

## Editorial

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*Dear readers,*

*I am pleased to introduce this new issue of Relational Social Work, which brings together six original contributions exploring diverse yet convergent expressions of relationality in social work theory and practice.*

*The first article, authored by Raineri and myself, investigates social workers' attitudes towards older adults, focusing on the sentiment of respect within the helping relationship. Through qualitative analysis, the paper identifies professional stances that promote or hinder mature reciprocity, emphasizing the ethical and relational dimensions at stake in interactions with frail elderly people.*

*The second paper, by Mavuka and colleagues from the University of Zimbabwe, explores the African philosophy of Ubuntu as a foundation for decolonizing humanitarian social work. The article offers a critical re-reading of helping relationships in contexts marked by colonial legacies and proposes Ubuntu as an epistemological and ethical compass capable of restoring relational justice.*

*In the third contribution, Cacopardo (Catholic University, Milan) examines how digitalization is transforming the boundaries of the helping relationship. Drawing on the Relational Social Work paradigm, the paper explores opportunities and risks emerging from digital technologies, particularly their impact on ethics, presence, and relational attunement.*

*The fourth article presents a case study of the Sportello Assistenti Familiari in Reggio Emilia (Italy), analysed by Notari. This qualitative study highlights how professionals support and mediate relationships between family caregivers, migrant care workers, and elderly people, offering practical insights into the relational work at case level that sustains care in domestic settings.*

*Following, the contribution by Grassini (Catholic University, Milan), explores how fathers who have perpetrated intimate partner violence are — or are not — involved in child protection assessments. Based on documentary analysis of social work case files, the article questions conventional understandings of «involvement» and advocates for a more nuanced, relationally grounded approach to assessment.*

*The issue closes with a cross-national perspective. Alaverdyan (Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences) presents a study on the deinstitutionalization of childcare in Armenia, applying a systemic-relational lens. The paper discusses how deinstitutionalization efforts can only be effective when supported by relational infrastructures that sustain children's development within their communities.*

Erickson

**Relational Social Work**

Vol. 9, n. 1, April 2025

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*Together, these articles invite us to reflect on how helping relationships are shaped not only by policies and professional norms, but by ethical positioning, cultural paradigms, and the willingness to engage with others in their uniqueness.*

*I thank all the authors for their valuable contributions to the ongoing dialogue on relational social work.*

*Milan, May 2025*