Transnational social workers' transition into receiving countries: What lessons can be learned from nursing and teaching?

Te whakawhitinga o ngā toki tūārangi kaimahi pāpori ki ngā whenua hou: He aha ngā akoranga hou kua kitea i ngā neehi me ngā kaiako?

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Abstract

Appropriate interventions for assisting transnational social workers (TSWs), nurses, and teachers in their transition into the receiving country are significant for enabling competent and safe professional practice. These professionals form a significant part of the professional workforce of many countries as globalisation and liberal migration policies encourage many to cross borders for professional practice. Engaging in employment overseas, however, is a challenging process for them as it entails relocating to a new country and working in unfamiliar socio-cultural and practice contexts. While some form of profession-wide assistance is found in nursing and teaching, social workers rarely receive any such interventions. This article discusses existing support offered to transnational nurses and teachers in English-speaking countries such as the UK, US, New Zealand, Australia and Canada and suggests how a similar approach to social workers can assist their transitioning into the receiving country. It draws on the findings of a thematic review of the literature addressing support for transnational nurses, teachers and social workers. The imperative of interventions to assist transition of transnational social workers into host countries is explored and the article concludes with recommendations for some intervention strategies and mechanisms.

WHAKARĀPOPOTOTANGA

He mea nui ngā kaupapa āwhina hei taunaki i ngā toki tūā rangi kaimahi pāpori, nēhi me ngā kaiako i ō rātou whakawhitinga ki whenua kē, e tika ai e haumaru ai ngā mahi ngaio. Ko rātou tētahi wāhanga nui o te ohu ngaio o ngā whenua maha kua kaha ake te whakawhitiwhiti i ngā rohenga whenua inā hoki kua whāiti te ao, ā, he nihokore hoki ngā kaupapa here mō te nukunuku te take. He pierenuku te whiwhi mahi mā rātou ki tāwāhi, nā te mea he uaua te uru ki ahurea kē, horopaki kē. Ahakoa tērā tētahi āwhinatanga ngaio e kitea ana i ngā mahi nēhime te mahi kaiako, he iti noa iho ngā

āwhinatanga mā ngā kaimahi pāpori. Ko tā te pepa nei he matapaki i ngā taunakitanga mā ngā toki tūārangi nēhi me ngā kaiako kei ngā whenua reo Ingarihi, arā, a Piritānia, Amerika, Aotearoa, Ahitereiria, Kanata me te aha. Ka tirohia ērā āwhinatanga hei kaupapa taunaki mā ngā kaimahi pāpori e whakawhiti atu ana ki tētahi whenua hou. Ko ngā kitenga nō tētahi arotake whānui tonu o ngā tuhinga e anganui atu ana ki ngā taunakitanga mā ngā toki tūārangi nēhi, kaiako, kaimahi pāpori hoki. Ka tirohia e te pepa nei te whakaaro kia āwhinatia ngā toki tūārangi kaimaihi pāpori e whakawhiti ana ki tētahi whenua hou,ā, ka puta ai he tūtohunga mō ngā rautaki me ngā āheitanga taunaki.

Keywords: transnational social worker; workforce mobility; professions; immigrants; orientation programmes.

Introduction

Globalisation, liberal immigration policies and active recruitment to fill occupational shortages have encouraged qualified and skilled professionals to seek employment abroad, particularly in professions such as social work (see Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Brown, Sansfacon, Ethier, & Fulton, 2015; Fouché, Beddoe, Bartley, & Parkes, 2015; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hussein, 2014); nursing (Cummins, 2009; Dywili, Bonner, & O'Brien, 2013; Xu, 2007); and teaching (Collins & Reid, 2012; Miller, Ochs, & Mulvaney, 2008; Sharpline, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2010; Warner, 2010). Against this background, the question arises as to what the strategies and mechanisms are in the receiving countries to facilitate these professionals' transition into the new country and new professional contexts. What is the nature of those interventions? Whose responsibility are such interventions? Why is it important to facilitate transitioning?

