

Foreword

The theme of the PJSD Volume 15, *Transformative Social Work and Social Development: Responding to the Pandemic, Disasters, and Human Rights Issues*, seeks to capture social work and social development practices that exhibit the meaning of being transformative amidst the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden onset and global reach of the pandemic caught social work and social development practitioners by surprise. The pandemic revealed and the weaknesses of structures in dealing with containing the spread of the virus, in implementing measures such as social distancing and self-isolation and brought out the best and the worst in people, the creativity in adaptation and frailties of individuals. The pandemic truly changed the ways people lived and helping professions all over the world had to deal with this volatility and uncertainty and find new ways to respond. Social workers and social development practitioners sought ways to transform lives despite the pernicious taking over of the effects of the pandemic.

The term “transformative” has been defined as having the characteristics of a long lasting, important, radical, and positive change in such a way that it makes one’s life, outlook, or condition different and better. Yet, this composite definition from various dictionaries may still be applied using a wide array of perspectives. As such, transformative social work and social development may be viewed in various ways.

WAYS ON HOW TO VIEW TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

There are two sides as to how transformative social work may be viewed. Firstly, it may be viewed as a state of social work that has always been there from the start because social workers are naturally considered as agents of change. “Transformative” here therefore becomes a catch phrase with the assumption of it being innate in the social work profession. Some members of the helping profession may argue that the term “transformative social work” is redundant, because after all, given its values and principles, would there be a form of social work that is not transformative?

The other view is that transformative social work is emerging. For instance, the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) credo “Another Social Work is Possible” forwards the idea that social work may be a driving force to fight oppression and injustice thus reject structures that may cause oppression. The meaning of being transformative emerges from narratives of practice from dialogues among practitioners and the community.

In social work there are three ways to view transformative social work practice:

1. The advance generalist view;
2. The critical and anti-oppressive view, and
3. The critical-creative view

The advance generalist view of social work posits that transformative social work is the outcome of what advance generalist social workers do: “The ability to travers various domains and levels of practice simultaneously is what makes the social work profession unique among the helping professions, and it is how we can make a sustained impact in society and the world around us (Schott & Schott, 2016, p. 9).

The idea comes from the improvement of the health care landscape where social workers' utmost concern is the health of individuals, families, and communities. This combines a multidisciplinary approach towards achieving innovations in practice. Schott and Weiss (2016) echoes Dran (2014, p. 569) in defining the advance generalist practitioner as a social worker who "works patiently in multiple dimensions at once, alert to new patterns that emerge. In a complex situation, the advance generalist creatively responds by discovering new interventions to apply in new ways" (p. 3). This view of transformative social work emphasizes the importance of evidence-based practice (EBP) and empirically supported treatments (EST).

On the other hand, the other notion of transformative social work is a product of "critical habits of questioning" (Medina, 2013, in Schroder, 2022; Munford and Sanders, 2021) define transformative social work practice as that which "involves challenging injustice and marginalization" (p. 721). Further, Schott and Weiss (2016) outlined common characteristics of a transformative social work practice:

1. A practice that occurs at various levels and therefore will involve the participation of individuals, and at the wider community and societal levels in identifying factors that facilitate social change (Schott & Weiss, 2016).
2. A partnership between social worker and service user that is not limited to attending the immediate needs but more so in "developing an understanding of the connection between personal troubles and the broader social and political issues and contexts that contribute to disadvantage" (Irizarry et al., 2016; Van Breda, 2019 in Schott & Weiss, 2016).
3. Purposively having an "emancipatory ethic" which 'addresses the removal of structural barriers' and 'encourages the deconstruction of privileged discourses that frame human suffering as an individual experience resulting from personal deficits' (VanderPlaat, 2016, p. 198 in Schott & Weiss, 2016)
4. Promotes a critical analysis of the structural issues and social conditions that exclude individuals from fully participating in community life (Brookfield, 2009; Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016; Nelson et al., 2017; VanderPlaat, 2016 in Schott & Weiss, 2016).

Moreover, Schröder (2022; New ecosocial world Leaving No one Behind (2022) explains that transformative practices in social development emanate from having an open space to share a common strategy for collectively dismantling the neoliberal framework. Nicolas (2022) argues that transformative practice is borne from a transformative social work education framework which maximizes transformative potential by combining critical and creative thinking. In turn, "critical thinking and creative thinking produce innovative ways on how to shape a liberative education and critical-creative practice in social work" (Nicolas, 2022).

