Teaching Poverty in Social Work Classroom: Perspectives from Global South and Policy Implications

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1   Introduction to the Special Issue

The idea of this special issue originated from a research collaboration meeting which took place at Shandong Youth University of Political Science, PR China in 2019 between the social work educators from India and China (guest editors of this special issue). The idea was further encouraged by our own teaching experience to social work students and the questions we encountered during discussion with students on multiple dimensions of poverty and how it impacts on the services and interventions rendered by professional social workers? The editorial team consists of four members having vast teaching and academic administrative experience in reputed educational institutions, where as one member is an early career researcher exploring social work education and research through international exposures and research.

This special issue aims to explore the following objectives-

- Extent to which poverty is addressed in social work curriculum?

- The ways in which social work address poverty and the related concerns in different socio-political contexts?

- Perspectives of social work educators and students on poverty and the manner in which these affect their sensitivity and professional development?

Contributions in this issue explores social work response to poverty in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Vietnam and Sweden. While five of these directly explore the teaching aspects related to social work, the other five look at relevance and response of social work to poverty as remotely connected. Nevertheless, the principle aim of all contributions in this issue is to explore poverty in global south and analyse the policy for better critical appreciation of policy interventions and improvement. The primary mission of social work profession is to work with the vulnerable, oppressed and marginalized population and help them to meet basic human needs. Owing to these principles throughout social work history there have been concerns about social workers' commitment to the poor and to social action on their behalf. Social work has been coined as a "dissenting Profession" and social workers

are considered to be the change agents with unique capabilities to deal with the social problems. Educational programs in social work offered in schools of social work across the globe aim to develop the skills required for social work graduates to deal with the poverty and vulnerable groups. Social Workers are largely trained for planning, development and execution of projects and programs aimed for poverty alleviation and empowerment of people in distress. Further social workers use the skills such as consultation and involvement of the individuals, family, community and population groups in planning and implementing the poverty eradication programs. Informed by the professional principles and ethics social work professionals are expected to uses the principles of participation, self-reliance, sustainability, and empowerment while dealing with poverty groups and communities. In order to take up these responsibilities some professionals need to be trained beyond their passive understanding of poverty and suffering. Godbey (2006) noted the changing societal trends i.e. rapid change in demography, reduced public funding, dramatic shift in social values which is actually demanding the service profession to be proactive in their service and programs.

In the present contemporary world there is a need to educate and train social work graduates to work with marginalized group affected by poverty across the borders. Perspective building of social work graduates in the classroom as well as in practice is essential as Student attitudes toward poverty are known to affect the way that they treat individuals who are likely to be poor. Social work education and the manner in which we currently teach poverty and inequality have important roles in increasing justice and economic equality and promoting peace and harmony. Further in a constantly changing world Social work educators are responsible for ensuring that future practitioners are culturally competent and have the ability to work effectively with people from different backgrounds. Social work education has an important role in the development of critical consciousness among students. Idea of this special issue is to provide a rare opportunity to the academics in the developing and emerging economies to highlight their experiences and views on teaching poverty in social work classroom. Poverty impacts every society irrespective of development status. In this context global south perspective would be learning from the poverty reduction intervention strategies in the economically less developed countries. Despite enormous effort by the state and non-state actors in poverty reduction in many south Asian countries, the results seem not very encouraging. As a result, poverty continues to be discussed, researched and written upon by the various academic disciplines. However, research evidence suggests that social work interventions to address poverty and its causative factors particularly at the macro level are confined largely to class room and seminar discussions. Huge gap between preaching and practice highlights professional inadequacies to deal with structural problems such as poverty and calls for a revisit to the scope and objectives of social work profession. Increasing dominance of market economies and neo-liberal discourse in the policy making and grass root effects in many of the South Asian countries, require a fresh look at the debates around poverty and the role of social work in its eradication or reduction. Hence, we plan to critically look at various experiments both at the grass root levels and states' efforts in this direction. This special issue of the journal aims at documenting these to facilitate learning from each other's experiences in the global north and south and cull out the commonalities and unique aspects of poverty, policies and strategies to deal with it and implications of the same for social work education and practice.

