

NEED FOR MACRO SOCIAL WORKERS

**Global and National Events: The Need for Macro Social Workers**

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SLAS 6013: Qualifying Seminar

Fall 2022

### **Abstract**

This study examines the global consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, gun violence in the United States, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict and how they have impacted the lifestyle of the individual, the family, and the community in terms of psychological, economic, and social havoc. This paper focuses specifically on the need for the social work curriculum to provide social work students with awareness and knowledge of the macro role of social workers. Through policy practice internships, students will be trained in macro issues and acquire the skills needed to be successful. As a result of directly working to support and execute macro-level issues, a goal of minimizing issues at the mezzo and micro areas can hopefully be achieved. The recent events of an unanticipated pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and an increase in everyday gun violence in the U.S. lend credibility to this issue. While these events have targeted individual citizens, they will continue to negatively impact society as a whole. The struggles of psychological, economic, and social issues have been experienced throughout the world. Those that are most vulnerable are often the ones who will lack resources. Therefore, engaging in policy practice utilizing social work at the macro level is one step toward social justice.

*Keywords:* macro social worker, gun violence, pandemic, war, awareness, social justice

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### **Global and National Events: The Need for Macro Social Workers**

Our society has recently faced three major events, COVID-19, recurring gun violence in the United States, and the Ukraine-Russia conflict. All of these lend themselves to the problem statement, which will address the need to bring an awareness of macro social work coursework and experience/internships in the macro area to social work students. This, in turn, can motivate students to choose to work in the macro area. COVID-19, recurring gun violence in the U.S., and the Ukraine-Russia conflict will be examined as they relate to and support the need for more macro social work in policy practices being implemented with the goal of social justice.

Because of its focus on policy change and fighting against unjust government or economic practices, macro social work ultimately builds stronger communities and provides a better quality of life for the people living in these communities. Reisch (2016) noted that macro social work focuses on the big picture and the prevention of societal problems.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U. S. in March 2020, the policy, economic, and social areas of one's routine life were turned into a chaotic state. Individuals were impacted not only without warning but also had no safety or survival networks that they could immediately call upon or that even existed. Such has been the case with the recent Ukraine-Russia conflict, leaving people in a state of fear and survival, as well as the homicidal gun violence in the U.S., which placed communities unexpectedly in a reactionary position for human survival with little or no resources to protect their inner fragility. A worldwide pandemic, needless killing of innocent human beings with AR-15s, and military conflicts are all examples that support the need for social workers at the macro level. These examples all demonstrate that the need for macro social work will continue, but first and

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foremost, to advance this idea for a student, training is needed in the macro area of social work so students gain new skillsets and are aware of employment opportunities in the macro field.

During the pandemic, the vast majority of attention focused on hospital health care, and those workers that provided these services were considered essential for our safety and well-being. However, a social worker's role during the early days of the pandemic received little, if any, mention. Their role behind the scene, especially palliative care social workers, consisted of coordinating video visits between patients and their families. This often necessitated the use of new technology in a timely manner, and since many healthcare workers were called out of retirement, this presented an additional challenge for them. In addition, the child welfare social workers also confronted ethical challenges when the courts barred families from physical visitation, but they found a solution by providing continuity of care via video (Abrams and Dettlaff, 2020).

In March 2020, when the pandemic was just beginning, many agencies did not have the volunteer staff to provide services. Therefore, new sources of funding had to be found quickly. Although these agencies had planned for services in a disaster, the sheer number of people who required services was unsustainable, as well as the manner in which these services had been previously implemented. Often many services that necessitated a referral were lacking clients, such as youth shelters and domestic violence shelters. This was not a consequence of these services not being needed but a consequence of a lack of referrals (Abrams and Dettlaff, 2020). In addition, with students schooled from home, many found themselves without access to the internet, highlighting the negative impact of racial disparities. As of 2017, 12 million children did not have internet in their homes (CBS News,

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2020).

The recent invasion of Ukraine is a major humanitarian and economic crisis. According to Semigina and Gusak (2015), social work was included in the Ukrainian Occupations Classification in 2004. The traditional approach has been for a social worker to solve a client's problem, an example of state paternalism. However, new ideas of empowerment and inclusion by the client are now more than ever necessary as Ukrainians face international displacement. The needs of social work, in the face of this conflict, according to Semigina and Gusak (2015) p.16), are that of "long-term intervention strategies focused on a system-ecological model of social work and community development" (p.16). With Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), the implication for social workers is that of empowering strategies and changing public perceptions towards IDPs, as opposed to a traditional therapeutic paradigm. As a result, macro social workers will be challenged to work with multiple groups such as government agencies, NGOs, and volunteers, who often may be more adept at outreach and crisis intervention. The knowledge of macro social work can lead to an awareness of career options for students to pursue, in turn, lead to advocacy, and "may include revising public policy, challenging unjust regulations, and increasing allocations of funding and resources to support those in need" (Social Work Guide, 2020, "Jobs in Macro Social Work"). In essence, macro social work directly supports social justice.

With the recent increase in mass shootings in the U.S., many are calling this a public health crisis. According to Arp et al. (2017), the fact that the number of Americans killed or injured each year by guns is 114,914, giving credibility to declaring gun violence a public health crisis. Comparatively, in 2013 over 33,000 people died from auto accidents. According to Keefe and Evans (2013), public health social justice work is a framework that

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integrates public health with the values and techniques of social justice. If individuals are involved in decision-making regarding their health, then eliminating health inequity and health disparities which encompasses differences in illness, physical and mental, across race, ethnic, and economically oppressed groups, can be a start to solving gun violence. The public health approach to violence prevention uses multidisciplinary data to address the problem, identify risk and protective factors, and design prevention strategies (CDC, 2022). This public health perspective complements the social work approach by bringing focus to levels of influence from the micro, mezzo, and macro social work practice.

Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of families and communities through the promotion of healthy lifestyles, research for disease and injury prevention and detection, and control of infectious diseases. Overall, public health is concerned with protecting the health of a population, whether it's a local neighborhood, an entire country, or a region of the world (Arp et al., 2017, p. 2).

According to Logan-Greene et al. (2018), there is a relative lack of social work research on gun violence. This is evident in social work professional conferences. For example, in recent meetings of the Society for Social Work and Research, the number of abstracts that contain the words "firearm" or "gun" has been extremely low. Between 2009 and 2016, there were no more than three per year. The number has increased only to six in 2017 and five in 2018. This is yet another indication that research on gun violence by social workers is needed to bring it to the forefront as a public health crisis for real change to happen. Much more social work research about gun violence is needed to address options for solutions.

The main topic that this paper seeks to demonstrate is that there is a need for social workers to have experience in the macro area and offer ways in which that can be achieved. This

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paper examines policy, economic, and psychological themes, and the advocacy coalition, critical race, Karl Marx conflict, and planned behavior theories as part of macro social work. This paper's thesis studies the need for a social work curriculum to offer courses that focus on macro social work by bringing about its awareness through current world events and presenting topics on policy advocacy that address the importance of social policy practice through core social work competencies.

### **Literature Review**

The worldwide coronavirus, an increase in national gun violence, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 are all challenges to societal well-being. Those challenges are most apt to be improved by “macro social workers who investigate the origins, persistence, and impact of social problems and advocate to encourage changes in policies and legislation to better serve vulnerable populations, such as those geared to broadening healthcare access to low-income groups” (Social Work Guide, 2020, “Jobs in Macro Social Work”). The goal of macro social work is to bring about change in policy areas which will positively impact change in human behavior systems. A building block of change in policy is for social workers to undertake professional activities in diverse fields which focus on the formulation and implementation of new policies, as well as suggested changes to current ones (Jiang, 2016). Policy practice and policy advocacy have been identified as prime methods of promoting social justice and engaging social workers in our social reform tradition (Jansson, 2008). Additionally, student social workers must be competent in agenda building, which uses political knowledge and strategies to put forth an issue to garner interest and support and place it on the decision maker's agenda. Students in graduate social work programs may be exposed

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to real-life problems at the micro and mezzo levels, such as poverty or lack of access, but often they are not exposed to the “how to” of engagement in the policy practice such as drafting legislation, lobbying for a policy, and engaging in grassroots community activities.

