

Book Reviews

Forensic Social Work: Legal Aspects of Professional Practice, Robert L Barker and Douglas M Branson, The Haworth Press, New York, 1993, ISBN: 1-56024-351-1 (h/b); ISBN: 1-56024-352-X (p/b), 139 pp inc index, Price: \$26,95 (h/b); \$19,95 (p/b).

With the democratisation process currently developing all over the world and more recently also in Southern Africa, Mozambique being an excellent current example, we cannot help being amazed at the varied complexity and diversity of the created order. The attempts of governments to unite their people in Governments of National Unity is not just a faddish attempt to respond to the ecological, economic, social and political holocaust that threatens to engulf humankind. Social work at its core attempts to deal with the social problems of humankind and in the struggle we find competing responsibilities that all demand our attention. The problem is more acute for those who sincerely want to do what is right.

One of the competing responsibilities we as social workers encounter is our legal responsibility towards our clients and our organisations. This is what Barker and Branson (1993) write about. For social workers to effectively do their work, they will need to know more about the legal system of their specific countries. Even though the authors wrote the book for the American legal system it will not be difficult to customise the guidelines the book proposes to any local legal system.

It is of the utmost necessity that social workers know and understand their country's legal system, the general procedures and the roles of the various persons involved. *"This knowledge should be based on serious study rather than watching television courtroom dramas..."* Barker and Branson (1993:10). It is necessary for social workers and other professionals in the helping profession to know what is admissible as evidence in a court of law. Workers must know what information to obtain, legally and ethically. In doing this workers can ensure that their testimony in court will be effective and to the benefit of society as a whole.

Other issues Barker and Branson (1993) describe are that a social worker should take cognisance of aspects concerning malpractice, ethics, legal and professional credentials, adjudication processes and procedures, and preparing for litigation. It is a great danger for social workers to assume that social work can function independently of the law. We have to view the work of the social worker within the landscape of the whole. It is then that one gain balance and perspective.

The book is stimulating to read, the contents understandable and easy to follow. It will be a useful book for academics and students in social work. The book is a must for practitioners in the field because of the fact that forensic social work is a new professional speciality.

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