2   Poverty in the global South

In the past five decades the world has experienced an unprecedented growth in wealth which is evident in the medical and technological advancement followed by attainment of civil

liberties by a large majority. Numerous people across the globe availed the benefit of these advancement and development in technology and civil liberties to make their lives more secure and comfortable. However, a significant amount of population continues to experience extraordinary level of poverty and deprivation. Further being poor is not only about income hence the suitable development goal formulated and agreed upon by the world leaders focuses on poverty alleviation in multi-dimensional aspects. Owing to the world leaders call to end poverty in all its forms has been included as the first and foremost goal of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (United Nations 2015). By recognizing the importance of ending poverty in all its form as one of the greatest challenge (Collaborators GS 2015) ahead of most of the countries, first and foremost goal of SDG promises to leave no one behind (WHO 2013). With an inclination to reduce the effects of poverty on vulnerable communities and achieve a world free of poverty development project and poverty alleviation programmes across the globe are now focusing on participatory and community-demand-driven approaches (Yalegama, et al.,2016; Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2013).

Globalization, neoliberalism and privatization of means of production lead to profit oriented investment rather than service oriented enterprises. Further income inequality and increase in poverty rate is also the result of neoliberal economic policies practiced since last 25 years (Coburn, 2004). While few studies suggest that economic growth and advancement resulting in employment opportunities helps the country to pull people out of poverty through (Bhagwati and Panagariya, 2012). Further studies have also documented the role of economic growth in lifting a significant number of people out of poverty in Africa, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, and Indonesia (Ambarkhane, 2013; World Bank 2001). However, a number of authors argue that poverty is not basically an economic aspect rather it is a combination of social, cultural and economic condition (Lokshin, 2009; Annim, et al., Mariwah, & Sebu, 2012; Zhang, 2014; Mihai and Titan, 2015; Gonçalves & Machado, 2015; Marinho, et al., 2017; Li, 2018; Ravallion, 2001). The economic and the social impact of poverty is experienced more in the developing countries and poverty is also connected to human rights and dignity in the countries in the global south. Earlier studies have also noted that poverty alleviation in any society needs multidimensional approach and efforts by both state and non-state actors irrespective of economic and industrial development achieved by the county. However, the depth and speed poverty impacts on developing economies is much worrisome than it impacts developed countries. The effects of poverty are experienced differently by different countries based on the characteristics of demography, level of employment and educational level of the people.

Globalization has resulted in tremendous changes and challenges in the twenty first century. Collier and Dollar (2001) calls globalization as integration of societies and economies across the globe. Whereas International Monitory Fund (IMF) notes movement of capital and investment, trade and transactions, migration and movement of people and dissemination of knowledge as basic aspects of globalization (International Monetary Fund, 2000). One the one hand these process of economic and social integration lead to grave inequality in many society despite of its positive impact on economic and trade development that was mostly enjoyed by the developed countries. Despite of advancement of technology, communication and global connectivity with an open and free market economies in the developing countries still face a lot of ups and downs with regard to balancing their productivity and sustainability of productivity. While enormous studies climes economic transformation leads to development and poverty reeducation, there are hardly five studies that provides a comprehensive comparative understanding of the impact of growth on poverty reeducation in

the developing countries (Kalwij and Verschoor 2007). Along with the market changes that took place as response to the globalization and neoliberal economic policy, the knowledge production, analysis and interpretation on poverty, economic growth have also seen dramatic change in the last decade. While both state and non-state actors work for poverty reeducation the progress in the global south is very minimal as World Bank (2016) statistics on poverty shows that there were an estimated 767 million people or 10.7 percent of the world's population living below the established poverty line in 2013. Further half of the world's extremely poor are living in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2016a). These statistics reviles that economic development and trade advancement in the developing countries has not resulted in extensive poverty reeducation even though they have resulted in improved condition of people living in poverty as claimed by five studies (Banerjee, et al. 2015).

