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"London calling" -The Experiences of International Social Work Recruits Working in London

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ABSTRACT:

This recruitment of International social workers (ISWs) in England has been primarily aimed at 'plugging the gaps' in the child protection services. This paper reports on one aspect of a qualitative research project investigating the post-arrival integration, professional practice and development of 'international social workers' i.e. SWs trained and qualified outside of the UK working in London and the Home Counties. Findings demonstrate that as well as being a challenging professional and work experience this form of labour mobility is a profound life event for most ISWs and, as with human migration in other fields and countries, entails a complex social, emotional and cultural transition.

KEY WORDS: International Social Worker, Labour mobility, child protection, England

INTRODUCTION:

Social work is essentially a 'local activity', rooted in the historical development and current manifestations of national welfare systems and the cultural norms of a given society. However, in the 21st century 'age of migration', and notwithstanding that the majority of people remain in the countries of their birth (Castles and Millar, 2003), labour mobility is a worldwide phenomenon evident in a wide range of occupations and professions including social work (Bartley et al, 2013). The study reported here was a qualitative research project funded by of the Nuffield Foundation and carried out in South East England from 2011 to2012. The inquiry's aim was to investigate the post-arrival integration, professional practice and development of International social workers (ISWs) from the perspectives of both international recruits (28) and social work managers (SWMs) (15) with experience of managing this group of social workers.

This paper details the findings from the international social workers in this study i.e. SWs trained and qualified outside the UK and argues that the experience of professional adaptation, acculturation and professional dislocation reported on in other social work focussed cross-national studies (e.g. Fouche et al, 2013), should not be seen independently from the social and emotional dimensions associated with the experience of immigration. The reason for this is that a combination of professional and complex personal factors often forms the motivation for coming to the UK in the first instance, and thereafter provides the reference point through which social workers assess and reflect on their experience of professional practice in the UK, both as a new home (or at least one for now) and as a receiving country. Following is a summary of relevant theory and literature; the findings are then presented and discussed before drawing some conclusions.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MOBILITY IN SOCIAL WORK: THEORY AND RESEARCH

This section presents a summary of material from the broader and specific literature about international labour mobility, particularly regarding the interplay between the personal and professional motivations for ISW mobility, and expectations in the receiving country. To date the motivations and experiences of ISWs are relatively under- researched (Hugman, Moosa – Mitha, Moyo, 2010; Lyons and Huegler, 2012) although there is a developing body of literature in the social work field.

More generally, Lee (1966) first identified the significance of (economic) 'push' and 'pull factors' operating in relation to the country of origin and the destination country. These argue that the uneven configuration of world markets explains the migration decisions and patterns of people moving from less powerful peripheral countries to more powerful and wealthier core countries (Lee 1966 cited in Price, 2009 p.20**;** Segal & Heck, 2012). Migration systems theory draws on a more interdisciplinary approach arguing that migration is best understood by recognising the dynamic link between structural factors e.g. the existence of prior links between sending and receiving countries (based on colonisation, political influence, trade investment and cultural ties) and individual reasons, involving immigrants' beliefs and pre-existing social and familial networks in the destination country (Castles and Miller, 2003). Such links and networks are evident in the migration of social workers to the UK from countries including Australia, India and South Africa (Hussein et al, 2010).

More recently, transnational theory, which views immigration as a dynamic social process (Castles and Miller, 2003) recognises the development of circulatory or repeated mobility patterns of migratory movement (Flavell, 2008). Such arrangements now stand alongside conventional and traditional patterns of temporary or permanent migration, as skilled migrants with valued expertise in destination countries view their migratory movement as opportunistic, circular, and not necessarily linked to permanent settlement (Flavell, 2008). It is not clear whether transnational migration theory can yet be applied to international social workers although it is evident that migrants with particular characteristics and from some countries are more likely to plan or become 'permanent settlers' relative to those who intend only short term relocation (Lyons and Littlechild, 2006).

