

Infusing Gerontological Content into Social Work Education in New Zealand and Korea

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ABSTRACT

As population ageing looms larger, gerontological social work has emerged as an important area of practice across all cultures and nations. It is an important role of social work education to produce gerontologically competent professionals in this area. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the infusion of ageing-related content in social work curricula in New Zealand and Korean universities. In the study discussed here, data were obtained through the collection of documentary sources, and analysed utilising content analysis and concept-mapping techniques. The content of ageing in course descriptions and other documents was systematically examined. The findings from the study show that there have been limited efforts to infuse ageing-related content in social work programmes in both countries. This cross-national comparison also reveals that there were significant differences in the level of emphasis on ageing issues between New Zealand and Korean social work curricula. Three different approaches were used to determine what and how ageing content was infused in current social work education.

Keywords: *Ageing; Death; Gerontology; Korea; New Zealand; Social work education*

INTRODUCTION

Population ageing is “predictably” unpredictable worldwide. People are living longer than ever before, and ideas and debates associated with old age continue to change. Around the world, no nations are immune to the population explosion of older adults aged 65 years and over (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011). For example, the 2013 Census in New Zealand shows that 607,032 people were over 65, 14.3% of the total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Similarly, the number of older people in Korea has surpassed 6.1 million, accounting for 12.2% of the population in 2013 (Statistics Korea, 2014). The number of older people is expected to more than double between now and 2050, to reach more than 25% of the population in both countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). Issues around population ageing raise critical challenges for social welfare systems due to the growing number of older people needing social care and support. In addition, the recent global crisis of capitalism is likely to undermine the foundations of social policy and social services for older adults (see Payne, 2009).

In response to the rapidly growing aged population, gerontological social work has become an important field providing services for older people and their families in the community (Green, Dezendorf, Lyman, & Lyman, 2005; Martin, Kosberg, Sun, & Durkin, 2012). Gerontological social work is an applied discipline that consists of training, practice and research in the field of ageing and death (Youdin, 2014). The role of this discipline is to promote more integrative understandings of ageing issues, including physical, mental and social changes in later life, rather than focusing on biological decline and deficit in old age (see Ray et al., 2014). Gerontological social work, therefore, is suitably positioned to deal with ageing issues, “by virtue of its holistic person-in-environment perspective, its distinctive attention to psychological and social functioning, its integrative focus, and its commitment to meeting the needs of undeserved and disadvantaged groups” (Scharlach, Damron-Rodriguez, Robinson, & Feldman, 2000, p. 536).

Social workers serve as front-line professionals who help older people maintain their quality of life and accomplish their daily life activities (Cummings & Adler, 2007; Gelman, 2012). Rosen, Zlotink, and Singer (2003) argue that all social work practitioners must be equipped with basic gerontological competency to meet the needs of elderly clients. Recent studies, however, suggest the existence of a shortage of trained social work professionals who are competent to provide effective services for older people (Hooyman & St. Peter, 2006; Scharlach et al., 2000). There is an increased need for gerontologically competent social workers who complement their skills and experience in this field with good understandings of the social, psychological and biological aspects of ageing (Lee & Waites, 2006).

It is an important role of social work education to produce more gerontologically competent social work practitioners in this new era of ageing (Kolomer, Lewinson, Kropf, & Wilks, 2006). Increasing ageing-related content in social work curricula is essential as many social work students become interested in the ageing field following their academic education (Ferguson, 2012; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Bonifas, & Hooyman, 2006; Gutheil, Heyman, & Chernesky, 2009). Gerontological content, including the topics of ageing and death, should be effectively incorporated within social work courses and programmes.

It has been asserted by Rosen and Zlotnik (2002), however, that social work education lacks ageing content, and does not appropriately respond to the demographic need in ageing societies. This insufficiency of content about ageing in social work curricula impedes the development of gerontological social work education, and consequently contributes to the shortage of ageing-competent social work practitioners (see Tompkins, Rosen, & Larkin, 2006).