A thematic review of literature focussing on the transition of transnational nurses, teachers and social workers reveals that some profession-wide mechanisms are in place for nurses and teachers, albeit taking varied names and forms, while no formal interventions are found for social workers. The purpose of this study is to discuss existing interventions offered to nurses and teachers, and drawing insights from them, and to suggest some intervention strategies and mechanisms for social workers.

Conceptual clarifications

Terms referring to professionals who relocate to other countries for professional practice are many and various. The most common include the following:

- Overseas; and overseas trained/educated/qualified;

- International; and internationally trained/educated/qualified;

- Foreign; and foreign trained/educated/qualified;

- Border crossing; relocating; migrating;

- Overseas/foreign/internationally recruited;

- Foreign/overseas born; and

- Transnational.

The term *transnational*, unlike other terms, has added implications. The concept of transnationalism references ideas such as: that these are professionals who received their training outside their host countries and where they engage in professional practice (Xu & He, 2012); that 'they establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders' (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. ix); that they 'forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995, p. 48); that 'they maintain a working knowledge of developments in their profession in the countries from which they have emigrated, and other jurisdictions as well' (Bartley, Beddoe, Fouché, & Harington, 2012, p. 2); and that they 'deploy their networks for engagement with homeland and international politics, often via new technologies' (Williams & Graham, 2014, p. 4). For these reasons, this study uses transnational and defines it as a professional who undertakes professional practice in any other country than her home country or the one in which she received her training and qualifications.

Likewise, a plethora of generic terms are used to refer to learning programmes designed to assist the transition of transnational teachers (TTs) and transnational nurses (TNs) while transnational social workers (TSWs) are largely expected to undergo credential recognition and registration. Adaptation, bridging, upgrading, refresher, integration, orientation, induction, residency, transition, adjustment, and assimilation are used for programmes for nurses (Xu & He, 2012), while induction, adaptation, bridging, mentoring, integration, and orientation are used for teacher programmes. There are differences in the content and mode of delivery of these learning programmes, but they are all designed to facilitate the transition of transnational professionals (TPs).

In this article, the term *programme of transition* is used to denote all learning programmes designed for assisting the transition of TPs into the host country, and is defined as a formal programme of learning activities explicitly designed for supporting and facilitating the transition of newly arrived or recruited transnational professionals into the socio-cultural and

practice environments of the host country. Inherent in the term *practice* are the policy and legal contexts in which professional practice takes place. *Transition* is conceptualised as an internal process through which one comes to terms with aspects of a new situation created by change (Bridges, 2003).

Methodology

The host countries considered for examination included the English-speaking countries that are actively recruiting TNs, TTs and TSWs or that have experienced an escalation in their arrival owing to skilled migration policies: the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US. They have comparable systems for nursing, teaching, and social work and they rely on overseas recruitment as a solution to staff shortages.

This study employed a thematic review of literature because this allows the researcher to identify initial themes in the relevant literature, and to follow threads/references that emerge from that literature to discover more (Peter, 2012). Thus, themes were tracked, which helped to locate more literature, but all emerging themes were checked for relevance in answering the research questions. These efforts enabled the development of a critical review and arguments rather than simply a list of what has been read (Peter, 2012). A thematic literature review differs from a systematic review: systematic reviews of literature undertake an exhaustive search of all the literature that is available on a given topic, keeping very clear boundaries about what to include or exclude in the search. Such reviews often establish criteria to determine not only the literature to be included and excluded, but also the relative value or impact of each included item. This is mainly done by scrutinising the research methodology applied in the literature to see how well each study has been carried out. Thus some studies will be given more weight than the others. A thematic review, on the other hand, may use more flexible criteria to identify relevant literature, which allows the researcher to follow threads/references that emerge from that literature to find additional references. The researcher can then identify the key themes that emerge from a wide range of literature that will inform the study. The researcher can follow these themes in searching for more literature, also keeping the eyes open for whether these themes work and/or whether others are emerging that help to make sense of what the researcher reads to find evidence. Based on these themes a critical review of the literature can be written and develop arguments rather than simply list what has been read.

