

Episode 154 - Dr. Toba Kerson and Dr. Judith McCoyd: In Response to Need: An Analysis of Social Work Roles Over Time

[00:00:08] Welcome to in social work. The podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at www.insocialwork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice to research. We're so Sure hi from the University at Buffalo as recently cited in The Huffington Post If you're looking to improve your happiness. You might want to consider moving to our fair city. We placed sixth out of the top 10 U.S. cities for the highest quality of life. We already knew that we're just surprised we weren't higher. I'm Peter Sobota. In this episode our guest Doctors Toba Kerson and Judith McCoyd discuss their latest work re-examining interviews conducted in 1976 with the early pioneers of health related social work. They compare those with themes they identified from current social workers in the health care field they were in that then as now social workers in the health care field respond to the needs of their clients. The medical establishment and also others affected by public health issues per responses to needs include those created by war's new and underserved populations. Technological advances public health crises wealth disparity and globalization doctors Kerson and McCoyd found that current social workers continued to respond in line with our core ethical values of social justice human rights advocacy and social action.

[00:01:53] Our guests provide a strong reminder that from our earliest days the distinctive way that social workers respond to needs serves as an example of how our core values and skills provide a unique voice and identity for our profession. Toba Kerson DSW Ph.D. is professor in the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. And Mary Hale Chase professor emeritus and social sciences at Bryn Mawr College. Her researches into areas broadly defined social work practice and depictions of epilepsy and mass media. Professor Kerson was recently named a Fulbright specialist. Judith McCoyd is associate professor at Rutgers University School of Social Work. Her scholarly work centers around perinatal decision making technology and health care societal aspects of bereavement and social work education. Her research agenda involves exploration of the ways advancing technologies impact the experience of childbearing and bereavement. Our guests were interviewed in July of 2014 by our own Dr. Laura Lewis director of field education here at the UB School of Social Work. So good morning. I have Toba Kerson and Judith McCoyd with me today. Welcome to you. And there's a fascinating story about the early history social work in the U.S.. I hadn't been aware of. And I think our listeners are going to find fascinating too. So Toba and Judy I'm very interested in learning about how you came to study history as a social worker Ok, well I'm Toba Kerson. Well we have to start with older social workers because the interviews that formed the sort of kernel of what we did were actually done by me as the basis of my sociology dissertation which would really social work from a theological perspective.

[00:03:53] I found I spent a lot of time reading every article that had been written by about medical social workers who were health social workers hospital social workers birth school that I really need be women as many women as I decided so I interview or issue a questionnaire to every social work professional in the medical field who is kind of the second generation of workers in healthcare. All these women had achieved some prominence had important positions and partners who were federal government or state governments. And I found interviewing them to be tremendously exciting. The most famous was Harriet Bartlett who might don't know know they have. I hope so many women. Very practical work perhaps with the good work in shaping fields. And there's a legacy here of these women that perhaps people have not talked about or are not familiar with. Right. And part of what intrigued me and brought me to this work in this series the thing I was a hospital social worker for many years and then came back for doctoral work primarily

here to Bryn Mawr because the towboats first well I guess with your second edition of the first case of that book and she talked about the importance of context and the work in healthcare settings and that I was already doing that work and has heard of some time reading some things about canon and so when I heard that she had all these interviews I was totally intrigued. We worked together for at least five maybe eight years before I finally had the space and my wife and my doctoral studies under my belt and I love to read those interviews. And that was what brought the genesis of that together with putting together the 2010 such work and how studying book kind of brought the genesis of this article I see. And so partly your own experience and your own entry.

[00:06:10] What led you Judy to join up with Toba analyze the data from that earlier study. I don't know either. Judy actually did her doctorate here and she did after me. So yeah I was a shareholder after a committee I had certainly read practically everything but that point sir. And Judy can I ask you did some of the information about those early pioneers resonate with you as a hostile social worker coming back to school to get your doctorate in social work. Absolutely although I have to say I didn't read the interviews or the law form on the Hill after I'd completed my doctorate work but before I started my doctorate who are maybe that first year I've read both heavy dissertation and so I had a sense of what she written the medical social work paradox and that had all resonated. There were many people who were quoted in her dissertation who I had heard of too. I did my Masters in New York and some even though many of the people she interviewed were either involved more often. Nevertheless I've heard of many of those names and they really were the one other thing the older people like Macy right before deciding dusting off the names I've seen a lot. Sure it feels a little bit like discovering buried treasure. How exciting it must have been and one of the things that I believe our listeners will really appreciate is some of the lessons and nuggets of wisdom that you found that have resonance even still today.