Very little is known about the content of gerontological issues in social work education around the world (Richards et al., 2013). As a result, there is a lack of information about what content has been offered and how it has been infused in social work curricula. The aim of this paper is to investigate the ageing content that has been incorporated into social work education in New Zealand and Korea. These two countries were selected for comparison of their curricula because their social work education systems appear to be substantially different from each other across cultural and geographical settings. It was also considered by the author that there is a lack of understanding about social work and welfare between the two countries while their relationship has been rapidly deepening in social, cultural and economic domains. The paper begins with a discussion of the issues associated with gerontological content in social work education and the need to address this particular area in the curriculum. An analysis of ageing-related content follows, based on the current curricula of major social work schools in both countries. This article concludes by suggesting some implications for implementing curricular-infusion efforts in gerontological social work.

Historical aspects of social work education in New Zealand and Korea

Social work in New Zealand has evolved in a historically sensitive environment where Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives are continuously interwoven. The profession's role and identity have been significantly affected by the economic, political and social changes in the wider social intervention context (Beddoe, 2007). Under the current legislation, one can be a qualified social worker after completing a three/four-year bachelor's degree from an accredited programme, and then be eligible to apply for social work registration with the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB). The number of those people working as social workers was estimated as 6,645 in 2012 (Careers New Zealand, n.d.), while the number of registered social workers eligible for the renewal of an Annual Practising Certificate was 4,029 in 2012/13 (SWRB, 2014).

Social work education in New Zealand has grown alongside the development of social work practice within a wider social welfare system (Nash & Munford, 2001). The first formal social work education in New Zealand began in 1949 when the Diploma of Social Science was offered at the Victoria University College, Wellington. The publication of the *Puao-te-Atu-tu* (Day break) in 1986 paved New Zealand's unique way of infusing Māori traditions, through recognising the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, into the existing dominance of the Western social work education field (Nash & Munford, 2001). Currently, there are 18 social work/social services programmes recognised by the SWRB, among which are five four-year programmes in universities (Beddoe, 2014).

On the other hand, Korean social work itself has grown with the development of social welfare laws and regulations. The terms “social welfare” and “social work” are still used interchangeably in the Korean language and, as a result, any distinction between the two areas is ambiguous and often causes confusion for the identity of the social work profession. The legal definition of “social worker” is extremely general: “a person who has extensive knowledge and skills in social welfare” (Social Welfare Services Act, s. 11). From 1983 onwards, social workers are classified into three different certified levels: Grades I, II and III. Under the current law implemented in 2003, to obtain a Grade I certificate, one should meet the set criteria and pass a state examination, while Grades II and III can be granted to those who have studied social work/welfare in a tertiary institution, or those who have work experience in the field of social welfare services. As of December 2012, the number of people who were certified as social workers nationally was 560,530 (Jeong et al., 2013).

Social welfare/work education in Korea started in 1947 at Ewha Women’s University, followed by Gangnam University’s social work programme in 1953. Since its beginning, Korean social work education has relied heavily on programmes from the United States and Japan. The majority of social work educators were trained in these countries and, as a result, the content of social work education is to a great extent, similar to that of America. A number of social work schools have been established to produce certified social workers since the 1990s (Hong & Han, 2009). In 2014, there were 193 graduate and 147 undergraduate programmes in social work and social welfare across the country. These data indicate that about 80% of 189 universities currently offer four-year social welfare/work programmes. In addition, 71 among 154 junior colleges (polytechnics) also offer two- or three-year social welfare/work programmes nationwide (Korea Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.).

Importance of gerontological content in social work education

Gerontological social work has emerged as an independent discipline through its own established ontological and epistemological assumptions, methodological approaches, and research agendas in the broad area of older people and ageing (Youdin, 2014). This discipline has developed mainly through education, including teaching, training and research. In gerontological social work education, content is the key vehicle to establish the discipline’s own nature and boundaries. This gerontological subject matter encompasses both the broad field of ageing and the issues dealing with dying and death (Hooyman & St. Peter, 2006). The actual scope of ageing-related content tends to be determined within the teaching and learning context where the following questions are inherent: what students should learn, who these learners are, what elements the course should contain, and how subject topics should be introduced. In this vein, making decisions about what content is to be taught is an important step towards enhancing the gerontological curriculum in social work education.

