The Editorial Board Dedicates This Issue to the Memory of the Late Emeritus Professor Vimla V. Nadkarni, PhD

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As 2021 drew to a close, social work lost one of its cherished leaders, Vimla V. Nadkarni. Vimla joined the Editorial Board of our Journal at its founding and was a dedicated, conscientious reviewer who patiently guided manuscripts forward with gentleness.

Vimla had served as the Head of the Department of Medical and Psychiatric Social Work and the first Dean of School of Social Work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in India. She served as the first President of the International Association of the Schools of Social Work from India during 2012–2016.

Her compassion for others, willingness to listen, and kindness paired with her intelligence and determination best characterize the collective memory of our Editorial Board members. Vimla’s contributions to the Journal, her commitment to social work and helping others develop their careers are greatly appreciated. She will be missed.

Our Children and Families Deserve Better

Is there a place in the world where all children are treated well and have the food, nurturance, and protection they need? Do they have free access to education, are they included in their community, and do they have the time they desire to play? We are at a loss to think of such a place, though many of us believe that such a place for children should exist for all children.

Children should not live alone in this world. They should be part of families, communities, and cultures. When we speak of child well-being, we must own up to the reality that we can only take care of our children when we care for families, communities, and one another. Children who have loving parents but live in conflict zones are deprived of their well-being. The well-being of children who live in comfortable physical settings but whose families physically or emotionally harm them or one another is also compromised.

Over many years in cultures worldwide, we have built societies that exclude, hate, and punish some while elevating others, not based on an individual’s actions but rather based on divisions we have created. Whether based on one’s ancestry, sexual preference, ability, age, gender, religion, income, race, ethnicity, or body type, these divisions become excuses to see and treat some children and families differently. We “other” rather than include, we blame rather than embrace, and punish instead of rewarding. In many countries, this has led to child welfare or protection systems that do more significant harm than good for too many children and families.

In 2018, we were all aghast as we watched US government officials at the US-Mexico border separate more than 5500 children from their parents under the Trump Administration’s “zero tolerance” policy. We watched the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement place the children, some of whom were toddlers, in shelters without their parents. Nearly four years later, hundreds of the separated children have yet to be reunited because of poor record-keeping or because the parents were deported to their home country. The families have suffered an enormous emotional and economic toll. While there is talk of financial compensation and developing legal pathways for the families to remain in the USA, progress has stalled.

Most of us are horrified by the policies that caused family separation at the US-Mexico border. Every day, thousands of families risk separation in the USA alone. For example, in New York City, tens of thousands of investigations are launched each year following reports of child neglect and abuse, overwhelmingly and disproportionately targeting

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Black and Latinx families. Government agents separate too many children from their families, mainly due to economic concerns. When COVID-19 shut down New York City, and children were not physically attending school, the number of mandated reports dropped precipitously, caseworkers adopted less invasive interventions, and courts held back—and more children remained with their parents and families. Arons (2021) found no concurrent increases in children’s hospitalizations, emergency visits, child fatalities, or reports of child abuse. Families found mutual aid networks in their communities for support, and federal pandemic grants helped many families economically leaving time for families to be together. In Arons's words, the “large-scale reconfiguration of the family regulation system represents a short-term experiment in abolition: in this period, New Yorkers moved away from a system that oppressed poor Black and Latinx and not only envisioned but built a more democratic and humane model to protect families” (Arons, 2021, p. 1).

Our old family helping systems have become instruments for policing certain families, increasing the likelihood of children experiencing more profound trauma. Several articles in this issue explore how current systems are harming children, albeit intentional or unintentional.

Using a human rights lens, Nourie shows us the ways that the current child welfare system in the USA harms LGBTQ+ youth, especially youth of color. Nourie calls for abolishing and reimagining the child welfare system in the USA. Reid shows us how using a human rights risk assessment instrument in Ontario, Canada, can reduce discrimination and other human rights violations in the child welfare system. Hagues examines Tanzania’s policy of permanently expelling young girls from public school if they become pregnant. These young women carry the economic and social consequences of this policy throughout their lives, and Hagues argues for overhauling such policies. Another of our contributors in this issue, Miller, also explores how educational policies harm children. Miller presents an autoethnographic account of his experience with a public school closing as a graduate student in the USA. He describes the structural violence he witnessed as a genocide. Veronese shows us how human insecurity negatively affects the general and mental well-being of youth living in refugee camps in Niger, calling for us to rethink our policies.

Often, the focus is on human rights violations rather than how we live up to the realization of rights. How we measure the implementation of children’s rights is the subject of Shamrova’s paper. She uses a global dataset of children’s well-being to pilot a scale measuring provision and participation rights of children across countries.

The effects of family life and community on well-being are explored in two articles. Johnson, Chami, and Udit evaluated the impact of domestic violence on women and children in Trinidad and Tobago. The adverse effects superseded age, ethnicity, religion, education, and socio-economic status. The effectiveness of coping strategies used by women experiencing domestic violence in Penang, Malaysia, is explored by Azman. She finds that using a rights-based approach reduced the women’s stress and empowered them to overcome challenges experienced.

Another article examines the degradation of human rights during COVID-19 and its effects on people living in poverty in Malaysia. Tampubolon shows us how Malaysia suspended some human rights as permitted under the Siracusa principle during the pandemic. The results were most detrimental to low-income families. Cummins shows us how the austerity policies in Spain and the UK introduced in the aftermath of the banking crisis of 2008 also disproportionately impacted low-income and marginalized populations. He discusses the implications of such policies for social work practice.

References
Arons, A. (2021). An unintended abolition: Family regulation during the COVID-19 crisis. Columbia Journal of Race and Law, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3815217

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