In the case of professional workers, push-pull factors are in evidence, for example in relation to the immigration of nurses to the UK (Winklemann-Gleed, 2006), and similarly affect social workers. 'Overseas nurses' identify family related and economic reasons as both push and pull factors, while opportunities for employment and career development featured significantly as pull factors (as do historic links and improving English language). Some cited the pull of adventure and the promises of recruitment agencies. A minority in this sample were refugees or asylum seekers and subject to the push of threats or persecution. Similarly, partly on the basis of social work students' experience,

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Lyons and Huegler (2012) theorise social workers' motivations to live and 'work abroad' as including adventure, altruism and opportunities to explore cultural roots and improve life chances, as well as for professional development reasons. Some of these motives are likely to be associated with migration which is planned as short term, and might apply particularly to young, single social workers from other developed countries. But others underpin intended permanent relocation, often of older migrants, possibly with partners and children, from countries in the Global South (Lyons and Littlechild, 2006).

Apropos of 'pull factors', recruitment agencies are often used as intermediaries to target and attract valued international workers to fill gaps in the domestic labour market (Bernard- Grouteau, 2007 cited in Price, 2009; Hussein et al, 2010). They play a potentially important role in assessing applicants' 'suitability'; 'matching' them with the opportunities available; and advising them on a range of issues, including expectations to be met in a specific destination.

Examples of labour market demands influencing social work mobility patterns have been identified in Ireland (Walsh et al, 2009; England (Hussein et al, 2010) and Canada (Pullen-Sansfacon, 2012b). The status of England as a receiving country in relation to migration of social workers has been evidenced by data from the previous and current registration bodies*. However, figures show a dramatic fall in the numbers of international social workers registered with the GSCC in 2011 (6946) relative to those recorded by the HCPC in (July) 2014 (182). The number of countries from which such recruits are drawn has also decreased from 83 to 35* and the previously identified trend towards greater recruitment from EU countries relative to the rest of the world (authors, 2011) has continued, though at a greatly reduced rate. The figures suggest a preponderance of 'solo movements' rather than group or targeted recruitment, with only six countries indicating registration of more than 10 social workers from each of three EU countries (Ireland (13); Poland (14) and Romania (14)) and also from Australia (27); India (13) and USA (13). The most dramatic national decreases between 2011 and 2014 are of recruits from Germany (379 to 4) and Romania (354 to 14). The data suggest that the period of high overseas recruitment has peaked, reflecting policy changes and strict enforcement of immigration rules, rather than an improvement in social work labour market conditions. The bias towards EU qualified social workers might have implications for English language proficiency; and similarities between welfare systems and roles of social workers might be even less than those sometimes assumed for recruits from English speaking countries.

* General Social Care Council (GSCC, England) to March 2012; Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) from 2012. Please note that the HCPC figures for 2014 only run to July and that the HCPC includes a category of UK nationals (139 in 2014) who have qualified abroad, but whose country of qualification is not recorded in the data supplied.

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Various studies (Pullen Sansfacon et al 2012(a); Manthorpe et al, 2009; Walsh et al, 2009) have illustrated the dominance of national political contexts; local social concerns; and cultural considerations in shaping social work organisation, practice and related educational programmes, resulting in (sometimes unanticipated) challenges facing ISWs. For instance, Pullen-Sansfacon et al (2012a) found many differences in social work curricula, regulatory and ethical frameworks between Canada, South Africa and the UK, notwithstanding some commonalities in origins and the efforts of international social work bodies to promote global standards of education and ethics (IASSW, 2004; IFSW, 2004). In the case of England, recruitment of ISWs has occurred particularly in relation to the child protection field, an area of practice characterised by high levels of occupational stress and high staff turnover and which has been identified by some writers as avoided by local social workers because of the challenging and stressful nature of that work (Welbourne, et al 2007; Walsh, Wilson & O'Connor, 2009).

Austerity measures affecting the public sector are having a particular effect on social work employment at the time of writing. Given current economic and political conditions, there have been significant changes in the British social welfare system, not least in relation to the organisations which recruit social workers. At the same time, public and governmental concerns persist about standards of social work with children and families (often almost exclusively concerned with 'child protection' cases) where a number of ISWs already work or continue to seek posts. As well as the challenges to the new recruits themselves, this has presented particular challenges to the managers charged with overseeing their work

The social and emotional impacts associated with migration that make immigration a challenging undertaking have been well documented (Lee and Westwood, 1996; Casado et al, 2010). Decisions to migrate are significant and invariably complex (Fouche et al, 2013). The multiple losses of home, community and country which are associated with emigration can have a lasting impact on a person's identity (Ward and Styles, 2005) wherever (s) he comes from. Issues related to personal and professional identity and confidence can be exacerbated or ameliorated by experiences in their new workplace, including international recruits' relationships with peers and managers as well as service users (Winklemann-Gleed, 2006). Choi (2003) for example, in a study of American expatriate social workers in Saudi Arabia noted the testing effects presented by different socio- economic systems, language and customs on individual ISWs and their families, which commonly manifest in symptoms of culture shock, frustration and disappointment.