The content of gerontological social work is influenced by a range of factors that can be categorised into direct and indirect components. The subject matter itself can directly affect what ageing issues should be taught to prepare gerontologically competent social work professionals in this field. The degree of knowledge regarding theories, principles and concepts in ageing studies determines the nature of the course and the scope of course content at different levels of social work programmes (Ray et al., 2014). To

achieve educational goals in this field, the content itself needs to be comprehensively established and organised around teaching processes. Relevant ageing content should be incorporated into the social work curriculum in a way that is consistent with the goals towards which teaching is directed. There is a gap in research on what ageing issues and concerns need to be infused systematically into social work education, even though there may be no shortage of research on ageing in the broader social work field (see Powell & Orme, 2011).

The content of gerontological social work is also affected by indirect factors at individual, pedagogical, institutional and structural levels (see Lee & Waites, 2006). These elements may include students' interest and motivation, educators' knowledge, teaching methods, professional bodies' requirements, and wider social and cultural environments. For example, students' lack of interest in the field of ageing and older people has been the major barrier to developing gerontological social work education (Hooyman & St. Peter, 2006; Richards et al., 2013; Weiss, 2005; Whitfold, 2001). Social work students' negative attitudes towards, and stereotypes held about, older people also permeate their thinking and learning behaviour, which is likely to reduce those students' willingness to work in the field of ageing and elder care (Damron-Rodriguez, Feldman, Robinson, & Scharlach, 2000). The disinterest and bias of social work students arguably contributes to the scarcity of ageing content in social work courses and programmes (Rosen & Zlotnik, 2002).

Ageing content can be affected by the level of educators' content knowledge on ageing-related issues. Such content knowledge includes knowledge of subject matter and its organising structures in the field of ageing and death (see Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989). In addition, social work educators need to develop pedagogical content knowledge, defined as knowledge of the curriculum development and teaching strategies (Shulman, 1986). Mastering these two types of knowledge is the skill through which social work educators can help students have more meaningful learning activities and experiences. Not being equipped with the knowledge of subject and pedagogical content themselves, social work educators may be less willing to include sufficient ageing content in their teaching practice.

Gerontological social work education occurs in a wider context where diverse internal and external stakeholders are involved in planning, implementation and evaluation processes. These stakeholders include faculty, community practitioners, older people and their families, and potential employers, beyond the classroom (Hooyman & St. Peter, 2006). Each stakeholder can contribute to the reasons for the lack of ageing content in social work programmes in different settings. For instance, social work schools may not assign sufficient content on ageing and older people due to the reality that the curriculum is already densely populated by other subjects (Gelman, 2012). Studies also show that there is a lack of trained faculty members in gerontological social work (Kane, 1999; Ray et al., 2014). Institutional regulations and policies may also prevent social work schools from incorporating more gerontological content into their courses and programmes (see Kropf, Schneider, & Stahlman, 1993).

At structural and cultural levels, a negative attitude towards older people has been identified as a potential obstacle to increasing ageing-related content in social work curricula. The

prevalence of ageism in society adversely affects the development of ageing content and its infusion into social work education (Scharlach et al., 2000). For instance, a significant proportion of social workers may have negative and stereotypical views towards older people (Chonody & Wang, 2013). Such professional biases can provide fertile ground for the insufficiency of gerontological content in social work programmes (Walker & Pillai, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, documentary study was undertaken using data from New Zealand and Korea. The social work curricula of these two countries were investigated to determine how the content of ageing and death issues permeated social work programmes at major universities in each country. The overall research question was: “What ageing content has been included in New Zealand and Korean social work education?” More specifically, there were three further questions: “What courses/papers have been offered to teach gerontological issues in social work education in each country?” and “What issues/problems associated with ageing and death have been taught in each country?” Another area of inquiry was “Is there a significant difference in the level of emphasis on ageing content when comparing social work curricula in New Zealand and Korea?”

