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## **Ripples in a pond: Do social work students need to learn about terrorism?**

**Abstract:** *In the face of heightened awareness of terrorism, however it is defined, the challenges for social work are legion. Social work roles may include working with the military to ensure the well-being of service-men and women and their families when bereaved or injured, as well as being prepared to support the public within the emergency context of an overt act of terrorism.*

*This paper reviews some of the literature concerning how social work responds to conflict and terrorism before reporting a small-scale qualitative study examining the views of social work students, on a qualifying programme in the UK, of terrorism and the need for knowledge and understanding as part of their education.*

**Keywords:** *terrorism; social work; education*

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## Introduction

Social work has had a complex and contested relationship with political violence and conflict throughout its history. The terms political violence and conflict represent difficult and intertwined concepts even before the concept of terrorism is added to the mix (Ramon et al., 2006). On the one hand, social workers have been implicated in aspects of extreme eugenics in Nazi Germany, assessing people with disabilities for lethal intervention (Williams, 2010). On the other hand, and more aligned with accepted values, social work has championed international peace campaigns from the time of Jane Addams and Alice Salomon to the present day (IFSW, 2010). In the UK, social work is undertaken with people affected by violent conflicts or injured within them. Also, specific services are provided to military personnel (SSAFA, 2007), whilst in the US, social workers practise as part of the military, for example, in Afghanistan and Iraq ([http://www.amedd.army.mil/r2d/social\\_work.html](http://www.amedd.army.mil/r2d/social_work.html)). Social work's involvement and embeddedness in the contexts in which terrorism, understood as a complex form of political violence, takes place is not well understood.

Terrorism represents a frequently mentioned topic in the contemporary world. Definitions of terrorism, however, signify popular constructions with contested meanings for different interest groups. Globalisation and mass migration provide a context for the experience of the technologies of terrorism, and shape social welfare and policy responses from the global to local levels (Parker, 2012). These social trends also impact on social work practice at a variety of levels.

In the face of heightened awareness of terrorism, however it is defined, the challenges for social work in the West are many. They include Islamophobia, racism and responding to the pressures associated with migration alongside enacting resulting social policies that may run counter to social workers' values. In addition, social workers may work with the military to ensure the well-being of service-men and women and their families when bereaved or injured, and be prepared to act when there an overt act of terrorism occurs.

This paper reviews some of the literature concerning how social work responds to terrorism. It reports a study examining the views of social work students, on a qualifying programme in the UK, of terrorism, and the need for knowledge as part of their education. Conclusions favouring a critically aware but generalist approach to qualifying education can be extrapolated to other countries and other human service professions.

### **What is terrorism?**

Terrorism is recognised as a global problem (Itzhaky and Dekel, 2005), with initiatives being developed to cooperate across States to counter terrorist threats (Archick, 2010; Ekengren, 2006). Terrorism is, however, a complex phenomenon to define. The anonymous adage 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' is oft-quoted but replete with over-simplified justifications, leaving out the complexities of such experiences. In some definitions this has been replaced by a normative political and legal understanding that separates morally the 'legitimate' or supported groups or States from those who are said to instil fear and terror by random, violent, often lethal, actions against unsuspecting citizens. However, this approach fails to account for the ambiguities of violent and fear-provoking actions whatever the direction from which they are perpetrated, including States. It suggests a normative approach that requires political critique.

Atran (2010) recognises that the US State Department agrees there is no single agreed definition of terrorism, generally understanding terrorism as 'premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience' (United States State Department, 2002, xvi). Atran argues, however, that this definition would allow the Nazi German occupiers of France legitimately to label the French resistance as terrorists, and that the US extends the concept of State terrorism only to so-called enemy nations not its allies.

Legislative approaches to defining terrorism are limited. In the UK, terrorism represents

the use or threat of action where (it) is designed to influence the government, or an international governmental organisation, or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and... is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause. (The Terrorism Act 2000 s. 1 (1) b, c, amended by the Terrorism Act 2006 and Counter Terrorism Act 2008)

This mirrors the United Nations (2004) description of terrorism as any action 'intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose ... is to intimidate ..., or to compel ... (p. 65).