A library/IT based literature search was undertaken to find materials in books, journal articles, research findings, policy documents, newspaper reports, and relevant periodicals in English. The key search descriptors used singularly, and in various combinations, were

materials that included 'foreign', 'foreign-trained', 'transnational', 'migrant', 'migrating', 'migrated', 'immigrant', 'overseas', 'overseas trained', 'international', 'internationally trained', 'border-crossing', and 'relocating' social workers, nurses and teachers, containing 'orientation', 'adaptation', 'induction', 'integration', 'bridging', 'transitional', 'mentoring', and 'refresher' programmes and courses. Searches were done through ERIC, Education Research Complete, NZER Journals Online, Index New Zealand: INNZ, ProQuest Education Journals, Social Work Abstracts Plus, Social Services Abstracts, Social Care Online, Family & Society Collection (informit), ProQuest Social Science Journals, CINAHL Plus, MEDLINE (Ovid), PsycINFO, PubMed, ProQuest Nursing & Allied Health Source, Cochrane Library, and Google Scholar. A total of 28 entries for social work, 26 for nursing, and 17 for teaching were analysed after the search that used a 20 year search period from 1996 to 2016. Refereed academic journals accounted for the most entries found. Materials were organised according to their relevance under the major categories of nursing, teaching and social work. They included programme evaluation reports, research studies, literature reviews and academic theses. Additionally for social work, grey literature was sought across government websites in the relevant jurisdictions, and the works of the leading researchers on this topic in the five countries was further reviewed to find any mention in their studies about any existing profession-wide programmes. No such references were found.

Programmes of transition for transnational nurses

Ensuing are country-specific descriptions of mechanisms and strategies that facilitate the transition of TNs in selected English-speaking countries.

Canada

Canada does not have a national regulatory system for the assessment of TNs' eligibility for the Canadian Registered Nurses Examination (CRNE) and each province undertakes its own assessment (Xu & He, 2012). The country's strategy is to bridge the gaps in the educational requirements of TNs, and hence they have bridging programmes designed to provide TNs with 'the skills, competencies or formal criteria necessary for registration exam eligibility' (Baumann & Blythe, 2009, p. 20). Some form of post-hire assistance for transition into the work environment exists in Canada, in which TNs 'accompany another nurse or preceptor for the purpose of mentorship and to learn how nursing duties are performed within the organisation' (Njie-Mokonya & Etowa, 2014). However, these are not standard practices across health care organisations in Canada, and considerable ambiguity remains about the

strategies used to assist transition of TNs (Njie-Mokonya, 2014). Bridging programmes in Canada have been criticised as focussing on clinical skills while the needs of TNs relate more to 'cultural, language and health care differences' (Atack, Cruz, Maher, & Murphy, 2012, p. 378).

US

No national-level transition programmes exist for TNs in the US as employers are expected to provide their overseas recruits with necessary training, which is often the same given for domestic hires (Xu & He, 2012), despite many studies making strong recommendations for formal programmes of transition specifically for TNs (see Adeniran et al., 2008; Sherman & Eggenberger, 2008; Xu, Gutierrez, & Kim, 2008; Xu & He, 2012). What is required of TNs in the US is that they 'must obtain either a U.S. nurse licence or a Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools Certificate and secure a job offer before coming to the country' (Xu & He, 2012, p. 216).

UK

NHS trusts and the independent nursing home sector provide adaptation programmes for TNs in the UK (Gerrish & Griffith, 2004) while the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is responsible for their registration (Singh & Sochan, 2010). The length of the adaptation programme is determined by NMC requirements, and has a minimum duration of 12 weeks, during which induction, supervised practice and taught inputs are offered (Gerrish & Griffith, 2004). An evaluation study has reported that the trust considered it essential to orient TNs not only to the work environment but to the living environment also (Withers & Snowball, 2003). Programmes of transition, however, are applicable only to TNs from non-European Union countries, because qualifications of TNs from member countries of the European Union are recognised automatically owing to credential recognition reciprocity (Zabalegui et al., 2006).