RESPONDING TO PANDEMIC THROUGH A TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL WORK LENS AND PRACTICE

The country's response to the pandemic was headed by the security sector (Lim & Imbong, 2021), a sector not so much trained with epidemiology or other health sciences as combat strategies. With the security sector at the helm, the direction of the pandemic response was expectedly militaristic (Lim & Imbong, 2021). Medical experts as well as social workers have offered insight in the handling of pandemic and alternatives in light of fast and early recoveries of nations such as Vietnam (Lim & Imbong, 2021). Despite such informed opinions,

the Duterte administration chose to ignore this advice and rather continued with the militaristic solutions of the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Emerging Infectious Diseases [ATF-EID] (Lim & Imbong, 2021).

The distinctive character in the time of pandemic is the normalization of repression itself. In the normalization of repression, fundamental and constitutionally guaranteed rights such as those of assembly and speech are curtailed if not altogether denied (Lim & Imbong, 2021). Yet the state forces legitimized such a repression based on supposed health protocols, implying the idea that it is abnormal to exercise fundamental freedoms amid the pandemic (Lim & Imbong, 2021). They lost sight that low social transfers support amid joblessness and rising hunger (CNN Philippines Staff, 2021) is also likely to weaken compliance with mobility restriction policies (Mendoza, 2021).

The delivery mechanism of the social amelioration program (SAP) also suffers from the phenomenon of “squeezing the balloon”. In accountability studies, the term called “squeezing the balloon,” refers to how government at a certain level, passes on the blame or responsibility to the other levels of the government to evade accountability (Aceron, 2020). In the delivery mechanism of SAP, local government units (LGUs) were delegated many tasks that are dependent on the central government’s work (Aceron, 2020). If the listing and validation takes long, if the listing and corresponding benefits are wrong, if the national government does not download the funds and goods on time, if the benefits do not get to the intended beneficiaries, local governments will be forced to explain to their constituencies (Aceron, 2020). Local governments bore the brunt of citizens if those qualified were not provided with corresponding assistance or those who were not qualified got access to services.

Recounting our professional values (service, human rights and social justice, dignity and worth of people, privacy and confidentiality, the importance of human relationships, and integrity), which COVID-19 has undermined and, in some instances, overturned, it has become increasingly notable that if any profession is most hurt by the pandemic, it is the social work profession (Amadasun, 2020). Starkly, social work is under threat today because the value of social justice is challenged by the deleterious impact of the pandemic on powerless groups. More so, the value of human dignity tanks in the face of resource and economic deprivation among many citizens who are unable to gain access to medical care (Amadasun, 2020). Our creed to ensure the entrenchment of human rights tenets in human relationships appears to teeter on the brink of defect in the high of flagrant human rights violations (Amadasun, 2020). The critical questions that should be posed in our practice during the pandemic are the following (Finn & Jacobson, 2018):

- How do people give meaning to the experiences and conditions that they share in their lives?
- How do we comprehend and appreciate the contextual nature of human experience and interaction?
- What forms and relations of power shape social relations and experience?
- Who has the power to have their interpretations of reality values as “true”?
- How might a historical perspective provide us with a deeper understanding of the context, help us grasp the ways that struggles over meaning and power play out, and enable us to appreciate the human consequences of these struggles?
- How do we claim a sense of the possible as an impetus for justice-oriented social work practice?

Given the “rampaging onslaught of the pandemic on individuals and families”, different initiatives coming from individuals, institutions, and communities in responding to the pandemic that have sharply changed the contours of the country that falls under what we call transformative social practice lens and practice. It situates seemingly individual problems within social and material conditions and alienating social structures (Lundy, 2011). At the same time, it emphasizes the importance of human agency while offering help to individuals and families. Moreover, it can also be viewed as a practice that acknowledges the role of social structures in producing and maintaining inequality and personal hardship and the importance of offering help to those in need or difficulty (Lundy, 2011).

It is also about social work as not being neutral, caring profession caring profession but an active political process especially when we are trying to meet client’s needs in the context of injustice at the local levels (Baines, 2011). Every action we undertake is political and ultimately about power, resources, and who has the right and opportunity to feel positive about themselves, their identities, and their futures (Baines, 2011).

