

EDITORIAL JULY 2017

The social work community has recently participated in an international conference, hosted in Johannesburg, South Africa, themed “Rethinking social work in Africa: Decoloniality and indigenous knowledge in education and practice”. The conference, which was attended by delegates from South Africa and elsewhere in Africa, and also from countries in other parts of the world, and which included academics, practitioners, policymakers and students, provided a valuable platform for critical engagement on the relevance of social work in a postcolonial society. A few hundred resolutions were proposed by conference delegates to refocus social work education and practice on the local and contemporary context.

One of the recurring needs identified in the conference was for local literature that informs and guides indigenous and decolonised social work practice. This journal, together with *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, provides an important forum to meet such a need. The *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development* is committed to fostering research that has significant and cutting-edge relevance to an emerging understanding of social work practice. Prospective authors are thus encouraged to use this journal as a platform not merely to report on research done, but to intensify our insight into indigenous social issues and solutions.

This issue of the *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development* covers three broad themes: social work education, elucidation of social issues, and evaluation of practice.

Smit focuses on an important aspect of social work education, namely the development of group work competencies in undergraduate students. She rightly notes that group work is an underutilised method of social work, which is unfortunate given its potential alignment with indigenous methods of self-help. In this article, she investigates second-year students’ experiences of role-playing group work in the classroom, as preparation for them moving into the field to practice group work with real group members.

Four papers deal with contemporary social issues. First, **Warria** concentrates on the issue of the social construction of masculinity, which is highly salient in patriarchal South Africa. She notes that many notions of masculinity impede men’s willingness to seek help when facing ill health, resulting in an increased mortality among young men. She argues for a reconstruction of masculinity in ways that are health-enhancing. Second, **Mbhele and George** investigate adolescent suicidal risk, which has become

an increasing concern nationally. They investigate the potential of parental employment to act as a protective factor in the relationship between stressful life exposure and suicide risk. While the latter relationship is confirmed in their research, they found that parental employment did not moderate this relationship. Third, **Moodley et al.** examined the relationship between the receipt of the CSG and the educational and health capabilities of children. They found that receiving the CSG improved school attendance and weight, suggesting the genuine benefit of a small cash transfer for child development. In addition, they found that access to basic services, notably water and electricity, also has an impact on educational and health capabilities, suggesting the need for multisystemic interventions to promote healthy child development. Fourth, **Ronaasen et al.** investigate the relationship between nutritional status and the ECD indicators of social-emotional development, physical-motor development and cognitive development. Using quantitative measures, they found that nutritional status (measured as height for age) had a significant impact on these indicators. This implies that nutritional status, which is perhaps not prominent in the minds of social workers, has important implications for social work practice, and contributes significantly to child development.

Three papers focus on social work practice. This emphasis on practice issues is welcomed, as it facilitates improved service delivery to client systems. **Chibonore and Chikadzi** investigate factors that facilitate or hinder social workers in the child welfare field from taking up a social advocacy role. This role can be regarded as particularly important in a society emerging from decades of human rights violations and poor service delivery. They found that limited resources and inadequate partnerships hindered a fuller uptake of the advocacy role. **Tanga and Mundau** focus on the Community Development Workers' Programme, asking if it is contributing to the War on Poverty. Poverty is widely recognised as a major impediment to social development in South Africa and thus interventions to undermine poverty are crucial. Their research, however, finds that the programme is making little impact on poverty, citing poor implementation and politicisation as the main reasons. Finally, **Engelbrecht and Gouws** designed and implemented a treatment plan for substance addicts centred on the role of the family of origin as a cause of the addiction. Feedback from therapists and addicts suggests that the intervention contributes to improved self-actualisation and relationships. Such an intervention model, centred on intergenerational family processes, has good potential in a society with strong family ties and values.

The articles in this issue of the *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development* have good utility value for teaching social work, dealing with key topics of case-, group- and community-work practice, gender, children, families, addiction, social security and poverty. Lecturers are encouraged to make use of local literature in their teaching.

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