Australia

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) is the national regulator for nursing and midwifery in Australia (NMBA, 2016). An independent organisation, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMAC) is responsible for ensuring the quality of education, training and assessment of nursing and midwifery; and successful completion of ANMAC-accredited education programmes is required for registration with the NMBA (ANMAC, 2013). The ANMAC assesses the skills and qualifications of TNs seeking to migrate to

Australia.

Australia has bridging programmes for TNs and, unlike in the UK, these are fee-charged and are designed to 'fill in gaps of education, language, and clinical experiences to meet regulatory requirements' (Xu & He, 2012, p. 218). There is, however, a separate assessment procedure for nurses from New Zealand, because of the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act 1997, according to which, only current registration and proof of identity of nurses are required for reciprocity (ANMAC, 2013).

New Zealand

The Nursing Council of New Zealand (NCNZ) is responsible for the recognition of qualifications of TNs in New Zealand, and applicants who do not meet the requirements for registration may be required to undergo further training at a New Zealand education institution (Zurn & Dumont, 2008). Australian educated nurses' registration is recognised in New Zealand under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (ICN, 2008 in Singh & Sochan, 2010). All TNs, except those from Australia, are required to enrol with one of the approximately 20 registered Competency Assessment Programmes (CAPs) offered by both public and private providers in order to demonstrate practice competency and English language proficiency (see Riden, Jacobs, & Marshall, 2014). Assessments are taken individually and content, length, and intensity of CAP varies for each TN depending on their needs (Woodbridge & Bland, 2010). A trained preceptor who has a minimum three years' experience as a registered nurse in New Zealand assists TNs during their clinical practice placement and assesses their competency for registration (Bland, Oakley, Ear, & Lichtwark, 2011; Riden et al., 2014). Successful completion of a CAP leads to registration and eligibility for employment.

Further orientation to the practice context is given to TNs by their first employers. For example, District Health Boards offer a 10-day orientation. However, studies suggest that this short duration is not sufficient for orientating TNs and often Clinical Nursing Managers allocate extended time to enable effective transitioning (Hogan, 2014). A clearer picture of the transition experience of TNs in New Zealand is unobtainable as there is a paucity of studies on the New Zealand TN programme of transition (Hogan, 2014; Woodbridge & Bland, 2010).

Programmes of transition for transnational teachers

Mechanisms for the transition of TTs vary in host countries and are state/province/district or school board level efforts, depending on the country and the nature of its administrative divisions.

Australia

Professional registration is a requirement for all teachers in Australia, and all TTs are mandated to obtain registration prior to seeking teaching employment. Each state in Australia offers its own university-based programmes of transition named, variously, 'teacher training course', 'alternate mode programme', 'teacher preparation programme', etc. (see Cruickshank, 2004; McCluskey, Sim, & Johnson, 2011; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Santoro, Reid, & Kamler, 2001) for upgrading qualifications and gaining Australian accreditation. However, TTs often find it extremely hard to obtain information about appropriate programmes of transition on account of the varied requirements of differing state government and non-government systems (Cruickshank, 2004). Further induction programmes (accompanied by mentoring) are offered to all beginning teachers, including TTs, when they are in their first teaching position after registration (Devos, 2010; McCluskey et al., 2011; Sharpline et al., 2010).

Although Australia has made considerable progress in facilitating the transition of TTs into the country, McCluskey et al. (2011) cautions against 'one size fits all' approaches to induction and recommends structured and individualised orientation and mentoring programmes. Although induction is mandated in some states, studies report that the current practice is inadequate in some cases or is non-existent in others and hence these suggest higher levels of organisational support to TTs (Peeler & Jane, 2005; Sharpline, 2009; Sharpline et al., 2010).