In the light of the foregoing, what does social work labour mobility mean professionally for individual ISWs, managers and indeed social work teams in the agencies to which ISWs are recruited? The literature available suggests that practising social work in another country can be a fraught experience. Simpson (2009), reporting on the experiences of several Romanian ISWs, found that despite good

qualifications, and knowledge of theories & methods, the reality of English social work was something that these international workers had never experienced. Simpson (2009) also commented on the intensified short term pressure placed on teams by international recruits whose appointments are paradoxically intended to provide immediate relief from high workloads generated by existing social work vacancies. Fouche, et al (2013) comment on an enduring sense of professional dislocation reported by ISWs in their New Zealand based sample. Likewise In a reflective commentary published in "Professional Social Work" three ISWs from different countries of origin wrote of the culture shock they experienced in England adapting to an unfamiliar practice context and coping with a profound new life experience (Rayner, Voltz, & Swart, 2012).

Using the framework of adaptation and acculturation, Pullen- Sansfacon et al, (2012b) have extensively theorised the experiences of 15 ISWs in Canada. They suggest that adaptation and acculturation is a dynamic and iterative process between the individual's experiences in various social work roles, interventions and sociocultural and professional environments. They conclude that professional adaptation intersects with all spheres of life including personal, social and cultural identity. This reinforces the meaning of the term ISW, in recognising the social, emotional and professional complexity of the migratory and settlement experience: it is consistent with the systems approach to migration which recognises the interplay between structural and personal factors involved in the decision to migrate. The theoretical frameworks and research available demonstrate that the decision to migrate and the experience of living and practising in another country are complex, involving substantial life changes. In short, migration is a decision for the ISW which is significantly more complex and personal than the organisational intent simply to 'plug a gap'.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The study reported here was a qualitative research project which received ethical approval from the then University Human Ethics Committee of the lead author. The inquiry's aim was to investigate the post-arrival integration, professional practice and development of ISWs employed in statutory Child & Family Services in London and The Home Counties. The ISWs' experiences were explored from the perspectives of both international recruits themselves and social work managers (SWMs) with experience of managing this group of social workers. As noted, this paper discusses the findings from the ISW sample (28), while the views of the managers have been reported elsewhere. (Authors, forthcoming).

Theoretical framework and methodology

Qualitative research is especially useful in exploring situations and phenomena about which little is known. Since the professional work experiences of ISWs in statutory child protection services had not

been formally investigated when the research was instigated, its use seemed particularly appropriate, as did employing an epistemological foundation informed by social constructivism. This approach enabled a focus on the voices of the participants and how they construct their practice within organisational contexts as well as within broader social work practice narratives. In addition, the person-centred, holistic and contextual emphasis facilitated by this methodology made it suitable to manage the likely sensitivity and emotional depth of the data (Pagett, 2008).

Snowball sampling through informed and knowledgeable professional contacts was utilised to secure a purposive sample of ISWs from four different London Boroughs and two County Councils.

Participation in the study was limited to those ISWs who met the following criteria:

- Born outside the U.K.
- Trained and qualified outside the U.K
- Working legally in the UK
- Registered with the GSCC (England, or its equivalent)
- Currently working in statutory children and family social work services
- Employed by a London borough or a Home Counties council
- Been working in the U.K. for no more than five years.

Face to face interviews, guided by a semi structured interview schedule, were used to gather data from participants, with questions corresponding to the aim of the project. Responses were audio-taped with participants' permission and transcribed. Comparative and thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, the aim being to uncover themes in textual data at varying levels of complexity (Padgett, 2008). This process is assisted by the use of thematic networks described by Attride- Stirling, (2001) as web like illustrations that summarise the main themes comprising a piece of text. Thematic networks thus provide a tool for organising thematic analysis in a representational form that makes explicit the link between text and interpretation (Attride – Stirling, 2001).