Kee (1974) opines that political violence, which he associates with 'terrorism', describes an ambiguous phenomenon with the actions of 'revolutionaries' being condemned by those in power, whilst the former campaign against 'unjust and oppressive' regimes. Contemporary definitions of terrorism often concern violence against a State in which the status quo is challenged (Sweifach et al., 2010); however, this has not always been the way in which terrorism has been seen.

The term terrorism was originally developed to describe the Jacobins in the French Revolution, and concerned State terror against the populace, albeit from the perspective of other States. It was used, in this way, to describe the Soviet and Nazi regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by observers (see Arendt, 1958). The term has since been transposed to describe using violent means *against* States. A further change concerns the underlying concern with violence which has shifted the focus from the terrorist or their aim to a definition based around actions (Primoratz, 2004).

Allen (2007) discusses the association of the term 'evil' with terrorism which resonates with US and British justification for action in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Bush referred to an 'axis of evil', evil acts and evil-doers in his 2002 State of the Union address. Using the concept 'evil' as a descriptor demonises the person to whom the label is applied, and constructs a view that contrasts the two protagonists at a superficial level of 'good guy' and 'bad guy', which has been applied by contemporary States to designate certain people and groups, even countries, as terrorists.

Definitional problems are further highlighted by Anderson (2011) in his examination of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, positing terrorism in the duplicitous reasoning for the removal of Saddam Hussein and a catalogue of abuses perpetrated at Abu Ghraib.

Dekel et al. (2007) recognise that the political and ideological assumptions underpinning legislation preclude an agreed international definition and simply make a distinction between terror by a State or government and terrorism by an individual or group against a State of government. This fails to capture the nuances of deliberate actions to harm and intimidate, whatever the direction or seemingly random nature of those actions. The basic divergence between definitions is related to the 'terrorist' being whosoever the definer views as the 'enemy' (Dedeoglu, 2003), returning to the simplistic definitions of 'good guy' and 'bad guy'.

Definitions of terrorism stress its political-motivation, but also its 'illegitimacy', which reflects the power and position of the person, group or State making the definition (Whittaker, 2007). This categorises people and indicates where people, and with what and whom, they should align themselves. The term has changed and shifted through history and invokes moral judgement on behalf of a viewpoint, whether in favour of claims made by those defined as terrorists, or those seeking the condemnation of those individuals or groups. The search for an objective definition, therefore, is likely to be fruitless. However, we need to be clear about what it is that we are discussing and to unpick the emotive and partisan overtones associated with it if we are to understand how terrorism may impact on social workers and their practice. Terrorist actions are played out in context, channelled and refined by governments and the public media. When social workers respond to such actions their behaviours and practices may be considered constitutive of how we understand terrorism and conflict-related trauma. We may identify a moral perspective by observing who social workers practise with and how they deal with them.

Individual and community experiences of 'terrorism' may often evoke expressions of fear, outrage and a lack of control. Terrorist acts are seemingly random, although often planned by those executing them. They are, like many natural disasters and

sometimes intimate partner violence, unexpected. It is perhaps in this context that social workers and other human service professionals have a role in assisting people through such challenging experiences.

The complex and politically-driven definitions of terrorism lead us to consider terrorism broadly as intentional and often targeted use of violence, across the spectrum, towards or by States, and used for political ends (Vertigans, 2011). As we argue elsewhere, it is not useful to be prescriptive, partly because of the disagreements over definitions, but also because of the emotional and moral characteristics of many attempts and the direction in which they are positioned (Parker, 2012). In this paper, we allow a fluid approach in which those actions defined as terrorism reflect the views and constructions of the students interviewed (see Shamai, 2003), acknowledging they bring moral, political and emotional perspectives to the topic.

### **Social work and terrorism**

The literature concerning social work and terrorism sets out a broad tapestry of normative and critical approaches to the way terrorism is defined. Being dominated by papers from the US and Israel, terrorism is located within the experience *against* States and associated frequently with binary distinctions of 'good' and 'bad'. However, the papers move beyond this simple difference. This may be expected given the reflexivity associated with social work as a discipline.

US papers often relate to the attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 (Besthorn, 2008; Bride, 2007; Mackelprang et al., 2005; Proctor, 2004; Scurfield, 2002). Strug et al. (2009) identify the importance of migration status in Hispanic older people's reactions to terrorist threats drawing on New York data. Further US research concerns the different impact the sniper attacks in the Washington area in 2002 had on homeless and settled people, concluding there is differential treatment of marginalised groups at times of terrorist activity (Donaldson et al., 2009). Spitz (2003) aligns the trauma associated with stalking behaviours with some of the psychological

characteristics of terrorism, drawing on associations between the effects of terrorism and individual and partner violence. The latter two papers associate terrorism with randomised acts of violence designed to evoke fear and assert power.