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2017), many social policy texts developed for social work students argue that (engagement) is critical and that there is an imperative for practitioners to engage in macro/policy practice.

Additional support is affirmed by (Colby, 2018), which supports the social work mission of social justice and human rights. Therefore, social reform is necessary for the policy practice area in organizational settings participating in all governmental levels, including local county/council, state, and federal.

Macro social work involves intervening in large, high-level societal systems. Social workers in the macro area are often focused on engaging with programs, their structural changes, and policy for social justice which affect large groups of people, even across borders. Additional examples of macro social work include lobbying to change a healthcare law, organizing a state-wide activist group, or advocating for large-scale social policy change. Macro social work also generally addresses issues experienced in mezzo or micro social work practice, as well as issues in social work research. Effective macro practice can empower clients by involving them in systemic change.

Those working as macro social workers investigate the origins, persistence, and impact of social problems, such as homelessness or suicide among young people; create and implement social service initiatives to address social issues, including the

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opioid crisis or childhood diabetes; and advocate to encourage changes in policies and legislation to better serve vulnerable populations, such as those geared to broadening healthcare access to low-income groups (Social Work Guide, 2020, “Jobs in Macro Social Work”).

**Figure 1**

*Social Workers Can Be found in Schools, Hospitals, - Micro Level Social Work*

# But what can I do as a social worker?



In 2017 the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Policy Institute observed that bifurcation exists between micro and macro practice, even though the social work

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profession is more than 100 years old (Pawar and Nixon, 2021). In addition, (Pawar and Nixon, 2021) noted,

Students are discouraged from policy placements because they are not perceived to fit with the generalist curriculum or because a clinical license is promoted as the golden ticket to a successful social work career. Students are told that they will have difficulty getting policy jobs and will be paid less in such jobs, even though this might be more myth than reality. Many schools do not offer policy placements, nor do they actively do outreach to identify them. (p.2282)

A new societal awareness of the policies of the government and how they can positively or negatively impact one's life has come about as a result of the recent global pandemic, an increase in gun violence, and the conflict in Ukraine. For example, without clear guidelines, and with political agendas, often those most vulnerable were the victims of the pandemic, such as people in nursing homes. Gun laws that profit corporations over societal well-being have only recently compromised to changes in the law. The conflict in Ukraine has impacted those in the U.S. who cannot afford the high cost of transportation to make significant economic changes. These three events demonstrate that a need for macro social work to change policy and systems is relevant today more than ever before.

Figueira-McDonough (1993) believed that social workers needed to engage in policy practice using legislative advocacy, litigation, social action, and policy analysis if they wanted to pursue social justice. Therefore, they must understand, learn, and work in the policy practice area as a means to pursue social justice. When viewing social justice as a commitment to equal access for all, the typical role of social workers as case managers falls short of this goal. Many years

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later, Saulnier (2008) conducted a study and confirmed that when students receive policy practice training, it results in social workers engaging in policy practice activities beyond graduation. Previous to the study, MSW students reported that they did not plan to be involved in macro practice after graduation. However, students were required to take a class that helped them build skills and learn concepts to be effective in agencies. During this time, they also had the opportunity to analyze, develop and support policies supporting social justice. Implementing these skills in coursework and offering internships has the potential to place macro social work on par with micro social work. Gal and Weiss-Gal (2011) clarified that engagement in policy practice appears to be by proxy with such organizations as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Their study found that social workers from non-profits and government agencies participated only in 13% of committee meetings about diverse social policy and social care issues. Social workers, as members of these organizations, can become directly involved in policy practice. In addition, social workers who are employed by the state have an insider view of policy practice strategies.

The degree to which the environment enables one to influence and be involved in policy practice is an area worthy of discussion. There is very little theorization in the field of policy practice, according to Strier and Feldman (2018). The insights of policy practice by these research findings, however, do not discuss how students can engage in policy practice through learning teaching activities. In addition, the social issues that students are interested in for policy practice remain unclear (Pawar and Nixon, 2021). This may suggest that policy practice internships are an area for further research and discussion.

Therefore, with the contemporary social issues of the pandemic, gun violence, and international conflict, the development of social policy practice in the curriculum of social work

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students seems to be an important component to expand their knowledge and develop skills in macro social work.

As a result of the pandemic, there was an increase in domestic abuse worldwide. Hotlines throughout the world lit up with reports of abuse, and governments were left individually to react to a crisis. According to Taub (2020), the United Nations called for action in response to the worldwide spike in domestic violence. For example, Spain reported a 30% increase. A global plan for this crisis may have helped victims who experienced delays in assistance because the immediate need of the first responders was the pandemic. Creating such a plan could perhaps come from social workers who are interested to work in the macro area working on policy.

The multiple fatal incidents of gun violence in our country cannot be ignored. The ongoing question has been, what is the solution? The same question faced our nation in 1982 about the issue of smoking which became a matter of public health.

In 1982, 33% of Americans smoked. By 1987, 40 states restricted smoking in public places, 33 prohibited it in public conveyances, and 17 banned it in offices and other work sites. More than 800 local antismoking ordinances had been passed, and the federal government restricted smoking in 6,800 federal buildings. Antismoking campaigns by private groups like the American Lung Association and the American Heart Association had accelerated. (Masiakos and Sacks, 2020)

According to McGough et al. (2022), firearms recently became the **number one** cause of death for children in the United States. This surpasses motor vehicle deaths and those caused by other injuries. The U.S., compared to peer nations' firearm deaths, stands alone as the top four causes of mortality and the number one cause of death among children.

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Richardson and Hemenway (2011) stated that children in the U.S. between 0 and 14 years of age were 10 times more likely to be killed by a gun compared to other children in high-income nations. Compared to twenty-three high-income countries, unintentional firearm deaths were 5.2 times higher, 80% of firearm deaths happened in the U.S., 86% of women killed by firearms were women in the U.S., and 87% of all children 0-14 killed by firearms were children in the U.S. In addition, homicide rates in the U.S. were 42.7 times higher than in other countries, homicide rates were 6.9 times higher than other high-income countries, and firearm homicide rates were 22 times higher for males, lending credibility that gun violence is a public health crisis.

Compared to the steady decline in motor vehicle-related deaths and the decline in smoking, firearm-related injuries in children over time have not declined. Masiakos and Sacks (2020) contend that motor vehicle-related deaths and smoking were both presented as public health issues. As a result, these issues had data to support funding allocations for research. Even though the U.S. reports the death toll from the epidemic of gun violence, the secondary physical struggles and psychological trauma faced by survivors are lacking.

Working to portray a public health strategy to prevent gun violence may be a start. If so, macro social workers could be at the forefront, engaging in policy practice that could have important and significant changes in legislation, which would be able to assist in educating the public that curtailing gun violence must be viewed as a public health crisis, similar to vehicle accidents and smoking.

Fleegler et al. (2013) found that the higher rate of firearm fatalities was associated with lax firearm legislation in the South. This regional discrepancy in firearm deaths notes that the South's largest portion of its population lives in distressed geographic areas and violent deaths

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are 52% higher in these areas. In 2005, medical costs of firearm injuries and fatalities had been estimated at \$599 million and \$112 million respectively, while work loss costs were approximately \$40.5 billion. These preventable costs undoubtedly face economically distressed communities.