[00:07:55] And so let me back up a little now and ask you what main themes emerged from the data Judy until the godfather of the I know it's sounds nothing responsively which means that the way social workers shape the world. They didn't think of that and we've clumsily horrible the consequences too from a long time ago. They didn't think about what will really further the procession. What will make sure that you know it's very exclusive group. No they just started that when people. How can we get to these people and how do we get off and get permission to work with the people. So that was who were the great depression when they been told they can only work with the poor people in hospitals and they are now always middle class people are now in terrible quandary himself was always true with the public health problems like syphilis and polio where they suddenly Stettin they often find what they were doing really was a champion. Had some wonderful stories some of which are in this article that women's health care a lot of these women that their star in the American Red Cross with regular overseas. Very exciting. And they would just be a sign of women's health that the funerals are not half a year after that because they knew they said will you want to meet a woman at a funeral. So yes you have to show up right. Just about that that was I was just looking at the article as Mary Kay Taylor and that was one of the first of the interviews that I read when I went back to look at the data.

[00:09:38] And she writes about not only going right into all of the families of the deceased soldiers but then attending funerals and she has this incredibly funny story about bringing up the tail end of a funeral procession. And that's how joining her and she was so afraid of crowds but she worked to collaborate with the body by the end a funeral procession. I thought you know that the adaptability. I think that wasn't a thing that we drew out of the in but it was one we saw throughout the day that social workers just across the board while they respond to wars and public health issues and new technology and all these other things that are identified in the article. The thing that goes across and comes through is the adaptability and commitment of bases for social workers as well as current ones. I think so. So now another one of the things we talk about is the needs of organizations which keep changing and which sometimes find that someone has an understanding that we have to offer.

And so they and we and everybody in between this generation that was two generations older than I am now has to be able to express exactly what they do. Ray clarity everyone can understand what they do. I think that when I referred to these women earlier as pioneers and I was speaking rather metaphorically but really quite literally they charted new territory here and discovered new ground with the focus not being that necessarily but like you said earlier really concerned about what people needed. They were also remarkably brave Megan Rapinoe who happened to my lost city hospitals for six years and if I have a mentor it would still be amazing. There is an example of the only hardcore that the doctors think this person needs. Second searching she.

[00:11:47] Tell me about the person I will meet the person I will tell you with the person and I will make sure that that person. Yes sir. She knew and that was exactly how she managed the suspicions and the nurses and just moved forward. The patient's interests really mattered to him and she was determined to hear from them before making a decision about what was in their best interests. Right. And I think Judy you now I think that one of the things that I was taken by Naisi rather Nerio was that not only the story that just told but the fact that she was really clearly a professional she was no handmaidens to the doctors because sort of what some of the early medical social work sort of looked like we were handmaidens. And as we know we are professionals with a good perspective and training and values of our own and that values I think was one of the other things that sort of crossed come across knowing that not just we respond to need are we Canadians but we value the autonomy and self-determination of the patients and we do want to hear their stories. We're not going to just go running for the homemaker cause the doctor says a homemaker. I think I'd love to add to another baby rabbit for her. I loved her. She worked with prostitutes in Baltimore I guess and we were interviewing them.

[00:13:19] So she was in the 30s and she was talking about how out of the West they were trying to do mental health work with prostitutes trying to figure out you know what were the psychoanalytic reasons that they were prostituting and they said overtly they needed money to raise their children and that kind of west contained a grass roots here a lot of the social structural problems that are going on then just having absolutely taken by the energies that had done. Pioneers yes it's very inspirational. From my perspective the courage and the bravery. Like you said earlier when you did a new analysis were there any other themes that you found new or different that emerged from the interviews and that can equate into question but let me say that one of the things that almost concerns me as a researcher is that this seems so consistent and that's why it was so certain that I do this with jury. I mean I would say somebody who is present because she saw the same things that I did when she took off for the issue of this case Brooke. I hadn't revamped my myself and once I got in with the group at the time it was it was OK. A lot of cases and seems. The same thing which was very affirming that she agreed with all of these things. The thing is that the same things could come to that. For example technology I originally included that in my thinking because technological developments that were happening is that I was first thinking about the ground by the time we did this and this case through technology was a completely different experience. Everybody just take what you paid to do and yes we're smart so know that you can have a heart lung transplant.

