



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 34

Issue 2 June - Special Issue on Globalization,
Social Justice & Social Welfare

Article 2

2007

Introduction: Globalization, Social Justice, and Social Welfare

Frederick Fritz MacDonald
Western Michigan University

James Midgley
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Welfare Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

MacDonald, Frederick Fritz and Midgley, James (2007) "Introduction: Globalization, Social Justice, and Social Welfare," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 34 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol34/iss2/2>

This Editor's Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



INTRODUCTION:
GLOBALIZATION,
SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND
SOCIAL WELFARE

Special Editors

FREDERICK MACDONALD

Western Michigan University
School of Social Work

JAMES MIDGLEY

University of California, Berkeley
School of Social Welfare

Although the literature on globalization has increased exponentially over the last decade, the term is still poorly defined and its many facets and complexities are under-appreciated. A major problem is the way the effects of globalization on social welfare have been reduced to simplistic, rhetorical statements that either condemn all aspects of globalization or uncritically extol its benefits. In reality, however, globalization has complex and paradoxical consequences for human well-being. For example, international trade is widely viewed by many progressive observers as being exploitative and unequal and many are appropriately critical of the way neo-liberal writers wax lyrical about its purportedly positive impact. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that some countries have benefited from export led development, and that incomes and standards

of living for many of their citizens have improved as a result of the increased rate of employment generated through trade.

However, arguments about the social consequences of globalization cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy in which globalization is viewed either as having disastrous consequences or otherwise as bringing untold benefits. These issues are far more complex. While employment opportunities and incomes have indeed increased for many people in low income countries that have adopted export led industrialization strategies, improvements in incomes and standards of living have come at a cost for many of these countries. Rapid urbanization, congestion, heightened inequalities, the decline of traditional values, emotional stress and other negative manifestations of prosperity now characterize many newly industrializing developing countries. Globalization has also fostered the diffusion of Western cultural beliefs and practices to other parts of the world which many traditionalists abhor. This has resulted in the resurgence of fundamentalist religious and cultural movements that have in some cases used violence to resist the spread of secularism, individualism and consumerism. On the other hand, rapid advances in communication technologies and more the frequent exchanges between people of different cultures through these technologies and travel have produced results that cosmopolitans view as highly desirable. As these examples suggest, a proper analysis of the impact of globalization requires a nuanced understanding of the complexities and paradoxes of the globalization process.

An analysis of this kind not only challenges social work and social welfare scholars to understand the complexities of globalization but to advocate for the adoption of principles, policies and practices that may lead to a socially just system of global exchange that explicitly incorporates social welfare and social justice ideals. Efforts to promote fair trade, equitable economic exchanges and the regulation of the global economy have gained more support in recent years as activists, academics and progressive policy makers have challenged the market fundamentalism that has characterized economic globalization. The goal of creating a socially just global system is now more frequently discussed in both the media and the academic literature. Since social work and social policy have

long been committed to social justice ideals, there is a need for more scholarly debate on these issues in social work and social welfare circles. The tendency in the social work and social policy literature to totally dismiss globalization needs to be reassessed in the light of international efforts to promote these social justice ideals. After all, few informed observers today believe that nation states can ignore global realities and retreat into economic nationalism and isolationism. The issue today is not whether globalization should be welcomed or rejected but how globalization can be regulated in terms of principles that promote social justice.

This special issue of the *Journal Sociology and Social Welfare* presents a number of articles that address aspects of the way the issues of globalization, social justice and social welfare have been addressed in social work, social policy and social welfare. Although much of the existing literature has focused on the social problems that may be attributed to globalization, an attempt has been made here to focus on issues of mainstream social welfare concern in the context of globalization.

The special issue begins with an article by James Midgley, one of the special editors. Midgley asserts that although the literature on globalization has proliferated, social policy and social work scholars have not adequately debated the consequences of globalization for social welfare and social justice. Recognizing that different social science interpretations of globalization reach very different conclusions on this issue, four major perspectives which offer different analytical and normative insights into globalization are identified and their implications for social welfare and social justice are briefly examined. Midgley concludes that cultures and societies define, interpret and promote social justice and social welfare in a variety of ways. Social work and social policy must embrace an international perspective that views the phenomena of globalization from more than a western view in order to permit the formulations of interventions to promote social justice and social welfare that are culturally congruent and socially compatible.

Pamela Anne Quiroz examines the prevailing ideology of color-blindness and transracial adoption. *Color-blind individualism*, the adoption arena's version of color-blind discourse, argues that race should not matter in adoption; racism can

be eradicated through transracial adoption; and individual rights should be exercised without interference of the state. She argues that as privatization has increasingly dominated our world and disparities between countries have grown, so too has intercountry adoption. This article examines the colonial aspects of intercountry adoption and implications for conceptualizing global human rights from the current emphasis on individual rights. Quiroz concludes that the real issue continues to be which children are desired by which parents. By recognizing the colonial aspects of intercountry adoption and challenging the practices that reproduce racial, gendered, and economic hierarchies children's rights can be protected.

Karen Smith Rotabi, Denise Gammonley, Dorothy N. Gamble and Marie O. Weil define social work as a global profession. The authors encourage a broadening of social work education, moving beyond the traditional conception of "internationalized" to a "globalized" social work curriculum which embraces a world systems perspective. Practical teaching strategies for a globalized perspective are presented with selected key concepts specifically applied to social policy, community practice, human behavior in the social environment, and sustainable development. Discussion also includes macro-scale ethical considerations in a neoliberal economic system.