Canada

Similar to Australia, province- or territory-based systems are in place for assisting the transition of TTs in Canada, as education is under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. A common strategy is to provide teacher education programmes for upgrading or bridging the qualifications and experience of TTs in order to obtain registration or certification that is required of all teachers to undertake professional practice in Canada (see Bascia, 1996; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Phillion, 2003; Schmidt, Young, & Mandzuk, 2010). A significant drawback of this strategy is that TTs often assume beginner status, regardless of teaching experience in home countries and are required to undergo an adaptation programme in order to seek employment (Niyubahwe, Mukamurera, & Jutras, 2013). A serious criticism is that this strategy is insufficient as TTs are largely unsuccessful in entering the teaching profession even after completing required courses and obtaining certification or registration (Deters, 2006; Frank & Ilieva, 2015; Niyubahwe et al., 2013; Phillion, 2003; Schmidt et al., 2010).

UK

The UK follows a centralised system for qualification recognition. TTs coming to the UK from outside the European Union (qualifications of TTs from the European Union are automatically recognised in the UK, however, this might change in the wake of the Brexit referendum) are required to seek comparability of their qualifications and skills from NARIC, the designated national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills, and pursue a programme of study leading to the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), irrespective of any teaching qualification or experience from their home countries (Miller, 2008a). The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), an executive agency of the Department of Education, is the authority to award QTS required to work as a teacher in the UK (NCTL, 2016).

TTs whose qualification is assessed as UK-equivalent are allowed to work as temporary, 'unqualified' teachers in state-maintained and non-maintained special schools for a maximum of four years, after the completion of which, however, they are required to pursue a programme of study and obtain QTS (Matimba, 2015). Nevertheless, TTs who are qualified and registered in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US can apply for the award of QTS without having to complete an accredited programme of study, while other TTs (excluding those from the European Union and Switzerland) have to complete an accredited programme of study (Matimba, 2015). This preferential recognition strategy may be viewed as amounting to discrimination as it favours some over others. The existing strategies for assisting the transition of TTs into the UK has been criticised as insufficient (Miller et al., 2008) and there is considerable confusion about the 'who' and 'how' of any programme of transition, as nobody acknowledges responsibility (Miller, 2008b).

US

The US does not have a national governmental system and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) are responsible in their respective states to establish assessment programmes and determine qualifications for professional education personnel (NASBE, 2016). Evaluation of foreign educational credentials of TTs is typically done in-house by colleges and universities, however the same can be partially or fully outsourced to evaluating agencies if needed (Association of International Educators, NAFSA, 2016). Although teacher certification is the prerogative of each state, there are some common requirements across states in the US such as,

'completion of the foreign equivalent of a U.S. undergraduate degree; completion of a teacher preparation programme that meets the requirements of the state where the individual would like to teach; and completion of a certain number of university-level credit hours in education and in the subject area they wish to teach' (Shannon, 2008, p. 1).

Mentoring, the most common form of teacher induction in the US, is offered to all beginning teachers, including TTs (Ingersoll, 2012; McCann, Salas, & Kissau, 2012). Whereas the most common induction package includes 'working with a mentor and having regular supportive communication with one's principal, another administrator, or one's department chair', other more comprehensive, packages comprise 'participation in a seminar for beginning teachers, common planning time with other teachers in the same subject, a reduced course load, and assistance from a classroom aide' (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 50).

New Zealand

The Education Council of New Zealand (ECNZ) is responsible for establishing and maintaining criteria for teacher registration, standards for ongoing practice and criteria for the issue of practising certificates of different kinds across New Zealand (ECNZ, 2016b). TTs are required to get their qualifications assessed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to determine their comparability to a New Zealand teaching qualification (ECNZ, 2016c). TTs can apply for registration if their qualifications are assessed as meeting the registration standard 'satisfactorily trained to teach'; however, if the qualifications are not comparable, then TTs may be required to complete a Teacher Education Refresh (TER) programme (ECNZ, 2016c) or other studies as recommended by the Education Council to be eligible for registration. Under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement, teachers who are lawfully eligible to practise in Australia are considered eligible for obtaining registration and a practising certificate in New Zealand (ECNZ, 2016c).