Tracy et al. (2019) conducted a study with a hypothesis that there was a relationship between a region's level of socioeconomic distress and the incidence of firearm-related events. Gun violence by youth resulting in pediatric firearm-related incidents was predicted to show that distressed communities have greater rates of pediatric gun violence than communities not labeled as distressed. With the Poisson regression analysis, the distressed communities index revealed that adults without a high school diploma, living in poverty, and their median income rate all were high predictors of firearm incidents. According to this study, when these variables present themselves in a community, higher socio-economic distress is related to higher incidents of firearm injury in the home. Conversely, non-distressed communities would present with lower firearm-related incidents.

Data such as this can be used by macro social workers to advocate for substantive changes in the framework of distressed communities. Therefore, providing internships for social work students in distressed communities may very well in the long run be a piece of the solution to reduce gun violence.

Any crisis which happens in the world does not exist in a vacuum. It has ramifications that are explicit and those which are implicit. Some of these ramifications can be addressed immediately, and others may not present themselves until years later. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 is an example of a crisis in which the basic needs of life; food and shelter have been upended and as a result, citizens of Ukraine are now refugees. A crisis such as this

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according to Zaliska et al. (2022) encompass “geopolitical, financial, infrastructural, and health impacts.” Moreover, the health care needs as a result of this crisis, particularly psychological help need social workers now to address systems which will have systematic global outreach. This means working with different levels of government to not only develop policy, but to work on how to implement policy across borders. A question for macro social workers is, is there a way overstretched technical resources in underdeveloped countries can become more efficient for their own population and then lend support to refugees in their country during a crisis? Other issues on the rise due to the invasion of Ukraine, as more women and children leave their homes, are the risks of human trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence. These issues relate to the (NASW) (2017) which states,

Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values, and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice (NASW Code of Ethics: Ethical Standards 6.01 Social Welfare).

First and foremost, content in macro courses can be connected to the social innovation framework. According to Pitt-Catsouphes and Berzin (2015), this framework encompasses the roles and responsibilities of change agents, strategies, and tactics such as participatory 3D modeling, participatory and rapid rural appraisal, and market analysis which can identify opportunities for offering products in the market. Berzin and Pitt-Catsouphes (2015), also suggest that although the social innovation framework often promotes entrepreneurial efforts, there are also risks and limitations with new organizations. The first risk is sustainability with

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new organizations. Whether for-profit or nonprofit, 34 percent survive after 10 years. The second risk is scalability. Even if some organizations are on a path to scalability, it is important to look at the size and scope of social impact. The size and scope of social impact may not expand quickly, thus affecting a limited number of people. The third risk is leadership transition. Skillsets for entrepreneurs and skillsets for those who have day-to-day responsibilities are different. Often entrepreneurs work with other leaders to develop new products, whereas the day-to-day leadership of one person can become vulnerable. This is not to say that the existing organizations do not have value. They just have not found their way to the social innovation table.

Berzin and Pitt-Catsouphes (2015) suggest that existing organizations are guided to intrapreneurship. An idea for a new product would be developed in an existing organization and an existing organization committed to social innovation would nurture the new idea. In this way, an idea becomes the strength of many and is at low risk for sustainability, scalability, and leadership transition. The existing organization already has resources to support social innovation and infrastructure to support sustainability. There is no need to develop new infrastructure, therefore resources and energy can be devoted to the new product. The existing organization also brings value with its expertise on many levels such as working relationships with frontline workers, historical knowledge, and their understanding of social issues. They can also finance the social capital needed for the innovation to work with the other organization.

Pitt-Catsouphes and Berzin (2015) suggest that students explore websites such as Ashoka Fellows which promote each individual as a changemaker and demonstrate the power of social initiatives in action. Participating in real-world social problems students can learn about various

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ideation activities and then present prototype solutions which respond to a social problem using the team approach.

Pitt-Catsouphes and Berzin (2015) also promote specific methods linked to the social innovation cycle for use in teaching macro content. Students are introduced to “developing a market analysis, problem-solving using strategies such as open innovation, crowd-sourcing, and user-led design. In addition, testing components of a creative response in real-world settings with people who are not members of the target population minimizes the exposure that vulnerable populations have to the unintended risk associated with possible program ineffectiveness” (p. 411).

### **Analysis: Themes and Theories**

Macro social work has the potential to help large numbers of individuals avoid the aftermath of larger, community-wide issues altogether. The objective of this literature review has been to broaden one’s perspective on macro social work, support the need for social work students to have internship options in the area of macro social work, and focus on macro social work as a main component of the social work curriculum. When macro social work is emphasized on par with micro and mezzo, it can exemplify how the critical long-range impact of advocacy and policy is necessary for positive social changes. The policy, economic, and psychological themes are components that support high-level issues through macro social work. Work in the macro arena is an opportunity to make an impact on high-level issues that can lead to positively impacting problems at the personal, family, and community levels. Legislation and advocacy groups in the macro social work area may very well be able to avoid the aftermath of larger, community-wide issues altogether.

### **Policy Theme**

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### *Changes to Systems, Communities, and Society*

The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 resulted in a surge in daily living expenses and the pandemic of 2020, which lasted nearly two years, had consumers facing an unprecedented short supply of new cars and daily goods. In addition, how to solve the problem of an increase in mass shootings in the U.S. has divided Americans.

Transformations can take place in social institutions with new policies. There is a need for social work students to have an opportunity to participate in internships in the macro area (Strier and Feldman, 2018). They lend credibility to the need to support social work internships at the macro level. Gal and Weis-Gal (2015) cited cross-national studies which show social workers' activities in policy practice/advocacy or community organizing. They also viewed the activities of social workers as an integral part of their professional activity in diverse fields. These activities tend to be in line with formulating and implementing policies as well as existing policies and making suggestions for changes.

Strier and Feldman (2018) contend that policy practice is viewed as a critical component of radical social work. In addition, Ferguson and Woodward (2009) saw radical social work as a challenge of commitment to unfair and harmful policies. As a result, a neoliberal approach to social work as managerial has led to difficulty for social workers to use approaches to link the individual and their problems to public issues.

Today the practice of policy, utilizing activities such as lobbying, social action, educating policymakers, agenda-setting activities, and media involvement are important skillsets for social workers in light of the recent Roe v. Wade decision and laws to suppress marginalized groups from voting. This calls for a dedicated focus on macro social work in the social work curriculum.

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Strier and Feldman (2018) view policy practice as an avenue to professionalize policy advocacy activities and to legitimize them so that they are seen as part of the social work practice and knowledge base. If students have an opportunity to develop a knowledge base and learn how to implement these policy activities through their social work curriculum, then a raised consciousness about the necessity and importance of macro social work with the goal of changing systems within societal frameworks, hopefully, will occur and can be passed on to colleagues and clients.

Wyers (1991) supported different models of policy practice based on the role of a social worker. For example, one's role may be defined as a change agent and parallel their social work environment, or another role may be a policy expert which reflects their work on legislation.

On the other hand, Figueira-McDonough (1993) supported a model based on different types of policy practice such as legislative advocacy, reform using litigation, social action, and social policy analysis.

### ***Impact of Neo-liberalism on Policy Practice (lobbying, social action, educating policymakers, agenda-setting activities, and media involvement)***

Change, of course, does not happen in a vacuum. As a result, according to Harvey (2005), a neo-liberal state has opportunities for social workers in the policy practice areas due to an overlap of state, market, and civil society boundaries. Harvey (2005) views neoliberalism as a form of politics relating to the economy. Its goal is to bring back the class power of the global economic elite. Spolander et al. (2014) argue that the well-being of individuals happens when they are liberated by engaging in entrepreneurial freedoms and skills in an institution advocating private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

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Wacquant (2012) contends that when poverty became penalized in Western Europe, U.S. politics linked social policy to the penal system. No longer was the state looking after the welfare of those most in need from the market. Instead, those marginalized by the penal system and poverty fell victim to stigma and controls. For example, some who receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) have been required to stand in line with parolees for drug testing to keep this benefit.