Papers from Israel cover a more protracted period mainly focusing on the Arab-Israeli conflict and political violence (Baum, 2004; Dekel, 2004; Drory et al., 1998; Itzhaky and Dekel, 2005, 2008; Itzhaky and York, 2005; Sever et al., 2008; Sweifach et al., 2010)). Interestingly, gendered responses are reported within these studies, indicating intensity of reaction to events and a focus on care relations by women (Dekel, 2004; Sever et al., 2008).

Other papers also consider the need to confront social work value issues raised by the global phenomenon of terrorism. Tsui and Cheung (2003), writing in Hong Kong, suggests a social work response to the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks in the US should be based on justice not revenge, which challenges the profession to look deeper into itself to promote an agenda of forgiveness, inclusion and justice, similar to the earlier approaches of Addams and Salamon.

There is very little work on social work and terrorism in the UK. Cemlyn (2008) and Cemlyn and Nye (2012) consider the need for working with asylum seekers and refugees who may have experienced or fled from political violence but avoid associating this overtly with 'terrorism'. Guru (2012) takes a specific focus on families, often women, affected by counter-terrorism in the UK.

The most recent major terrorist event on mainland Britain concerned the underground and bus bombings in London 2005 in which 52 people died and over 700 were injured. It is interesting that there have been few accounts of this event from a social work perspective given the importance of social work in times of disaster (Dominelli, 2007). The profession has focused on disaster planning following natural and terrorist disasters (Hodgkinson and Stewart, 1991; Smith et al., 2003), with Kearney (2007) suggesting that contemporary responsibility of social services for psycho-social support and help during such events fits well with the skills of social work. However, the majority of research concerning social

work and, what has been politically and in the media termed, terrorism in the UK relates to 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland (Manktelow, 2008), and the lasting ramifications for individuals and communities (Hayes and Campbell, 2000), especially in respect of children (Skehill, 2003; Kelly and Sinclair, 2005). The use of the term 'Troubles' creates a discourse that acknowledges the ambiguities of labelling political violence as terrorism, especially in a post- 9/11 context, and demonstrates the importance of language when seeking to rebuild lives following such events. However, if we accept these ambiguities and acknowledge these studies may relate to terrorism in the eyes of some observers, and given its lack of specific or partisan direction, this provides a UK perspective (see Kapur and Campbell, 2002). Campbell and Healey (1999) identified a seeming reluctance on the part of social workers to deal with issues arising from the Troubles, which requires a critical approach to political issues to address this situation, whilst Manktelow (2008) advocates the development of specialist services to deal with vulnerability to anxiety and depression resulting from the often postponed processing of feelings of loss and bereavement. Services, according to Manktelow, need to be community based, human rights focussed and therapeutic.

It is also recognised that professionals in Northern Ireland may also have been exposed to political conflict and 'high levels of Troubles-related incidents (Campbell and McCrystal, 2005, p. 173). Campbell and McCrystal suggest little support has been provided to practitioners, identifying an on-going need in the aftermath of the conflict.

There are a range of social work approaches when faced with terrorist incidents, exposure to terrorism and so forth. There are macro-level responses seeking to engender attitudinal shift as exemplified by Tsui and Cheung (2003), to the centralised provision of information concerning potential victims subsequent to a terrorist attack (Drory et al., 1998; Sweifach et al., 2010). Itzhaky and York (2005) review the multidisciplinary approaches in which social work is practised. Itzhaky and Dekel (2005) note that the effectiveness of social work intervention with individuals is correlated with the exposure of social workers to terrorism, stating that this



... may enhance their understanding of the clients' difficulties and improve their ability to provide effective treatment to victims of trauma. (Itzhaky and Dekel, 2005, p. 340)

This may be important when planning social work responses to terrorist attack in the UK, as will the importance of providing support to social workers secondarily traumatised by working with the victims of domestic and international terrorism (Bride, 2007; Linzer et al., 2008; Tosane, 2006). Risk factors for secondary trauma include the process of empathy, intensity of exposure to terrorist event, age and professional experience of the practitioner (Dekel et al., 2007). Dekel et al. (2007) indicate that secondary traumatisation was relatively infrequent but ensuring that working conditions and systems meet the need for support is important, where specific training and supervision tend to reduce trauma.