New Zealand has a mandatory, formal induction programme for all new teachers who have completed an Initial Teacher Education programme, obtained provisional registration and embarked on their first teaching job (Haigh & Anthony, 2012; Piggot-Irvine, Aitken, Ritchie, Ferguson, & McGrath, 2009) that meets the requirements set by the ECNZ (ECNZ, 2016a). During induction, beginning teachers are offered the guidance of a mentor: an experienced colleague who holds full certification and who has received training to guide, support and give constructive feedback (ECNZ, 2016a). Induction is for two years' duration, however, teachers

can be provisionally registered for a maximum of six years (ECNZ, 2016a). The most significant aspects of induction and mentoring are as follows: an emphasis on practice-focused professional learning; a range of professional development opportunities; evaluations of professional practice based on the Practising Teacher Criteria; and active support and commitment from professional leaders (ECNZ, 2016a).

It is, however, intriguing to note that, while there is a highly structured induction programme for beginning teachers, an equally structured induction or orientation programme has not been specifically designed for overseas-trained teachers beginning their career in New Zealand (see Biggs, 2010; Butcher, 2012).

Discussion

Findings from the review above show that there the various programmes for TNs and TTs share a common element, that the profession as a whole is engaged in not only credentialing the TPs (i.e., assessing their overseas qualifications and experience and determining whether they are suitable to practice on the basis of these), but that the profession itself also takes a lead in specifying the transition requirements and in some cases designing the framework in which transition programmes operate. These are profession-wide, or at least system-wide strategies (i.e., within school districts, or provincial authority regions, etc.), determined by the professions themselves, rather than the much more narrow focus in social work of the bounds of the employer-employee relationship.

Findings further reveal that host countries are generally primarily concerned about the comparability of overseas qualifications of TNs and TTs. Consequently, principal strategies adopted for assisting the transition of these transnational professionals are geared to upgrade or bridge the gap of educational qualifications for making them equivalent to host country requirements and enabling mandatory professional registration. In addition, assistance is offered to transnational professionals (largely in the form of induction, mentoring or orientation) to adapt to the new work environment when they embark on their first recognised position after completing their educational and registration requirements. This, however, is not a consistent or standard practice across host countries as considerable vagueness remains in relation to its exact nature, duration, content, and delivery mode. There are many instances of host countries offering transnational professionals the same induction or orientation programme offered to local newly qualified professionals. While this practice may be of some assistance to transnational professionals, researchers have criticised it as insufficient and inappropriate (see Santoro et al., 2001). Literature is unambiguously in favour of a programme

of transition that is specifically designed to assist transnational professionals.

Although not on a larger scale, some promising results from existing programmes of transition are reported by researchers in the fields of teaching and nursing while social work remained devoid of any such reports owing to the absence of reported studies on the topic.

In the context of attempts to address increasing teacher turnover, McCluskey et al. (2011) point out that facilitated transition has helped retain quality teachers in the profession while teachers who did not receive any support experienced professional and personal isolation, leading to their eventual leaving of the job. Similarly, Sharpline et al. (2010) report that TTs who experienced 'protective factors' during the transitional phase in their workplace, such as 'positive collegial interaction or induction process[es]' were 'more likely to describe positive attitudes to their work place and work role' in contrast to those who 'encountered risk factors, such as an absence of information or an absence of collegial networks' and 'experienced stressors' leading to developing negative attitudes towards the workplace (p. 143). Likewise, a study conducted on some successful TTs, examining the reasons why they were successful, revealed that teachers attributed their success to the support and the sense of teamwork they experienced in their schools (see Warner, 2010). Furthermore, TTs 'are trained and usually experienced practitioners; it would be a waste of the resource if they were not adequately supported and this is what they value' (Warner, 2010, p. 15).