This twenty eight person sample comprised six men (21%) and twenty two women (79%), all of whom were overseas trained and social work qualified. Twenty five members (89%) were sponsored as Tier 2 migrants and recruited through group recruitment drives involving a two year bond. Four (11%) ISWs came alone and found employment through recruitment agencies once in London. In respect of experience, nine members (32%) of the sample were newly qualified social workers, fifteen (54%) had previous statutory child and family work experience (and of that number three also had previous supervisory experience) and, lastly, four (14%) were experienced social workers but not in the area of child protection.

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Ethnic Origin of Participating ISWs

USA	Romania	India	New Zealand	Southern Europe
12	7	5	3	1
43%	25%	18%	11%	3%

Ages of Participating ISWs

26-30	31- 35	36-40	41-45	46- 50	50+
14	8	4	1		1
50%	29%	14%	3%	-	3%

NB: Percentages have been rounded.

There were limitations to this project. It had been intended to include a larger sample of ISWs (40). However, recruitment was more challenging than anticipated and a decision was made to close enrolment at 28, when the data had, in any case, reached saturation point. On the other hand, a larger sample of managers was recruited than was originally planned. Other limitations customarily pertain to qualitative research projects, for example, concerns about the generalizability of findings due to small sample sizes.

FINDINGS

The findings described below are illustrated by use of quotations from different respondents, identified by their country of origin, age and interview code number (ICN). They are grouped under sub-headings reflecting the major decision making points and transitions in the migratory and work related settlement experience.

Motivations – Deciding to come to the UK

Findings from this study revealed that the majority of ISWs decided to relocate to London/Home Counties (England) as much for the experience of living in another country and a desire to travel, as from a desire to broaden their professional experience and build skills. (The reasons given by the ISWs were substantiated by the perceptions of SWM sample). Smaller proportions were motivated by economic factors related to diminishing work opportunities in their home countries and the belief that

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they can achieve a better standard of living for themselves and their families in the UK.

> *'I wanted to get some experience as a social worker and see new cultures cos I like to travel and I like to have new experience so this is it and I wanted to improve my English, and they were all together'. (Portugal, 28. ICN 21)*

Planning and Preparation for the move

The participants generally, were not well prepared for the experience of living in England and working in London/Home Counties. Those recruited in specific recruitment drives were frequently unclear what vacancies they were coming to, or what would be expected of them in the posts they would take up on arrival, although the majority had assiduously read (though not necessarily understood) material they received from recruitment agencies prior to departure. This usually comprised briefing documents concerning UK Child & Family legislation, Social Policy and information on highly publicised Child Fatalities (e.g. Peter O'Connell, Victoria Climbie).

> **'***I mean none of us knew that we were going into child protection services. I don't know that I would have been quite so keen to come over if I had known what I was signing up for. (USA, 26. ICN 6)*

Working in London and the Home Counties - the initial period

Many of the ISWs in this sample were relatively unprepared for the social and emotional challenges of living and working in England (and specifically in London and the Home Counties), for example, being away from established support networks and familiar surroundings, difficulties experienced in coping with the English reserve and making friends in London. Homesickness was commonly reported, and many recruits had regular if not daily contact e.g. through Skype with family and friends 'back home'.

> *'I think the English tend to be cliquish, I don't think that it's meant to be exclusive, but my impression is that they have their group of about 5-6 friends, they may be friends they grew up with or they're friends from uni or whatever. But, they have a small quota and once they hit that quota they don't want to make another friend in their lives'. (USA,31. ICN 7)*

Levels of assistance provided by employers with various aspects of relocation varied significantly. Practical assistance (e.g. in finding suitable accommodation, facilitating professional registration) and the provision of information about cultural similarities /dissimilarities between UK and the home country were gratefully received when provided as these assisted people in readjusting their expectations.

> *'In our cultural training they said Americans are like avocados and Brits are like coconuts.*

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> *Americans are really soft and friendly and talkative, but have a hard inner core. British people they have a really hard shell and it's hard to get to the interior .... I think that may be a little true.' (USA, 38. ICN 20)*

Unsurprisingly, responses show that the first year to eighteen months of employment in England was a time of low job satisfaction and considerable challenge and adjustment for ISWs. Indeed some participants reported that they knew of other international colleagues who had returned home, while others questioned their suitability for the job.

