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Introduction

New perspectives on human rights, social inequality and social justice

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Welcome to this book on human rights, social inequality, and social justice. As editors, we hope you, as a reader, will experience something new and different and learn something you did not know before by reading the chapters in the book. Together with all the contributors, we have a profound interest in social justice, and we try to make a difference.

Social work strives for social justice. Social work challenges dominant narratives, discourses, and power structures. Our time is characterized by important questions about social justice, how we achieve it, and why research into human rights, inequality, and poverty must be prioritized. A threatening world image is on the agenda both nationally and internationally. Central efforts in improving the population's public health include equalizing social differences and developing social justice for all citizens. Everyone must be guaranteed safe growing-up conditions, a living wage, the right to have a safe place to live, and protection against stigmatization and social exclusion. This requires a fundamentally new policy, expanded knowledge bases, and new practices.

If we want to do something about these conditions, equalizing social differences and developing social justice among all residents is the most important measure. The best way to develop health, well-being, social justice, and human rights is through working with social equality and citizens' living conditions. Every human being must be ensured safe growing-up conditions, a living wage, the right to have a safe place to live, and protection against stigmatization and social exclusion. Socio-economic and political conditions are decisive for our health and well-being. The differences between the poorest and the richest in the world have increased during the pandemic. For example, the highest number of families ever in Norway now live below the EU's poverty line. Social inequalities are not only linked to poor mental health and drug use but also affect already socially marginalized groups in society. It is urgent to put in place new understandings and strategies that recognize the relationship between social determinants and what can promote good health and well-being. The required shift involves a fundamentally new policy, an expanded knowledge base, and new practices. The importance of social determinants for health, well-being, and social justice is well known and obvious. There is a lack of action through a paradigm shift that addresses the importance of social determinants for health, well-being, social justice, and equality.

Broaden the perspective to interdisciplinary approaches

New perspectives on social inequality and social justice are strongly needed. Working with these issues demands an interdisciplinary field of education, research, and work within a broader perspective in social work. Efforts focused on promoting and improving people's health and well-being are well documented. We need to change the conditions in our society that create and contribute to stigmatization processes and social exclusion. The purpose must be to strengthen people's perceived self-worth and vitality, assist in processes that develop experiences of connection and opportunities to master everyday challenges, and create inclusive local environments. There is a need for fundamental changes in the health, social, and welfare fields, both regarding understandings and practices. There is a need for a revolution—and it should come now!

The best way to develop health, well-being, and social security is through work related to social justice and citizens' living conditions. Social inequalities are not only linked to poor health or well-being but also affect already socially marginalized groups in our society. New understandings and strategies are needed that recognize the relationships between social determinants and what can promote health, well-being, and social justice. This shift involves a fundamentally new policy and new practices. This book presents different professional and research projects. Behind each project are people who work for new policies and new practices.

The birth of the project

The very beginning of this book started as a dialogue between people who want to make a change. To put social inequality and social justice on the agenda, the editors organized an international conference in August 2023 at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. The conference promoted social work research on justice and human rights. The Department of Child Welfare and Social Work at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway headed the conference.

The rationale and purpose of the conference were to direct attention to the challenges we face in the work of social inequality and social justice. We believe that bringing people together across borders and cultures contributes to a greater understanding of our common challenges. As emphasized, the most crucial aspect of improving public health in a population is to equalize social differences and develop social justice among all inhabitants. Every health and social service must strengthen the work on social justice and citizens' living conditions. There is a need to unsettle traditional concepts of what counts as social work research, social justice, and evidence and inquiry.

The conference addressed inequality from a broad perspective. It highlighted important themes with global lenses, focusing on the United Nations Declarations and Conventions on human rights, recognizing that respect for the individual's inalienable rights is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace. The conference's opening lecture was held by Professor Dainius Pūras, a UN Special Rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health from 2014 to 2020. The UN Special Rapporteur has investigated how the world's population can achieve the best possible health and well-being, as well as the conditions for this. The Special Rapporteur describes the situation in the field of mental health as follows:

Focus on human rights is mainly absent in mental health services globally and locally. People who experience mental health difficulties find themselves in a circle of social exclusion, discrimination, coercion, and injustice. To remedy this, all services, forms of treatment, and support schemes must be seen in a broad perspective and move away from a biomedical understanding of and practices with mental health challenges. Both globally and locally, arrangements must be made for changes and discussions about how to understand and respond to mental health challenges. This work must be rooted in a rights-based, holistic, and experience-based approach that has as its starting point people who have experienced abusive socio-political institutions and practices. (UN, p. 16, 2020)

All the speakers at the conference emphasized global and local research on social justice and human rights.