In keeping with the method of documentary research, the study analysed the relevant documents that contain information about ageing content in the social work education (for this methodology, see Mogalakwe, 2009). Curriculum documents were collected from 24 universities (five in New Zealand and 19 in Korea). The documents obtained were mainly primary and public sources, while the materials themselves were collected through both physically and virtually. A relatively limited range of documentary sources was found, but included university calendars, course outlines, official data, articles and textbooks. There were particular efforts to explore the interface of past and present, and making connections between different types of documentary sources. By combining such multiple sources of data, several different perspectives were employed to answer the research questions stated above.

The collected data were analysed by means of a combined analysis approach using content analysis and concept-mapping techniques. This mixed method approach is a form of inductive and creative analysis to discover relationships within the phenomena being explored. Firstly, the content analysis of curriculum documents was used to identify whether social work courses had content on ageing and death in selected social work programmes. Course descriptions were analysed to examine whether each of the courses contained ageing content in its description. For this, qualifying words such as “ageing”, “death”, “dying”, “elderly”, “gerontology”, “older people” or “older adults”, were critically examined, while rigid typological distinction was not proven satisfactory among those terms. Once a course was found to have any of the qualifying words in its course description, further analysis was undertaken to decide whether the course could be considered as an ageing-related course or not. Coding in this content analysis involved a back-and-forth process of moving between sets of collected data to make constant comparisons. A similar analytical process was applied to other documents collected from different sources, including the social work textbooks used in each country.

The analysis necessarily involved cross-cultural comparison to examine and re-examine differences and similarities in concepts, meanings and methodological issues. The data collected were managed by the author who is fluent in English and Korean in a cross-language context in which both languages were continuously interwoven in the analysis process. Once the traditional content analysis was completed, concept-mapping analysis was undertaken to interpret the data written in both languages. The translated concepts were placed on a map to sort and identify relationships among them. This stage of concept-mapping analysis involved multidimensional scaling to position concepts in a two-dimensional space, and create clusters to divide the items into similar groups (see Kane & Trochim, 2007). The sequential combination of content analysis and concept-mapping methods contributed to promoting the validity and credibility of the study findings through utilising the dynamic and data-driven visualisation of the data written in different languages.

Ethical and legal issues were dealt with in a way that was appropriate and sensitive within this cross-national research context. The authenticity of the collected data was monitored; at the same time, the reliability and representativeness of the collected documents were appraised. Legal issues, such as copyright and the intellectual ownership of data, were carefully examined to abide by the prevailing legal provisions and restrictions in each country. Potential ethical dilemmas regarding confidentiality of information and data protection were clarified at all stages of the research project. The study was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (Ref. 011844).

Gerontological social work education in both countries

As populations are growing older, ageing has become an increasingly important topic in social work education in both New Zealand and Korea. The issue of ageing content within social work curricula emerged within the context of a rapid increase in ageing populations in both countries. The comparative analysis of ageing-related content indicates that this is of two types: 1) “basic content” – content of basic concepts and knowledge on ageing and death; and 2) “applied content” – content related to specific topics, social work practicum and research with older people. These different types of gerontological content need to be understood within the context in which each nation’s social work education has been developed.

Gerontological content in New Zealand social work education

The level and depth of gerontological content in New Zealand’s social work curriculum were examined at five (among eight) universities which have social work programmes. Subject offerings at the undergraduate level were assessed through course descriptions and relevant documents available online. Overall, a dearth of gerontological content was found in social work education in New Zealand; none of the universities offered specialised courses which focused on gerontological social work as a major or compulsory course for undergraduate students.