As a consequence, class lines are more divided, trust is eroded in the state, and neoliberalism becomes a threat to democracy. Therefore, social workers at the macro level are needed to develop and support legislation with more equitable outcomes for social justice.

There are two reasons for social workers to engage in public policy. First, public assets have been privatized as well as public services and programs. As a result, according to Strier and Feldman (2018), social workers must engage in public policy due to the impact of state withdrawal from social protection. Reisch (2016) contends that as social protection has decreased, target populations have become more impoverished; resulting in growing inequality. Addressing these adverse impacts on clients requires nothing short of policy practice so as to reaffirm one's public responsibility for the well-being of clients and to pressure the neo-liberal state to provide social protection. Secondly, social workers have become dependent on government funds so that the operation of non-profit organizations can provide social services to their clients. Therefore, engaging in policy practice is often necessary to secure government funding with the ultimate goal of organizational survival. For example, many social workers work in non-profit organizations which tend to rely on government funding, and securing funding in a neo-liberal environment necessitates political skills to successfully advocate for the social rights of the marginalized.

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According to Cummins et al. (2010), policy practice is, using social work skills to propose and change policies in order to achieve the goal of social and economic justice. In doing policy practice, social workers apply generalist social work perspectives and skills to make changes in laws, rules, budgets, and policies and in the bodies that create those policies, whether they be local, state, or federal agencies or other decision-making bodies, in the pursuit of the social work mission of social and economic justice. The goal of policy practice in social work is to ensure social and economic justice in the social environment so that all people, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, have opportunities to achieve success for themselves and their families. (p. 2)

The state, on the other hand, often is viewed as a constraint for social workers engaging in public policy. For example, the state seeks to downsize government and at the same time works so its power is expanded in order to impose the market rule. Thus, social workers are challenged to make claims on behalf of their clients because the state is like a moving target always shifting in the policy area (Peck, 2010). The state then becomes a defense mechanism against social claims by pushing back the claims and redirecting them to the market (Crouch, 2014). For example, according to Gal and Weiss-Gal (2014), in response to food insecurity, social workers in Israel asked the government for assistance. Instead of taking responsibility for the problem, the government established a Code of Ethical Conduct that food pantries in the non-profit market had to follow in order to receive government funding. Gal and Weiss-Gal (2014) also contend that to involve social workers in policy practice they will have to view their professional role through a new lens. Their commitment to social justice and change will have to

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be expanded to include agenda setting and policy analysis to develop new policies and oversee their implementation.

A constraint for social workers to engage in policy practice is an agency's risk of losing government funding. The state's pushback for its provision of welfare has led to non-profits that are funded by and dependent on the state (Strier and Feldman, 2018). While this may be an opportunity for policy practice to ensure funding, the dependence on government funding has had the opposite effect, whereby social workers have been limited in their involvement in the policy area. Many social workers refrain from policy practice that challenges the state and may put their organization at risk for funding. Staying connected to state funding becomes necessary to keep an organization active and preserve social workers' jobs. According to Pettijohn and Boris (2013), nearly two-thirds of nonprofits reported having cost-reimbursement contracts (63 percent) and grants (64 percent) with governments. Health and human service organizations are more likely to be affected by reductions in government funding.

According to Gal and Weiss-Gal (2011), social workers in Israel participated in 13% of the deliberations in parliamentary committees about diverse social policy, and two-thirds of them were affiliated with non-profit organizations and local government. Jansson (2008) noted that by virtue of their training, social workers are more aware of social problems and the limitations of the policy. Therefore, they should be able to work with the media or directly with legislators in order to place issues on the public agenda. They can also engage in the analysis of problems, the assessment of policies, and the preparation of policy alternatives as a means of influencing policy-makers.

Weiss-Gal (2008) stated that the person-in-environment (PIE) is a traditional approach in the social work profession with the belief that one's problems are in part connected to economic,

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social, and cultural attributes. Therefore, social workers' knowledge of policy practices, such as legislative action and working with the media can have a positive effect on constructive policy change.

### *The Culture of Marketization and Neo-Liberalism*

Neo-liberalism views marketization as social and political, not natural, but based on an institution's framework (Harvey, 2007). Marketization in neo-liberalism is evident in the delivery of social welfare services which include privatization, contracting out and outsourcing, all of which enable the social and political areas of marketization to exist. For example, marketization can be found in children's social work services in England (Jones, 2015) and in drug treatment services in the U.S. (Schram, 2015), both of which have become political topics of controversy.

Although marketization implies less cost and bureaucracy with more efficiency, neo-liberalism serves the market first. The client becomes less protected with unmet needs. For example, in 2008 in Ireland, an austerity program was implemented with welfare cuts with the goal of restoring growth to the economy (Clarke, 2013). More and more people went into debt and poverty. In addition, child poverty rose from 18 percent in 2008 to almost 29 percent in 2012 (Feldman, 2019). This example demonstrates that undermining the social safety nets presents a need for policy practice activities by social workers in the macro area.

### **Advocacy Coalition Theory and Policy Theme**

The advocacy coalition theory focuses on the belief systems of advocacy coalitions within policy subsystems as the critical vehicle for understanding the role of policy analysis in policy-oriented learning and the effect, in turn, of such learning on changes in governmental programs (Sabatier, 1988). The first premise of the framework suggests that policy-oriented

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learning requires a decade or more, that policy change needs to be viewed as policy subsystems consisting of actors interacting from different agencies, and that policies can be conceptualized in the same way as belief systems. Policy changes according to Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) contend that one formulation/implementation/reformulation cycle will take a decade to assess program success and failure. With respect to COVID-19, gun violence in the U.S., and the invasion of Ukraine, this timeframe makes sense as research is needed to change the perceptions of policy-makers relative to the social and political climate at the time.

The second premise of the framework suggests that policy subsystems consisting of the interaction of people from many different institutions, not an individual institution, is the most useful tool in understanding policy change due to their interest in the policy problem (Sabatier, 1988). For example, policy changes on the issue of gun violence in the U.S. can only make changes to decrease gun violence when both sides of the issue are willing to come together. For this framework to succeed various actors need to work together such as politicians, advocacy coalitions, and institutions, not just the advocates of a policy. Key factors influencing the degree to which a public policy is implemented in cross-organizational settings include inter-organizational trust, resources, communication, and networking.

The third premise of the framework suggests that the criteria by which policies are achieved are the same criteria used to conceptualize belief systems. These criteria are value priorities, perceptions of important casual relationships, and perceptions of world states which encompass the significance of the problem (Wu, 2020). Therefore, it is important to promote students' involvement in policies that express their beliefs for positive fundamental change early on in their education. Sabatier (1988) noted that the extent that one uses their political power is

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correlated with income, social class, and institutions. Consequently, the influence of non-dominant groups will take decades.

Policy subsystems consist of active and latent actors and are a component of the advocacy coalition theory. A group of actors known as policy brokers is concerned with keeping political conflict at an acceptable level and working to find a reasonable solution to the problem, although policy brokers and advocates remain a continuum of each other (Sabatier, 1988). Both are advocating according to their core belief system which is resistant to change, thus explaining why such issues as gun violence and vaccines related to the pandemic tend to remain stable for allies and opponents, often for decades. Advocacy coalition theory has a goal of translating policy core values that are resistant to change and secondary aspects of their belief systems into governmental programs (Sabatier, 1988).

According to Weible et al. (2009), the advocacy coalition theory can be categorized into three paths. The first can be events either external or internal to the subsystems in the environment affecting change to policy such as public opinion or socioeconomic conditions. The response of the policy participants will determine the degree of change. The second path, learning, leads to change when policy participants in or out of the subsystem have their values, knowledge, and strategies (cognitive and behavioral effects) altered. However, learning, rather than resulting in change, more often results in the reinforcement of one's values. The third path, negotiation and cooperation, is one in which adversaries can potentially reach an agreement. Key factors influencing the degree to which a public policy is implemented in cross-organizational settings include inter-organizational trust, resources, communication, and networking.

