

Social work education in a time of national crisis: educating the workforce to combat inequalities

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Background: Greek society since 2010 is experiencing an unprecedented economic and humanitarian crisis with tremendous social impact: 43% rise of suicides (NSS, 2013), unemployment in 27,4% (NSS, 2013) and rise of oppressive even brutal attacks in minorities at an everyday basis. Austerity measures and policy cuts have included a dis-investment in social work and social care and more recently the abolition of one of the four national Social Work Departments. In this context, it is crucial than ever for an anti-oppressive practice in social work protesting the principles of human rights and equality through the promotion of social justice and social change. Reflecting on this need, a social work doctoral research project was carried out asking the critical question: What is the role of social work education in influencing students' ability to manage value tensions in relation to anti-oppressive practice within the current context of social work education in Greece?
Methods: The qualitative study using a grounded theory approach was based in one of the four national Departments of Social Work. Data were collected from social work students pre and post professional education by means of semi-structured interviews (n=32), academic staff/placement supervisors (n=10) and by means of documentary analysis of curricula and teaching material.
Results: This presentation will focus on the following key findings: (i) the role of research in developing social work education in times of crisis (ii) how does understanding of diversity and oppression change through the course of social work education.
Conclusions and Implications: Social work has a key role to play in the current crisis in Greece and in its future recovery. Adopting an anti-oppressive approach to social work practice is beyond practice "by the book" but a service to people and society that promotes empowerment, social justice and social change even in times of crisis.

Keywords: anti-oppressive practice, social work education, social work research, Greece