[00:15:29] Now I guess the technology was one of the angles that I was interested in because a lot of my work is around genetic diagnosis and technologies you are in Natal settings and so you know those are all fairly new. Certainly the genetics part is new compared to the bathroom when you are interviewing the women and the prostheses for veterans. Polio was more accessible as well. I think what's very powerful about your work is that as Tumbo was saying even when duty participate in analyzing all of the interviews the themes were consistent the theme seemed to really resonate across both of your analysis but also across all of these changing circumstances and conditions technology for example changing through the years. And yet some of these themes are ones that really still resonate today. They really do and I guess I was a little surprised that that was the finding even though what we felt. But I think the other piece of that is that social work perspectives have

changed too. So I have been taught here are in my doctoral program have a very critical perspective on things which is not really part of Social Work at the point where Tegel doing interviews. So I really came out of sort of thinking you know all this response stuff now where are we. And yet there we were leaving the profession there we were using our professional judgment some pushing back at the docs and not just taking it which I think was sort of but when I went into all those original interviews I was sort of expecting I guess a little bit more not 30 type of women and I was delighted to sign that law. Yes that's really exciting. I love that story.

[00:17:26] Judy for a couple of reasons because I think and my work with students sometimes I think they are looking for these predetermined kinds of answers and they assume that sort of recipes for doing the work. But I think what is really inspiring about this is it shows students that there's really still room to think outside of the box and be creative that as we move into new territory and we move to undertake new issues there's no pre-determined way to respond really. It's sort of a way of being about your work that you can see in these very early women these very early social workers. Very true. Were there any other surprises in your analysis. My biggest regret when I said was it held up so incredibly well and there are these little gems that were not such surprises in terms of analysis. I mean I think that was the big surprise that it held up so well. One of the things a lot of what I do more generally is around great work and so a number of the interviewees have worked at Massachusetts General Hospital during the Coconut Grove fire of the 1943. So I've read a lot of Glindemann early work on great work where he finds that people get it from sexual to 11 men to the psychiatrist. But what I found in the interviews that Trevor has done was that these social workers were very much a part of that and they actually were saying people for a lot longer than that and psychiatrist residents have. And so it was really fascinating from that point of view to see the backstage stories that haven't been told. And so for our listeners talk a little bit about how this work has relevance for today. I have so many reasons not to start.

[00:19:27] One is that I think that night all social workers and loses loses her drive which we talked about also that this kind of thing that sounds a cliché says that it's action too. And it's that how these women responded to problems. How all the women and some in each case responded problems and how the way that we tried to teach them in the classroom that you feel this idea that they really done keep people united with those mothers to come a long time ago. Yeah and I think it's just emphasizing whatever just said that but that sense of the professional use of self inform social work values making sure that the people who are marginalized are the people we are watching out for not paternalistic way but in a way to find out what the needs are and try and with them through that person's perspective so that we try and help them find solutions by mobilizing community resources and organizations and changing policy and coming up with new programs. The holistic nature of that professional I think is a big part of it too. I actually kind of got lost in my head when you said that the students coming in recipes. So I want to go back to that for a second. So I think the recipes are impossible except who were understanding.

[00:21:02] You have to understand so many levels of Hine's experience to really get what their problems are that you have to have the superb the ways you know in order to build enough trust between the two of you were never there to use your family or you in a group where you had a community project that everybody can really move forward with. And that truly is another thing I haven't seen for a long time and it's partly something that I learned from these interviews. Well once there's a recipe when you really have a solution for a problem it's now once you so sure. No time for that. Certainly one of the worst things that happened to her. She was my husband with a great sense of humor this her can go at it with sobbing from Poleon because the mom who died said a large number of students who Susan were getting in social work and went south. It was no longer a problem. The social workers needed to. And so he had one of the so that might be far afield from the idea that recipe. That's why I received work and I was not that into the two and that is that all the Samhadana material is extremely important because of this need to be relational experts. But in

the end though the teachers you had to come up with some psychiatric diagnosis. That's not the answer. We have to teach people the people that were asking them how to right. And not just with the individual I am however that and more behind that. And I think the SAHRC I always tell my students that one of the fabulous things about social workers is I'm sure this doesn't go over well is what I say in the classroom. One of the bad things about being a social worker is psychologist. We care about social justice.