Charles Fiki presents an exploratory study of alcohol and drug use in two rural communities in Plateau State, Nigeria with the aim of raising awareness to the rural alcohol and drug problem. This article examines the patterns of alcohol consumption and drug use, and their perceived functions for substance use among rural farmers in Nigeria. He discusses the common use of marijuana and alcohol in addition to prescription drugs as well as multiple or combinational drug use. Pleasure and relaxation emerged as the major reason for drug and alcohol use. Fiki concludes that the factors influencing alcohol and drug use are the relative neglect of rural communities, and the activities of hawkers, quacks, and other untrained individuals pervading the rural health sectors. He calls for further research to adequately capture the reality of alcohol and drug use in rural communities in Nigeria.

Gregg M. Olsen analyzes the highly contentious accounts of the welfare state and the dynamics governing its

development in the social policy literature over the past few decades. He argues that research has suggested that as a result of domestic pressures and strains and/or the impact of globalization, welfare states were declining in tandem. However, most of these studies were quantitative, focusing upon 18 or more advanced capitalist nations and emphasized variables that were readily amenable to statistical manipulation in search of broad, cross-national trends. His study investigates the extent to which the social democratic welfare state in Sweden, the "social liberal" welfare state in Canada, and the liberal welfare state in the United States have converged. Olsen applies a qualitative approach, examining the character of the income security and social service programs in two broad policy domains, family policy and health care and concludes that the welfare states in the three nations remain distinct.

Marina Findlay and John McCormack's article investigates the educational preparedness and practice views on globalization from a sample of Australian social work practitioners. Sixty-six social workers completed a questionnaire which explored the relationship between local and international issues. Practitioner responses indicated a strong interest in the topic and widespread agreement that there is a link between local and global issues on clients in their daily practice. While there was a diversity of opinion on educational preparedness for global practice, practitioner responses again indicated general agreement that ongoing education would be useful. Findlay and McCormack conclude with some suggestions to further enhance the knowledge and education of social workers for global practice.

Loring Jones, David W. Engstrom, Tricia Hilliard and Mariel Diaz argue that globalization demands that social workers embrace more than just local and national perspectives; they must adopt an international viewpoint as well. A negative aspect of globalization that deserves more attention is the international movement of labor. This article presents a description and analysis of trafficking, the more deleterious part of this movement of people, in a global context. Decision makers seeking to make global migration more humane need to know about the dynamics and process of trafficking, as well as ways to combat it. Definitional controversies, contextual issues

cluding the dynamics and processes of trafficking), and consequences of this movement for individuals and societies are discussed. Implications for social work are also presented with a particular emphasis on advocacy for human rights.

Vanna Gonzales argues that our understanding of the relationship between globalization and contemporary social welfare systems is heavily influenced by three conventional approaches to studying welfare reform: the political economy, moral economy, and mixed economy approaches. In addition to analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches, she introduces the social economy approach as an emergent alternative. Drawing from a growing body of work on institutional innovation within the European third sector, Gonzales argues that the social economy approach makes a valuable contribution to understanding the role of welfare networks in reconfiguring globalization's impact on the character and quality of social welfare so as to better reconcile social efficacy with social justice.

Qingweh Xu examines the issue of globalization and immigration. The relationship between globalization and immigration has been intensely examined in the last decade with a focus not only on whether and how much globalization has caused international immigration but also how to promote and sustain a just global system for the growing number of immigrants. His article selects three developed countries with different welfare state philosophies and traditions—Australia, Sweden and the United States—and compares how they cope with the growing number of immigrants and their various needs. This article reflects thinking about states' ability to redistribute resources, about the ability to agree upon a unified theory of welfare rights in a diverse society, and the feasibility of opening nations' welfare systems to all immigrants in the globalization context and from a rights-based social work perspective calling for policy makers, scholars and social workers to underscore and reinforce the value of immigrant.

Howard Karger, Christian Iyiani and Pat Shannon examine how and why five major stakeholders—international financial organizations; NGOs; governmental entities; multinational corporations; and community development projects—have failed to significantly and uniformly reduce aggregate global

poverty. This article uses the results of a case study of HIV/AIDS prevention in a low-income Nigerian city to argue that effective action must involve local and global stakeholders in collaborative partnerships. It concludes by discussing the critical role of facilitators in such partnerships.

Ernie Lightman, Andrew Mitchell and Dean Herd explore whether people are better off working in the precarious employment associated with a neoliberal globalized economy. Their research shows the impacts of globalization on the composition of food bank users in Toronto, Canada. They then compare two groups of food bank users, one with at least one household member working, the other without. The findings demonstrate that the life experiences of the two groups remain depressingly similar: those employed remained mired in poverty and continued to lead marginalized, precarious lives.

The lack of investment in education or training characteristic of 'work-first' welfare reforms leads to unstable, low-paid work for the vast majority of those leaving welfare. The authors call for a rejection of the narrow work-first models and the continued development of broader mixed models offering pre- and post-employment services and financial supports necessary to make work both realistic and sustainable, challenging the assumption that any work is the route out of poverty for all groups within society.

These articles demonstrate the wide range of areas and content that can help provide a better understanding of globalization and the issues facing policy makers, educators, social workers, and the diverse groups of people impacted by the changing international context. It is the editors' hope that the selected articles will stimulate further understanding, discussion and plans for action to address the social and economic realities in a rapidly changing world.