In terms of basic content of concepts and knowledge on ageing and death, there were several courses highlighting those issues across lifespan development at most universities. While all five universities had their own specific curricular structure, most social work

programmes (except for one) offered the course “Human development” or “Lifespan development for human services” as a prerequisite in first-year studies. The course descriptions of these courses were relatively similar across all four universities, focused on human development from conception to death within various social contexts. One university was found to offer the course, “Social work issues across the lifespan”, which explored in-depth social work practice with diverse populations including older people through the lifespan development perspective. Another university offered a specialised social work pathway in health practice which contained the course, “Effective social work in health and disability services”, covering aspects of illness, ageing, recovery and rehabilitation. This social work programme also offered an elective course “Working with grief and loss” exploring in-depth theoretical and cultural perspectives of grief and loss including suicide and chronic illness.

Applied content on ageing and death issues was unlikely to be provided in social work schools and programmes. The majority of the social work programmes allowed students to study specific content on ageing issues offered by other departments/faculties under electives. These courses, mainly offered by Health Sciences or Nursing programmes, focused on topics such as health, wellness/illness, developmental aspects of ageing, impacts of ageing on family and society, and policies on health and wellbeing. Clinical aspects of gerontology were usually offered under the honours and postgraduate programmes through a specific focus on hospice and palliative care. For example, the course “Health and ageing” covered the biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of health in late adulthood. Other, similar, courses included “Adult development and ageing” where the change processes in the physical, psychological, social, political and philosophical aspects of adulthood were explored; “Ageing in an ageing society” looked at the social, psychological, cultural and biological processes in later life and the interplays of society against an increasingly diverse older population; and “Sociology of the family” explored family life covering the whole spectrum from love to parenthood, the “empty nest” and grandparenthood. As these courses were electives, selection of courses was the students’ prerogative and depended on interest.

At one university, social work students could choose, as one of their elective courses, to study such courses as “Perspectives on ageing in human systems” and “Culture, context and ageing” from the Human Services programme. These courses pointed to a deeper focus on ageing and the related issues from a human service perspective. The topics covered included trends and patterns of change related to ageing, attitudes towards ageing, generational equity and sustainable provision of welfare and the application of ageing theories in relation to human service practice. It was indicated, however, that both courses were currently not offered in 2014. Another university was found to follow through the level 100 offering to level 200 where the course “Social work issues” examined causes and effects of abuse, neglect and violence across the lifespan. No courses were found on gerontological research methods or practicum components.

Gerontological content in Korean social work education

Gerontological issues in Korean social work education have been dealt with in the context in which such transfer continued to occur between local demands and global trends. Unlike

the New Zealand curriculum, the scope of Korean social work education was severely restricted within the social worker certification system regulated by the Social Welfare Services Act and related legislation. Under the current law, a social work programme needs to offer assigned courses in order to allow students to gain the social worker certificate at Grade II after their four-year undergraduate studies. This means that students should complete at least 14 social welfare/work courses (10 compulsory and four elective courses) to be eligible for the Grade II social worker certificate (Enforcement Rule of the Social Welfare Services Act, s. 3). The current programmes of gerontological social work are classified into two different types: general social welfare/work programmes and ageing specialised programmes.

In general social welfare/work programmes, gerontological social work was offered as one of 10 electives specified in the Enforcement Rule. The universities offering social welfare/work programmes provided an ageing-specific course, called *noinbokjiron*, which has various translations including “Social services for the elderly”, “Social welfare for the elderly”, “Social welfare with the aged”, “Welfare for the aged”, “Social work for the elderly”, or “Advanced social welfare for the aged”. This specialised course was one of the subject-based courses that consisted of children, young people, and people with disabilities. Jeong et al. (2013) found that more than 90% of social work programmes offered this ageing-specialised course as an elective course.

There were 21 gerontological social work programmes at the undergraduate level across the country. The titles of these specialised programmes varied from Gerontological Social Work, to Elder Care Management, Silver Welfare, and Silver Care (in Korea, “silver” is commonly used as a symbolic word that refers to “grey colour”, and thus, “older people” in this context). The specialised programmes provided a range of ageing-related courses, although they were still required to offer general social welfare/work courses. For example, one university’s programme contained ageing-specialised courses such as “Elder care”, “Physiology of older people”, “Recreation for older people”, “Rehabilitation for older people”, “Retirement plan”, “Death studies”, “Practicum in elder care” and ‘Management of elder care facilities’. Other examples of gerontological social welfare/work courses included “Volunteerism”, “Elderly counselling”, “Hospice”, “Silver (ageing) industry”, “Music and art therapy for the elderly”, and “Play therapy for the elderly”.

