

Marginalization and Social Work in a Changing Society (subtheme: Human Rights)

Title: Dealing with the legacy of political conflict: Researching the views of social workers in Northern Ireland

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Despite the fact that social workers, alongside other professionals, have been dealing with the legacy of the Northern Irish conflict for forty years, few empirical studies have been carried out in this field. A decade old study revealed the experiences of mental health social workers in dealing with violent contexts and the choices they made in helping clients (Campbell and McCrystal, 2005). More recently, a group of academics have explored ways of preparing students for practice in such contexts, with a particular focus on engaging victims and survivors as educators in social work educational programmes (Duffy, 2012; Coulter et al, 2013; Campbell et al, 2013).

This paper presentation will summarise the findings from the first comprehensive study into the views and attitudes of social workers on the political conflict in Northern Ireland. A mixed method approach was used to collect data from on-line survey, focus groups and in depth interviews. The paper will present the preliminary findings from this research and will focus on how identity issues have impacted upon practice and relationships with clients; the way in which interventions were carried out relatively normally in abnormal circumstances and the range of interventions used to meet the needs of victims and survivors of the conflict. The paper will then conclude with a number of recommendations about how agencies and social workers should create more spaces for discussion, debate and education to enable practitioners to deal with the legacy of this political conflict.

References

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