Whilst this literature is set within a context of 'terrorism' as understood by the papers' authors, it draws on more traditional understandings of social work support and does not promote novel adaptations in practice. It does not help us understand terrorism as a phenomenon, confirming the importance of taking a fluid approach to the concept.

## **The Study**

Data were collected from two cohorts of final year undergraduate social work students in focused seminar groups concerning terrorism, adult safeguarding and social work and exploring 'what social workers need to know'. Data were gathered over two years, in 2010 and 2011. There were five seminar groups in total comprising forty students. Two cohorts were chosen to check validity of the first year seminar group findings.

In addition to the seminar group discussions, four students, chosen purposefully for their engagement in the seminar and expressed interest in the topic, consented to in-depth semi-structured interviews following the first set of seminar data, from which an interview protocol was developed. Interviewees

comprised two men and two women, all mature, White UK students with social services experience, and one with a background in military service. Students in seminar groups and interviews were aware that data were being collected as part of a study, and that their participation was voluntary and did not form part of their assessment. They were also aware their views were anonymised and would not be disclosed to other faculty members.

Seminar discussions and interview data were focused around core topics and themes, including how terrorism is defined, what knowledge is needed to practise where terrorism has been an issue; and finally, the roles which social workers have in relation to helping after acts or experience of terrorism. Interview data were audio-recorded and transcribed, and seminar data collected from posters, and subsequent presentations. Data were coded thematically, during the analysis, offering a range of rich findings, fascinating in themselves as an expression of UK student social work views in the early twenty-first century, and for the recommendations for practice and education.

## **Findings**

### ***Defining terrorism***

Data from the seminar groups indicated that understandings of the term 'terrorism' were indeed contested and recognised to be subjective or constructed by a particular perspective. The partisan associations led one group to have a heated debate about its usefulness as anything other than reflecting a particular ideological position. However, the seminar groups tended to agree that terrorist acts were perpetrated by those considered to be the 'enemy' or the 'other' with one group stating 'terrorism is done by someone else!' (Atran, 2010; Whittaker, 2007).

Terrorism, when defined, was equated with extreme acts which were associated with violence and power, and predicated on the experience of oppression by victim or perpetrator. It was depicted as a desperate act, oppressive in its enactment and conclusion, which worked towards the achieving of an ideologically contested

end by any means possible, whether through hatred, anger, anarchy, fear, evil, revenge or hopelessness. Terrorist acts were by no means confined to individuals or organisations alone, but were acts where the State could equally be complicit.

The problems of defining the concept raised the example of Nelson Mandela as being described as both a terrorist and freedom fighter. Other examples raised in the seminar groups oscillated around well-known examples such as the Holocaust, genocide in Rwanda, the London bombings, Madrid train bombing (11M), and 9/11.

Interviewees tended to replicate views expressed in the groups. Three respondents indicated that defining terrorism was a complex task and undertaking such would demand a multifaceted approach; it was not just 'things going on in Afghanistan and Iraq, suicide bombers' but involved the media, together with conceptualisations of diversity and difference, and was perhaps a stimulated response to injustice or oppression. Two respondents focused on the invisibility of terror and the centrality of fear over others which accentuated its unpredictability, and its impact on personal and intimate relationships:

*You can't see it coming – a plane full of people you can see but suddenly having no power, electricity or no money in your bank account is unseen – it's unpreventable.*

As well as fear, one respondent viewed terrorism as 'an act designed to cause maximum disruption to someone who is a perceived enemy', often because of misplaced beliefs or needing to make one's voice heard. According to another respondent this interlinks with social work's critically reflective approach:

*... there have always been large terrorist groups, e.g. the IRA, al Qaeda ... but this isn't carried around as a fear. It's difficult to know just how much of a threat there is. Social workers perhaps think a little differently and try to weigh things up from all sides.*

However, there was also a sense of other agendas at work, where the issue of emotiveness and irrationality was seen as inexorably

feeding into these power-based, futile conflicts.