### **Critical Race Theory and Policy Theme**

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Critical Race Theory (CRT) according to George (2021), critiques how the social construction of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers. CRT also recognizes that race intersects with other identities, including sexuality, gender identity, and others. It can be an approach from which to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways in which race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses. CRT, a social movement, encompasses multiple disciplines that examine how racism coincides with disparities in laws in the United States and seeks to change social structures for racial justice. Understanding what CRT means is an important concept for social workers so that they can address change through policy thus advocating for social justice.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in relation to social work can be found in the culture of poverty. The culture of poverty serves as an umbrella for other subsystems such as mental health challenges, a lack of adequate housing, food insecurity, and a lack of health care primarily within minority communities.

The first step to change is an acknowledgment of CRT by expanding awareness of it to others. The curriculum for social workers is a good time and place for this introduction. For example, with more field placements in the macro social work arena, social work students can have an opportunity to process CRT in their daily fieldwork by keeping journals and self-assessing their awareness of CRT. This, in turn, gives them ideas to pursue as policy as they enter the macro social work field. In support of bringing an awareness of CRT to the social work curriculum, Einbinder (2021), found when “critical race theory” was searched as a keyword or in a title only 20 articles in social work journals had one or more social work authors through summer 2017. These articles explored social work education’s learning environment and clinical

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social work practices. However, they fall short of promoting social justice. Social justice can be facilitated when students can identify institutional and structural barriers to social justice and then learn how to organize them into public policy initiatives for change.

According to Kolivoski et al. (2014), (CRT) provides a framework for examining power structures that maintain racial inequities and developing strategies for action and change. Though social work acknowledges racial disparities and the role of racism when identifying and attempting to ameliorate social problems, the profession has not fully incorporated CRT. An area of practice particularly relevant for CRT in the social work field is access to mental health treatment.

According to Huggins et al. (2020), the attitudes that social work students hold about race and poverty impact the effectiveness of their practice in the field. Results from their study found that MSW students had less favorable attitudes toward poverty than BSW students. In light of this finding, policies that target large issues such as decent housing at affordable prices and healthcare are those that have the ability to move people out of the cycle of poverty.

It is helpful to consider the macro approach to CRT alongside the approach brought to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). According to Mayerson (1992), in 1973 the passage of Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, Section 504, banned discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal funds. Until this time, people with disabilities were excluded from certain places of employment, and mainstream thought was that this was inevitable due to one's disability, whether it be physical or mental. It was not only important for a new policy to be developed but also necessary that the regulations mandated affirmative conduct to remove architectural and communication barriers and provide accommodations such as in the case of push-button doors. Decent affordable housing and healthcare need to become as commonplace

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as everyday facets of the (ADA), 1990, such as push-button doors. This is an example of applying the same sorts of efforts of the ADA to issues of CRT to make systemic changes.

The success of macro social work in the area of accessibility brought about by the ADA and related policy changes points to the value of addressing issues of systemic racism and social injustices through the lens of CRT in the social work curriculum as laying the foundation for making positive social changes in these areas. Addressing these issues from the lens of CRT in the social work curriculum is a necessary step to rectify these social injustices. This example lends support for more awareness and training in the macro area of social work.

In the case of social work policy, mandated affirmative conduct in the public health arena is needed rather than the policy focus on insurance. For example, according to Miller et al. (2017), the United Kingdom's family policy expenditures are directed toward family allowance, parental leave, early childhood education, and child care. They exceed the United States' expenditures nearly 6-fold (4.0% vs 0.7% of GDP). Some suggest that these comparisons highlight the urgent need for United States' policymaking to more actively targeting the social determinants of health, including the upstream social structures that activate and maintain health disparities. More than half of the 650,000 practicing social workers in the United States are employed in health settings and engage in activities across the full range of the policy process, and their work frequently places them in close interaction with the most vulnerable segments of the population, both of which provide natural insights into the design and effectiveness of health policies.

### **Economic Theme**

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic impacts were felt throughout the world. Macro social workers asked questions such as, how can these impacts be

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mitigated, what policies address these impacts, how can policies be implemented in such a crisis, how the economic impacts affect people psychologically, what systems are in place to address shortages, and what can be done about rising food prices? For many people, it was the first time they had experienced empty shelves in the grocery store and rationing of products. According to Rose (2020), at the end of the first quarter of 2020, the GDP of the U.S. saw a reduction of approximately 19 percent.

Lockdown measures and social distancing prevented people from working, consequently reducing the production of goods and limiting services. The global economy was also disrupted by panic buying, hoarding, and the misuse of personal protective equipment (PPE). China, according to Burki (2020), was the main manufacturer of PPE. Many medical providers could not respond adequately to the demand for PPE. This was a global crisis never seen before and supports the need for countries to have in place contingency plans. One way in which to work on such a problem is to have social workers in the macro field working on these issues by developing policy. The World Health Organization Regional Office of Europe (2022) recommended that to meet the demand for 89 million masks a month, 76 million examination gloves, and 1.6 million medical goggles, manufacturing would have to increase by 40 percent. Mask production was greatest in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and accounted for half the global need. The greatest production of gloves was in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. However, due to such a large demand, the logistics of the supply chain were constrained. This was due to a shortage of raw materials, quarantines of workers making PPE, export bans on PPE from some countries, and shipping delays (Burki, 2020). Social workers in the macro arena can be key actors working with international agencies such as the WHO in a global crisis such as this.

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As the pandemic persisted, a rise in gun violence seemed to take its toll on American communities. According to Everytown Research & Policy, “Federal, state, and local governments are spending a combined average of \$35 million each day to deal with the aftermath of gun violence across the country” (“The economic cost of gun violence,” 2022, “Introduction”).

Lifetime costs of gun violence are \$557 billion to include immediate, subsequent, and quality of life lost over the victims’ life spans for the pain and suffering of victims’ families, while the Department of Education has a budget of approximately \$112 billion for pre-school through college, nearly a fifth of what gun violence costs. While gun violence may not be geographically distributed, everyone is paying for it. One example of gun violence was the nation’s failure to prevent the shooting in Uvalde, Texas in May 2022 which resulted in a cost of \$244.2 million and cost taxpayers \$10.2 million. The cost to the U.S. taxpayer is approximately \$273,904 for each gun death, an astronomical cost. In addition to costs to the taxpayer, there are health-care-related costs to employers such as health insurance coverage, disability insurance, and worker’s compensation. The cost to employers is \$534.91 million per year in direct costs related to gun violence. In addition, to fatal gun violence, nonfatal gun injuries cost U.S. taxpayers approximately \$25,150 per person (“The economic cost of gun violence,” 2022, “Costs to Taxpayers”). The aftermath costs of gun violence are enormous including physical therapy, prescriptions, and mental health, all of which sometimes can continue for many years.

History has shown any war has major repercussions for many years to come. Those repercussions often occur in the economy. According to Pereira et al. (2022), inflation has increased globally, prices for oil and gas have sky-rocked to a maximum since 2014, minerals and wheat, and corn prices have caused concern for global food insecurity. Inevitably, military

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conflicts cause crop damage and therefore result in food system infrastructure and supply chain destruction. In addition, military hardware explosions result in wildfires which decrease the harvesting of crops. Ukraine has a type of unique fertile soil called Chernozem, and one-third of the global area where it is found is within Ukraine's borders. Destruction of this soil may create food insecurity at a more accelerated rate than anticipated. Economic issues related to the pandemic, gun violence, and the conflict in Ukraine are topics that macro social workers need to engage in.