> *'I think I came with very high expectations as my colleagues did and they were like 'we are going home this is really really rubbish'. The Americans left, a big part of the Portuguese, a couple of them from Poland and Bulgaria left as well, but the Romanians they ninety percent of them, actually stayed...'*
> *Int: Why was that do you think?*
> *Why? It's gonna sound bad, but true, we're used to it - taking a lot of shit. (Romania 28, ICN 19).*

> *'I think initially for anyone from overseas, it's very very challenging. Very very hard work'. (India, 38. ICN 5)*

Respondents typically depicted this period as intense, and oft times deskilling and stressful. For most, it was characterised by problems in understanding the language, learning the physical geography of their local borough and becoming familiar with the details of their new role. The last included adapting to a very bureaucratised child protection system with high demands in terms of producing reports and maintaining records. Several ISWs quoted basic organisational expectations, for example, regarding the number and frequency of home visits to children on their caseloads, as being commitments that they simply had not been informed about.

> *I felt completely deskilled because I felt I couldn't transfer my experience because the language is different. It's not only the language it's the culture and the mentality which I didn't know much about. You can't transfer all your experience. I felt like I had lost my referral point. (Romania, 40. ICN 22)*

The quantity and quality of induction experienced by the new recruits varied, but was generally delivered as a form of training which was not found to be helpful by many of the participants. It was often very focussed on the statutory underpinnings of child and family work in England at a time when the new recruits had no direct working experience of this and it did not relate to the prior experience of the respondents.

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> *'I think we had three days of intensive introduction to social work in the UK but to be honest I didn't understand any of it, it was just three days of sitting there thinking, what have I got myself into? (Indian, 26.* ICN 27)

Settling into the work

Participants identified many and varied practice challenges in undertaking their new roles mainly associated with their previous level of experience as well as the similarities (or not) between the welfare system in England and their home countries. Many ISWs reported that their employers assumed that they knew more than they did and that they were expected to 'hit the ground running' in a local practice context with which they were unfamiliar and where there were high expectations and very specific ways of working.

> *'At the beginning I was leaving work at eight in the evening and coming here first thing, first to arrive and last to leave coz I was so scared. I wanted to keep my job because I had borrowed lots of money to get here which I had to pay back. Now I leave at five sometimes, but I still work Saturdays.' (Romania, 29. ICN 9)*

Certain difficulties were experienced more frequently by the respondents, particularly those associated with the level and quality of supervision, support and oversight received from managers. Sixteen ISWs (57%) commented specifically on high managerial turnover, poor supervision and unsupportive management as being features of their work experience in the early stages. In eight cases the subsequent arrival of supportive managers was thought to have contributed to an improvement in the work environment.

> *'The supervision here is not reflective at all. It is just pretty much what are you doing on this case, and have you seen this kid and when was the last time you saw him, and, ok where are you at with it?' (USA, 30. ICN 14)*

Establishing Professional Credibility

Testimony from the ISW sample reveals that they, like most new comers, are ascribed a peripheral position within work groups and that interest in the unique skills, experiences and contributions they could make based on practice in their home countries was minimal, certainly early on.

> *'Yes, I think you just have to sink or swim when you get here and to prove yourself before they will acknowledge your previous experience. I don't like to put it too bluntly but you get here and they just throw all these cases at you, especially if you're agency, and if you can do it then you must be ok.' (New Zealand, 28. ICN 3)*

Participants were also questioned about the degree to which they had been able to develop professional networks and engage in broader social work debates outside their immediate work environments. Only four (14%) of the sample reported that they had achieved this, with the remaining twenty four (86%) reporting that their work focus was dominated by the day to day work in their immediate workplace.

Working with Difference

A wish to work with a diverse group of service users was one of the reasons commonly cited as being part of the professional development that participants hoped to gain from their experience of working in the UK. Thus, reports from the ISWs about their experiences of engaging with service users from different cultural groups recognised the universality of issues of poverty, deprivation and abuse confronting social workers in whatever practice context they were employed. However, there were sometimes stark contrasts between the living conditions of local service user and those previously experienced in the respondents' home countries

> *'I remember my very first home visit. I was so shocked because I was looking at this woman and thinking, "ok, you have a house and you've got food, what's your problem? All you need to do is look after your children, you've got no other sort of needs and your house is not going to break down."' (India, 26.ICN 26)*

Respondents generally reflected positively on their experiences of working with service users, despite their sometimes aggressive or, conversely, passive aggressive reactions to social workers. The expectations of the service users and their language and accents could also be confusing for international recruits. There were reports of resistance from involuntary service users which proved challenging particularly for newly qualified SWs and those less experienced in child protection work; and a small minority of the ISWs reported escalating on-going harassment, and physical assault from service users.