*There is a hatred issue – an assumption that hate led to an attack and therefore ‘there is a reciprocal need to return that hatred. Terrorism may be driven by an understandable ideology but terrorism uses a different language of emotion. Because I’ve never experienced it things may seem a little ‘airy fairy’, difficult... what has killing Osama bin Laden achieved? It may have eliminated part of the problem but it hasn’t addressed the problem, more the US imposing its own ideas on to others.*

When describing acts of terrorism, all participants focused on well-known incidents such as Lockerbie, 9/11, IRA bombings but also made links with less recent acts and ideologies such as Nazi ideology and the Holocaust. Two respondents identified the hallmark of a terrorist act as the inducement of fear in others, especially where there were personal accounts that served to ground it as the personal and experiential phenomena to which others could more easily relate to maybe.

*Perhaps it sticks when you hear about the personal accounts and the impact on individuals and those on the ground. Where it becomes personalised it means much more.*

One, in particular, focused on the conflict in Afghanistan:

*I had a friend killed by an IED in Afghanistan. His partner was in the Navy with me. She got help to deal with loss, bereavement and the resulting emotional problems. This was one incident for one person but if you had an incident that killed hundreds the actual fall-out would be drastic. You would need an on-call team that can be dispatched specifically to work with people who are affected after the event. You could be working with thousands – think one bus in London, witnesses, parents, children, friends, colleagues – so many people affected. One drop in the water and there’s ripples for miles.*

Another participant recognised that incidents are fraught with complications, being open to different interpretations, as one statement shows prior to the final events leading to the removal of President Mubarak.

*In Egypt it's seen as one group of people trying to disrupt the lives of other people.*

The focus on well-known incidents is interesting and may reflect over-simplification in thinking that is somewhat at odds with the acknowledged need the students themselves expressed to understand the complexity and fluidity of terrorism. Emphasising key events reflects the 'political enemy' and morality-based approach to terrorism evidenced in the literature concerning the attacks in the US and Israel. The tension between 'professional' and personal definitions reflects a contest between two assumptive worlds. In respect of social work education such contests suggest a need for hearing the personal experiences and biographies of those affected by terrorism to grasp its wider meaning for social work practice. Some of these issues are explored when discussing what social workers need to know about terrorism - however the term is understood.

#### ***What do social workers need to know and what should they do?***

Data from the seminar groups indicated there were a number of areas with which it would be useful for students to be familiar when practising with people who had experienced terrorism. This echoed calls within the literature for responding at macro, mezzo and micro levels (Itzhaky and Dekel, 2005; Itzhaky and York, 2005; Tsui and Cheung, 2003), although these students had not considered the role of social work in this area previously. Accordingly, the need to understand terrorism encapsulated both history and biography; the causes and progression of conflicts and the experiences of the person. This reflects a core element of social work in intertwining the social and the individual. It identified a perceived educational need across three intersecting foci individual/therapeutic, community, international development - underpinned by commitment to anti-oppressive practice. It does not, however, suggest the need for major additions to social work education programmes, rather it indicates the importance of reflexivity and criticality in the curriculum and students keeping up-to-date in global and local politics.

Knowledge of the potential impact of terrorism through personal

experience was highlighted. This included awareness of mental and emotional health consequences, especially in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder. There are correspondences between student perceptions and individual/therapeutic and community based social work, especially in relation to work from Northern Ireland (Campbell and Healy, 1999; Hayes and Campbell, 2000; Kelly and Sinclair, 2005). The seminar groups also identified the need to provide and seek good supervision when working with distress to mitigate the risks of secondary trauma that might otherwise impact on professional competence mirroring the literature (Bride, 2007; Linzer et al., 2008; Tosane, 2006).

The assessment role of social work was noted as important in gathering biographical information about people's experiences. Social work assessments underpin the counselling, grief work and psychotherapeutic role social workers engage in, but also lead to the practical aspects of liaison and service brokerage, developing educational and reintegration into society (Parker and Bradley, 2010). Good assessment enables social workers to make safeguarding and protection decisions - another transferable role.

It was also recognised that social workers carried a responsibility to ensure that their skills were current in order to intervene using appropriate models in situations where terrorism had been an issue, particularly in respect of crisis intervention knowledge and skills (Thompson, 2011).