3   Social work student's attitude towards poverty

Social work is a profession committed to the empowerment of people, community and groups. As human service professional's social workers are expected to address the issues relate to inequality, discrimination, vulnerability and sufferings of the people in any society that they serve. Professional values and principles of social work also ensures that social workers adhere to basic ethics and professional requirements whilst serving the most disadvantaged sections of the society. The professional tasks performed by trained social workers needs them to be equipped with certain professional skills and techniques to address the issues encountered by the service users. And these knowledge and skills are expected to be imparted by the schools of social work through their teaching and field education programs. Despite of its professional commitment to serve the people living in poverty and disparity, it seems the professional has failed to develop its practice based on awareness of poverty (Michal Krumer-Nevo et al 2009). While developing the social work student's attitude towards the people who are less privileged and vulnerable in any community their learning and practice training plays a major role. Earlier studies have found that teaching programs at the undergraduate, graduate and professional level tend to increases learners understanding on poverty, especially among the social work students (Clark, 2007; Sun, 2001). While there is an increasing demand and need for incorporating poverty contents in to social work curriculum, studies have also noted the limited focused on poverty in other human service professions including health care professions (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Loignon, et al., 2012; Reutter, Sword, Meagher-Stewart, & Rideout, 2004; Wear & Kuczewski, 2008). It is also expected that these contents incorporated in to social work curriculum so that the next generation of social workers will serve people living in poverty and distress more effectively and respectfully. Pulla V. et al. (2017) found that the concepts of poverty and social justice are overlapping in the master of social work curriculum in India and suggested for their incorporation and adequate teaching methods to enable students to understand the concepts. Further, Krumer-Nevo et al. (2009) suggested additional pedagogical approach to bring self-awareness and make students empathetic towards people living with poverty. A number of scholars have also suggested stimulation-based education to make students and practitioners understand the challenges of living in poverty (Vandsburger, Duncan-Daston, Akerson, & Dillon, 2010; Zosky & Thompson, 2012). Training social work students to deal with poverty, inequality, injustice and disparity is also an emerging concern across the globe.

4   Teaching Poverty to Social Work Students

Earlier studies found a limited understanding of the causes and implications of poverty among the health care professionals and students including social work. Social Work as a human

service profession adheres to the principles of human dignity, social justice and equality. Hence professionally trained social workers are expected to full fill the roles of counselor, therapist, activist and social change agents. To assume these roles and ensure effective service delivery social workers must be trained with an intensive focus on social problems and issues such as poverty and deprivation. Studies have found that poverty is cartelized in curriculums of some disciplines including social work (e.g., Davis & Wainwright, 2005), but also suggested for providing expertise recreational faculty to develop teaching practice. Recreational teaching faculties are known for their unique pedagogical skills (e.g., simulations; Barney, 2012; service learning; Tobias, Powell, & Johnson, 2010; civic engagement; Biaett, 2011) which may help others to understand poverty more professionally. Further these understandings are important for social work professionals as they are expected to go beyond passive understanding of poverty and empowerment.

Though we are well aware that poverty is a most common concept that every human knows in on or the other perspectives, we are much concerned with social work students in-depth understanding of poverty and their response to people living in poverty. Hence with this aim we invited social work educators from different parts of the world to address the issues related to poverty in line with teaching social work. Though there are five studies available in different contexts unfortunately not many studies are available dealing with poverty and social work teaching especially in the context of global south. Further need for effective and relevant education and training for social work professionals to relate their profession with the people who are living in poverty. Despite of a clear understanding of the responsibility of social workers (Kadushin, 1996) people relay upon them and expect them to deliver high quality service and care (Malley & Fernandez, 2010), and there by contribute to the betterment of the society (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2006). Training social workers to deal with the problems of people living with poverty is thus important to make them more efficient and productive. Scholars have also argued that individuals who aspire to work in caregiving profession will have a compiling reason to do so (Collings & Murray, 1996; Stevens et al., 2012). Hence all they need is a well-structured training and professional skills to deal with the communities that they serve. Studies have found that social work graduates have deeper understanding of the causes of poverty when compared to non-social work students (Clark, 2007; Sun, 2001). Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015) and National Association of Social Workers, (2017) in their ethical guidelines for social work professionals notes that social work strives to serve the people who are the victims of poverty and also suggests that social work students should also be knowledgeable about poverty and its impact on individuals and communities. However, researchers have also noted the lack of rigor and in-depth understanding of poverty in social work education (Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009, p. 230).