In the case of TNs, Cummins (2009) attributes a vital role to 'induction programmes and preceptorship' as they assist integration of nurses into the receiving country and hence she suggests that, 'these should be standardized in all institutions' (p. 1615). Analysing the existing practices for supporting TNs, Lee and Mills (2005) and Gerrish and Griffith (2004) advocate for longer orientation programmes to enable effective transition. Smith, Allen, Henry, Larsen, and Mackintosh (2006) and Alexis (2005) report that supportive leadership and a comprehensive orientation plan are requisites for successful transition of TNs. Some studies have reported evidence of detrimental outcomes of inadequate transitional programmes including compromised patient care (Zizzo & Xu, 2009). Expressing a similar concern, Atack et al. (2012) argue that 'the cultural context for practice is critical because attitudes and practices regarding the nurse-patient relationship can be different, depending on the nurse's educational experience' (p. 371), and they give the example of collaborative delivery of care that is not part of nursing education in most Asian countries.

As for social work, reports on existing profession-wide programmes are unavailable. Unlike nursing and teaching, social work is not a regulated profession in some of the Anglophone countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Among the countries where it is regulated, only

in the UK are there national level regulatory bodies,[1] while Canada and the USA have state or territorial/provincial level regulatory systems. Speculating whether the non-regulatory nature of the profession or the absence of national level regulatory systems is the reason for the lack of a profession-wide response is pointless because the country that has a national regulatory system does not have a reported formal transitional programme for TSWs.

However, some researchers have emphasised the need for interventions to assist transition of TSWs into the receiving country (see Fouché et al., 2015; Simmons, Walsh-Tapiata, Meo-Sewabu, & Umugwaneza, 2014). Fouché, Beddoe, Bartley, and de Haan (2014) strongly recommend strategies to facilitate TSWs' adjustment to the New Zealand context and they point out

> the lack of processes for aiding social workers crossing borders to understand how the social work discourse has evolved in their new country and how they might use the notion of "person-in-situation" to adapt their practice to suit the context' (pp. 2020–2021).

A broad study conducted in three phases by social work educators at the School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work of the University of Auckland under the title, 'Crossing Borders: An exploration of migrant professional workforce dynamics', has reported, among other things, on the need for interventions and strategies to facilitate the cultural transition of TSWs (see Bartley et al., 2011; Fouché et al., 2014, 2016).

While global social work practice standards are helpful for TSWs, they are not enough to ensure that TSWs are reasonably competent in a new setting. Studies have suggested that the transferability of social work practice skills learned previously is less direct in an alien setting in comparison to other professions (Crisp, 2009; Simmons et al., 2014; Simpson, 2009; White, 2006). In these contexts, interventions facilitating the transition of TSWs become an imperative as they help address a web of complex transitional issues.

Recommendations for social work

A programme of study that is specifically designed for TSWs can significantly assist them in their knowledge accumulation of the practice and socio-cultural contexts of the host country.

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[1] Each of the countries that comprise the UK has a separate social work regulatory authority. These are: in England, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC); in Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC); in Wales the regulatory authority is Social Care Wales; and in Northern Ireland it is the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC).

Whereas upgrading one's qualification or bridging its gap to make it comparable to the host country depends on individual assessments of TSWs and the quality of their source country education, TSWs developing knowledge about the socio-cultural and professional aspects of social work in the host country can be understood as a general requirement for all new arrivals.

The UK's post-hire pre-registration programme for nurses appears to be a viable option worth emulating. Their strategy allows professionals to engage in available employment while pursuing their programme of study and registration processes. This will avoid undue financial burden on the professionals who otherwise have to bear the costs of fee-charging programmes. Given that host countries gain hugely when recruiting ready-to-serve qualified professionals, employer-funded or state-funded programmes that bear the expenses of the programme of transition can be a workable option. The support of a preceptor/mentor is significant, enabling learning at the workplace and particularly so while gaining hands-on experience. Shadowing competent and experienced practitioners is another way of gaining knowledge of local practice requirements in the chosen field.