In addition to specialised courses, the basic content on gerontological issues in Korean social work education varied from ageing processes to death-related issues. The course, “Human behaviour in the social environment”, which was a compulsory course in most schools, contained several issues associated with ageing and old age. Physical and mental health in late-adulthood was a commonly infused element in social welfare/work courses. The aspect of psychological development of older adults was also covered in ageing-related courses. Social changes in the period of ageing were incorporated into social work education at universities nation-wide. The content of death/dying was often found in existing social work courses, but the scope of this issue was in general, not extensive. A few foundation courses contained such issues as spirituality and sexuality in late-adulthood. At a wider contextual level, gerontological content in the Korean social work curriculum was likely

to be related to the provision of social welfare services for older people, focusing on ageing demographics, social policy, and programmes for senior citizens.

Applied content on gerontological social work issues was relatively sparse, particularly in social work practice and research courses. The issues associated with ageing and old age were likely to be considered within the family context due mainly to the family of older people being treated as the most significant aspect of ageing and its processes within Korean culture. The focus on family in gerontological social work was found to be connected with the notion that elder care is seen as part of social work practice in Korea. The term “Care welfare” was commonly found in the social work courses offered by both ageing-specialty and non-ageing-specialty programmes across the country. This inclusion of elder care practice in social work curriculum arguably led to the tendency for many social work students to be placed at aged-care facilities for their practicums.

COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION

The current curriculum content in both New Zealand and Korea was found to be relatively similar in both its focus and scope. It was the method of including ageing content in social work curricula that differed significantly. The cross-national comparison in this study raised important issues that reflect New Zealand’s “infusion” approach to gerontological social work, Korea’s “specialisation” approach to this field, and a lack of death/dying content in social work in both nations. In turn, re-examination of these issues suggests that a three-stage model of the infusion/specialisation of ageing-related content is pertinent to pedagogical issues in social work education across the two countries.

Looking at the course offerings in New Zealand universities, there appears to be scant attention given to gerontology in social work education. There were no ageing-specialised courses within social work programmes. The findings from this study also indicate that little gerontological content has been infused into the social work curriculum. As shown in the findings, it is not uncommon that New Zealand’s social work schools will direct students to take ageing-related courses as elective courses in other departments or faculties. This “bystander” approach to ageing content could contribute to a lack of interest in ageing issues and practices among both social work students and faculty members. New Zealand’s need is perhaps in line with British authors such as Richards et al. (2013) who state that there is an urgent need to infuse content on older people throughout the social work curriculum to increase opportunities for more research and reporting on gerontological social work.

Korean social work education, in comparison to the New Zealand curriculum, typically incorporates ageing content into specialised courses at large. Ageing courses are formally offered in social welfare/work programmes and schools in most universities. The expectations of its collectivistic culture are characterised by a strong emphasis on family relationships and this was reflected in the nature of gerontological social work education in this country. The legislation regarding social welfare/work services directs social work programmes to include the specialised areas of ageing and gerontology in the basic curriculum as part of students’ certification as social workers. Under these circumstances,

Korean social work education demonstrates an increasing tendency to cover the basics in the ageing component, rather than provide students with the in-depth theoretical, professional and ethical foundations of social work skills needed in the field of ageing.

Gerontological social work education in both countries is unlikely to cover any content on aspects of death/dying and bereavement in late-adulthood, limiting its content and scope to ageing-related issues (see Reith & Payne, 2009). The findings from this study reflect the notion that, in modern societies, death is regarded as taboo, is rarely spoken of, and is usually accompanied by negative associations in wider society. A “medicalised” approach to death becomes the dominant way in which dying is likely to be handled by trained medical professionals, rather than occurring within the “natural” family environment (Beckett & Taylor, 2010). Content about the care of dying people and their families is rarely infused into New Zealand and Korean social work curricula, although such death-related issues as euthanasia, loss and grief, and bereavement are briefly taught in foundation and health-related courses.

