AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: TOWARDS AN AFRO-SENSED PERSPECTIVE

Allucia L. Shokane

orcid.org/0000-0002-2928-1526

University of Venda, Department of Social Work
Allucia.Shokane@univen.ac.za

Mogomme A. Masoga

orcid.org/0000-0001-6515-4236

University of Venda, School of Human and Social Sciences,
 Alpheus.Masoga@univen.ac.za

ABSTRACT

South Africa is a multicultural society with diverse indigenous cultural communities. It has been argued that as Africa enters into a new phase of knowledge development, disciplines like social work are equally asked to rethink their methods and theories to embrace this emerging challenge. The central idea of this article is based on the presumption that social workers should intervene in a culturally-sensed manner, appropriately and seeking to discover uniqueness in local indigenous ways within specific communities. It is contested in this article that the practice of social work, with its specific intervention approach, which uses local specific knowledge, can be a catalyst for social change and transformation. The article calls for a transformed social work education in South Africa that embraces notions and discourses such as decolonisation, indigenisation and Africanisation. Locally collected anecdotes are presented in the discussion. Broadly, the article suggests that indigenous knowledge, which encourages local cultures, and contexts, which integrate culturally-sensitive and Afro-sensed approaches, has the potential for driving a changed social work practice and education.

Keywords: social work practice; indigenous knowledge; intervention; Afro-sensed

INTRODUCTION

This article proposes indigenous knowledge consideration and application through the embodiment of local cultural practices, norms, morals and values, which support human rights. Social work practice should integrate culturally-sensitive and Afro-sensed approaches towards a transformed indigenous-relevant practice. The argument raised in this article is that African indigenous knowledge can be an important tool for the development of social work interventions. Further, this article calls for a transformed social work education in South Africa that embraces notions and discourses such as decolonisation, indigenisation and Africanisation in order in order to be in alignment with the current emerging transformative agenda in South African higher education. Implementing African indigenous knowledge could enhance social work assessment and interventions in Africa. Generally, social workers appreciate the knowledge local people have to solve local problems, but theory and models of practice are often generated in settings outside the communities in which they serve (Mwansa 2011; Ntusi 1995; Olaleye 2013).

Historically, the social work profession in South Africa has been applying Western knowledge models such as those from America, Australia and Britain. However, all these models have been criticised for being unable to deal with the unique issues and cultural characteristics of the majority of Africans (Brock-Utne 2000; Munford and Sanders 2011). Social workers in South Africa are currently practicing in multifaceted situations, therefore it is essential that they be acquainted with indigenous knowledge for the provision of social work services. Thabede (2008) avers that African professionals should know African socio-cultural beliefs in order to appreciate what informs the behaviours of African people. Furthermore, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (2014) uphold that the legacy of colonialism has popularised Western theories and knowledge, while African indigenous knowledge has remained unappreciated, denigrated and dominated by Western theories and knowledge. Indigenous knowledge systems scholars (Lwonga 2009; Masoga and Kaya 2011; Ntuli 1999; Vilakazi 1999) criticise theorists of development for perceiving indigenous (traditional) knowledge as being inefficient, inferior and an obstacle to development.

Western theories have dominated local indigenous knowledge in social work practice for decades. For this case, Ross (2010) and Thabede (2008) point out that by incorporating indigenous knowledge in social work, one will attempt to focus on respectful practices and begin to appreciate the African worldviews. The above-mentioned is affirmed by Dominelli (2004; 2009; 2010; 2012) who asserts that the profession of social work should strive to eschew a neo-colonial mentality, and to develop new theories and innovative forms of practice and research, influencing policymakers at the local, national and global levels.

Noticeably, a new global definition of the social work profession by the IFSW and the IASSW – adopted at its General Assembly in July 2014 at Melbourne, Australia –

also focused on indigenous knowledge and pronounced a long overdue move for the social work profession. The IFSW and IASSW (2014) global definition is as follows:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

The above global definition by the IFSW and IASSW (2014) indicates that the social work profession should endeavour to acknowledge indigenous knowledge as an invaluable tool to enhancing the scientific knowledge of social work. Munford and Sanders (2011, 64) support indigenous approaches in that they "provide practitioners with another perspective on the dimensions of practice". Similarly, Gray, Coates and Hetherington (2008) sustain that social workers working across cultures require understanding and competence in cross-cultural matters. In addition, Dominelli (2012) avows that for social work intervention, which uses inherent strengths, locally specific knowledge can be a catalyst for social change. It is for the reasons mentioned above that the authors claim that social workers should intervene in a culturally appropriate way and should seek to discover uniqueness and indigenous local ways.