> *'Over here I am a foreigner and one of my clients made all these racially motivated threats that I am a foreigner and now they are prosecuting her and she is claiming not guilty and I have to give evidence in crown court' (USA 38 ICN 20).*

Reflecting on the experience and future plans

So was the experience of working in the UK what participants hoped it would be? Given their original motivations for coming to the UK the majority of participants reflected that indeed they had

broadened their experience both personally and professionally. Personal growth and perseverance was acknowledged, and professional highlights included development of new skills e.g. report writing, working with conflict, and a sense of accomplishment in mastering the competencies needed to practice effectively in a new system. Participants also commented favourably on the number and nature of training courses available to them in their local authority, although, due to workloads, there was not always the opportunity to attend. Working here was not considered an 'easy ride' however and most participants discussed the need for recruitment agencies and local authorities to provide a more explicit and comprehensive picture of the challenges entailed in the experience, as well as the provision of more meaningful preparatory material. This should critically engage with English culture, the history of social work in England and its impact on current approaches to practice.

> *I would say really nail down the interview, what are the practicalities of the job gonna be like, what are the expectations of the work, what is the supervision actually LIKE …ask questions about the turnover. (USA , 29 ICN 4)*

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study has provided some indications of the views of recently recruited ISWs working in statutory Child and Family Services in London/Home Counties and of those responsible for their management and supervision. The results demonstrate that the ISW experience is a complex multi-faceted one which involves considerably more than adaptation to a new professional environment and a different way of working. While some of the findings highlight issues identified as affecting the motivation and well-being of new recruits to social work more generally, these are intensified when compounded by the dislocation of the ISWs' personal relationships and reference points, which often support a positive sense of identity and development in the professional role for 'home grown' new recruits. Furthermore, migration is most frequently a group process in which people move from one country to another with family or other compatriots. However, a large proportion of respondents in this sample were relatively young without such familial or social support, working in a challenging area of practice, on their own in a huge new city and living and working abroad for the first time.

As this study and others have revealed (Hussein et al, 2010; Pullen- Sansfacon et al, 2012) social work is increasingly a global profession and international recruits relocate to the UK for a range of professional reasons, which include professional development, career advancement, pay and improved working conditions. However, it was not just the work that attracted the ISWs in this study. As others have identified, elements of adventure and broader development (including of language skills) were also in evidence (Winkelmann-Gleed**,** 2006; Lyons and Huegler, 2012). The ease of travel and personal communications between most countries of origin and England added to other pull factors, as did the efforts of recruitments agencies. In addition, the prospect of working in or near London itself was seen in positive terms. It was only on arrival that the reality hit many of working in an over-

crowded, expensive city, where anonymity in living conditions is a stronger characteristic than sociability and where a large proportion of the workforce commute long distances and/or are simply too tired and stressed by their work to develop new friendships and socialise out of hours.

Therefore, whilst the notion of trans-nationalism and of social workers as a transnational global professional workforce (Authors 2011) has a certain theoretical glamour, this study reveals, as do others, that the lived reality for workers adjusting to a different society with complex social problems, a diverse workforce and a new culture of professional practice is very challenging. Austin (cited in Pullen Sansfacon et al, 2013) has elaborated the theory of 'double culture shock' as encompassing both the personal and the professional aspects of relating to another country: this draws attention to the social and cultural identity transitions accompanying the logistical ones involved in transnational migration (Pullen Sansfacon et al, 2013).

