Letter from the Chair

If you missed this June’s NASW National Conference, which was quite appropriately titled “Leading Change: Transforming Lives,” please know that it was amazingly enriching and enlightening! The plenary speeches, keynote addresses, preconference workshops, posters, and symposium presentations helped us to think about and prepare to make changes in our practice and personal lives. There was plenty of opportunity over the four days to reflect on how we as social workers can “be the change we want to see in the world,” as Mahatma Gandhi said.

Given the social, political, and human rights concerns that the US and the international community currently face, there is no better time than now to focus on peace, unity, and social justice issues in mental health practice. The perpetual threat to civil liberty and even the right to a peaceful protest are continually challenged. We as mental health social workers must hold strong to our professional values and ethics to bridge race relations and to facilitate truth and reconciliation, and we must take a stand for peace and harmony in our communities. Providing services to those individuals, families, and communities in need has taken on a new meaning, considering both the state of violence, racism, and homophobia in this country and the disillusionment we social workers have about our varying roles to bring about change.

During these tough times that challenge us professionally and personally, I invite you to delve into the revised NASW (2016) Cultural Competence Standards and explore the updates and changes, which are intended to help us be the best mental health professionals we can, with even stronger commitments to the standards and the NASW Code of Ethics.

It is imperative that we “leave no group behind.” Think about the people you serve each day in your professional life. Consider what their quality of life would be like were it not for those of us who work long hours and who are often underpaid and devalued for our commitment to social justice and the pursuit of happiness and self-determination for all. In this issue of Sections Connections, two authors remind us to think about subgroups that are less likely to be empowered and are often the focus of media attention: women and social work practitioners.

The articles in this issue come to us from doctoral students Crystal Hayes and Eric Tucker. Each has a long history and commitment to mental health practice on the macro-, mezzo-, and micro-levels. Both authors hope to gain knowledge, skills, and the scholarly acumen that will render them experts in their fields of practice. In her article, Hayes addresses issues of particular concern for African American women, who have long been oppressed and marginalized in mainstream society yet are viewed as strong and are revered in their own communities. Tucker, in his article, reminds us that mental health practitioners are at risk for burnout and other types of psycho–social–emotional stressors as we work on the front lines daily. We welcome your feedback, comments, and contributions that address issues and concerns about social work and mental health practice.

Karen Bullock, PhD, LCSW
DO BLACK WOMEN’S LIVES MATTER TO SOCIAL WORK?  
Toward a Gender Analysis of Racialized, State-Sanctioned Police Violence

Crystal M. Hayes, MSW

As social work practitioners providing mental health services, it is imperative that we understand the risks and adversity facing women of color (particularly black women and girls) in our culture in an era of social movements such as Black Lives Matter, which remains a constant and very painful struggle. According to the Washington Post database that tracks fatal police shootings in the United States, 10 black women where tragically killed by police officers in 2015 (Washington Post, 2015). For 2016, at this writing, there have been nine black women fatally shot in 2016. The database does not include black and brown transgendered women and gender-nonconforming people killed by police.

Yet, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, black women are only 7 percent of the U.S. population (http://factfinder.census.gov). The killing of black women by police or by an intimate partner is a brutal reality of our culture.

On Friday, July 29, 2016, Joyce Quawwey, a 22-year-old mother of two, killed by her boyfriend, a former Temple University police officer, and his best friend, also a police officer, because she refused to “submit” to her boyfriend’s authority (Wells, 2016). On Saturday, July 30, Sky Mockabee, a black transgender woman, was found dead in a Cleveland parking lot. Police and media misgendered her, making it difficult to investigate her case (Brighe, 2016). Mockabee was the 17th transgender person to be killed in 2016. On Monday,
problem in the United States affecting millions of people

August 1, Korryn Gaines, a 23-year-old mother of two small children, was shot and killed by Baltimore county police after an hours-long standoff over an arrest warrant for traffic tickets. Her five-year-old son was also shot and had to be hospitalized (Lowery, 2016). This case is still developing; details are still emerging about the circumstances and context of the shooting.