Broadly, the article suggests that indigenous knowledge and the integration of culturally sensitive approaches have the potential to drive a changed social work practice. Therefore, this article is organised into how indigenous knowledge can be interfaced with social work, focusing on the characteristics of indigenous knowledge with an emphasis on culture. A cross-cultural perspective as a theoretical framework is presented to understand how indigenous knowledge can be integrated with social work. In addition, the methodological framework applied in conducting the study is presented. Furthermore, findings and discussions will be presented. As a final point, our proposed direction, conclusions and recommendations will be delivered.

INTERFACING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL WORK

It has been previously argued that as Africa enters a new phase of knowledge in this century, it is expected that social work will synthesise indigenous and Western knowledge (Mwansa 2011; Ntusi 1995; Olaleye 2013). Masoga and Kaya (2011) insist that, for many centuries, African communities have developed indigenous knowledge, skills and beliefs, which are then passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. It is for this reason that Ngulube (2003, 21) resolves that indigenous knowledge is "largely tacit, orally communicated, experiential, unique and embedded in the people's heads".

Research in various fields of indigenous knowledge systems has been conducted by various scholars. Lwonga (2009) is one such researcher, who studied the application of

knowledge management approaches and information and communication technologies to manage indigenous knowledge in the agricultural sector in selected districts in Tanzania. In addition, Masoga and Kaya (2011) conducted research on building on the indigenous, the focus of which was to develop an appropriate paradigm for sustainable development in Africa. Masoga (2005), however, researched South Africa specifically, with his focus on indigenous knowledge systems and the obstacles to change. Additionally, Ntuli's (1999) research focused on the missing link between culture and education, where the question of whether or not we were still chasing gods that are not our own was explored. And, finally, Vilakazi's (1999) research on indigenous knowledge focused on the problem of African universities.

Masoga and Kaya (2011) emphasise that indigenous knowledge plays an important role in the lives of the poor and is an integral part of the local ecosystem. However, little research that focuses on local indigenous knowledge, and, in particular, the South African context, has been carried out in the field of social work (Gray, Coates and Hetherington 2008; Thabede 2008). The most readily available studies in social work focus on Australian indigenous people and social work carried out in that context, where most centred around aboriginal tribes (Briskman 2008). The authors motivate that indigenous knowledge is a major asset for many communities in overcoming the struggle for survival, educating them on how to produce food and provide shelter for their families, for example. This deficit in research is thus highly problematic as the many advantages of indigenous knowledge systems are not able to be enjoyed. Osei-Hwedie (1993) validates this, saying that the lack of research by locals has led to continued reliance on Western theories, paradigms and models.

In this regard, the IFSW and the IASSW (2014) advocated that social work should seek to redress the historic Western scientific colonialism and domination by listening to, and learning from, indigenous knowledge around the world. According to Mataira (2002) and Handley et al. (2009), developments in practice have emphasised the importance of validating local stories and knowledge in order to build engaged communities, in the long term, that find strength in utilising their own energy, resources and local talent. In this case, social workers can use their cultural competence as a tool to access indigenous knowledge in specific practice locations. Furthermore, Ngulube (2003) specified that indigenous knowledge is also related to the activities and practices of communities with long histories of close interaction with the natural environment across cultures and geographical spaces.

Significantly, this article attempts to interface indigenous knowledge and social work. This is done through applying the cardinal values of social work and seeing whether they can be interfaced with indigenous knowledge value systems. For instance, what is central to social work is affirming the worth and dignity of individuals, and pursuing and protecting the common good where all people are treated fairly in order to create a just society. The aforementioned is comparable to African indigenous knowledge's Ubuntu – which advocates collective responsibility for one another as a value and philosophy for mutual coexistence and compassion. In pursuit of quality services, social workers

aspire and subscribe to the following ethical values or principles, as stipulated by the South African Council for Social Service Professions:

- Social justice.
- Respect for people's worth, human rights and dignity.
- Competence.
- Integrity.
- Professional responsibility.
- Care and concern for others' well-being.
- Service delivery.

Interestingly, one notes that these value systems are in both indigenous knowledge and social work. In this regard, as Thabede (2008, 235) argues, "an Afrocentric perspective further describes the ethos and the values of Africans. Afrocentric work reorganises the African frame of reference so that the African history, culture and worldview become the context for understanding Africans. An understanding of African clients within their context begins to challenge the privileged status of the European worldview and places them in the centre of their conception of reality." Basically, one denotes key issues from this, namely, the importance of world views, social and cultural spaces, and norms and values in articulating the social practice in the African context better.