The conference truly addressed inequality from a broad perspective, with participants from many parts of the world. As part of the event, we invited the conference participants to contribute to this book. By including group work and feedback on papers as part of the conference, the book project became a collaborative teamwork effort between researchers striving for change. Coming together for fruitful discussions about research, local and global issues, and networking was an important part of the conference and the book's birth.

The aim of the book

In 1963, the American civil rights activist Martin Luther King said: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." The struggle for civil rights was built on the Human Rights Declaration adopted by the UN in 1948. The declaration constituted a watershed in the view of human rights and their status both internationally and nationally. One of the many arguments was that the declaration was universal and not nationally justified. The first article reads: "All people are born free and with the same human dignity and human rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards each other in the spirit of brotherhood" (United Nations, 1948).

The civil rights movement's fight for the rights of people of colour was about being able to sit in a bar, choose a seat on the bus, go to a selective school, or use a public toilet. Like other marginalized groups today, human beings striving for social justice and human rights have a dream of being recognized as full citizens and deciding over their own lives. King's speech is a reminder that many of us still dream that everyone will be treated as equal citizens. Everyone should have a safe home, a job or meaningful activity, and enough money to go to a concert or buy a cup of coffee.

This book aims to describe the need for new perspectives on social inequality and social justice for people who are marginalized, excluded, or in need of support and solidarity. Hopefully, the book will inspire us and our

colleagues working in the field of health, social, and welfare services and has the potential to make valuable contributions to changing ways of thinking, practices, services, and ways of being. The changes are deeply needed—now! Everyone is welcome—always—to contribute to changes and improvements in social justice and equality!

The impact of the book

A paradigm shift that addresses the importance of social determinants for health, well-being, and social justice is crucial. The United Nations and WHO are deeply concerned about how stigma, alienation, violations of human rights, and social inequality continue to characterize the lives of many people around the world. It has been well documented over several decades that countries with citizens living in social inequality and injustice have experienced increased loneliness, difficulties in finding work, unequal access to various public services, shorter life expectancy, and widespread social exclusion and stigmatization. Many citizens feel that the services available to them are fragmented, poorly adapted to their individual needs, and often inaccessible.

There is every reason to be alarmed by the significant prevalence of stigma in society and services, as well as by coercion, violence, and abuse. The human rights perspective assumes that politicians and society as a whole take responsibility for ensuring that all citizens are guaranteed their rights.

The aim of this book is to describe, discuss, and inspire us all to challenge and critically reflect on how social work can strive for social justice. At the same time, it calls for challenging dominant narratives, discourses, and power structures. The book discusses and provides examples of key questions about social justice, particularly how research and practices in human rights, inequality, and poverty have been prioritized.

The content of the book

The book's content presents a landscape of various social work themes and research. We have chosen to organize the chapters into three thematic areas. The first thematic area focuses on human rights, the second thematic area discusses social inequality, and the third thematic area addresses social justice.

Human Rights

The first chapter is written by one of the editors, Professor Bengt Karlsson. Karlsson is a professor emeritus at the University of South-Eastern Norway. He also holds a position as professor emeritus at the Department of Child Welfare and Social Work, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. Trained as a psychiatric nurse and a family therapist, Professor Karlsson writes about human rights, mental health, and social mental health work. He emphasizes the need to incorporate human rights, social inequality, and social justice into the field of mental health and practices in mental health care.

Chapter 2 derives from an interest in children's human right to an adequate standard of living and is written by Aina A. Kane, professor of law at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, Department of Child Welfare and Social Work. Securing human rights within welfare governance and services for citizens, particularly for those in vulnerable situations due to inadequate living standards, unemployment, challenging growing-up conditions, or intellectual disabilities, represents Kane's main research interests. Her contribution to this book addresses the securing of human rights and social justice for children in low-income families through governance, practice, and social work skills in social services.