[00:23:16] And what we really care about the policy implications both how they affect the individual and how we can try and change some of those policies. We really care about how programs are affecting people in their own social context and how we can intervene backward into the social context to not just on people. And so I can't really any more. So true so true and there's still of course a lot of work that still needs to be done in our communities and a lot of equities. And I think what is terrific about the work that you've done is you help to operationalize for students how to value based in the profession and how use of South something I think that can allow students how those can be employed to really effect change. One of the things we keep having all of these new discoveries in science right. So social workers from back with Harry Bartlett was doing Apoyo work and says she had a whole people I'm sort of going in and working with the mothers and then realizing that really these letters have these kids who were told to stay in that for six months and that they had to figure out how to help the mothers keep the dad and entertained. Many were to this whole event next to her when she went to New Orleans to separate several governments. Right. In social work early were mothers were looking from that direction. And now we're having all of these new scientific discoveries about neurobiology and attachment. And so we are still there as a profession hopefully advocating for mothers and their children to be able to have him other child relationship that is healthy and helps build our brains and so now we have even more evidence for why we do what we've been doing for forever.

[00:25:17] But we can say oh now we can look at the science of it also you know the attachment and the biology of developing the brain that doesn't happen if mothers aren't or primary caregiver aren't available to their children. And so I think that there's a healthy way that it all ends up living together again that the places where individual well-being and family well-being and really societal well-being. We can look at in the same way that the adult male who inherited work who was a teller of these women has bought the shirt. How do you think that changes that we're seeing today the growing disparities between rich and poor might play out over the years in globalization and those trends. I think they would be terribly horrified at that disparities especially even looking at her salary. For example if you don't mind my little making it to whoever runs zation Christians are tremendously interesting for us and we're right there these. The difference I think is that these women who were middle class not upper class middle class who were educated really very segregated in life until they became Zimpher. And so it was very exciting to work through all these different ethnic groups. Time was countermovement German Italian Irish Irish and Jewish. That was the big race. And how in this world do you go to any elementary school in any city and you have kids who are living in homes. The kids think we're here the minority from all over several continents. So globalization has come to us in terms of working with the immigrant population many of whom suffered terrible problems.

[00:27:28] I'm not sure that wasn't here but many immigrants who are rescued from countries settled in Philadelphia and so are students now Mendez's in review with the population. The federal government from saying he watched my television so they expect to come in and have jobs and middle class lives and I hope they keep that aspiration to help them. I agree we have a similar situation here in Buffalo with a very large growing population of immigrants and refugees. There's a story there are many stories in your article and I hope that our readers will take time to read it. They're just incredibly rich descriptions but there's one in particular that comes to mind when we talk about globalization and that's the story about the social worker who initially begins by other

means. You know what I'm talking about where she goes to the home of an Irish family. Can you tell us that story. And the last name of McCoyd and I'm all for though I've got that viner. But yes she talks in her dialogue would talk about how they really they had a lot of disrespect for the Irish family because they had food and clothing all of war that a lot of children. And then she was sort of amazed when she got into the home and found out how much love was going on in those homes between them and their kids particularly children. So it does start out very much as that sort of alluded to that earlier that there's sort of a sense that these middle class women who had not been exposed to much different.

[00:29:21] All of a sudden we're hitting these different kinds of environments and while they may not commend the road but we're really again one of the neat things was that they were open to seeing what was there to finding the strength of faith back before that name was Pauline. They were recognizing the strength of the things that they worked with and surprised by them and so hopefully our social work students now don't have to be surprised by the fact that their strength even in the most marginalized and challenge kinds of population. That kind of why I know some of the women. So the interesting thing is they haven't talked about. I'm sure that our students struggle with some of the same concerns. And I think it can be disturbing when we're learning a social workers when we find ourselves potentially othering people. And I think one of the lessons here too is that some of these things have been experienced through the years. But what makes social work unique is that we take the time to be aware and alter our thinking and our used self can make a big difference in the way that we engage with people so it's OK to make mistakes and it's probably another way of saying it along with the knowledge and actually apologize like that. Exactly. There's a lot of hope and optimism.