Given our social justice advocacy values and mental health training, social work can be a powerful voice, speaking directly to the vulnerabilities of black women in a culture that continues to need convincing that black lives matter. As a values-based profession, social work is called to advocate for greater police accountability and policy reform in these cases, but this will require a willingness to say that black women’s lives matter without qualification or equivocation.

The following is a list of five suggested actions that social workers—as social justice advocates, scholars, and practitioners—can immediately take in support of a gender-inclusive racial justice movement that specifically examines the ways that gender, sexuality and sexual orientation, and race help shape police violence against black women and oppression more broadly.

- **Consider joining the Collaborative to Advance Equity through Research on Women and Girls of Color through the White House Equity in Research Initiative.** This initiative invites colleges and universities to join the collaborative in an effort to encourage students to use research to make policy recommendations that improve the lives of women and girls of color. The initiative is not limited to academics; rather, it is a broad coalition of institutions that are deeply committed to promoting equity and racial and gender justice.
- **Set priorities in 2017, at the national level that makes gender inclusivity explicit in policy platforms.** Bring advocacy to the forefront to embrace all black lives by examining patterns of police violence against black women that are often hidden in our culture. Use the policy platforms as a reminder that police reform must be framed to include the experiences of women and girls of color. https://policy.m4bl.org/end-war-on-black-people
- **Advocate for mental health services within the black community that position social workers, not the police, as the first responders to a mental health crisis.** We have to wonder why a mental health crisis team was not dispatched to help in the situation with Korryn Gaines instead of a police SWAT team. We must fervently organize and lobby against cuts that would take money out of the mental health sector for vulnerable groups (such as poor working class communities of color) and argue for more funding, resources, and supports for mental health professionals working in predominately black and brown communities.

As part of this advocacy, individual citizens and social workers, along with organizations we can join divestment movements to pressure banks to sever ties with mass incarceration businesses. It is important to urge financial institutions to invest in mental health agencies and nonprofits that have track records of caring for vulnerable groups.

- **Offer social work trainings, courses, and workshops beyond “cultural competence” to train social work practitioners in clinical techniques informed by social justice trauma.** This work should address the trauma associated with the constant exposure to social media posts and videos of black and brown people killed by police. The emphasis should be on healing and de-pathologizing behaviors that are reactions to the gross violence in our culture stemming from systemic social, political, and economic racial oppression.
- **In an increasingly multiracial United States, we must do more to recruit, retain, and train professionals who reflect the communities they serve.** The new NASW Cultural Competence Standards address this issue and should be implemented at all levels, from undergraduate programs to doctoral programs, from NASW leadership to the agencies where social workers work every day.

One recommendation is to incorporate this agenda item into a national conference, with paper presentations and workshops that focus on recruiting and training social work professionals on how to be more reflective of the communities they serve. An interracial, multi-ethnic coalition of social workers from around the country could put together a policy and best practices whitepaper, with input from professionals who have already set this goal for their programs and institutions and have had successful outcomes.

These are but a few suggestions and recommendations. All social workers are encouraged to add to this list of action steps.

Some people like me feel personally haunted by the ghosts of black women and girls who have been stolen from us by police violence. One of the most disturbing recent incidents is that of seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones, who was killed in her sleep during a 2010 raid on her home by a Detroit SWAT team. They were there looking for her uncle. Her case received attention from local activists, and John Conyers (the U.S. representative whose district includes Detroit) helped get some national coverage by asking the Department of Justice and Attorney General Eric Holder to intervene, but the police officers involved were officially cleared of all charges in 2015. Today, little Aiyana is barely remembered in the conversation about police brutality. While all of these deaths are incredibly tragic and deeply disturbing, Aiyana’s story continues to resonate with me, as does the story of Korryn and her son, Kodi.