Chapter 3 is written by Ellen Jakobsson Strømsø, a PhD student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) who also has a part-time position at the Department of Child Welfare and Social Work, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. Her research focuses on how support and management are expressed in the provision of welfare services and how the right to self-determination is safeguarded. Her contribution to the book examines the exercise of guardianship and is partly based on her master's thesis. Strømsø seeks to contribute to knowledge about how people can receive

assistance to protect their interests in ways that help to reduce social inequality and minimize alienation and discrimination.

Social inequality

Chapter 4 introduces the theme of social inequality. The chapter is written by Bodil S. Olsvik and Margrethe Tresselt. Bodil Olsvik, the first editor of this book and an associate professor at the School of Business and Economics, UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, conducts research on discretion in leadership and leadership decisions in child welfare services. Olsvik also holds a position at NTNU, Regional Centre for Child and Youth, Mental Health and Child Welfare, where she teaches and supervises national leadership training for municipal and institutional child welfare leaders.

Margrethe A. Tresselt is an assistant professor at the Department of Child Welfare and Social Work at the Arctic University of Norway. She lectures on pedagogy and supervises students training to become social workers. In her research, she is particularly interested in interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration among agencies working for children's best interests.

Olsvik and Tresselt's contribution to the book focuses on innovation in child protection services. It sheds light on some challenges that child welfare still faces regarding digitization and interprofessional collaboration. The authors consider the opportunities for the child welfare service to pay greater attention to social inequality and social justice.

Chapter 5 is written by assistant professor Agnete Bersvendsen from the Department of Child Welfare and Social Work, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. Her point of departure is a study on social inequity in sexual abuse prevention and intervention, considering its potential as an assimilation of the Sámi people. Bersvendsen's motivation to contribute to this book arises from a desire to give back to the Sámi and non-Sámi individuals who have shared their stories. "Giving back" transcends transactional motivations, representing a commitment to creating positive change and contributing to the collective knowledge that can inform better social practices. Bersvendsen's value position is rooted in the belief that every untold story, overlooked perspective, and unasked question holds the potential to shape a more compassionate and equitable society.

Associate professor of law, Marius Storvik, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, has written Chapter 6. Storvik has extensive experience in teaching, research, and supervision in law, human rights, welfare, and health care. He is known for his ability to demystify complex legal subjects and has received accolades for his teaching and research communication. In the book's fifth chapter, Storvik demonstrates that beliefs have transformative powers and can serve as tools for improvement. Storvik argues that Norwegian psychiatry can advance by expanding its perspectives beyond traditional practices.

Eva Brekke, the author of Chapter 7, is a clinical psychologist and researcher from Norway specializing in community psychology and addiction psychology. She holds a Ph.D. in Person-Centred Health Care, with the thesis titled *Recovery in Co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders: A Qualitative Study of First-person and Staff Experiences*. She currently works in inpatient addiction treatment at Fredheim, at Sagatun Recovery user-led center, and as a researcher at the Norwegian National Advisory Unit on Concurrent Substance Abuse and Mental Health Disorders. Brekke is also a board member of the Norwegian Confederation of Addiction and a member of the Committee of Addiction Psychology in the Norwegian Psychological Association. Addiction, community psychology, and recovery are the main areas of her clinical and academic work. Brekke considers social inequality and social justice as highly relevant approaches to addressing problems related to addiction, such as discrimination and health inequality. In her chapter, Brekke combines activism and academic endeavor from a human rights perspective.

Chapter 8 is written by American colleagues working within social work and education. Associate professor Michael Bartone has co-authored the chapter on social inequity together with his colleagues Joanne León, Ph.D., associate professor and Social Work program director at Central Connecticut State University, and E. Mackenzie (Ken) Shell, associate professor of Counselor Education at Central Connecticut State University.

Michael D. Bartone, Ph.D., is an associate professor of elementary education at Central Connecticut State University. As a qualitative researcher examining the social foundations of educational policy, his work focuses on LGBTQ2S+ness and race in schools and society. Currently, Bartone is gathering oral histories of LGBTQ2S+ educators and analyzing these histories within the socio-political-historical context of LGBTQ2S+ness in schools, education policy, and national and local rhetoric about LGBTQ2S+ness in education.