FEATURES OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Various characteristics are useful in shaping an understanding of indigenous knowledge. One of the foremost writers on indigenous knowledge, Warren (1990, 1), in a paper prepared for the World Bank, indicates one of the characteristics of indigenous knowledge is that it contains "local knowledge and that is unique to a given culture or society." Succinctly, Maurial (1999) and Warren, Slikkerveer and Titilola (1989) describe the three characteristics of indigenous knowledge as being "local", "holistic" and "oral". Similarly, Masoga (2005) describes the above characteristics of indigenous knowledge as "personal", "oral", "experiential", and "holistic", and emphasises that it is conveyed in "narrative" or "metaphorical language". Moreover, Lwonga (2009) esteems indigenous knowledge as knowledge that is used as the basis for local-level decision-making. This could be used to validate social work interfacing with indigenous knowledge as a basis for decision-making. In addition, Odora-Hoppers (2001, 4) further explicates indigenous knowledge as knowledge that is characterised by its "embeddedness in the cultural web and history of a people including their civilisation and forms the backbone of the social, economic, scientific and technological identity of such a people". It is therefore, essential to understand social work and culture in the context of indigenous knowledge.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL WORK, CULTURE AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Literature indicates that culture is a commonly used concept and remains complex for one to define (Sheafor and Horesji 2006; Thabede 2008). According to Sheafor and Horesji (2006, 172), "culture is a set of interrelated behaviours, beliefs, values, attitudes and practices that is transmitted or communicated from generation to generation." Devore and Schlesinger (1999, 26) enlighten us that the concept of culture revolves around the fact that "people differ in the way they structure their behaviour, in their worldview, in their perspective on the rhythms and patterns of life, and in their concept of the essential nature of the human condition." Culture includes the beliefs, values and knowledge held by a particular society.

Indigenous knowledge, by extension, therefore, is regarded as the unique knowledge that is confined to a particular culture or society (Fernandez 1994). It is for this reason that Vilakazi (1999) sustains that indigenous knowledge is located out there in a particular source: the older, ordinary, uncertificated men and women and traditional healers, especially in rural areas. Thus, social workers are urged to possess appropriate skills and knowledge, which include establishing rapport with the community, adhering to local community protocol, and observing and endeavouring to speak the language to work with the people who often follow cultural beliefs and practices. Furthermore, Thabede (2008) asserts that social work as a profession is a product of culture. The above descriptions of culture appear to be interconnected to indigenous knowledge. Hence, the knowledge about various cultural groups is essential for cultural competence in social work practice.

Social workers interact with many individuals, groups and communities from various cultural backgrounds. Thus, there is a need for social work to build on their cultural competence. The American National Association of Social Workers (NASW 2015) describes cultural competence as a process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds and religions. Social workers in rural areas frequently meet local people with specific indigenous knowledge in their work and practice. Furthermore, the NASW (2015) indicates that cultural competence should acknowledge all forms of diversity, and recognise, affirm, and value individuals, families, and communities, and protect and preserve the worth and dignity of each.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

This article adopts a cross-cultural perspective to incorporate indigenous local knowledge that relates to the interaction and synthesis concerning different cultures. According to Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013), theories provide a framework for critically understanding any phenomenon. Munford and Sanders (2011) support the cultural dimension of social work in order to understand the background context of

people as a significant dimension of social work practice, because social work, as both task and relationship, takes place in specific social and cultural settings. The cross-cultural perspective will enable social workers to apply cultural sensitivity to their practice in being open-minded and non-judgmental. This will further assist in applying the cardinal values of social work, such as acceptance and respect. Nicholas, Rautenbach and Maistry (2010) explain the cross-cultural perspective in the context of being the helper to someone with a different cultural and ethnic background than oneself. This perspective is avowed by Ross (2010) that it can open opportunities for indigenous social work and local approaches of healing and helping.

Indigenous knowledge includes the cultural traditions, values, beliefs and worldviews of local peoples, as being distinguished from Western scientific knowledge. Such local knowledge is the product of indigenous peoples' direct experience of the workings of nature and its relationship with the social world. According to Masoga and Kaya (2011), sharing indigenous knowledge across communities can also enhance cross-cultural understanding and help promote the cultural dimensions of development. Similarly, culture seems to play a crucial role in social work (Gray, Coates and Hetherington 2008).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMING

Qualitative research methodology was followed in this study. An ethnographic and exploratory research design was applied in this research in order to collect locally recorded cases and anecdotes to discuss the main idea of this article. The ethnographic paradigm was suitable to conduct a narrative analysis of the oral data in describing and interpreting the cultural behaviour of participants (Schwandt 2007). The main research question that was raised in this article was to explore the cultural indigenous practices that can be incorporated in social work and other helping professions which facilitate interventions. The research design also relates to both the research question and the theoretical perspective (Creswell 2007). Furthermore, Leedy and Ormond (2001) encourage ethnographic studies when studying a cultural group.