All interviewees recognised the need for wide-ranging knowledge in terms of history, cross-cultural and political understandings. Being able to work with people through that understanding and to recognise oppression and discrimination appeared to lie at the heart of effective intervention. This highlighted a value-based approach; for instance, there was a focus on tackling unwarranted discrimination of groups and growing Islamophobia.

*We need to work with terrorists because of other issues that social workers work with or because of the perceptions of society and its treatment of people – exclusionary. We need to understand the causes, reasons, the discrimination and oppression and how it's experienced.*

*All social workers need an awareness. It's a problem perceived to be rampant within the universities as well as in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan ...*

These comments echo the professional and value-based approaches to responding to terrorism highlighted by Tsui and Cheung (2003) and Sweifach et al. (2010).

All interviewees offered clear ideas about the role of social workers where terrorism was an issue, including therapeutic work, crisis work and loss and grief counselling of individuals and families. This included signposting families to other support services to manage those experiences, as well as undertaking pragmatic work in reuniting displaced families.

Respondents understood terrorism as subjectively experienced and hard to define and posited that outcomes would equally be subjective (see Dekel, 2004; Sever et al., 2008). There was also concern that those 'experiencing' the impacts of terrorism were wide ranging and included people made vulnerable because of heightened suspicions. These vulnerable individuals might embrace a person with Asperger Syndrome being extradited for computer hacking or the shooting of the Brazilian Jean Charles Menezes. Knowledge of the processes leading to vulnerability and marginalisation underpinned these concerns, and to campaign against the vilification of particular groups was considered part of social work's role. Thus the impact was not purely concerned with individuals but demanded community knowledge and skills, underpinned by historical and cultural knowledge. As one group stated,

*(t)errorism leads to other vulnerabilities through media portrayal, intrusion and exploitation...social workers need to challenge exploitation and the political ramifications of terrorism.*

There was acknowledgement that part of social work's role concerns building positive community cohesion, and with working with communities to develop tolerance and reduce the potential dangers of extreme or fundamentalist views. One interviewee

also suggested a proactive approach where social workers should work to 'prevent people converting to terrorist viewpoints'. This is a somewhat controversial idea in suggesting that social workers might work at grassroot-levels among disaffected groups and communities perceived to be at risk of harbouring subversive activities.

One interviewee highlighted the healing of communities experiencing terrorist events:

*I think we need quiet and gentle support for communities to heal themselves and social workers should have the sensitivity to recognise families and individuals often have the power to support themselves.*

Respondents recognised that social work roles was necessary within communities in order to protect those who were marginalised because of events, or those who might be more likely to become dissatisfied as a result of unfair social division, poverty or marginalisation, focusing on Islamophobia resulting from terrorist events during the first part of this century.

The remit extended more widely to those working in international development or aid, noted by one group indicating that community development and aid workers offer important support cognate to that offered by social workers. This comment suggested a global perspective is necessary within educational programmes recognising that social workers could also be construed as terrorists in some other countries because of their actions.

Social work's practical orientation also came to the fore in some of the discussion in which participants identified the need for knowledge concerning available resources and legislative or policy reasons for intervening.

Whilst three of the four interviewees thought terrorism should be included somewhere in the curriculum, the seminar groups thought that extant curriculum elements - knowledge, skills and values - were transferable, and empathic and non-judgemental approaches were central to and sufficient for effective working in



this area, 'social workers should work in the same way with all people whether victims or perpetrators of terrorism.' The fourth interviewee recognised that given the packed curriculum it would be difficult to include specific teaching concerning terrorism:

*... you can't know everything, but aspects of terrorism should be linked to any new developments or modules. Every social worker will deal with terrorist actions – this may not have happened in this country but if it is not recognised it will prevent you working with these issues and won't address important matters.*

Most social work education programmes internationally already include a consideration of plurivocality and global awareness. Indeed, this is expected in the International Association of Schools of Social Work global standards for education (IASSW, 2004). Therefore, a value-based approach and an understanding of the transferability of knowledge and skills may provide a sufficient grounding at qualifying educational level, prior to further specialisation.