### **Class Conflict Theory and Economic Theme**

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased gun violence, and the conflict in Ukraine not only brought about how interconnected the world is but also brought awareness to the social inequalities in society. For many, it was the first time the consumer understood the role that service providers played in maintaining their lives.

According to Fraser and Jaeggi (2018), capitalist production depends on a social order that is institutionalized. Recognizing the importance of class relations can help to explain the current situation of progressive neoliberalism. The social stratum shifted from postindustrial to cognitive, to globalizing capitalism. In its own self-understanding, it was culturally and morally superior to the parochial working-class communities whom those shifts have left behind (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018).

Throughout history, there has been conflict between social classes that have more than social classes that have less (Fenyo, 2011). There will always be those who own the means of production and those who own labor power. According to Prychitko (2002), Marx claimed that capitalism is a struggle between the capitalist class that owns the means of production and the working class. For example, during the pandemic, workers in the service industry, from medical

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personnel to delivery people had to continue to work. It was not until the plight of the service worker came to light, that wages in N.Y. State dramatically rose. Inevitably, when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed, this becomes a vehicle for social change. In the healthcare area, Elbaum (2020) noted that African-Americans tend to make different healthcare choices than white Americans which is attributable to knowledge gaps; another example of social class inequity. In every single state that reported demographic data, African Americans were overrepresented in COVID-19 cases, deaths, or even both. Another example displaying conflict theory can be seen in the delivery of tests. When tests for COVID-19 became available, residents in the wealthy city of Bolinas, California, were the first to receive them free. However, in contrast, in San Quentin State Prison, where African Americans represent a rate five times higher than the general population, a social distancing policy wasn't even developed. In addition, premature black deaths can be linked to a particular zip code having higher rates of pollution and police violence. Class inequity between those who have and those who have not often changed slowly. In essence, these are examples of structural racism.

During the *Black Lives Matter Movement*, Americans watched news media reports showing police officers using violence against African Americans at peaceful demonstrations. Today this is still occurring as a routine event and too many times officers are not held accountable for their actions. According to Jenkins (1984), police officers often violated the *First, Fourth, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments*, denying equal protection and equality by agitating people during peaceful demonstrations. They leveraged their position of power upon those with less power, often minorities, to their advantage. There will always be some who have more than others, and this supports the need for curriculum and internships which support macro social work.

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According to Peak and Evertt (2017), when the mass media shows police brutality as such, it serves as a message that police officers represent the law of the majority group which in turn serves to keep the minority groups in their place. Therefore, conflict theory in the context of police brutality, demonstrates that the minorities or the have-nots are in a constant struggle with the social class of the haves. One group will always be in competition with the other group because of an unequal distribution of power and resources.

The class conflict theory is also apparent in Ukraine as the Russian invasion continues. The World Bank, according to Hanlon (2022) has reported that the Ukrainian economy will decrease by 45 percent in 2022. Coupled with the pandemic, the Ukraine war is a worldwide crisis as Ukraine and Russia provide 40 percent of wheat to the region. This crisis will have far-reaching economic damage across classes around the globe as developing countries already face food shortages. Therefore, in such a crisis macroeconomic policy that can curtail risks and strengthen social safety nets for those in need is a challenge (Hanlon, 2022).

According to Marx (2018),

A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut.

This quote by Marx expresses his view that conflict is inevitable between groups. Those who have more wealth are able to purchase labor and those who have less wealth have labor to live. Therefore, power and conflict control the social order. According to Crossman (2019), when resources are unevenly distributed, society becomes a system of the powerful majority who create an unequal social order. Those without resources are coerced to accept the majority's values and expectations. These conditions of oppression and class conflict are reflected in

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society's social institutions, political structures, and culture. The Ukraine-Russia 2022 conflict is an example of inequality among groups. Not all groups who tried to flee the war were treated with equity.

According to Kim and Sutley (2021), when disasters occur people are affected disproportionately due to socioeconomic conditions that exist and systematic discrimination. They propose the use of the Societally-Informed Optimization of Resource Distribution (SIORD) framework which provides resource distributions for equitable disaster outcomes. This framework may also be useful in disasters such as war to promote equity of resources and social justice. If so, social workers knowledgeable in the macro area can provide and advocate for equity among refugees to gain access to limited resources such as shelter and medical care using this framework.

### **Psychological Theme**

The COVID-19 pandemic, increased gun violence, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine are each a crisis in their own right. However, when all are taken together the psychological toll can be challenging. At the beginning of the pandemic, the option for the public was prevention. For example, people were not gathering at their normal activities but were staying home. As a result, according to Pillay and Barnes (2020), unemployment skyrocketed and fear and panic were affecting our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in a negative manner. Since people were staying at home, those that needed mental health services most likely had no support services. Variables such as age, educational level, and technological proficiency contributed to one's success to participate in telehealth. According to the United Nations (2020), survey data showed that the prevalence of distress ranged from 35 percent to 60 percent. In addition, staying home and social distancing for months brought about an increase in depression and anxiety. The

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pandemic highlighted how social systems such as poverty, inequality, racism, and healthcare access targeted the most vulnerable groups. During this crisis, migrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTI people faced increased stigma, discrimination, and violence.

Social workers in the macro field can do research about inadequate mental health care systems and be involved in social justice for marginalized groups. They can also partner with the psychology field to shape public health policies. Miller et al. (2017), contend that social workers need to be involved in policymaking to ensure equity, fairness, and justice are upheld for a more equitable society.

For the past several years, the media has broadcasted the aftermath of mass shootings at schools. According to Rowhani-Rahbar et al. (2019), one occurred in 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut and one occurred in 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. In 2019, three individuals who survived in Parkland, Florida died by suicide. The sad fact, according to Rowhani-Rahbar et al. (2019) is that regarding the longer-term psychological and emotional toll of mass school shootings among the youth in those schools or the communities in which they live, little is known. Events such as these leave people with a sense of helplessness and highlight the potential long-lasting consequences of gun violence such as anxiety, depression, grief, sleep problems, anger, demoralization, and catastrophic thinking. Rowhani-Rahbar et al. (2019) reviewed 49 articles on independent samples of survivors and members of affected communities in the aftermath of 15 mass shooting incidents which identified prevalence estimates of up to 91% for posttraumatic stress disorder and up to 71% for major depression. Such statistics can develop into a community response to social disruption. Therefore, such mental health issues need to be addressed as part of an overall community health program.

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Longitudinal studies with multiple phases of data collection are needed to examine the trajectories of mass shooting responses that turn into chronic symptoms and their potential risk and protective factors. As of 2019, there are no ongoing National Institutes of Health-funded studies of longer-term effects among the survivors and communities affected by mass shootings, which have occurred (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2019).

The involvement of macro social workers regarding gun violence is a challenge and deserves further study because not only are interventions needed for the community as a whole but according to (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2019), changes are needed in the area of health service delivery as current models address only a minority of the people with symptoms. For example, macro social workers can be involved with a policy that supports the population-based healthcare model. This is a public health approach linking community-level intervention to the delivery of personalized health services. In addition, data is needed which shows mass shootings have long-term consequences on a community in order to develop and test new models of healthcare delivery, specific to this issue because policymakers tend to allocate resources in the immediate aftermath. When this happens, longer health needs receive less attention and funding. Social workers in the macro area working on a policy to prevent such events from occurring would be the most likely actors to engage and support policy changes.

Internationally displaced persons (IDPs) and military people from Ukraine have been traumatized due to recent conflicts. According to Singh et al. (2021), there is a need for community-based programming that helps in social adaptation. These programs need to promote greater awareness, interaction, and understanding among the general public. In this manner using a community-based program can link individuals to formal mental health services. Therefore, decision-makers in charge of program funds also need to be aware of community needs. This can

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be accomplished using program funds to create or support opportunities where IDPs and veterans share their priorities and feedback with policy-makers, media, advocates, and service providers. Macro social workers can work with policymakers to ensure funding is used to develop ongoing comprehensive community outreach campaigns that increase community mental health literacy. Without an advocate at the policy level community recovery may not be prioritized. Macro social workers can also take on the role of providing state representatives and journalists training on how to speak about the psychosocial needs of IDPs.

### **Theory of Planned Behavior and Psychological Theme**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) contends that one's behavioral intention is a predictor of one's behavior. A behavioral intention has three components: (a) one's attitude/belief toward the behavior, (b) subjective norms which is the perceived social pressure one feels to participate in behavior, and (c) perceived behavioral control which is one's belief in their ability to perform an action after accessing what things will be helpful or be a barrier (Joseph et al., 2016). The TPB is relative to those who took the COVID-19 vaccine.

A study by Aldalaykeh et al. (2019) found that people who had a positive attitude toward seeking help during COVID -19 demonstrated a trait of the TPB. They were not hesitant about taking the vaccine for COVID and as could be expected their decision was positively influenced by the social approval they received from others. In addition, when they had the ability to screen themselves they viewed this as a helpful behavior, eliminating a barrier to their health care. It should be noted that the TPB during COVID-19 worked well with those from countries with a collectivist nature. This may have increased the effect of subjective norms on intention. The lessons learned pertaining to TPB during COVID-19 can help healthcare leaders to focus their efforts on improving attitudes toward seeking healthcare, in addition

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to serving as a preventive measure. This can be done through innovative awareness campaigns to increase intent and increase achieving actual behavior.

According to Tracy et al. (2019, p. 2375), the Economic Innovation Group (EIG) found that more of the population in the Southern area of the U.S. lives in distressed communities. In addition, the mortality rates are 25% higher and the number of violent deaths is 52% higher in these distressed communities. The Distressed Communities Index (DCI), an assessment of economic distress, has the following seven indicators related to its zip code:

1. Percentage of adults aged 25 years and older without a high school diploma (or the equivalent).
2. Percentage of habitable housing that is unoccupied.
3. Percentage of adults aged 25 to 64 years not working.
4. Percentage of the population living beneath the poverty line.
5. Median household income as a percentage of the state's median household income.
6. Percent change in the number of jobs.
7. Percent change in the number of business establishments.

If this information is available to policymakers then the three components of the behavioral intention of TPB, one's attitude/belief toward the behavior, subjective norms which is the perceived social pressure one feels to participate in behavior, and perceived behavioral control which is one's belief in their ability to perform an action after accessing what things will be helpful or be a barrier, can be used to reduce gun violence, (Joseph et al., 2016). For example, in one county there were 114 children, the majority of which were male and black, involved in firearm events that required hospitalization. Using the TPB, communities can take steps by

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developing policies to reduce gun violence by decreasing the percentage of the seven components of distressed communities.

Gun violence and resulting suicides can potentially be decreased with the TPB. Gun retailers could provide temporary and voluntary storage of firearms. First, they could be educated about the principle of means safety for suicide prevention, thereby, changing their attitude from one of negativity to understanding how their involvement could be of assistance. Secondly, this action could be viewed as positive for the well-being of others and therefore, a perception that this action is negative by gun enthusiasts would be removed from their decision-making. Thirdly, they would be confident that their mean safety action is in their control (Tung et al., 2019). According to Tung et al. (2019), approaches to encourage gun retailers to offer storage for firearms for suicide prevention showed that their behavioral intentions were a strong predictor of their willingness to volunteer to offer means safety.

Pursuing social work graduate education is related to a number of factors such as the economic market and student interests. Macro social work educators and practitioners both reported, according to Hill et al. (2017, p. 522), “negative perceptions, attitudes, and experiences toward macro social work while in their graduate program.” Graduate social workers with a clinical license encompass 93% of the field (Donaldson et al., 2016). There has been a decline in completed social work dissertations focusing on macro practice (Fogel and Ersing, 2016) as there are faculty few in number interested in and prepared to teach this content. A lack of faculty interested in and prepared to teach macro social work is an example of TPB in the negative sense. With a social media campaign promoted by the college, one’s attitude of non-interest in the macro field can change. In addition, training for faculty such as how to integrate macro content into field experiences can change one’s belief in their ability to teach macro content. Not

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promoting macro social work leaves students not equipped to respond to complex social and policy systems.

### **Ethical Implications**

Social workers at the macro level face ethical implications. It is important to remember that they will be working with policymakers. Often times the priority of funding issues may be dependent on the policymaker's political agenda. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the social worker to educate the policymakers on an issue in the broad sense as to how their decision will affect people in a positive or negative manner. At all times the social worker must stay true to the NASW ethical principles which are service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

From the philosophical perspective, according to Ozlem et al. (2017) questions of "what should be?" and "what should be done?" are addressed, but the questions of "what is going on?" and "what does the current situation tell us?" are not developed and are not clearly understood. This is an opportune time for a social worker to explain the unanswered questions.

Brown et al. (2005) suggest a fair treatment component for consideration as a part of ethics-related communication in an organization. Fair treatment of employees overlaps with ethical behavior. According to Johnson (2005), an ethical leader is influenced by how they relate to understanding the world around them. They work to support the potential of all stakeholders by liberating their abilities in an effort to reach the goals of the organization. In this sense, there are checks and balances for those in power.

Since many researchers believe a crisis such as an economic one is the result of those in power due to mismanagement, misbehavior, or misuse of resources, they propose the use of the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) model to evaluate the behavior of the organization

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This model promotes one's environmental behavior and attitudes, one's social belief that our actions must benefit society, and one's governance belief that an agency promotes best practices and accountability (Cosmin and Florin-Alexandru, 2020). Very often the public hears about corruption and misuse of resources from governmental organizations such as in the case of refugees. In addition, the slow process of passing legislation and a lack of social justice often in the regulations, imply that the use of a fair treatment component and the ESG model may serve those that are most in need. Placing an emphasis on an ethical model can assist everyone to put the needs of others first. The majority of the time when social workers deal with a crisis such as COVID-19, gun violence, and war, their services provide aid to those who are already disenfranchised or marginalized.

The social work curriculum involves fieldwork and takes place at a workplace. Compared to academic classes taken in a classroom setting, fieldwork tends to be informal. According to Papouli (2014), learning is experiential in nature with students gaining knowledge and skills through daily contact with people in a real work setting. As students relate their academic knowledge to their field practice, reflecting critically and ethically is important so they can transfer these skills and understand their role in a professional job.

Most students are placed in field settings that will transfer to working at the micro or mezzo level of social work. Therefore, at a time when social workers are needed more than ever at the macro level, the implication is that placing emphasis on the macro role in the curriculum and providing field placements at the macro level will broaden the experiences of social workers as well as provide them another option for work.

According to Miller et al. (2017), the U.S. spends more on health care than England. However, people in the U.S. have lower scores on health indicators even after differences were

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accounted for in risk behaviors. More money spent on health care does not seem to improve health in the U.S. For example, both countries spend 8% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on public health care. However, the U.S. expends six times less on early childhood education and child care (4.0% vs 0.7% of GDP). Spending more on insurance for health care is an American concept. Although expanding health insurance coverage, increases healthcare access, it falls short of expanding the overall health of a population. The ethical implication is one of health disparity which can be related to COVID-19, gun violence, and war. Social factors such as the importance of the social environment, social relationships, and values can reduce hospital readmissions and improve outcomes. These need to be addressed because the amount of money does not seem to be helping health care outcomes. However, focusing on what matters, that is the social factors do seem to be positive. Therefore, this implies that social workers in the macro area can work with policymakers in the public health area to broaden a health care policy to include not only government programs, but multiple policies which focus on the social environments that improve health. Targeting a broad framework in health care reform has a goal to optimize the relationship between the social environments that can improve health (Miller et al., 2017).

### **Policy Recommendations**

Social work advocates for social justice which encompasses gender, race, ethnicity, identity, age, and sexual orientation. New policy practices call on us to clarify our values as we encounter changes needed in organizations, communities, or policy areas.

In order for students to gain knowledge and skills as well as practice in the macro area, Pawar and Nixon (2020) suggest that the curriculum is structured in such a way that students have the flexibility to learn about policy issues relative to their experiences and needs. Many

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social work texts contend “that it is critical and imperative for social work practitioners to engage in macro/policy practice” (p. 2281).

A second policy recommendation is that social work curriculums offer courses in policy practice. According to Hodge (2021), in the fall 2020 semester, students at the University of Michigan could select the “Policy & Political Social Work Pathway” as an area of study for their Master of Social Work degree. Preceding this change, students interested in policy practice had to also focus on program evaluation because the two areas of study were combined into a single program concentration. Despite the need for more macro social work awareness, fewer than 10% of schools of social work have concentrations that are political in nature. The objective of such a pathway is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to be competitive for jobs in policy and political settings. Learning about theories that support socially just policy practice as well as the skills to engage in policy analysis across various topics can set students up for success in the macro field practice.

A third policy recommendation is that teachers and supervisors in the social work area be trained in issues and concepts related to the macro level. According to Tosch and Jones (2012), few social work students are trained formally in macro-level work including existing workers, social work faculty, and social work supervisors who oversee field placements.

A fourth policy recommendation is that language in the Council on Social Work Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) be changed to include more macro-level language. For example, the core competencies in the (EPAS) focus more on the micro level using language such as achieving client goals, collecting, organizing, assessing client strengths, and interpreting client data (p.1). Therefore, the EPAS could incorporate new language directed at macro-level practice objectives. As a result, students could demonstrate how changing

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organizational culture serves the public better, necessitating the use of macro-level objectives. Keep in mind that when working to change a system, knowing who your client system is, knowing what the problem is within the system that is being addressed, and knowing what strategies will be utilized for change all need to correlate to the core competencies (Tosch and Jones, 2012).

A fifth recommendation is to provide students with field placement offerings to match the quality of the curriculum. Due to the relatively low number of field placement sites in policy settings, this is a challenge. According to Hodge (2020), only 20% of MSW programs, and even fewer BSW programs, across the United States offer politically focused field placements.

According to Donaldson et al. (2014), the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) develops the social work licensing exams that are required by the states. It does not offer a specialized macro exam at the undergraduate or graduate level. Three states (Michigan, Missouri, and Oklahoma) offer advanced macro licenses and one must take the ASWB Advanced Generalist exam for state licensure. The ASWB does not offer any macro exams, but three states offer advanced macro licenses, and as a result, there is confusion.

Starr et al. (1999) contend that students believe that specialization at the macro level might limit their employment possibilities. Rothman (2012) reported that because licensing is geared toward clinical social work, “macro students feel that their employment options will be constrained because they will not be qualified to work in the much larger clinical arena if they are not able to get macro jobs or if they want to switch emphasis” (p. 9). The lack of a licensure option for macro practice has contributed to a lack of macro representation on social work boards. Therefore, a recommendation is for the ASWB to offer a macro exam and a macro representation on social work boards. Thus, increasing interest in social work macro practice.

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### **Summary**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing gun violence, and the Ukraine-Russia conflict, people have been affected inequitably by public policies. Additionally, these events are related to economic and psychological challenges such as higher global oil prices, which ultimately affect the individual and the lack of equitable mental health services. The need for systemic changes through advocacy coalition, critical race theory, and planned behavior theory all have the ability to improve equity by utilizing macro social work principles within a public policy framework.

However, to make progress the ongoing challenge needs to focus on changing attitudes and increasing the little support given to macro social work from universities and faculty. Therefore, the first necessary step is to recruit staff who are competent to teach macro social work and who can supervise students in agencies where students will have the opportunity to analyze and advocate for large communities, such as lobbying to change a healthcare law or organizing a state-wide activist group.

According to Pitt-Castsouphe and Berzin (2015), the next step is to promote social innovation in class as a practice of addressing social issues. Social innovation is a “process of developing an innovation or an output from social innovation such as a change in service delivery processes,” in which planning is viewed as a cycle that is not linear (pp.407-408).

According to the (NASW, 2017) Code of Ethics, the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and the empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.

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The policy theme is critical in developing systemic changes to alter macro systems that do not adequately distribute resources equitably. Knowing the origin of a policy can help an advocacy group develop an effective campaign by asking questions such as, who proposed this policy and what was the intent? Social workers can be change agents by knowing where and how the policy was made in order to focus on the setting and the level where change is needed. Sometimes it may not be the person who needs to change but the environment, institutions, and policies that need to change (Netting et al., 2014). As a result of changing policy to be more inclusive, a positive economic change can be seen such as a decrease in crime and an increase in overall health. Real change happens primarily from the people who strive to follow the six values of social work: service, social justice, dignity and value of the person, importance of relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2017).

As many economies are recovering from the pandemic, other countries in Africa are facing food shortages. Therefore, it is long overdue for social work curriculums to offer macro courses using the social innovation framework. These courses can be in social media to create idea banks, rapid prototyping, open innovation, and beta testing to address creative solutions to these complex problems (Pitt-Castsouphes and Berzin, 2015). Social work students need these new skill sets to work effectively in the macro field.

In the aftermath of COVID-19, gun violence, and the conflict in Ukraine, social workers are finding that funding sources play a large role in providing services for the well-being of others. Often those who have the power, such as legislators, to provide funding have no understanding of the social problems and the needs people face. If changes in organizations, communities, and policy are to occur, then the Advocacy Coalition Theory is well-suited to bring about these changes. How coalitions understand, respond, and interpret global events and

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environmental crises are key to policy changes that support their efforts. Organizations are complex with multiple groups having a stake in what is accomplished and who is served.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), the idea that race is a social construct, can also be a proponent of policy changes. With further research exploring how racism is embedded in legal systems and policies only then can there be more equity in the distribution of resources such as mental health services, health care services, and underfunding of minority schools.

How to decrease gun violence is a controversial issue for Americans. According to Wamser-Nannery (2021), “2020 was a record-breaking year with 43,551 deaths attributed to gun violence in the U.S., with almost 20,000 classified as murder/unintentional death” (p. 1). Gun violence in the U.S. is astounding. According to NBC News (2017), since 1968, more people in the U.S. have died from gun violence than from all of the wars in which the U.S. has participated beginning with the Revolutionary War. This has resulted in an economic burden, with gun-related injuries and mortalities costing the U.S. \$280 billion dollars every year (Shumaker, 2021).

The Theory of Planned Behavior can be influential and utilized to promote changes in public policies. Gun violence, if declared a public health crisis, could look at multiple systems within a community. According to Wamser-Nannery (2021), gun violence needs to be viewed as part of a larger ecological framework. This framework exists on a number of levels such as individual to include demographic, psychological, exposure to stressors, bullying/victimization, and traumatic events, and group level to include family, social, cultural, and community. Finnegan et al. (2014), found that teens whose parents opposed aggression and who used self-control strategies had less aggressive behavior, supporting the Theory of Planned Behavior which may be a useful framework to develop violence prevention programs.

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The Class Conflict Theory is related to the economic theme. According to Hayes (2022), in class conflict theory, those with wealth and power try to suppress the poor and powerless. The dominant class will use economic institutions to maintain inequality among the classes and retain their dominance. Therefore, a war for resources and property such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict is an example of conflict theory. Macro social workers can be key actors in promoting social justice such as developing policies for refugees.

Future research on this topic could include implementing the recommendations in an attempt to provide equity in the distribution of resources to the marginalized. Most importantly, universities can provide students with macro classes on how to develop public policy, organize grass-roots advocacy, and experience large-scale political lobbying. Macro social work is key to changes in the world.

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