

The Political Biographies of Social Workers: A Qualitative Study of the Political Lives of Social Workers

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Abstract : This paper will explore the political biographies of social workers in a neoliberal era. The findings are based on a research project for a successfully completed professional doctorate in social work. The methodology deployed for the research is a combination of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry. The paper will present findings from 14 biographical interviews and will focus on one case study of a participant whose life story is richly informed by political social work. The 14 participants reflect different genders, ethnic identities, cultural and linguistic identities, age and length of social work careers. The participants also reflect different forms of political engagement, such as, as political activists and members of political parties, including parliamentarians. The findings demonstrate how deeply ingrained the social work identity is amongst the participants and how their political identity has remained strongly social democratic in nature despite the many changes in the social work profession since the rise of neoliberalism as a thought collective and policy package. The individual case study will explore the early roots of political identity in the childhood and nurturing years and the interface with subsequent social work and political careers. It will also explore the evolution of the participant's political identity in the social work career. The case study will also present findings on how the participant has contributed to the political field with policy involvement and initiatives. The presentation will conclude with a discussion on how this particular group of social workers can best contribute to the future direction of the social work profession.

Keywords : political social work, political biographies, neoliberal, grounded theory

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