5   Poverty- policy and Social Work nexus
The central aim of police makers is poverty since it is directly related to welfare of the people (Chen and Ravallion, 2013). Economies in the 21st century set poverty alleviation as their first goal. Evidence to this is Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) and Sustainable Development goals (SDGs). Primary goal of these programs is to eradicate poverty and sufferings for all. Both these strategies formulated by the United nationals come in close relation with the basic professional principles of social work as social work primarily aims for achieving a just and equitable society with dignity and respect for human relations. Further scholars also note the development of a notion among the social work community in the past two decades across the globe with determination to integrate caring and commitment to social

justice (Healy, 2001; Hokenstad, Khinduke & Midgley, 1992). Further scholars have also argued for a collaborative work with individuals, families, groups, communities and societies in combining the policy practice activates (Abramovitz, 1998; Haynes & White, 1999; Lynn, 1999; Schneider & Netting, 1999). Further our aim of producing this special issue is to bring impact full changes in the poverty related issues in five countries in the global south as the contributions in this special issue address the need for 'peoples' policy making. Further significant influence of the scientific publications on policymakers is already documented by the scholars (Cardoso and Teixeira 2020). There are some considerable research publications on poverty in the form of books and book chapters (Marsh, 2011), this special issue is an effort to add the value to the existing literature with a clear focus on global south. Further ultimate goal of research on poverty is to find the ways and means of fighting against it. Thus the articles included in this special issue aims to understand the types of policies and programs that are useful to fight against poverty in general (Vykopalová, 2016) or in one of its dimensions (Gascón, 2015), or to prevent poverty (Kim, 2018). The contributions also discuss the adequacy and efficiency of implementing such polices at the local or national level (Blank, 2005), and effectiveness of those already implemented (Cashin, Mauro, & Sahay, 2001). We believe these contributions in the special issue will go a long way in defining, redefining and reformulating poverty, poverty alleviation programs and monitoring of such programs. Further, there is a hope as earlier studies have noted an increasing turn by the policymakers towards the research community to understand the behavioral and economic impact of the social programs on the citizens (Burkhauser, 2001, p. 757). Further Lahat (2018, p. 623) finds this is applicable for polices related to poverty as well.

6   Overview of the essays in this Issue

This special issue has contributions from diverse contexts and countries. Social Work educators and practitioners from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Vietnam and Sweden explore the issue related to poverty and its integration in social work curriculum, practice and teaching. *Dhemba & Nhapi*, in *'Social work and poverty reduction in Southern Africa: The case of Eswatini, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe'* argues that social work education in south Africa must engage meaningfully with curriculum-related activities so that practitioners have clear guidelines on its operationalization. Further they suggest providing resources for capacity building of social workers is crucial to develop their skills to work in the developmental sector.

Jeevasuthan & Sivakumara in *'Teaching Poverty in Social Work Class Room: A Sri Lankan Perspective'* demands social work fraternity and schools of social work in Sri Lanka to develop a conceptual framework to teach poverty in classroom and carrying out field activities to make social work teaching more context specific. They also argue that conceptual framework in social work is the urgent need to poster the interest among the aspirants to pursue social work education. *Majumdar & Chatterjee* bring out an interesting perspective on its causes and future commitment to work with poverty affected victims among the non-social work students from India. The study demands for institutional interventions in terms of curriculum development as response to poverty where university departments with non-social work courses can establish a clear and structured perception of poverty among rural development student's through their course curriculum. They also argue these perception building is important as the future professionals who are working with poverty groups are expected to be strongly influenced by their learnings which will shape their commitment toward the attitude of working with poverty victims.

