

Editorial

Contained within this edition are the final two papers of the eight that have been published from the symposium 'Changing Social Work?' Hosted by the Review and held at Lancaster University in September 2004, the symposium provided leading academics with the opportunity to highlight developments in social work and critically debate its evolving construction. In the first of these two papers Garrett takes issue with the government's proposal for electronically collating information on children and facilitating its exchange between professionals. Introduced by the Children Act 2004 in order that services might be 'joined up' and risks to children reduced, this new facility purports to be a 'directory' of children for the caring professionals. Although the electronic sharing of information might be seen as a legitimate means by which services are modernized, Garrett draws attention to the inadequate foundations upon which the proposal is based and the potential implications for civil liberties. Whilst a range of child care professionals are affected in these developments, Garrett's paper makes a contribution to the academic literature that constructs social work as one component within a wider system of surveillance and control (see for example Donzelot, 1980, and Parton, 1985): new technologies create new means by which surveillance might be achieved.

Hostages to Fortune: The impact of violence on health and social care staff by David Denney, is the final paper published from the symposium. Given that many child care practitioners are employed to protect children from abusive parents, acts of violence and social work may be associated in the minds of the general public. The growing awareness of elder abuse may have led to the appreciation that even adult oriented practitioners may at times have to facilitate protective arrangements. However, social workers as the subjects of violent acts perpetrated by service users may still be relatively removed from public consciousness. Discussion on violence to social workers arose in the 1970s with the work of Prins (1975) and Webb (1976) (Parton and Small, 1989). According to Parton and Small, the closer scrutiny of this topic in the 1980s reflected social and welfare changes that required practitioners to take a more controlling role within the context of reducing resources. Although still an under-researched area, there is now a growing body of knowledge on violence to social workers and other public sector professionals (see for example Milner and Myers, in press). In this issue, Denny identifies some of the themes that have emerged from empirical projects and discusses them in the light of policy developments. He also draws attention to gaps in current knowledge and suggests areas for future investigation.

The paper by Houston *et al.* was not presented at the symposium 'Changing Social Work?', but its content is consistent with the theme of the event. Whilst the generally pessimistic portrayals of today's social work are acknowledged by the authors, they are rejected: for example, the view that neo-liberalism has reduced practice to nothing

more than a managerialist enterprise is eschewed. It is suggested that social work still occupies a social 'space' (see also O'Brien, 2004), and can still draw on theoretical 'space', to allow for the negotiation of its own construction. In making their case, the authors explore the work of Habermas, Foucault, Klein, and Marx. It is suggested that the work of these theorists highlights the potential for social workers to care for and empower rather than control and oppress service users.

The final paper in this edition, authored by Isherwood and Regan, might be seen as an illustration of the case made by Houston *et al.* The paper results from an innovative attempt to define and improve service outcomes. In this inclusive approach to service evaluation, a Solution Focused Brief Therapy questionnaire was used to gather the views of service users, staff and managers of a residential rehabilitation establishment for people who experience severe and enduring mental ill health. This exercise not only identified the focus for service enhancement, but also the internal resources (such as personal qualities) and external resources (such as relationship networks) that might facilitate the change. The paper recounts and comments upon the views expressed in the questionnaire. Following this, the organizational and individual responses are described. Whilst the detail of how the service was improved is interesting in its own right, the application of the Solution Focused Brief Therapy approach in achieving change is of particular significance. The publication of this paper may encourage its use elsewhere.

In short, papers published in this edition have drawn on social and practice theory, as well as large and small scale empirical research findings in order to comment upon policy developments, highlight current or potential problems, or suggest ways in which social work services might be more effectively or sensitively delivered.

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