No one should die over traffic tickets, especially a young mother holding her child. It’s extremely troubling to me that Baltimore police shot and killed Korryn Gaines while her five-year-old son sat on her lap and that he was shot himself. While his physical wounds will heal, the psychological and emotional trauma of the incident is not something he will soon forget or possibly ever get over.

Civil rights scholar and attorney Kimberlé Crenshaw reminds us that we must sharpen our lens when it comes to racialized police violence to include the lives of black women and girls.
In an effort to demarginalize the experiences of black women felled by police violence, Crenshaw’s advocacy think tank (the African American Policy Forum) coined the hashtag #SayHerName as a submovement of the Black Lives Matter movement.

This is a state of emergency. While social work has done much to acknowledge and address structural racism in our culture—from joining national calls to end police brutality to specifically working at the local level, like the NASW-NYC chapter that joined a coalition of institutions and individuals working to close the Riker’s Island prison—we can always do more. We can always do better. I became a social worker because I believe in our social justice values. I believe in the transformative work that we do, and I know that if we address this issue we can help our country heal, end state-sanctioned violence. Please feel free to share your own ideas as well. You can share your thoughts via e-mail at sayhernamemovement@gmail.com. I hope to develop opportunities across the field of social work that will help us overcome the challenges involved in building an intersectional anti-racist social work practice that is healing and promotes equity in the world.

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Black Lives Matter without the humanity of black women’s lives at the center of all our work.

To this end, I invite you to share your ideas with me about how to move forward. I welcome your thoughts on any of the ideas offered in this article, such as convening a national social work conference or publishing a social work journal dedicated to considering the many issues of black women at the dangerous intersections between race, gender, and state-sanctioned violence. Please feel free to share your own ideas as well. You can share your thoughts via e-mail at sayhernamemovement@gmail.com. I hope to develop opportunities across the field of social work that will help us overcome the challenges involved in building an intersectional anti-racist social work practice that is healing and promotes equity in the world.

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REFERENCES


RESOURCES
Black Lives Matter https://policy.m4bl.org/end-war-on-black-people

Collaborative to Advance Equity www.equitythroughresearch.com/join

Organizing for Racial and Economic Justice www.enlaceintl.org/#!/resources/c1km9

More live webinars coming soon including an ethics webinar in March visit socialworkers.org/sections for details.
Mental health social work can be incredibly meaningful and rewarding for those who enter the profession. It is one of power, passion, and purpose (Bent-Goodley, 2014). Often people perceive their work as more than simply a job. They choose mental health social work as a career because they consider it a “calling.” Often they feel drawn to the profession from an internal motivation that reflects a generalized form of psychological and emotional engagement. Both personal experiences and career goals are motivating factors for choosing social work (Stevens et al., 2012). Although the practice of social work can be rewarding and fulfilling, it is also often stressful, and the work presents an increased risk of burnout for both new and seasoned social workers alike.

Burnout is commonly referred to as a psychological response to prolonged work-related stress, where human service professionals experience overlapping physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems (Kim, Ji, & Kao, 2011). Burnout is characterized by three distinct features: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (i.e., disengagement, detachment, cynicism), and diminished feelings of accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is the key feature of burnout and can be defined as the depletion of mental energy involved in professional obligation. Depersonalization is the development of negative attitudes, emotional numbness, apathy, and cynicism toward clients. Diminished feelings of accomplishment can be described as a state of diminution of self-esteem and ambition toward work (Hamama, 2012). Compared with other professionals, social workers are at a greater risk for developing burnout. The work environment, which can be highly stressful, often requires working with individuals, families, and communities who might have experienced a broad range of trauma. People with burnout may feel incapable of effectively helping or engaging with others on a psychological and emotional level. Burnout may lead to job dissatisfaction, unethical behaviors, compassion fatigue, lowered sense of self-efficacy, low morale and motivation to work, lack of self-confidence, and high turnover rates, ultimately disrupting continuity of care for already underserved populations. Burnout also causes higher absenteeism and work turnover, sleep disturbances, self-medicating behaviors, unhealthy diets, a drop in physical activity, and psychosocial problems in personal and work settings (Kim et al., 2011).

