

Promoting social inclusion: More important now than ever?

It is indeed a pleasure to bring you this edition of the *Journal of Social Inclusion* (JoSI) following some recent changes in the Journal's editorial and support team. The opportunity to highlight issues of social inclusion at this time, in particular, in lieu of some responses to recent world events, is both an honour and an important responsibility. Perhaps it is more important now than ever?

We are all unique and as humans share the experience of having areas of strength and weakness. However, our opportunities and abilities to capitalise on our strengths, and concordantly, to mask or accommodate our weaknesses vary tremendously. The degree to which our intersectionality or whether the different aspects of our lives are valued or de-valued and the degree to which this impacts us is also heterogeneous. The phenomena of social exclusion and the need for more socially inclusive agendas is therefore not universally experienced nor understood. Indeed, it is argued that to not have to think about such issues is itself indicative of a position of relative privilege.

Following an upsurge in recent terrorism related activities, many of which have been attributed to or on behalf of ISIL and the Islamic State, we have seen some corresponding upsurges; for instance, in vilification and active calls for the greater social exclusion of specific population groups. Recent examples include responses from different international leaders to the millions of refugees around the world, and in particular, people who have fled Syria; be they Muslims, Christians or people of other faiths. Some of the political responses which have demonised or suggested the need for the active exclusion of Muslim peoples have emanated from former national leaders and aspiring presidential candidates, in different hemispheres, respectively. There is clearly a need to increase awareness of the dangers of social exclusion, the inherent value of inclusive practices and the importance of combatting ignorance and extremism. While the world's media has provided glimpses of consciousness into some of the issues for people who are Muslim or refugees; this edition considers the influence of different identities, experiences and outcomes (both between and among groups of people) which may not attract the same media focus. It also provides further insights regarding the effectiveness of different strategies and settings based approaches in achieving more inclusive societies.

In the first article, Melissa Graham, Carly Smith and Margaret Shield investigate the issues for childless women living in a 'pronatalist' society such as Australia. The quantitative study of adult women without children, counters some of the negative attitudinal stereotypes of

women who are childless. Although a number of attitudinal associations are noted in their findings, overall attitudes towards children and motherhood may not substantially explain future childlessness. Nevertheless, the research elevates the discussion of issues for childless women in a society where fertility is not only more valued but firmly entrenched in the dominant discourse.

The experience of social disadvantage and dealing with stigma and discrimination is perhaps most evident in the second manuscript– a participatory study of experiences by Trudy Norman, Bernadette Pauly, Hilary Marks and Dakota Palazzo of homelessness and solutions to address homelessness issues in Canada. While the identification of structural and psychosocial influences are noteworthy, the study provides important clues for promoting greater inclusion, developing trusts and mitigating power inequities. Indeed, the recognition of the lived impacts of power imbalances for people who are homeless appears to be a pre-requisite of inclusive practices.

A small yet substantially practice-oriented study undertaken in a metropolitan area of Australia provides a unique perspective into the benefits of recovery oriented practices for the lives of people with a mental illness. The study by Matthew Armstrong and Pat Dorsett highlights the importance of participation and hope-based practices, both for service provision and social research purposes. It offers key insights into processes which contribute to reducing power inequities and meaningful social inclusion.

Another small Australian study, the first of its type that appears to have been undertaken in the context of South Australia, suggests emergency relief assistance is a key support for people experiencing the acute effects of poverty. The study by Tanya Mackay and Ian Goodwin-Smith, suggests that while some who seek emergency support reported feeling judged or stigmatised, the majority did not find this a negative encounter which would have left them feeling further distressed in their time of need. The findings would appear to be more important given recent changes in federal funding and administrative arrangements for community organisations who auspice emergency relief services in Australia - even though emergency relief assistance has historically been a well-established component of Australia's support system.

The importance of more supportive environments to enable greater social inclusion is also demonstrated in the international context, in this case, through the research of Susan Mensah, Maxwell Opoku and Eric Badu in exploring the issues for people with disabilities accessing tourist facilities in Ghana. The study which also engaged regional tourism bodies,

reports on the barriers that people with disabilities face in accessing tourist structures, destinations and facilities. The implications for greater resourcing to redesign and modify tourism facilities are discussed in order to ensure tourist environments in Ghana are safe, supportive and accessible.

The final study published in this edition, demonstrates the importance of settings based approaches in providing supportive local environments and more opportunities for social inclusion. The qualitative study undertaken by Michael Nycyk and Margaret Redsell explores older peoples' perspectives of social inclusion in the context of accessing a healthy ageing program in suburban Brisbane, Australia. The results demonstrate the importance of community programs for older people in reducing social isolation and the critical role of transport, living arrangements, health, crime and safety and technology in contributing to or reducing social isolation.

The need for greater awareness raising and activism is reflected in Tinashe Dune and Ann Armstrong's retrospective perspective on the importance of institutions such as the University of Western Sydney participating in the Mardi Gras to celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex peoples. Similarly, Shauna Cappe's book review of *Civil disabilities: Citizenship, membership and belonging*, by Nancy Hirschman and Beth Linker would suggest this serves as an important resource for improving our understanding and responses to the issues for the more than a billion people who live with disabilities globally. Nevertheless, each of these perspectives provides only a glimpse of different realities, in particular, for those in the privileged position of not having to consider them. The key themes identified in this edition of JoSI therefore relate to the importance of understanding identity issues; power imbalances; the use of participatory approaches, supportive environments and settings based approaches; and the role of awareness raising, advocacy and action. Clearly social inclusive practices are multidimensional and it is acknowledged that it is not just the structural determinants of social exclusion that must be considered but also their psychosocial impacts. As noted in this and previous editions of JoSI, comprehensive responses to social inclusion issues are required. At the whole of community level this includes the need to ensure supportive environments and spaces; as discussed in relation to tourism infrastructure for people with disabilities in Ghana and the provision of community-based programs for older persons. At the individual level this extends to the need to be aware of our power as human service professionals and the imperative to do no harm or not add to the stigma or sense of shame people may feel when they need assistance. For instance, when accessing emergency relief or mental health support services.

The journal is proud of its role and history in promoting inclusive research agendas and raising awareness of social exclusion/inclusion issues. We trust you will find this edition of further assistance in this regard. In future editions we look forward to further promoting inclusive practices and supporting emerging social researchers through a dedicated section and support mechanisms to promote student research, in recognition of their passion and contributions to this field.

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