The oral data were obtained from storytelling collected from a group discussion conducted in the Maruleng Municipality, Mopani District of the Limpopo province, using purposive sampling for its convenience to the researchers. According to the Maruleng Integrated Development Plan (IDP) Report (Maruleng Local Municipality 2016), the resources, such as natural resources within the boundaries of the municipal area, are scarce. However, its people possess indigenous knowledge that can offer opportunities for development. It is for the stated reasons that the 15 participants who were chosen to take part in the research study – all of whom were regarded as custodians of indigenous knowledge – were purposively selected to participate in a group discussion. Satisfactory local cases and anecdotes were collected from three key informants, two religious leaders, five traditional leaders regarded as "knowledgeable"

in the community and with expertise on indigenous knowledge, and five social workers who have an understanding of indigenous knowledge. The data were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The transcribed data were analysed qualitatively using qualitative narrative analysis (Bailey and Tilley 2002; Schwandt 2007). This involved the examination of participants' stories identified in interview data. This, according to Leedy and Ormond (2001), is done with the aim of studying the cultural concepts and generating a cultural portrait.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The data collected served to answer the main research exploratory question, namely to find out how an Afro-sensed indigenised approach could be followed in social work practice. The following four themes that emerged from the analysis were

- cultural practices,
- cultural beliefs,
- African marriages and families, and
- the practice of polygamy.

Theme 1: Cultural Practices

The role of indigenous knowledge, specifically on cultural practices in social work is not well documented especially in social work intervention strategies. The first theme that emerged focused on how cultural practices could be incorporated in the intervening of social work. The majority of the participants indicated that they believed in cultural practices. In confirmation, the following sentiment was expressed:

> We believe in cultural beliefs and practices.

The majority of participants indicated that African cultural practice could be incorporated in the interventions carried out in social work. The participants further expressed the following sentiments:

> As Africans, we embrace Ubuntu and communal cultural practices such as rituals and rites practices.

In confirmation, the participants further expressed the following sentiments:

> In our rural community, it is common for people who have problems to start solving problems as a family and assisting each other before reporting to a social worker. (Group discussion)

> We used to practice "Ubuntu" and taking care of each other. (Group discussion)

Ubuntu is an African word for a universal concept. The word originates in southern Africa, has been popularised by Desmond Tutu, and is understood by a segment of educated Westerners to be, as mentioned, akin to human kindness. Thus, Ubuntu is central to community-building. Furthermore, this could include the commonly held social work values and/or principles of cultural sensitivity, non-judgemental attitudes, and acceptance, such as the inherent value of every person, regardless of personal characteristics.

The findings indicated that the people in a rural community would, according to their beliefs and culture, report a matter that they sought intervention for. The reporting and consulting could be done either through a religious or a traditional leader. The participants indicated that community members usually refer family or community matters and problems to social workers as a last resort, that is, once they have exhausted all their options. The participants also indicated that, in the past, social workers were not accessible to the community as they were very far from the community.

Theme 2: Cultural Beliefs

In terms of cultural beliefs and customs, the community members expressed that they practice rituals linked to their cultural belief system, such as worshipping their ancestors. In substantiation, the participants indicated the following: "Re dumela mo badimong", which is literally translated from Sepedi or Northern Sotho as "We believe in our ancestors". According to Hammond-Tooke (1993, 325), ancestors are defined as "the spirits of the dead members of the lineage or clan". In addition, Thabede (2008, 238), enlightens that in the South African culture ancestors are called by different names: "Zulus refer to ancestors as 'amadlozi' or 'amathongo', the Xhosa call ancestors 'izinyanya', the Tsonga call them 'swikwembu', and the Tswana, Pedi and Sotho call them 'badimo'". Furthermore, the Nguni, Tsonga, Sotho and Venda groups in South Africa have a common culture in terms of worshipping the ancestors (Thabede 2008).

In substantiation, the participants have indicated that: "To remember our ancestors does not mean we worship them." The participants further expressed the following sentiment: "There is nothing wrong with remembering our loved ones."

In reinforcing this, the participants indicated that it is their belief that the departed watch over them and are capable of showing them the way. Furthermore, they indicated the following:

> We only remember our ancestors by performing certain rites and rituals, which are depending on one's culture and upon the counsel and guidance from family elders under the supervision of a traditional healer ... This process involves the offering of alcoholic drink, preparing of food and slaughtering of animals to the ancestors departed as tokens of fellowship, hospitality and respect. (Group discussion)

In support of the above views, Mbiti (1990, 9) mentions that African peoples do not feel ashamed to remember the departed members of their family. In this regard, for Mbiti (1990, 9), honouring is a veneration.

The group of participants expressed the following views:

> The church does not stop us from visiting graveyard and remembering our departed; however, this practice usually coincides with Easter holidays, because that is when most Christians celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are Christians, therefore we report our problems to a religious leader. (Group discussion)

The participants also indicated that in their church it is permitted to pray and remember relatives who have departed.

The participants have indicated that various African cultural beliefs, which they observed and understood, can ensure a smooth process of intervening in various social problems in marriages and families. Thus, the social worker should apply values and/ or principles of cultural sensitivity, such as adopting non-judgemental attitudes and acceptance. This should be encompassed by respecting the worth and dignity of people.