Ageing content is significantly affected by the social and cultural contexts within which social work education is embedded (see Lee & Waites, 2006). The structure of social work education, such as specialisation or non-specialisation streams, can have a direct impact on how ageing content is included and taught at the university level. The comparison between New Zealand and Korean curricula reveals at least three different approaches to infusing ageing content into social work education. In this model, unlike other studies (e.g., Cummings, Cassie, Galambos, & Wilson, 2006), “specialisation” is considered as a way of infusing ageing-related content into the social work curriculum:

- Systematic infusion/specialisation of ageing content in the form of a formal course, including a specialised course in gerontology, offered in a significant number of universities in Korea. This systematic infusion approach allows social work schools to provide a range of ageing and death issues in relation to biological, social and psychological aspects of late adulthood, as well as applied content such as practice and research in the field of ageing.
- Episodic infusion of ageing content, including social work issues with older people mainly in foundation or health-related courses, offered in most New Zealand social work schools and non-specialised social work programmes in Korea. Content on ageing is taught in foundation courses, such as “Human behaviour in the social environment”, “Social policy”, and “Social work practice”, and therefore, ageing theories and skills are eclectically covered in some basic courses.
- No significant attempts at infusion of ageing content, not directly offering gerontological courses within the social work programme, but often allowing students to take them through electives in other departments or faculties. This lack of effort towards infusion is especially apparent in the area of death and care for dying people in most social work schools in both New Zealand and Korea.

Increasing ageing and death content is the starting point for social work education to develop its identity, autonomy and competence in the gerontology field (see Cummings et al., 2006; Youdin, 2014). As in other areas of social work education, the content of gerontological issues should evolve, beyond theories, concepts and understandings of age-ing and death, to applied content of specific subjects, practicum and research methodologies in this field. There is a lack of impetus towards infusing, not only content knowledge on ageing and death, but also pedagogical content knowledge into social work curriculum in both New Zealand and Korea. This lack of both types of knowledge on death and ageing is likely to limit the growth of gerontological social work as an advanced field within the profession. While acknowledging other barriers (e.g., Damron-Rodriguez et al., 2000; Kane, 1999; Weiss, 2005), this study highlights that the lack of systematic infusion of ageing-related content into social work curriculum is also a significant hurdle in the development of educational interventions in gerontological social work.

CONCLUSION

Issues related to gerontological content in social work education are complex and constantly evolving. This cross-national study ascertains that the content of ageing and death is an important part of social work education as a way to deal with the issues associated with ageing populations. It shows that two types of content in the ageing area have been infused into social work curriculum at different stages, and that there are significant differences in the emphasis on ageing and gerontological practice between New Zealand and Korean social work programmes. Currently, attention to the gerontological social work curriculum is limited in New Zealand, while Korean social work, relatively quickly, has responded to the needs of the fastest-growing sector of that society's population. Despite these differences, it is argued that the systematic infusion of ageing content is insufficient in the current social work curricula in both countries.

The limitations of this study pertain to the documentary research method in which the ageing content provided mainly in course descriptions was evaluated. Some universities provided detailed information, while others gave relatively simple outlines. Although the collected documents were manually checked with care, the qualifying words used in the study might not have captured all aspects of ageing/death content in the social work field. This potential problem is also applicable in relation to safe generalisations about the findings obtained from two different national and linguistic settings. This study was also limited in that only undergraduate social work education was studied while postgraduate training and research programmes may contain differing amounts of gerontological content. Future research in this field could adopt the more strategic and inclusive approach of methodological triangulation to obtain rich and in-depth information on gerontological social work training in higher education.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a Faculty Fellowship in Academic Practice from The University of Auckland in 2013-14. The author also expresses great appreciation to Dr Barbara

Kensington-Miller, Centre for Learning and Research in Higher Education (CLearR),
The University of Auckland, for her critical review of the manuscript.

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