Dr. Joanne León's research revolves around providing culturally sensitive mental health services to Latino children and families, the effects of parental incarceration on children and adolescents, and the effects of chronic absenteeism on children's academic success. She has over 25 years of experience working with vulnerable and diverse populations in medical, psychiatric, and school settings. León holds certifications as a Professional Educator in School Social Work and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

Associate professor Ken Shell, from Counselor Education at Central Connecticut State University, is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), a Certified Professional Counselor Supervisor (CPCS), a Certified Advanced Alcohol & Drug Counselor (CAADC), and a certified school counselor. Dr. Shell's research and training interests focus on equity-based policies and procedures in schools and mental health clinics, culturally specific professional development, client/student and practitioner experiences with school and mental health services, and culturally responsive pedagogy and andragogy. He has over 20 years of experience in school and clinical counseling.

The authors argue that social equity and humanness must be addressed globally to ensure human freedom. They hope that practitioners in school settings, such as social workers, counselors, and teachers, will critically examine their practices and ideologies to determine if and how these contribute to or mitigate (in)equity. They strive to fight against oppressive systems that harm students in education and mental health.

Social justice

Chapter 9 is written by Tracie Rogers and Arna Elliott-Rattray and introduces the theme of social justice. They are social work educators and program coordinators in the Department of Sociology, Psychology, and Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Jamaica. Trauma-informed social work is a shared area of research and practice for both educators.

Tracie Rogers is a qualitative researcher specializing in participatory research frameworks and collaborative/action-oriented methodologies. Her research focuses on the psychosocial vulnerabilities faced by marginalized people encountering gender-based violence, stigma related to living with mental illness and HIV, and epistemic violence. Her teaching focuses on centering

indigenous perspectives and decolonizing practice through trauma-responsive approaches to social justice and activism.

Arna Elliott-Ratray is an educator with a commitment to the mind-body connection. Her teaching philosophy revolves around creating a dynamic learning environment that fosters critical thinking, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. Her research centers on understanding the complexities of trauma and its intersection with social work practice, using qualitative methodologies such as autoethnography.

Rogers and Elliott-Ratray's contribution recognizes the role of higher education in promoting social equity. A core element of fostering critical thinking, civic participation, and the ability to engage in advocacy work among students is providing opportunities to heighten emotional awareness and sharpen competencies to manage personal trauma histories. The authors argue that building a trauma-informed learning environment is crucial to fostering trauma-informed practitioners who can best care for vulnerable populations facing systemic barriers and inequities that prevent them from having equal access to opportunities, resources, and just treatment. Dismantling blocks, biases, and unjust policies or practices that create and perpetuate inequities for vulnerable populations is both a personal and political endeavor.

Chapter 10 is written by Professor Rita Sørly and Associate Professor Vår Mathisen. Professor Sørly is the initiator of the conference and one of the book's editors. Sørly is leading the research center Arctic Youth, an interdisciplinary center hosted by the Department of Child Welfare and Social Work, at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Her research focuses on narrative theory and method, social work, mental health, health service research, user involvement, and participation. Sørly also works with migration and health, indigenous research, and collaborative research.

Vår Mathisen is an occupational therapist with a Ph.D. in mental health work. She is an associate professor in occupational therapy at the Faculty of Health Sciences, UiT Norway's Arctic University. Her research interests include professional work in substance abuse and mental health care, user participation as social practice, migration health, collaborative research, and student learning.

Together, Sørly and Mathisen believe that collaboration in research is of great importance. That includes the importance of bringing a diversity of different people with different experiences of a common theme, together

in research projects. In their chapter, they present a course in collaborative research for 6 refugee women in a migration health project. The intention of the chapter is to share knowledge of how to pedagogically facilitate so that women with refugee experience can participate in research, to obtain more up-to-date and democratic research.

