
EDITORIAL

The state of youth in South Africa is of grave concern. Just over a third (36.2%) of the 2015 population falls within this age range (15-35 years), with 19.4% falling in the narrower range of 15-24 years (StatsSA, 2014a). South African youth have one of the highest rates of unemployment globally, viz. 37% in 2015 (Graham and Mlatsheni, 2015). When discouraged work-seekers are included, this rises to 45%. Furthermore, 33% of 15-24-year-old young people are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) (ibid.) and 50.7% of 18-24-year-olds were living in poverty in 2011 (StatsSA, 2014b). South Africa has the highest Gini Coefficient in the world – 63.4% in 2011 (World Data Bank, 2016) – indicative of massive income inequality. These challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality concentrate on youth, and particularly on young people in the 18-24-year range.

Unemployment and poverty among youth create a fertile ground for the development of other social challenges. Manganye and Phetlho-Thekisho, for example, note a six-fold increase in offenders serving long-term sentences between 1994 and 2010, suggesting significant increases in serious crimes. Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) note that international studies show youth unemployment to be associated with increased mental health concerns and suicide. HIV continues to spread, though at reduced levels, among young people: in 2014, 8.7% of 15-24-year-olds were living with HIV (StatsSA, 2014a). HIV in turn leads to orphans: in 2012, 19% of all South African children were orphaned (Hall, Meintjes and Sambu, 2014).

Little wonder, then, that we are seeing an increase in anger and frustration among South African youth. While much attention is being given to addressing the vulnerability of children, this support all but disappears at age 18, leaving a large group of young people abandoned by society at large and the social welfare system in particular. In light of this, there is a need for academics to expand their attention to include youth in their research, and particularly those in the transitional age of 15-24.

It is thus fortuitous that this issue of the *Social Work Practitioner-Researcher*, soon to be retitled *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development*, gives particular attention to youth in five of the seven articles. These articles attend to the salient youth-related topics of poverty, social security, family planning and reproductive health, mental health, family support, parental divorce, crime and diversity.

Moodley and Slijper's article, *The Child Support Grant and Young Motherhood: Exploring Correlates of Depressive Symptomology*, is set against the background argument that social security protects female youth from the negative impact of young motherhood on educational and employment outcomes. They found that while the grant was beneficial, family support was a key factor in protecting these young women from depressive symptoms. Thus, an integrated package of social security and social services is required to provide optimal youth well-being outcomes.

Bhuda and Sekudu, in *Abortion and Contraceptives: An Exploratory Study*, explore the challenge of the rise in unplanned pregnancies and consequent increased requests for termination of pregnancy, despite the expanded accessibility of contraceptives. Participants – female youth who had requested a pregnancy termination – demonstrated

mixed knowledge of and attitudes towards contraception, which may have resulted in unplanned pregnancy. Cultural beliefs were reported as a barrier to contraception use. A wide range of reasons for terminating their pregnancies was reported, including financial considerations, number of children they already have and being HIV positive. This study is useful in showing that the mere availability of public health services is not sufficient; education and social development are also necessary.

What Do the True Experts Say? Young Adults' Recommendations for Coping with Parental Divorce, by **Du Plooy and Van Rensburg**, explores the views of youth, whose parents divorced while they were children, on what assisted them in coping with this challenge. Participants generated helpful and practical guidelines for divorcing parents (such as explaining to their children what is happening and reassuring them that it is not their fault) and children experiencing parental divorce (such as distracting themselves by focusing on personal interests or school work, as well as strengthening their relationship with other family members, such as grandparents). These guidelines could assist in buffering children from the negative impacts of marital breakdown.

Reynecke, in *The Benefits of Using Adventure Education to Facilitate Dialogue in Social Work Diversity Training*, focuses on a particular subpopulation of South Africa youth, viz. social work students. He explores the use of adventure activities within the social work curriculum to facilitate student experiential learning about issues of diversity. These activities were found by students to facilitate greater self-awareness of their own attitudes towards diversity and to create a low-threat environment in which to talk openly about diversity.

Perceptions of Offenders and Correctional Officials on Rehabilitation in Maximum Correctional Centres, by **Manganye and Phetlho-Thekisho**, explores the views of both offenders (all of whom fall within the age category of 'youth') and correctional officials on the implementation of rehabilitation programmes. This study is particularly important given the high rates of crime in South Africa, and the commitment to restorative and rehabilitative justice. The article finds both offenders and officials to be knowledgeable about and positive towards the rehabilitation programmes, which appear to be well run. The primary challenge reported by both groups was overcrowding of the prisons, which hindered effective implementation of the programmes.

Mosoma and Spies' article, *Social Workers' Experiences with the South African Policy Manual on Family Preservation Services*, reports on a mixed-methods review of the policy on family preservation services. They identify important gaps in the policy itself, as well as challenges in its implementation by social workers, notably training, resources and workload. This study reinforces the need to give greater attention not only to policy formulation but also implementation.

Twesigye and Kagee's article, *Patients' and Care Providers' Experiences of Stigma Associated with Bipolar I Disorder in Uganda*, is a welcome addition from outside of South Africa. The study qualitatively explores the impact of stigma on individuals diagnosed with Bipolar I disorder. Stigma, emerging from community ignorance, was prevalent and had a subjectively significant impact on help seeking and treatment adherence among these patients. The article is particularly useful in showing the links between micro (the emotions and behaviours of psychiatric patients) levels of intervention, and macro (community

attitudes and interactions), lending support to one of the pillars of social development within the mental health field.

It is hoped that further research will be conducted and published on youth, linking the important themes of poverty, education and employment with a range of other psycho-social themes such as substance abuse, family relationships, gender-based violence and volunteerism.

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