussion, collecting data on the gender allocation of tasks in order to show inequities) (Munro, 1991:175).

To ensure that development objectives are truly shared, disaggregation by gender must occur. If not, community needs will be dictated by those in power and those with voices, that is, men; women will be silenced (for example, a social worker may consult with a trade union leader about a worker AIDS education project, but not consciously notice that the leadership is made up of men only, and thus not notice that women worker's interests may not be reflected by the union leaders). Social workers must identify specific practical and strategic gender objectives, and a clear method must be specified as to how and with whose participation these objectives will be achieved.

(c) Gender-aware implementation

The social worker should use a gender perspective throughout the process of implementation of the project and must actively implement the gender objectives. This approach needs very careful planning and a willingness and ability to challenge creatively and sensitively. There must be equal participation of women and men in both the *work* and the *decision-making* of the project (Munro, 1991). Without gender awareness, development outcomes are enjoyed only by those with access to community, institutional and cultural resources.

(d) Gender-aware monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation must be undertaken by both the worker and the community members, and again wide consultation should occur. The Zambia Association for Research and Development Workshop (1991:179) suggests using the following indicators against which gender objectives can be evaluated:

- Basic needs
- Leadership roles
- Consciousness

- Needs assessment
- Planning
- Gender division of labour
- Control over the factors of production.

Maintaining a gender perspective in planning is an ongoing process. The social worker can have the best planning procedure, but unless the social context and political and power issues are understood, projects can look very good but be ideologically repressive. Gender sensitive practice cannot be undertaken until the social worker's own assumptions about gender are challenged and s/he is comfortable with challenging others in a respectful way.

Gender analysis as a core area of indigenous knowledge development

Echoing Osei-Hwedie's (1993) call that indigenous practice must have indigenous knowledge at its core, the importance of developing theory and practice models around gender analysis in local contexts in Africa needs to be emphasised. Although social workers increasingly need to develop skills in working in an inter-disciplinary context and should use what is useful from other disciplines, for example, employing social work values to assess what will fit and what will undermine social work objectives, a uniquely *social work* understanding of the relevance of gender in indigenous practice must be developed so that gender analysis is an integrated part of accepted practice theory and method.

OBSTACLES TO USING GENDER ANALYSIS IN INDIGENOUS PRACTICE

Clash between personal and professional values

The most fundamental obstacle to the use of gender analysis in practice is the clash of values or beliefs many social workers face when they consider gender. If it remains an undeconstructed notion in the private lives of social workers, they will be fatally resistant to actively and creatively using it in their work. Indeed, gender-related concerns encountered in practice may result in a fear of challenging the personal beliefs which they question. Gender analysis requires social workers to examine their personal lives and identities, and become conscious of what implications this has personally, socially, culturally and politically. This does not require a complete rejection of personal beliefs, but rather an awareness of how personal positions and meanings can impact on how social workers view their clients, their social environments and the way in which power is played out in communities.

Gender issues do not reflect a bourgeois, Western feminist approach alien to the local context

The common misconception that gender is a *women's* issue or that gender theory is advocating a radical Western feminist and thus alien stance allows practitioners to dismiss it out of hand. Similarly, the misconception that pro-feminist work is *anti-men* makes social workers immediately resistant and defensive when faced with gender challenges. Thus gender analysis needs to be more widely understood and its usefulness demonstrated by theory, case studies and direct practice methods.

Belief that gender equality in South Africa has already been achieved

There is a widely held belief that gender equality in South Africa has been achieved and that contemporary gender analysis is "reactionary". This stems from the conflation of substantive gender equality with formal gender equality, and the lack of awareness that gender identities and meanings will always impact on communities with which social workers work, whether this is acknowledged or not. This is particularly evident in many public and non-governmental organisations which comply with formal gender equality requirements, but resist or are not aware of the power changes required by substantive equality. For example, national welfare structures, traditional social service agencies, community decision-making structures, and so on.

Skill deficit in knowing how to put gender analysis into practice

Skill deficit in knowing how to put gender analysis into practice is a major block to its effective use. Gender issues and analysis have traditionally fallen outside of generic social work education and practice, and so practitioners are left with the frustrations of trying to implement what is often a very new and demanding area of skill. This issue should be urgently addressed by social work educators, just as developmental social work is beginning to receive serious educational attention in training institutions.

Implications of gender analysis: challenge and change

A further obstacle to using gender analysis is the ultimate implication of this analysis: challenge and change. It is much easier to work within rather than challenge the status quo and often comfort is preferred to the difficulties of change and the unknown, especially when there is something to lose. For example, social workers may find it easier to consult with the designated leaders of a community regarding a particular project, even though they are exclusively men and represent men's interests, than to undertake a lengthy, more complex and politically delicate process of wide consultation with those with no decision-making powers, often women. This situation also has implications with respect to social work education. Resisting the inclusion of gender analysis in generic social work education because of the effort, and sometimes threat, it may hold for academics and educators is a serious lapse in commitment to ensuring that beginning practitioners are equipped to facilitate real equity and social justice.

The above issues are practical hurdles that can certainly be overcome if the centrality of gender analysis for social work is acknowledged and there is the will to take risks by challenging the self and learning new skills. This is particularly important for social work educators, as their teaching can greatly assist in the professional imperative for change.

CONCLUSIONS AND STRATEGIES

The following are some suggestions as to the way forward that arise from the issues addressed in this article:

- Individual social workers need to make the link between a commitment to practice excellence and social justice and gender-sensitive practice. Making an impact on gender disparity through practice or in the field of social work education is impossible unless it is an integrated part of one's thinking on a personal level.
- Social workers must recognise gender as a central form of social ordering and begin a debate the best ways to integrate this positively into everyday indigenous social work practice.

- The concept of gender and gender analysis is fairly new for some people – social workers should be developing their own knowledge and skill in this area, perhaps led by the Joint Universities Committee on Social Work Education offering continuing education in this field.
- If social work continues to view "gender" as referring to "women" and continues to think of and teach gender as an "additional" or "specialist" area of investigation, then it is not taking advantage of the transformatory potential of gender analysis (McNay, 1992), nor is it being true to social work as a repository of social justice. Gender concerns must be integrated into *all* course content in social work education, not just confined to a specific course on gender. Such an approach would serve to raise consciousness and advance the attainment of human rights.

Linking with other disciplines is an important way to benefit from others' expertise and experience in using gender analysis in social development. This is especially true with respect to non-social work NGOs and development organisations.

- Social workers need to cease to be afraid of raise consciousness among clients. Social work is not a neutral institution. Practitioners acknowledge their influence on clients and must ensure that such influence is liberationist and does not reinforce repressive power relations.

Social equity and developing community capacity are fundamental to indigenous social work practice. Social workers who wish to strive for these ideals in their practice need to acknowledge that gender analysis is an essential tool to help them understand and address the obstacles to the attainment of social equity and development. Social workers cannot continue to function as if being a woman or a man has merely biological implications which are divorced from social reality.

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