Chapter 11 is written by Associate Professor Johan Lilja, Researcher Sheila Zimic, Professor Ottar Ness, and Associate Professor Dina von Heimburg. Johan Lilja, Ph.D., works as an associate professor at the Department of Communication, Quality Management, and Information Systems at Mid Sweden University (MIUN). He is the project leader of “Develop and Improve Together,” which explores mindsets and practices for facilitating regenerative and sustainable transformation in complex living systems. His research interests include leading and facilitating change, development, and innovation in shifting from relationships of domination towards partnership and co-creation.

Sheila Zimic, Ph.D., works as a researcher at the Research and Development Unit for Social Services at the Association of Local Authorities, Västernorrland County, Sweden. She has critically explored the categorization of young people as the “Net generation” and what this means for young people themselves. As an R&D researcher, she has worked on various projects focusing on young people’s living conditions and participation in society. Her recent work has focused on knowledge use in social work practices, particularly regarding systematic follow-up and digitalization.

Professor Ottar Ness works at the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). He is the head of NTNU WellFare: Nordic Research Center for Wellbeing and Social Sustainability. He also holds adjunct professor positions at the University of Agder (Norway) and Aalborg University (Denmark). His research interests include social justice, mattering, citizenship, relational welfare, and mental health recovery.

Associate Professor Dina von Heimburg works in the same department as Ness and is the deputy head of NTNU WellFare: Nordic Research Center for Wellbeing and Social Sustainability. She is also a member of the WHO New Economic Expert Group (NEEG) on Wellbeing Economy. Her research interests include social justice, sustainable development, co-creation, relational welfare, and public value governance.

The authors focus on co-creating youth wellbeing and social justice in their chapter. They argue that knowledge about equal, respectful, and meaningful intergenerational relationships—and how to facilitate and promote these relationships—is important for building a sustainable and socially just society.

Chapter 12 is written by Associate Professor of Law Marius Storvik from UiT The Arctic University of Norway and Michael Kwadwo Ntiamoah, a Ghanaian scholar of religious studies. Michael Kwadwo Ntiamoah is a lecturer at the Department of Religion and Human Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. His research interests include comparative religions, religious diversity in Ghana, religion and chieftaincy/African culture, Akan Indigenous Religion and Environment, African Indigenous Religion, and social order.

Storvik and Ntiamoah's chapter is titled *Insights from Ghana's Chieftaincy System and Prayer Camps for Addressing Coercion in Norwegian Child and Adolescent Mental Health Care*. In this chapter, the authors share knowledge and experiences aimed at empowering beliefs and encouraging readers to address social inequality and co-create social justice.

Chapter 13, the final chapter, is written by Birgit Hegge, a senior lecturer at VID University of Science, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Health, Oslo, Norway. Hegge has 15 years of experience in clinical work, guidance, and lectures on sexuality and sexual health. In addition to teaching, she conducts research on topics such as sexuality, professional practice, and student-active learning.

Hegge's motivation for participating in this project is to contribute knowledge and promote understanding about sexuality. In her clinical work with children, families, and professional networks, she has observed that topics related to sexuality are challenging and often surrounded by differing and competing understandings. This complexity can result in necessary information and help not reaching those who need it. As a supervisor and researcher, Hegge has found that professional reflexive practice increases awareness and confidence among professional helpers. However, this requires an acknowledgment of the importance of sexuality and children's rights. Her chapter is a contribution to this practice.

Professor Tony Ghaye is the fourth editor of this book, along with Associate Professor Bodil Olsvik, Professor Rita Sørly, and Professor Bengt Karlsson. Professor Ghaye, FRSA, is a professor at Loughborough University

in London and serves as the director of the Global Human Rights & Wellbeing Project, *U MATTER*. He is also the president of Live Healthy Initiatives, Kenya, and associate director and research chair for AlphaZULU Advocates, which works globally to design and implement strategies for improving governance for sustainable development. Additionally, Ghaye holds a position as Professor II at the Department of Child Welfare and Social Work at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. He has been an important mentor and dialogue partner for many of the authors in this project and has provided significant inspiration throughout the process.

To all contributors, the editors express their gratitude for your participation in both the conference and this book. You have all been part of an inspiring journey, transforming an initial idea into a comprehensive collection of academic work. This book represents a collaborative effort to create new knowledge and, hopefully, inspire a wider audience.

Dear readers, it is our wish that this book will provide you with new ideas on how to make a change.

Best regards
The editors