

BOOK REVIEW

Social Work Practice in Mental Health: An Introduction (2nd ed.).

Robert Bland, Noel Renouf and Ann Tullgren
Allen & Unwin Sydney, Australia, 2015,
ISBN-13: 978-1-74331-475-, pp. 336, Paperback, AUD\$55.00.

This second edition text provides a good contribution to social work practice in mental health in Australia and New Zealand. It has been five years since the first edition was published and the current iteration follows some of the important recent trends in the field of mental health for social workers. There is an increased development of recovery and strengths orientation in this edition, as well as key updates to policy, legislation and reference to the new *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 5th edition.

A real strength of this book lies in its clear articulation of the role of social work in mental health, an area that has sometimes been murky at best. Consistent with the *Practice Standards for Mental Health Social Workers* (AASW, 2008), the book places the domain of social work in a social context and of the social consequences of mental illness. Social workers focus on relationship in the lives of clients, and recognise relationships as a central element of the work (p. 146). The lived experience of people experiencing mental illness is also strongly presented throughout the book.

The book is divided into two parts: the context of practice, and social work practice. Section 1 provides a useful background to some key areas of knowledge for students and practitioners revolving around the field of mental health. The first chapter introduces the context of work in mental health and some of the binaries that are often presented (such as that of social workers identifying themselves as working from either a 'critical' or a 'clinical' perspective). Readers are challenged to move beyond the 'either/or' nature of social work practice and consider the importance of finding syntheses between concepts often presented in opposition to one another.

A very important aspect of this first section is discussion of the importance of considering language in mental health and the powerful role that it can play in engendering either inclusiveness or the 'othering' of people. The consumer voice is presented throughout the book with textboxes presenting views of various people who have experienced mental illness. One of the more prominent voices is that of Ann Tullgren, one of the authors of the book. Tullgren provides several powerful insights throughout the book. She describes

the importance of the concept of 'dignity' in this field and introduces us to the idea that the *philosophy* of care is just as important as the *technology* of care.

Concepts and issues to do with mental health are well explored in Chapter Three. The importance of social workers being aware of, and working from, an evidence-based practice is discussed, but with a recognition of some of the limitations and variations that may exist within this area. Recovery approaches are considered with a further emphasis placed on the importance of consumer participation at various levels of practice, service delivery, policy development and research. Concepts surrounding social inclusion/exclusion are discussed, and explored in relationship to stigma and its impacts. The role of language in these processes is further considered. Finally, the importance of spirituality is explored; there are good linkages made to culture.

Chapter Four provides an update on the policies and legislation that are relevant in the area of mental health. The discussion moves from a global human rights perspective through to legislation and policy specific to the Australian context. Tullgren provides an excellent discussion on the importance of examining policy in relation to its historical context, stating that, "In the rush towards best practice, history is often left unexamined and its insidious impact on the practices of today is unacknowledged" (p. 80).

The first section ends with a very useful overview of mental disorders. This is clearly written and includes the proviso that, in this chapter, "we will use the language of psychiatry" (p. 104). The DSM classification system is well described and there is a good consideration of the concepts of diagnosis and assessment. The social consequences of mental illness are also considered, and vignettes describing experiences such as the complexities involved in taking multiple medications are powerfully presented.

Section 2 of the book focuses more specifically on social work practice within mental health. There is further in-depth consideration of social work assessment in mental health. There is good discussion about the often-confusing ideas surrounding assessing for both problems and strengths. A useful template for assessment is provided and constructs such as the 'mental status examination' are well presented. Risk assessment is also well considered from various perspectives.

The authors have moved from the term 'case management' in the first edition of this book to the term 'social casework' in this edition. The importance of relationships is emphasized with the authors stating that one of the most challenging aspects of a social casework approach is in "forming relationships that are both human and professional" (p. 183).

There is good discussion on the role of social work at various levels of intervention. The importance of family work is emphasised, and social work with groups and communities is well explored with useful and varied examples of group and community work in action being presented. The importance of maintaining an emphasis on social justice is also explored.

The book ends with a focus on maintaining sustainable social work practices in mental health settings. The importance of self-care and supervision are propounded for workers,

while service-user involvement at all levels of service delivery and good teamwork are recommended for resilience of agency settings.

The book is consistent around the themes of social causation and consequences of mental illness, the importance of relationship and the consumer voice throughout. Each chapter ends with a section of resources available (in Australia), a summary of the chapter and some thought-provoking questions.

The book's strength, and its limitations, lie in its regional focus. While there is some attempt to address social work practice in mental health in New Zealand, it does not attempt to go beyond Australasia. Given that the book is focused on an Australian context, it would have been good to have chapters addressing mental health issues for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, and perhaps for people seeking asylum or refuge.

Dr Barbara Staniforth

Senior Lecturer

University of Auckland

Reference

American Psychiatric Association (APA). (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM 5 (5th ed.)*. Arlington, VA: Author.

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Practice standards for mental health social workers*. Barton, ACT: Author.