These negative health behaviors may exacerbate burnout and lead to the onset of various physical health problems such as metabolic syndrome, elevated blood pressure, obesity, musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular diseases, and other stress-related illnesses (Kim et al., 2011). Research further suggests that burnout can lead to increased incidences of headaches, neck and back pain, flu-like illnesses, common colds, and gastrointestinal problems (Tosone, McTighe, & Bauwens, 2015). Moreover, physical health problems can lead to diminished job performance, disability, and increased compensation for sick leave, causing overwhelming strain on organizations and the work environment in general. The impact of burnout on social workers and human service agencies can be severely underestimated.

There is growing evidence that regular physical activity might be one of the healthiest ways to counter stress that normally leads to burnout (Asmundson et al., 2013). While physical activity “is a general term that refers to any movement of the body that results in energy expenditure above that of resting level,” exercise, a subset of physical activity, has been shown to effectively reduce tension, induce relaxation, and provide a distraction from prolonged stress. Participation in regular physical activity induces neurochemical processes that stimulate production of brain neurotransmitters (e.g., endorphins, norepinephrine, and serotonin), enhancing overall mood and psychological well-being (McKercher et al., 2013; Schuch et al., 2014). Being physically active can increase...
As the profession welcomes new, developing social workers to the field, we must promote self-care activities as an integral element of effective social work practice and not simply as an adjunct intervention used after burnout is developed. Self-care means engaging in activities that nurture the soul as much as the body. Essentially, an effective social worker is a healthy social worker. As much as we value serving others we also must attend to our own health and well-being. A holistic self-care plan is certainly relevant and timely as we continue to support and care for clients who look to us for strength, encouragement, and resilience.

Eric Tucker, MSW, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is currently in a doctoral kinesiology program at the University of North Carolina–Greensboro. His research interest involves studying physical activity’s role in addressing burnout among social workers. Mr. Tucker also has an interest in integrative health care, social justice, and clinical practice with diverse populations. He is a part-time lecturer at North Carolina State University Department of Social Work. He can be reached at edtucker@ncsu.edu.

REFERENCES


RESOURCES

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» Have virtual access to the most qualified applicants through instant messaging or Skype.

NOVEMBER 9, 2016 » 12PM-4PM EST
Stay tuned for more details regarding the NASW Virtual Grad Fair.

To find out more about social work job opportunities visit:
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STUDENTS:
» Network with top social work graduate schools from across the country.
» Virtually interact with recruiters online through instant messaging or Skype.
» Make the admissions process more efficient by instantly sending your social work graduate school application virtually.
NASW Specialty Practice Sections Webinar

DSM-5 Depressive and Grief Disorders: Mastering the Changes, Understanding the Controversies

December 11, 2013
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM ET
Credit Hours: 1.5 CEU(s)

Presenter:
• Jerome Wakefield, PHD, DSW, LCSW

Moderator(s):
• Kamilah Omari, LMSW-C&M, ACSW

Learn more visit: http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/areas/news.asp?news=312

Clinical Social Workers Be Aware: PQRS 2013 Deadlines Approaching
The 2013 PQRS program will end December 31, 2013 and clinical social workers will have the opportunity to submit 2013 PQRS claims until February 28, 2014

Learn more visit: http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/clinical/2013/100413.asp

Did You Know?
Advancing social justice through the protection and preservation of individual civil liberties is a key tenant of the social work profession.

Call for Social Work Practitioner Submissions

NASW invites current social work practitioners to submit brief articles for our specialty practice publications. Topics must be relevant to one or more of the following specialized areas:

- Administration/Supervision
- Aging
- Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs
- Child Welfare
- Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults
- Health
- Mental Health
- Private Practice
- School Social Work
- Social and Economic Justice & Peace
- Social Work and the Courts

For submission details and author guidelines, go to SocialWorkers.org/Sections. If you need more information, email sections@naswdc.org.

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