Ali et al. in their article *'Is Malaysia's Pension Scheme Sufficient to Secure the Quality of Life for the Elderly?'* provides an insightful exploration of Malaysia's pension scheme and its impact on improved quality of life of elderly. The authors bring in insightful findings that could be of immense use for the policy makers to formulate legislation related to pension for elderly in Malaysia. They further note favourable and dignified pension scheme is essential to improve the QOL of the elderly. Further *Dash et al.*, in their article *'Women and Poverty in India: Poverty Alleviation and Empowerment through Cooperatives'* note the significant contribution of Indian women cooperatives in socio economic empowerment of women. The authors argue that women's participation in cooperatives resulted in increased economic well-being, social standing, self-esteem, decision making skills as well as leadership skills. Further these cooperatives have provided an avenue to the poor and marginalised women to organise and undertake entrepreneurial activities with small capital. Which is the launching pad for many innovative and significantly successful entrepreneurships in the long run. *Ali and his co-authors* further explore the contributions of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in providing social services and poverty reduction in Bangladesh. Given the basic principles of social work profession this article argues that 'social work practitioners, particularly those in the Muslim world must be equipped with attitude, knowledge, skills, and abilities about *zakat* and *waqf* and the need for social work training to ensure the running of professionally based FBOs. *Nasreen & Singh* bring in the discussion on field work practicum in the urban Slums of Delhi. Based on the examinations of case records the authors argue that social workers need to extend their support in realizing polices and creating public awareness on healthy life practices through behavioral change approach while the government have a lead role to develop sustainable strategies for health, sanitation, transport, education and employment to reduce or end the cropping of slums and its manifestations.

Singh V. in his article *'Manual Scavenging: The Role of Government and Civil Society in against discriminative practice'* argues that despite of enormous programs and policies by the state and non-state actors 'lives of millions of manual scavengers belonging to particular castes who are considered as untouchables in the India society remain unchanged. Further the author argues that the occupation condition of these manual scavengers 'remains unchanged as they continue to clean sewers and septic tank manually. Undoubtedly these findings have lots to do with polices related to these deprived sections of the Indian society. Further *Trai & Trang* discuss about the problems faced by the minority community in the Vietnam in their article *'Essential Problems in Sustainable Development of Ethnic Minority in Vietnam'* suggests some fundamental recommendations for (i) policy formulation; (ii) coordination in policy implementation; (iii) handling discrimination; (iv) enhancing education; (v) improved livelihood. The central argument of the authors is that the government needs to work more to ensure that the outcomes of governmental policies and provisions are sustainable in the future. *Trygged* in his article *'Coping strategies among low-income families in Sweden'* brings in the experiences of families with low income in the global south and examines 'what it means for families to live at a low economic standard, their experiences of contacts with the social services, and how they cope with low incomes'. This contribution of *Trygged* is important to understand the impact of poverty and low income in a relatively well of economy in the global south with poor migrant families struggling to make their living. The author also brings out the coping strategies, which could be seen as individual responses to structural problems. Finally, *Carpenter* argues that 'the meaning of poverty is no longer associated with the general notion of food, clothing and shelter' as it has expanded to more human rights issues like access to water supply, sanitation and gainful employment through social welfare measures. In her article *'Teaching Poverty in Classroom setting: An Anti-Oppressive Social*

Work Practice' author brings out the theoretical inadequacies in defining poverty in India and notes that 'it is difficult to objectify and portray poverty out of other element of caste, class and gender'.

The contributions in this issue do not address all the issues related to poverty or teaching poverty in social work classroom. However as all of them are directly addressing the issues of poverty in one or the other perspectives they do make a difference in the main stream literature on poverty and social work. Most important aspect of these contributions is they are directly resulting from the experiences of the social work educators in different countries in the 'global south'. Thus, these contributions promise to be a global south voice in fight for poverty and achieving sustainable development goals as agreed by the world leaders in their commitment to end poverty in all its form and living no one behind by 2030. Further we believe a collaborative effort by state and non-state actors such as civil society, community development organizations and self-help groups, along with private sector undertakings, governments can fulfil the dream of achieving sustainable development goal and overall development of its citizens in the emerging and growing economies in the global south. These efforts will also contribute to the world's effort in sustainable development and put an end or at least reduce significantly the incidence of poverty in the world.

7   Acknowledgements

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