The articles in this volume

The articles in this volume are grouped into three forms of responses during the time of pandemic: 1) structural social work and working with communities; 2) institutional social work practice and frontline social workers; and 3) social development strategies and working with social movements.

Structural social work and working with communities

The first four articles in this volume contribute to the discourse of transformative social work by delving more in explaining the nature of structural social work practice in the Philippines during the pandemic. This group of articles features research in remote community organizing field instruction with farmers, engagement with women in urban poor communities, human rights issues among the homeless, and an essay on structural social work during the time of COVID-19. The first article *COv2 – Community Organizing in a Virtual World: Lessons from a Student’s Field Experience* during the Pandemic attempts to frame a version two of community organizing (COV2) through a firsthand field instruction experience of a student and faculty supervisor. Nazal and Tungala discuss attempts made by the academe to collaborate with a non-government agency field instruction partner to implement virtual platforms to assist communication among community organizers and the farmers whom they were assisting. The article details how a student intern used technology mediated platforms as a communication tool throughout the CO process. The authors used Structuration as a theoretical lens to the explain how human agency produces technology but in turn is influenced by technology. The authors explain how human agency and technology shape forms of participation in the community. They used the pun COv2 as both referring to CO version 2 and its application during the time of sars-Cov2.

Sina-on and Dagooc’s article is entitled *Fighting for their Right to Food and Education: The Case of Lakas Women Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic*. In this article, Sina-on serves as the researcher while Dagooc or Nanay Precy as representative of the community knowledge keepers and member of the women’s organization LAKAS, Inc. situated at Purok Aguinaldo, a community inside the University of the Philippines Diliman. Sina-on recounted stories shared by Nanay Precy

on how the women of LAKAS responded to issues during the pandemic such as food security, job loss, and school closures, through community-based approaches. The article shares insights from strategies employed by the women such as urban farming and community learning hubs to assert their right to food and employment and their children's right to education. Sina-on and Dagooc share important insights in community organizing and collective action.

The third article *Re-Examining the Phenomenon of Homelessness during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the National Capital Region* analyzes cases of human rights violations among families in street situations during the pandemic. Prondosa uses a structural social work lens to analyze how homelessness as a human rights issue was aggravated during the pandemic. In this beginning analysis, Prondosa leaves important reminders to structural social work practitioners regarding tasks related to working with families in street situations.

The essay *Structural Social Work Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Look into Authoritarianism in the Philippines, the Duterte Administration, and the Country's Pandemic Response* is a fearless critic of how government mishandled the pandemic situation from its onset in 2020. Cristobal explains the meaning of structural social work and how such practice should lead to emancipation of disadvantaged groups and vulnerable sectors during the time of COVID-19. In the end, Cristobal highlights the need to abolish oppressive structures and the importance of consciousness raising in structural social work. This article summarizes the importance of structural social work as a response to the pandemic, disasters, and human rights issues.

Institutional social work practice and frontline social workers

The next three articles are all collaborations that discuss experiences of social workers in direct practice during the pandemic. The articles attempt to show how social work practice in institutions such as child caring agencies and hospitals, have been transformational during the time of COVID-19. Institutional social work practice is consistent with Weiss & Schott's (2016) argument that transformative social work shows the ability to maneuver between different levels of practice and facilitate lasting outcomes through evidence-based practice and empirically tested treatments. Moreover, the articles also support Pyles and Adam's (2016) stand that in aiming to achieve transformative social work, the social worker ventures into critical view of practice and reflects on one's own practice to ensure holistic engagement which involves the whole body (body, mind, heart, culture, and spirit) in implementing interventions that transform traditional practices into critical ones through participatory pedagogies to co-create narratives of transformative practices. The articles in this section seek to contribute to the stories of transformation by highlighting the roles of direct practitioners in uplifting the lives of others during the time of pandemic despite the limits and challenges they faced.

The fifth article in this volume, *Philippine Child Caring Agencies amidst COVID-19 Pandemic: Operational Challenges, Responses, and Reflections* is a collaboration among academics who had had to some degree practice in child protection and who are advocates of children's rights. Lamberte, Arellano, Jontaciergo and Sina-on provide an overview of their research on child-caring agencies (CCA) during the time of COVID-19. The authors challenge social workers to contribute to transformative social work by advocating change in Residential Care Facilities for Children and in developing new models of practice.

