

Interrogating Western Political Perspectives of Social Justice in Canadian Social Work

Authors : Samantha Clarke

Abstract : The term social justice is central to social work; however, the meaning behind this term is not as simple as defining the term itself. This is because the meaning of social justice is relative since its origin and development is based on evolving political perspectives. Political perspectives provide numerous lenses to view social justice in social work; however, the realities of changing society have meant that social justice has assumed different values, definitions, and understandings over time and in different geopolitical and cultural contexts. There are many competing and convincing theories of social justice that are relevant to social work practice. Exploring the term is not an idle preoccupation because the meaning of the term is not as crucial as the meaning of the worldview, as it is the worldview that positions social justice as crucial in the emancipation of people marginalized from oppression. The many political assumptions that underlie the term social justice are explored and connected to the contemporary discussions about social justice in social work. These connections are then interrogated in the Canadian Social Works Code of Ethics, and in micro, mezzo, and macro approaches. To be remiss in interrogating the underlying political assumptions of the worldview of social justice is to entrench oppression and to preserve oppressive structures in contemporary Canadian social work. The concept of social justice is unable to withstand closer scrutiny about its emancipatory qualities in Canadian social work when we interrogate the many political assumptions that frame its understanding. In order to authenticate social justice as an emancipatory central organizing principle, Canadian social workers must engage in deeper discussions about the political implications of social justice in their everyday practices based on diverse worldviews and geopolitical contexts. Social workers are well positioned to develop an understanding of social justice that is emancipatory based on their everyday practices because as social and political actors they are positioned to work for and with individuals and toward the greater good of those who are marginalized from oppression.

Keywords : Canadian social work, political analysis, social justice, social work practice

Conference Title : ICSJ 2019 : International Conference on Social Justice

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : January 21-22, 2019