Thus, a programme of study that incorporates various components such as additional education and induction (including mentoring and shadowing) for three to six months, depending on the individual needs of TSWs, can be visualised as a reasonable, minimum, mechanism for assisting their transition. As the orientation programmes for TNs in the UK highlight, a programme of transition for TSWs ought to take on board TSWs' work as well as living environments in the host country as assistance is needed in adjusting to both.

A significant point of focus, however, must be the standpoints that underpin strategies for transitional assistance. How do host countries strategise transitional assistance? It is plausible to gauge three different standpoints. In the first instance, transitional assistance is regarded as an employment relations matter, that is, a private contractual matter between an employer and employee, and consequently, employers are expected to facilitate the transition of their recruits. The second perspective views transition as a purely private good and, in that, the onus is on individual professionals to upgrade their qualifications to the local standard before entering the local labour market or to seek out transitional assistance. In the final instance, the requirement is viewed as a matter for the profession, and accordingly, professional regulatory bodies are deemed best placed to strategise and plan for transition programmes.

However, viewing the transition of TSWs as an employment relations matter can have serious repercussions as it may give rise to the creation of numerous unrelated and unregulated programmes of transition which can engender unwanted misperceptions among stakeholders and the general public about such programmes, as well as the suitability of TSWs. Some studies

report on induction offered to TSWs in the context of employment that are disjointed efforts by employing agencies unsupported by appropriate regulatory or professional bodies (Bartley et al., 2012). Similar efforts in the fields of nursing and teaching received much criticism as they were seen as insufficient and, subsequently, recommendations were made for formal structured programmes. Likewise, putting the onus on the relocating professionals is also inappropriate as it may only add to already disadvantaged circumstances in the new country.

Therefore, professional and regulatory bodies have a crucial role to play in giving direction to efforts focusing on the transition of transnational professionals and they ought to work towards policy formulations and strategic advances in this regard. In the context of New Zealand, for example, the absence of programmes of transition for TSWs is convincingly highlighted by Simmons et al. (2014) and subsequently, they recommend the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) formulate a policy for transnational social workers. They proposed *powhiri*, a traditional formal Māori ceremony of greeting and welcome as an ethical framework for orientating TSWs, and use the Treaty of Waitangi as the base for constructing their arguments. As the 'what' and 'how' of a programme of transition for transnational social workers are largely non-existent, individual host countries need to develop their own strategies and mechanisms. While a 'one-size-fits-all' mechanism is undesirable for a diverse group of TSWs, a formal national framework can set out broad guidelines, within the scope of which individual agencies such as schools of social work can design specific transition programmes.

However, further research is needed to gather the perspectives of all the major stakeholders (including employers, professional bodies, schools of social work, recruiting agencies and TSWs themselves), to develop adequate knowledge of the specifics of a programme for transition. Informed by those perspectives and through collaborative endeavour, a sound programme can be designed that meaningfully addresses the transitional issues of TSWs.

Conclusion

The existing literature unequivocally advocates for transitional assistance to TSWs, TTs and TNs. Studies from across the given Anglophone countries have reported the benefits of transitional programmes and the detriments of their absence in both the teaching and nursing professions. Their professional or regulatory bodies have taken a lead role in some instances to give directionality to the efforts for establishing programmes of transition. The social work profession is beginning to recognise the need for transitional programmes; nonetheless, prevailing literature is conspicuous in its absence of studies dealing with any transitional

interventions. It is high time that the profession of social work takes its cue from nursing and teaching and assists its transnational professionals in their overseas transitioning to new local contexts.

Note

1. Each of the countries that comprise the UK has a separate social work regulatory authority. These are: in England, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC); in Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC); in Wales, the Care Council for Wales; and in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC).

Disclosure statement

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