In the sixth article, *Medical Social Workers' Social Wellbeing: Tales from the Frontlines*, Uclaray et al. employed a phenomenological approach, in discussing the experiences of five Filipino medical social workers who were found to be “physically and emotionally exhausted, discriminated against, and fearful due to the COVID-19 pandemic.” The medical social workers practiced self-care to overcome loneliness and fear. Their connection with a support system also helped maintain their social well-being. More importantly, despite the risks, the Filipino medical social workers continued to be dedicated in their work as frontliners during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article promotes the value of the social work profession and the key role of social workers during the pandemic. The authors echo the call for a deeper appreciation of the social work profession.

The seventh article, *Social Workers' Roles, Challenges, and Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Albay, Bicol*, explored the roles assumed by social workers in Albay, Bicol during the time of pandemic. The authors also described the lessons and challenges that came with fulfilling the identified roles. Mainly they assumed roles as resource provider, facilitator, service brokers, coordinators, and educators. The social workers' involvement in personal and professional development and self-care to overcome physical, psychological, and social challenges in working during the time of COVID-19, also led to stronger commitment to the profession's principles and ethics.

Social development strategies and working with social movements

The last three articles are contributions from academics and social development practitioners who mostly discussed strategies involving creative modalities, engaging labor unions, and developing solidarity and disaster response through the social media and digital platforms. The articles discuss transformative social change, transformative policy and transformative innovations in relation to social development.

The eighth article, *Dance Movement Exploration (DME) with the Filipino Children during the COVID-19 Movement Restriction Period: An Exploratory Study on Focus DME Model* discusses how Dimarucut and his colleagues applied dance as a creative modality in drawing out emotions of children affected by pandemic shocks. Dimarucut et al. position Dance Movement Exploration (DME) as a supplementary form of transformative social development which provided emotional approach coping as an intervention for children during the time of COVID-19.

The ninth article, *Social Movements as Enablers of Transformative Social Protection and Building Back Better: A Case Study of the Nagkaisa Labor Coalition's COVID Advocacy* highlights a labor coalition as part a social movement advocating for change during the time of COVID. Velasco discusses his concept of transformative social protection using the building back better framework through social movements, specifically through the Nagkaisa labor coalition. The author recommends a human-centered and transformative recovery from the effects of COVID-19 by transforming its advocacies into electoral programs. These recommendations include ensuring delivery of social services, establishment of universal basic income, and institution of a wealth tax.

The tenth article, *Rethinking Resilience: An Analysis of the Online (Re)presentations and (Re)definitions of “Community Resilience and Cooperation” in Typhoon-related Relief Efforts in the Philippines* analyzes articulations of bayanihan and community resilience in social media and other digital platforms. Deocampo matched her own experience with mined data from social media and digital platforms to trace new meanings of community resilience and practices of bayanihan during the two typhoons while there was a pandemic. The author also explored forms of resistance in social media against appearances of authoritarianism.

Concluding statement

During the People’s Global Summit 2022, two questions were asked to the participants: What vision should social work have? and What transformative practices should social work have to realize that vision? Instead of providing a definition of transformative social work, social workers and social development practitioners should get together and discuss through different venues such as the global social movements to learn from the transformative practices of others. Christian Schöder (2022) invites social workers to continue questioning their own practice and participate in open spaces such as the World Social Forum to learn from the stories of other transformative practitioners. He echoes Garrett’s (2021) call for dissenting social work and forming a neo-social work that eschews any form that limits social work to its normative functions, continuously pushing boundaries of the profession through knowledge creation (Nicolas, 2016). Cristobal (2022) in this volume agreed with Longres (1986) and George and Marlow (2005) explaining that ‘Complete transformation therefore requires the abolition of oppressive systems followed by a comprehensive overhaul of social and economic structures.’ As such, achieving transformative practice in social work and social development is a process. Perhaps the term ‘Transformative Social Works’ is more appropriate in relating to various applications of transformative social change, more so in responding to issues of uncertainty, social inequality, and injustice. Schöder (2022) argues that social work derived its methods from the context of social movements. Social work therefore should find its way back to creative practice, embracing social movements, and constructing itself through constant reflection, towards a truly transformative practice.

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