Theme 3: African Marriages and Families

Indigenous knowledge also emerged as a theme that could be used in preserving African marriages and families. In applying indigenous knowledge in social work practices, values such as symbiotic relationships, mutual coexistence, communalism, sharing and togetherness (letšema, which originates in the African tradition of volunteering one's labour to community projects) could be applied in the intervention process. One such belief is in the togetherness of families, where one does not marry an individual but actually the whole family. Hence, it is more difficult to get divorced in African indigenous marriages than in white marriages, where divorce and marriage can occur multiple times. In support of the above-mentioned view, the participants have expressed the following sentiments with regard to the practice of African marriages, which social workers, if they understood them, could intervene in a cultural and sensitive manner:

> Ka Sesotho sa rena pele o nyala mosadi uswanetse go ntsha magadi. (Group discussion)

This Sepedi or Northern Sotho saying refers to the practice in the African culture where, before one gets married, one must pay the "bride price". The participants further indicated that this payment of the bride price – which is commonly known as Lobolo in IsiZulu, or Magadi in Sepedi – is determined and agreed on by the parents and elders of both the families of the bride and the groom.

Additionally, Benokraitis (2011) supports the above finding that customary marriages are differentiated in almost all African cultures by the common practice of the payment of Lobolo (in IsiZulu, IsiSwati, IsiXhosa and Xitsonga), as determined by the families of both prospective spouses. In most African families, Lobolo is carefully

planned and negotiated by men (and representatives) from both families (Nkosi 2011, 9). The participants indicated that the payment of iLobola is significant in the African culture as the couple will not be blessed or permitted to live together before it is partly paid or paid in full. The participants further expressed the following: "Ka SePedi go ntsha magadi a go fele", which literally means in Sepedi that "paying Magadi never ends in SePedi African culture". The participants further indicated that if this cultural practice of "go ntsha magadi" (paying the bride price) is not performed, the new family would not be blessed. The participants further indicated the following:

> Certain rituals are performed on the couple before they can live together in order to release blessings on the new family that they are about to start. (Group discussion)

The participants added:

> If the woman dies while staying with a man who did not pay the bride price for her, the husband won't be permitted to bury her and can even be asked to marry the corpse.

The participants indicated that even the children who are from such unions are not really stable and experience difficulties in late adulthood. Once the Lobolo has been agreed upon and paid either partly or in full by the groom or his family to the bride's family, the couple is then expected to undergo certain rituals before being released to live together as husband and wife and start a family of their own. The bride's parents also confirm in writing or by other means that they give consent for their daughter to be taken as a wife, once they are satisfied with the Lobolo agreement. Similarly, the Customary Marriages Act (South Africa 1998) also observes the prerequisite of paying Lobolo or bride price before allowing the customary marriage to be registered with the Department of Home Affairs as a legal marriage. Furthermore, in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa 1996), these marriages are currently equal in terms of status to other types of marriages, Christian marriages specifically.

The Bill of Rights recognises the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities to enjoy and practice their culture. Furthermore, Hammond-Tooke (1993) also supports that all African societies have some belief in a supernatural being, espouse a belief in ancestors, adhere to the custom of a bride living at the home of her husband's father, advocate polygamous marriages, have prohibitions on mating with close kin, adopt the incest taboo, and have a universal sense of dependence on the existence of a supreme supernatural being. Therefore, an understanding of African cultural marriage practices needs to be incorporated into social work practices before counselling services can be provided to the couple and the family.

Theme 4: Practice of Polygamy

The practice of polygamy emerged in the findings as an African cultural practice that needs to be understood in interventions through various cultures. Polygamy is recognised

as a practice of marrying more than one spouse (Benokraitis 2011). The participants indicated the following:

> In our culture, polygamy is accepted, not this "vat en sit" (cohabitation) that we observe these days. (Group discussion)

This view is similar to the research conducted by Masoga and Shokane (2016, 2) that, "In most African cultures, in particular, sub-Saharan Africa, it has been a tradition that a man is allowed to marry more than one wife as long as he follows specified customary requirements."

The majority of the participants indicated that they concurred with the participant quoted below:

> The practice of polygamy was seen as an unselfish way of meeting the needs of as many people (women in particular) as possible without neglecting others.

The participants then elaborated on polygamy, making the following statements:

> These days, the women in their community do not allow the men to practice polygamy officially; as a result the men continue to engage in external affairs without the knowledge of the legal wife, which constitutes adultery and often creates problems in the family home. Before, the wife would give permission to her husband to take another wife, and even choose one for him. (Group discussion)

This practice of polygamy was done to ensure a continuation of generational multiplication of clans.

This is further supported by the fact that this practice ensured there is always someone to carry a family name, especially if the male children were born out of such unions. Ayisi (1979) asserts that marriage is generally seen to serve the purpose of procreation and the passing on of one's name from one generation to the next.

The participants indicated the following:

> Polygamy was also suitable in solving cases such as infertility where a married couple was unable to conceive, then the family elders would suggest that the male marry another wife. However, these days there are no alternatives – couples either separate or divorce. (Group discussion)

In analysing the above views, it is clear that the African people have various cultural beliefs and follow traditional practices that incorporate various indigenous knowledge systems that can be used in solving the problems they face. Applying indigenous knowledge in social work practice could also be beneficial to preserving the unity of marriages and families. The function of social work also strives for the protection, promotion and preservation of families, and endeavours to prevent problems and care for people. It is affirmed by Thabede (2008, 238) that the African people have long incorporated indigenous knowledge systems in dealing with their problems, such as,

"taking a particular problem to church, to the ancestors, to the helping professional and to traditional healers at the same time." Having a thorough understanding of the African traditions of marriage and family is essential in order for social work to intervene properly.

Tembo (1988) professes that the rejection of the traditional African family structure was as a result of it having been subjected to the European colonial cultural bias. Furthermore, he contends that Eurocentrism did not treat polygamy, African marriages, the extended family, the paying of Lobola and any other of its "eccentricities" – which were regarded as such because they were different from European customs – as social phenomena that were legitimate and workable in an indigenous African environment. Instead, colonialism saw them as "curiosities" that were to succumb to conforming to the superior European monogamous marriage values (Asante 1998; Tembo 1988). This background could provide the social worker with tools for thinking about a problem or need while intervening with families. In this instance, the social worker could integrate African values with those of social work, such as the right to self-determination, which includes understanding the right of that person to make his/her own life choices, for example, whether to be in a polygamous relationship or marriage. The dignity and worth of each person should always be respected.

CONCLUSION

Any development agenda should be informed by a particular approach to development and shaped by an overarching philosophical or conceptual framework that is required (Gumede 2016). The point of departure of this article is that social workers need to consider various African cultures and indigenous knowledge systems in terms of beliefs and practices. This should include studying and understanding various beliefs of the African culture, such as the belief in God, reverence for ancestors, belief in witchcraft and traditional healing, and the practice of polygamy. African indigenous local knowledge is much more prevalent in rural areas, where social workers practice. Therefore, the incorporation and acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge in social work will promote cultural competence in the discipline of social work.

According to Cross et al. (1989, 1), "cultural competence is defined as a system of care that acknowledges and incorporates the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs." Furthermore, Stewart (2006) asserts that cultural competence extends the notions of cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness, which implies both action and accountability. The incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems will support social workers in their endeavours to practice and intervene appropriately. Boyle et al. (2006) present a discourse on cultural and diversity issues that could be beneficial for social workers practicing in rural areas to be culturally competent and to

value diversity in local indigenous knowledge. According to Ruwhiu (2009), applying the indigenous approaches will assist the social work profession to be able to link a client's current experience to historical contexts (and key family and community events), and this is likely to be of central importance in helping the relationship. Scholars such as Jani, Ortiz and Aranda (2008) argue that cultural competency in social work is an ethical mandate and has the potential for increasing the effectiveness of interventions by integrating the clients' unique cultural assets.

The competent social work practitioner strives to work within a client's cultural context. This encompasses possessing sufficient capacity and skills to engage with people from various backgrounds. It is prominent for culturally competent or culturally grounded social work to incorporate culturally based values, norms and diverse ways of knowing (Morano and Bravo 2002). The need for language competency of the social worker while working in cultural diverse environments is essential for social work practice. Thus, social workers in rural areas are expected to communicate in the local languages. The use of language is also important to culture and it is difficult to preserve a culture without the upholding of language, since every language contains beliefs, worldviews and concepts. The South African languages are particularly important to African cultures as the language is a part of the foundations of their cultures. For instance, in South Africa there are 11 official languages, which are Afrikaans, English, IsiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, IsiSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu, which are closely related to the ethnic groups and culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The article points out that the knowledge base of the social work education and helping professions is characterised by a European-American cultural hegemony that is adopted from the existential experiences, paradigms and theories that have emerged from Western intellectual history and thought (Schiele 2000). It is for the stated reasons that the authors lobby and advocate for a discourse to embrace indigenisation by modifying Western social work models to suit the African context that supports and promotes the culture of human rights. In addition, the teaching of social work requires incorporating local indigenous knowledge systems, through applying cultural sensitivity, reflecting the needs of local people. Masoga (2005) supports the notion that indigenous knowledge could provide the basis for problem-solving strategies for local communities, especially amongst the rural populace and urban poor.

Social work educators should equip social work students to apply social service models and theoretical frameworks, such as asset- and strengths-based, and resilience community development that are relevant to local cultures, and to enhance contexts and incorporate indigenous knowledge in social work education. The suggested social service models and theoretical frameworks should be participatory in involving the communities to connect the local problems, as identified by local communities themselves and/or

local governments, because they know their own problems and, therefore, have the ability to solve them. The authors also acknowledged that the suggested interventions may be outside the scope of social work, and so these may need to be appropriately referred to other service providers, such as faith healers, traditional healers and diviners.

However, social work educators, professionals and other helping professionals should understand the dynamics of differences in local indigenous knowledge systems in terms of values, practices, taboos and customs. It is also necessary for social work students to assess the clients' needs and strengths in developing an appropriate strategy for them. Social work educators are, therefore, required to be socio-culturally sensitive and to demonstrate the relevant knowledge and skills for effective education. For this reason, indigenous local knowledge will enable social work students to assess and intervene appropriately. The integrated approaches, such as having and utilising local indigenous knowledge, should be implemented in the education and practice of social work. This implies that local and cultural approaches should be conducted together with the community in the field, as equals, in order to ensure the co-production of knowledge.

This article concludes that indigenous local knowledge is an asset for social work education and other social science professionals, through incorporating culturally sensitive practices, especially in a culturally diverse country like South Africa. Furthermore, cultural competence can provide access to indigenous knowledge systems that can enhance social work education.

REFERENCES

Asante, M. K. 1998. *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Ayisi, E. O. 1979. *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture*. London: Heinemann.

Bailey, P. H., and S. Tilley. 2002. "Storytelling and the Interpretation of Meaning in Qualitative Research." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 38 (6): 574–583. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2000.02224.x

Benokraitis, N. J. 2011. *Marriages and Families: Changes, Choices and Constraints*. 5th ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Bless, C., C. Higson-Smith, and S. L. Sithole. 2013. *Fundamentals of Social Research Methods: An African Perspective*. Cape Town: Juta.

Boyle, S. W., G. H. Hull, J. H. Mather, L. L. Smith, and O. W. Farley. 2006. *Direct Practice in Social Work*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Briskman, L. 2008. "Decolonizing Social Work in Australia: Prospect or Illusion." In *Indigenous Social Work Around the World towards Culturally Relevant Education and Practice*, edited by M. Gray, M. J. Coates, and M. Yellow Bird, 83–93. Surrey: MPG Books Ltd.

Brock-Utne, B. 2000. *Who's Education for All: Recolonization of the African Mind*. New York: Falmer Press.

Creswell, J. W. 2007. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among the Five Approaches*. London: Sage.

Cross, T., B. Bazron, K. Dennis, and M. Isaacs. 1989. *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care*, Volume 1. Washington D.C: Center for Child Health and Mental Health Policy, Georgetown University Child Development Center.

Devore, W., and E. Schlesinger. 1999. *Ethnic-Sensitive Social Work Practice*. 5th ed. Nedham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.

Dominelli, L. 2004. *Social Work: Theory and Practice in a Changing World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dominelli, L. 2009. *Social Work in a Globalising World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dominelli, L. 2010. *Globalisation, Contemporary Challenges and Social Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dominelli, L. 2012. *Green Social Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fernandez, M. E. 1994. "Gender and Indigenous Knowledge." *Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor* 2:6–7.

Gray, M., J. Coates, and T. Hetherington. 2008. "Hearing Indigenous and Local Voices in Mainstream Social Work." In *Indigenous Social Work around the World: Towards Culturally Relevant Education and Practice*, edited by M. Gray, J. Coates, and M. Yellow Bird, 257–269. Surrey: MPG Books Ltd.

Gumede, V. 2016. "Towards a Better Socio-Economic Development Approach for Africa's Renewal." *Africa Insight* 46 (1): 89–105.

Hammond-Tooke, W. D. 1993. *The Roots of Black South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Handley, K., S. Horn, R. Kaipuke, B. Maden, E. Maden, B. Stuckey, R. Munford, and J. Sanders. 2009. *The Spinafex Effect: A Theory of Change.* The Families Commission: Wellington.

IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) and the IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work). 2014. "Global Definition of Social Work." (http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/ (accessed 30 October 2016).

Jani, J. S., L. Ortiz, and M. P. Aranda. 2008. "Latino Outcome Studies in Social Work: A Review of the Literature." *Research on Social Work Practice* 19:179–194. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731508315974

Leedy, P. D., and J. E. Ormond. 2001. *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. 7th ed. New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Lwonga, E. 2009. "Application of Knowledge Management Approaches and Information and Communication Technologies to Manage Indigenous Knowledge in the Agricultural Sector in Selected Districts in Tanzania." Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Maruleng Local Municipality. 2016. "Integrated Development Plan (IDP) Report 2011-2016." Hoedspruit: Maruleng Municipality.

Masoga, M. A. 2005. "South African Research in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Challenges for Change." *Indilinga* 4 (1): 15–29.

Masoga, M. A., and H. Kaya. 2011. "Building on the Indigenous: An Appropriate Paradigm for Sustainable Development." In *Africa in African Philosophy and the Future of Africa*, edited by G. Walmsley, 154–169 Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

Masoga, M. A., and A. L. Shokane. 2016. "Women in Polygynous Marriages and African Initiated Churches: Selected Narratives in Greater Tzaneen, South Africa." *Agenda* 30 (2): 1–11.

Mataira, P. J. 2002. "Treaty Partnering: Establishment of a Charter for Maori Community-based Programmes." *Te Komako, Social Work Review* xiv (2): 5–7.

Maurial, M. 1999. "Indigenous Knowledge and Schooling: A Continuum between Conflict and Dialogue." In *What is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy*, edited by L. M. Semali and J. L. Kincheloe, 59–77. New York: Falmer Press.

Mbiti, J. S. 1990. *African Religions and the Roots of Black South Africa*. Heinemann: Johannesburg.

Morano, C. L., and M. Bravo. 2002. "A Psychoeducational Model for Hispanic Alzheimer's Disease Caregivers." *The Gerontologist* 42:122–126. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/42.1.122

Munford, R., and J. Sanders. 2011. "Embracing the Diversity of Practice: Indigenous Knowledge and Mainstream Social Work Practice." *Journal of Social Work Practice* 25 (1): 63–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2010.532867

Mwansa, L. 2011. "Social Work Education in Africa: Whence and Whither?" *Social Work Education* 30 (1): 4–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615471003753148

NASW (National Association of Social Workers). 2015. "Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice." http://naswil.org/news/chapter-news/featured/the-importance-of-cultural-competence-in-social-work-practice/ (accessed 2 February 2017).

Ngulube, P. 2003. "Using the SECI Knowledge Management Model and Other Tools to Communicate and Manage Tacit Indigenous Knowledge." *Innovation* 21:21–30.

Nicholas, L., J. Rautenbach, and M. Maistry. 2010. *Introduction to Social Work*. Cape Town: Juta.

Nkosi, S. 2011. "Lobola: Black Students' Perceptions of its Role on Gender Power Dynamics." Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.

Ntuli, P. 1999. "The Missing Link between Culture and Education: Are we Still Chasing Gods that are Not Our Own?" In *African Renaissance*, edited by M. W. Makgoba, 184–199. Cape Town: Mafube-Tafelberg.

Ntusi, T. 1995. "South Africa." In *International Handbook on Social Work Education*, edited by T. D. Watts, D. Elliot, and N. S. Mayadas, 261–279. Westport, Connecticut: Green Wood Press.

Odora-Hoppers, C. 2001. *Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems: Towards a Conceptual and Methodological Framework*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

Olaleye, Y. L. 2013. "Indigenous Cultural Practices as Precursors to Social Work Education in Nigeria." *Life Center for Psychological Studies/Services* 21 (2): 106–112.

Osei-Hwedie, K. 1993. "The Challenge of Social Work in Africa: Starting the Indigenization Process." *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 8 (1): 1–30.

Ross, E. 2010. "Inaugural Lecture: African Spirituality, Ethics and Traditional Healing: Implications for Indigenous African Social Work Education and Practice." *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law* 3 (1): 44–51.

Ruwhiu, L. 2009. "Indigenous Issues in Aotearoa New Zealand." In *Social Work: Contexts and Practice*, edited by M. Connolly and L. Harms, 107–120. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Schiele, J. H. 2000. *Human Services and the Afrocentric Paradigm*. New York: The Haworth Press.

Schwandt, T. A. 2007. *The Dictionary of Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oakes, Sage.

Sheafor, B., and C. R. Horesji. 2006. *Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice*. 7th ed. Boston: Pearson.

South Africa. 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

South Africa. 1998. *Customary Marriages Act (Act No. 120 of 1998)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Stewart, S. 2006. *Cultural Competence in Health Care*. Parramatta, NSW: Diversity Health Institute.

Tembo, M. S. 1988. *The Traditional African Family*. Virginia: Bridgewater College.

Thabede, D. G. 2008. "The African Worldview as the Basis of Practice in the Helping Professions." *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 44:233–245.

Vilakazi, H. W. 1999. "The Problem of African Universities." In *African Renaissance*, edited by M. W. Makgoba, 200–209. Cape Town: Mafube-Tafelberg.

Warren, D. M. 1990. "Using Indigenous Knowledge in Agricultural Development." World Bank Discussion Paper 127. Washington DC: World Bank.

Warren, D. M., J. Slikkerveer, and S. Titilola. 1989. "Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Implications for Agriculture and International Development." In *Studies in Technology and Social Change, No. 11*. Ames, Iowa: Technology and Social Change Program, Iowa State University.