The reality of English social work has been noted as being something quite outside the previous experience of most ISWs (Misso, 2006; Tobaiwa et al, 2006; Raynor et al, 2012) and this was confirmed by the respondents in this study. While some ISWs may hold possibly ill-informed or unrealistic expectations, findings from this study demonstrate that these are not effectively addressed in the early stages, due to the poor quality of induction; the pressures of complex cases and heavy caseloads; and limited or poor management and supervision. These are issues which have already been identified as of concern in English social work more generally. However, the proportion in this sample who found their experience of induction unhelpful suggests that the general model of sending people on training to induct and orient them to the job may well reassure Local Authorities that they have ticked this box, but it does not necessarily constitute an effective exercise in learning transfer for international recruits. Perhaps the whole concept and practice of the induction of ISWs into both the national and local SW systems needs to be reconsidered, together with the introduction of more innovative schemes, such as buddying with another team member or shadowing of social workers carrying out different tasks.

Respondents in this study also often reported low levels of managerial support (certainly in the initial stages of employment) as they struggled to familiarise themselves with the details of their new role and wider cultural adaptation. The issue of workloads – both the number of cases for which ISWs were responsible and the range and emphasis of the work to be undertaken in relation to them - was also a source of concern to the respondents. While this is partly a function of the area of work to which ISWs were recruited this was also related to issues of staff management and supervision. The challenging nature of the initial period was in fact recognised by some of the managers interviewed who identified ISWs as being on ‘a steep learning curve’ at this stage. However, some managers felt ill-equipped to take on responsibility for the supervision of ISWs as part of an already pressurised workload and unable to relieve them of the high caseloads which were held by all social workers in

particular teams (Authors, forthcoming). Undoubtedly, it is likely that providing more effective induction, training and support to new ISWs will mean more work and responsibility for the immediate managers and also for team colleagues, when the object of the exercise (overseas recruitment) is to relieve workload pressures associated with vacant posts, but the investment of extra effort in the early stages could reap considerable rewards in terms of the more effective role which ISWs can then play. Interestingly, an as yet unpublished study of transition into the role of qualified 'home grown' social workers suggests that it is the first six months of employment which are the most stressful for the new recruits who similarly felt the lack of good induction and supervision (Walker, 2014). This finding potentially also has significant implications for when and how induction and other forms of training, supervision and management support are delivered to new ISWs.

Another aspect of the work to which ISWs had to adapt was around the attitudes and behaviour of services users. This would usually have been in a wider context of disrespect for – or disinterest in- the role of a social worker. While most respondents reported that they enjoyed their interactions with service users, 'hostility ' was commonly experienced and other examples of negative attitudes and even intimidation or actual violence were not unknown. Indeed, one respondent described an experience of serious assault which required medical treatment and a period of time off work for recovery and rehabilitation. In this instance this was not something the ISW felt able to divulge to family members 'back home' for fear of worrying them. Instances of discrimination against and aggression towards social care workers have been reported in other studies (e.g. Stevens et al, 2011)

Clearly, the overseas recruitment of social workers to the UK is not solely an answer to 'plugging gaps' in the local labour force and should not be viewed as such. Practising in England (whether in London or elsewhere) involves many work related and professional challenges for international recruits but the adaptations required are more than just about the work. The total experience also encompasses a host of challenging human and personal factors which occur beyond the office door. The fact is that, far from just filling a vacancy, this is a profound life experience for most ISWs and, as with human migration in other fields and countries, entails a complex social, emotional and cultural transition.

CONCLUSION

To some extent –international labour mobility, including for social workers – is still a matter of personal choice and it seems that, when London calls ISWs still answer. This study illustrates that in recent years they continued to be recruited into child and family services in London and the Home Counties in quite significant numbers. It also reveals a first-hand appreciation that, for both the ISW and their receiving organisation, the expectations of that experience both personal and professional will more than likely *not* be "what it says on the tin". In fact these findings suggest that once here many ISWs find their local authorities to be indifferent employers. While it is not expected that

employers can address external factors which impinge on the psycho-social well-being of ISWs, acknowledgement of the extra dimension of being a migrant which they bring to the role (both its negative and positive aspects) could be beneficial to both the worker and the organisation

Patently ISWs would appreciate better support during their early days in the field and an overt recognition that they are doing their best to cope with radical lifestyle differences in their personal as well as their professional contexts. If two goals are to be satisfied - the employers' need for a return on the substantial investments of time and money in recruiting ISWs and the wish of the newcomers to acquit themselves well in their new professional venture - then more positive and supportive team and organisational cultures must be developed. Even if seen only in terms of overall cost effectiveness, this could be a goal that would be of direct and wider benefit.

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