[00:30:50] I think care for students or people who are new to the profession and a lot of inspiration also for people who have been in the field for a long time about what really makes social work unique and what we can be proud of and the things that we do every single day in our jobs that we might take for granted over time as how differently we respond to people and how brave and courageous many social workers really are. I'll say from the outset that sounded like a share from an interview for a lot of those interviews that you haven't even haven't read because this woman who eventually became a public health school professor at Harvard social workers went over her interview and decided that it was so casual that shouldn't be included and that there was no way to persuade her. One of the things that she said to me that she was horrified when she read her interview was that she was living in a settlement house extremely exciting for her. I'm not sure whether her father was a minister but if not she had that kind of upbringing and she says that she and her friends were both working as social workers settlement house in Boston were hanging out the window at night and watch what was going on in the street with all of the Italian people who were hopping very badly and visiting with each other and the fact that that I think that is important that we must not lose this kind of the opposite view of this and othering which is one of the things that netting that so sure is yet to me people with backgrounds not just with problems you haven't had but from that graphic that you have experienced and part of that has to be the excitement of getting to know all of these different kinds of people. And that is not a negative thing as long as you use his brothers. Understand people and get through the kinds of people that an example working with the Irish family share I am so glad that you gave that example Tolba.

[00:33:04] That makes me think about in social work the importance of curiosity and you know humbleness or humility about our own expertise or knowledge. We brought hope and optimism. I thought about a lot of shows for the critical social classes in the fall of cancer. So a little version of that I hope that they all felt hope and curiosity because those I believe are the core of being a good social worker that you have to share that hope and vision. When people are feeling very low but even when you have to be curious not think you have the answers but be curious about helping people find their answers and stories about what their that they're serious be. And those embody but

to be curious about what their life has them because if you're not serious then they have the answers. And if we have the answers already we're going to be met and that's the problem. And then when we're working with clients we really need to have that level of curiosity. That's terrific. And you know your article and the work that you Tolba are doing together I think really highlights that point for students. I read the article and in talking to you today it leaves me with a feeling of hope and optimism for the future and reminds me that I'm part of the fighter legacy. And I wish I could have been in the room when you were conducting those interviews originally. But but I could talk to you guys all day about some of these stories are really wonderful and I hadn't heard the one that told her that she said I knew that one respondent who was not allowing her to go forward.

[00:35:00] There are very Tolba Judy I think I've gone to most of the questions but are there any other questions you would like me to ask or a couple of directions you'd like me to go in. Things that maybe happened last month that say something about the question that we analyzed. And I would say that one should collect data and key who acting more and more. You can go back and use these data in so many different ways and you it. I know said earlier that I would have never thought that I would have used these interviews. I was very determined. I did use them in my book which is called the national paranoia which I believe he has myself and you but I just never thought that they would come in handy. But the people speak. And so you have something. I went back to the interviews for many years because I was asked to give talks that this is the anniversary of the social work department in what has been the goal. And I also had cases so I could say something that were in his car. And then lo and behold the person who was very involved with the American national impact. Last year a national association apparently will vote for me if I would please come and give the keynote talk to the meeting and it just happened to me. And so and she wanted me to do a school of social work then. Now and what is going to be great about us and for us in the future.

[00:36:49] And so I went back again and looked at all this material and gave that toxo heard the news when I said that it's just work. It was I work with how things look. So it's a funny kind of lesson. And you know it's like when you're a grandmother which I am and nobody really wants you you wish that you would know 40 or 50 years ago that you're passing on it. That's my message. Well it's a terrific message and I feel privileged to have the opportunity to hear you speak about it and to hear Judy speak about it. And I agree I think there's a lot of hope and optimism that comes from your work. And again I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to talk to you both. Well that is as well a great experience for us. You've been listening to Toba Kerson and Judith McCoyd discuss their analysis of social works role and response to needs over time. I'm in social work Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history our programs and what we do we invite you to visit our Web site at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu.