Altruistic Exploitation: Orphan Tourism and Global Social Work

Karen Smith Rotabi[1],*, Jini L. Roby[2] and
Kelley McCreery Bunkers[3]

[1]*United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates*
[2]*Brigham Young University, School of Social Work, Provo, Utah, 84602, USA*
[3]*Independent Child Protection Consultant*

*Correspondence to Karen Smith Rotabi, United Arab Emirates University, PO Box 15551, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. E-mail: ksrotabi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Despite the abundant scientific evidence demonstrating the benefits of family-based care for children and the damages brought on by institution-based care, the social work profession continues to endorse and engage in practices that promote the latter. This is particularly true through *orphan tourism* and *orphan volunteerism*— short- and longer-term forms of providing aid to residential facilities caring for children. Using educational tours to orphanages, fundraising and service projects, and academic internships based in such facilities, the profession contributes to the perpetuation of institution-based care and forms of exploitation. Based on an exhaustive review of the global literature and utilising an innovative theoretical framework of 'altruistic exploitation', the authors explore the ironic juxtaposition of benefits and harms associated with orphan tourism to the various stakeholders. Volunteers are often exploited in fulfilling their altruistic motives while at the same time engaging in potential exploitation of the very children they aim to serve. Authors further examine social work implications in the policy, practice and research arenas, and provide examples and recommendations in preventing family separation, promoting family-based alternative care and empowering communities.

Keywords: Study abroad, international learning, ethics, social work, orphans, tourism, exploitation, altruism

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Introduction

Orphan tourism is understood as 'a form of volunteer tourism characterized by travel to [residential care] facilities for children to engage in everyday caregiving' (Richter and Norman, 2010, p. 222) and tends to be short-term. *Orphan volunteerism* focuses on a longer-term commitment to provide direct care of children and/or to provide other services at no cost to the institution. It is not clear what proportion of the 1.6 million international volunteers (Guttentag, 2009; Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008) are constituted of orphan volunteers; however, such trips provide readily available volunteer experiences during holidays and school breaks as well as during the 'gap year', and have risen in popularity in recent years. Social work students are likely to be engaging in these trips in greater proportions than other majors because they tend to be service-oriented and credits are often associated with such experiences through their schools (Inter-Agency Initiative (IAI), 2014).

However, research evidence is overwhelmingly weighed against institution-based care in favour of family-based care; hence, practices that promote and perpetuate institution-based care must be carefully examined. In this paper, we review the entirety of peer-reviewed and 'grey' literature from around the world in order to critically explore the motivations, dynamics, and net gains and potential harm to the volunteers, the children and their families. Since orphan tourism and volunteerism are most prevalent in developing countries, much of the discussion is based in low-income countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Our own considerable observations at close range have also informed the construction of our framework. Our analysis utilises a new hybrid theory, which we have coined 'altruistic exploitation' to capture the ironic juxtaposition of the two concepts—altruistic motivations that often result in the exploitation of the intended beneficiaries. For this paper, we use residential care facility, orphanage and care institution interchangeably to represent facilities in which children are being cared for in a group setting.

Foreign travel, including for volunteer services, has become a form of rite of passage for some people, particularly among university students and volunteers from faith-based communities (IAI, 2014). Incidentally, it has become a social status symbol to post photos and excerpts of engagement with vulnerable populations in social media outlets, spurring aggressive recruitment efforts by the tourism industry. A newly released study by an international consortium of leading child protection agencies, the IAI (2014), found that, out of the twenty-three organisations in the first two pages of a Google search for 'volunteer abroad', twenty of them offered child-care/orphanage opportunities (p. 5). In addition, orphan tourism or volunteerism is often tied to itineraries of tourists.

With this rise in orphan tourism and volunteerism, serious concerns have been raised about the impact of such transnational experiences on the children themselves (IAI, 2014). Despite the potential harm to the children, orphan tourism and volunteerism remain among the most popular forms of 'educational experiences' undertaken by students, especially in the fields of social work and education to gain hands-on experience with children (IAI, 2014). For faculty, social work 'learning trips' and 'field visits' associated with conferences continue to incorporate visits to residential care centres and payment or donation to the administration. Yet, the social work community has engaged in surprisingly little self-reflection, theory development or research on this issue. The purpose of this article is to explore the impact of orphan tourism and volunteerism on the 'beneficiaries', offer a social-work-compatible conceptual framework, and provide suggestions on alternative forms of serving vulnerable children and families.

The growth of orphan volunteerism

Most orphanage-based tourists and volunteers are unaware that 'orphanages' are not filled with 'orphans' according to the conventional understanding of orphans as children who have lost both parents. Studies from different regions consistently demonstrate that 80–90 per cent of children in residential care have at least one living parent (IAI, 2014; Williamson and Greenberg, 2010). Evidence further shows that poverty, alone or combined with other factors such as lack of social services, limited access to health care or education, disability or parental drug and alcohol abuse, is primarily responsible for children's entry into residential care (Bilson and Cox, 2007; Family Health International *et al.*, 2010; Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion *et al.*, 2012; UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, 2010; UNICEF, 2013). Hence, the family situations of children in residential care are vastly different from the conventional view that they are 'orphans' who have no family. This issue has been exacerbated by the global definition of 'orphans' which includes children who have lost one parent ('single orphans') as well as those who have lost both parents ('double orphans') (UNICEF Press Centre, 2015). Global estimates place the number of both types of orphans at approximately 153 million, of which 17.8 million are identified as double orphans (United States Government, 2010). Most single orphans live with their surviving parent, while most double orphans are absorbed into their extended family systems (Roby, 2012).

The most recent global estimates of children living in residential care range between 2.2 and 8 million (Browne, 2009). Data remain elusive due to inconsistent recorded keeping and definitional issues of what is

considered an institution. It is also difficult because of the rapid increase in the number of residential care facilities, many operating without official government licensing or monitoring (Browne, 2009; Pinheiro, 2006). For example, in Uganda, the number of residential care facilities has increased from thirty (Boothby *et al.*, 2012) to approximately 800 in a twenty-year period, but more than 95 per cent of the facilities have not been officially licensed (Riley, 2013). In Ghana, despite a coordinated effort by government and civil society aimed at decreasing reliance on residential care, the overall number of orphanages has increased from ninety-nine to 114 in the past several years and only a small fraction of those facilities are registered.

The IAI (2014) study shows that child-care institutions are established by well-meaning individuals who sincerely believe that children will be 'better off' in institutions rather than in their destitute families, as well as those with opportunistic business motives. Unfortunately, some who start out with the best of intentions fall prey to the profit motive. A business model can often be seen with centres whose aim is to increase income and lower costs. The situation in Siem Reap in Cambodia, near the entry to the world-famous Angkor Wat ruins, illustrates one form of the orphan tourism business. As tourists get close to arriving in Siem Reap on a boat, the captain tells stories about the needy children being cared for at the orphanage in dire need of food and school supplies. As the boat pulls up, the tourists are greeted by twenty-five 'orphans' asking for support. The author, a tourist, explains:

> The good news was that all we had to do was to go to the floating general store, buy some rice or pencils (at 10–20 times the Siem Reap prices) and then drop these off at a nearby waterborne orphanage (Betteridge, 2013, p. 1).

Several boats of tourists arrive each hour throughout the day, each buying more rice and pencils, and providing vast amounts of income to the shop owners and orphanage director.

The business model is manifest in many other forms. In some situations, care centre staff and other community members actively recruit children to maintain their livelihoods. It is not uncommon for founders of facilities to pay parents for placing their children in their institution. A centre director shared with one of the authors recently that, when she first opened up a centre, she had 'too many empty beds' and had to pay another centre to 'buy' their overflow children. Similar transactions have also been reported in Nepal (Punak and Feit, 2014). A recent study in Malawi found that more than 50 per cent of orphanages involved in the study directly recruited children from families (Ministry of Gender, Family and Community Development and UNICEF, 2013). There are noted concerns of 'fake' orphanages in significant tourist areas in Cambodia and Bali being used as income-generating schemes (Butler, 2011; Al Jazeera, 2012).

On one of the authors' recent visits to Africa, one institution had three sponsors for each child, while documentation showed that each sponsor was led to believe that he or she was the sole sponsor for one child. In another centre, the director represented both verbally and in written brochures that she was caring for eighty-five orphaned children, but a short investigation by government officials revealed that there were only twenty-one actual residents of the centre (with no house staff except the director) and the rest of the children were paying students at the boarding school on the same premises. The actual 'orphan' status of the resident children was also questionable, as their records were identical as to the cause (death of both parents) and, during individual interviews, most resident children identified at least one parent still living. Each of the eighty-five children had foreign sponsors who likely had no idea that they were funding a for-profit business for the director. At the same centre, several groups of volunteers were playing with the children and helping in other ways. They were mostly social work or child development students from the USA, many of them returning each summer, and they were excited to share their vision to help the director open another centre in a nearby community to 'help even more children'. Questioned on what they knew of the parental status of the children, all of them expressed surprise with the question: they had all assumed that the children were double orphans with no family.

Orphan tourism and the proliferation of orphanages often appear to be related. In Cambodia, orphan tourism has doubled over the past decade, and there was a 75 per cent increase in the number of orphanages between 2005 and 2010 (Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, Youth Rehabilitation and UNICEF, 2011). A vast, coordinated network seems to drive the orphan tourism, including *tuk-tuk* (motorcycle rickshaw) drivers who scout out tourists and are paid to bring them to orphanages (Hartley, 2015; Higgins, 2012). To maximise fund raising, orphanage directors often intentionally create an environment of deprivation to elicit sympathetic responses from visitors (Friends International, n.d.). Ghana has also become a major destination for orphan tourism, and many believe that the increase in orphanages from ten in 1996 to 148 in 2006 (UNICEF, Child Frontiers, Crescent and Government of Ghana, 2012) is fanned by funds raised via sponsorship and foreign tourists and volunteers (Voelkl, 2012). Sponsoring 'orphaned' children and providing support for operating institutions caring for them have become highly visible means of expressing compassion and generosity—a form of altruism.

Conceptual framework: altruistic exploitation

Research shows that few people volunteer for purely altruistic motives, and personal gains are a necessary component of encouraging

volunteerism and often natural products of service (Broad and Jenkins, 2008; Lyons and Wearing, 2008). However, when those personal gains are sought with little or no regard for the impact on the intended beneficiaries, or at the risk of perpetuating harmful social practices, volunteerism may cross into exploitation. It may also be an expression of imperialistic imposition of 'what is good for them'. Yet, 'academic interest in volunteer tourism remains scant, focused primarily on the identities, behaviors, values, motives and personal development of the volunteers' (Gray and Campbell, 2007, p. 464), with little focus on the impact on the intended beneficiaries (Andereck, 2008; Callahan and Thomas, 2005). Against this backdrop, a conceptual framework of 'altruistic exploitation' is now applied.

Altruism

Altruism is the 'unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others' (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/altruism*). In more academic terms, altruism has been examined along a continuum between two polar ends: focus on the benefit of others as opposed to focus on one's own benefits (Krebs and Van Hesteren, 1994). The closer to the point of serving others, presumably the greater degree of altruism is present. However, this simple model of the volunteer's intent is inadequate in understanding orphan volunteerism; the conceptual framework must be expanded to include the intended versus actual cost/benefit analysis to both the volunteer and the intended beneficiaries.

Individual volunteers may be motivated by a weighing of anticipated costs and benefits to themselves (Söderman and Snead, 2008). They may consider the costs involved in travel, housing and materials. To this, they may add opportunity costs, potential health risks and the impact of leaving loved ones. They may consider the benefits of cross-cultural experiences, enriching their résumés and, most often, fulfilment from serving vulnerable children. However, to date, there is little evidence that they have seriously considered the costs and benefits to their target population. There is almost a universal belief, based on numerous social media reports, that, if their intention is to serve needy children, their actions translate to benefitting the children.

This gap between *intentions* on the part of the actor and the actual *outcome* of their 'altruistic' behaviour is at the core of this article, as altruistic intentions may in fact harm the intended beneficiaries. For example, a mother who makes a large sacrifice to obtain and administer a harmful drug to her child while intending to heal her child's illness sabotages her purpose. Likewise, volunteers who wish to contribute to the well-being of children by their sacrifice may actually be harming the children, as explained in more detail below. Further, altruism is

influenced by the rewards and sanctions of third-party observers, and is therefore socially constructed (Ferh and Rockenbach, 2004). The more positive attention a volunteer may receive from significant others, the more the experience can be construed as being rewarding and altruistic.

Exploitation

One definition of exploitation, *the act of taking unfair advantage of another for one's benefit* (Wertheimer and Zwolinski, 2013), is a generic starting point of discussion. However, two distinct forms of exploitation can be applied to orphan volunteerism: (i) the classic Marxist economic theory (Wertheimer, 1996) and (ii) a more subtle form of psycho-social exploitation to enhance one's social profile or self-image through the use of others.

In the volunteerism context, volunteers may be viewed as being economically exploited through their provision of free labour in lowering overhead and increasing profitability of orphanages. A study in South Asia showed that fourteen out of twenty-two residential care facilities surveyed had volunteer programmes (Herr, 2014). Volunteers were seen as a cost-cutting measure and useful in fundraising (Punaks and Feit, 2014). Some institutions mitigate the economic exploitation through provision of free sleeping space or food to the volunteers, but the cost/benefit ratio would certainly be in the institution's favour in both the short and long terms. While hosting volunteers does not always indicate exploitation, residential care facilities often present a picture of deprivation and scarcity to attract more sympathetic support and free labour (IAI, 2014; Punaks and Feit, 2014). Volunteers also provide material assistance in the form of school supplies, clothing or other necessary items in caring for children (Voelkl, 2012). The long-term value of volunteers is magnified when 'the volunteers return home and continue to support the home through donations, raise support from friends . . . and spread the mission of the organization' (Herr, 2014, p. 53). In can be argued that those who voluntarily provide free labour are not in fact being exploited, since they enter the experience fully aware that they will not be paid in monetary terms. However, when the volunteer does not fully understand his or her role in a possible profit-making scheme, their labour is produced under fraud, changing the nature of the labour from voluntary to involuntary (Banaji, 2003; Strauss, 2012). In this scenario, the volunteer is clearly subjected to labour exploitation, even if the individual does not define the experience as such given the subjective nature of this particular aspect of the work experience. An inexperienced individual may not recognise their own exploitation while having a moving experience interacting with orphaned and vulnerable children.

The second, psycho-social form of exploitation is more nuanced and has only recently been recognised (Snyder, 2010; Wyatt and Bunton, 2012). Sample's (2003) framework of 'exploitation by degradation' posits that exploitation occurs when an individual's inherent value as a human being is ignored in an effort to improve the actor's own situation (p. 57). Volunteers who have a 'need' to serve others can be psychologically exploited by the emotional plea for their service. It is important to note that the individual(s) exploited may, in fact, reap benefits in the short term, but nonetheless the circumstances and vulnerability of those exploited are taken advantage of for personal gain (Danish Council of Ethics, 2013). But the most serious aspect of psycho-social exploitation may be experienced not by the volunteers, but by the children and their families who are the intended beneficiaries.

Altruistic exploitation

The more troubling aspect for the social work community is the subtle form of exploitation engaged in by volunteers without awareness of potential harm in the long run. Children in orphanages are vulnerable to victimisation by degradation (Sample, 2003; Snyder, 2013; Vrousalis, 2011) due to their immediate need for attention from adults. There is a risk of using a vulnerable individual as a commodity for some social gain (Panitch, 2012), as reflected upon by one activist:

> You exploit the people for 'the poor who have nothing', you invest in short-term projects that contribute to long-term problems, you make yourself feel good while leaving those cute little cherubs behind, you come back . . . and show off all of your good deeds to your friends— you're the hero, you're the bleeding heart that 'did something' (Thomas, 2010).

It is a form of exploitation when photographs or stories of vulnerable people are used to enhance the volunteer's image or the tourism company's marketing. Children typically do not understand where and how their images will be shared, and are usually not knowledgeable enough to give informed consent. This is an obvious violation of basic human rights to privacy and dignity, often aided by social construction of orphan volunteerism (Lyons and Wearing, 2008).

The impact of orphan tourism on children, families and communities

The impact of orphan tourism and volunteerism can be viewed at three levels: the child, the family and the community. At the child's level, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General

Assembly, 1989; hereafter 'CRC') extends children the right to grow up in a family environment (Prmbl #6). This instrument has been ratified by 195 member nations (*www.unicef.orgsomalia/media_16037.html*) of the United Nations, including low-income countries, and is to be implemented at the national level. If biological parents are not able to care for their children, extended family or other family care arrangements are to be made. Residential care facilities are to be a temporary and last resort and, even when that is necessary, children should have the right to reunification or reintegration.

The strong mandate for family-based care is grounded in highly reliable scientific evidence suggesting that sustained and long-term attachment is pivotal to a child's cognitive, emotional and social development (Browne, 2009; Nelson *et al.*, 2013). Living in an orphanage can cause lifelong harmful effects to children's cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development (Johnson and Gunnar, 2011; Dobrova-Krol *et al.*, 2008; Nelson *et al.*, 2013; Levin *et al.*, 2014). A substantial evidence base has also demonstrated that the negative impacts are more severe the longer children are in care and the earlier they enter care (Browne, 2009; Bucharest Early Intervention Project, 2009; Sonuga-Barke *et al.*, 2012; National Scientific Council on the Development Child, 2012). Research also shows the detrimental impact that growing up in residential care has on care leavers. Rates of suicide, depression and unemployment are extremely high in young adults who leave residential care (Save the Children, 2009; SOS Children's Villages, 2010; Family Health International *et al.*, 2010).

The unavoidable fact is that orphan volunteerism in its present form, regardless of the most altruistic motivation, contributes to the continuation of residential care, in violation of the child's right to grow up in a family environment. In the short run, volunteers may at least partially be meeting the contact and attachment needs of the children. Due to the low staff-to-children ratio at the residential centres and the tasks to be accomplished by the staff, many such centres rely on volunteers to provide this important need. On the other hand, rapidly formed attachments with children followed by an abrupt abandonment can lead to the child's long-term unwillingness or inability to engage in meaningful attachments and sustainable relationships (Ainsworth, 1985; Bowlby, 1978; Richter and Norman, 2010; Voelkl, 2012). There is also increasing evidence of the risk of physical or sexual abuse as children are entrusted to volunteers who have not undergone a background check (Hilton, 2013; Punaks and Feit, 2014). Multiple cases of sexual abuse by volunteers have been reported, some of them on a widespread and long-term basis (e.g. Global Travel Industry News, 2013).

Orphan tourism jeopardises the human rights of vulnerable parents as well. Under the CRC, parents have the right to be assisted by the state in raising their children and, under the Convention to End All Forms of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), mothers are entitled to raise their children, with assistance when necessary (Holtmaat and Naber, 2011). But lacking the necessary assistance, parents may find care facilities the only means of providing their children with shelter, food and education (Punaks and Feit, 2014). Ironically, there is no guarantee that children in care centres are afforded an education or receive a better education than they can receive in their own communities (e.g. Ministry of Social Affairs *et al.*, 2011).

At the macro level, *orphan tourism* has come under sharp criticism from the development sector (IAI, 2014; Child Safe Network, n.d.; Punaks and Feit, 2014; Richter and Norman, 2010). Among the concerns, volunteers may reduce the proportion of local staff who can make longer-term commitments and care for the children in a culturally competent manner, although the scope of this factor is not well known. These indigenous workers can also serve as a bridge to the resident children who have been cut off from the community. These workers themselves may live in poverty; the loss of paid hours due to displacement (e.g. being sent home because there is free labour available) or even unemployment in the worst scenario (Voelkl, 2012) has a negative effect on their families as well. The presence of institutions also dampens the efforts to strengthen and preserve families, and shifts resources and attention away from family-based alternative care solutions.

The social work mandate: promoting human rights of children and families

Social work ethics and interface with the costs and consequences of globalisation have received considerable attention in social work literature (Gabel and Healy, 2012; Lyons, 2006; Midgley, 2007) with human dignity as a major concern of the profession (IFSW and IASWW, 2004; NASW, 2008). Anti-oppressive practices (Dominelli, 2005) and the avoidance of 'modern colonialism' or neo-colonialism have been emphasised while global engagement has been urged (Nuttman-Shwartz and Berger, 2012; Razack, 2009). The International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Work declarations require involvement of social workers internationally. 'The goals [of these organisations] are to minimize the negative effects of globalization on social problems, prevent the erosion of human rights of excluded and neglected populations and provide support during crises in developing countries' (Nuttman-Schwartz and Berger, 2012, p. 237). In critical discourse, these problems expand conceptions of discrimination and exploitation into global dimensions, serving as a reminder that oppression is distinguished in part by 'exploiting strangers, i.e., other

societies and their people and resources' (Gil, 1998, p. 21). However, specific guidance on 'how to engage' in critical issues like promotion of family-based care and avoidance of orphan volunteerism is lacking in the discourse. It should be recognised that social workers are vulnerable to joining orphan volunteerism efforts due to their commitment to service, social justice and assisting the vulnerable (NASW, 2008). In this section, we provide some suggestions on how the social work profession can engage in working with vulnerable children and their families without perpetuating institution-based care.

Orphan tourism and volunteerism are created and sustained ultimately by demand and supply, out of an interaction between many variables at the macro, mezzo and micro levels. At the larger international level, globalisation has added to greater awareness and social consciousness to participate in humanitarian work, including in response to the plight of orphaned and vulnerable children (IAI, 2014). Lower costs of travel, innovations in travel itineraries, ease of transferring funds and the instant availability of information have also contributed to orphan tourism. These dynamics call attention to issues of economic injustice, in that thousands of dollars are required to transport and accommodate these 'tourists' in a developing country when a fraction of this money could be used to train social workers and potentially move towards reunification or integration of children into family settings. Rather than an experience guided by altruism resulting in exploitation, these resources could be spent alternatively on capacity building in the area of child protection. And advocating for donors and other communities to join this effort can be argued to be a far greater investment in the long run.

At the national level, poverty, high birth rates, fledgling economies and disasters often combine with the lack or insufficiency of child welfare systems, thereby making family-based care a challenge. Governments often find institutions an easy 'solution' to the overwhelming challenge of providing the basic necessities of impoverished children (Williamson and Greenberg, 2010), while assisting families to remain intact can seem a distant luxury. Community-level response mechanisms and their effectiveness in caring for the children are also variables. Add to this the lack of regulations, oversight or minimum standards applied to residential care centres, and a shortage of funding, and this combination can create an environment in which corruption and exploitation play out.

At the family level, families' capacity and decision-making process, lack of access to necessary resources and services, the weakening of the extended family system and, in many regions of the world, conflict, HIV/ AIDS pandemic and work-related migration patterns are direct variables in the decision to send children to institutions (Roby and Eddleman, 2007; Williamson and Greenberg, 2010). Finally, children often have no

voice in placement matters despite the CRC's mandate that they are entitled to express their opinion on such matters (Article 12).

Social work intervention with this vulnerable population must be informed by concepts of human rights, social justice, innovative methods of empowerment over 'charitable' work, evidence-based educational and practice models, and critical discourse on the impact of interfacing with 'client' populations. There should be an emphasis, particularly, on the individual human rights of children, each with a unique history and personality, whose rights to live in a family are being violated (United Nations General Assembly, 1989; IFSW and IASSW, 2004; NASW, 2008). The social work community can and should confront the issues surrounding orphan tourism and volunteerism through policy, programming and research efforts.

On the policy front, social workers in all spheres—whether in public/private practice or in academia—can participate in public awareness campaigns and legislative efforts against these demeaning practices. In programming, social workers can work with government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) actors to monitor the quality of care provided to the children in the institutions (including adult to children ratio and reintegration efforts), and conduct family tracing and reintegration services including case management and referral and monitoring services to ensure the quality of the reunification or placement into family-based care. There is a dire need for research on many fronts—on the well-being of children in institutions and their family backgrounds and resources, the gaps and strengths applicable to their reunification, available resources for identifying and preparing foster and adoptive families, etc.

On the education front, social work students need the opportunity to participate in more community-initiated and sustainable developmental projects (Lough *et al.*, 2012). For example, a social work field practicum programme has provided a variety of social service agency settings for students to observe and participate in programming in India. One field agency supported women who cooked and served midday meals for up to fifty children per day (Barlow, 2007, p. 248). This cross-cultural experience in India provided an opportunity for social work students to interface with children at the neighbourhood level and learn about a family support model of community-based social welfare. Students reported, as a result of this particular programme in India, that 'being white and in a minority was a new and disquieting experience' (Barlow, 2007, p. 248) and this sentiment is often paired with new understandings of poverty and its impact on family and community life. Consciousness raising about race and privilege and consequences of oppression are consistent with social work values and hands-on learning experiences which underscore learning about these critical social justice dimensions of human difference, social opportunity and inequality (Nuttman-Schwartz and

Berger, 2012; Gamble *et al.*, 2007; Rotabi *et al.*, 2006). This particular example of social work student engagement is an alternative to residential care institutions as the location for learning; neighbourhood-level intervention is more consistent with social work values and ethics given concerns about orphan tourism. Other examples include assisting in the establishment of a foster-care programme, conducting research on children and families recently reunified to learn of the benefits and challenges of the process, conducting community-based campaigns on child nutrition and birth registration, conducting case management skills training, teaching parenting skills and many more, which are all targeted to improve child welfare and child protection services while strengthening vulnerable families. Advocating for direct assistance to the families should also be a serious consideration (Child Safe Network, n.d.; Singer, 2002).

Conclusion

In a continuing effort to carry out social workers' responsibilities as global citizens, it is imperative for the discipline to apply concepts of social and economic justice as well as human rights to new and emergent problems including orphan tourism (Lundy and van Wormer, 2007; Reichert, 2003, 2006; Ife and Fiske, 2006; Ife, 2008). Rather than orphan tourism and volunteerism with its negative impact, investment in activities that strengthen vulnerable families, prevent separation of children from their families, support community-based care for vulnerable children, establish family-based alternative care, assist in the reunification and reintegration of children, and conduct research to guide practices are recommended as alternative international social work educational models consistent with social justice and evidence-based social work education.

Currently, there is rapidly emerging, albeit scattered and anecdotal, information about orphan tourism and ethical engagement; recommendations for practice and alternatives are also emerging from a variety of sources (IAI, 2014; Child Safe Network, n.d.; Next Generation Nepal, 2014). The Child Safe Network (n.d.) provides a comprehensive checklist that is helpful for critical assessment of orphan tourism and making informed choices. Because some of these orphan tourism and volunteerism opportunities are actually marketed as a 'social work' experience (Punaks and Feit, 2014), it is essential for the discipline to make a clear response based on our values and ethical practices. First, this requires the profession to hold itself to greater levels of accountability in its own international practices and then to engage in developing the evidence base, practice modalities and policy advocacy.

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