

activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people. (p. 3)

The Council on Social Work Education's *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (2015) shape and monitor the curriculum of social work programs. The standards outline the importance of social justice to social workers:

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person-in-environment framework, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally. (p. 5)

It is not enough for social workers to work with individuals to help them live with and adapt to injustice or to lessen the effects of injustice on individuals. Social workers must also work to change the unjust and oppressive conditions in society that limit people's ability to live self-determined, satisfying lives.



EP 2,
EP 3a

Barriers to Social Justice

To achieve a more just and equal society, it is necessary to first understand the barriers that stand in the way of social justice. Many barriers are related to the way people treat each other and the way societal institutions treat groups of people. These barriers include prejudice, discrimination, and oppression.

Prejudice is an attitude. It involves judging or disliking groups and individuals based on myths and misconceptions. People can be prejudiced without acting on their feelings. For example, a prejudiced person might be afraid of members of a certain group and not want them to move in next door. But he or she would not do anything to prevent members of this group from buying the house.

Discrimination is an action. Discriminating against people involves treating them differently, usually by denying them something, based on their membership in a group. Examples of discrimination abound. People of color might be pulled out of line and searched more often while going through airport security. A qualified woman may be turned down for a job because she is over 50 years old. In some stores, all African American customers may be followed by a security guard, whereas white clients are not routinely watched.

Oppression is systematic and pervasive mistreatment of people based on their membership in a certain group. Oppression can include differential treatment that is built into institutions and systems as well as instances of violence. It restricts people's opportunities, life chances, beliefs in what they can be, and self-determination (Bell, 1997). The situation of a poor, young African American boy is an example of oppression. He lives in a neighborhood characterized by violence and decay. He goes to a school that has inadequate