## **Concluding discussion**

Social work in the UK draws clear and distinct parameters for intervention, based on legislative and policy criteria that are interpreted and mandated by Local Authorities. Vulnerability, however it is defined, is worked with a variety of levels in adult intervention and family work including work with political refugees (Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2011) However, the input of the profession in tackling the impact of terrorism has yet to be fully recognised or harnessed within education or practice (Foa et al., 2005; Dominelli 2007; Kearney 2007). Current literature discussing the reactions of social work students is minimal (see Cemlyn, 2008), and mainly concerns Arab students in Israel at the time of the Second Intifada (Baum, 2004) and student reactions in the US in response to the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 attacks (Knight, 2006).

The findings from this study indicate a level of need among trainee social workers for knowledge required to address the needs of individuals, families and communities affected by

terrorism (Kearney, 2007; Smith et al., 2003). However, this does not necessarily demand the introduction of yet more into an already packed curriculum. Rather, it reinforces the focus on critical understanding, questioning and appreciation of diversity, which need to be promoted and recognised as transferable to multiple settings. In our isomorphic and increasingly standardised curriculum in parts of the UK, it is possible to lose the centrality of the general in the search for the specific. Terrorist issues are important but current social work knowledge and skills can be used to address the needs of those having experienced such.

Therapeutic skills that were always implicit in skilled social work appear side-lined in contemporary social work in the UK with its target-driven focus on instrumental assessment processes and the brokerage of services. The responses of participants in the seminar groups and interviews reveal that a more extensive and sensitive range of intervention tools need to be deployed through a more coherent and nuanced understanding of the geo-political dimensions surrounding the construction of 'global terrorism' - and its potential impact on local populations that have migrated and settled in the UK (Manktelow, 2008) as well as the impact in themselves. However, these skills and knowledges must be recognised as part of the overall critical political awareness of social workers and the potential for diverse perspectives acknowledged. It is still, as mentioned above, most important that social workers are generalists working in special and individual circumstances and not practising on the basis of received political ideologies.

As noted earlier, there is a limited but acknowledged body of work concerning disaster management in the UK (Dominelli, 2007), and from international relations, for example the US and Pakistan (Candland and Qazi, 2012). Crisis intervention, community development and cohesion represent transferable and existing social work approaches with a clear evidence base (Thompson, 2011). Indeed, crisis intervention skills transfer across the range from family violence (O'Hagan, 1989) to community resilience building (Thompson, 2004).

The need for a non-partisan political approach carries

ramifications for social work education in its role to prepare novice social workers for frontline professional work dealing with contemporary social issues. For the profession the question of the preventative and proactive power of social work to work with marginalised and underprivileged groups and communities is raised to the fore. Should UK social workers be openly prevailed upon by governments and their counter-terrorist strategies, to identify subversive factions in the groups they work with, or correspondingly to target them, it will undoubtedly prove ethically contentious. It is something that would test the values and principles of the profession. Nonetheless, and in conclusion, it is apparent that the funnelled remit of this once broad and diverse profession in the UK requires challenge. Far greater latitude is necessary if social workers are to act in their traditional capacity as both agents of change and community advocates as effective players working in this increasingly prominent domain of national and international concern. The politicisation of social work in the UK is something that requires challenge (see Ferguson, 2007). Social work can offer much to develop community cohesion and repair, providing a forum for the expression of community concerns to those in positions of power (Popple, 1995).

Explicit education about terrorist issues may remain a niche rather than core area in qualifying social work education, although it has potential post-qualification. The knowledge, skills and values taught in qualifying social work education are transferable across situations. However, recognition of continuing global challenges, the personal experiences of those seeking social work and the need to work at the margins of society demand openness to new knowledge concerning wider social and political issues that will impact on practice. Recognition that social workers will come into contact with people who have, in some way, been affected by terrorism – due to migration experiences, military service, secondary experience or from media representations – asks social workers to confront their moral selves and to resist the safety of working solely within the bureaucratic confines of much contemporary practice.

There is no doubt of the importance of the contemporary topic of terrorism, despite continuing tensions, fluidity and subjectivity

in its definition. It is also clear that social workers and other human service professionals, in the UK and elsewhere, have a mandate to be involved with people at the margins of society, with those who are displaced in multiple ways and who may be traumatised by experiences that result from popularly termed or subjectively understood terrorist events. However, the skills and knowledge enacted by social workers would appear to constitute generic application to specific circumstances. It is important for social workers to be politically aware, and to identify their own perspectives, but more so because of the potential to affect responses rather than to respond according to received interpretations of given circumstances, in this case terrorism.

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